



2021 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

ALBANIA
OCTOBER 2022



2021 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

For Albania

October 2022

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.

LOCAL PARTNER

INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY AND MEDIATION

Megi Reçi
Daniel Prroni

PROJECT MANAGERS

FHI 360

Michael Kott
Eka Imerlishvili
Alex Nejadian

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT LAW (ICNL)

Catherine Shea
Jennifer Stuart

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Erin McCarthy, Michael Kott, Jennifer Stuart, and Kristie Evenson

OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 3.7



Albania held parliamentary elections in April 2021, in which the Socialist Party won a third consecutive mandate. While the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) found that the elections were generally well organized, CSOs criticized the selective application of sanctions for illegal assemblies and the misuse of state resources and functions by the ruling party and other public figures. In addition, credible allegations of vote buying, intimidation, and violence were reported, undermining the integrity of the election, according to Freedom House’s 2022 *Nations in Transit* report. A few weeks before the elections, a database containing the personal data of 910,000 voters, including their alleged political preferences, was leaked online, raising concerns that voters could be vulnerable to political pressure.

Media freedoms in Albania seriously deteriorated during 2021. According to the World Press Freedom Index (WPFI), media was subject to increased political pressure and attempts to control information during the ongoing pandemic and elections. Albania dropped twenty places in the WPFI in 2021 compared to the previous year.

Albania continued to manage the negative social and economic impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and reconstruction following the 2019 earthquake. Restrictions on gatherings and movement remained in place while the vaccination process proceeded. According to the European Commission (EC) 2021 progress report, civil society provided support and services to the most vulnerable people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EC report also stated that Albania fulfilled all the conditions set out for the first Inter-governmental Conference on accession negotiations, which was held in mid-2022, while also noting that limited progress was made in 2021 in implementing the Roadmap on Creating an Enabling Environment for Civil Society.

Overall CSO sustainability did not change in 2021, although there were slight deteriorations in the legal environment, advocacy, and public image dimensions. The legal environment declined slightly due to several changes to the legal framework for CSOs. Prolonged restrictions on assemblies, limited transparency, and lack of opportunities to consult with the government undermined CSOs’ advocacy initiatives, while the CSO sector’s public image deteriorated slightly as a result of the constant government and government-influenced media attacks on CSOs and activists. Other dimensions of CSO sustainability remained largely unchanged.

According to the Tirana District Court, as of the end of 2021, a total of 12,240 CSOs were registered nationwide. During 2021, a total of 278 new organizations (156 associations, 73 centers, and 49 foundations) were registered. According to the tax authorities, 2,217 CSOs were financially active during 2021.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 3.8



During 2021, the government introduced several changes to the legal framework for CSOs that resulted in a slight worsening in the score for this dimension.

In June 2021, the government enacted Law No. 80/2021 on the Registration of Non-Profit Organizations as part of a broad set of money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism measures. CSOs were largely excluded from consultations during the drafting of the law. In principle, the sector welcomed the initiative, which purports to enhance the enabling environment and transparency of CSOs by streamlining registration procedures and creating an online CSO registry. However, 119 CSOs raised serious concerns about the law, arguing that the vague powers it grants the government would have a chilling effect on civil society,

especially organizations focused on public accountability. In August 2021, Albania's High Judicial Council, mandated by the law to create the online CSO registry, held that it could not do so due to lack of funds provided for this purpose. As a result, the registry had not been created by the end of the year.

The law also failed to reflect the recommendations of civil society regarding necessary data privacy safeguards for information included in the online CSO registry. CSOs viewed this as particularly concerning in light of the significant data breaches that occurred in 2021 on government databases managed by the National Agency of ICT, in which the salaries, alleged political preferences, and other sensitive information of Albanian citizens were exposed to the public.

CSOs' day-to-day operations continued to be hampered by the slow pace of required court procedures. For instance, under Law No. 8788 on Non-Profit Organizations, CSOs are legally required to submit any changes to their internal statutes or governance procedures to the Tirana District Court. During 2021, the court's service provision timeframes worsened, most likely because of an ongoing judicial reform initiative that has decreased the number of judges and increase the court's workload.

Beyond Barriers, a CSO focused on non-formal youth education, held consultations with CSO networks on the legal framework for volunteerism throughout 2021. During these consultations, CSOs identified several key challenges, including the lack of a framework to legally recognize volunteer work, contract volunteers, and calculate the value of volunteers' social contributions, as well as lack of clarity around the volunteer registry. In January, Partners Albania (PA) published an analysis of the legal framework for volunteering which highlighted the need to remove formal barriers to volunteering, burdensome financial obligations for volunteers, and registration requirements for the provision of volunteerism services.

Article 262 of the Criminal Code requires prior authorization for protests. According to the Ombudsperson, however, prior permission should not be required to hold a rally, as a simple notification should enable state authorities to facilitate such gatherings, while ensuring public order and protecting the rights of others. In May, the Constitutional Court ruled that the requirement for prior authorization for protests was unconstitutional, thus removing the main basis for criminal prosecution of participants in unauthorized gatherings.

At the same time, however, the Technical Committee of Experts that implements measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic continued to restrict gatherings. Non-compliance with these restrictions was subject to a fine of ALL 5 million (approximately USD 48,000). However, the police applied sanctions arbitrarily, allowing some electoral rallies and other public gatherings, while banning others. Four organizers were arrested and thirty protesters were criminally charged for organizing and participating in a protest against the construction of a hydropower plant in Mirditë; nine oil workers were criminally charged for participating in a protest in Ballsh; and two independent candidates were fined for organizing public assemblies during the electoral campaign.

Certain forms of state harassment still persist, and organizations that receive government funding often refrain from publicly criticizing government actions as they fear they will lose funds. CSOs have noted that tactics such as

online trolling and phone calls to exert pressure continue to be a problem. Moreover, frequent and often uncoordinated inspections by social service authorities and labor inspectors are problematic for organizations that provide shelter services to victims of violence and anti-trafficking, as these organizations are reluctant to expose their client lists to third parties.

In September, the Council of Ministers issued a decision establishing the Agency for Media and Information. This agency aims to centralize decision making on all media appearances, publications, and requests for information processed by the executive branch. Media organizations and civil society raised concerns that this agency will be used to enhance government control and reduce transparency, rather than advancing the public's right to access to information.

In December 2021, the Commissioner for the Right of Information and Protection of Personal Information published draft amendments to Law No. 119/2014 on the Right to Information. Journalists and CSOs criticized certain aspects of the draft amendments, which are currently undergoing public consultations. For instance, the draft amendments exclude the courts and prosecutors from the scope of the law, which undermines the public's right to access information from these important public actors.

Legal opportunities for CSOs to mobilize financial resources remained unchanged during 2021. 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. Law No. 7892 on Sponsorship recognizes corporate donations as deductible expenses under certain conditions. Individuals continue to lack tax incentives to donate to CSOs. Local taxes such as property, signboard, and environmental taxes place a significant burden on the finances of organizations, especially those engaged in service provision.

Under Law No. 92/2014 on Value-Added Tax (VAT), grants are exempted from VAT if they are used for the purposes of an organization's non-profit activity and the organization does not supply goods or services to donors in return for the grant. In addition, as taxable entities, CSOs are eligible for VAT reimbursement under certain conditions. However, the process of obtaining VAT reimbursement for CSOs' projects has been a long-standing challenge for the sector. The General Directorate of Taxation reimbursed VAT for four CSO projects across the country during the year, which was seen as moderate progress. The National Resource Center for Civil Society in Albania (NRCCS) conducted awareness-raising actions and training to familiarize CSOs with the VAT reimbursement procedure for foreign grants.

CSOs have limited access to specialized legal expertise, which is mostly concentrated within Tirana.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 3.6

CSOs' organizational capacity remained largely unchanged in 2021.

Organizational challenges, such as a lack of resources, infrastructure, and an established culture of work, continued to disproportionately affect local, rural, and smaller organizations. Most well-established CSOs operate in Tirana and have more resources. Local CSOs typically have limited access to funding and human capital, which limits their ability to develop their organizational capacities. This is reinforced by the ongoing practice of international donors to direct most of their support to larger, well-established CSOs. In addition, many CSOs lack core funds to support their operational needs and allow them to become sustainable.

CSOs at the local level tend to establish stronger and more sustainable connections with their constituencies than national organizations. However, the increasing use of digital tools has provided an opportunity to maintain closer relations and involve beneficiaries in CSO activities and project design. During 2021, for instance, the Albanian



Network for Rural Development (ANRD) consulted with 500 local stakeholders to design and advocate for new rural sector governance policies.

As a result of donor programs aiming to build CSOs' organizational capacity, CSOs increasingly engaged in strategic planning, program design, and the development of well-defined missions. These improvements were most evident in CSOs operating in large urban areas. However, CSOs' missions and strategic planning are often secondary to current donor priorities or agendas, and the suspension or reduction of various funding streams due to the COVID-19 pandemic increased some organizations' dependence on one or a few donors, causing them to focus only on activities of interest to that donor.

CSOs have internal management structures and clearly define the division of responsibilities between staff and board members in their statutes. However, these structures are largely formal and instituted to comply with legal requirements, rather than governing the day-to-day activities of many organizations. National organizations such as the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network Albania, Open Society Foundation Albania, and the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC), among others, actively interact with their boards. Donor requirements have also incentivized most CSOs to adopt internal organizational policies and procedures to govern their activity.

The lingering effects of the pandemic and the ongoing reliance on project-based funding limited CSOs' ability to hire permanent staff and pay staff salaries in 2021. According to data from the 2020 Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development for Albania, the civil society sector employed 9,793 people in 2020. A 2020 country report by the European Training Foundation showed that the majority of surveyed CSOs in Albania (61 percent) have between one and four paid staff and collaborators and only 7 percent have between fifteen and forty-nine paid staff and collaborators. CSOs' ability to retain staff and hire quality professionals was also negatively impacted by the ever-worsening phenomenon of "brain drain," as young professionals migrate to developed countries to obtain higher salaries and better quality of life.

According to the 2020 Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, 42 percent of surveyed CSOs engaged between one and ten volunteers and only 2 percent engaged more than 300 volunteers. However, Albania's legal framework over-regulates the sector and makes it difficult for CSOs to involve volunteers in their activities. In May 2021, Beyond Barriers and the Center for Progress and Development held Albania's first National Volunteerism Conference to create a national platform on volunteering. Conference participants proposed the creation of standards to help organizations establish and manage sustainable systems for volunteer engagement.

While CSOs explored the use of new digital tools to meet the challenges of the pandemic, many organizations did not adopt meaningful technological upgrades or innovations, both because of a lack of funds and an apparent lack of will among some CSOs to embrace digitalization. CSOs commonly use social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter to facilitate their operations. However, they rarely utilize project management and tracking platforms or software to coordinate and standardize work among project team members.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 4.5

CSOs' financial viability remained largely unchanged in 2021, as it was affected by both positive and negative developments.

According to the 2021 EC Report on Albania, the COVID-19 pandemic further weakened the civil society sector's financial sustainability, which was already challenged due to Albania's unfavorable legal and fiscal framework. The 2020 Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development found that the fiscal treatment of the sector, including the lack of VAT refunds for grants, continues to negatively affect CSOs' operations and activities. No progress was made in addressing the measures related to the financial and tax treatment of CSOs provided in the Roadmap on Creating an Enabling Environment for Civil Society 2019 – 2023.

Foreign donors, including European Union institutions, foreign embassies, development agencies, and foreign political party institutes, continue to be the most important source of funding for CSOs in Albania. Public institutions, in particular ministries and municipalities, are also an important funding source.

Sub-granting schemes remained an important source of financial support for CSOs. For example, PA, with funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, implemented the Program for Civil Society for Albania and



Kosovo; this program issued its third call for proposals in May 2021 through which five CSOs received a total of EUR 128,000. With funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Lëviz Albania issued eight calls for grants up to CHF 60,000 (approximately \$62,740) for CSOs, informal groups, and activists working to improve local democracy and government accountability. However, CSOs point out that small-scale funds often create significant administrative burdens that hinder CSOs' ability to develop their programs.

CSOs receive some grants from the national government. The Agency for Support of Civil Society (ASCS) provides only minimal financial support to the sector and is not regarded as a viable funding source for

CSOs due to budget cuts in recent years. In April, ASCS published a call for project proposals for financial support up to ALL 2 million per project (approximately USD 17,800). The National Youth Agency (NYA) provided support for youth-based organizations in 2021.

The new Law on Public Procurement entered into force in March 2021 and enabled CSOs offering social services to participate in public procurement procedures. However, the government issued few relevant public procurements and few CSOs took advantage of this opportunity in 2021. According to Public Procurement Agency data, only seven non-profit organizations participated in public procurement calls and four ultimately received funding; these were mostly focused on agricultural services.

Several CSOs experimented with crowdfunding to supplement traditional funding sources in 2021. One promising example was a crowdfunding initiative conducted by Down Syndrome Albania and PA's smile.al platform, which was established in cooperation with the private sector and raised funds for five projects.

In January 2021, the government enacted the Law on the Central Registry of Bank Accounts, which requires all legal persons, including non-profit organizations, to provide relevant information regarding their bank accounts for the purpose of creating a registry to detect, identify, and investigate criminal activity. A group of CSOs submitted a legal opinion on the law to the Ministry of Finance that notes concerns regarding the institution that would administer the registry and the right of other interested institutions to obtain the information contained in the registry without prior court approval. However, these recommendations were not fully reflected in the final law. As a result, these CSOs argued that the law should be reviewed by the Constitutional Court.

CSOs increasingly engage in service provision, including social entrepreneurship, to diversify their income. Law No. 10192/2009 allows confiscated assets to be converted into public property and supports an effective model of inclusive social business to provide services, training, employment, and support to vulnerable groups.

CSOs are increasingly mindful of the need to guarantee adequate financial management of their resources and grants and to strengthen their compliance with donor requirements. To this end, CSOs continue to invest in more sophisticated financial management systems and training for their staff. NRCCS' yearly NGO Academy, for example, enables CSOs' financial staff to receive training on financial management and internal financial procedures, budgeting and accounting, securing financial support through grants, and reporting obligations.

ADVOCACY: 3.3

Although CSOs conducted advocacy on a wide range of issues in 2021, lack of transparency, infrequent government consultations, and continued COVID-19 restrictions have undermined CSOs' ability to influence public policy over the past few years, resulting in a slight deterioration in this dimension.

Parliamentary elections were held in April 2021. Despite the limited scope for engagement under pandemic restrictions, several CSOs monitored the elections throughout the country. These observers reported the misuse of state resources during the campaign and irregularities on election day. Additionally, CSOs conducted voter

education programs to raise public awareness on voting rights, the electoral reform introduced in 2020, and the importance of public participation by marginalized communities and youth.

According to the *Trust in Governance 2021* survey by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), more than half of Albanians perceived local and central governments as being not transparent in 2021. Court hearings and public meetings were often held behind closed doors due to COVID-19 measures, denying access to journalists and watchdogs. In 2021, the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC) was excluded from the National Commission for Asylum and Refugees, leaving it without civil society representation. A civic monitoring report published by IDM revealed that municipal transparency programs remain incomplete, and that municipalities were least transparent regarding information on citizens' participation in decision making. On a positive note, parliamentary committees continued to livestream their work as a good practice to advance public participation and scrutiny of the legislative processes.



Public consultations with CSOs remained largely a formality with limited impact. For example, a group of CSOs criticized inadequate consultations and parliament's use of an accelerated procedure to enact a package of justice reform legislation, while forty-four CSOs publicly condemned consultations held on the government's plan to update the map of environmentally-protected areas as an inadequate "box ticking" exercise. Parliament approved new Rules of Procedure for Accreditation, Accommodation, and Orientation of Mass Media without any public consultations. Following CSO and media criticism of the regulation's potential negative impact on transparency, however, parliament consulted with stakeholders and revised the Rules.

According to a Res Publica report, the average time within which institutions responded to freedom of information requests in 2021 was the worst on record. Freedom of information requests were often followed by lengthy court procedures. As noted above, local and international organizations deemed the new Agency for Media and Information as an effort to consolidate government control and limit access to information.

CSOs submitted several legislative initiatives to parliament in 2021. For instance, a CSO coalition proposed a draft law to create a national register of persons convicted of sex crimes, after successfully collecting 22,428 signatures from citizens. The Center for Civic and Legal Initiatives and the Environmental Center for Development Education and Networking (EDEN) prepared a draft Law on Class Action Lawsuits, which a member of parliament then submitted for parliamentary consideration at the joint request of seventy-three CSOs. AHC provided technical assistance to the Farmer's Union to prepare and submit proposed amendments to the law for agriculture and rural development and the law on VAT. None of the above-mentioned legislative initiatives have not yet been adopted by parliament.

CSOs pursued their advocacy efforts through public campaigns, petitions, and other engagement tools. An online petition launched by Eco Albania to designate the Vjosa river as a national park received over 50,000 signatures and wide national and international support, though the government did not take action in 2021. Juxtaposing Political Offers (POP), a network of twelve CSOs working to promote accountability and citizen engagement at the local level, organized campaigns in multiple municipalities to advocate for the implementation of community-selected policy priorities in the areas of public services, local democracy and good governance, economic development, and local social matters. As a result, five municipalities committed to addressing community requests in 2022. IDM held its first national deliberative polling exercise, which surveyed 1,200 citizens' perceptions on matters of public interest and potential solutions. IDM will submit its findings to parliament to inform legislative decision making.

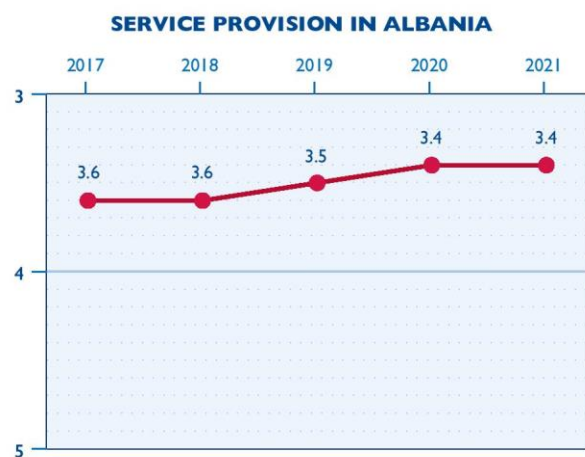
Finally, CSOs used strategic litigation to address human rights violations and challenge controversial government decisions. After a database containing the personal data of 910,000 voters was leaked on the eve of the parliamentary election, Guxo, a youth CSO, pressed charges against the Socialist Party on behalf of 162 citizens and filed a complaint with the Data Protection Commissioner. Res Publica provided legal representation to the media that first reported on the database after the Special Prosecution Office against Organized Crime and

Corruption (SPAK) ordered the seizure of its computer servers. Res Publica brought the matter to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which ordered SPAK to halt the seizure. The ECHR order was subsequently upheld by Albania's national courts, thus setting an important precedent on the protection of journalistic sources. However, by the end of 2021, no one had been held legally accountable for this incident.

AHC successfully challenged the constitutionality of provisions of the Law on State Police that allowed unauthorized surveillance, which the Constitutional Court found violated the right to private life. Tirana Legal Aid Society (TLAS) brought a lawsuit before the Administrative Court of First Instance challenging the civil registry's refusal to register a lesbian couple as parents, which was unsuccessful. TLAS plans to appeal and seek the repeal of legislation denying same-sex couples' access to equal parental rights. Open Society Foundation for Albania's legal clinics provided legal representation to a local community trying to prevent the construction of two hydropower plants in Zall Gjoçaj National Park. In January, the Administrative Court of First Instance abolished the license allowing the private company to produce energy in one of the hydropower plants. The decision was upheld by the Administrative Court of Appeal. In July, the High Court suspended the construction of two other hydropower plants over Valbona River in the culmination of a lawsuit filed by the Organization to Conserve the Albanian Alps (TOKA) six years ago. CSOs filed several successful anti-discrimination complaints with the Commission for the Protection from Discrimination pertaining to the rights of the Roma community, Egyptians, persons with disabilities, and LGBTI+ people.

The European Youth Forum announced that Tirana would be the European Youth Capital for 2022. As part of the initiative, youth CSOs will be able to apply for funding for projects in eight programmatic areas such as promoting volunteerism, encouraging active participation, promoting European identity, and increasing investment in youth.

SERVICE PROVISION: 3.4



CSO service provision did not change significantly in 2021.

CSOs remain the main private providers of social services in the country. During the year, they provided critical health, housing, and psychological services; legal aid; educational services; and research. CSOs were particularly important in providing services to the Roma and Egyptian communities, LGBTI+ people, persons with disabilities, women victims of domestic violence and trafficking, children, and the elderly. With funding from UN Women, for example, CSOs provided services, shelter, legal aid, and socio-economic reintegration support to survivors of gender-based violence and women from vulnerable groups. Due to limited resources, many CSOs focused on the continuation of

existing service activities, rather than introducing new services.

In 2021, CSOs were able to offer in-person services as COVID-19 restrictions were eased, increasing the effectiveness of their services. However, continued restrictions on gatherings posed an obstacle to the organization of certain activities. According to the EC progress report for 2021, CSO services for vulnerable persons affected by the pandemic complemented and sometimes replaced state interventions.

CSO service provision depends heavily on donor support and few CSOs generate revenue through these activities, which poses a challenge to their sustainability. Overall, social enterprises in Albania struggled to ensure sustainability and the Fund for Supporting Social Enterprises provided no funding in 2021.

Government support for CSO service provision is insufficient. ASCS provided limited financial support to CSOs offering psycho-social services to youth, survivors of domestic violence, marginalized communities, and persons who have recovered from COVID-19. The Agency for the Administration of Sequestered and Confiscated Assets provided EUR 154,000 from seized criminal assets to seven CSOs offering services to crime and trafficking victims. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) allocated EUR 66,000 to support CSOs' legal aid programs and, in March 2021, ten

CSOs applied for this funding. However, none of these CSOs was selected and the MoJ did not distribute these funds in 2021. On a positive note, the MoJ began drafting a methodology to assess project applications and improve the funding process.

At the local level, municipalities have minimal budgets for social care and therefore provide limited support to CSOs. Data and studies on local needs for specific services are lacking and sometimes must be provided by CSOs themselves when applying for public funds. The government provided support through the Social Fund to sixteen of the sixty-one municipalities in the country. Some municipalities used this funding to financially support CSO services. However, CSOs raised concerns about lack of transparency, nepotism, delays in accessing funds, and government attempts to influence the internal decision making of CSOs that received support.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 3.6

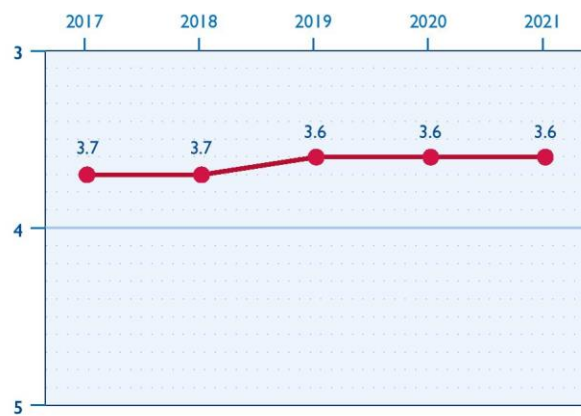
The infrastructure supporting the CSO sector remained largely unchanged in 2021. The majority of capacity-building activities for the sector continued to be organized online, although CSOs began to hold some activities in person as COVID-19 measures were eased.

NRCCS continued to provide training and technical assistance to CSOs. In 2021, NRCCS continued to offer its long-running NPO Academy, through which twenty-three directors and managers of organizations from eight cities across Albania received training on organizational governance, human resource management, strategic communication and planning, advocacy and lobbying, and fundraising and financial management. NRCCS also organized online information sessions on the process of fiscalization (electronic reporting of invoices); beneficiary owner registration; and the fiscal framework and VAT reimbursement procedures for CSOs. In addition, NRCCS published briefing materials to raise awareness of legal changes affecting CSOs and provided technical assistance to four new CSO networks and coalitions on internal consolidation, strategic planning, advocacy, lobbying, fundraising, and cooperation with law enforcement institutions.

CSOs also had access to a wide variety of training opportunities offered by other organizations. IDM trained ninety local CSO representatives and activists on mechanisms to participate in the parliamentary process and twenty-four CSOs on Albania's anti-money laundering framework. Further, IDM trained six grantees on monitoring public administration reform and EU citizen consultation methods, as well as project management and reporting. Lëviz Albania mentored its grantees on the use of innovative and creative advocacy tools. Olof Palme International Center (OPIC) provided thematic assistance and mentoring to partner CSOs on strategic planning, advocacy and communication, internal management, and coalition building, and organized international experience sharing events for partner CSOs. The Albanian Women's Empowerment Network (AWEN) trained CSOs on the process of fiscalization, gender analysis, and gender mainstreaming. PA introduced a new initiative to strengthen CSO crowdfunding capabilities. EDEN provided training to CSOs on environmental diligence in the process of Albania's EU integration. EDEN also trained CSOs on the components of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.

Several organizations provided support to CSOs by regranteeing international donor funds. AWEN provided twenty-five grants to CSOs working to promote gender equality and address gender-based violence with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Austrian Development Agency. OPIC provided thirteen grants to CSOs, trade unions, and a CSO network focused on human rights, local democracy and good governance, and youth with support from Sida. The Kosovar Civil Society Foundation and PA provided five grants to CSOs for media, anti-discrimination, anti-corruption, and environment-related activities through a program funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Lëviz Albania, with the support of SDC, awarded fifty-two grants to CSOs and non-formal civic actors for advocacy initiatives and engagement at the local level, including support for networking and alliance-building amongst civic actors. The Resource Environmental Center provided small grants to ten women-led CSOs and start-ups promoting green products through a program

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN ALBANIA

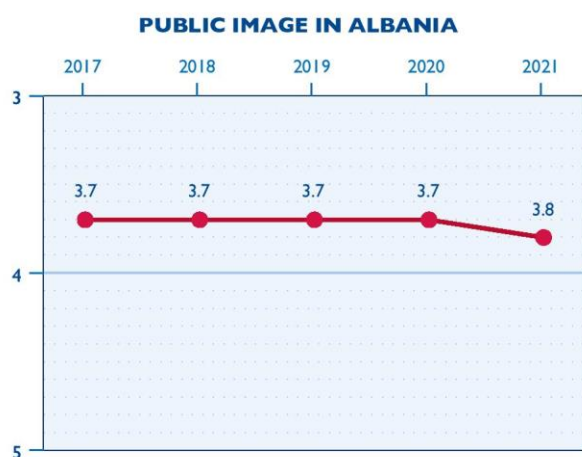


supported by the Global Environment Facility. Civil Rights Defenders provided three grants to CSOs working on media issues, as well as Roma and Egyptian rights with the support of Sida. In a welcome development, some organizations have started to promote CSO coalition building and networks through their grant programs.

CSOs continued to cooperate, undertake joint actions, and build networks to increase their impact and visibility. During 2021, membership in ANRD increased both thematically and geographically. This heightened the impact of ANRD's March 2021 advocacy and networking event, Albanian Rural Parliament, by ensuring the participation of 600 local stakeholders who gathered to discuss agricultural and rural development challenges. CSOs also increasingly engaged in joint actions with informal groups of activists. During the year, for example, several activists and CSOs worked together to organize nationwide protests against gender-based violence, indicating the start of a feminist movement. Environmental activists received continuous support from CSOs in their legal battles and protests against construction projects deemed as harmful to the environment.

Cooperation between CSOs and the national and local governments remained insufficient and CSOs do not trust that their input will be considered by government bodies. On a positive note, however, CSOs cooperated with independent institutions, local media, and universities throughout the year to exchange information, raise public awareness, and increase the visibility of different causes. For instance, CSOs cooperated with universities to organize voter education activities among students during the electoral period. Although cooperation between CSOs and the private sector remained underdeveloped in 2021, a positive example was seen in the cooperation between IDM and private sector associations to increase non-state actors' capacity and awareness of the framework of anti-money laundering policies.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 3.8



The CSO sector's public image worsened slightly in 2021 as a result of the ongoing attacks on the sector by the government and government-influenced media over the past few years.

The government frequently undermined the credibility and image of civil society and informal movements. Freedom House's *Nations in Transit* report noted that during the 2021 general elections there were vicious campaigns against activists, reporters, and civil society, among others. These campaigns were marked by discriminatory language, misogyny, intimidation, threats, and even violence. For example, human rights activists who advocated for changes in laws affecting the LGBTI+ community were often subject to homophobic slurs and threats. In addition, the co-authors of a study on state

capture and corruption in Albania published by Transparency International and IDM were attacked in the media in an effort to diminish the study's findings.

Media coverage and public discourse during the year focused disproportionately on political parties and the 2021 parliamentary election, rather than civil society activities. Established CSOs attract media attention, but traditional media outlets rarely cover CSOs that work with minority groups such as the Roma community, which undermines the ability of these CSOs to garner public attention. CSOs also gained local and international media coverage for protests they organized on sensitive issues such as price increases, domestic violence, and LGBTI+ rights.

According to IDM's *Trust in Governance 2021* survey, the public perceived CSOs as the fourth most trusted domestic institution, with 52.6 percent of respondents indicating that they trust CSOs, after religious institutions (67 percent), educational institutions (57.1 percent), and the armed forces (54.6 percent). These results are similar to those of the prior year. More than half of survey respondents agreed that the media and CSOs advance government accountability. CSOs were also perceived as one of the most independent institutions from political interests.

The CSO sector's positive image was due in part to the support of green movements that advocate for the protection of biodiversity and local communities that are affected by large infrastructure projects such as airports or hydropower plants. For example, the movement to protect Vjosa, the last wild river in Europe, mobilized significant citizen support. Eco Albania advocated and impacted citizens' perception of this issue through innovative online campaigns and petitions.

The private sector demonstrated a growing understanding of the important role of CSOs, particularly for cross-cutting issues such as the promotion of social entrepreneurship, philanthropy, and anti-money laundering.

The COVID-19 pandemic spurred CSOs to increase their online presence. CSOs made more proficient use of social media and other digital tools to promote their activity and to reach their target groups. This trend is more apparent in CSOs operating in Tirana and large urban areas.

In July, NRCCS published the Code of Standards for Non-Profit Organizations in Albania, a self-regulatory mechanism aiming to improve non-profit organizations' effectiveness, good governance, transparency, and accountability. The Code is modeled on international and regional best practices for CSOs. By demonstrating the sector's commitment to a rigorous self-regulatory mechanism, CSOs hope that the Code of Standards will encourage learning and change within the sector, consolidate the sector's partnership with other stakeholders, and increase the legitimacy and credibility of CSOs.

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.*

U.S. Agency for International Development

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20523

Tel: (202) 712-0000

Fax: (202) 216-3524

www.usaid.gov