



Institute for Democracy and Mediation
Instituti për Demokraci dhe Ndërmjetësim

THEMATIC REPORT

CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT IN PARLIAMENTARY DECISION- MAKING

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DELIBERATIVE
POLLING
'SHQIPËRIA
N'KUVENDIM'

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) held the first national deliberative polling¹ exercise entitled “Shqipëria n’Kuvendim” on 18-21 November 2021, in Tirana. Deliberative Polling relies on three surveys – a nationally representative survey with 1200 respondents, a treatment group² survey with 110 respondents, and a control group³ survey with another 110 respondents. These thematic report findings are based on the data of the national survey⁴, as well as insights from the small discussion groups⁵ of “Shqipëria n’Kuvendim”. The national survey aimed to capture the public perceptions on a set of questions related to parliamentary oversight, citizen participation in the parliamentary activity, internal party democracy, electoral system, diaspora vote, climate change, and economic immigration and tested their attitude on possible alternatives for solutions.

The national survey data evidenced a lack of citizens’ awareness and understanding of the mechanisms for engagement in decision-making and the respective legal framework. The findings indicate the need for an enabling regulatory environment for various forms of channeling citizens’ contribution to the parliamentary decision-making process. More than half of Albanians (67.7%) supported the idea of having a unified legal framework for referendums and citizens’ legislative initiatives

and 56.8% supported the statement to have dedicated budgets to cover the costs of initiating a referendum or legislative proposals by citizens. The proposal of holding obligatory referendums on controversial matters was supported by 68.2% of the respondents in the national survey. Nevertheless, shortcomings regarding the effectiveness of obligatory referendums and their cost were also discussed during the small discussion groups in the November deliberative polling exercise.

Moreover, 70.3% of the respondents supported the proposal of establishing online petitions with voter identification as an instrument for influencing the legislative process and 72% supported the proposal of making public consultations obligatory for every draft law. Prevailing disbelief that citizens’ participation can influence the outcome of the parliamentary decision-making, together with a perceived gap between MPs and citizens was noticed during the small discussion groups of “Shqipëria n’Kuvendim”. This was also confirmed by the survey respondents, as 35.4% of Albanians seemed to perceive the MPs as being completely disconnected from the concerns of the citizens, and 63.7% of the respondents did not support the statement that ordinary people have an influence on the work of the Parliament.



- 1 Deliberative Polling is a unique form of political consultation that combines techniques of public opinion research and public deliberation to reveal what public opinion would be on a particular issue if citizens were given a chance to become more informed. The Deliberative Poll seeks to account for the preferences and opinions of citizens both before and after they have had an opportunity to arrive at considerate judgments based on balanced information and discussion with fellow citizens. For more information see: <http://cdd.stanford.edu>.
- 2 The treatment group included randomly selected citizens from the national survey sample that had the opportunity to deliberate on the topics and access further information through briefing materials and panels of independent experts during the four-day event “Shqipëria n’Kuvendim”.
- 3 The control group included randomly selected citizens from the national survey sample who did not participate in the event.
- 4 The national survey was administered from 8th to 18th October 2021.
- 5 The topic was the subject of a 60-minute discussion in eight small discussion groups and a plenary session with experts of a similar length.

INTRODUCTION

Citizens' engagement in decision-making is a crucial indicator of a healthy civic space and democracy. The Parliament, as one of the key institutions in a democratic system of governance, has a critical role to play in promoting such participation by including the citizens it represents in its decision-making. In Albania, citizens' engagement in the legislative process is legally possible through referendums, legislative initiatives, petitions, and public consultations.

Despite having a legal framework in place, citizens' engagement in the country has declined and many people feel disenfranchised.⁶ The national survey and the discussions during the deliberative polling exercise provide "food for thought" on some of the potential reasons behind this disenfranchisement, as well as the citizens', say on some proposals to address it.



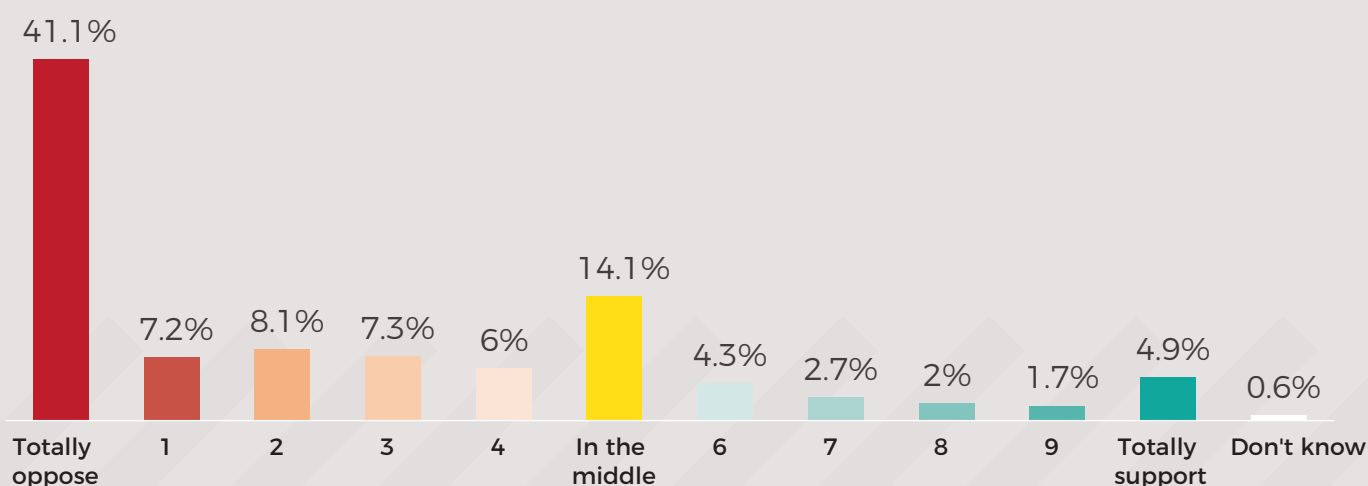
6 IDM, Survey Findings of Political Engagement in Albania 2020, available at: <https://idmalbania.org/survey-of-political-engagement-in-albania-2020/> ; IDM, Trust in Governance 2020, available at: <https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/IDM-OpinionPoll-2020-EN.pdf>

ALBANIANS' PREFERENCES AND ATTITUDES ON CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT⁷

Survey participants were inquired about their perceptions and knowledge about citizens' engagement in the parliament. When presented with the statement: *"Ordinary people have influence on the work of the Parliament"*, 63.7% of the respondents opposed it and 24.4% were neutral, whilst only 11.3% were supportive and 0.6% said they 'did not know'. See Fig. 1.

Albanians between 55-64 years old or those with a monthly income of 70 001 – 100 000 ALL and over 100 001 ALL, were more likely to oppose this statement. On the other hand, respondents employed in the public sector were more likely to support the statement, compared to those employed in the private sector.

FIGURE 1. ORDINARY PEOPLE HAVE INFLUENCE ON THE WORK OF THE PARLIAMENT



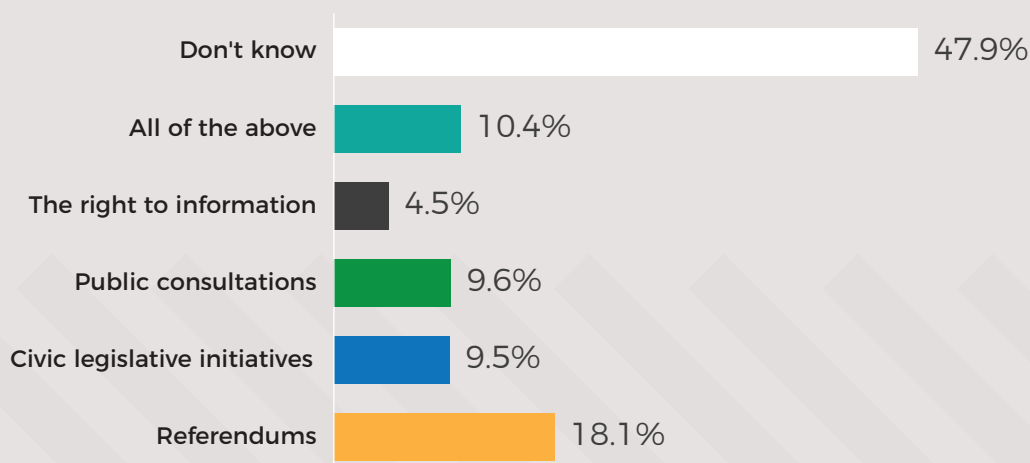
The survey responses evidenced that citizens' knowledge of the applicable legal framework enabling their engagement in the legislative process is very limited. When asked about the laws on right to information, public consultations, civic legislative initiatives, and referendums, 47.9% of the respondents said

they 'did not know' if Albania has adopted such laws. See Fig 2.



7 In the narrative, the 10 points scale is grouped into three categories: 0-3 oppose, 4-6 neutral, and 7-10 supportive of the statement.

FIGURE 2. ALBANIA HAS NOT ADOPTED A LAW ON:



On the other hand, when asked if the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament allow citizens to participate in the Standing Parliamentary Committee meetings, 29.8% of the respondents said they could not participate, whilst 43.9%

said they 'did not know'. See Fig.3. This suggests a lack of information on how to access the Parliament. Respondents with a low level of education were more likely to choose the alternative "I do not know".

FIGURE 3 ACCORDING TO THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE PARLIAMENT, CAN YOU AS A CITIZEN PARTICIPATE IN THE STANDING PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE MEETINGS?



Additionally, the national survey findings showed that Albanians find it difficult to understand public policies and laws. 57.4% of the respondents confirmed that most public policy issues and laws are so complicated that regular citizens cannot understand them, 26.1% were neutral, 15.2% opposed the statement and 1.3% said they did not know. See Fig. 4.

The national survey findings showed that 67.7% of the respondents support the idea of having a unified law on referendums and citizens' legislative initiatives, 23% were neutral, 4.6% opposed it and 4.7% said they did not know. See Fig.5.

FIGURE 4. MOST PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES AND LAWS ARE SO COMPLICATED THAT PEOPLE LIKE ME CAN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT'S GOING ON.

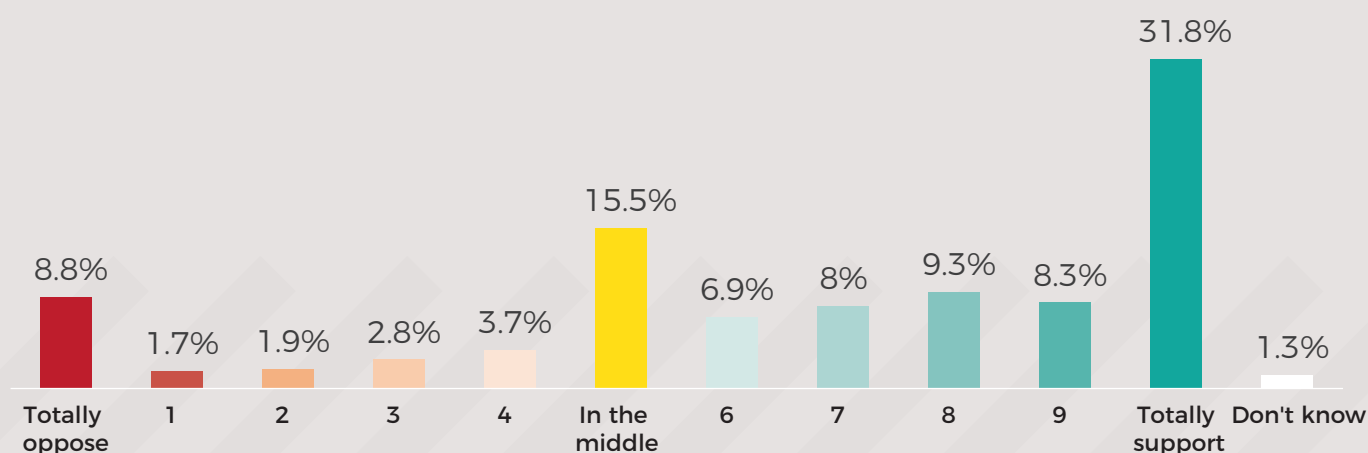
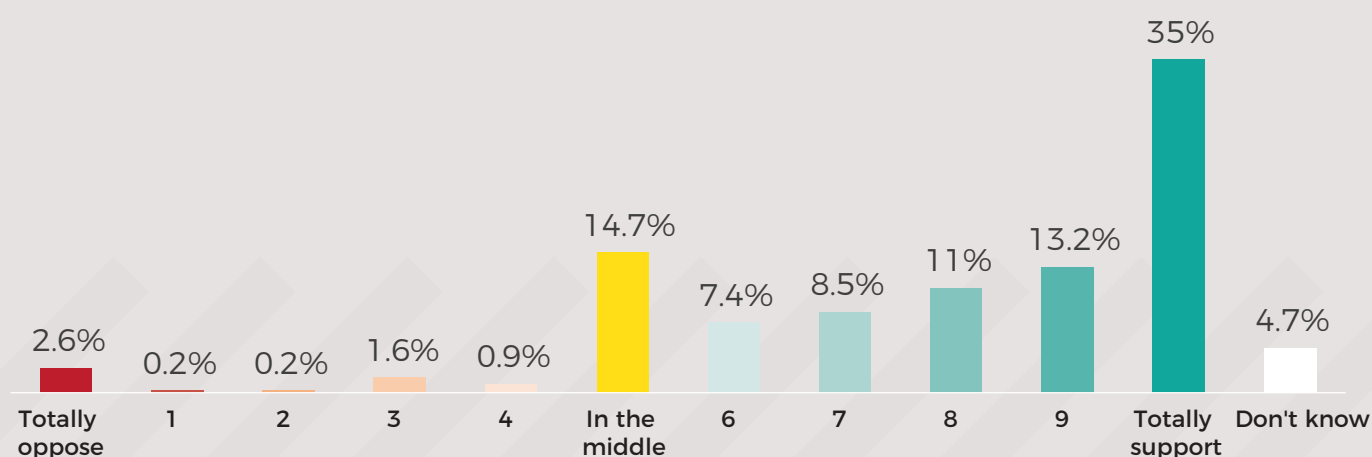


FIGURE 5. HAVING A UNIFIED LAW ON REFERENDUMS AND CITIZENS' LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES.

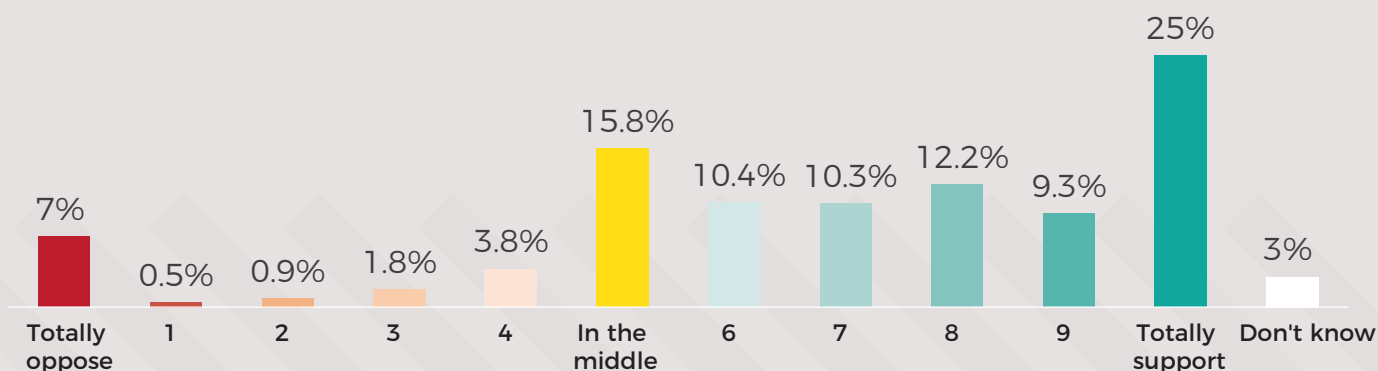


During the small discussion groups of “Shqipëria n’Kuvendim”, an overall agreement was noticed regarding the fact that referendums would improve direct democracy and that successful examples of citizens’ participation (referendums or legislative initiatives) are needed to motivate engagement.

When discussing the need for a dedicated budget to cover the costs of initiating a referendum or legislative proposals by citizens, the participants in “Shqipëria n’Kuvendim” noted potential shortcomings such as public

funds being driven away from public services that address pressing issues, as well as the risk of these funds to being misused. When asked whether they oppose or support the statement of having a dedicated budget from public funds to cover the costs of initiating a referendum or a legislative initiative by the citizens, 56.8% of the respondents supported the statement, 30% leaned towards the middle, 10.2% opposed it and 3% said they did not know. See Fig. 6.

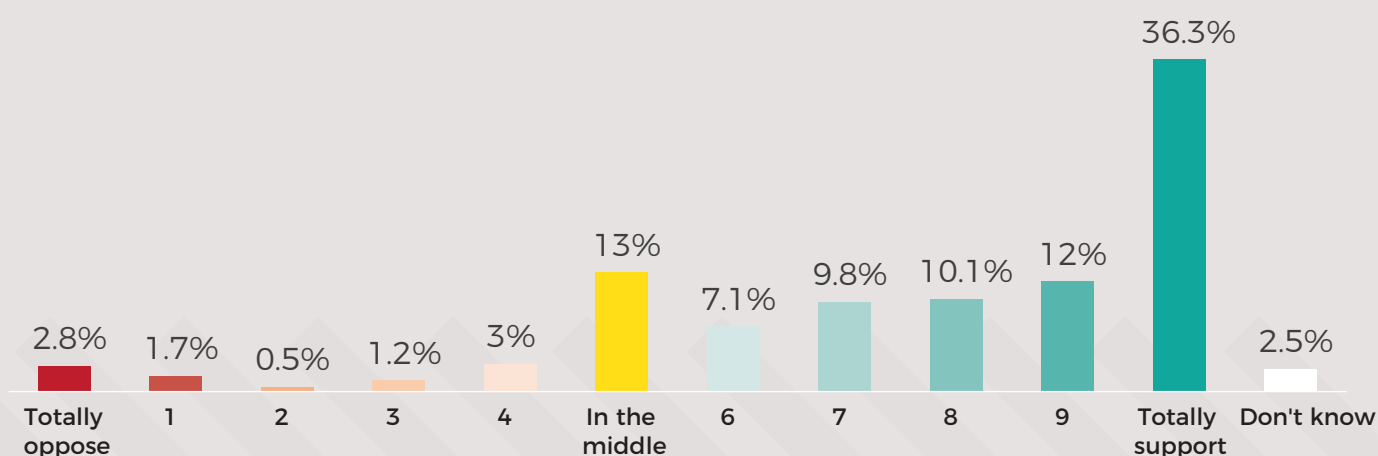
FIGURE 6. A DEDICATED BUDGET (FROM PUBLIC FUNDS) TO COVER COSTS OF INITIATING A REFERENDUM OR LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS BY CITIZENS.



The survey findings reveal that 68.2% of the respondents were supportive of holding obligatory referendums on controversial matters. 6.2% of the survey respondents were opposed to establishing obligatory referendums, whilst 23.1% were neutral and 2.5% said they did not know. *See Fig. 7.* Respondents employed in the public sector were more likely to favor this statement. During the small discussion groups of “Shqipëria n’Kuvendim”, participants highlighted some controversial issues that generated high

public interest in the past few years, such as the import of chemical weapons from Syria, the demolition of the National Theatre, the protection of the Vjosa river through the national park status, etc. According to some participants, holding a referendum could have been necessary for the above-mentioned cases. Nevertheless, regarding obligatory referendums, some expressed skepticism, noting that referendums could be costly and not effective.

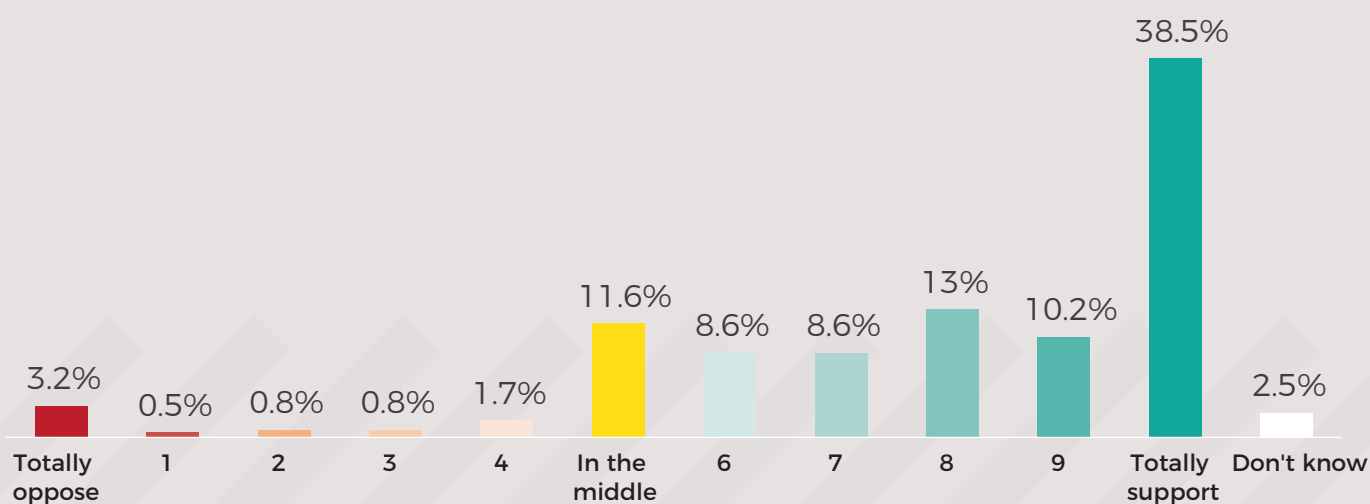
FIGURE 7. ESTABLISHING THE OBLIGATION OF HOLDING REFERENDUMS ON CONTROVERSIAL MATTERS.



When asked about the establishment of online petitions with voter identification as an instrument for citizens to force the Parliament to deliberate on an important public concern, 70.3% of the respondents were supportive, 21.9% were neutral, 5.3% were opposed and 2.5% said they 'did not know'. See Fig. 8. Respondents between 25-34 years old were more likely to favour online petitions. Participants in the deliberative poll "*Shqipëria n'Kuvendim*" argued that such instruments would bring the Parliament closer to the concerns of citizens. With regards to the online petitions, some disadvantages were noted,

including the risk of manipulation of the results and the limited access to such a process for the elderly or citizens with no internet access. Lastly, referring to the recent scandals of citizens' personal data leaks that took place in Albania, privacy concerns around online petitions were raised. As one of the participants stated: "*There is a risk of manipulation of online petitions, e.g. misuse of personal data from patronagists*".⁸ It was argued that the risks concerning privacy and accessibility should be duly mitigated for online petitions to be utilized as an effective tool for citizens' participation.

FIGURE 8. ESTABLISH ONLINE PETITION WITH VOTER IDENTIFICATION AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR CITIZENS TO FORCE THE PARLIAMENT TO DELIBERATE ON AN IMPORTANT PUBLIC CONCERN.



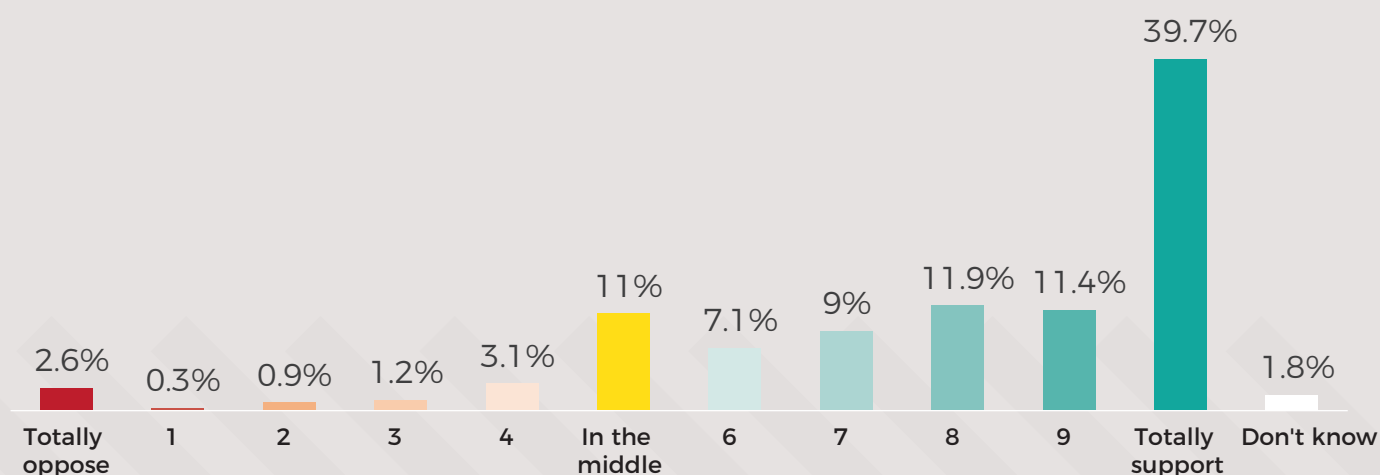
The majority of the respondents (72%) were supportive of the statement of consultations with citizens and interest groups becoming mandatory for all draft laws, indicating high interest for inclusion in consultations, while 21.2% were neutral, 5% were opposed and 1.8% said that they 'did not know'. See Fig. 9.

Well-educated respondents were more likely to support this statement.



8 On 11 April 2021, a database containing personal data and private information of 910,000 Albanian voters, was leaked in the media. The database was allegedly created by the country's ruling Socialist Party for political gain. "Patronagist" is the term used referring to individuals assigned by the ruling party to track each voter and log their personal data into this national database.

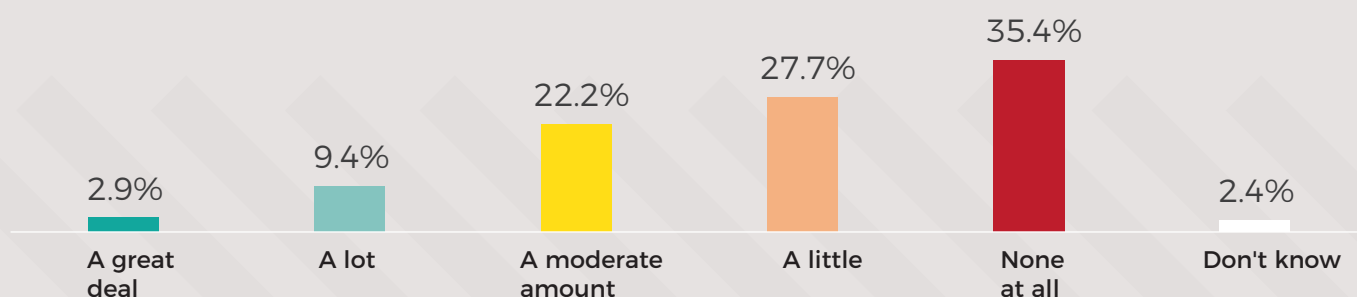
FIGURE 9. CONSULTATION WITH CITIZENS AND INTEREST GROUPS TO BECOME MANDATORY FOR ALL DRAFT LAWS REGARDLESS OF COSTS AND TIME REQUIRED.



When asked how in touch are MPs with the priorities and concerns of the citizens, 35.4% believed that MPs are not in touch at all, while 27.7% thought they are a little in touch with the priorities and concerns of the citizens. The rest of the responses were split amongst "a great

deal" (2.9%); "a lot" (9.4%); "a moderate amount" (22.2%); and "don't know" (2.4%). See Fig 10. Younger respondents up to 24 years old were more likely to perceive this distance between citizens' concerns and the MPs.

FIGURE 10. HOW IN TOUCH ARE MPS WITH PRIORITIES AND CONCERNS OF CITIZENS IN THE COUNTRY?



On the other hand, 67.9% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that: "MPs and politicians care about what people like me think", only 9.9% were supportive, 21.6% were neutral and 0.6% said they 'did not know'. See Fig. 11. Women, the unemployed, and students were more likely to oppose this statement.

When it comes to directly engaging with MPs

in person, in writing, or in some other way, Albanians were reluctant, as only 12.6% were extremely willing to do so. The rest of the respondents were split amongst "very willing" (21.6%); "moderately willing" (20.6%); "slightly willing" (18.9%); "not willing to engage at all" (23.9%); and "don't know" (2.4%). See Fig 12. The data showed that women were more reluctant to engage directly with MPs compared to men.

FIGURE 11. MPS AND POLITICIANS CARE A LOT ABOUT WHAT PEOPLE LIKE ME THINK.

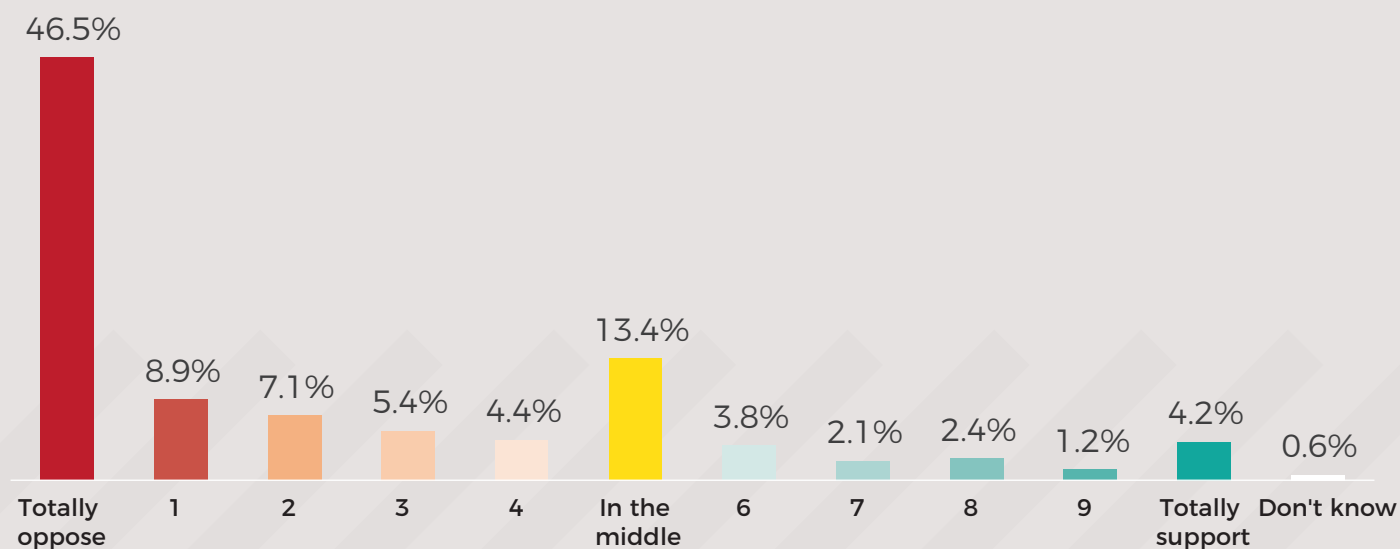
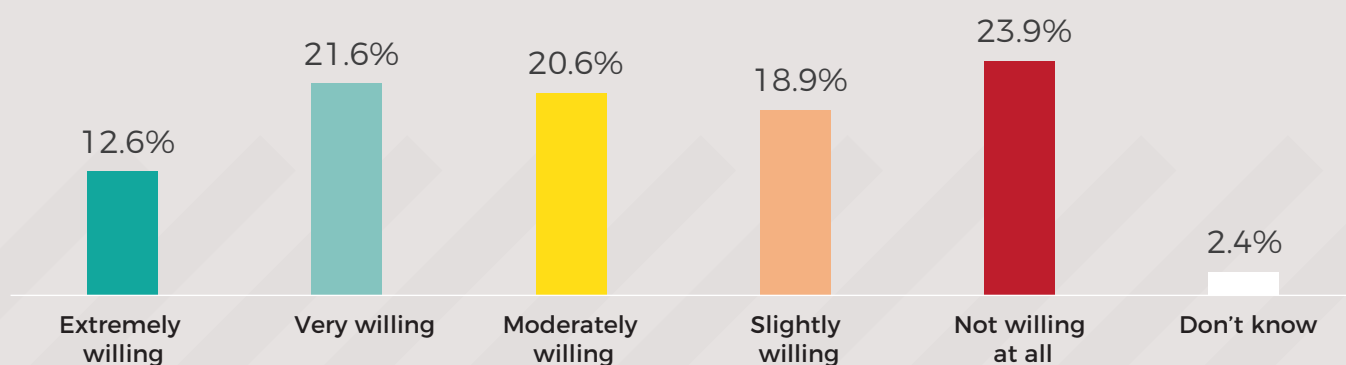


FIGURE 12. HOW WILLING WOULD YOU BE TO CONTACT POLITICIANS OR MPS EITHER IN PERSON, OR IN WRITING, OR IN SOME OTHER WAY?



METHODOLOGY

The national survey employed a representative sample of the Albanian population in which respondents were selected across the country's municipalities and their administrative units. Employing a weighted, nationally representative sample allows us to extrapolate from the national survey findings for the Albanian population as a whole. Consequently, the statistical significance level of the sample is described as follows: for an adult resident Albanian citizen population of 2,220,569, with a sample size of 1,200 respondents, for a confidence level of 95%, the confidence interval is ± 2.83 ; and for a confidence level of 99%, the confidence interval is ± 3.72 .

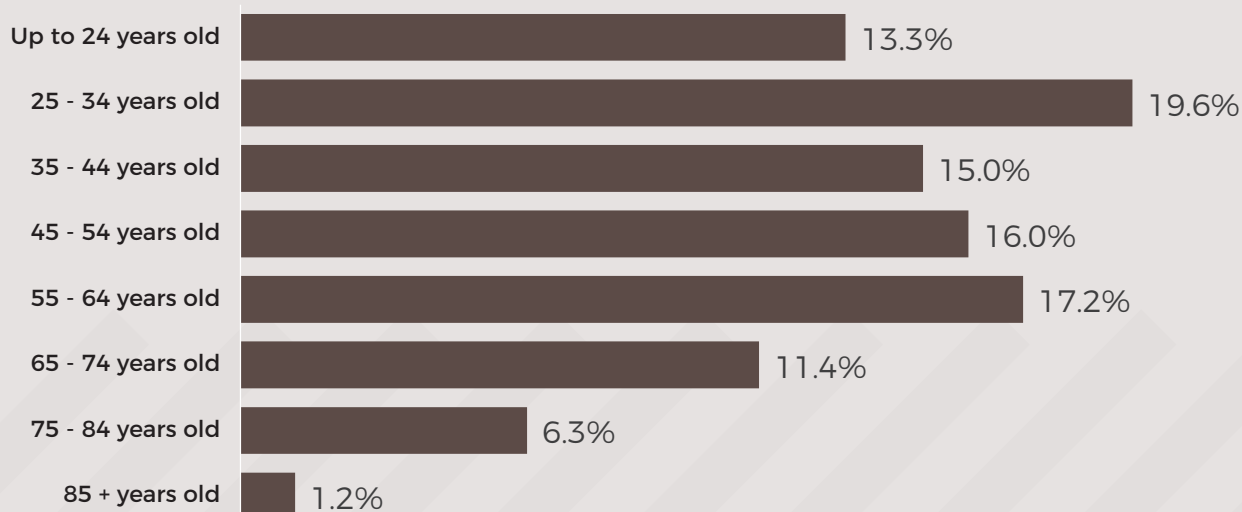
To determine the quota size of each of the counties, the population of Albania was retrieved from the civil registry, and the number of residents of each of the counties on 1 January 2021 was retrieved from the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT). Since the number of residents in the territory of Albania from 2019 to 2021 for the population over 18 years has changed by about 0.31%, it did not statistically affect the sample size by county and the confidence interval mentioned above. The sample of 1,200 respondents was distributed across all 61 municipalities of the 12 counties. Subsequently, distribution by county was adjusted to select only the adult population (aged 18 years and older) and to employ quota controls for gender. As INSTAT does not define age groups as either under 18 years old or over 18 years old, a linear interpolation technique was used. The selection was then weighted according to the most recent age groups published by INSTAT (at the time the lot was drawn) which were the data for 2020. The results calculated and published in this analysis are therefore weighted according to two dimensions: geographical distribution of the population and age groups.

DEMOGRAPHY OF RESPONDENTS

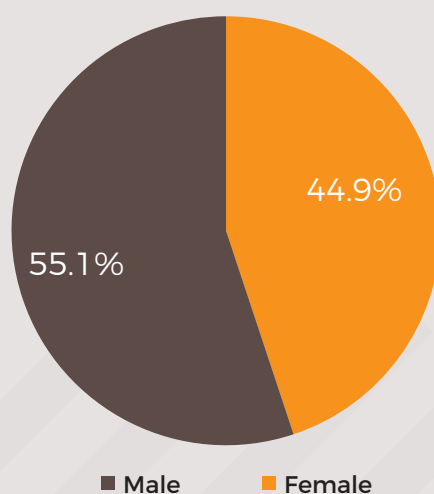
A total of 1200 Albanian citizens, 18 years old and over, from all the municipalities of the Republic of Albania, participated in the national survey. Of all the respondents, 55.1% were male while 44.9% were female. The majority of respondents pertained to age groups ranging

from 18 years old to 54 years old (63.9%). Respondents aged between 55 years old and over, made up only 36.1% of the overall sample. For more detailed information on the sample's age distribution, please refer to the graph below.

AGE



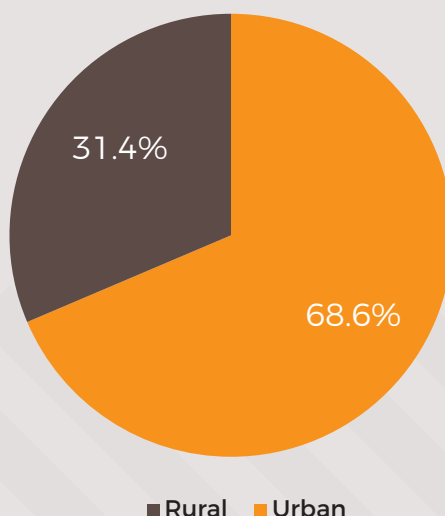
GENDER



The geographical distribution was 68.6% urban and 31.4% rural. In comparison, data from the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) says that in 2011,

58.2% of the Albanian resident population was located in an urban area.⁹ However, over the past ten years, this number has increased.

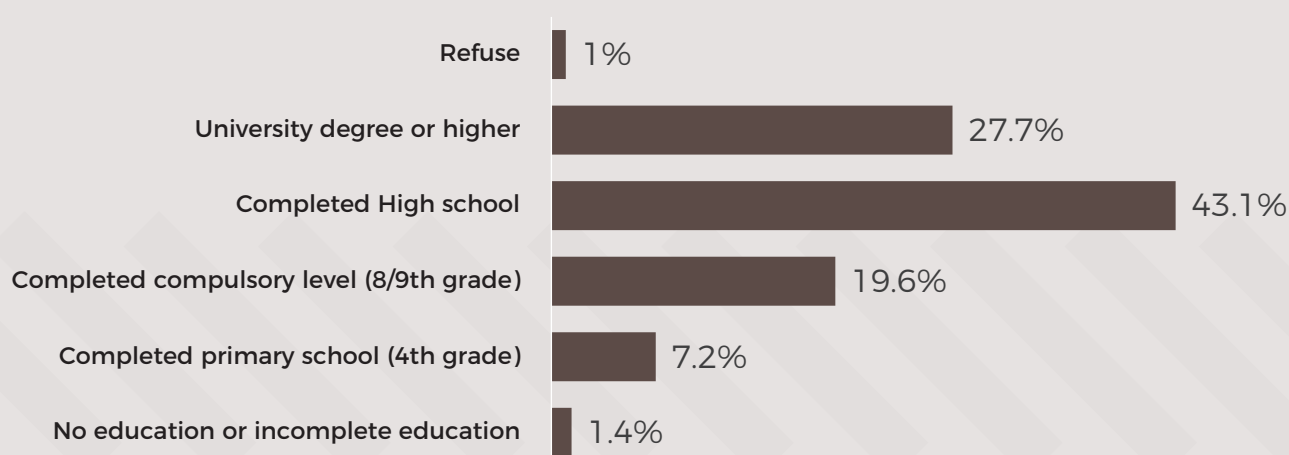
GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION



The majority of the respondents (70.8%) had received a high school diploma or held a university or postgraduate degree, with 43.1% of them having completed their education up to the upper secondary level (i.e. high school diploma) whilst 27.7% had received a university or postgraduate degree. 28.2% of

the respondents had up to lower secondary education, with 19.6% of the respondents having completed the compulsory 8/9-year programme, while 8.6% had received no education or finished only primary education (4/5-year programme).

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

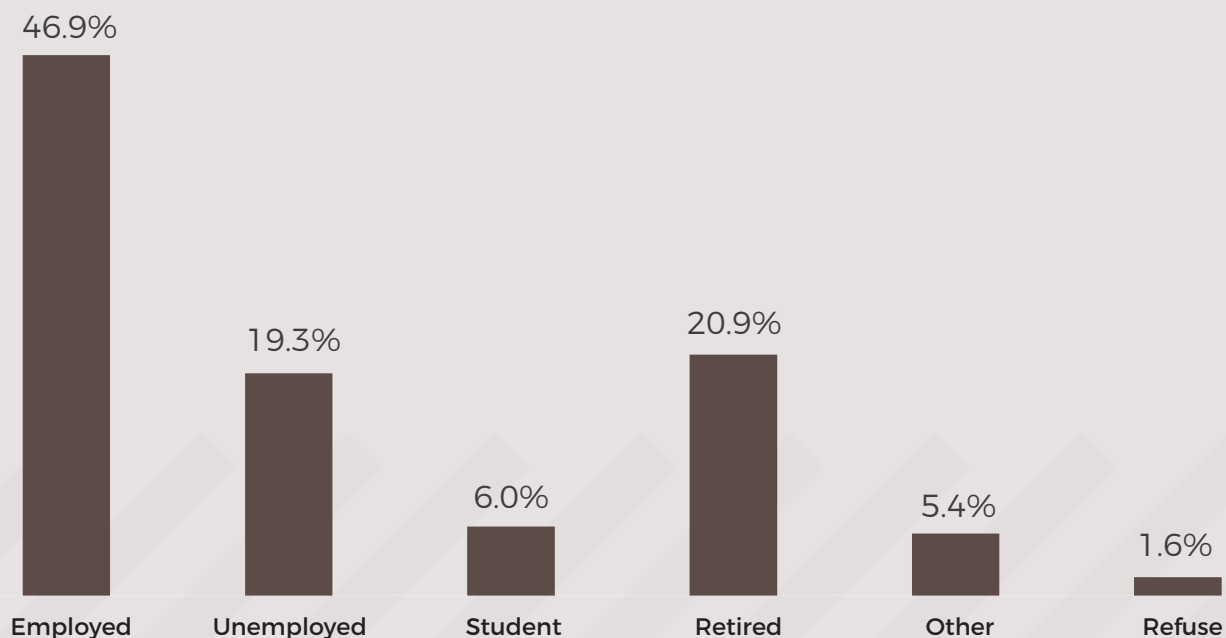


9 http://www.instat.gov.al/media/2919/a_new_urban-rural_classification_of_albanian_population.pdf

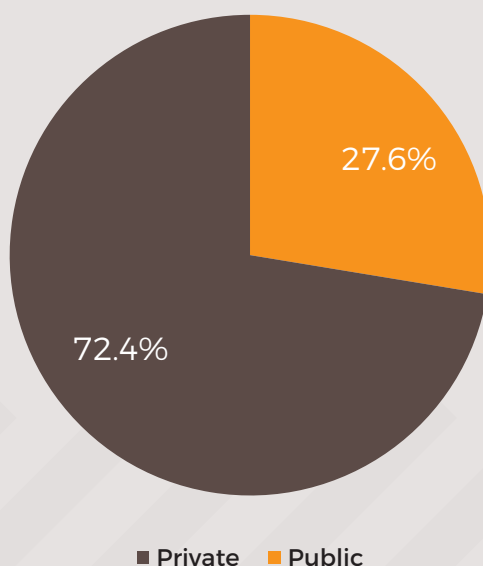
About 46.9% of the respondents were employed at the time of the survey, with 72.4% of them working in the private sector and 27.6% employed in the public sector. About a fifth

of the respondents declared that they were unemployed (19.3%), while 6% were students, 20.9% retired and 5.4% chose the 'other' option.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS



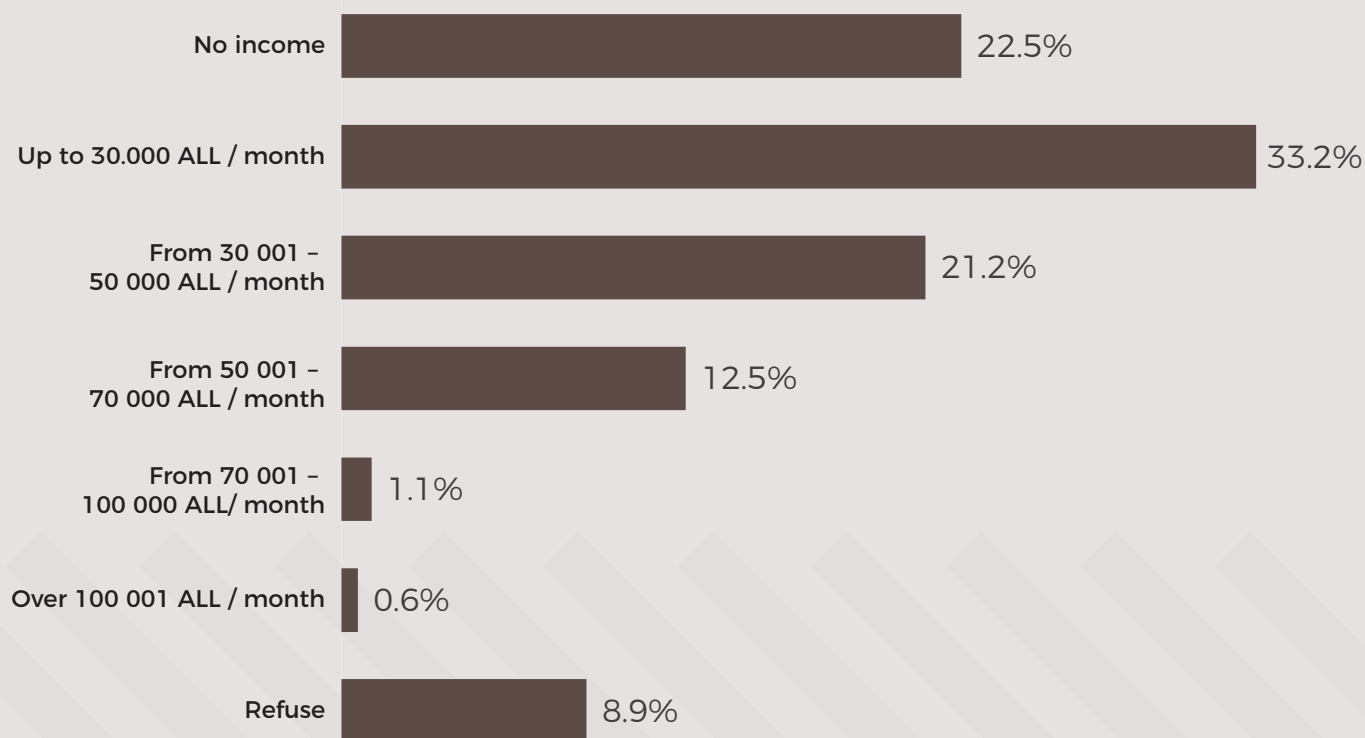
EMPLOYMENT SECTOR



With regards to the respondents' regular individual monthly incomes, 22.5% of the respondents stated that they did not receive any regular income at the time of the survey. 33.2% earned up to 30,000 ALL/month, whilst

21.2% reported that they received regular monthly incomes falling between 30,001 ALL and 50,000 ALL. Only 14.2% of the respondents stated that they received individual monthly incomes of over 50,000 ALL.

REGULAR INDIVIDUAL MONTHLY INCOME



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Mbështetje për Parlamentin
dhe Edukimin Qytetar në Shqipëri

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