



Institute for Democracy and Mediation
Instituti për Demokraci dhe Ndërmjetësim

THEMATIC REPORT

DIASPORA VOTING

Author: **Daniel Prroni**



DELIBERATIVE
POLLING
'SHQIPËRIA
N'KU VENDIM'

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 group⁵ 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 decision-making, internal party democracy, electoral system, diaspora vote, climate change; and economic immigration and tested their attitude on possible alternatives for solutions.

Respondents largely support the right to vote of the Albanian diaspora (71.5%). The findings also show that respondents are relatively uninformed on whether Albanian citizens residing abroad can vote in elections in Albania. Participants at “Shqipëria n’Kuvendim” argued that by guaranteeing their right to vote, citizens residing abroad would be more integrated into the public and political life in Albania. They argued that this segment of society is more resilient to corruption but they also had concerns that the diaspora might be an easier target for manipulation by propaganda. Concerning the method of voting, citizens leaned more towards electronic voting (61.9%) as they regard it as more reliable and it provides easier access to citizens living abroad, regardless if there is a diplomatic mission in the country they are residing.



- 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 and did not participate at the event
- 4 IDM administered the national survey 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

Albania has one of the largest diasporas, with over 36% of 4.4 million Albanian citizens residing outside the country, according to INSTAT.⁶ Due to their citizenship and the civil and political rights attached to it, the Constitution of Albania and the Electoral Code provide for their right to vote.

Although approx. 1.3 million citizens residing outside Albania have reached the voting age and are registered with the civil registry, as required by the Electoral Code, the only way to exercise their right to vote is to physically come to Albania and vote in their designated voting center.

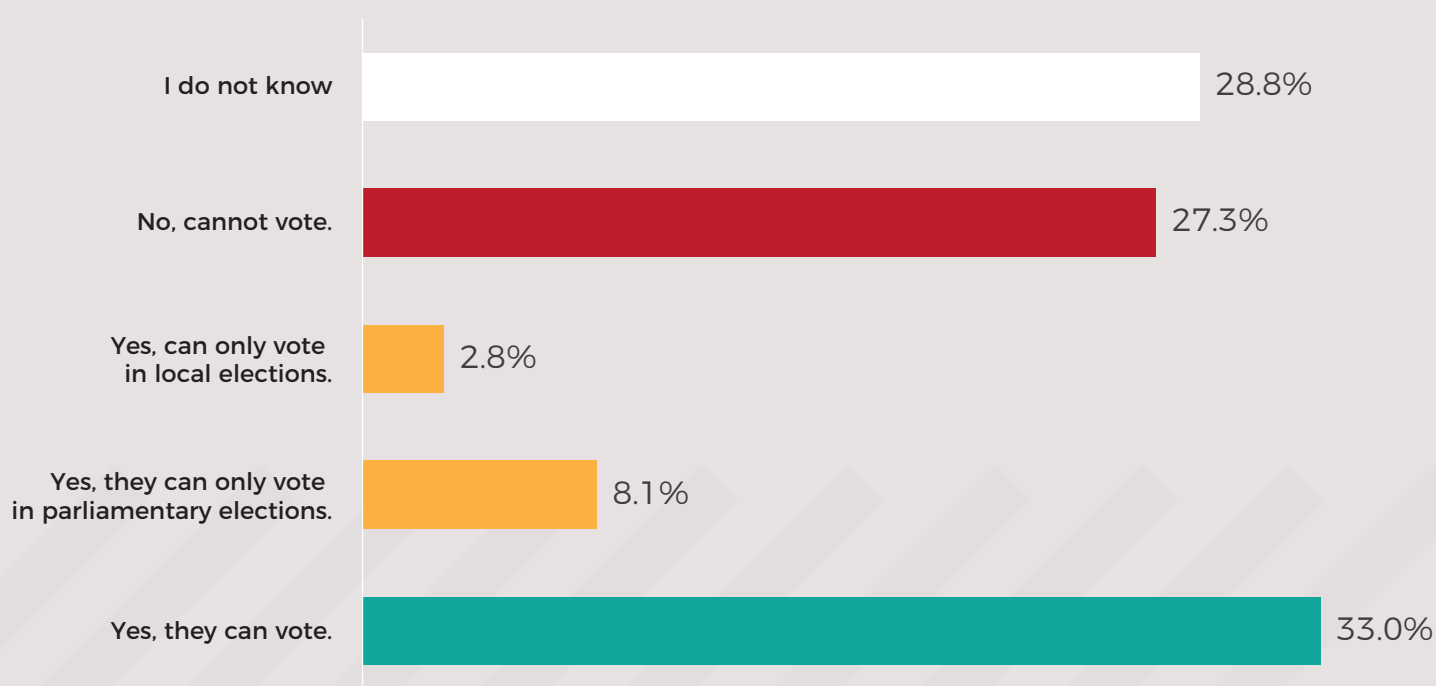
Despite the recognition in principle of the right to vote for citizens residing outside of Albania, the procedural process is a delicate one that requires a broad political and social consensus to safeguard the fairness and impartiality of the electoral system. Elements such as how to register the voters, how will they vote, and how and where will their votes be counted, must be consensually well thought out. There are various models and examples for the diaspora to exercise their right to vote. Each system has its comparative advantages and each country determines the method based on the national infrastructure, resources, cultural considerations, effectiveness, and preparedness.

ALBANIANS' PREFERENCES AND ATTITUDES ON DIASPORA VOTING⁷

Survey data show that respondents are relatively unaware of whether Albanian citizens permanently residing abroad can vote. Only 33% say that the Albanian diaspora can vote in local and parliamentary elections in Albania (see figure 1). Whereas, more than half either says that the diaspora cannot vote or they do not know. Men appear to be more informed on

the matter, whereas women more often state that they do not know. The latter applies also to citizens with less formal education and those working in the private sector. Citizens with higher education and young citizens more often maintain that the Albanian diaspora cannot vote.

FIGURE 1: ACCORDING TO THE ELECTORAL CODE, CAN THE ALBANIAN DIASPORA (ALBANIAN CITIZENS RESIDING PERMANENTLY ABROAD) VOTE FOR THE LOCAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ALBANIA?



However, respondents appear to be overwhelmingly favorable of the fact that the diaspora should vote in elections in Albania.

Of the total respondents, 71.5% are favorable and only 9.9% say that they are unfavorable (see figure 2). Respondents in retirement and

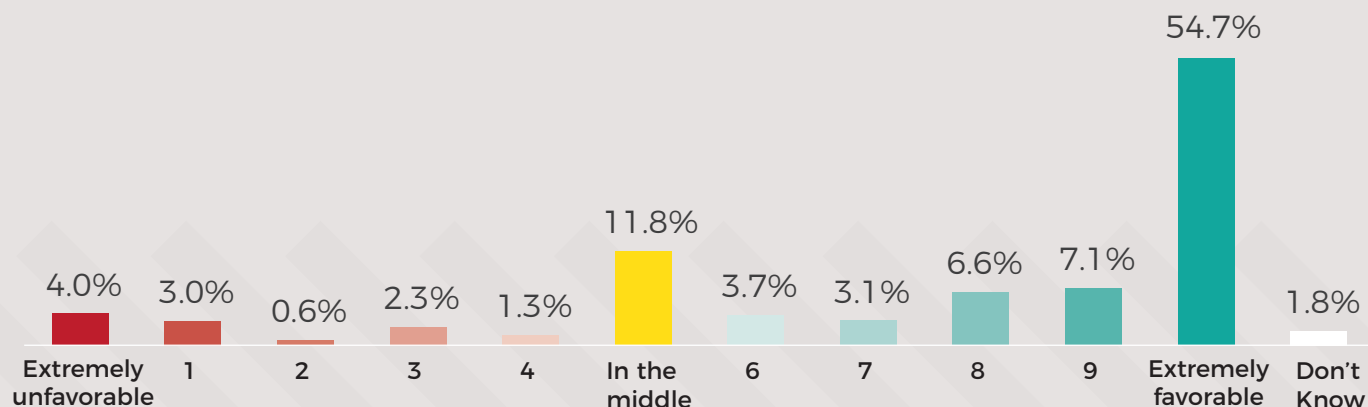


7 In the narrative, the 10 points scale is grouped into three categories: 0-3 unfavourable, 4-6 neutral, and 7-10 favourable of the statement.

those with low monthly income tend to be more favorable. Whereas, students and young respondents (up to 24 years old) tend to be

less favorable about the right to vote of the diaspora.

FIGURE 2: TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU FAVORABLE OR OPPOSED TO THE FACT THAT THE ALBANIAN CITIZENS RESIDING ABROAD SHOULD VOTE IN ELECTIONS IN ALBANIA?



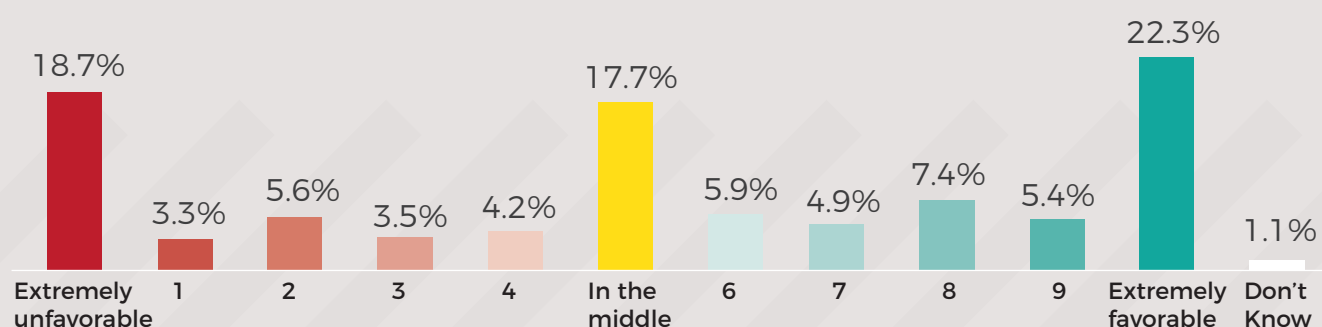
Participants at “Shqipëria n’Kuvendim” strongly supported the right to vote of the diaspora. They emphasized the need to provide the appropriate infrastructure to exercise this right, according to the proposed voting methods such as electronic voting, voting by regular mail, and voting at the diplomatic missions. They argued that by facilitating the right to vote for the diaspora, the members of the latter would feel more included in the political life of Albania. Participants considered citizens residing outside of Albania as less prone to corruption, in part due to their relatively better socio-economic wellbeing. Others were concerned about the vulnerability of this group towards state propaganda, highlighting, in particular, the risk of manipulation through social media and P&R stunts. On another note, participants stated that citizens residing outside of the country are less affected by policymaking decisions and therefore are not sufficiently invested or informed on the status of politics in Albania. Overall, the right to vote of the diaspora was considered fair and constitutional, but concerns were raised as to the voting procedure.

In terms of the method of voting for citizens residing abroad, the most preferred alternative

is electronic voting with 61.9% support. Whereas, the least preferred alternative is voting by regular mail, to which 31.2% opposed. The main arguments for each method are briefly provided below.

There was little support for voting by regular mail at “Shqipëria n’Kuvendim” small discussion groups. Participants argued that the method is costly and largely unreliable. Additionally, they argued that voting by regular mail can lead to higher levels of corruption. Lastly, participants argued that the ballot counting process should be administered only within the country. However, survey data show a 40% support for the implementation of voting by regular mail (see figure 3). Respondents in retirement tend to be more favorable compared to younger respondents (25-34 years old).

FIGURE 3: ALBANIAN CITIZENS RESIDING PERMANENTLY ABROAD SHOULD BE ENABLED VOTING IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ALBANIA BY REGULAR MAIL



Regarding the method of voting in person at Albania's diplomatic missions, survey data show considerable support of 56.5% (see figure 4). Here the demographic composition follows the same trend, with older respondents being more in favour than younger ones. However, during the small discussion group "Shqipëria n'Kuvendim", participants argued that this option lacks the proper infrastructure. On this note, participants pointed out that the network of embassies and/or consulates is not extensive enough to cover the whole diaspora. Moreover, participants did not regard embassies and consulates as credible institutions, capable of administering the electoral process with integrity, nor did they consider them well-prepared to handle the process.

Lastly, results show that the method of electronic voting is the most preferred

alternative, with 61.9% of the respondents saying they are favorable (see figure 5). Among respondents in the 65-74 age group, 71.4% of them are favorable. Whereas, the least support comes from respondents in the 25-34 age group (53.8%) and those up to 24 years old (56.8%). There was significant support for electronic voting also during the small discussion groups at "Shqipëria n'Kuvendim". Participants considered it a more reliable process, requiring lower costs and fewer human resources to operate. Moreover, voters can easily access electronic voting, therefore providing a more extensive reach. However, it was argued that this method must be accompanied by digital education campaigns to not exclude the elderly or the digitally impaired.

FIGURE 4: ALBANIAN CITIZENS RESIDING PERMANENTLY ABROAD SHOULD BE ENABLED VOTING IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AT ALBANIA'S DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS ABROAD

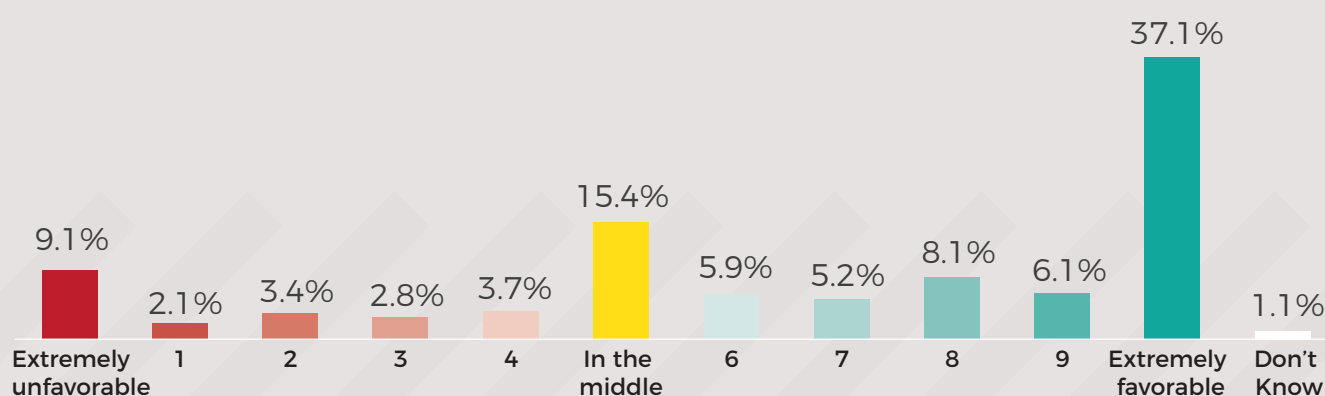
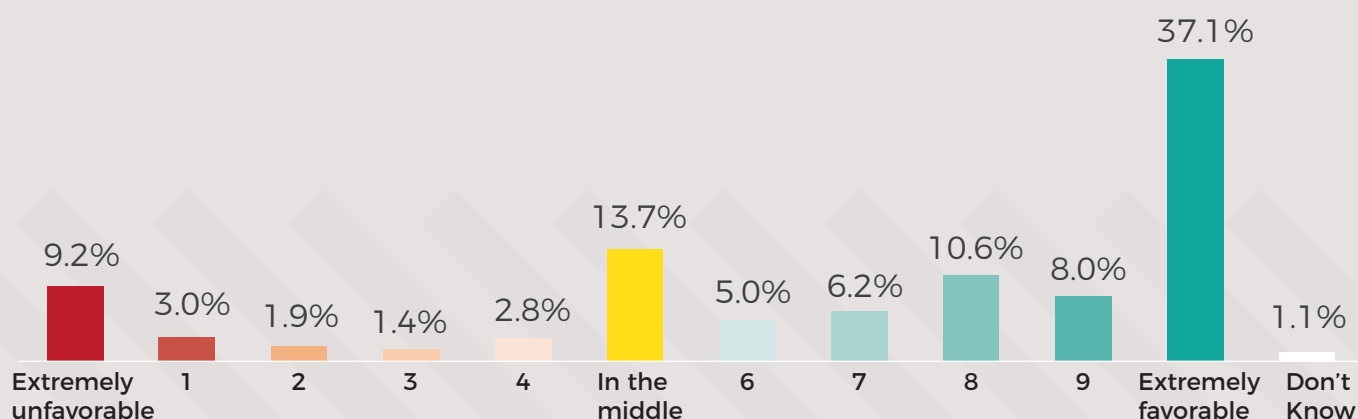


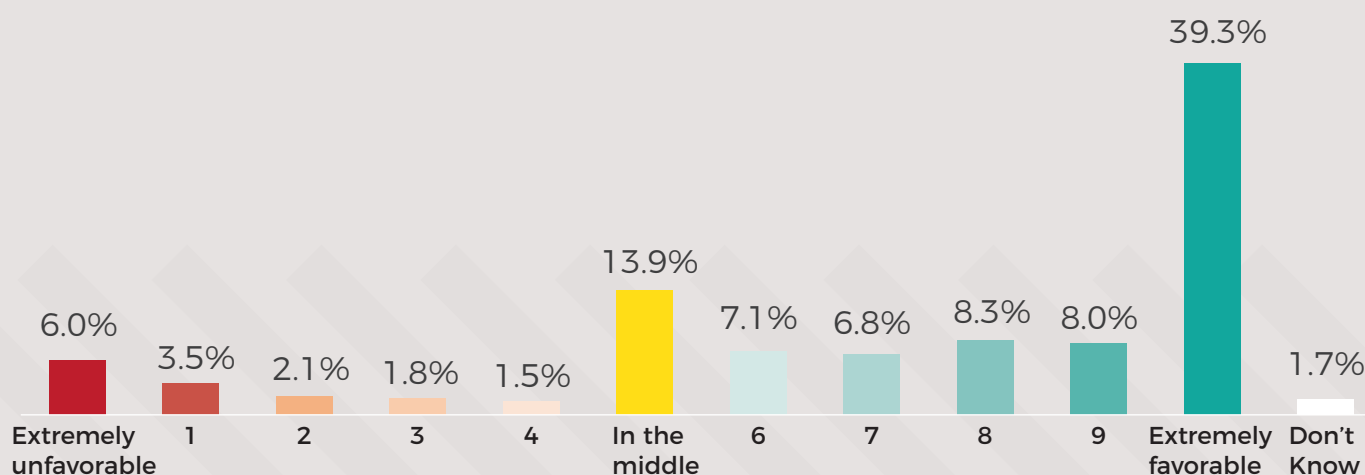
FIGURE 5: ALBANIAN CITIZENS RESIDING PERMANENTLY ABROAD SHOULD BE ENABLED ELECTRONIC VOTING FOR PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ALBANIA



Concerning the proposal to ensure dedicated seats in the parliament for which the diaspora votes and gets elected, a majority of 62.4% were favorable towards the proposition, 22.5% were in the middle, while 13.4% were unfavorable (see figure 6). Findings show that students and respondents with a university degree tend to be more in favor. Respondents with no or little formal education and those with low monthly income tend to be more unfavorable.

Participants at “Shqipëria n’Kuvendim” were mostly in favor of parliamentary quotas for the diaspora. They argue that the measure could act as an incentive to include the diaspora in the political debate. However, many were unclear on certain aspects such as the system according to which diaspora would vote, if they could participate in local elections, the model of the ballot they would use, or how their vote would be calculated.

FIGURE 6: ALBANIA SHOULD ENSURE DEDICATED MP SEATS FOR WHICH THE ALBANIAN DIASPORA (ALBANIAN CITIZENS RESIDING PERMANENTLY ABROAD) VOTES AND GETS ELECTED



METHODOLOGY

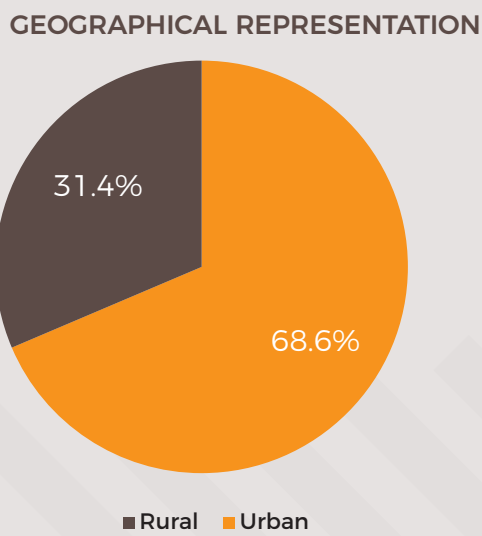
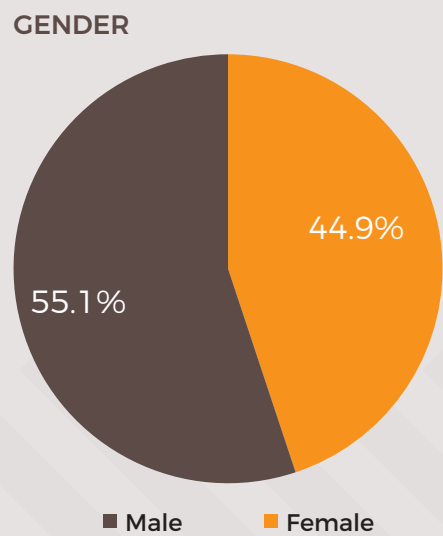
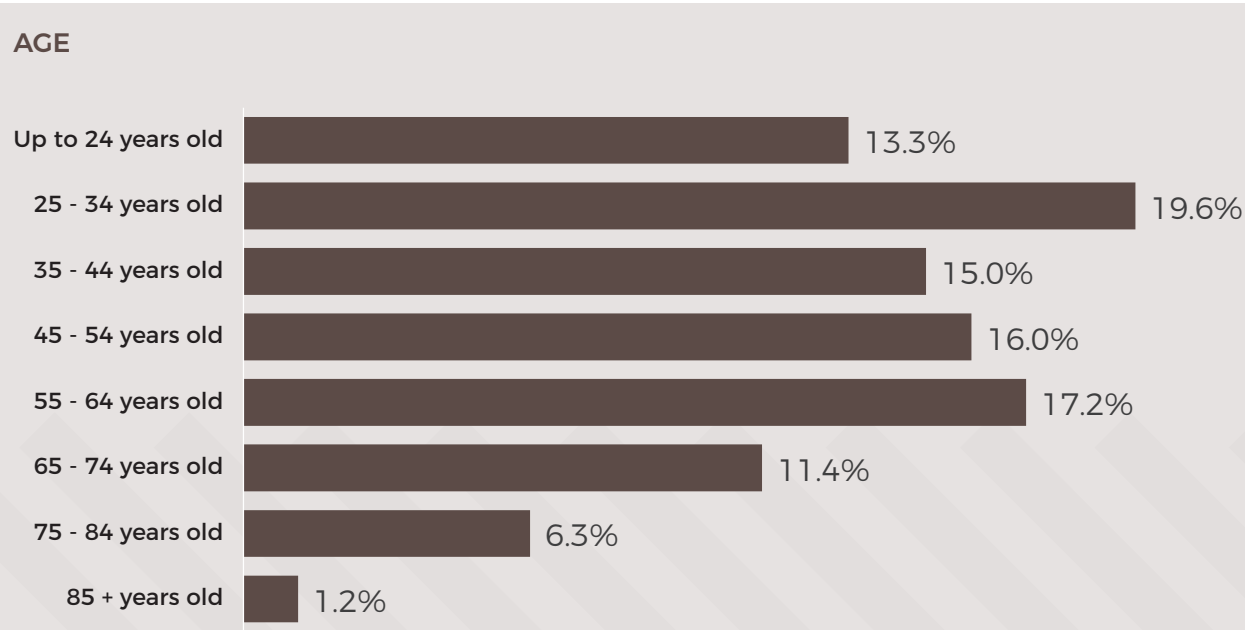
The national survey employed a representative sample of the Albanian population in which respondents were selected across the country's municipalities and their administrative units. Employing a weighted, nationally representative sample allows us to extrapolate from the national survey findings for 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

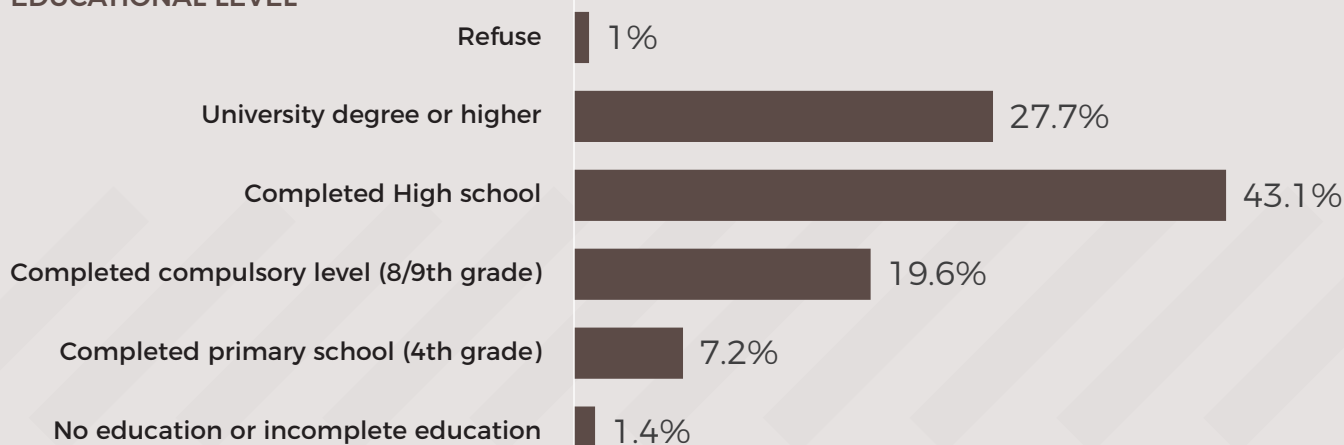
from 18 years old to 54 years old (63.9%). Respondents aged between 55 years old and over, made up only 36.1% of the overall sample. For more detailed information on the sample's age distribution, please refer to the graph below.



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.⁸ However, over the past ten years this number has increased. 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).

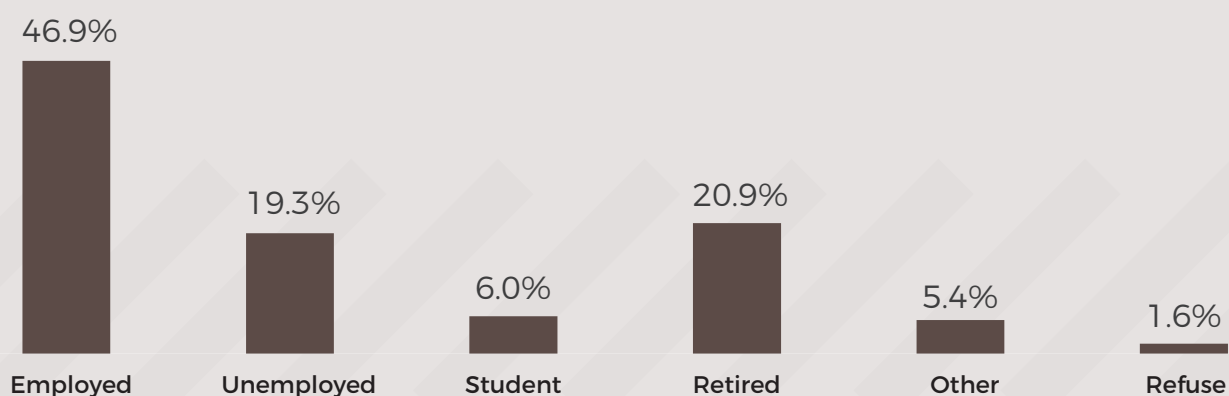
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL



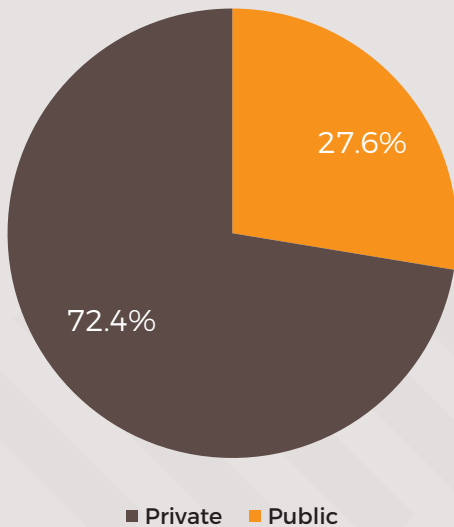
About 46.9% of the respondents were employed at the time of the survey, with 72.4% of them working in the private sector and 27.6% employed in the public sector. About a fifth

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 SECTOR



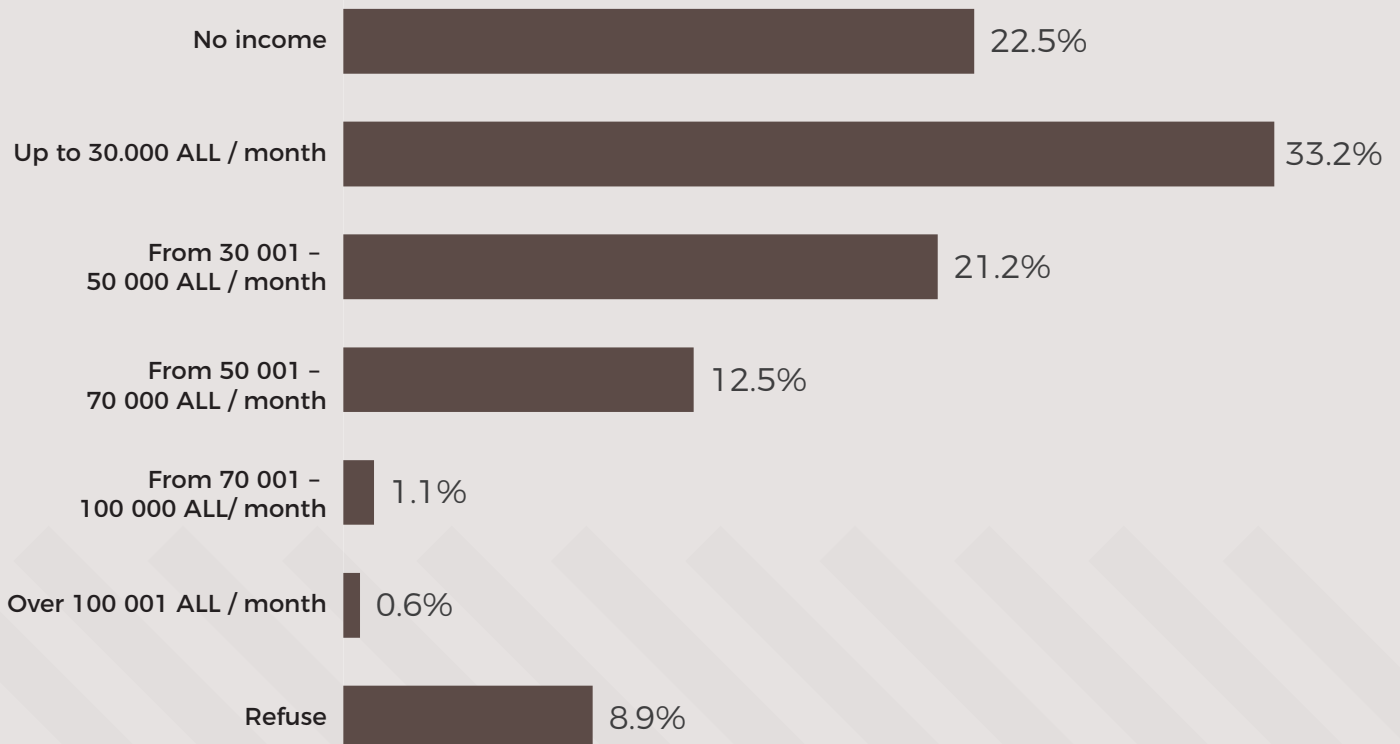
EMPLOYMENT STATUS



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



Tirana, February 2022

© 2022 by Institute for Democracy and Mediation. All rights reserved.

Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)
Address: St. Shenasi Dishnica, Nd. 35, H.1
1017 Tirana, Albania
E-mail: info@idmalbania.org
Website: www.idmalbania.org

DISCLAIMER

This thematic report was produced by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM). The views and conclusions contained in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Swiss Government or the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The sole authorship of this publication belongs to IDM. No part of this publication can be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the copyright holder.



PROJECT OF:



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

IMPLEMENTED BY:



IMPLEMENTING PARTNER:



Institute for Democracy and Mediation
Institut për Demokracinë dhe Mediationin



"Support to Parliament and Civic Education in Albania" (PACEP) is a project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) implemented by the OSCE Presence in Albania and the National Democratic Institute (NDI)."

This activity was held by IDM in the framework of PACEP project, in consultation with the Center for Deliberative Democracy (CDD) at Stanford University (USA).