Institute
for Democracy
and Mediation

Policy Brief: Restoring Public Trust through Strengthened Public Integrity in Albania

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Executive Summary

Public trust in Albania's key public-service institutions is slipping[1]: only 11.6 % of citizens expressed high confidence in 2024, down from 16.7 % in 2022. Service-user satisfaction has barely moved (≈17%), and perceptions of institutional accountability have fallen sharply (63.5 % → 49.5 %). Inside these institutions, however, the picture is more positive. Nearly 84% of officials now know their institution's Integrity Plan (up from 15.5%), and self-reported capacity to apply ethics rules has risen. This widening "perception gap" shows that technical reforms alone are not enough—their results must become visible and relatable to citizens. Bridging that gap, and restoring confidence in public governance, will require sustained transparency, stronger channels for public feedback, and continued investment in ethics capacity across all levels of the civil service.

I. Context

In recent years, Albania has undertaken significant institutional reforms aimed at strengthening democratic governance, curbing corruption, and restoring public trust in public institutions. These efforts align with the country's broader European integration agenda, which prioritizes transparency, rule of law, and administrative accountability. However, despite these ongoing reforms, the governance landscape in Albania continues to be challenged by persistent concerns about the effectiveness of public institutions, integrity violations, and citizen disengagement.

Public integrity—understood as the consistent alignment of institutional behavior with ethical standards, transparency, and accountability—remains a core pillar for sustainable democratic development. Yet, Albania's progress in institutionalizing public integrity has been uneven. While formal structures and legal instruments have been adopted to promote integrity, their implementation and public impact have often lagged behind. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index has consistently placed Albania in the lower half of global rankings, suggesting a tructural disconnect between anti-corruption policy intentions and lived institutional realities.[2]

These results reflect deeper systemic challenges such as weak enforcement mechanisms, politicized public administration, and limited citizen oversight

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[1] Data presented are based on internal baseline (2022) and end-line (2024) surveys conducted by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) within a project funded by the Embassy of Sweden. These reports remain unpublished per donor guidelines but can be made available upon request through IDM.

[2] Transparency International. *Corruption Perceptions Index 2024*. Available at: https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024/index/alb

mechanisms which have all contributed to a fragile integrity framework. In this context, public trust in institutions has remained low, compounded by a widespread perception of corruption and a sense of limited institutional responsiveness. At the same time, institutional capacity within the public sector to manage and uphold integrity has shown signs of gradual improvement, particularly in awareness and adoption of ethical frameworks among public officials.

The project "Serving Democracy and Citizens through Improved Public Integrity" implemented by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) from 2021 to 2025, supported by the Embassy of Sweeden, has provided an important lens through which to evaluate Albania's recent progress and remaining challenges in public integrity. Through surveys targeting both public officials and service users[3], the project captured both internal (institutional) and external (public) perspectives on the state of integrity in Albania's public sector. The findings reveal a complex picture: while there has been notable institutional progress in embedding integrity frameworks, public satisfaction, trust, and perceptions of accountability have either stagnated or declined.

This duality underscores a key theoretical tension in governance reform: improving institutional integrity is not solely about internal policy development but also about transforming the relationship between citizens and the state. Where reforms remain inward-looking, focused only on policy adoption and compliance, they may fail to translate into improved public experience or trust. Instead, integrity must be framed as a dynamic behavior between institutions and citizens, grounded in transparency, responsiveness, and ethical practice.

These concepts will be explored in the sections that follow, which unpack the findings of the IDM endline assessment under three interrelated dimensions: Institutional Progress and Internal Reform, Public Satisfaction and Trust, and Shortcomings in Accountability and Transparency. Together, these dimensions reveal not only the current trajectory of public integrity in Albania but also offer a roadmap for targeted policy intervention to bridge the gap between institutional commitment and public trust.

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[3] A note on the sample used in the assessment: the study involved 99 public officials from five institutions and 69 service users from four institutions. Although these figures fell short of the initially targeted sample sizes (250 officials and 350 users), the sampling was conducted using convenience and snowball sampling methods. These techniques, while useful in contexts with accessibility limitations, limit the representativeness of the findings at the institutional level. Nevertheless, the sample distributions by demographic characteristics were broadly stable, allowing for meaningful comparative analysis between baseline and endline data, especially regarding shifts in trends rather than generalizable prevalence.

II. Methodology

(All figures presented in this section are based on internal IDM surveys—see Executive Summary footnote for details.)

This assessment follows a quantitative "before–after" design that compares a baseline measurement (March-mid-May 2022) with an end-line measurement (March-December 2024). In both rounds the project team deployed identical, structured online questionnaires via Google Forms, ensuring strict comparability of questions, wording and response scales. Two separate instruments captured the perspectives of:

- Public officials working inside the targeted institutions, and
- Service users—citizens who had interacted with those institutions over the previous 12 months.

Because no comprehensive sampling frames were available, the study used non-probability methods: convenience sampling for officials (links circulated by institutional focal points) and snowball sampling for citizens (initial respondents' invited peers). These approaches offered speed and cost-efficiency but limit statistical representativeness.

Achieved sample:
- Baseline 2022: 97 public officials and 199 service users, covering 3 of 6 institutions for officials and 4 of 6 for citizens.
- End-line 2024: 99 public officials and 69 service users, covering 5 of 6 institutions for officials and again 4 of 6 for citizens.

Assuming large underlying populations, these sample sizes yield an approximate 95 % confidence margin of ±10 percentage points for officials and ±7–12 percentage points for citizens. Results should therefore be interpreted as indicative trends rather than institution-level population estimates.

Survey links were open for four to ten weeks in each round. The raw responses were exported to Excel, cleaned, coded and transferred to SPSS for descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations; sex and institution-type disaggregation was applied where relevant. All participants received an information sheet and gave informed consent; participation was voluntary, anonymous and could be withdrawn at any time. Collected data are stored only in aggregate form for reporting purposes. The analysis incorporates all validated survey responses and documentary sources up to 31 March 2025. This mixed internal–external perspective, despite its sampling limitations, provides a consistent yard-stick for tracking changes in integrity awareness, trust and perceived accountability across the project lifecycle.

III. Key Findings

The survey results offer a dual lens on integrity progress: how citizens experience public institutions and how officials implement reforms. By comparing baseline (2022) and end-line (2024) data, we can pinpoint where perceptions have improved, where they have stalled, and where they have slipped back. The headline story is one of widening divergence—technical capacity inside institutions is advancing more quickly than public confidence outside them.

3.1 Citizen perspective – trust, satisfaction, accountability

From the users' viewpoint, trust and perceived accountability remain fragile. While isolated integrity measures are starting to resonate, most citizens still struggle to see tangible change in everyday interactions. The bullets below summarize the core shifts captured by the survey.

- Trust is slipping: The share of citizens who declare high trust in the four target institutions fell from 16.7 % in 2022 to 11.6 % in 2024—a one-third decline (see Figure 1).
- Perceived corruption is rising: The proportion who believe corruption is "widespread" grew by 10 percentage points over the same period, mirroring the drop in trust.
- Satisfaction is stagnant–unless integrity tools are visible: Overall, very-satisfied users nudged up only marginally (16.7 % → 17 %). Yet among citizens who reported seeing concrete anti-corruption measures (e.g., hotline numbers, public dashboards), satisfaction shot up 26 percentage points, underscoring the power of visibility.
- Accountability feels weaker: Citizens who rated their institution as "accountable to the public" declined from 63.5 % to 49.5 %. Qualitative comments point to slow complaint handling, limited feedback on reported irregularities, and a perception that integrity reforms occur "behind closed doors."
- Equity concerns: Women continue to face greater information barriers—58 % of female respondents versus 42 % of men said they had difficulty obtaining basic service information—which may further depress trust among vulnerable groups.

Figure 1 – Share of citizens with high trust in target institutions

Share of Citizens with High Trust in Target Institutions
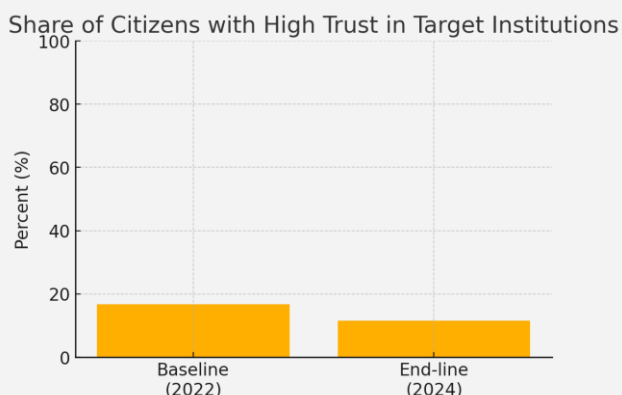
3.2 Institution perspective – awareness, capacity, persistent gaps

Inside the organizations, momentum is unmistakable: staff know more, feel better equipped, and have clearer points of contact for integrity matters than they did two years ago. Yet the systems that turn knowledge into action—secure whistle-blower channels, user-friendly digital services, and consistent data analytics—still lag behind, and resource constraints threaten to stall progress. The key institutional shifts are summarized below:

• Integrity Plan awareness has exploded: Among public officials, self-reported awareness of their institution's Integrity Plan leapt from 15.5 % to 84 % between 2022 and 2024 (see Figure 2).
• Skill levels are catching up: Officials who feel "fully capable" of applying ethics rules and conflict-of-interest checks rose by 28 percentage points. Internal training logs confirm that more than 600 staff have completed at least one integrity module since mid-2022.
• Integrity Coordinators now cover almost the entire field: Five of six institutions have formally appointed coordinators and published their contact details; the sixth has initiated recruitment.
• Whistle-blower systems remain the weak link: Fewer than half of officials (48 %) say they know how and where to file a protected disclosure, and only one-third believe those channels are completely safe from retaliation.
• Digital tools are still under-used: While two institutions have launched e-services that cut face-to-face interactions—thereby lowering corruption risk—citizen uptake remains modest (≤ 20 % of transactions), indicating a need for stronger outreach and user-centred design.

• Resource disparities persist: Smaller agencies report limited budget and IT staff to maintain dashboards or run analytics, suggesting that centralised technical support may be needed to sustain data-driven integrity monitoring.

Figure 2 – Public-official awareness of integrity plans

Public Officials Aware of Integrity Plans in Their Institution
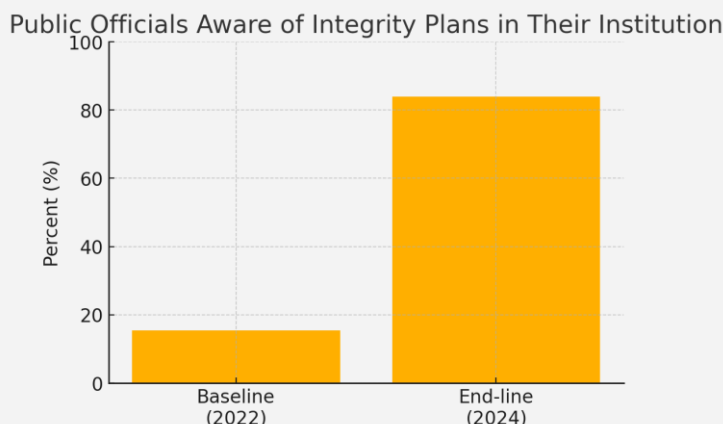
Overall, the findings tell a mixed story: institutions are gearing up, but citizens are not yet convinced. If reforms are not made more visible—through open data, direct user feedback, and strong whistle-blower protection—these gains will stay hidden, fueling public skepticism and weakening support for integrity efforts.

IV. Regional Benchmark

Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) gives Albania a score of 37 / 100, ranking it 98th of 180 countries.[4] By comparison, the Western-Balkan-6 average stands at 39 points, while the EU-27 average is 64. Albania therefore sits two points below its immediate regional peers and 27 points behind the EU norm—a gap that underscores both the urgency of sustained anti-corruption effort and the distance still to travel toward European governance standards.

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[4] Source: Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2023* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2024). Available at: https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023

Figure 3 - Corruption Perceptions Index 2023 – Albania vs. Regional & EU Averages
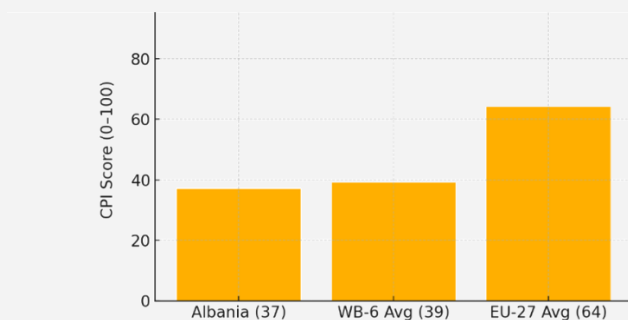
Source: Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2023 (Berlin: Transparency International, 2024).

V. Gap Analysis

5.1 Institutional Progress and Internal Reform

Despite challenges in public perception, the findings of the IDM project demonstrate substantial progress within institutions themselves, particularly in terms of internal capacities, regulatory frameworks, and ethical infrastructure. Public officials reported significantly higher levels of awareness regarding integrity plans, codes of ethics, and anti-corruption mechanisms. These trends reflect a growing institutional commitment to integrity as a management principle rather than merely a compliance issue.

One of the most notable advancements revealed in the endline assessment is the significant improvement in institutional capacity to manage integrity. Among public officials, the awareness of integrity plans increased dramatically—from only 15.5% of respondents at the baseline to 84% by the endline. Similarly, the share of officials who reported having the knowledge and skills to design and implement such plans rose from 38.2% to 67%.

Furthermore, confidence among public servants in implementing these integrity frameworks grew notably. At the baseline, only 64.6% expressed confidence in executing integrity plans. By the endline, that number had risen to 83%, reflecting greater institutional support and internal capability. This progress is further underscored by the increased awareness of specific policies and mechanisms. For example, knowledge of conflict-of-interest policies improved from 60.8% to 88.9%, and the presence of a Code of Ethics was confirmed by 95% of officials, up from 73.5%.

Such developments indicate that the targeted institutions have successfully institutionalized many integrity mechanisms and built a stronger ethical foundation internally. However, the perception and trust of the public tell a different story. The data also suggest that improved internal frameworks have not yet translated into improved perceptions externally. This disconnect underscores the need for institutions not only to build internal systems but also to engage in sustained communication and demonstrate results through more visible, citizen-facing initiatives.

5.2 Public Satisfaction and Trust: A Widening Gap

The data from the endline survey paint a concerning picture of citizen trust and satisfaction with public institutions. Although there was a marginal increase in the proportion of users reporting satisfaction with service delivery, the overall levels remain critically low. Trust in institutions, in particular, showed a decline, and is closely tied to perceptions of corruption.

While internal indicators improved, citizen-facing indicators either stagnated or declined, underscoring a disconnect between institutional performance and public perception. According to the survey, only 17% of service users reported being "very satisfied" with their experience at the targeted institutions—barely higher than the 16.65% recorded at the baseline.

A more concerning trend is the sharp decline in public trust. At the baseline, 16.7% of respondents indicated a high level of trust in institutions. By the endline, this number had fallen to just 11.6%. This decrease is even more striking when viewed alongside citizen perceptions of corruption, which increased significantly over the same period. In 2022, 32.98% of respondents believed corruption was present in public institutions. By 2025, this figure had risen to 43.48%.

Figure 4 - Trust in Institutions, Baseline vs. Endline
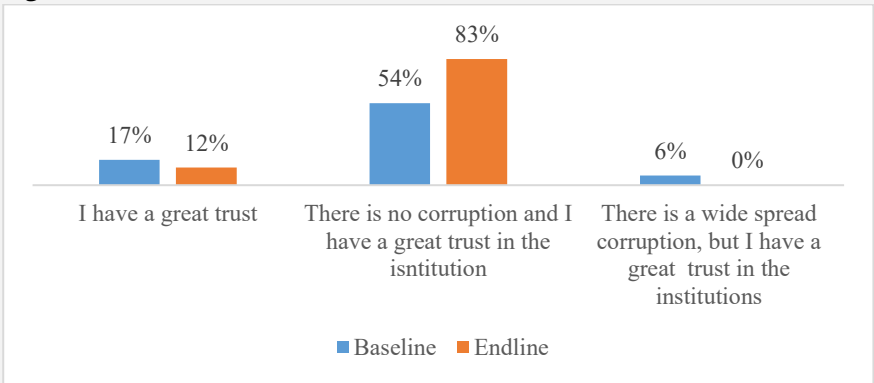
This data demonstrates a strong inverse relationship between the perception of corruption and trust in institutions. Citizens who believe there is no or minimal corruption are far more likely to trust institutions (83%), while trust drops sharply

when corruption is perceived as widespread. In effect, corruption remains a central obstacle to public confidence in governance.

The declining trust in public institutions poses significant risks, including reduced citizen cooperation with institutional initiatives, reluctance to report corruption, and overall disengagement from public life. Addressing these trends requires institutions not only to improve their internal integrity mechanisms but also to rebuild the social contract through transparency, responsiveness, and proactive engagement.

5.3 Shortcomings in Accountability and Transparency

The findings highlight that those mechanisms meant to ensure accountability and transparency, such as whistleblower protections, complaint systems, and financial oversight bodies, are either inconsistently applied or poorly understood by both staff and citizens. Despite the presence of policies, awareness remains limited, and the visibility of these mechanisms within the institutions is uneven.

In addition to the decline in trust, the survey found a reduction in perceived institutional accountability. In 2022, 63.5% of respondents described institutions as accountable. This dropped to 49.5% by 2025. Moreover, many citizens remain unaware of mechanisms for reporting misconduct or unethical behavior. Only about half of respondents confirmed the presence of anti-corruption structures or complaint systems.

These perceptions are mirrored among public officials. Despite increased awareness of integrity plans, only 47.5% confirmed that their institution had whistleblower protection mechanisms, while a significant proportion remained unsure. This lack of clarity undermines the effectiveness of integrity policies and hinders public institutions' ability to assure citizens that unethical behavior is being addressed.

Unless institutions invest in closing these accountability gaps—through both operational mechanisms and public communication—efforts to build public integrity will remain incomplete, and public skepticism will continue to undermine reform outcomes. This is particularly critical in ensuring that anti-corruption frameworks do not exist only on paper but are perceived as effective and trustworthy by the public.

VI. Recommendations

To reverse the decline in trust and strengthen public integrity, several key measures are needed:

First, all institutions should ensure the appointment and visibility of Integrity Coordinators. These individuals should not only support the implementation of ethics frameworks but also engage directly with staff and the public to raise awareness on their role.

Second, institutions must promote public engagement and transparency. Publishing regular monitoring reports, opening consultation channels, and conducting public outreach on anti-corruption mechanisms are essential to demonstrate accountability and rebuild citizen trust.

Third, whistleblower protection frameworks must be fully institutionalized and widely communicated. Public servants and citizens alike should feel confident in their ability to report unethical behavior without fear of retaliation.

Fourth, investment in digital platforms can streamline public service delivery, reduce opportunities for corruption, and improve citizen satisfaction. These platforms should be designed with clear feedback systems and accessible information about services and complaint processes.

Lastly, ongoing capacity-building and ethics training is vital for public officials, particularly those at the mid- and junior levels, where staff may be less familiar with integrity mechanisms. Regular updates and refresher sessions on codes of conduct, conflict-of-interest regulations, and data protection policies will further entrench a culture of integrity.

The findings of the 2025 endline report reveal both encouraging institutional improvements and pressing challenges in public perception. While public officials are more aware, more capable, and more confident in implementing integrity frameworks, citizens remain sceptical, perceiving corruption as widespread and accountability as insufficient.

To bridge this gap, reforms must not only continue but also be made more visible, participatory, and citizen-focused. Strengthening public integrity in Albania demands a concerted effort that aligns institutional performance with public expectations, restores trust, and ultimately enhances democratic governance.

VII. Conclusion

Restoring public trust is more than an administrative tick-box in Albania's reform agenda; it is the gateway to EU accession and the cornerstone of a resilient, citizen-centered state. The actions championed in this brief—public Integrity Dashboards, secure whistle-blower channels, systematic citizen engagement, and continuous ethics training—translate behind-the-scenes reforms into results that every Albanian can see and feel. By institutionalizing transparency and accountability, Albania can close the 27-point CPI gap with the EU-27, satisfy Chapter 23 and 24 benchmarks, and embed a culture of integrity that outlasts electoral cycles. Simply put, making integrity visible today paves the surest path to stronger governance, inclusive growth, and enduring public confidence tomorrow.