



Institute
for Democracy
and Mediation

A GENERATION AT RISK

Rising Youth Violence in Albania

Romario Shehu

Recent data in Albania indicate a growing trend of youth involvement in violence and criminal behavior, reflecting similar patterns observed across Europe and beyond. In response, state institutions have introduced measures such as the deployment of school safety officers, the “School Safety” package, and plans to install surveillance cameras in schools. However, these efforts remain fragmented and short-term. Addressing youth security in a meaningful way requires primarily a systemic, data-driven approach that examines the forms, root causes and contributing factors of youth-on-youth violence and underreported criminal activity, particularly within and around schools. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics, combined with stronger institutional coordination, investment in preventive education, and the promotion of youth resilience, is essential to ensuring a safer, more inclusive environment for Albania’s young people.

1. BACKGROUND

Youth security in Albania is facing an escalating crisis, marked by rising levels of violence and criminal behavior involving minors, particularly within and around school environments. This troubling trend has been underscored by two fatal incidents in recent years, each illustrating the severity of the threat and the institutional shortcomings that allow such violence to persist.

In May 2023, a 15-year-old student was fatally stabbed in the city of Gramsh following a conflict reportedly triggered by social media interactions. His cousin was also critically injured. All suspects involved were minors aged 14 to 15, highlighting the disturbing normalization of violence among adolescents. Just a year later, in November 2024, another similar event unfolded in Tirana when a 14-year-old student fatally stabbed a peer outside their school after a verbal disagreement escalated. Despite the presence of a school security officer and clear warning signs, no preventive measures were taken. The attacker later posted images glamorizing the act on social media, reflecting a growing digital culture that glorifies violence and emboldens harmful behaviors.

These incidents are not isolated. Rather, they are symptomatic of deeper systemic gaps: weak conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, insufficient supervision in school environments, a limited psychological support services, and the unchecked influence of digital platforms in shaping youth behavior. Together, these factors contribute to a dangerous environment in which violence is both escalating and going unaddressed.

2. STATE OF PLAY

Data from national institutions corroborate the gravity of this trend. In 2024, Albanian authorities registered 835 criminal proceedings involving minors—more than double the number reported in 2019 (397 cases).¹ Crimes committed by minors most frequently involve theft and irregular vehicle use, but increasingly include more serious offenses such as drug-related crimes, illegal possession of firearms, and crimes against life. Notably, minors accounted for 7.38% of all defendants charged with intentional crimes against life in 2024, up from just 1% in 2019. A total of 27 minors were sentenced to prison in 2024 and 39 in 2019,² reflecting the increasing entanglement of young people with the criminal justice system.

Similar trends are noticed throughout Europe. Beyond isolated acts of violence, youth are also being drawn into the structures of serious and organized crime. A 2025 EUROPOL report reveals that minors in Europe are being recruited through social media and encrypted messaging platforms, which exploit anonymity and target adolescents with carefully tailored messaging.³ These networks often glamorize violence and material wealth, preying on young people's vulnerabilities and limited economic opportunities. Albanian research confirms that youth aged 14 to 23 are particularly susceptible to recruitment, driven by a mix of personal, familial, and socio-economic factors.⁴

In addition to the growing concerns around organized crime, Europe (and beyond) is witnessing a troubling rise in the number of minors becoming involved in violent extremist activities.⁵ While youth radicalization is not a new phenomenon, the current trend reveals a disturbing shift that those being radicalized are increasingly younger, with some individuals charged with terrorism-related offences as young as 15 or even younger.⁶ Furthermore, the phenomenon is seemingly reaching unprecedented levels (reaching up to 20-30 percent of the counter-terrorism investigations in some

¹ Annual Reports of the General Prosecutor "On the situation of criminality." Available at https://www.pp.gov.al/Dokumente/RAPORTE_T_PROKURORIT_T_P_RGJITHSH_M/

² Data received from the General Prosecutor's Office through a Freedom of Information request. May 2nd, 2025.

³ EUROPOL, "The changing DNA of serious and organized crime," 2025. Available at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/EU-SOCTA-2025.pdf>

⁴ Institute for Democracy and Mediation (2018). Scoping recommendations for a pilot to deter and divert people from involvement in Serious and Organized Crime (SOC) in Albania.

⁵ Dr. Thomas Renard (2025), "Adolescent Radicalization: It's Not Just on Netflix," European Commission, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/home/items/880571/en>

⁶ Ibid.

A Generation at Risk: Rising Youth Violence in Albania

countries).⁷ The phenomenon points to a new and deeply concerning chapter in the landscape of youth violence and extremism. The Albanian Strategy against Terrorism and Violent Extremism also acknowledges the growing concern of youth radicalization. It highlights that unemployed or socially isolated young people are particularly vulnerable to extremist propaganda, that advocate the use of violence to protest against the existing order, to bring about desired changes, or for personal gain.⁸ Further research in Albania reveals that a significant portion of young people in the country feel disconnected from society and prone to dangerous behavior, a condition that can heighten the appeal of violent extremist groups offering a sense of purpose.⁹

In response to the growing concerns over school safety, the Albanian government has taken some necessary steps to mitigate these threats. In 2018, Albania introduced the project of “School Safety Officers”—trained professionals, with backgrounds in psychology, pedagogy, or social work.¹⁰ Unlike traditional police, these officers serve as intermediaries between students, teachers, parents, and law enforcement. Their role focuses on addressing violence, drug-related issues, and disciplinary challenges while promoting a safe and supportive environment both inside and outside the classroom. They facilitate communication among students, staff, families, and, when necessary, coordinate directly with the police.¹¹ The number of these officers has been gradually increased, reaching 270 officers, as well as extending their presence to vocational education schools as well.¹² Nonetheless, despite these efforts, concerns about school safety persist and require ongoing attention.

The government has also introduced the “School Safety” package in 2023, which aims to enhance the security of children not only within school premises but also in the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The Cross-Sectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight Against Terrorism 2023-2025, pp 27, available at <https://cve.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Strategjia-CT-CVE-2023-2025-vkm-81-14-02-2023.pdf>

⁹ Institute for Democracy and Mediation, “The 2024 Violent Extremism in Albania: Drivers, forms and threats,” pp. 108, available at <https://idmalbania.org/publication-cpt/the-2024-assessment-of-violent-extremism-in-albania/>

¹⁰ Prime Minister’s Office (2018), “School Safety Officers” – the newest project to enhance security in schools,” <https://www.kryeministria.al/newsroom/security-officers-schools-newest-programme-enhance-school-safety/>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ministry of Education (2025), “77 new security officers certified; Manastirliu: We are increasing the number of school safety officers to 400, for the first time also in vocational education,” <https://arsimi.gov.al/en/newsroom/certifkohen-77-oficere-te-rinj-sigurie-manastirliu-rrisim-ne-400-numrin-e-oficereve-te-sigurise-ne-shkolla-per-here-te-pare-edhe-ne-arsimin-profesional/>

A Generation at Risk: Rising Youth Violence in Albania

surrounding areas.¹³ Its primary goals are to prevent youth involvement in crime and drug use, and to combat drug distribution networks near schools.¹⁴ Additionally, the package calls for inter-institutional cooperation, involving agencies like the National Food Authority, municipalities, and health and construction inspectors, to ensure food safety, hygienic conditions, and structural compliance within the designated school safety perimeters.¹⁵ While the "School Safety" package takes important steps toward enhancing security, there remains a need for a more comprehensive and proactive approach—one that builds on these efforts by incorporating deeper analysis of youth criminalization to inform and guide future prevention-oriented strategies.

The government has also announced plans to install surveillance cameras across educational institutions.¹⁶ The system, modelled after one used in the United Arab Emirates, is designed to enable real-time monitoring of school premises. Authorities claim that the approach has led to reductions in bullying and violence. However, there is limited empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of surveillance technology in preventing school violence. According to a 2023 report by the American Civil Liberties Union, surveillance cameras were in operation during 8 of the 10 deadliest school shootings in the United States in recent decades—yet failed to prevent them.¹⁷ More importantly, surveillance technologies have been shown to cause significant harm to students by infringing on privacy, undermining trust between students and school staff, fostering fear, and criminalizing youth behavior.¹⁸

¹³ Albanian Telegraphic Agency (2023), "The 'School Safety' Package, Balla: The Objective is Preventing Youth Crime," <https://ata.gov.al/2023/12/18/paketa-siguria-ne-shkolla-balla-objektiv-parandalimi-i-kriminalitetit-tek-te-rinjte/>

¹⁴ Ministry of Internal Affairs (2024), "National Conference School, a Community Center / Minister Hoxha: We Are Working Together to Build Safe Schools and Institutions," <https://arkiva.mb.gov.al/konferenca-kombetare-shkolla-qender-komunitare-ministri-hoxha-punojme-se-bashku-per-te-ndertuar-shkolla-e-institucione-te-sigurta/>

¹⁵ Albanian Telegraphic Agency (2023), "The 'School Safety' Package, Balla: The Objective is Preventing Youth Crime," <https://ata.gov.al/2023/12/18/paketa-siguria-ne-shkolla-balla-objektiv-parandalimi-i-kriminalitetit-tek-te-rinjte/>

¹⁶ Albanian Telegraphic Agency (2024), "Agreement with UAE over school surveillance," available at <https://ata.gov.al/2024/11/26/rama-marreveshje-me-emiratet-arabe-per-monitorimin-me-kamera-te-shkollave/>

¹⁷ American Civil Liberties Union (2023), "Digital Dystopia The Danger in Buying What the EdTech Surveillance Industry is Selling," available at https://assets.aclu.org/live/uploads/publications/digital_dystopia_report_aclu.pdf

¹⁸ Ibid.

3. PROSPECTS

Against this backdrop, it is evident that youth security in Albania requires more than short-term or isolated interventions. A data-driven and systemic approach is urgently needed—one that investigates the forms, root causes and enabling factors of youth-on-youth violence and underreported criminal behavior among minors, particularly in school premises. This means collecting reliable data, engaging key stakeholders, and developing evidence-based policy recommendations to enhance crime reporting mechanisms, foster trust in institutional actors, and build a safer, more inclusive environment for young people. Only through a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics behind youth violence—and by strengthening institutional coordination, investing in preventative education, and promoting youth resilience—can Albania begin to address this growing threat to their social fabric and future stability.