

MAPPING OF YOUTH POLICIES AND IDENTIFICATION OF EXISTING SUPPORT AND GAPS IN FINANCING OF YOUTH ACTIONS IN ALBANIA



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Title: MAPPING OF YOUTH POLICIES AND IDENTIFICATION OF EXISTING SUPPORT AND GAPS IN FINANCING OF YOUTH ACTIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS - ALBANIA REPORT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASCS	Agency for Support of Civil Society
CoM	Council of Ministers
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EC	European Commission
GoA	Government of Albania
EAMIS	External Assistant Management Information System
EU	European Union
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
IDM	Institute for Democracy and Mediation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INPO	International Non-Profit Organisations
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics in Albania
LYC	Local Youth Councils
MoC	Ministry of Culture
MEFA	Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs
MESY	Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth
MFE	Ministry of Finance and Economy
MSWY	Ministry for Social Welfare and Youth
APY	Action Plan for Youth
AYA	Agency for Youth of Albania
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, Training
ESS	Employment and Skills Strategy
YSA/SHKR	Youth Service
YRO	Youth Representative Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSFA	Open Society Foundation for Albania
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Presence in Albania
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SASPAC	State Agency for Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination
SMYC	State Minister for Youth and Children

TYEC	Tirana Youth European Capital
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WBYL	Western Balkans Youth Lab
WB	Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, ¹ Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia)
WFD	Westminster Foundation for Democracy
WBIF	Western Balkans Investment Framework

1 This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report serves as a comprehensive analysis of the current state of youth policies in Albania. In a broader context, this analysis is conducted within the framework of mapping youth policies and identifying support and financing gaps in the Western Balkans. It builds on the results of the first report developed in 2020. The report's different chapters will identify the current support and gaps in the financing of youth actions, explore youth participation in decision-making processes by highlighting best practices, provide recommendations, and outline a mapping of donor programmes in youth sector, thus offering insights into new developments that are in place.

The methodology for composing and updating the report relies on a combination of desk and empirical research conducted between August and October 2023. Desk research involved analysis of laws, strategies, policy documents, and other reports pertaining to youth policies. It also incorporated statistics from various sources, with a primary focus on data from the Institute of Statistics in Albania (INSTAT) and the latest reports from public institutions and international organisations concerning Albania's youth agenda. The empirical research involved conducting in-depth interviews with 13 stakeholders from the policy sector, civil society, donor community, and non-profit organisations.

As per the existing legislation, individuals falling within the age range of 15 to 29 years are classified as young citizens. According to INSTAT, youth population (ages 15-29) in Albania has shown a decline, decreasing from 24.91% in 2016 to 23.4% in 2020 and further to 21.3% in 2023. Ethnicity data for the young population remain unavailable. INSTAT reports that the unemployment rate for 2023 stands at 22.3%. In 2022, approximately 46,460 Albanians emigrated, with roughly 36,000 of them falling into the category of young individuals, according to the latest data from INSTAT.

The youth rights are guaranteed in the Albanian Constitution. In 2019, the Parliament of Albania passed the Law on Youth, leading to the subsequent development of the Youth Strategy of Albania and Action Plan for the period 2022–2029. These serve as the primary foundations for safeguarding youth rights and overseeing the youth sector. The law serves as the foundational framework for development of youth policies and strategic programmes. It establishes mechanisms to ensure youth participation in decision-making processes and to oversee the youth sector. These mechanisms include the Youth Council of Albania (NYC), Local Youth Council (LYC), Youth Representative Organisation (YRO), Youth Worker, Youth Infrastructure, and dedicated funds for youth grants from the public budget, ultimately leading to the establishment of the Youth Agency of Albania. Concerning participatory mechanisms, the membership of Local Youth Councils (LYCs) has increased, the Youth Council of Albania (NYC) has been established, and a call for applications for the Youth Representative Organisation (YRO) was published. The upcoming chapters will provide more details on the provisions within the legal framework, challenges faced, and positive developments concerning these structures.

A significant recent development involves the approval of the introduction of a new government structure that incorporates the appointment of a State Minister for Youth and Children. This step underlines the increasing significance of youth issues and establishes a well-defined framework. The Minister of State for Youth and Children is entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding the



rights of young individuals and promoting their active participation in society. This role includes development, enhancement, and oversight of youth policies, as well as coordination of policies related to the well-being, health, education, and welfare of children. However, it is important to note that this institution operates as a State Minister without an allocated budget or portfolio.

In terms of funding, the Agency for Youth of Albania has taken a central role in financing projects since 2021. These funds are earmarked for both youth organisations and organisations engaged in various youth-related activities. Notably, calls for applications initiated by the Agency for Support of Civil Society (ASCS) in 2022 and 2023 have explicitly prioritised youth, marking a shift from previous calls where youth served more as a crosscutting target group.

Furthermore, the Government of Albania (GoA) extends financial support to entities such as the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) and Erasmus+ Programme. GoA has also established several mechanisms to support youth, including the Programme on Work Placement and Internships. In recent years, additional initiatives related to Vocational Education and Training (VET), support for start-up development, Coding in Schools, and Programme of Extracurricular Activities have been introduced. Apart from the financial support provided by the Government of Albania, there is a growing interest among other donors in youth-related initiatives. This increased attention can be attributed to various factors, with the foremost being the substantial levels of youth migration. Furthermore, international organisations have come to acknowledge the vital role of youth as key stakeholders in advancing the development goals of their communities. This recognition has spurred a proactive approach that encompasses engaging with young people, setting up entities with a youth focus, executing specialised youth-oriented programmes or projects, and explicitly prioritising youth as a primary target group in their calls for proposals.

In mapping donors' involvement in youth sector, key areas of focus remain youth unemployment, skills development, entrepreneurship, and vocational education and training, retaining their high-priority status. There is continued attention to security matters, including the prevention of radicalisation, countering extremism, and promoting peacebuilding. Donors also extend their support to various other sectors, encompassing active citizenship, media literacy, elections, gender equality, arts, and culture. Moreover, the ongoing impact of COVID-19 pandemic has elevated youth well-being and mental health as important priorities for donors, although there is a need for increased funding in this area. Additionally, there is a growing interest in environmental and agricultural issues, with these sectors gaining prominence in recent donor discussions.

In conclusion, support for the youth sector, youth policies, and youth development continues to show positive momentum. However, there is a need for deeper commitment and further progress. The key areas where efforts should be intensified include: inter-institutional and cross-sectorial cooperation in the area of youth and related issues; amendments to the most important legal framework such as the Laws on Youth and on Volunteerism; ensuring the consistency of data gathering and unification of methodologies for the benefit of youth research and evidence-based youth policy; increasing donor coordination; further consolidation of structural policy dialogue with youth through strengthening participatory mechanism and building more effective cooperation and trust.

The report is divided into six chapters, each offering a comprehensive range of information on the youth sector and presenting comparative data on its development since the last report. Chapter 1



provides an overview of youth demographics, with a focus on population trends, education, current developments, employment situations, and youth migration. Chapter 2 presents an overview and analysis of youth policy framework in Albania, emphasising recent developments and assessing progress or setbacks in its implementation compared to previous years. The subsequent chapters delve into the topics of youth participation in policy-making and decision-making processes, provide an overview of donor interventions in Albania's youth sector, and highlight existing best practices.



CHAPTER 1: YOUTH POPULATION DATA

This chapter delves into comprehensive statistical and demographic information related to the youth segment of Albanian population. It provides an analysis across areas such as age distribution, gender ratios, educational attainment, employment statistics, migration and other relevant data. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of youth demographics, thus comparing with previous years and providing hints on possible trends over time. It is a crucial resource which serves as a baseline in the process of seeking to understand and address the specific needs and challenges faced by young people within the Albanian context and necessary policies which should be developed. Similar to previous reports, this report primarily relies on official data sources from INSTAT. Additionally, it utilizes data from publications of international organisations, including the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), International Labour Organisation (ILO), World Bank (WB), and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to support its arguments. However, it is important to acknowledge that the challenge of obtaining youth-specific disaggregated data in Albania continues to persist.

1.1. Age and Gender

The Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) conducts population research at regular intervals to provide up-to-date demographic data and insights. These research initiatives are essential for monitoring changes in the population, tracking demographic trends, and informing various policy decisions. The last population CENSUS took place in 2011. A new population CENSUS is taking place in 2023.

In general, Albanian population is on the decline, primarily attributed to a significant emigration of young and skilled workers from Albania and a decreasing birth rate among the Albanians who choose to stay. This has led to an ageing population, with compounding effects on the overall economy as well as the social safety net and social capital. The average age of Albanian population has increased over the last ten years according to the Institute of Statistics. In its most recent population research, INSTAT reported that the median age in the economy had increased from 33 years in 2011 to 38 years in 2022.² For men, the median age has increased from 31.3 to 37.3 years and for women from 33.9 to 39.1 years. Since 2019, the share of population made up of people aged 18-29 decreased from 19.7% to 17.7%,³ a trend that is likely to continue as birth rates decline, life expectancy increases and emigration continues.

According to Albanian law, specifically the Law on Youth,⁴ a young person is defined as any citizen aged 15 to 29. The table below presents the age distribution of youth population from 2020 to 2023.

- 2 INSTAT, 2022, *The population of Albania*, accessed 24 September 2023, <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/statistical-literacy/the-population-of-albania/#:~:text=Albanian%20median%20age%20of%20population>
- 3 INSTAT, 2023, *Population on January 1st by age group, gender, and year*, accessed 23 September 2023 https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1X2ERwPoUnLhxHylOX55ORZmOwlqXRFuQ/edit?usp=share_link&ouid=117681649862726207803&rtfpof=true&sd=true
- 4 *Law on Youth*, 2019, accessed 23 September 2023 <https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Permbledhje-e-ligjit-dhe-akteve-n%C3%ABnligjore-n%C3%AB-fush%C3%ABn-e-rinis%C3%AB.pdf>



Year by year, a declining trend in the economy's youth population becomes evident. The principal factors contributing to this decline are primarily associated with a decrease in the birth rate and significant trends of emigration.

Table 1: Youth population by age and gender 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023

Age/Gender	2020			2021			2022			2023		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
15-19	100,459	96,874	197,333	96,566	92,509	189,075	93,320	89,877	183,197	87,761	84,315	172,076
20-24	112,810	113,615	226,425	109,136	109,651	218,787	101,815	101,448	203,263	98,353	97,887	196,240
25-29	120,166	117,441	237,607	117,857	117,340	235,197	113,768	115,124	228,892	108,705	110,867	219,572
Total	333,435	327,930	661,365	323,559	319,500	643,059	308,903	306,449	615,352	294,819	293,069	587,888

Sourced from INSTAT through an information request sent to the institutions

1.2. Education and Employment

Education and employment remain the most important pillars for youth in Albania and also often mentioned among the reason why they decide to migrate. The challenges encountered during the youth transition from education to the labour market have already been acknowledged by the Government of Albania and other significant stakeholders such as youth and international organisations. Youth concerns about education primarily revolve around the need for modernising curricula to align with labour market requirements and ensuring the quality of education. These quality improvements encompass infrastructure development and the endeavour to combat corruption within higher education institutions.

1.2.1. Education

The education sector has witnessed a series of reforms in recent years, ranging from decentralisation to a limited focus on overall education funding. However, the enduring issues of poor educational quality and systemic corruption in the education system have far-reaching consequences, encompassing reduced employment opportunities, diminished social mobility, and a compromised ability to participate meaningfully in civic life. Education challenges have been noticed at all other levels of education, from tertiary to primary education, and an overview will be provided in this subchapter.

Albania's budget allocation to education in 2021 remained low, estimated at 3.6% of GDP, only 0.9 pps. higher than in 2020⁵ but it still sits below the EU average of 4.6%.⁶ According to Gallup World Poll surveys Albania has the highest satisfaction rate with the education system and schools in the region. Nevertheless, this is lower than the satisfaction rate in OECD and OECD-EU economies on average, namely 67% and 68%.⁷ According to QS EECA University Rankings 2022 University of Tiranais ranked

5 European Commission. 2022, *Albania Report 2022*, accessed 24 September 2023, available at: <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Albania%20Report%202022.pdf> p.99

6 United Nations in Albania, 2022, *Education Budget Brief*, available at: <https://albania.un.org/en/173580-education-budget-brief> (accessed 24 September 2023)

7 OECD, 2020, *Citizen satisfaction with public services and institutions | Government at a Glance: Western Balkans*, accessed 24 September 2023, available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/78f49f8d-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/78f49f8d-en>



401 out of 450 Universities from Emerging Europe and Central Asia,⁸ thus being at the very end of the list. The lack of reforms directly addressing the poor quality of education is evident in both declining student satisfaction and decreasing students' enrolment over the years. This is also shown by the data in the table below, which offers an overview of students enrolled in tertiary education by fields of study.⁹

This decrease in students' enrolment in tertiary education is mostly attributed to the high migration trend and dissatisfaction with the quality of education. In any case, this situation poses a risk to the labour market outlook and future development projections. Concrete measures to improve the quality of education, enhance university infrastructure, and modernise curricula should be undertaken.

Table 2: Students enrolled in tertiary education by fields of study

2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	School / academic year
					Fields of Study
10,062	9,062	8,367	8,085	7,317	Education
14,348	12,537	10,972	9,536	7,926	Arts and humanities
14,086	11,397	10,277	9,204	9,222	Social sciences, journalism and information
33,447	32,732	31,173	32,227	30,713	Business, administration and law
7,060	5,962	4,924	4,553	4,056	Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics
10,016	8,883	8,341	8,458	9,297	Information and communication technologies
20,019	20,775	20,537	22,555	22,834	Engineering, manufacturing and construction
4,999	4,158	3,458	2,770	3,108	Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary
20,727	20,199	21,195	22,130	22,433	Health and welfare
4,279	4,559	4,553	4,362	4,446	Services
139,043	130,264	123,797	123,880	121,352	Total

Source: Labour Market and Education, INSTAT (2023)

This decline of students has been noticed even in the pre-university system. Enrolment rates in pre-university education system dropped to 72.9%.¹⁰ The current enrolment in basic education stands at 286,486 students, with 158,528 in primary education and 127,958 in lower secondary education. Attendance in basic education saw a 2.5% decline in comparison to the 2021 academic year. Additionally, a noteworthy decline in school enrolment has been observed in numerous schools, primarily as a result of decreasing birth rate and emigration. This has led to many infrastructural problems where urban schools struggle to have the necessary resources to meet student demand while some rural schools fear closure.

Meanwhile, there is room for improvement in terms of access to education for students from the Roma and Egyptian community. While already at a significantly low level, the involvement of Roma and Egyptian children decreased in both pre-university education (13,086 compared to 14,515 in

8 Top Universities, 2022, *QS University Rankings for EECA*, accessed 24 September 2023, available at: <https://topuniversities.com/university-rankings/eeca-rankings/2022>

9 INSTAT 2023, *Labour Market and Education*, accessed 24 September 2023, available at: <https://instat.gov.al/al/temat/tregu-i-pun%C3%ABs-dhe-arsimi/arsimi/#tab2>

10 European Commission. 2022, *Albania Report 2022*, accessed 24 September 2023, available at: <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Albania%20Report%202022.pdf> p.99



2019-2020) and early childhood education and care (2,514 compared to 2,996 in 2019-2020).¹¹ The disparity in educational access between Roma and Egyptian children and their peers residing in the same areas remains extensive. The proposed measures aimed at improving university access, such as a quota system and fee waivers, are generally not put into practice.

1.2.2. Neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET)

The NEET (Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training) rate in Albania is high compared to other economies in Europe. In 2020, the NEET rate for 15-29-year-olds was 25.8% overall, with 18.7% males and 33.6% females.¹² Over the year 2021, youth aged 15-29 years old Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) accounted for 26.1 % of all youth population. Even with a decline of 1.8 pp compared to the year 2020 the percentage of NEET still remains high.¹³

NEET population is generally more concentrated in the 20-24 age group, accounting for 41.6% of the total NEET youth among 15-29-year-olds. The majority (76%) have a medium or low level of education. Only 28.7% of NEET youth are registered with the public employment service. There is a significant gender gap: 60% of NEETs aged 25-29 are female. The NEET rate varies substantially by region, with the highest concentration in Tirana (35.1%) and the lowest in Kukes (1.2%).¹⁴ Key challenges for Albanian NEET youth include lack of access to quality education and training, limited employment opportunities, and insufficient labour market policies and services tailored to their needs. To address the NEET issue, Albanian government has introduced initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee programme focusing on outreach, guidance, education/training, and employment opportunities. The scheme was launched in October 2023 and it will be first piloted in the municipalities of Tirana, Shkodra and Vlora.

However, continued efforts are needed to strengthen the education system, expand vocational training, provide career guidance, and support youth entrepreneurship and employment. Regardless of the fact that segmented measures are necessary, it is important to target the entire chain of the problem. The quarterly data on the Labour Force Survey, published for each quarter separately during the year, does not include the rate of youth in NEET category

1.2.3. Employment and Unemployment rate

Youth unemployment rates have remained persistent over the last decade. The position of young people in the labour market in Albania seems to be more disappointing as shown by the generally scanty labour market indices: high rates of unemployment and NEET. In the past 4 years, unemployment rate has had an increasing trend. According to the latest Quarterly Labour Force

11 Ibid

12 Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 2023, Desk review and policy notes *On Addressing Needs' Needs At Upper Secondary Education And Professional Training Centres*, accessed 24 September 2023, available at: https://observator.org.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/en_Desk-review-and-policy-notes-on-NEET.pdf

13 Republic of Albania Council of Ministers, 2023, *Economic Reform Programme 2023 -2025*, accessed 24 September 2023, available at: <https://financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Economic-Reform-Programme-2023-2025.pdf>

14 Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 2023, *Desk review and policy notes On Addressing Needs' Needs at Upper Secondary Education and Professional Training Centres*, accessed 24 September 2023, available at: https://observator.org.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/en_Desk-review-and-policy-notes-on-NEET.pdf p.11



Survey, Q2 – 2023 developed by INSTAT,¹⁵ unemployment rate was at 22.3%, compared to 2020 when the official youth (15-29) unemployment rate was 20.7%, as of December 2020.¹⁶

It is challenging to ascertain whether the incline in the unemployment rate is primarily attributed to people leaving the economy or the effects of specific policies. Individuals without secondary and tertiary education are among those who are less likely to achieve full employment. Combined with other challenges in youth sector, such as skills mismatches, high youth unemployment, and unequal access to education, many young people find it challenging to stay in Albania and opt to seek different opportunities abroad. This trend results in significant brain drain from the economy.¹⁷

It is important to recognise that men and women in Albania experience markedly different living and working conditions. Although metrics indicating gender parity in the labour market have improved since the economy was liberalised after the fall of communism in 1992, there is still room for improvement. Meanwhile, women also do a much higher degree of domestic labour than their male counterparts, creating a second shift for women who work both in the professional and domestic sphere. The gender gap in Albania is 14.5 % percentage points, where the male youth activity rate surpasses that of female.¹⁸

This implies that elevated levels of youth unemployment disproportionately affect the employment prospects of young women in the labour market. This suggests that high rates of youth unemployment are especially disadvantageous for the prospects of young women in the labour market.

1.3. Youth migration

Challenges in all the sectors listed above contribute to high levels of youth migration and high migration is the main reason of population decline. As shown in Table 1, youth population in Albania has decreased by 2.5% in the last four years. A study developed on youth¹⁹ found that 71% of youth are considering emigration in their short and mid-term plans. In 2022, approximately 46,460 Albanians emigrated, marking a 10.5% increase compared to 2021. Notably, the majority of these emigrants, numbering around 36,000, were young individuals, as revealed by the latest statistics from the Albanian Institute of Statistics.²⁰

Building on the earlier sections, various factors are contributing to this trend, encompassing both economic and social aspects. Among the reasons cited, youth migration is driven by concerns regarding quality of life, standard of education, and scarcity of employment opportunities. However,

15 INSTAT. 2023, *Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Q2 – 2023*, accessed 24 September 2023, available at: <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/12504/quarterly-labour-force-survey-q2-2023.pdf>

16 Regional Cooperation Council, 2020, *Mapping of Youth Policies and Identification of Existing Support and Gaps in Financing of Youth Actions in the Western Balkans, Albania Report*, accessed 24 September 2023, available at: <https://www.rcc.int/docs/618/mapping-of-youth-policies-and-identification-of-existing-support-and-gaps-in-financing-of-youth-actions-in-the-western-balkans>

17 European Commission. 2023, *Economic Reform Programmes of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye and Kosovo*. accessed 24 September 2023, Available at: https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/ip252_en.pdf

18 Regional Cooperation Council, 2021, *Study on Youth Employment in the Western Balkans*, accessed 24 September 2023, <https://www.rcc.int/docs/573/study-on-youth-employment-in-the-western-balkans>

19 Westminster Foundation for Democracy & Civic Resistance, 2021, *Survey: Young People and Politics in Albania*, accessed 24 September 2023, https://wfd.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/national-survey_young-people-and-politics-in-albania-final.pdf

20 The Conversation, 2023, *Albania's brain drain: why so many young people are leaving and how to get them to stay*, accessed 24 September 2023, <https://theconversation.com/albanias-brain-drain-why-so-many-young-people-are-leaving-and-how-to-get-them-to-stay-207455>



with policies and coordinated solutions remaining stagnant, the likelihood of continued youth emigration persists.²¹

Two of the major problems noticed in the short-term from youth migration have been labour force shortage²² and infrastructural problems. Urban schools struggle to have the necessary resources to meet student demand while some rural schools fear closure.²³ Youth migration has a significant impact on the labour force and social capital where two of the most important effects are being noticed in the brain drain and labour shortages, especially those that rely on lower-skilled or entry-level workers. This has started to already impact labour force. In addition, it can also have grave implications for the erosion of democracy and democratic processes within the economy.

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- 21 Westminster Foundation for Democracy & Civic Resistance, 2021, *Survey: Young People and Politics in Albania*, accessed 24 September 2023, https://www.wfd.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/national-survey_young-people-and-politics-in-albania-final.pdf
- 22 Balkan Insight, 2023, *Vanishing Foreign Workers Leave Albania's Short-Staffed Businesses Frustrated*, accessed 24 September 2023, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/05/01/vanishing-foreign-workers-leave-albanias-short-staffed-businesses-frustrated/>
- 23 OECD, 2020, *The Albanian education system | OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education*, 24 September 2023, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/7f73878b-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/7f73878b-en>



CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF THE YOUTH POLICY FRAMEWORK IN ALBANIA

This chapter analyses the youth policy, and its legal and institutional framework in Albania, thus providing additional input on its further development. In addition to outlining the relevant strategic documents, action plans, laws and bylaws, a critical assessment identifies achievements, challenges and remaining gaps over the years.

2.1. The Constitution

Article 54 of the Albanian Constitution states that “Children, young people, pregnant women and new mothers have the right to special protection from the state”, thus mandating special protection for specific groups. This provision is situated within the broader context of fundamental freedoms, social, economic, and political rights. It is noteworthy that the Constitution does not offer a precise definition of youth nor does it make other specific references to this demographic. Instead, the rights of youth are safeguarded within the scope of human rights and liberties outlined in the Constitution.

2.2. Law on Youth

Youth civil society organisations (CSOs), civil society entities, international organisations, donors, and stakeholders actively campaigned and lobbied the Government of Albania to develop legislation concerning youth. The process of drafting this law involved engaging in public consultations with various stakeholders, including policymakers, experts, and representatives of interest groups, among them young individuals and youth organisations. The primary concern raised by youth organisations pertained to the perceived risk of reducing the independence of youth CSOs and the potential for politicisation of the entire sphere of youth work and youth activism.

The Law on Youth was approved at the last session of Parliament in 2019.²⁴ In Article 3 the Law specifies that the concept of youth refers to persons 15 to 29 years old.²⁵ The Law is designed to provide a legal framework for addressing youth-related issues. It laid the foundation for various mechanisms and institutions to protect and promote the rights of young people. The Law defines the activities, mechanisms, and authorities responsible for protecting and promoting the rights of young people and increasing youth participation in policy-making and decision-making processes, both at the central and local levels. The Law introduces a set of important concepts for the youth sector and its regulation, such as the concept of youth networks, including institutions and organisations that target working with and for youth, youth centres, structured dialogue, non-formal education for

24 Law No. 75, dated 4.11.2019, on *Youth*, 15 September 2023,
<https://www.parlament.al/Files/ProjektLigje/20191107152923ligj%20nr.%2075,%20dt.%204.11.2019.pdf>

25 *ibid*



young people, youth infrastructure, and the concept of safe youth spaces, but solely as physical safe spaces for young people, including those with disabilities. It also emphasizes cooperation based on active, systematic, transparent, continuous, and long-term interaction.

The Law enables establishment of a legal basis for some important youth structures: Youth Council of Albania(NYC), Youth Representative Organisation (YRO), and the Local Youth Council (LYC) which are expected to operate at the central and local level to ensure youth participation in policy and decision-making. The Law envisages provision of sources of funding for youth policies, programmes, and activities, emphasizing the contribution of local budgets in this regard, in addition to the public budget. At the same time, it provides for other legal sources of funding, such as income generated from the activities of youth organisations, donations, sponsorships, European programmes, and so on.

The Law defines “youth work” as “any activity of a social, cultural, educational, environmental nature by, with or for young people, in groups or individually, which aims to motivate and support young people, contributing to their personal and social development and the development of society in general.”²⁶ However, the Law does not define the criteria for a “youth worker”. Interviews with stakeholders from the youth sector highlight the essential need to further specify the notion of youth work and include criteria for professionals who work with young people through the introduction of the definition of “youth worker”.

The Law envisages establishment of the following structures:

1. The institution responsible for youth at the central level and youth budget is the Agency for Youth of Albania (AYA) and former Youth Service of Albania (YSA).
2. The Youth Council of Albania(NYC), an advisory body that now operates under the Minister of State for Youth and Children (MSYC) according to the new organisational structure. The Council’s criteria and procedures for member elections, as well as its organisation and functioning, are outlined in the Council of Ministers’ decision of 2 December 2020.
3. Local Youth Council (LYC) is an advisory body at local level, which operates under the mayor in each municipality.
4. A Youth Representative Organisation (YRO) is slated to be established as an umbrella non-profit organisation representing youth organisations. The Council of Ministers’ decision of 12 May 2021 outlines the criteria and procedures for electing YRO members, as well as its organisation and functioning.
5. Youth database aims to provide up-to-date information for young people in the economy, as well as to support the process of planning, supervision, administration and evaluation of youth policies, at the central and local level.

26 Law on Youth No. 75, dated 4.11.2019, 15 September 2023,
<https://www.parlament.al/Files/ProjektLigje/20191107152923ligj%20nr.%2075,%20dt.%204.11.2019.pdf> Article 14



Development of the Law was accompanied by a significant public debate concerning some of its bylaws and involving youth CSOs and other stakeholders. Moreover, following its implementation for several years, it became evident that the Law requires further enhancements in terms of some specific articles such as LYCS, YRO etc., with these revisions also being requested by youth non-profit organisations. There are indications that a process to amend the Law will commence in 2024.²⁷

2.3. Youth Strategy of Albania and Action Plan 2022 -2029

Based on the data secured from the previous report, Albania initially adopted NSY 2007-2013 to outline its vision and strategic objectives for youth policies. In 2013, the government prioritised youth and opted for APY 2015-2020 instead of renewing NSY. During 2021 and 2022 there was no NSY in place, despite calls from youth organisations, civil society, and donors for its development. The Youth Strategy of Albania and Action Plan 2022-2029 were adopted in October 2022.

The new Youth Strategy 2022–2029²⁸ was published in Official Journal of Albania No. 144, dated 01/11/2022 and it is followed by an action plan which also involves financial considerations. According to the information provided, the Youth Strategy 2022-2029 is intricately intertwined with various policies and international agreements. It aligns with the GoA programme, ensuring its objectives are consistent with the economy agenda. It also links the UN Youth Strategy and Sustainable Development Goals, Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union, it coordinates with the EU Youth Strategy and follows the standards set by the Council of Europe's Youth Strategy. The Strategy also integrates regional efforts through the Western Balkans Agenda for Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport, aligns with economy-wide strategies, such as the Strategy for Development and Integration (2015-2022) and corresponds with the Plan for European Integration (NPEI) 2022-2024. The Strategy was developed following a consultative process conducted from August 2021 to February 2022. During this period, young people shared their concerns and highlighted the challenges they face in their daily lives. Youth also contributed with ideas and potential solutions to address their needs. The youth policy and programmatic efforts are primarily focused on promoting equal opportunities and rights for young people, with special attention to supporting vulnerable and marginalised youth facing various disadvantages, including poverty, violence, abuse, disability, and social exclusion. The Strategy's overarching goal is to guide Albanian youth towards positive actions that will shape their future in a beneficial way.

The Youth Strategy of Albania 2022-2029 outlines three key policy objectives:

1. Encouraging active participation of young women and men in society, empowering them to voice their opinions. It emphasizes coordinated, evidence-based, and adequately funded cross-sectoral youth policies. The Strategy also supports youth innovation and skills development, particularly in ICT and digital fields, to enhance their employability.
2. Prioritising physical, social, and mental well-being of young people, with an emphasis on their safety, protection, and inclusion, especially for those at risk or facing social exclusion.

27 Interview with Representatives of Public Administration, September 2023

28 Youth Strategy 2022 – 2029, accessed 15 September 2023, available at:
<https://riniafemijet.gov.al/strategjia-kombetare-e-rinise-2022-2029-tashme-miratuar/>



3. Enhancing the overall situation of young people in Albania by providing them with opportunities on par with European youth. This includes access to quality education and participation in both the Albanian and international labour markets.

It is worth noting that in contrast to previous youth action plans or strategies that have already expired, the new Youth Strategy 2022-2029 is accompanied by a comprehensive set of components. These include an action plan, key performance indicators aligned with the policy goals and specific strategy objectives, a cost-estimated action plan, and a budget forecast. Additionally, the published Strategy outlines the approach for monitoring and evaluating the implementation progress of the Youth Strategy of Albania (YSA). It is mentioned that: *“MoSYC will develop annual and semi-annual monitoring and assessment reports based on IPSIS standards for monitoring and reporting of strategic documents, which will generate necessary and timely information for policymakers on the implementation progress of measures provided in the YSA Action Plan in the following 2 years.”*²⁹

Monitoring and evaluation of policies are indeed crucial components that are sometimes overlooked or inadequately implemented. The explicit mention and planning of these processes within the document is certainly a positive signal, reflecting a commitment to transparency and accountability. It is essential for not only interest groups but also civil society, stakeholders, and the public to closely follow and engage in the implementation process to ensure that policies are effectively carried out and achieve their intended outcomes. This collaborative oversight can contribute to better policy results and foster a sense of ownership and participation among various stakeholders.

Furthermore, development of this Strategy was enriched by the contributions of the first Youth Lab of WBYL which will be further discussed in details in Chapter 6.1 and the findings of the Roadmap of Youth Transition from School to the Labour Market. The economy-level meetings were aligned with consultations conducted within the framework of YSA, and the key recommendations were incorporated into the section on skills development and youth employment of YSA.

2.4. Institutions dealing with Youth

Youth policy is cross-sectorial involving numerous stakeholders in its implementation, as stated in Article 3 of the Law on Youth: GoA; public bodies; local self-government bodies; CSOs; students/pupils parliaments and other legal entities for the purpose of improving the status of youth, their personal and social development, and their inclusion in social affairs.

2.4.1. State Minister for Youth and Children

From 2009 to 2013, youth policy fell under the purview of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth, and Sports. Between 2013 and 2017, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY) assumed responsibility for youth policy. Beginning of 2017, the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth (MESY) became the primary authority for youth policy, overseeing its formulation and execution, as well as representing Albania internationally regarding matters related to youth. An encouraging milestone in this period was the appointment of a Deputy Minister for Youth in 2020.

²⁹ Youth Strategy 2022 – 2029, available at: https://rini.femijet.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/SKR29_Anglisht.pdf (accessed 15 September 2023). p.93



Meanwhile, starting from 2021 and due to the changes in the government, the State Minister for Youth and Children (MSYC) was appointed. The mission and responsibilities of the Minister were determined by the Council of Ministers' decision No. 524, dated 22.9.2021,³⁰ in accordance with Article 100 of the Constitution and Point 2, Article 5, of Law no. 90/2012, *on the organisation and functioning of the state administration*.³¹ The State Minister for Youth and Children (MSYC)³² is responsible for formulating and implementing policies that protect the rights of young people and promote their active participation in society. This includes coordinating matters related to the well-being and development of children. Additionally, the Minister plays a crucial role in developing comprehensive policies for youth and children's rights, creating conditions for their engagement, and defining roles of institutions at various levels. Furthermore, MSYC oversees child protection policies, ensuring compliance with international conventions and laws while establishing mechanisms to safeguard children's well-being and rights.

The State Minister for Youth and Children was one of the co-chairs of the first Youth Lab and contributed to development of Roadmap of Youth Transition from School to Labour Market in Albania, thus actively participating in all meetings and activities which took place at economy level. Findings of the roadmap were included in NYS 2022–2029.

Some of the challenges faced include the fact that this Ministry lacks a portfolio and does not have a dedicated budget. Consequently, even the availability of human resources is limited. Nonetheless, the State Minister for Youth and Children has received support from international organisations, including the World Bank, UNFPA, UNICEF, Lead Albania³³ and other agencies.

2.4.2. Youth Agency of Albania

The Youth Agency of Albania which is the responsible institution for youth and the implementation body of youth policies was established by the Council of Ministers' decision in September 2020.³⁴ It is under the authority of the Minister of State for Children and Youth. It is funded by the central budget and its mission is to ensure the protection and promotion of rights of young people through a grant mechanism for youth CSOs and other activities in accordance with youth policies of Albania. The dedicated budget for 2023 was 212,960,000 ALL (2 million EUR – lump sum). NYA carries out its activities in the following areas of responsibility: a) support for non-formal education; b) youth interaction and mobilisation; c) financing of youth activities.

Furthermore, it will be the entity in charge of the administration and updating of youth database once it is established.

In July 2023 the Agency launched its third call for proposals based on the Council of Ministers Decision³⁵ no.1141, dated 24.12.2020. Detailed information will be given about the call for proposals,

30 CoM No. 524, dated 22.9.2021, accessed 15 September 2023 <https://www.riniafemijet.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Vendimi-Nr.524-date-22.9.2021-Per-fushen-e-pergjegjesise-shteterore-te-MSHRF.pdf>

31 CoM No. 524, dated 22.9.2021, accessed 15 September 2023, <https://www.riniafemijet.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Vendimi-Nr.524-date-22.9.2021-Per-fushen-e-pergjegjesise-shteterore-te-MSHRF.pdf>

32 More detailed information about State Minister for Children and Youth competences – ANNEX 1

33 Interview with Public Administration Representative, 4 October 2023.

34 CoM No.681, dated 02.09.2020, accessed 15 September 2023, <https://rinia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Vendim-nr.681-date-02.09.2020-1-VKM.pdf>

35 CoM No.1141, dated 24.12.2020, accessed 15 September 2023, <https://www.riniafemijet.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Vendimi-Nr.1141-date-24.12.2020-Per-financimin-e-projekteve-rinore.pdf>



its objectives, funds available, etc., in Chapter 3.1. Youth Policy Funding. Additionally, NYA has been responsible for various other youth-related activities, including the administration of the call for the Youth Representative in the Governing Board of RYCO, among other duties.

2.4.3. Line ministries

The Ministry of Finance and Economy (MFE) is responsible for drafting policies VET, innovation and Youth Guarantee programme, while the Ministry of Justice is responsible for drafting law on juvenile delinquency. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP) is responsible for youth health, gender equality and social inclusion. The Ministry of Culture (MoC) is responsible for art and cultural policies that also target youth. The parliamentary committee dealing with youth issues is the Committee for Education and Public Information Tools. The Ministry of Education and Sports is responsible for overseeing the economy's educational system, from early childhood education to higher education. Additionally, it plays a role in promoting sports and physical education in Albania. The State Minister for Entrepreneurship Protection's role is to support and safeguard private entrepreneurship in Albania while fostering inter-institutional collaboration to enhance public services for entrepreneurs by cultivating a conducive business environment.

2.4.4. The Parliamentary Youth Club

The Parliamentary Youth Club was established on the 2nd of February 2022³⁶ with the support of Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and it is composed of Members of Parliament (MPs). The concept of parliamentary youth clubs allows young parliamentarians to engage in cross-party discussions on common issues, amplifying youth concerns within legislatures. Their strategies and collaborations serve as means to actively involve young individuals in policies that directly impact them.³⁷ According to information gathered through interviews with civil society organisations (CSOs) and the findings of desk research, it is evident that the Parliamentary Youth Club has not been particularly active so far.

2.4.5. Local self-government units

Since 2014, Albania has undertaken a series of local government reforms under the umbrella of the broader Territorial and Administrative Reform, which have created a new and favourable framework for strengthening local government institutions and service delivery efficiency, but also re-dimensioned the challenges of advancing local democracy and citizen engagement in public affairs.³⁸

Currently, Albania is divided into 61 municipalities and 12 administrative districts. Municipalities, regardless of their size, typically have a Social Services Directorate or Unit that includes responsibilities related to youth affairs. Often, municipalities assign multiple responsibilities to a single person, including youth matters. While this approach may seem practical on the surface, it can present

36 News on the establishment of the Parliamentary Youth Club for young deputies of the Parliament, accessed 13 September 2023, available at <https://ata.gov.al/2022/02/02/konstituohet-klubi-parlamentar-per-te-rinjte-deputete-te-kuvendit/>

37 Study Visit Between the Parliamentary Youth Clubs of North Macedonia and Albania, accessed on 13 September 2023, available at: <https://www.wfd.org/news/priorities-youth-north-macedonia-and-albania-topic-study-visit-between-parliamentary-youth>

38 UNDP, 2018, *Local Governance Mapping in Albania*, accessed on 13 September 2023, https://www.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/LG_Mapping_en.pdf



challenges in effectively addressing the needs and concerns of youth population, properly working on their engagement and adhere to youth work standards. This has also been one of the primary challenges highlighted during the interviews with youth CSOs.³⁹ At the local level, youth centres are an essential platform for youth empowerment. Youth centres have been already established in Korça, Shkodra, Vlora, Elbasan, Berat, Roskovec, Kuçovë, Lezhe and Tirana. However, it is necessary to have dedicated youth infrastructure in all municipalities, which should not exist only as venues for the organisation of project events by CSOs but rather as platforms for youth engagement and personal development having dedicated programmes on youth. Therefore, their functionality should also be aligned with the Quality Label for Youth Centres of the Council of Europe.⁴⁰ Furthermore, there is a need to develop a mapping of the existing youth centres so that they can be utilised by civil society organisations and other stakeholders that wish to carry out activities in these respective cities.

With the reform of local government, its decentralisation, reform of social services and social protection, and the approval of the new law on youth, local government units are obliged to develop local social plans, and to set up local youth councils. There have been several attempts from different CSOs to introduce youth action plans or to propose youth participatory budget at local level.⁴¹ The Youth Congress of Albania, with funding from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), has assisted 12 municipalities in creating Local Youth Plans for 2020-2023.⁴² which include different segments of youth life at the local level. The Observatory for the Rights of Children and Youth, with funding from UN and UNFPA, has undertaken initiatives at the local level to include youth in the existing local plans or undertake initiatives for youth budget.

Both types of initiatives are positive in regard to mainstreaming youth at the local level and providing a clear framework where they stand in terms of budget, youth action plans or local social plans. Nevertheless, based on the Law on Local Self-Government No. 139/2015.⁴³ policies or other measures should be approved by the Municipal Council's decision to be considered legal, sustainable over time, and their implementation obligatory. Any plan, strategy, etc. must go through the municipal council to have legal force.⁴⁴ Based on the research done, none of the municipalities has published a youth action plan or youth participatory budget. This is also backed by Porta Vendore,⁴⁵ an online resource centre that provides comprehensive information about local governance in terms of data and policies in place. Therefore, even though the mentioned examples are very positive, their implementation is not safeguarded or mandatory.

However, so far the initiatives addressing youth-related local policies or budget can be viewed as sporadic efforts rather than organised and strategic investments. The majority of these initiatives has been instigated by civil society organisations (CSOs) with the backing of the mentioned international entities, as opposed to being initiated directly by the municipality itself, which would secure their sustainability and implementation.

39 Interview with Youth CSOs, 4 October 2023

40 Quality Label for Youth Centres, Council of Europe, accessed on 13 September 2023, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/quality-label-for-youth-centres#>

41 Observatory for the Rights of Children and Youth, accessed on 13 September 2023, <https://observator.org.al/sq/publikime/>

42 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *The Youth Local Action Plans in 12 regions of Albania*, accessed on 13 September 2023, <https://tirana.fes.de/news-events-publications-detail/the-youth-local-action-plans-in-12-regions-of-albania>

43 LAW 139/2015 DATED 17.12.2015, *On Local Self-Governance*, accessed on 13 September 2023 <https://financat-lokale.al/sq/node/107>

44 Consultation with Local Government Expert, 15 September 2023

45 Porta Vendore, Online resource centre that provides information about local governance, 13 September 2023 <https://portavendore.al/>



2.4.6. Non-profit organisations

Youth civil society organisations (CSOs) and other CSOs focused on youth play a pivotal role in this domain, frequently bridging the gaps in addressing youth-related issues that public institutions may not cover comprehensively. The new Law on Youth establishes a distinction between ‘youth organisations’ and ‘organisations for youth.’ According to the Law on Youth, youth organisations are defined as “non-profit legal entities, established and registered in compliance with current NPO legislation, with the primary aim of representing, safeguarding, and advancing the comprehensive interests of young people.” On the other hand, organisations for youth are described as “non-profit legal entities, created and registered in accordance with the prevailing NPO legislation, which, in their specific area of operation, also strive to safeguard and advance the interests of young people and have a track record of implementing impactful programmes for young people.”⁴⁶ This implies a broader definition of CSOs working with youth among other areas or priorities. This recognition in the law of organisations for youth as relevant stakeholders or eligible parties for implementation of youth policy is a positive development that broadens the spectrum of CSOs working in the field of youth.

Nevertheless, more efforts should be made to create an enabling environment for the operation of youth CSOs and to provide them with the facilities needed to strengthen their capacities and operate effectively. The fiscal package and bank commissions for CSOs are the same as those for business sector. Even though these two sectors have different goals, they are treated the same, thus creating financial challenges for youth CSOs. Therefore, it should be considered to provide a more favourable fiscal package for youth CSOs.⁴⁷ There are several measures that could be considered to help strengthen the capacities of youth CSOs and create a more enabling environment for their operations. These measures might include local and municipal tax reductions or tax abatements, as well as other provisions related to social and health contributions.

In the meantime, a law that has introduced financial challenges for the operation of CSOs is Law No. 92/204 on Value-Added Tax, which did not provide an exemption from VAT for CSOs, and they were not refunded the funds received from foreign donors as mandated by the Law. During 2022, only three certificates were reissued by the respective authorities, and only two CSOs were reimbursed.⁴⁸ The Law was amended and came into effect in 2023. However, there is no available data regarding its current implementation status. Another law which has negatively impacted the civil society sector is the Law no 112/2020 on Registration of Ultimate Beneficial Owners which was not properly consulted with the civil society sector and has caused a lot of issues in their operation. The Law is designated to map all financial entities and their Beneficial Owner (the individual who ultimately owns or controls the entity according to law). Nevertheless, there have been many ambiguities concerning this Law and the necessity of including CSOs. Furthermore, the registration process has proven to be challenging, leading to difficulties and financial sanctions for some CSOs. The main

46 Law on Youth, No. 75, dated 4.11.2019, Article 3. 11 September 2023

<https://YSA.parlament.al/Files/ProjektLigje/20191107152923ligj%20nr.%2075,%20dt.%204.11.2019.pdf>

47 Interview with Youth NPO Representative, 4 October 2023

48 Partners Albania, 2023, *Monitoring Matrix on the Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development*, Albanian Report 2022, accessed on 11 September 2023, <https://www.partnersalbania.org/publication/monitoring-matrix-on-enabling-environment-for-csos-development-country-report-for-albania-2022/> p.14



reasons for these violations include the lack of an awareness campaign by the authorities and the lack of clarity from NGOs regarding registration procedures.⁴⁹

The financial landscape for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Albania has a particularly negative impact on youth civil society organisations (CSOs), making it more challenging for them to achieve financial sustainability and decent working conditions. These challenges are further intensified by the shrinking civic space. While democracy needs civil society to thrive, CSOs need support to properly adhere.

2.5. Other sectors impacting youth

Youth-related challenges and opportunities are multifaceted, often intertwining with sectors such as education, employment, healthcare, and social services. Therefore, this sub-section adopts an intersectoral lens to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the policy framework in place that might affect youth policies or youth as a target group.

2.5.1. Law for Voluntarism

An important law for the youth policies and youth development is the Law on Voluntarism No.45/2016⁵⁰ which seeks to establish legal provisions for volunteer engagement, with the objective of stimulating civic engagement and motivating individuals to take an active part in community life to improve overall quality of life, while also promoting the values of human solidarity. The enforcement of this Law has encountered challenges, and civil society organisations have voiced concerns that it fails to address the requirements of volunteers, donors, and recipients of volunteer services in Albania, while also imposing substantial obstacles. Some of these difficulties are related to the volunteer registration procedure, which is complicated; ambiguities regarding health insurance payments by youth civil society organisations to their volunteers which might also cause financial burden; 'Volunteer contract' mentioned in the Law, the contract should be further clarified to avoid ambiguity or penalties for youth non-profit organisations, among other issues, etc.

This Law holds significance by promoting civic engagement and empowering young people to participate in volunteer activities. It can foster skill development, social inclusion, and equal opportunities for youth involvement. The Law also ensures formal recognition and support for volunteer efforts, aligning with broader youth policy objectives and addressing societal challenges. Ultimately, it allows young people to make positive contributions to their communities while reflecting cultural and social values that prioritise collective well-being.

According to the Legal opinion "On the legal framework for volunteerism and its applicability" developed by Partners Albania⁵¹ and to other policy documents developed by youth CSOs in Albania,

49 Partners Albania, 2023, *Monitoring Matrix on the Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, Albanian Report 2022*, accessed on 11 September 2023, <https://www.partnersalbania.org/publication/monitoring-matrix-on-enabling-environment-for-csos-development-country-report-for-albania-2022/> p.10

50 Law on Voluntarism No.45/2016, accessed on 11 September 2023, <https://resourcecentre.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ligj-2016-04-28-45.pdf>

51 Resource Centre Albania, 2023, *Legal opinion On the legal framework for volunteerism and its applicability*. Accessed on 11 September 2023 https://resourcecentre.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Opinion-Ligjor-V_Final_2021_AL.pdf



the Law should be revised and the feedback of volunteerism providers should be taken into account to avoid future ambiguity.

- a. According to the political letter 'Recognition and Promotion of Volunteerism in Albania through Improvement of the Existing Legal Framework'⁵² developed by a consortium of youth CSOs, there are three main recommendations which should be taken into account for this Law:
- b. Approving bylaws for problematic clauses in Law No. 45/2016 and adopting a package that adequately meets the needs of volunteers and beneficiaries, support and sustainability have been ensured for the legal framework governing volunteering in Albania;
- c. Council for Civil Society should start a process to enhance the current legal system in cooperation with the Ministries of Economy and Finance, Education, Youth, and Sports, as well as the Employment and Skills Agency. Civil society organisations, volunteer service providers, recipients of volunteer services, volunteers, and public institutions will all be consulted throughout this process.
- d. Central, local, and educational institutions should consider civil society organisations, volunteer service providers, and volunteer service recipients as significant stakeholders. Their experience can help to create an environment for volunteerism that is organised, qualitative, and sustainable.

2.5.2. Policy Framework

The new GoA strategies and action plan affecting youth include: Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2025);⁵³ Action Plan for LGBTI People (2021-2027);⁵⁴ Strategy for Gender Equality (2021-2030);⁵⁵ Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma and Egyptians in Albania (2021-2025);⁵⁶ Strategy for Social Housing (2015-2025).⁵⁷

∞ Employment

GoA has committed to continue the consolidation of employment and skills development reform beyond 2020. To this purpose, the Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2023–2030⁵⁸ is being developed and will build on the achievements and lessons learnt from previous policies. It will aim to reshape vocational education and training for greater agility and inclusivity; enhance private sector involvement and incentivising it through policy measures and programme restructuring to deliver

52 Beyond Barriers, 2021, *Acknowledgment and promotion of volunteerism in Albania through the improvement of existing legal framework*, accessed on 11 September 2023, <https://beyondbarriers.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/POLICY-Brief-VAL-1.pdf>

53 Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2025), accessed on 11 September 2023, https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Plani-Kombetar-PAK-2021-2025_AL.pdf

54 Action Plan for People LGBTI (2021-2027), <https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/LGBTI-NAP-2021-2027-EN-final.pdf>

55 Strategy for Gender Equality (2021-2030), accessed on 11 September 2023, https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WEB_Strategjia-Kombetare-EN.pdf

56 Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania (2021-2025), accessed on 11 September 2023, <https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NATIONAL-ACTION-PLAN-FOR-EQUALITY.pdf>

57 Strategy for Social Housing (2015-2025), accessed on 11 September 2023, https://infrastruktura.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/VKM_nr_405_date_1.06.2016.pdf

58 Regional Cooperation Council, *Performance of Western Balkan economies regarding the European Pillar of Social Rights 2022 Review on Albania*, accessed on 11 September 2023, <https://www.esap.online/docs/196/rcc-esap-2-performance-of-western-balkan-economies-regarding-the-european-pillar-of-social-rights-2022-review-on-albania>



timely and effective skills development, addressing immediate workforce needs and upskilling opportunities in response to demand-driven priorities.

∞ Education

Albania has a Strategy on Education (2021–2026). In terms of education, enrolments in pre-primary, secondary and tertiary education have declined slightly and education levels and public spending on education remain below OECD and EU averages. An important development in the education sector for 2020 was the Pact for the University, announced by the Prime Minister in December 2018, following protests by students. According to interviews conducted with CSOs monitoring the education sector in Albania, this policy failed to deliver the promised improvements in the quality of education. This failure has further manifested in increased emigration and a significant decrease in university branch operations.⁵⁹

∞ Entrepreneurship and innovation

Albania has a Strategy on Science, Technology and Innovation (2023-2030)⁶⁰ and Business and Investment Development Strategy (BIDS) (2021-2027) including its Action Plan. According to the Competitive Industrial Performance Index 2019, Albania ranks 105th out of 150 economies and for the 2020 Index it ranks 118th out of 152 economies.⁶¹ According to the EU's assessment of Albania's Economic Reform Programme (ERP) 2020-2026,⁶² the government should enhance technical support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including creating a network to boost growth, access to finance, innovation, digitalisation, and exports. In light of these development the Law No. 25/2022 on Supporting and Developing Startups was developed. The World Bank Doing Business Report is not considered in this report.⁶³

2.6. Critical Assessment

The approval of the new Law on Youth signifies a favourable progression in the youth sector in Albania and an increase in attention from policymaking towards youth. The approval of this Law clarifies several important concepts for youth and the youth sector and, more importantly, further specifies which institutions are responsible for delivering the envisaged mechanisms and structures of the Law. Nevertheless, the efforts on its full implementation should continue and more initiatives should be undertaken to create a more enabling environment for youth and other CSOs. The main expectation is that the Law will strengthen the influence of youth in the decision-making process, empower youth and guarantee the effectiveness of government agencies addressing matters that impact the youth. In terms of its implementation, there have been improvements in some mechanisms, such as an increase in the number of Local Youth Councils (LYCs), establishment of a Youth Council of Albania (NYC), and a functioning youth grant mechanism that has improved over

59 Interview with Representative of CSO, 29 September 2023

60 Strategy on Science, Technology and Innovation (2023-2030), accessed on September 11, 2023, <https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/Detaje/614>

61 UNIDO, 2020, *Country Profile Albania*, accessed on 11 September 2023, <https://stat.unido.org/content/publications/competitive-industrial-performance-index-2020%253a-country-profiles>

62 Action Document for EU for Innovation Phase II, accessed on 11 September 2023, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-01/C_2021_9730_F1_ANNEX_EN_V1_P1_1674689.PDF

63 After data irregularities on Doing Business 2018 and 2020, World Bank paused the next edition of Doing Business, accessed on 11 September 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2021/09/16/world-bank-group-to-discontinue-doing-business-report>



the years. Additionally, there are Council of Ministers decisions in place for the implementation of all these mechanisms. However, there is a need for improvement of the Law itself to make some of these mechanisms fully implementable and in line with the principles of youth participation.

The completion of the segregated database on youth is imperative, as it serves as a crucial tool for collecting youth data, overseeing the activities of youth organisations, and shaping youth policies based on evidence. Nevertheless, a central concern expressed by the interviewees regarding its operation revolves around data privacy. Deliberations have ensued regarding the inclusion or exclusion of specific NPO data and the potential implications for public perception and the work of CSOs.

An important aspect to mention is sustainability of youth organisations and unfavourable environment in which they operate. There is little support for the activities of youth CSOs, and they are not exempt from any taxes at the local or central level nor from bank commissions, thus receiving the same treatment as the for-profit sector. The incentives should be considered as part of the fiscal package. Furthermore, almost all CSOs are project-based, as there are few donors which provide core grants. This presents difficulties in terms of sustainability, achieving impact, and availability of human resources. Therefore, creating a more enabling environment, which plays a crucial role in youth development, should be the primary focus. Youth have received more attention from local governments, but structured efforts should be made to establish and enhance the functionality of youth centres and develop local youth policies. Youth infrastructure and local youth policies should be a focal point, with dedicated youth budgets separate from those involving youth in education, sports, etc. Additionally, there should be an emphasis on increasing cooperation between local government units and youth organisations, recognising that this may vary from one municipality to another.

The interviews with youth stakeholders echo the need to promptly finalise the policy and legal framework on two important laws for the sector such as the Law on Youth' and Law on Volunteerism. Albania has already adopted the Youth Strategy of Albania and Action Plan 2022–2029, which has addressed gaps in the economy policy framework. The shortcomings of the previous Action Plan (2015–2020) are reflected in the new one. Its implementation and its planned quarterly monitoring should be closely followed.

Youth policy is a cross-sectorial policy area and various line ministries and bodies deal with youth issues, which at times proves challenging in terms of building synergies, data collection and analysis, and overall coordination. Youth organisations argue that institutions in Albania, by transferring their competencies from one institution to another regarding youth, have caused a disorientation in institutional coordination for youth in Albania. It is recommended to continue investing in institutional memory and having a responsible entity at both the policy and implementation levels. Human resources and capacities also impact the institutional framework on youth. SMYC, responsible for youth policy, has limited staff working with and for young people. Budget for youth remains limited and included within the budgetary lines of education and sports.

In summary, there have been noteworthy advancements in the realm of youth policies, and it is imperative that these endeavours persist. This can be achieved through augmenting the budget, strengthening current mechanisms, promoting the integration of youth concerns into all policies, and investing in the retention of institutional knowledge and expertise.



2.7. Tabular comparison

Table 3: Comparison of development of institutions provided by the Law on Youth through the years and youth policies in place

Institution/ Mechanism	2020 – 2021 (based on the previous report)	2023 (current statute assessed)	Critical Assessment
Institution responsible for youth, youth	Formerly known as the Youth Service. The Council of Ministers' decision No. 681, dated 2.9.2020 ⁶⁴ established NAY in September 2020. The new Director of NAY was appointed in December 2020 and the full functioning of the re-organised NAY is expected to further progress in 2021.	Agency for Youth of Albania (NAY) is already operating.	The Agency for Youth of Albania (NAY) is already operating, and it has opened its third call for applications, benefiting even from the support of UN Agencies.
Youth database	No data available.	The CoM Decision No. 833, dated 24.12.2021 for the establishment, administration, and maintenance of youth database and its interaction with other databases was published.	It has not been established yet. There have been two consultation meetings with youth CSOs to discuss its functionality. A matter of concern for youth CSOs is the data that will be published and data privacy matters.
Policy Framework	The Youth Action Plan 2015–2020 faced a significant issue: the absence of a designated budget for its execution. Furthermore, the frequent changes in the organisation responsible for youth affairs posed challenges in effectively implementing and monitoring its impact and progress. The implementation of APY presented multiple interconnected challenges: The previous Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY) had to prioritise issues related to social inclusion, protection, and welfare rather than youth-specific concerns. MSWY, responsible for APY implementation, was dissolved with the new government in September 2017.	The new Youth Strategy 2022 – 2029 was published in Official Journal of Albania No. 144, dated 01/11/2022 and it is followed by an action plan which also involves financial considerations. The Strategy was developed based on wider consultations with youth groups and youth CSOs.	Albania had a Youth Action Plan for the period 2015–2020, and one of the major criticisms was the absence of a sufficient budget and a robust monitoring process. In the new Strategy, these concerns have been appropriately addressed, and a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation process has been planned. The total estimated cost of the Youth Strategy of Albania 2022–2029 is 51 865 807 EUR ⁶⁵

64 Law on Youth, accessed on 11 September 2023, <https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Permbledhje-e-ligjit-dhe-akteve-n%C3%ABnligjore-n%C3%AB-fush%C3%ABn-e-rinis%C3%AB.pdf>

65 Information provided by MSYC



Institution/ Mechanism	2020 – 2021 (based on the previous report)	2023 (current statute assessed)	Critical Assessment
Policy Framework	<p>The youth sector was transferred to the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth (MESY), which primarily focuses on the education sector rather than youth-specific matters. This shift was partly influenced by various events, including the student protests of December 2018 - January 2019, devastating earthquake of November 2019, and COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.</p> <p>Furthermore, the emphasis on youth issues was predominantly driven by international donors. MESY did not release monitoring reports for APY . Nevertheless, the main challenge in APY implementation was the absence of dedicated funding for youth within the public budget</p>		
Policy Making Institutions for youth	<p>During 2009-2013 youth has been an area under the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports.</p> <p>During 2013-2017 MSWY was responsible for youth policy.</p> <p>Meanwhile, from 2018 until 2021 youth was part of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth portfolio and a Deputy Minister in charge of youth was appointed. Also, a directorate called Youth Service was the implementing body of the policies.</p>	<p>From September 2021 – up to date a State Minister for Children and Youth was established which operates at policy-making level.</p> <p>The implementing body of youth policies and grant giving mechanism is Youth Agency of Albania.</p>	<p>Over the years, more attention has been given to youth. The establishment of a dedicated institution is a positive development, but it should be further strengthened in terms of human resources and finances.</p>



CHAPTER 3: FUNDING FRAMEWORK: OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF THE YOUTH PROGRAMMES AND INSTRUMENTS AT ECONOMY LEVEL

The chapter analyses youth policy funding and presents some key interventions and government programmes in the youth area, including a critical assessment of the above.

3.1. Youth Policy Funding

The Law on Youth stipulates that the sources of funding for the implementation of youth policies, programmes, and projects are as follows: a) grant funds from the public budget dedicated to youth; b) local budgets; c) income generated by youth organisations; d) donations; e) sponsorships; f) other legal sources.⁶⁶

The new Law on Youth envisages that youth organisations or CSOs working in youth-related areas can benefit from central government funding through a dedicated youth fund.⁶⁷ A specific CoM decision⁶⁸ No. 1411, dated 24/12/2020 was approved, defining the criteria and procedures for the selection of youth organisations, and/or youth who benefit from the public budget grant funds intended for youth. CoM Decision specifies that NAY will be responsible for the management of youth grant funds, which will be approved in the annual budget law and will finance projects in the area of youth. Projects must be proposed and implemented not only by youth organisations and youth but also by local self-government units. After the first call of proposals in 2021, a new CoM Decision No. 566, dated 29/07/ 2022⁶⁹ was adopted to further improve the quality of the call for applications addressing components such as involvement of two expert members from civil society with expertise in the evaluation of development projects.

The requirements for submission of applications include not only a project proposal, but also organisation's administrative and legal documents. CSOs and local government units need capacity building for project proposal writing, partnership building, and project implementation, particularly grassroots youth organisations, informal groups and CSOs outside of Tirana. There has been criticism from some youth CSOs regarding the call for applications as being quite demanding in terms of documents requested, and feedback in specific projects not being provided. Meanwhile, the entire

66 Law on Youth No. 75, dated 4.11.2019, accessed on 11 September 2023
<https://www.parlament.al/Files/ProjektLigje/20191107152923ligje%20nr.%2075,%20dt.%204.11.2019.pdf>

67 Ibid. Article 15.

68 CoM Decision for the youth grants. accessed on 25 September 2023,
<https://riniafemijet.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Vendimi-Nr.1141-date-24.12.2020-Per-financimin-e-projekteve-rinore.pdf>

69 CoM Decision 566 dated 29.07.2022, accessed on 25 September 2023,
<https://rinia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/vendim-2022-07-29-566.pdf>



process, including the publishing of the call for applications, staff training, rules, and procedures, has benefited from the support of UNDP in Albania. The application process aligns with the EU-certified RELOAD methodology.

In 2021, the total amount for supporting youth organisations and/or youth in this call was 48 million EUR. In 2022, the total grant amount for supporting youth organisations and/or youth in this call was 540,066⁷⁰ EUR and 46,557.5 EUR were allocated to municipalities for youth infrastructure. Additionally, for 2023 the total grant amount for supporting youth organisations and/or youth remained at 540,066 EUR but UNFPA/UNDP/ UNICEF supported additional projects in the frame of the call for proposals.⁷¹ This serves as a good example of increased support for youth projects through cooperation among various entities. The 2023 call for proposals was specifically focused on soliciting project proposals that contribute to the implementation of Youth Strategy of Albania.

A more detailed information about all the projects supported through NYA⁷² are provided below:

- a. In the 1st Public Call, announced on 28.06.2021, 12 youth organisations and organisations for youth had been supported financially under the 4 main pillars as follows: innovation and entrepreneurship; decision-making and inclusivity; non-formal education; and social inclusion. Four municipalities had been financially supported: the municipality of Lezhë, municipality of Elbasan, municipality of Roskovec, and municipality of Tiranë.
- b. Through the 2nd Public Call, announced on 22.08.2022, and using the central government's grant funds, 23 youth organisations and organisations for youth (as well as 1 organisation for youth which was funded by UNICEF) had been supported financially, under the 3 main pillars as follows: 1) incentive for youth innovation and technological skills of the 21st century in youth/young people; 2) support and counselling/career orientation and incorporation of young people in the work force; and 3) support to active wellbeing, physical health, social, cultural and emotional/mental wellbeing of youth/young people. Five municipalities had been financially supported: the municipality of Gjirokastër, municipality of Lushnje, municipality of Kamëz, municipality of Durrës, and municipality of Dibër.
- c. Through the 3rd Public Call, announced on 27.04.2023, and using the central government's grant funds, 20 youth organisations and organisations for youth (as well as 3 youth organisations which were funded by UNDP/UNFPA/UNICEF) had been supported financially, under the 3 main pillars as follows: 1) support for the inclusion of youth/young people in decision-making processes, and support to the social activism and citizenship; 2) support and promotion of job opportunities and their inclusion in the work force; and 3) support to active wellbeing, physical health, social, cultural and emotional/mental wellbeing of youth/young people.

Since youth is a cross-cutting issue, the competencies for policy-making dedicated to youth fall under SMYC. Meanwhile, the budget allocated to youth is managed by the Youth Agency of Albania under the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MFE). Other line ministries are responsible for youth-related policy implementation, such as employment, vocational education and training (VET),

70 Youth Agency of Albania, *Call Guideline (2022)*, accessed on 25 September 2023, <https://rinia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/SHTOJCA-6-Udhezuesi-1.pdf>

71 Interview with representative of Public Administration 4 October 2023.

72 Information provided by the MYSC



culture, and others. They also have budget programmes for youth, but it is difficult and complex to analyse specific and detailed data on youth budgets.

In the budget predictions for 2022 and 2023, as well as in the MFE monitoring reports, there is no specific data regarding a youth budget, except for the 'sport and youth' line budget, which makes it difficult to distinguish the allocated budget for youth. Youth organisations have been lobbying the Government of Albania for some time now to allocate a dedicated public budgetary line for youth.

However, finance experts note that because youth is a cross-cutting issue, there cannot be a specific budget for youth, unless there is only one institution in charge of policy making and implementation of issues related to youth. Furthermore, it is worth noting that allocating a specific budget exclusively for youth is not feasible due to the government's use of Programme and Performance-based Budgeting. Nevertheless, reports indicate an increase in public funding for youth in 2022 and 2023, possibly influenced by the introduction of the new Youth Strategy of Albania and institutional changes.

According to the Mid-Year Report on the Implementation of 2022 Budget, an allocation of 3770.23 EUR⁷³ was earmarked for the development of youth and sports. However, this figure does not provide a clear breakdown of the specific amount dedicated solely to youth-related initiatives. In the same report, it is mentioned that the Reserve Fund, as established by Law No. 115/2021 on the Budget for the Year 2022, was approved with a total allocation of 500 million EUR. Article 14 of this Law outlines the intended use of the Reserve Fund for the "projects for children and youth". This suggests that a portion of the Reserve Fund is intended for projects related to children and youth, though the exact amount is not specified in the information provided.

Other allocated funds for development of youth is the yearly contribution from GoA to RYCO⁷⁴ in the amount 173,000 EUR. RYCO is financed by the governments of the WB region and is supported by the EU and other donors.

Another public budget that contributes to supporting youth initiatives is provided by ASCS to support NPO projects. In 2022, a total of EUR 795,000 (95,000,000 ALL)⁷⁵ was explicitly allocated to support CSOs, but there is no information about initiatives that specifically targeted youth. However, this agency faces significant criticism from CSOs regarding issues of accountability, transparency, and project evaluation committee.

73 Ministry of Finance and Economy, *Mid-Year Report on the Implementation of 2022 Budget*, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://financa.gov.al/buxheti-2022/>

74 More about RYCO: <https://www.rycowb.org/about/> (accessed 25 September)

75 Partners Albania, *The Monitoring Matrix on the Environment Enabling Civil Society Development, Albanian Report 2022*, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://www.partnersalbania.org/publication/monitoring-matrix-on-enabling-environment-for-civil-society-development-country-report-for-albania-2/> p.15



3.2. Key Youth Programmes/Instruments

In terms of education and skills development, GoA has several programmes that target young people.

These programmes include:

*In terms of **education***, one of the key GoA programmes is the Excellence Fund, which is a grant awarded to excellent students to pursue their studies in the top 15 universities in the world. This grant is available for bachelor, master's, and PhD students with a total fund of approximately 1 million Euros. MESY publishes an annual call for the selection of candidates and the criterion for obtaining a scholarship is that students agree to return and work in public institutions in Albania, for at least two years, after completing their studies abroad. A total of 29 grants were awarded for the academic year 2020-2021, and since 2017, a cumulative total of 103 grants have been awarded. Unfortunately, there is no available information regarding the grants awarded in 2022 and 2023. *In terms of **employment***, GoA has been implementing the Programme on Work Placement and Internships in Albania⁷⁶ established with CoM. In the seventh call (2022) of the Work Placement Programme, 1,096 young people applied, from whom 457 were selected as they met the application criteria. Out of these, 157 young individuals, who received the maximum score, were employed on one-year contracts with the institutions where they completed their internships. In the sixth call (2021) of the Work Placement Programme, 572 young individuals completed their work placements, and 196 of them were hired on one-year contracts by the host institutions.

*In terms of **digital skills***, the Coding Programme⁷⁷ was established with CoM Decision No. 646, dated 5 October 2022,⁷⁸ 'On the procedures, criteria, and rules for the implementation of vocational training programmes through financial support offered, according to competition procedures, for vocational training courses organised by public or private vocational training institutions'. It aims to develop technological skills for young people and it is part of the implementation of NYS.

The call for applications was published in January 2023 but there is no information about the number of applicants and beneficiaries.

Programme of Extracurricular Activities (ECA)⁷⁹ aims to enhance pro-social and community orientation among children and youth, transforming schools into community life centres; to improve student learning by offering non-formal learning opportunities in coordination with and as an addition to the formal curriculum; to enhance career readiness and awareness; and to support physical and psychosocial health of students. The programme started to operate in January 2023, from first grade to twelfth grade, in 200 schools across Albania. In total, 1041 thematic courses have been opened, with more than 10,000 students enrolled.

76 CoM Decision No.395, dated 29.04.2015, accessed 25 September 2023, https://www.drejtesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Vendim_Nr.395_date_29.04.2015.pdf

77 More about Coding Programme: <https://riniafemijet.gov.al/rinia/kodimi-per-te-rinjte/> accessed 25 September 2023

78 CoM Decision No. 646, dated 5.11.2022, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://akpa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Buletini-nr-149.pdf>

79 More about Programme of Extracurricular Activities in Albania: <https://riniafemijet.gov.al/programi-jashteshkollor/> accessed 25 September 2023



The Sports Teams Programme⁸⁰ aims to promote a healthy sporting lifestyle, steer young people away from unhealthy habits that lead to social passivity, and help them spend their extracurricular time in a meaningful way. This project involves approximately 10,000 children and young people from volleyball and basketball teams in 61 cities across Albania, with the participation of 225 schools. Around 700 basketball and volleyball teams have been formed for both genders in pre-university education.

Youth Guarantee Programme is a EU flagship programme which focus on empowering and employing young people aged 15-29 who are not in employment, education, or vocational training, registered for no more than four months with employment services. The programme is carried out through vocational training courses, lasting 3 to 6 months, and subsequently through employment for at least 6 (six) more months after completing this programme, with the aim of paving the way for long-term employment for the participating youth. The process is supported by central budget funds and European Union funds. These are the three main steps of the programme:⁸¹ design and approval of Youth Guarantee Scheme in Albania (2022); pilot phase and adoption of implementing plan and institutional capacities (2022-2023); and implementation of Youth Guarantee (will start from 2023 and last up to 2026). Launching of the Youth Guarantee Scheme took place in October 2023.

3.3. Critical Assessment

The Law on Youth's provisions regarding public funding for grants to youth groups and individuals are a good development for Albania's youth sector in general. This funding method benefits young people, youth networks, and CSOs working in the youth sector. Furthermore, the provisions of Youth Strategy of Albania 2022–2029 deepen and orient the investments in the youth sector and put more emphasizes on youth in all other line ministries.

The number of projects supported by the Youth Agency of Albania (NYA) has increased over the years, and its project selection process has improved, benefiting from the support of UN agencies. However, the list of winning projects should be announced, feedback should be provided to youth CSOs upon request and efforts should be made to develop procedures to also support youth or non-formal youth groups. ASCS could benefit from the positive examples set by NYA and further enhance its functionality and transparency.

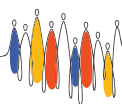
Given that youth policies often have a cross-sectorial nature, they should be eligible for funding from multiple budgetary programmes and policy areas, encompassing health, social protection, education, employment, vocational training, entrepreneurship, innovation, culture, and sports. Nonetheless, besides the budget dedicated to youth through the Youth Agency of Albania, youth should be clearly mainstreamed in all budget programmes linked with youth as a cross-cutting issue. This might help to make an approximation of the budget allocated to youth in all available policies and to further monitor budget allocated to youth.

80 More about Sports Teams Programme:
<https://riniagemijet.gov.al/programi-per-ekipet-sportive-shkollore/> accessed 25 September 2023

81 Youth Congress of Albania , 2023, *Snapshot of Youth Guarantee in Albania: How can youth organisations*, accessed 25 September 2023, <https://krk.al/pasqyrim-i-garancise-rinore-ne-shqiperi-si-mund-te-ndihmojne-organizatat-rinore/>



With the new NYS 2022–2029 there has been an increase in the programmes targeting youth such as the Programme on Work Placement and Internships, Programme of Extracurricular Activities, Coding Programme, etc. These programmes are positive development for youth in general but means to make them sustainable over the time should be explored through the use of youth centres.



3.4. Tabular comparison

Table 4: Economy-wide Youth Programme Funding Comparison

Institution/ Mechanism	2020 – 2021 (based on the previous)	2023 (current statute assessed)	Critical Assessment
Youth Agency	Funding every year for the Youth Service and the establishment of Regional Youth Centres as well as the implementation of youth activities provided in APY is in the amount of 75 million ALL (EUR 607,888), but there is no data available on the activities the budget has funded.	As per 2023 budget provision, 212,960,000 ALL (2 028 190 EUR – lump sum) was allocated to NYA.	During its three years of operation, the Youth Agency of Albania has enhanced its rules and procedures, increasing the number of supported projects with the assistance of UN agencies. Efforts to further improve transparency and accountability should persist. The annual budget dedicated to youth is doubled over the years.
Projects given to youth organisations or CSOs which work with youth	In 2021, the total amount for supporting youth organisations and/or CSOs which work with youth in this call was 48 million ALL (460,000 EUR lump sum).	In 2022, the total grant amount for supporting youth organisations and/or youth in this call was 58,000,000 ALL (543,606 EUR). In 2022, the total grant amount for supporting youth organisations and/or youth in this call was 58,000,000 ALL (543,606 EUR). Additionally, for the 2023 the total grant amount for supporting youth organisations and/or CSOs which work with youth remained at 58 million ALL (550,000 EUR – lump sum) but UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF supported additional projects in the frame of the call for proposals.	There is an increase in the number of projects funded for youth CSOs or by CSOs for youth. Cooperation with international institutions is noticed to be increasing and has led to a greater number of beneficial projects. Projects supported in numbers: 1st call – 12 projects/ 4 municipalities 2nd call – 24 projects / 5 municipalities 3rd call – 23 projects
ASCS	Another public budget that contributes to supporting youth initiatives is provided by ASCS to support NPO's projects. In 2019, a total of EUR 173,451 (21,400,000 ALL) was explicitly allocated in support of youth projects and initiatives such as rural youth integration, raising awareness of youth regarding the justice system, and youth self-employment.	Another public budget that contributes to supporting youth initiatives is provided by ASCS to support NPO projects. In 2022, a total of EUR 795,000 (95,000,000 ALL) was explicitly allocated to support CSOs, but there is no information about initiatives that specifically targeted youth.	Over the years, youth has been in focus of ASCS's call for proposals. Nonetheless, reforms are necessary to build trust in ASCS's project selection process and ensure the broad participation of CSOs and youth CSOs. More efforts should be put in transparency and accountability.
Youth Programmes	Excellence Fund Programme on Work Placement and Internships	1. Excellence Fund – there are no data about its implementation in 2022 and 2023 2. Programme on Work Placement and Internships 3. Coding Programme 4. Programme of Extracurricular Activities (ECA) 5. Sports Teams Programme	The number of programmes targeting youth has shown a positive increase.



CHAPTER 4: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLICY MAKING AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

This chapter analyses the existing mechanisms of youth participation, both at the central and local levels, and presents the primary youth organisations at economy level and networks.

4.1. Youth engagement and participation in policy: Key mechanisms and processes

The Law on Youth stipulates the importance of youth participation in policy and decision-making processes. The Law envisages setting up institutions that will improve coordination and communication and provide a more sustainable solution to youth participation in decision-making.

In Albania, 70% of youth has voted in at least one election, but few feel represented by the political system. *“Despite the importance that youth play in the Albanian society, many youngsters feel alienated and detached from the political system,”* states the report by WDF and Civic Resistance.⁸² Meanwhile, 40% of Albanian youth surveyed said they had never participated in a public meeting and 64% reported that they do not believe political leaders at the central or local levels are committed to youth. Civic and political activity is a complicated proxy for democratic activity in Albania. Many young people in Albania feel pessimistic about their ability to influence politics and interact with elected officials.⁸³ They have been discouraged from participating in politics by the negative examples encountered, which has eroded their trust in democratic institutions and a fair society. This lack of trust is especially impactful on the younger generation, and it distorts their perception of success. Consequently, 62% have no interest in Albanian politics and 87% believe it is closely connected to criminal activities,⁸⁴ which impacts sustainable democracy, and further development of a strong democratic culture.

Meanwhile, according to the Youth Participation Index (2021),⁸⁵ Albania scores 44.7% in terms of political participation out of possible 100%. This indicates an improvement compared to previous years but highlights the need for further enhancement. As per young MPs, Albania also experienced a decline in 2021 compared to previous years, from around 4% to only 2%.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, a positive development is the increase in the number of youth local councillors (age group 18-29 years old). In total there are 188 youth local councillors, where 112 are females and 76 males.⁸⁷ In the period from

82 Westminster Foundation for Democracy & Civic Resistance, 2021, *Survey: Young People and Politics in Albania*, accessed 24 September 2023, https://www.wfd.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/national-survey_young-people-and-politics-in-albania-final.pdf

83 International Republican Institute, 2023, *The vicious cycle of democratic decline*, accessed: 31 August 2023 <https://www.iri.org/resources/the-vicious-cycle-of-democratic-decline/>

84 International Republican Institute, 2023, *The vicious cycle of democratic decline*, accessed: 31 August 2023 <https://www.iri.org/resources/the-vicious-cycle-of-democratic-decline/>

85 Partners Albania, 2021, *Youth Participation Index*, accessed: 31 August 2023 <https://youthwbt.eu/youth-participation-index-2021/>

86 *ibid*

87 Based on the request for information addressed to the Central Election Commission



2016 to 2018, the percentage of young Mayors was 6%⁸⁸ in Albania although in the last three years this percentage dropped to zero after local elections.

Given the declining involvement of youth in political activities and their overall perception of the political process, it is essential to implement measures aimed at increasing youth political participation. This includes structured efforts in political education to not only foster a sense of representation among young people but also make politics more accountable and responsible. One potential approach to consider is the implementation of youth quotas.⁸⁹ This can be a valuable step in fostering greater youth engagement and inclusion in the decision-making process. It can help bridge generational gaps and ensure that the concerns and aspirations of young people are taken into account when formulating policies that impact their lives. However, it is important to approach this initiative thoughtfully and in a way that respects the principles of fairness, representation, and accountability.

4.1.1. Participation at central level

Youth Council of Albania

The new Law on Youth envisages the establishment of YCA as an advisory body, which functions under MESY. The main competences of YCA are: a) proposes the priority policies, budget, and activities in the field of youth; b) suggests the main directions and programmes for supporting and empowering youth participation; c) provides input on drafting the Youth Strategy of Albania and monitors its implementation. YCA is chaired by the Minister responsible for youth and consists of 16 members: 2 representatives of the Local Self-Government Support Agency; 8 representatives of youth organisations and/or youth and 4 representatives of student councils; chair of Youth Agency of Albania (NYA) and SMYC itself. Student councils and youth representatives are to be appointed by order of SMYC, after the selection procedure conducted by NAY. The criteria and procedures for the election of members, as well as the manner of organisation and functioning of YCA are defined in a CoM Decision approved in December 2020. The second call for applications was opened in September 2023 and members were announced in October 2023. YCA must meet at least twice per year and it will have a technical secretariat of three members to support its work. More details about its functionality will be given in Subchapter 4.3. Establishment and functioning of Youth Councils and umbrella organisations.

The establishment of YCA is essential for further enhancing youth policy framework in Albania and ensuring its proper implementation.

Youth Representative Organisation

The Youth Representative Organisation (YRO) should be established as a non-profit organisation (NPO) in accordance with the provisions of the Youth Law. It is expected to operate in compliance with the Civil Code of Albania and the current legislation for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). The right to establish a Youth Representative Organisation belongs to youth organisations and/or youth, which accept the purpose, field of activity and other definitions of this organisation, regulated in its

88 Partners Albania, 2021, *Youth Participation Index*, accessed 25 September 2023, available at:

https://youthwbt.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Divac_YPI-2021_Brosura_DIGITALNA-VERZIJA.pdf P.23

89 Interview with NPO Representative, 29 September 2023.



statute. The criteria for its establishment were approved through Council of Ministers (CoM) Decision No. 274 of 12 May 2021.⁹⁰ Subsequent to the CoM's Decision, a call for expressions of interest was extended to existing youth organisations and networks for the establishment of YRO. There were no applications submitted at this time. However, it is worth noting that youth CSOs have found the criteria to be challenging. Furthermore, legal provisions regarding the registration of networks and umbrella CSOs should be taken into account, as these provisions present additional difficulties for the establishment of this entity.⁹¹ As of now, there is no recognised Youth Representative Organisation (YRO), and specific criteria for its functionality and budget allocation have not been established.

Youth Representative of Albania in the Governing Board of RYCO

The Governing Board of RYCO consists of six youth representatives and six Ministers/Youth Institutions from each contracting party, serving as the highest decision-making body within this intergovernmental organisation. They hold significant responsibilities as per the RYCO statute, which mandates that youth representatives must be between 18 and 30 years old at the start of their three-year non-extendable term. Given their vital role and the substantial decisions they make, the youth representative's position on the Governing Board is considered a powerful instrument for youth participation in decision-making and policy-making processes. Consequently, the selection process should prioritise accountability and transparency. Albania has undergone three rounds of youth representative selection, with each iteration showing improvement and increased inclusivity by actively engaging youth CSOs.⁹²

4.1.2. Participation at the local level

The new Law on Youth introduces LYC, which functions as an advisory body to the mayor. During 2023, 59 out of 61 municipalities have established LYC⁹³ which is a very noticeable and positive progress. Nevertheless, concerns raised by youth CSOs operating at the local level have to do with the selection process and their operation. These concerns include LYCs functioning more as non-formal youth groups than advisory bodies which deal with youth policies, budget, etc. Another concern is the dependence of LYCs on the Mayor, who serves as the chair of the council, with members of the local youth council being appointed by the Mayor. This is being seen as centralisation of their activity which has an impact on the autonomy and functioning of LYCs. According to the interviews conducted, this centralises power and does not promote youth self-organisation. Furthermore, the activities of LYCs so far at the levels of youth participation can be clustered as youth decoration or tokenism.⁹⁴

There have been some initiatives and projects by SMYC to further improve LYCs functionality,⁹⁵ thus developing manuals, summer camps with representatives of LYCs, etc. but the municipality is the

90 CoM Decision No. 274 dated 12.05.2021. accessed: 10 September 2023, <https://rinia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/VKM-nr-274-date-12.05.2021-Per-percaktimin-e-kritereve-qe-duhet-te-permbushe-OKPR.pdf>

91 Confirmed in the interviews with youth stakeholders

92 Youth Agency of Albania, 2023, *Call for application for RYCO Youth Representative*, accessed: 31 August 2023, available at: <https://rinia.gov.al/thirrje-per-votime-nga-organizatat-jo-fitimprurese-rinore-per-te-rinjte-per-perpagesuesin-rinor-ne-bordin-drejtues-te-zyres-rajonale-per-bashkepunim-rinor-zrbr/>

93 Interview with Public Administration Representative, 4 October 2023.

94 University College, London, 2022, *Youth participation: models used to understand young people's participation in school and community programmes*, accessed: 31 August 2023 https://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/sites/evidence_based_practice_unit/files/headstart_evidence_briefing_participation_models.pdf

95 More about LYCs <https://riniafemijet.gov.al/?s=keshillat+rinor+vendor> accessed: 31 August 2023



main responsible authority and it should be the one proactively working in this direction. Therefore, LYCs require additional assistance, including resources, capacity building, operational guidelines, communication, and outreach to guarantee the effective representation and engagement of youth in local policy formulation.

4.2. Evidence-based youth policy

Over the past years, there has been a slight improvement in young people's participation in public institutions such as parliament and government. The legal framework that enables citizen and youth participation in decision-making has improved with the Law on Public Consultations,⁹⁶ Law on the Right to Information,⁹⁷ and local self-government laws.⁹⁸ Drafting of the Law on Youth and Youth Strategy 2022–2029 was done with a broad consultation process with various youth stakeholders, organisations and networks. Other youth-related policy areas are increasingly being informed by evidence and research such as employment, VET, innovation, and digital skills. However, the political agenda seems to be retained despite the evidence presented to policymakers. For instance, a study by WFD⁹⁹ finds that although the legal and policy frameworks for enabling cooperation between public institutions and civil society are mainly in place, challenges remain such as: a lack of feedback and follow-up mechanisms, poor implementation of the legal framework, and superficial collaboration with CSOs, with minimal impact. Institutions have limited capacities to prioritise public information, consultation, and comprehensive cooperation with CSOs, including with youth organisations.

Albania has only recently been building the systems and culture for evidence-based and informed policy-making, which requires good quality knowledge production, knowledge intermediaries, and a regulatory framework that creates incentives for doing (policy) research as well as using research results in policy decisions.¹⁰⁰ In pursuit of this goal, it is essential for youth organisations and relevant stakeholders, including networks, non-profit organisations, research centres, and youth-focused think-tanks, to enhance their capabilities for evidence-based research on youth and to actively participate in policy discussions. Simultaneously, there is a need for standardisation and consistency in institutional capacities, infrastructure, and data collection methodologies to ensure the reliable collection of youth-related data. Additionally, institutions should intensify their efforts to promote collaboration with and reach out to civil society organisations (CSOs), actively seeking their feedback and expertise.

4.3. Establishment and functioning of Youth Councils and umbrella organisations

As already mentioned in the Law on Youth, some important bodies are planned to be established to secure youth representation and youth dialogue. The Law on Youth envisioned the establishment of NYC, an advisory body which in the new organigram functions under SMYC. The CoM Decision

96 Law No 146/2014 on Notification and Public Consultations.

97 Law No 119/2014 on the Right to Information

98 Law No 68/2017 on Self-Government Finance, Law No 107/2014 on Territorial Planning and Development and Law No.139/2015 on Self-Government.

99 WFD and IDM, 2020, *Civil Society Participation in Decision Making in Albania*, accessed 2 January 2021, available at <https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CSO-Participation-in-Decision-Making-in-Albania.pdf>

100 *ibid*



setting out the criteria and procedures for the election of YCA members, and its organisation and functioning has been approved and the second round of members were selected in October 2023.

As this crucial mechanism has been operational for two years and new youth representatives have been selected through an open voting process where youth CSOs were engaged, it is essential to reflect on its initial period of existence. If it has fulfilled its mission and the level of engagement from both parties. Interviews with youth stakeholders confirm that YCA has not been very proactive and more support is needed (resources, capacity development, infrastructure, operating procedures, communication and outreach) to ensure not only efficient and effective operations, and to build trust with youth organisations, CSOs, civil society, other stakeholders, and youth. The structure has been functional, and meetings have taken place as required by the law. An important aspect of this participatory mechanism has been its qualitative functionality, and the necessity of having a dedicated secretariat. Meanwhile, there have been a few gatherings which have not touched upon important topics such as budget.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the Law stipulates that YCA is responsible for proposing and presenting, which implies that even representatives of youth CSOs or other individuals should take on a more proactive role to ensure more meaningful youth participation and authentic youth engagement. While central institutions should allocate a secretariat to the mechanism and publish meeting minutes, the members themselves should also proactively seek to fulfil their role in this structure.

Article 13 of the new Law on Youth foresees the establishment of YRO, which is expected to be established as a NPO. Details of its mission, function, and competences are clarified by the CoM Decision on the criteria to be fulfilled by YRO. LYCs are also envisioned in the new Law on Youth (Article 10) and are to be set up by a decision of the municipal council in each municipality (61). SMYC monitored the establishment of LYCs in each municipality. However, interviews with stakeholders reconfirm that municipalities will still need support in terms of resources and capacity development to set up LYCs.

4.4. Platforms for youth cooperation at the economy level

The Youth Congress of Albania of Albania (NYCA)¹⁰² is a youth umbrella organisation – a union of youth organisations, informal groups, youth forums of political parties, with the aim of exchanging information, highlighting youth issues, lobbying and advocating for solving these issues, and provision of capacity building for all entities involved in the network. Established in March 2013, it now represents 112 youth entities across Albania, fostering a broad representative base. NYCA emphasizes internal democracy and youth participation and operates in all 12 regions of Albania with dedicated regional coordinators. It relies on donor support for financial sustainability and runs three main programmes: Political Education and Capacity Building, Research Monitoring and Evaluation, and Institutional Dialogue and Cooperation. NYCA was the responsible entity, along with the Tirana Municipality, for the application and implementation of the title Tirana European Youth Capital 2022.

The Albanian Youth Network (AYN)¹⁰³ is a youth coalition, composed of representatives of political youth forums and youth groups and civil society organisations at the local and central level that

101 Interview with CSO Representative, 29 September 2023.

102 More about Youth Congress of Albania: <https://www.krk.al/what-is-nyc/> accessed 14 September 2023

103 More about Youth Network of Albania: <https://www.anyn.al/en> accessed 14 September 2023



was established in 2015. They come together under this group to undertake joint activities and initiatives of interest to all youth, regardless of political affiliation, economic and social status, sexual orientation, gender identity, skills, or clusters, to which they belong. Even though ANYN is not a legally registered entity, it is active in policy participation, advocacy, and networking also thanks to the support and facilitation of a consolidated NPO, such as CRCA. ANYN has been very vocal in the consultation process of the new Law on Youth. Given that it is not a formal entity, it relies primarily on the experience of CRCA.

The Young Professionals Network (YPN)¹⁰⁴ is a cooperative development platform composed of young professionals, non-profit organisations, youth organisations, business associations, freelancers, and businesses. It was formally established by a group of young and motivated professionals with diverse working backgrounds. After participating in several programmes supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung, they decided to create this platform to apply the knowledge they had gained to address various challenges in their home economies. YPN operates through three core programmes: Economic Empowerment and Social Rights, Active Citizenship and Local Democracy, and Peace and Security. It was established in 2019.

Observatory for Children and Youth Rights¹⁰⁵ (Observatory) in Albania is a nongovernmental entity established in 2009 as a civil society network intended to monitor the situation of children. Observatory has a coverage with offices in 12 districts of Albania and it offers a unique added value in data collection on children and youth rights. It has established a good track record of cooperation with local government and other local authorities in health, education, and social protection. Its mission is to ensure the dignity and well-being of children and young people across Albania through observation, research and analysis, communication and advocacy; by cooperating with other stakeholders / institutions; and getting involved in public awareness and education campaigns. To fulfil its mission, the Observatory operates in twelve regional nationwide branches.

Youth Voice Albania¹⁰⁶ is a youth-led network of organisations in Albania initially established with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as part of the global campaign on the inclusion of youth in the global 2030 sustainable development agenda. It is a network of organisations officially established in 2018, but has operated as a network since 2014. This network is composed of youth organisations and clubs specialised in various fields of sexual and reproductive health, education, social and health services, human rights, community work and work with marginalised and most vulnerable groups. The activities carried out by this network have encouraged the membership of organisations and youth from various cities of Albania.

World Vision Albania has set up more than 100 local youth groups, thus establishing one of the largest youth participations and self-organisation programmes in Albania. These youth groups are supported with capacity building, networking and advocacy skills and are consulted by World Vision on a regular basis to inform programme development and other youth related interventions.

US Embassy Youth Council Albania is an initiative of the US. Embassy in Tirana which brings together a cross-section of young, dynamic Albanians who give their input to society through

104 More about Young Professionals Network: <https://ypn.al/about-us/> accessed 14 September 2023

105 More about Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, accessed 14 September 2023 <https://observator.org.al/observators/>

106 More about Youth Voice Albania, accessed 14 September 2023 <https://unoy.org/member/youth-voice-network/>



activism, participation in the socio-political dialogue, community services and effective advocacy. It aims to strengthen the sense of active citizenship among the youth of Albania through leadership, outreach, and civic engagement activities.

Youth Advisory Group of OSCE in Albania (YAG) is an advisory body to the OSCE Presence in Albania seeking to support the Presence's efforts to integrate a youth perspective (youth-specific considerations, concerns, needs, priorities, and vulnerabilities) into its planning and programmatic activities.

United Nations Albania Youth Advisory Group is a group of individuals and/or representatives of UN Albania's stakeholders who have been nominated/selected to advise the UN in Albania Country Team (UNCT) on key youth issues of importance. Members of the UN Youth Advisory Group have an opportunity to learn more about the UN programmes in Albania and functioning of the United Nations globally, and provide suggestions to the UNCT about how programmes can better address Albania's youth and include a youth perspective in their components. UNYAG mandate started on 16 December 2020.

4.5. Regional platforms and networks

Regional platforms and networks active in Albania are listed below.

Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)¹⁰⁷ is an independently functioning institutional mechanism, founded by the WB and other donors, aiming to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation among the youth in the region through youth exchange programmes. Its headquarters are in Albania. In 2022 through RYCO's activities 60 schools organised 30 exchanges, 800+ students were engaged and 120 teachers across the region; support was provided to 12 youth social businesses; 6 student regional networks were supported and cooperated with 31 organisations; 1500+ students were reached, and 6 regional students' workshops organised, including 50+ local activities, etc.

Western Balkans Youth Lab is a 3-year project implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council (CC) with the support of the European Union (EU). This project is the first of its kind in the Western Balkans and aims to bring together representatives of institutions, civil society and other relevant stakeholders in joint public policy-making with a focus on youth, dialogue and institutional cooperation. Furthermore, the project has had a great role in enhancing connectivity among youth CSOs in the region and creating opportunities for young professionals and young leaders to participate in important regional events.

Western Balkans Youth Cooperation Platform (WBYCP) now called Connecting Youth¹⁰⁸ is a grassroots regional youth platform implemented by the Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) in Albania, together with the umbrella youth organisations from WB economies. WBYCP is designed to function as a resource centre for youth in the WB region.

107 More about Regional Youth Cooperation: <https://www.rycowb.org/> accessed 14 September 2023

108 More about Connection Youth: <https://www.connecting-youth.org/home.php> accessed 14 September 2023



Young European Ambassadors (YEA)¹⁰⁹ platform is a creative network of future young game changers from across the WB and EU. Although YEAs come from different backgrounds, all of them share an interest in learning about the EU's values and promoting the opportunities EU offers. Most importantly, YEA is open to sharing ideas and developing their talents towards inspiring change within their communities, WB region, and across the EU.

Coalition for Economic Development of Youth (CEDY) aims to improve socio-economic opportunities and empower youth across the Western Balkans. Its key goals are to address high youth unemployment, improve job quality, advocate for supportive policies, create new education and training programmes, promote STEM and digital skills, align training with business needs, and share positive examples and information to achieve economic development for youth in the region. The Coalition brings together stakeholders committed to collaborating and taking concrete actions to achieve these aims.

4.6. Critical Assessment

Youth participation in policy-making and decision-making processes through the years has improved and there is a mechanism in place which secures youth participation. However, young people remain sceptical about their political participation for various reasons. Therefore, investments in youth political education and youth political participation should be prioritised alongside skills development and employability. Concrete mechanisms, such as youth quota, could be considered to enhance youth position and foster greater trust in politics.

Efforts to implement all provisions of the Law on Youth have continued. There is still room for improvement, which is closely linked to the need to amend the Law's provisions and to better understand and implement the real concepts of youth participation. Local Youth Councils (LYCs) are operational in most municipalities, but concerns remain among youth organisations operating at the local level regarding their operation and the selection process for LYC members. These issues should be further addressed to enhance the effectiveness of existing local youth structures. The Youth Council of Albania (NYC) was established in 2021 and in September 2023 its third call for applications was published. Both parties should make efforts to establish a constructive mechanism that can serve as a platform for youth dialogue and policy monitoring.

The Youth Agency of Albania, which is the youth policy implementation body, has already been restructured. Youth CSOs have addressed the fact that the project application process entails a large volume of documentation and a multitude of elements. This situation can be viewed from two different angles: as a pioneering activity that helps youth CSOs learn about these processes and increase their capacities, or as a disadvantageous approach, given that most youth CSOs struggle with human resources. Furthermore, to fully align with EU practices, feedback should be provided to the applicants so they can further improve their applications. Additionally, providing grants to individuals or non-formal youth groups should be considered in the future.

109 More about WeBalkans: <https://webalkans.eu/en/yea/young-european-ambassadors/> accessed 14 September 2023



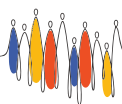
Another important mechanism which should be further taken into consideration is the establishment of YRO. Youth stakeholders interviewed stated that the criteria in the call for applications were demanding. Nevertheless, a completely new concept should be envisioned for this structure in the law amendment to make it feasible. This includes considerations regarding the registration of CSOs, elements related to their independence, financial support to their activity, accountability towards members, transparency and not duplicating the work of youth CSOs.



4.7. Tabular comparison

Table 5: Comparison of development of mechanisms which secure youth participation

Institution/ Mechanism	2020 – 2021 (based on the previous)	2023 (current statute assessed)	Critical Assessment
Youth Council of Albania	The establishment of YCA is still in process.	YCA is established. The Council of Ministers Decision No. 969, dated 2.12.2020	The Youth Council of Albania(NYC) has been established, and the second call for members was published in September 2023.
Local Youth Council (LYC)	LYCs have been set up only in certain municipalities, mainly through ad hoc project funding rather than as a direct implementation of the law.	LYCs are established in 59 out of 61 municipalities.	Local Youth Councils (LYCs) have been established in the majority of municipalities. Their establishment has been discussed since the early development of the law. The main criticism is related to the fact that the mayor serves as the chair of the council, and the members of the local youth council are appointed by the mayor's decision. According to the interviews conducted, this centralises power and does not promote youth self-organisation.
Youth Representative Organisation (YRO)	The CoM decision for the establishment of NYR and the criteria for YRO are yet to be specified by a CoM decision.	The criteria for YRO were specified by the CoM Decision No. 274 dated 12.05.2021. Criteria included geographical outreach, status of registration, cooperation with CSOs from WB, etc. No, information regarding its operation were available.	A call for applications was initiated on 31 May 2021, but no applications were received.



CHAPTER 5: MAPPING OF DONOR INTERVENTIONS IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH IN ALBANIA

This chapter presents programmes and interventions of key donors in youth-related issues. It also outlines how donor coordination works in Albania and what are the priority areas for the future in the field of youth.

5.1. Key donors in the field of youth

In Albania, foreign embassies and international organisations have been active in implementing programmes focused directly on youth and youth-related areas such as education and training (VET), employment, social inclusion (marginalised communities), and civic and political participation. The key donors in the field of youth in Albania are: EU; German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ); Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC); US Embassy / USAID; Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA); United Nations (UN); Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO); Italian Development Cooperation Agency (AICS); OSCE Presence in Albania (OSCE); Austria Development Agency (ADA); Council of Europe (CoE); Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA); European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD); World Bank (WB).

The EU, as the largest donor in Albania,¹¹⁰ has supported youth programmes, projects, and other initiatives through financial and technical support, capacity building, networking, and dialogue. The EU provides support through sector budget support for policy reforms and priorities as set out by GoA, direct support through granting to CSOs and other organisations managed by EUD or contracting authority in Albania (MFE), and through Union Programmes. The Structural Dialogue with Youth is a crucial instrument of mutual communication and collaboration between young people and the EU and their participation in the integration process. The EU has financed various programmes of youth self-organisation, networking, promotion, and advocacy such as the Western Balkans Alumni Association, Erasmus Student Network, Western Balkans Youth Lab, Young European Ambassadors, and the Exchange Programme of young Civil Servants. The essential EU programmes focusing on youth are Erasmus + Mobility and Capacity Building in Higher Education, Erasmus + Youth, and Erasmus + Solidarity Corps. Compared to the previous year, where none of the IPA funds was specifically allocated to youth per se, but youth was rather the target group of various projects financed under IPA, this time there are dedicated funds for youth.

110 EU contributed with 259 million USD in official donor assistance in Albania for 2020-2021, as per the OECD ODA Report: https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDODACaidataglancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=YSA&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=YSA&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no



In the IPA Programmes 2022–2027,¹¹¹ the Priority Areas which specifically focus on youth or from which youth can directly benefit are:

- IPA 2021: EU for Innovation, 10 million EUR, institution responsible is the Ministry of Finance and Economy;
- IPA 2022: EU4Youth, 5 million EUR, institution responsible is State Minister for Children and Youth and the Ministry of Finance and Economy;
- IPA 2024:¹¹² EU for Local Governance, 10 million EUR, institution responsible, Ministry of Interior;
- EU for Social Inclusion, Phase II (budget support), 28 (24 SBS + 4 TA) institution responsible is the Ministry of Finance and Economy.

Operational Programmes 2024–2027:

Youth Guarantee, Indicative Costs (69.4 million euros).

The Youth Guarantee programme is one of the most important flagship initiatives of the European Union, which is being supported in the Western Balkans through the European Commission's Economic and Investment Plan.¹¹³ In 2013, the European Commission introduced the Youth Guarantee programme, which was later strengthened in 2020.¹¹⁴ This initiative represented a political commitment of all European Union member states. Its primary objective was to offer high-quality opportunities to individuals under the age of 30 within four months of either completing their formal education or facing unemployment. These opportunities included employment, access to further education, apprenticeships, and internships, aiming to facilitate a smoother transition for young people into the workforce or educational pursuits. This macro programme holds particular importance for the youth of Albania as it directly targets the NEET category (those not in education, employment, or training), with the aim of facilitating their transition into the labour market. It is being implemented by the Ministry of Finance and Economy, and its measures are also integrated into the Employment and Skills Strategy for 2023-2030.

Another instrument is the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF),¹¹⁵ which supports socio-economic development and EU accession across the Western Balkans by providing finance and technical assistance for strategic investments. It is a joint initiative of the EU, financial institutions, bilateral donors, and Western Balkans' governments. Youth is not the principal target of WBIF. Still, it can be a potential area given its focus on financing and technical assistance to strategic investments in the energy, environment, social, transport, and digital infrastructure sectors. In Albania, the only significant project related to youth refers to infrastructural investments: Establishment of Smart Labs

111 Official Journal of the Republic of Albania No. 115, dated 02/08/2023, available at: <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/fz/2023/115/9ea8d66a-bb88-4ef8-a1d7-7b20a6eb413f;q=garancia%20rinore> (accessed 10 September 2023)

112 Currently, the Action Documents for this programme have been submitted, and it is expected to be approved by the European Commission by the end of this year

113 About the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans 2021-2027, available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/eip#:~:text=The%20Economic%20and%20Investment%20Plan,and%20convergence%20with%20the%20EU> (accessed 10 September 2023)

114 Regional Cooperation Council, 2021, Western Balkans Youth Guarantee, available at <https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/Youth-Employment-leaflet-15-6-b-AL.pdf/bd58b388896c2349d88cb7be2e30b1f6.pdf> (accessed on 10 September 2023)

115 About the Western Balkans Investment Framework, available at <https://wbif.eu/wbif-projects> (accessed 10 September 2023)



- Network of ICT Laboratories for the Pre-university Education System¹¹⁶ with the total budget of 34,005,425 EUR including grants and loans which is expected to be completed in May 2025, including other projects related to digitalisation where youth can be beneficiaries.

German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ),¹¹⁷ active in Albania since 1988 and the second largest donor in Albania, focus on the following priority areas: rural development, sustainable infrastructure, governance and democracy, environment and climate change, and economic development and employment. Currently, GIZ in Albania is addressing the problems regarding unemployment and is targeting youth. It is mainstreaming youth perspective into its programmes and grants. In Albania, a range of projects and programmes is underway, spanning multiple sectors such as:¹¹⁸

- *Social Development*: Improving media literacy among female students;
- *Rural Development*: Promoting rural areas in Albania as places to live and do business;
- *Sustainable Infrastructure*: 1) Improving drinking water supply and sanitation services; 2) Greening power grids in the Western Balkans;
- *Governance and Democracy*: 1) Achieving progress on Albania's pathway to EU accession; 2) Promoting social inclusion of disadvantaged groups in the Western Balkans; 3) Promoting contemporary, transformative drug policies; 4) Combating illicit financial flows; 5) Support to media freedom and pluralism in the Western Balkans; 6) Achieving more together with sport for development; 7) Youth exchanges in the Western Balkans; and 8) Preventing human trafficking in the Western Balkans.

Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme. *Superschools* is part of the larger Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme, co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). It is executed in collaboration with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). This project boasts a budget of €5.5 million and aligns with the broader aim of enhancing education systems and regional cooperation to empower the youth in the Western Balkans. It empowers secondary schools, students, and teachers to engage in school-to-school exchanges across the region, participate in capacity-building activities, and establish networks.

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)¹¹⁹ is the third largest donor in Albania, operating since 1977. Its support focuses on good governance and democracy, economic development, healthcare, and urban infrastructure, and energy. SDC is also a principal donor in the area of youth with the following main projects:

116 About the WBIIF projects, available at: <https://wbif.eu/project-detail/PRJ-ALB-DII-031> (accessed 10 September 2023)

117 Germany provided 161 million USD in official donor assistance to Albania for 2020-2021 as evidenced in the OECD ODA Data, available at: [https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDODAidatagancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=YSA&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=YSA&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no](https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDODAidatagancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=YSA&display_count=yes&:showTabs=YSA&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no) (accessed 10 September 2023)

118 About GIZ projects in Albania, available at <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/294.html> (accessed 10 September 2023)

119 Switzerland provided 32 million USD in official donor assistance to Albania for 2020 -2021 as evidenced in the OECD ODA Data, available at https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDODAidatagancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=YSA&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=YSA&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no (accessed 10 September 2023)



- RisiAlbania¹²⁰ implemented by Helvetas and Partners Albania with approximately 6,900,290 CHF (584.404 EUR). The project works to provide more employment opportunities for young women and men in Albania, aged 15-29, socially inclusive and sustainable through interventions in main pillars such as job demand, skills supply, career and guidance, and gender and social inclusion. The project focuses primarily on the tourism sector, agribusiness, and information and communication technologies. In cooperation with the Municipality of Tirana, RISI Albania inaugurated the establishment of the first Career Guidance Centre for Youth, which will serve to inform and advise young people and adults in their decisions regarding professions and education.
- Skills for Jobs,¹²¹ implemented by Swiss Contact, is an effective programme in creating career prospects for young people enrolled in VET by strengthening VET institutions and building long-lasting collaborations with private sector companies. The Second Phase of the project with 9.6 million CHF (10,043,712 EUR) (April 2019 - June 2023) supported 17,177 youngsters of which 11,749 students and 5,428 trainees: 35% of students and 30% of VET schools in Albania. The project started in 2023 and will last until 2027 with the same objective. Skills for Jobs works in coordination with two agencies in VET sector: Agency for Employment and Skills, and Agency for VET and Qualifications. Besides concrete results in improving employment prospects for young graduates from VET schools, this project has established successful cooperation between VET and the private sector in terms of apprenticeship, job placement and employment, curricula development, and overall VET school performance improvement.
- Leave No One Behind,¹²² is jointly implemented by four UN partner agencies: UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN WOMEN, under UNDP management with a total budget of 8 million CHF (8,369,760 EUR) for the first Phase (2017-2021) and the same budget for the second Phase (01.08.2021 - 31.07.2025). In addition to supporting policy reform in social protection, the project empowers vulnerable people, especially persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptians, and vulnerable women, to demand social inclusion and better access to social services to improve their social situation and well-being. Youth is also a key target group of this project. For instance, establishing participatory and youth-responsive budgeting practices empowers youth to be active in policymaking processes at the local level, providing youth with integrated social services.
- Schools for Health¹²³ is jointly implemented by the Foreign private sector South/East; Save the Children Federation and World Health Organisation. The programme aims to reduce the exposure to the major risk factors for NCDs through improvement of lifestyle practices in schoolchildren and communities. Municipalities will be supported to develop sustainable models for health promotion and healthy environments at school. Cooperation between Ministries of Health and Education will be strengthened to establish framework conditions

120 More information about RISI, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/albania/en/home/international-cooperation/projects.html/content/dezaprospects/SDC/en/2012/7F08310/phase3?oldPagePath=/content/countries/albania/en/home/internationale-zusammenarbeit/projekte.html>

121 More information about Skills for Job, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://skillsforjobs.al/what-we-do/>

122 More about Leave No One Behind, accessed 10 September 2023 <https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/albania/en/home/international-cooperation/projects.html/content/dezaprospects/SDC/en/2017/7F09572/phase2?oldPagePath=/content/countries/albania/en/home/internationale-zusammenarbeit/projekte.html>

123 More about Schools for Health, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/albania/en/home/international-cooperation/projects.html/content/dezaprospects/SDC/en/2017/7F09575/phase1?oldPagePath=/content/countries/albania/en/home/internationale-zusammenarbeit/projekte.html>



conducive to health. Through this intervention, all schoolchildren (320,000) 6-15 years, and their families will benefit from increased access to health education and health promotion interventions. All teachers (25,000) and health promotion specialists at local level will benefit from capacity development measures and establishment of innovative health promoting models. Ministries of health and education and their affiliated institutions will be capacitated to advance school health agenda in an intersectoral approach. The amount of money supported is 5,675,000 CHF (5,937,299 EUR).

SDC works primarily with the governmental institutions as partners in all its major projects and pays special attention to its projects' sustainability through policy dialogue and funding strategic policies by fostering local partners' capacities.

The United States is the sixth largest¹²⁴ donor in Albania. Support is provided through USAID and US Embassy Democracy Commission Small Grants and other direct support to CSOs.

Swedish Embassy/Sida – The goal of Swedish reform work in Albania is to assist with the reforms that the economy needs to implement to eventually gain membership in the EU. Sweden has been a donor to Albania since 1998. Sweden's development cooperation with Albania is governed by the government's strategy to reform cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey 2021-2027. The main priorities are economic development, democracy and human rights, environment and climate change issues, and peaceful and inclusive societies. Sweden's development cooperation with Albania amounts to approximately SEK 108 million (9,146,812 EUR) annually. Sida funds Strengthening Democratic Citizenship Education in Albania programme¹²⁵ to support efforts aimed at improving the quality of education in Albania by strengthening democratic citizenship education. The programme is based on standards and practices established by the Council of Europe. Additionally, Sweden collaborates with the Olof Palme Centre in Albania, which has extensive experience in working on youth issues and with youth organisations.

Partnered with HELVETAS, Sida regionally supports RECONOMY programme which aims to facilitate regional inclusive and green economic development.¹²⁶ One of the main objectives of the programme is to increase income and secure decent jobs for youth.

In collaboration with UN Women and ESD Albania, Sida also works to empower youth through the Empowering Self-Defence (ESD) programme.¹²⁷ ESD works to enhance gender equality by creating healthy relationships and empowering young girls and boys to stand up for themselves and their rights. ESD further promotes children's self-esteem and their ability to express their feelings and set boundaries.

124 US provided 15 million USD in official donor assistance to Albania for 2020 -2021 as evidenced in the OECD ODA Data, accessed 10 September 2023, https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDODAidatagancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=YSA&display_count=yes&:showTabs=YSA&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no

125 More about Strengthening Democratic Citizenship Education in Albania; accessed 10 September 2023, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/strengthening-democratic-citizenship-education-in-albania#:~:text=The%20project%20%E2%80%9Cstrengthening%20Democratic%20Citizenship,the%20implementation%20of%20the%20project>

126 More about Reconomy, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://www.helvetas.org/en/eastern-europe/what-we-do/how-we-work/our-projects/europe/Reconomy>

127 More about ESD Programme, accessed 10 September 2023 <https://albania.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2022/11/empowerment-through-self-defense-to-become-part-of-extra-curricular-school-programs-in-albania>



Sida has focused on youth-related issues such as innovation and entrepreneurship. It supports start-ups and organisations through challenge funds to encourage local problem-solving. This initiative is funded by the EU Delegation in Albania and implemented by Sida in partnership with GIZ, now in its second phase. The first phase of the Community Policing Programme, which included youth-focused activities like training and awareness campaigns in schools, has been completed. A second phase is expected to begin soon.

In 2020, Sida signed a decision on regional funding of EBRD's Youth in Business Programme for the Western Balkans. The aim was to support the growth of Youth MSMEs by providing them with dedicated finance and know-how. The funding provided by SIDA is EUR 3,542,500. The programme lasts for 5 years with a total programme value of EUR 68,100,000.

RYCO – Regional Youth Cooperation Office¹²⁸ is an independently functioning institutional mechanism, founded by: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, aiming to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region through youth exchange programmes.

As a grant giving mechanism, RYCO has launched four Open Calls for project proposals, each tailored to different stakeholders:

- a. Open Call in 2017 targeted CSOs and secondary schools;
- b. The subsequent 2018 Open Call also targeted CSOs and secondary schools;
- c. In 2019, a dedicated Open Call for secondary schools was published;
- d. In 2020, another Open Call was launched, again focusing on CSOs;
- e. In July 2023, Open Call entitled RYCOConnecting Youth was launched and the selection process for projects submitted by CSOs is currently ongoing.

These calls collectively garnered over 1,060 applications or project proposals for regional youth exchange programmes. A fundamental criterion for project support was the involvement of at least one partner from another RYCO Contracting Party. Remarkably, these calls fostered over 3,200 partnerships between various CSOs and secondary schools across the region.

According to the information provided by the Albanian Local Branch, 461 young people were reached through their events, showing the highest number of young citizens reached among other LBOs in the region.

This demonstrates RYCO's significant and sustainable contribution to the youth and youth-oriented civil society organisations in Albania. In addition to its grant-giving activities and policy-making efforts, the Albanian Local Branch has actively engaged in direct initiatives to enhance RYCO's visibility and expand opportunities for the youth.

128 More about RYCO, available at <https://www.rycowb.org/> accessed 10 September 2023



Western Balkans Fund – Currently offers small grants at the regional level in education, research, and culture. WBF has recently presented a new mobility scheme WBF MOVE Grants¹²⁹ which involves young professionals, researchers and CSOs.

The United Nations – The UN is working with its partners to promote economic and social reforms and innovations that help bring services to those who need them most – unemployed youth, vulnerable women, Roma and Egyptian communities and persons with disabilities. UNICEF, UNFPA, and UNDP are also working on youth and youth-related issues. The Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans (ReLOaD)¹³⁰ is financed by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme. The first phase was completed in 2020 and the ReLOaD phase 2 is being implemented. The ReLOaD2 project works with 13 partner municipalities in Albania: Elbasan, Kamëz, Kavajë, Kukës, Lezhë, Lushnje, Patos, Përmet, Korçë, Roskovec, Sarandë, Tiranë and Shkodër, and has launched the Youth Dedicated Public Call for project proposals from CSOs. Another important project implemented and directly targeting youth is Youth 4 Inclusion, Equality & Trust¹³¹ which includes all Western Balkan economies. In Albania, it worked closely on youth participation in decision-making at local level (LYCs), with MSYC, etc.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022–2026¹³² has already been launched. This Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework between the Government of Albania and the United Nations system is anchored by economy's priorities: accession to the European Union (EU), 2030 agenda and Albania's localised SDG targets, with a focus on the quality of health and education, good governance and rule of law, public service provision, and effective response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

OSCE also includes youth engagement as one of its priorities. Examples of youth involvement coming from OSCE PiA include: Youth Advisory Group (YAG), aiming to integrate youth perspective, including youth-specific considerations, concerns, needs, priorities, and vulnerabilities, into its planning and programmatic activities; Youth Talks; and YouthTrail which is a yearly activity which take place in cooperation with the RYCO Local Branch of Albania.

Austria Development Agency (ADA) priorities in Albania are governance and the rule of law, integrated water management, labour market-oriented VET, and employability. Austria's interventions in VET support the reduction of youth unemployment.

Although it does not have a particular focus on youth cooperation, **EBRD** supports youth through its support to VET programme and SMEs. The new EBRD strategy for Albania (2020-2025) emphasizes that it will support economic inclusion of women, youth, and regions through dedicated financing, advisory activities, and promotion of inclusive procurement with the EU, other IFIs, and donors. The Council of Europe deals with youth in terms of education, human rights, discrimination, and media.

129 More about Move Grant, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://wbportal.org/applicant/>

130 More about ReLOaD2, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://www.undp.org/albania/news/application-deadline-extended-public-call-participation-civil-society-representative-evaluation-commission-cso-grant-applications-under>

131 More about Youth 4 Inclusion, Equality & Trust, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://www.undp.org/albania/projects/youth-4-inclusion-equality-trust>

132 United Nations, *The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022 – 2026*, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/Final%20Albania%20CF%202022-2026.pdf>



European Union/Council of Europe's Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey (Horizontal Facility III)¹³³ is a cooperation initiative, running from 2023 until 2026.

The programme covers actions in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye. It enables the Beneficiaries to meet their reform agendas in the fields of human rights, rule of law and democracy and to comply with European standards, which is also a priority for the EU enlargement process. The third phase of the programme is worth €41 million (85% funded by the European Union, 15% by the Council of Europe).

French Development Agency (AFD) started to work in the Western Balkans in 2018, and Albania is the first of the region's economies where AFD is authorised to operate. It will not focus directly on youth, but on climate change mitigation and adaptation, sustainable cities and environment, and innovation and digital economy. Youth support will be provided under innovation and digital economy projects.

The United Kingdom has not been a major donor in Albania since 2019, but in light of BREXIT it is intensifying regional donor support, including Albania. Traditionally, it has supported youth through the British Council and education programmes such as Chevening scholarships for education programmes in the UK. It is currently supporting the New Perspectives (Perspektiva të Reja)¹³⁴ initiative in the value of 8.5 million EUR which aims to create new socio-economic opportunities and a more enabling entrepreneurial ecosystem for the North of Albania. Through this initiative, it contributes to the increase of employability of people who currently lack skills or access to (self-) employment, through training that is tailored to the labour market and micro-entrepreneurship that allows people to economically prosper in Kukës. The project supports business development and increases employment opportunities in the area in various sectors such as: (agro) tourism, medicinal and aromatic plants, improved agro-processing or ICT-based services, cultivating local entrepreneurship. It depicts the realities of migrant life in the UK and of people who decided to stay in Kukës, Has, Tropojë and Dibër and build up a decent livelihood.

OSFA is the largest locally-based/staffed donor in Albania since the Albania's transition to democracy. Since 1994, it has disbursed and managed over 9,260 local grants to civil society and public institutions totalling some 55.4 million Euros. In addition to grants, it engages in direct and indirect advocacy at central and local level. The foundation's early efforts addressed the need for basic building blocks of democracy and governance, with special emphasis on education, media and civic dialogue. It also provides scholarships and support to a large young cadre of professionals, journalists, artists, civic activists, and Roma community that continue to play an important role in Albania's political, economic, and social development.

133 More about Horizontal Facility III, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/horizontal-facility>

134 More information available about New Perspectives, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://www.swisscontact.org/en/projects/new-perspectives-perspektiva-te-reja>



5.2. Donor Coordination

In October 2021 the State Agency for Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination (SASPAC) was created by a CoM¹³⁵ decision and is directly dependent on the Prime Minister.

SASPAC¹³⁶ is the most important institution in terms of donor coordination and development funds, and is created to coordinate foreign aid for development programmes and projects, assist decision-making structures in formulating the Strategy for Development and Integration of Albania, provide methodological support in developing sectoral and intersectoral strategies, and enhance capacity in development programmes and projects. This agency has a very significant portfolio. Additionally, several directorates from other ministries were merged to form the Agency, thereby negating the investments made in terms of human resources and other resources for these entities. Nevertheless, despite being the most significant agency in terms of funds and development, it still lacks a website or any other suitable communication channel, even two years after its creation. Such a channel would be essential for gathering information about its work, reports on IPA funds, and more. Currently, the Agency only maintains a LinkedIn page,¹³⁷ which does not adequately provide information about its ongoing activities which has a serious implication on the transparency of the Agency and its accountability towards stakeholders. Furthermore, criticism regarding development of such a body refers to centralising all the funds in one entity which depends on the Prime Minister's Office.

Therefore, there is no information about donor coordination initiatives and how they align with each other to avoid overlapping or to join forces for a greater impact. According to the interviews conducted with youth stakeholders, there is still a top-down approach from donors, which makes it difficult for the perspectives and needs of youth CSOs to be well represented.¹³⁸ It is understandable that the work of donors should align with government objectives and strategies, but it is crucial to recognise the unique realities and perspectives, especially those of youth-focused civil society organisations (CSOs) or organisations working for youth. It is beneficial for donors support to involve local organisations rather than relying solely on international organisations. Encouraging competition and avoiding exclusive top-down interventions can also be constructive.¹³⁹ Their specific needs and priorities should be given greater consideration and be better reflected in the overall approach. This ensures a more inclusive and responsive approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities related to youth development and to the main stakeholders that work with them.

Consultation on the IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2021-2023 – Regional Call for Proposals 2023-2024 were undertaken from the regional EU TACSO 3 project in line with objectives and standards of DG NEAR Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in the Enlargement Region 2021-2027.¹⁴⁰

135 CoM decision on SASPAC creation, accessed 10 September 2023,

<https://kryeministria.al/newsroom/vendime-te-miratuara-ne-mbledhjen-e-keshillit-te-ministrave-date-29-tetor-2021/>

136 Detailed competences of SASPAC can be found in Annex 2

137 SASPAC page on LinkedIn, accessed 10 September 2023, available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/agjencia-shtet%C3%ABrore-e-programimit-strategjik-dhe-koordinimit-t%C3%ABndihm%C3%ABs-saspac-2a0912282/>

138 Based on the interviews with youth stakeholders

139 Based on the interviews with youth stakeholders

140 DG NEAR, *Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in the Enlargement Region 2021-2027*, accessed 10 September 2023

https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/dg-near-guidelines-eu-support-civil-society-enlargement-region-2021-2027_en



Despite positive developments and increased attention towards youth and youth CSOs, there is a need for greater communication and cooperation with entities that share similar objectives.

5.3. Priority areas for the future in the field of youth

Considering the situation described in Chapter 1, most donors have historically focused on education, vocational education and training (VET), employment, and social inclusion. These areas remain top priorities; however, there is an increasing emphasis on security issues, such as youth radicalisation and extremism, as well as youth involvement in organised crime. Additionally, there is a growing focus on digital skills, regional cooperation, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Simultaneously, while efforts are made to economically empower youth and improve their position in the labour market and the quality of jobs, there should be intensified efforts regarding civic education and political participation of youth. COVID-19 has shed light on the need for investment in the well-being and mental health of youth, and this attention should not wane. Measures for prevention of gender-based violence through education and other forms of engagement should be a focal point, along with human rights. Other crucial areas for the future of youth engagement include environment, media literacy, and more.

To ensure the impact and sustainability of the work done with youth, donors should consider shifting their attention from short-term, objective-specific interventions to long-term core grants that can effectively address these complex issues.

5.4. Critical assessment

There is a growing donor interest in youth, which is evident in the specific objectives of calls for proposals, direct interventions, and more. Furthermore, donors have significantly increased their support and communication with youth civil society organisations (CSOs) and have endorsed youth-government cooperation. It is crucial to continue considering the perspectives of youth civil society organisations (CSOs), their assessments of the situation, and their organisational needs, and increase communication with them.

Additionally, sub-granting as a means to support smaller CSOs has also increased and has proven to be vital for the financial sustainability of CSOs, especially grassroots ones. More funding has become accessible to a broader range of CSOs, particularly at the local level. The EU and other organisations work through intermediaries, where local CSOs are awarded EU funding and then provide sub-grants to others. This intermediate approach has made EU funding more accessible to CSOs.

On a positive note, almost all donors have aligned their programmes with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in line with their commitment to achieving more effective development and attaining SDGs. Donors are engaging more to find synergies and coordination in their initiatives. To ensure the impact and sustainability of the work done with youth, donors should consider shifting their attention from short-term, objective-specific interventions to long-term core grants that can effectively address problems in a specific region or in a specific sector.



Regarding the institution responsible for donor coordination in Albania, there have been frequent changes that hinder organisational development of relevant institutions and disrupt institutional memory. The establishment of new institutions, such as SASPAC, should be accompanied by necessary steps, especially in terms of transparency and communication with stakeholders. Additionally, an institution that coordinates all foreign aid for development programmes and projects, as well as donor coordination, should strive for as much independence as possible. It is important to build on the positive examples that are already in place and the investments already made, as exemplified by EAMIS. The institution in charge should organise more initiatives for donor coordination to maximise their impact and secure communication among stakeholders.



5.5. Tabular comparison

Table 6. Comparison of donor coordination mechanism through the years

Institution/ Mechanism	2020 – 2021 (based on the previous)	2023 (current statute assessed)	Critical Assessment
Institution in charge	Until 2017 sector level donor coordination structures were organised within the Office of the Prime Minister with a dedicated Department for Donor Coordination and Harmonisation of Strategies. However, in 2017, the set-up was reorganised. In September 2017, the responsibility for donor coordination was transferred to MFE, which takes a proactive role in organising this function and aims to increase comprehensiveness of resource allocations concerning the economy budget and donors.	In October 2021 the State Agency for Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination, (SASPAC), dependent on the Prime Minister, was created by a CoM decision. It is in charge for all	Frequent changes of institutions, practices, and mechanisms hinder organisational development and obstruct institutional memory.
Tools	Two positive developments in 2020 were: i) establishment of the EU projects database in Albania. ¹⁴¹ The platform on EU projects gathers information on past and ongoing projects funded by the EU. For each project, the website provides information about the implementing partners, beneficiaries, objectives, actions and expected results, in a fully transparent manner. The database has a user-friendly interface and the search function allows the search of projects by sector or any keyword; ii) External Assistant Management Information System (EAMIS) ¹⁴² aiming to serve as a reliable and credible source of information on overall donor, public, private and local investments in Albania's development and economic growth, 155 which still need to be fully functional.	1) The EU projects database in Albania is still functional, but it requires an update. It is unclear whether it is fully functional or not. 2) External Assistant Management Information System (EAMIS) – it does not longer exist	Despite changes in the organisational structure and institutions, it is essential to retain tools that have proven to be effective. More efforts should be directed towards preserving institutional memory even when there are changes in institutional representatives and so forth.

141 Link to the database: <https://www.euprojects.al/>, (accessed 10 September 2023)

142 Link to EAMIS: <http://demo.synisys.com/ddfa-portal/ips/eamis/>, (accessed 10 September 2023)



CHAPTER 6: GOOD PRACTICES AND GAP ANALYSIS

This chapter presents good practices in youth-related policy and programmes as well as gaps in financing mechanisms following the same structure of the report itself.

6.1. Good practices

The policy framework on youth in Albania has made significant progress with the approval of the new Law on Youth in 2019. This Law is expected to enhance youth empowerment and participation while providing funding opportunities for the youth sector. The consultation process for the Law and its bylaws is another positive aspect of youth policy-making. This process attracted diverse opinions from various youth civil society organisations (CSOs), networks, activists, and civil society stakeholders. It also received media coverage, which led to a public debate on the youth policy framework and funding.

In addition, the approval of the Strategy 2022–2029 and its action plan represents another positive development in youth policy-making in Albania. Development of this Strategy included comprehensive consultations with youth and youth CSOs. Furthermore, it took into consideration some of the gaps in the previous Action Plan for Youth (APY) 2015-2020.

Having a dedicated body for youth at the policy level helps in mainstreaming youth considerations into all existing sectoral policies. Some good examples of cooperation between youth CSOs and the government have also been noted. Additionally, having a dedicated IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) and a dedicated fund allocated to youth and their development is another positive practice.

Western Balkans Youth Lab

Western Balkans Youth Lab is a 3-year project implemented by Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) with the support of the European Union (EU). This project is the first of its kind in the Balkans and aims to bring together representatives of institutions, civil society and other relevant stakeholders in joint public policy-making with a focus on youth, dialogue and institutional cooperation. The Western Balkans Youth Lab involves the economies of Western Balkans. Both editions of WBYL series were successful, despite the challenges of cooperating with institutions. Youth CSOs successfully integrated youth perspectives into the intended policies. An important aspect of this process was the co-design approach, which enhanced understanding of the barriers encountered in the policy-making process and the functionality of policy-making institutions. This approach also provided insights into the practical steps involved in their processes. Meanwhile, during this process, the institutions had the opportunity to gain a better understanding of youth perspectives, how to further mainstream them in their work and to enhance their knowledge of existing positive examples in youth policies. This initiative promoted youth CSOs' cooperation with the central government.



There have been two series of Youth Lab taking place in Albania: Youth Policy Lab on Unemployment and Youth Policy Lab on Mental Health and concrete results have been delivered within each:

■ **RoadMap for Youth Transition from School to Labour Market**

The first edition of WBYL was focused on youth unemployment. The working group of Albania decided to address the topic of youth transition from school to the labour market.

In response to the challenges in Albania's school-to-labour market transition, representatives of youth and public institutions collaborated on the Roadmap for Youth Transition from School to Labour Market.¹⁴³ This document explores strategies and policies connecting educational institutions and the private sector while analysing existing mechanisms and stakeholders involved in youth education and labour market transition. It is the first economy-level strategic document addressing youth labour market transition comprehensively. Its goal is to benefit public institutions, labour offices, universities, businesses, and young people preparing for the labour market. The report provided a quantitative and qualitative database to inform policy enhancements, including the new Youth Strategy 2022-2029. The working group was composed of the Young Professionals Network, Youth Congress of Albania, Albanian Youth Network, Youth Agency of Albania and State Minister for Children and Youth.

■ **Improving Youth Mental Health Services and Defying Stigma**

The second edition of WBYL was youth mental health. Through the Thematic Youth Policy Lab on Mental Health, the project successfully facilitated active participation of youth alongside policymakers in the development and evaluation of mental health policies based on the principles of co-management and co-production. Based on the identified problems and possible areas of collaboration between public authorities and youth organisations, Action Plan in Albania was designed to focus mainly on the dynamics of youth mental health services. The Action Plan is titled Improving Youth Mental Health Services and Defying Stigma. As part of this initiative, two strategic documents were drafted, one on addressing the needs of young people in policymaking: Need Assessment on Youth Mental Health Services and the other on inclusion of Youth Component in the Health Strategy Mental 2023-2026 for the first time in Albania. Within the process in Albania, informative and awareness Toolkit on Mental Health of young people¹⁴⁴ is being published for the first time.

The Working Group was composed of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Institute of Public Health, Youth Agency of Albania, Young Professionals Network, Youth Congress, and Network for Young People in Albania. This group was co-chaired by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and Young Professionals Network.

143 Roadmap of Youth Transition from School to Labour Market, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://ypn.al/national-roadmap-of-youth-transition-from-school-to-labour-market/>

144 Mental Health Toolkit, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://ypn.al/mental-health-toolkit/>



Tirana European Youth Capital

The European Youth Capital¹⁴⁵ is a title awarded by the European Youth Forum (EYF) to empower young people, promote youth participation in society, and strengthen European identity. Every year, a new European city is given the opportunity to showcase its innovative ideas, projects, and activities aimed at empowering young voices and bringing a fresh youth perspective to all aspects of city life. Tirana EYC 2022¹⁴⁶ was a macro programme implemented by the Youth Congress of Albania and Tirana Municipality. Under the slogan *Activate Youth*, Tirana European Youth Capital 2022 programme encourages active participation through eight intertwined themes. They are focused on the needs of young people, informal education and creation of synergy and better European practices for a youth friendly city. This programme aims to empower youth by creating opportunities and giving a European dimension. Among other things the programme aims to: bring positive changes; encourage active participation; promote volunteering; foster European identity; promote and protect diversity and inclusiveness; empower youth organisations; raise investments for young people; transform the city in an international meeting spot; create networks and synergy through young people across Europe. This initiative promoted youth CSOs' cooperation with the local government.

6.2. Gaps

Progress has been observed in development of youth policies and financing of youth initiatives, as well as in cooperation among multiple stakeholders. Nevertheless, the report identifies the following gaps:

In terms of data-based policy, administrative capacity for data collection and its usage for better policy planning, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring has improved but it should be further increased. There should be more synergies and cooperation among institutions and INSTAT. Standardisation of data gathering should be further increased and unified. Also, published data for budgeting and investments in the area of youth, for instance, are not according to open data standards, even though GoA has committed to Open Government Partnership.¹⁴⁷ **The Law on Youth and law on Volunteerism** should be amended to enable their full implementation. The period since their enactment has allowed key stakeholders to identify respective gaps and address them properly. For example, in the case of the Law on Youth, it has been noticed that despite the approval of all Council of Ministers mechanisms for implementation of Youth Law provisions, their implementation remains challenging or there is room for improvement of their implementation, though this depends on the legal provisions.

In terms of youth participation, NYC, YRO and LYC are not fully established and their functionality and scale of implementation depend on the legal provisions. For the mechanisms that are already established such as YCA and LYC, more support should be available in terms of capacity building to fully deliver their advisory role and to act in coherence with the principles of youth participation.

145 More about European Youth Capital, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://www.youthforum.org/topics/youthcapital/?external=1>

146 More about European Youth Capital, accessed 10 September 2022, <https://tiranaeyc2022.al/rreth-eyc/?external=1>

147 More on Albania commitments to Open Government Partnership, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/policy-area/open-data/>



In terms of funding, limited specific budget on youth is a major gap as well as limited institutional human resources and capacities to work with and for youth. Youth policy is a cross-sectorial policy area with various line ministries and bodies that deal with youth issues, which at times proves challenging in terms of building synergies, data collection and analysis, and overall coordination. Mainstreaming of youth still needs to be developed across different policy areas. In documents such as the Mid-Year Report on the Implementation of 2023 Budget or the Law for the Budget of Year 2023, it is challenging to identify the budget allocation specifically dedicated to youth. Despite the cross-sectorial approach to youth issues, it is important to have a separate budget allocation for youth.

In terms of local government and youth, majority of municipalities across Albania do not have youth centres and are yet to be functioning as empowering platforms for youth. Limited capacities and financial resources at the local government level limit the structured dialogue and cooperation with youth. Furthermore, the standards for establishment of youth centres have not been developed, which is important to avoid youth centres becoming only physical spaces without programmes and activities dedicated to youth participation, engagement and empowerment. More efforts should be made at the local level to recognise youth as an important target and prioritise their inclusion in policymaking by allocating resources such as dedicated staff, budgets, and youth action plans.

In terms of sustainability and operation of youth civil society organisations (CSOs), they face a challenging operational landscape due to tax provisions and the lack of facilities to support their existence. Donor landscape has pushed them more towards project-based rather than long-term impactful initiatives.

In terms of donors and donor coordination, a more top-down approach should be in place, one that fully includes the perspectives of youth CSOs and other youth stakeholders. Furthermore, there should be more engagement, coordination, and transparency from the institution responsible for donor coordination. Donors should develop more projects that target youth as direct rather than as indirect beneficiaries.

6.3. Recommendations

The report indicates the need for overall improvement of youth policies and financing of youth initiatives. These efforts should be sustained. Specific recommendations for each target group are provided below.

For policymakers at the central level:

- Further improve the legal framework related to youth, including the Law on Youth, particularly the bylaws that have been difficult to implement due to legal provisions and context. Some concrete recommendations for bylaws to address might be:
 - a. Redefine the concept of 'youth workers' based on a European model of 'youth workers', including the provision and criteria for its certification. It should be properly consulted with relevant institutions.



- b. Define the term 'youth infrastructure' as it involves a broad meaning and includes a range of entities from youth centres to gyms, thus not making obligatory investment for youth centres or multifunctional centres at local level dedicated to youth development. This can even be regulated with CoM.
 - c. Restructure prevision for the Local Youth Council and its dependence on the Mayor/s.
 - d. Redefine YRO in terms of its functionality and its role.
- Amend the Law on Volunteerism thus approving sub-legal acts for problematic clauses in Law No. 45/2016 and adopting a package that adequately meets the needs of volunteers and beneficiaries, support and sustainability have been ensured for the legal framework governing volunteering in Albania.
- Harmonise age categories and enhance data collection processes across institutions that target youth through their activities or policies. Relevant ministries, municipalities, and other institutions should be involved in this process through a top-down approach. Standardising age categorisation and data collection will lead to evidence-based youth policies and beyond.
- Take measures to provide a more enabling environment for youth CSOs, thus supporting mechanism for their operations and a more favourable fiscal package to support them to strengthen their capacities and secure financial sustainability. The package of measures can vary based on their annual turnover.
- Strengthen inter-institutional and cross-sectoral cooperation on youth issues to secure policy integration by a range of sectors, from education and healthcare to employment and social services.
- Further consolidate structural policy dialogue with youth, building more effective cooperation and trust. In this light, it is necessary to envisage capacity development and other relevant support to the youth structures established/ to be established: NYC, YRO and LYC. Organising open meetings or making meeting minutes and other outputs publicly available would be beneficial for the Youth Council of Albania to boost transparency and build stronger trust with youth and youth organisations. In a similar way, the functionality of LYCs needs to be further supported. YRO is of particular relevance as an independent body representing youth. A transparent and inclusive process is crucial for establishing the Youth Representative Office. This process will require comprehensive support, including financial and institutional backing, human resources, lobbying, advocacy, project management, communication, and outreach efforts. YRO should aim to cultivate a highly credible profile and establish strong connections with youth communities, organisations, networks, and youth population at large to effectively serve as their representative voice.
- Strengthening accountability and transparency mechanisms within youth policy and funding is of paramount importance. It is vital to guarantee a clear, equitable, and competitive grant allocation process for financing youth programmes, initiatives, activities, and youth-oriented civil society organisations (CSOs), as well as CSOs with a specific focus on youth development. As an enhancement to the evolving grant allocation system, it would



be beneficial to include additional elements such as publicising the names of successful NPO recipients and offering feedback upon request.

- It is necessary to monitor NYS development as it is specified in the Strategy. Furthermore, the existing youth participatory mechanism should be used to develop monitoring and evaluation to ensure regular feedback from the youth and necessary changes in response to youth needs and context.
- The Parliamentary Youth Club, which is composed of the Members of Parliament (MPs) that strive to engage in cross-party discussions on common issues, amplifying youth concerns within legislatures, should be active and engage with youth stakeholders.
- Increase accountability and transparency of institutions, such as SASPAC, responsible for coordinating foreign aid for development programmes and projects. It is essential to create communication channels to engage with the public and stakeholders and to effectively address their annual work through public reports, etc.
- Despite changes in the organigram and institutions such as in the case of SASPAC, efforts should be made to retain and build upon the tools that have proven to be positive examples. Rather than discarding successful initiatives, it would be beneficial to use them as a foundation when moving in a new direction. Maintaining positive aspects provides a basis on which additional improvements can be made.
- Enhancing allocation of budget resources for youth programmes and policies, while clearly defining these allocations, serves as a critical mechanism for monitoring and creating a comprehensive understanding of tangible investments in this area.
- Better coordination between formal (central and local government, donors, business sector, CSOs, media, academia) and non-formal actors (families, youth groups, community leaders) should be ensured.
- Develop a mapping of the existing youth centres so they could be approached by civil society organisations and other stakeholders that wish to carry out activities in the respective cities.
- Develop more programmes that enhance students' quality of life by offering financial support during their university studies, as well as providing free meals and transportation.

Recommendations for policymakers at the local level:

- Allocate a dedicated budget specifically for youth policies and youth programmes aligned with provisions of the Law on Youth, Law on Self-Government, and other existing policies.
- Develop local youth strategies and action plans through participatory processes involving young people that need to be accordingly approved by the Municipal Council and accompanied by the respective budgeting.
- Establish youth centres that should not only serve as venues for organising project events by civil society organisations (CSOs), but also as platforms for youth engagement and personal development. The Council of Europe Quality Label for Youth Centres might be considered as a guide on their standards. Components such as non-formal education,



capacity development, participation and empowerment should be considered for the functionality of youth centres.

- Further improvement of the functionality of Local Youth Councils should be considered, addressing concerns such as tokenism, selection process, and other issues that enhance their advisory status and increase their capacities.
- Create a more enabling environment for youth CSOs at the local level by facilitating municipal taxes, providing free venues, etc.
- Strengthen cooperation with youth organisations to better understand the needs and challenges of young people in the municipality and co-develop joint initiatives and programmes which target youth.

For youth CSOs:

- Have a more proactive role in participatory mechanism through constructive contribution and operating in line with youth participation principles and youth policies in place.
- Engage in structured policy dialogue with government at central and local level to advocate youth interests.
- Provide feedback to strengthen government youth programmes such as grant schemes or other programmes in place;
- Identify new streams of financial resources to become financially sustainable and break the cycle of donor-dependency. Further advocate with government representatives and donors for improving working conditions and environment you operate in.
- Well-established youth organisations and networks should provide peer-to-peer support, guidance, and mentorship for smaller, grassroots organisations and youth initiatives from rural and remote areas.
- Youth organisations should focus on strengthening sustainable and trusting relations with diverse groups of youth and channel their interests, needs, and demands into decision making.
- Youth organisations should enhance efforts for networking, cooperation and partnership building with one another and other civil society stakeholders.

For donors:

- Continued support to GoA and associated bodies on youth and youth-related policy areas, but with particular attention to provision of support in the following dimensions:
 - a. Structured Youth Policy Dialogue: Policymakers at the central and local level, youth organisations and civil society organisations in the field of youth;
 - b. Implementation of the new Law on Youth and establishment of NYC, YRO, LYC and additional support for the implementation and quarterly monitoring of new NYS;



- c. Emerging priority areas: political education; quality education; mental health, health and social protection, local democracy; rural youth; media, data, and digital literacy;
 - d. Budget;
 - e. Support mechanism for evidence-based youth policy and establishment of dedicated youth research mechanism.
- Enhance the focus on strengthening an enabling environment and promoting sustainability for youth civil society organisations (CSOs) through a bottom-up approach. This approach should prioritise the assessment of youth CSOs, and consider their operational and administrative needs in light of inflation.
- Enhance coordination between donors to align, synergise and maximise resources and impact.
- Provide institutional funding for youth sector (organisations, associations, groups, networks, and other forms) to ensure sustainability of operations by providing finances and skills development.
- Provide support (financial and capacity, skills, networks, advocacy, mobility, exchange, mentoring) for Youth in the Quadruple Helix: Youth engagement with academia and research, civil society, policy sector, media, and private sector.
- Support open calls for grant allocation and development of youth advisory structures. This approach provides opportunities for all entities and individuals to engage, enhancing trust.
- Boost support and funding allocation for youth through programmes and initiatives designed to directly benefit young people, rather than considering them as indirect beneficiaries.



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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 – Competences of institutions dealing with youth

Policy Level Competences of the State Minister for Children and Youth:

- a. Formulating and implementing policies to protect the rights of young people and promote their participation in social life.
- b. Coordinating matters related to the protection, care, health, well-being, and development of children.
- c. Developing policies for the comprehensive protection of young people's rights.
- d. Creating conditions for the activation and support of young people.
- e. Defining functions and competencies of institutions at the central and local levels for youth issues.
- f. Collaborating with organisations engaged in youth activities.
- g. Addressing issues related to Albanian youth in the diaspora and international youth exchange programmes.
- h. Developing policies for child protection and ensuring compliance with international conventions and legislation.
- i. Outlining principles and mechanisms for policies on children's rights at economy level.
- j. Ensuring the well-being and improving the quality of children's lives.
- k. Taking measures to protect children's rights and best interests.
- l. Ensuring children's life and development.
- m. Promoting cooperation between central and local structures, authorities, and organisations protecting children's rights.
- n. Establishing effective mechanisms and institutions for the prevention and response to violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect of children.

∞ *Implementation of policy – Agency for Youth of Albania*

The institution responsible for youth is a public budgetary legal entity, depending on the minister responsible for youth, which is financed from the public budget and other legal sources, and operates throughout Albania. The institution responsible for youth performs the following functions:



- a. implements policies and programmes for youth;
- b. organises, administers, finances, coordinates, monitors, and supervises youth programmes and projects;
- c. cooperates with organisations, institutions, donors, and other entities, local and foreign, for the presentation and implementation of youth policies, programmes, and activities; supports the capacity building of units and structures at central and local level,
- d. creates and maintains an accessible database for youth,
- e. provides funding through application for local and international projects, which are transferred on an annual basis in cases where a multi-year project is approved,
- f. collects, administers, and analyses data on the situation of young people in cooperation with other institutions and local self-government units,
- g. reports periodically to the ministry responsible for youth on the situation of young people and the implementation of obligations arising from the law,
- h. supervises youth activity and work with young people of youth organisations and youth organisations which receive support in accordance with the provisions of the law.

The manner of establishment, organisation and functioning of the institution responsible for youth is approved by a decision of the Council of Ministers. The relevant decision is still to be approved.

∞ *Advisory – Youth Council of Albania*

YCA is an advisory body which operates under the Minister responsible for youth. YCA exercises the following competencies:

- a. submits to the Minister responsible for youth the priority policies, budget and activities in the field of youth,
- b. proposes the main directions and programmes for the support and strengthening of youth participation,
- c. gives an opinion on the drafting of the Strategy for Youth and monitors its implementation,
- d. approves the annual report on the implementation of Strategy for Youth and youth status.

YCA is chaired by the Minister responsible for youth and consists of 14 to 16 members, with at least half of the members representing youth and / or youth organisations. The members of YCA are appointed by an order of the Minister responsible for youth.

The criteria and procedures for the election of members, as well as the manner of organisation and functioning of YCA are approved by a decision of the Council of Ministers and the relevant decision is still to be approved.



∞ *Local level – Local Youth Councils*

LYC is an advisory body which operates as the advisor to the mayor. LYC exercises the following competencies:

- a. advises the local self-government units on directing local youth policies and plans,
- b. evaluates the situation of young people and the implementation of youth plans and policies at the local level,
- c. proposes improvements in local youth policies, as well as initiatives that adapt to the needs of young people in the region in which they are implemented,
- d. cooperates and exchanges information with NYC.

LYC is chaired by the mayor and consists of at least 4 to 6 members, where at least half of the members represent youth organisations and/or youth. The members of LYC are appointed by order of the mayor.

The criteria, procedures for selection of the members of local youth council, as well as the manner of organisation and functioning of LYC are approved by a decision of the municipal council, referring, as far as possible, to the approved criteria and procedures by DCM.

ANNEX 2 – Competences of SASPAC

State Agency for Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination (SASPAC) is created to coordinate foreign aid for development programmes and projects, assist decision-making structures in formulating the Strategy for Development and Integration of Albania, provide methodological support in developing sectoral and intersectoral strategies, and enhance capacity of development programmes and projects.

∞ *Functional Responsibilities of SASPAC:*

- a. Ensure coordination of foreign aid for development programmes and projects.
- b. Coordinate economy-wide and regional programmes of EU financial assistance and support the Coordinator for the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).
- c. Assist relevant decision-making institutions in strategic planning.
- d. Monitor the implementation of Strategy for Development and Integration of Albania.
- e. Support central-level administration institutions in obtaining funding for various development programmes.
- f. Coordinate economy-wide and important projects and secure necessary financial support from donors.
- g. Support the implementation of various projects with foreign funding.



- h.** Provide support for creating budgetary frameworks and budget ceilings.
- i.** Offer professional support to state institutions in project development and efficient implementation.
- j.** Maintain records and authorised personnel for foreign-funded projects.
- k.** Serve as the Technical Secretariat for the Strategic Planning Committee.
- l.** Establish contacts with relevant structures both domestically and internationally, signing cooperation protocols when needed.
- m.** Educate and inform interested parties about foreign aid instruments and possible means of enhancing access to foreign assistance.
- n.** Periodically report to the Prime Minister and relevant ministers and institutions.
- o.** Fulfil any other duties as specified by the Prime Minister, Council of Ministers, or current legislation.

ANNEX 3 – List of Interviewees

No.	Name Surname	Sector	Position	Entity
1	Arlinda Topciu	Public Institution	Chief of Cabinet	State Minister for Youth and Children
2	Rezarta Katuçi	International	Programme Manager	SIDA / Swedish Embassy
3	Erisa Lame	International	Programme Manager	Swiss Embassy
4	Etleva Martiri	International	Head of Section of Sustainable Economic and Social Development	Delegation of the European Union to Albania
5	Flutura Brakaj	International	Head of Local Branch (Albania)	RYCO
6	Elida Nuri	International	Advocacy and Communication Analyst	UNFPA
7	Krisela Hackaj	NPO	Executive Director	Cooperation and Development Institute/ WBYCP
8	Rigels Xhemollari	NPO	Executive Director	Civic Resistance
9	Rifat Demalija	NPO	Executive Director	Centre for Youth Progress Kukes
10	Andi Rabiaj	NPO	Executive Director	Youth Voice Network
11	Altin Hazizaj	NPO	Founder	Youth Network of Albania
12	Sara Zekaj	NPO	Partnership Officer	Young Professionals Network
13	Kejsi Kaçani	informal group	Member	Elbasan Local Youth Council



ANNEX 4 – List of Tables

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