



2019 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

Albania

July 2020

Cover Photo: Members of the Beresan Youth Bank present their achievements at the 2018 Annual Civil Society Development Forum, an event organized by Ednannia with support from USAID. The Forum is the largest national platform for learning, communication, and experience sharing among nonprofit organizations in Ukraine, typically bringing together approximately 2,500 participants from the non-profit and private sectors, donor community, media, governmental bodies, and local authorities.

Photo Credit: Ednannia, Ukraine

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For Albania

July 2020

Developed by:

United States Agency for International Development

Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance

Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance

Acknowledgment: This publication was made possible through support provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-LA-17-00003.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A publication of this type would not be possible without the contributions of many individuals and organizations. We are especially grateful to our implementing partners, who played the critical role of facilitating the expert panel meetings and writing the country reports. We would also like to thank the many CSO representatives and experts, USAID partners, and international donors who participated in the expert panels in each country. Their knowledge, perceptions, ideas, observations, and contributions are the foundation upon which this Index is based.

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ALBANIA

Capital: Tirana
Population: 3,074,579
GDP per capita (PPP): \$12,500
Human Development Index: High (0.791)
Freedom in the World: Partly Free (67/100)

OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 3.7



Albania experienced several important political and socio-economic developments in 2019. After months of violent anti-government protests and extreme political polarization, the opposition boycotted local elections in June, resulting in the majority party, the Socialist Party, running unopposed in many areas of the country. Voter turnout was low (22.96 percent), since Albanian voters were faced with the lack of “meaningful choice between political options,” according to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The deep divisions between the main political parties continued throughout 2019.

Despite considerable efforts over the last few years to meet membership criteria for the European Union (EU), the European Council failed for the second time to open accession talks with Albania in 2019. The postponement caused widespread public disappointment.

Freedom of expression deteriorated in 2019. Prime Minister Edi Rama and other politicians repeatedly used hostile or denigrating rhetoric about the media, and two television talk shows were shut down because of government pressure. Journalists were threatened and injured during anti-government demonstrations. In December, the parliament approved controversial amendments to the Laws on Audio-Visual Media and Electronic Communications, together known as the Anti-Defamation Package. The laws sought to allow the government’s Audio-Visual Media Authority to regulate content published by online media, thereby threatening to curtail freedom of speech, transparency, inclusive consultation, and respect for the constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights. The European Federation of Journalists, Reporters Without Borders, Council of Europe, EU, OSCE, and other international groups and journalists, as well as Albanian CSOs, repeatedly urged the president not to enact the new laws because of concerns that the package would deteriorate press freedoms in Albania. In the middle of January 2020, the president vetoed the laws, stating that they “could place Albania on the brink of authoritarianism and endanger its [EU] integration and the very existence of democracy in the country.” Nevertheless, on February 3, 2020, the government published one of the two amended laws in the Official Gazette and it went into force on February 18.

An earthquake hit Albania on November 26, 2019, killing about fifty people, injuring 1,000, and destroying the homes of up to 17,000 people. The World Bank estimated the total economic damage at \$820 million. CSOs and other activists provided immediate assistance to affected communities. Individuals and organizations, both domestic and international, as well as the Albanian diaspora, contributed to the recovery of affected communities by donating through the state portal e-Albania and other crowdfunding platforms.

The overall sustainability of the Albanian civil society sector did not change in 2019, although improvements were noted in several dimensions. CSOs demonstrated stronger organizational capacity as they benefited from donor support programs. The launch of the National Resource Center for Civil Society in Albania (NRCS) boosted the sectoral infrastructure. Albanian CSOs took part in the immediate response to communities affected by the earthquake, improving their service provision. CSOs continued to exhibit strong advocacy as they actively engaged

in important initiatives and demonstrated persistence in the pursuit of their missions. Financial viability continues to be the weakest dimension of sustainability.

According to the Tirana First Court of Instance, 11,739 CSOs were registered as of the end of 2019. This number included 313 newly registered organizations (193 associations, 79 centers, and 41 foundations). The number of organizations registered with the tax authorities, which provides a better estimate of the number of active CSOs, was 4,767 CSOs at the end of 2019, including 238 organizations newly registered in 2019. During the year, six CSOs submitted requests to the tax authorities to deregister, and 192 CSOs changed their status from active to passive.

CSOs are concentrated in Tirana and the main regional centers and are relatively scarce in small and medium-sized municipalities and rural and remote areas. According to a 2019 report by Partners Albania for Change and Development (PA) entitled “Capacity and Needs Assessment for CSOs in Albania,” 61 percent of organizations operate at the national level and 42 percent work at the local level.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 3.7



The legal environment for CSOs in Albania did not change in 2019. While legislation clearly addresses CSOs’ registration and operations, the processes for CSOs to register, amend their statutes, and de-register are centralized, bureaucratic, long, and costly, especially for CSOs outside of Tirana. The law provides clear limits on government oversight of CSOs, and CSOs have the right to appeal administrative decisions. No cases of abuse or state harassment were reported in 2019.

The government approved its revised Road Map for the Government Policy towards a More Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development (2019-23) in July 2019. With support from the Delegation of the EU in Albania, the Road Map was prepared through an open and participatory process involving CSOs and other key

stakeholders. The plan includes forty-two actions for the government to undertake, such as improving the Law on Volunteering and introducing state funding schemes for volunteer programs run by CSOs. Given the poor implementation of the 2015 Road Map, which finished with nearly 80 percent of planned actions reported as unimplemented, CSOs have low expectations for the realization of the revised Road Map.

Law No. 25/2018 on Accounting and Financial Statements entered into force on January 1, 2019. The law requires additional reporting by non-for-profit entities. CSOs were not involved in the drafting of the law and feel that it poses a high risk for state intervention in their operations. In May, CSOs submitted an open letter to the relevant institutions requesting a meeting to discuss their concerns but received no reply.

Law No. 45/2016 on Volunteerism and Law No. 65/2016 on Social Enterprises were finally operationalized in 2019. Bylaws for the Law on Volunteerism were adopted in 2019 to regulate the relationship between volunteers and CSOs, including the requirements for contracts and a code of ethics for volunteer work. However, the law needs further development, for instance to enable CSOs to rely on volunteers to operate when they lack funding. The Law on Social Enterprise remains problematic in that CSOs awarded the status of social enterprise have limited ability to generate income from their economic activity because of constraints imposed by the 2001 Law No. 8788 on Nonprofit Organizations, which still needs amendment.

The government’s fiscal treatment of CSOs was largely unchanged in 2019. CSOs are treated similarly to other taxable bodies, which constrains the sector’s development and sustainability. During the year, CSOs continued to express concern about their undifferentiated fiscal treatment and the challenging reimbursement process for value-added tax (VAT). In a positive step, a new VAT reimbursement procedure entered into force in December 2019, which is expected to ease CSOs’ VAT reimbursement process. Individuals and corporations continue to lack tax

incentives to donate to CSOs. CSOs are subject to operational audit inspections and anti-money laundering and financing of terrorism inspections by tax authorities.

A CSO may engage in economic activities to generate income, provided revenues do not account for more than 20 percent of its overall annual budget. In December 2019, a new draft law on public procurement was offered for public consultation. Under this draft law, social and other services are subject to a simplified procurement process, which is expected to have a positive impact on service-providing CSOs.

Few legal resources are available to CSOs, especially those based outside of Tirana. Some CSOs offer legal advice and expertise, and CSOs have improved access to pro bono legal assistance through the network of law clinics supported by the Open Society Foundation for Albania (OSFA). In 2019, five legal clinics and law centers offered free legal aid in Tirana, Durrës, Shkoder, and Vlora. In 2019, the Center for Rights at Work launched the Labor Academy, which provides legal aid to Albanian labor unions.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 3.6

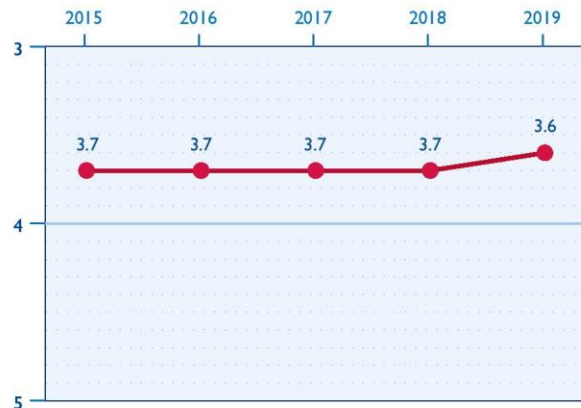
CSOs' organizational capacity improved slightly in 2019 as a result of donor programs focused on capacity building over the past few years. For example, under the EUR 5.4 million IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Program 2016-2017, the EU supported CSO capacity building including constituency building. With support from this program, in 2019, the Albanian Network for Rural Development (ANRD) organized twenty-six gatherings with its constituents at the local, regional, and national levels. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has provided institutional support to seventy-four CSOs, mainly environmental organizations. The USAID-funded project Accelerated Civic Development and Cooperation (2017-2020), implemented by the Albanian National Training and Technical Assistance Resource Center (ANTTARC), supports the organizational capacities of CSOs working in the democracy and governance sector. Since 2017, ANTTARC has provided sixty organizations with tailor-made support focused on organizational capacity, including training and technical assistance addressing issues such as organizational development, financial management, strategic planning, program design and management, and networking and fundraising.

During 2019, other donors and international organizations, including the National Democratic Institute, Roma Initiative Office in Berlin, and We Effect, supported strategic planning by CSOs. As a result, an increasing number of CSOs now have strategic plans based on their visions and constituencies' needs rather than donor priorities. According to the PA "Capacity and Needs Assessment for CSOs in Albania," 58 percent of interviewed CSOs have strategic plans. In 93 percent of cases, strategic plans were based on the organization's mission and statute, while in 73 percent of cases, strategic plans reflected constituencies' needs.

CSOs at the local level have stronger connections to their communities and constituencies than national organizations, but their resources and capacities are limited. Many CSOs are project-based, with the bulk of their funding coming from the EU, which requires detailed planning and administrative documentation. Consequently, CSOs invest more of their time in administrative tasks than building strong constituencies.

Most CSOs have formal management structures and processes in place, although they do not always function effectively. CSOs' internal management is varied. CSOs such as World Vision, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) Albania, OSFA, Helsinki Committee, and Civil Rights Defenders have active boards that engage in the governance of their organizations. In other organizations, boards of directors exist to comply with legal requirements but do not exercise oversight to ensure the accountability of executives. There are no known cases in which a board of directors has dismissed an executive director. According to the PA study, 65 percent of CSOs have internal organizational policies and procedures.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN ALBANIA



Albanian CSOs find it challenging to maintain permanent and full-time staff, mainly because they are constrained by project-based funding. The 2019 PA report finds that 20 percent of CSOs had no full-time employees in 2018, and that 3 percent of CSOs had neither full-time nor part-time employees and relied exclusively on volunteers. Eighty percent of organizations had some full-time staff, while 76 percent of organizations had part-time staff and 85 percent work with volunteers. CSOs in rural and remote areas face difficulties in attracting qualified human resources due to migration and depopulation in these areas. CSOs increasingly contract with experts on a short-term basis for the duration of funded projects. Volunteer engagement in Albania remains low. According to the Charities Aid Foundation’s 2019 World Giving Index, an average of just 9 percent of Albanian respondents reported volunteering over the past ten years.

CSOs increasingly use modern technologies, including social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn. CSOs have been able to increase their access to office equipment in recent years with support from donor programs.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 4.4



CSOs’ financial viability did not change in 2019. Funding from international donors continued to be available, while government support remained low. Overall, there continued to be a worrying lack of funding, especially for smaller CSOs, and a lack of diversity in funding modalities.

The Agency for Support of Civil Society (ASCS) remained the primary source of government funding for CSOs in 2019. ASCS awarded fifty-two grants during the year, seven more than in 2018, with grants ranging in size from ALL 700,000 (about \$6,300) to ALL 3,400,000 (about \$30,500). Priority areas for funding included youth activism, civil society in the European integration process, social services, and environment, tourism, and integrated development. The Ministry of Culture financed 151

projects in 2019—twenty-three more than in 2018—with grants ranging from \$4,500 for projects implemented by individuals to \$18,000 for CSO projects. The Good Causes Board of the National Lottery posted eight winning project proposals on its website but did not indicate the amount of financial support awarded.

An incomplete legal framework prevents local governments from developing mechanisms to make local funds available to CSOs. The Regional Program for Local Democracy (ReLOaD), a regional initiative financed by the EU and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), seeks to develop a transparent model of project-based funding for CSOs by local governments.

Larger CSOs continued to rely primarily on grants from international donors in 2019, with the bulk of funding coming from the EU. Foreign grants often include sub-granting components that make funds available to smaller organizations. For example, Terre des Hommes Albanian (Tdh), in partnership with ANTTARC, provided EUR 98,000 (approximately \$120,000) in sub-grants to local CSOs through the EU-funded project Strengthening Civil Society to Prevent and Protect Children from Abuse and Violence. Through the USAID-funded project Accelerated Civic Development and Cooperation, ANTTARC provided \$75,000 in sub-grants to youth CSOs for projects focused on local democracy, good governance, and anti-corruption. OSFA, Co-PLAN, and PA awarded sub-grants to local CSOs with funding from the EU and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Sida continues to be one of the main CSO donors; in 2019, it provided twenty-eight grants to CSOs that are members of four different networks, as well as fifteen operational grants. The GIZ-funded program ProSEED provided advisory and financial support to CSOs that implement projects targeting marginalized youth, allocating up to EUR 50,000 per project.

In general, Albanian CSOs lack the organizational capacities and resources needed to raise donations through fundraising activities. According to the World Giving Index, an average of 21 percent of people in Albania have donated to a CSO over the past ten years. However, PA’s monitoring of philanthropic activity over the last five

years shows a steady increase in the total value of private donations, with individual donors consistently giving more than businesses.

Philanthropy in the country increased significantly in the aftermath of the earthquake in November, with more than 90,000 donors (both individuals and institutional donors) giving more than \$6.5 million to help meet emergency needs stemming from the earthquake. While public institutions were the main recipients of international support for earthquake relief, most individual donors channeled their donations through CSOs. For example, the Firdeus Foundation, Fundjave Ndryshe, and Albanian Roots each raised about \$2 million in less than one week. The Albanian diaspora provided immense support, initiating nearly 90 percent of all donation campaigns. A few well-established organizations also donated funds to earthquake-affected communities. For example, World Vision US allocated \$140,000 through World Vision Albania, and World Vision Germany and World Vision UK launched domestic donation campaigns for Albania. In addition, many businesses provided support to those affected by the earthquake. The banking and telecommunication sectors offered free services, while private hospitals, Tirana Business Park, AVON Albania, Media Print, and Tirana International Airport made contributions to address the most pressing needs of affected families. Several fundraising campaigns responding to the earthquake made use of social networks and crowdfunding platforms. For example, e-Albania was the government's main platform for fundraising, while CSOs initiated fundraising campaigns through GoFundMe and Facebook.

Some CSOs engage in service provision as an alternative form of revenue generation. Their services include vocational training and agricultural expertise, which are usually offered at below-market prices. Starting in 2019, CSOs were able to apply for the status of social enterprises. CSOs have high expectations about the future of social entrepreneurship, fueled by the implementation of the Law on Social Enterprises and the government's allocation of \$2.2 million to finance social enterprises over the next three years.

CSOs are increasingly concerned about their treatment by tax authorities, local governments, and banks, which do not differentiate between nonprofit and for-profit entities. In recent years, bank procedures have imposed a heavy reporting burden on CSOs. This situation worsened in 2019 as commercial banks began to ask CSOs for more detailed information related to, for instance, statute amendments and minutes of board meetings. While most CSOs were able to collect and submit the required information, CSOs feel that these demands interfere in their operations and place them under increased control.

CSOs are subject to the National Accounting Standards for Nonprofit Organizations, which call for mandatory independent audits of CSOs, with the exception of small CSOs. The extent of CSOs' compliance with these standards is unknown. The new Law on Accounting and Financial Statements requires all CSOs with assets or income of ALL 30 million (approximately \$270,000) or greater to prepare performance reports on the efficiency and effectiveness of their activities. In addition, this law imposes additional costs on CSOs, as it obliges CSOs, regardless of their location, to submit their reports in person to the Tirana District Court.

ADVOCACY: 3.2

CSO advocacy continued to be strong in 2019. Despite persistent challenges, CSOs actively engage in decision-making and policy-making processes at the local and national levels. Some policy advocacy initiatives in 2019 demonstrated CSOs' persistence in articulating and advancing the interests and priorities of various communities and the sector itself. In general, CSOs at the national level continue to have stronger advocacy and lobbying capacities than CSOs at the local level. At the same time, CSO advocacy was hindered in 2019 by the highly polarized political situation in the country. In several cases, political actors hijacked civil society protests to further their political agendas and they manipulated the conversation to weaken public support and dissolve movements.



Law No. 146/2014 on Notification and Public Consultation seeks to ensure that citizens have a say in decision-making processes related to bylaws, draft laws, national and local strategic documents, and policies of high public interest. Consultations are obligatory during three phases: pre-consultations on decisions, open consultation meetings, and announcements or public displays of decisions and other related acts. The law allows interested stakeholders to initiate complaints when they are not consulted properly. Although the law is considered progressive, its implementation is problematic mainly due to the lack of an oversight body and sanctions. For example, notifications of public consultations are poorly advertised, and consultations are not always organized. Even when consultations are conducted, CSOs' recommendations and comments are usually not taken into consideration, and the government rarely explains why CSOs' suggestions are not included.

Law No. 119/2014 on the Right to Information regulates citizens' right to access public information. According to the law, each public authority is obliged to designate a Coordinator for the Right to Information; to publish on its website a register showing all the requests for information and the information contained in the responses; and to proactively disclose information of public interest through institutional Transparency Programs. However, a culture of secrecy still prevails among public institutions. Despite the increasing number of public authorities that have adopted Transparency Programs, institutions generally do not disclose information related to accountability mechanisms, such as audit reports, public procurements, and contracts. The commissioner for freedom of information and personal data protection oversees and reviews implementation of the law by public institutions. According to a recent study by ResPublika, the number of decisions taken by the commissioner has declined by 2 percent, while the number of complaints has increased. An increasing number of watchdog CSOs and media outlets monitor the transparency and accountability of public institutions, especially local authorities. In 2019, CSOs carried out awareness raising initiatives on the right to information.

Advocacy by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives (CLCL) contributed to the adoption in July of Law No. 54/2019 on the legislative initiative of voters. This law establishes procedures for voters to participate in decision-making processes by allowing a minimum of 20,000 voters to propose draft laws. CLCL led the drafting process in close cooperation with OSFA, other CSOs, and the Universities of Tirana, Shkodra, and Vlora.

CSOs engaged in several important policy advocacy initiatives in 2019. The Alliance for the Protection of the National Theater has organized daily protests to preserve the historical national theater building since the government decided to demolish it and further develop the area through a public-private partnership. National public figures, academics, journalists, architects, and historians joined this long-lasting protest. Due to the Alliance's efforts, in December 2019, Europa Nostra included the National Theater on a list of the fourteen most endangered heritage sites in Europe. The government had not changed its plans for the National Theater as of the time of writing this report.

CSOs also protested two proposed governmental packages known as the Anti-Defamation Package and Anti-KÇK (Anti-Seize Whatever You Can)¹ package. The Anti-Defamation Package includes amendments to thirty articles of the Law on Audiovisual Media and four articles on the Law on Electronic Communications. The changes introduce mandatory registration requirements for online media and create an administrative body with the power to fine and shut down online media and block foreign online media without a court order, as well as additional state regulations of online media. CSOs, journalists, and activists criticized the Anti-Defamation Package for violating the freedom of speech and increasing government control over the media and organized protests outside of parliament. Parliament passed the Anti-Defamation Package on December 18, 2019. Although the president vetoed the package in January 2020, the government published one of the two amended laws in the Official Gazette on February 2020.

CSOs also opposed the controversial Anti-KÇK Package, which gives the government power to restrict citizens' movement, and surveil, initiate searches, and arrest citizens without warrants. This package of legislation includes changes to the Anti-Mafia Law, the State Police Law, the Law on the Administration of Seized and Confiscated Assets, and the Criminal Code. A coalition of twenty-two CSOs, including the Helsinki Committee, BIRN Albania, Institute of Political Studies, and Civil Rights Defenders, sent an open letter to the government calling for transparency, consultation, and respect for the constitution and the European Convention of Human Rights in

¹ Prime Minister Edi Rama coined this term to describe prosecutors and judges who before being dismissed by the vetting commission abuse their power to "seize what they can."

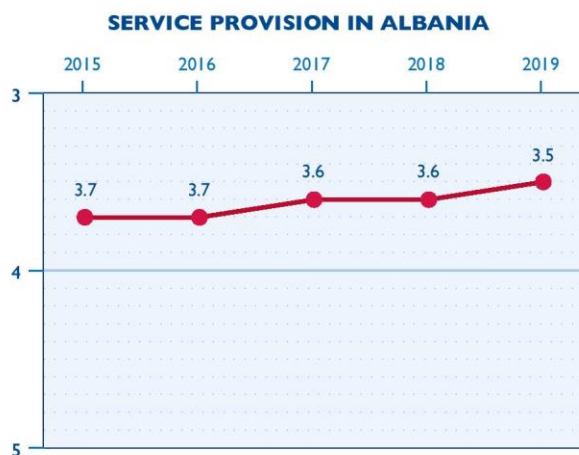
regards to the Anti-KÇK packages of laws. Nevertheless, the government adopted the Anti- KÇK package in January 2020.

Environmental CSOs under the leadership of Eco-Albania were at the core of a coalition working to prevent the construction of hydropower plants and protect the Vjosa River. In September, nearly 150 national and international CSOs sent an open letter to the prime minister urging him to suspend all ongoing hydropower developments in the Vjosa catchment. The open letter was sent following a protest by affected residents who opposed the construction of hydropower plants. At the end of 2019, the Bern Convention, a binding international legal instrument in the field of nature conservation, required the Albanian government to implement its 2018 recommendations, according to which the government should have suspended all hydropower plants on the Vjosa River.

A newly formed coalition of fourteen Roma and Egyptian CSOs, which advocates on behalf of Roma and Egyptian communities under the leadership of the Institute of Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA), succeeded in persuading the municipality of Tirana to eliminate registration fees for Roma and Egyptian children attending public pre-schools. The Albanian Helsinki Committee advocated for the construction of a prison for people with mental health problems. The Syndicate of Unified Miners of Bulqiza (SMBB), founded in 2019 by a group of miners from Bulqiza, worked to increase workers' representation in the mining industry, one of the deadliest sectors of the Albanian economy. CSOs also advocated for the rights of people with disabilities in 2019. Their advocacy contributed to the adoption of Law No.15/2019 on Employment Promotion, which is expected to create employment opportunities for disabled people.

The National Council for Civil Society (NCCS) selected new members in 2019 but was otherwise largely inactive. According to the PA study, among the 47 percent of CSOs that are aware of the structures set up to promote cooperation between CSOs and government, only 16 percent identify the NCCS, while 67 percent identify ASCS. However, CSOs describe both structures as non-functional and not supportive of the sector, and note that cooperation with both structures is lacking.

SERVICE PROVISION: 3.5



CSO service provision improved slightly in 2019, as CSOs mobilized quickly to meet the needs of populations affected by the earthquake in November. For example, within hours of the earthquake, World Vision Albania launched programs to provide food and non-food items and psychosocial assistance. The relatively new Alliance for the Protection of the National Theater, with the support of approximately 200 volunteers, collected and distributed over forty tons of food and non-food items donated by over 9,000 people. Moreover, it announced that it would use money it collected to build container homes for those who lost their homes in the earthquake. Caritas Albania immediately initiated relief activities with funding from other projects. Also, the Ministry of Interior officially requested Caritas Albania to distribute food and non-food items to displaced people in the

accommodation camps established by the government.

There were some disagreements regarding the allocation and management of funds at the first meeting of the National Reconstruction Committee, with the government insisting on having the sole responsibility of monitoring the funds, while CSOs insisted that they too should be part of the monitoring process. At the end, however, consensus was reached after the prime minister proposed that all funds from the state and private institutions become a single national fund, with each party able to monitor its own funds. CSOs agreed to this plan in order to increase coordination and harmonization of reconstruction activities.

CSOs also continue to provide services in a range of other areas. CSOs' support is of immense importance in areas in which public services are inadequate or lacking. CSOs provide many social services to vulnerable groups,

including Roma and Egyptian communities, children, women, the disabled, and elderly people. For example, women’s organizations that are members of the Albanian Women Empowering Network (AWEN) increasingly offer services to support women survivors of domestic violence. Protecting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (MEDPAK) offers services for persons with disabilities. Through its family care program, Emanuel Mission Foundation provides nearly 250 families with clothing, food, and medication. The Foundation also provides services for the elderly, especially those abandoned or at high risk of abandonment. Given that many of the beneficiaries of CSO services are members of the most vulnerable groups in Albanian society, they are generally unable to pay for services. Therefore, CSO service provision remains highly dependent on donors, with CSOs often struggling to obtain adequate funding.

CSOs, especially community-based ones, continuously strive to offer services tailored to the needs of their constituencies. They increasingly develop their in-house capacities related to needs assessments, communication, and advocacy by contracting short-term experts to provide interactive training courses. CSOs that have a strong presence in local communities, either through their local offices or local coordinators, have a good understanding of the needs of their constituencies.

CSOs provide a range of paid services including training courses, consulting, coffee bar and catering services, and social services. A growing number of CSOs lease their premises out as a source of income. However, only a small percentage of CSOs provide paid services. Most CSOs have still not embraced entrepreneurship as an alternative source of income, either because they lack interest in the development of paid services or lack the capacity to plan and manage such services.

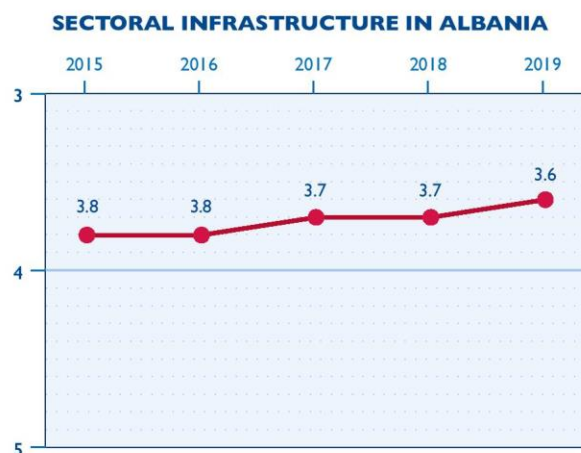
While central and local governments increasingly value civil society’s role in providing services, little progress was made in 2019 to ensure their sustained financial support. For example, fourteen municipalities receive social care funds from the central government to deliver services at the local level. Even though the municipalities prepared their applications jointly with local CSOs based on the service models CSOs have established over the years, the funds are administered solely by the municipalities. CSO representatives further report that the overall application process lacked clarity and there were considerable delays in the allocation of funds. In addition, CSOs continued to compete against private entities for government tenders. However, the new public procurement law is expected to increase the engagement of CSOs in service provision.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 3.6

The infrastructure supporting the CSO sector improved slightly in 2019 as new sub-grants and technical assistance programs offered opportunities for Albanian CSOs, especially smaller organizations, to develop their resources and capacities.

Several initiatives were undertaken in 2019 to assess and meet the needs of local CSOs. With funding from the EU, and in partnership with the Albanian Center for Population and Development (ACPD) and the European Movement in Albania (EMA), PA launched the National Resource Center for Civil Society (NRCS) to help develop the CSO sector in Albania. The NRCS has two regional centers, ensuring wide territorial coverage. Since its establishment, the NRCS has provided regular training and other support, such as information on funding opportunities, initiatives, and studies. The NRCS also organized the NPO Academy 2019, an annual initiative focused on enhancing the skills of CSO executives. NRCS provides its services for free.

In 2019, PA conducted research to map CSO networks, and the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) concluded a study on the participation of CSOs in governmental decision-making processes and their interactions with state and independent institutions. Both studies raise awareness on various issues related to the sector’s development and will serve as useful advocacy tools for CSOs going forward.

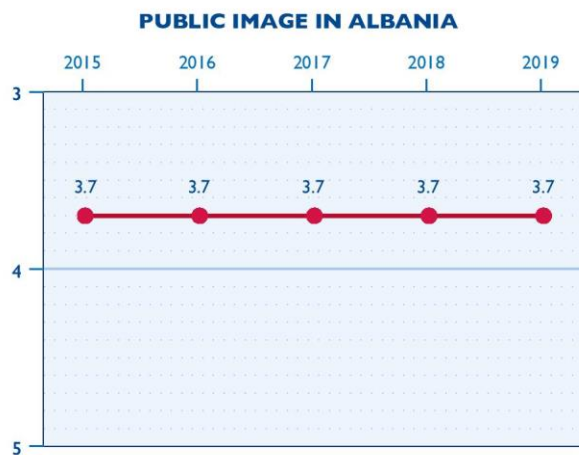


As described above, CSOs managed many foreign-funded sub-granting projects in 2019. Sub-granting schemes usually include some capacity building for smaller CSOs with limited capacity in project management and program-specific themes. Under the EU-funded Empowering CSOs for Roma Integration (ECSORI) program, for example, ANTTARC has built the organizational management, project cycle management, and advocacy and lobbying capacities of CSOs engaged in the social inclusion of Roma and Egyptian communities. With a budget of approximately \$820,000, the SDC-funded project LevizAlbania, implemented by a consortium including OSFA, PA, and Co-Plan, provides support to a considerable number of grassroots CSOs and individuals. The program also organizes training courses for its beneficiaries on activism, community mobilization, citizen participation, local democracy, and good governance.

During the year, CSOs increasingly engaged in formal and informal networks and coalitions, as well as networking beyond the sector. The 2019 PA study “Mapping and Assessment of Civil Society Organizations’ Networks in Albania” identifies twenty-seven networks, of which 33 percent are formally registered and 67 percent operate informally. Their domains are youth, good governance, human rights, environment, cultural heritage, and women’s rights. As noted earlier, the Alliance for the Protection of the National Theater continued its efforts to protect the historical National Theater building throughout 2019.

Cooperation between CSOs and businesses is still underdeveloped. Media and CSOs are increasingly interested in cooperating to address the shrinking of civic space. Media also play an important role in promoting CSOs’ visibility. There is limited cooperation between CSOs and government institutions because of the limited transparency of public institutions and low level of trust in government institutions by CSOs.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 3.7



CSOs’ public image did not change notably in 2019.

CSOs struggle to attract media coverage. CSOs find national media outlets to be nearly impossible to access, since media are interested mostly in political events and the activities of senior government officials. Local media, in contrast, are relatively accessible. Many media outlets—both local and national—require payments to cover CSOs’ activities, which discourages CSOs from seeking media coverage. The public media, however, does not require payments from CSOs and has a dedicated space for minorities that provides some coverage of CSOs working on minority issues. The media continues to express critical views of CSOs.

The public demonstrated its trust in CSOs in 2019 by making donations for earthquake relief to CSOs rather

than state institutions. According to a national poll conducted by IDM from November 18 to December 6, 2019, 56.3 percent of respondents indicated that they trust CSOs, a slight decrease compared to 2018. Nevertheless, respondents ranked CSOs as the fourth most trusted domestic institutions in the country, an improvement over their ranking in 2018. The institutions with greater levels of trust included religious institutions (65.6 percent), the armed forces (59.4 percent), and educational institutions (57.3 percent).

State institutions tend to have positive perceptions of organizations involved in service provision and negative perceptions of organizations engaged in advocacy and watchdog activities. Senior government officials engaged in smears against media-related CSOs in 2019. However, after the November 26 earthquake, the prime minister included representatives of three CSOs and the media in the National Reconstruction Committee.

Cooperation between the private sector and CSOs is underdeveloped, and business support for CSOs remains low, in part because the business community continues to have limited understanding of CSOs’ role in society.

Most CSOs do not communicate effectively. Only a small number of CSOs have dedicated staff for communications and public relations. The 2019 PA study “Capacity and Needs Assessment for CSOs in Albania” indicates that the three most used communication channels by organizations to inform and interact with the public

are: social media, specifically Facebook (90 percent); organizational websites (56.5 percent); and local audiovisual media (55 percent).

Although a significant number of CSOs advocate for transparency and good governance, the sector exhibits little progress in this regard. According to the 2019 PA study, nearly 80 percent of interviewed organizations reported that they produce annual reports, but only 58 percent publish their reports or share them with the sector, stakeholders, and others. A considerable percentage of CSOs (66 percent) reported that they have codes of ethics, but these are rarely implemented in practice.

Disclaimer: *The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.*

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