

Next Generation

Albania

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Foreword

It is with great pleasure that we present the Next Generation Albania report.

This is the first in-depth piece of research with young people in Albania that the British Council has carried out since the start of its operations in the country in 1994. It is the latest in a series of Next Generation reports that we have carried out in the UK and around the world.

The vision of the British Council is to contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous world built on trust. We do it by building connections, understanding, and trust between people in the UK and around the world. Young people remain at the core of our mission, and engaging with them through all our programmes in Arts and Culture, Education and English is important for us to promote open and inclusive societies.

Next Generation Albania was commissioned in 2022, which was a significant year for the UK and Albania, as we celebrated the centenary of diplomatic relations. That same year we signed a landmark joint communique to widen and deepen the already strong bilateral relations.

Youth was one of the key priority areas of that agreement. As it was signed, we were witnessing an invigorated discourse on migration and UK-Albania relations. Albania has come a long way since its transition to democracy in the early 1990s, and it has made significant progress in all areas of life. According to the Youth Progress Index 2023, Albania stands among the three top countries in the world with the most significant progress over the 12 past years. This piece of research was commissioned to analyse these developments, as well as the change of trajectory in Albania, and insodoing amplify the voice of those who will build the future of the country.

Throughout our journey to complete this fascinating report, we were inspired by the power, energy and the potential of young Albanians to create the future they strive for. They remain resolute regardless of the challenges they face as young individuals in the labour market, and given the political and societal uncertainty due to migration. It is also encouraging that three quarters of the youth in this research feel empowered to decide on their own future.

Next Generation Albania offers interesting comparisons with other recent Next Generation studies such as in Poland, where the life of today's

young Albanians is much more analogous to those of their European peers than those of their parents, with increased opportunities for freedom of choice, expression, and alternative lifestyles. Young Albanians demonstrate an excellent ability to balance traditional and modern influences, and shift from collective to individualist values, thus creating hope for a more prosperous future.

The report informs us that young Albanians show a mixed balance of optimism and pessimism regarding their future in Albania. They are unhappy with the quality of education, the current standard of living, frustrated with politics (two thirds have little trust in it) and show less meaningful engagement in the community.

Another concern remains the high number of young people who see opportunities for a better life outside Albania. The report highlights that three quarters of the young people who aspire to migrate have a master's degree, flagging that "Brain Drain" continues to be one of the main challenges for the future of Albania. The report tells us that the key drivers for this pessimism and migration are (a lack of) employment, low wages, and a lack of quality education. This report is therefore also a call to action.

Working on this fascinating report has been remarkable. We would like to thank the teams at M&C Saatchi World Services and IDRA Research and Consulting, the Next Generation Albania Task Force, the British Council, and of course the young Albanians involved for their dedication and hard work to bring this report to you. Their expertise, insights, and commitment to Albania's future have been invaluable. We would like to express our special gratitude to the British Ambassador in Albania, His Excellency Alastair King-Smith, and the team at the British Embassy in Tirana for their precious support throughout the process.

We hope you enjoy reading the report as much as we have. We strongly believe this evidence-based document will be a catalyst for action and collective effort for us all to engage in constructive dialogue, and take actions in shaping long-lasting, inclusive, and prosperous actions for a sustainable Albania.

Majlinda Mazelliu

Deputy Director Western Balkans,
Director Albania and Kosovo, British Council

Next Generation Albania Task Force Members

Executive Summary

Background to the research

This report presents findings from a comprehensive mixed-method study examining the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of Albanian youth aged between 18-29, as part of the British Council's global Next Generation research programme. We engaged 1,249 young Albanians from all walks of life for this research to provide a holistic and rich picture of the next generation.

The project utilised innovative and participatory approaches to understand the diversity of experiences and values of Albanian youth. These included a landscape analysis of existing literature and a nationally representative survey of 1,155 respondents (with an integrated booster sample to ensure representativity of marginalised groups). These quantitative techniques were combined with qualitative data from an online community, one-on-one youth immersion sessions, and youth workshops for collaboration and consensus building. Throughout the project, a Youth Task Force composed of youth experts and thought leaders remained our constant collaborators to support the research, providing guidance, expertise, and inputs.

These viewpoints have been documented during a period of numerous challenges for Albania's youth. The nation is grappling with significant economic challenges, coupled with notable political and societal uncertainty due to a wave of internal and international migration from the country, reminiscent of the post-communist wave in 1991.¹ Additionally, significant difficulties in the employment sector challenge young Albanians' outlooks on future security. The response to these circumstances holds immense importance, particularly because young individuals are both greatly affected by these issues and possess the potential to drive change. This juncture represents a pivotal moment for Albania, with the decisions made now significantly shaping the nation's future.



These viewpoints have been documented during a period of numerous challenges for Albania's youth. The nation is grappling with significant economic challenges, coupled with notable political and societal uncertainty

¹ Carletto, C., Davis, B., Stampini, M., & Zezza, A. (2006). A country on the move: International migration in post-communist Albania. *The International Migration Review*, 40(4), 767–785.

Summary of findings

Albanian youth are experiencing a shift from collective to increasingly individualist and personal values

Our research, including the Next Generation survey and qualitative deep dives, has identified three pivotal influences shaping the value systems of Albanian youth: 1) the family, 2) economic challenges driving an increasing trend toward individualism and social comparison, and 3) social media, which exacerbates feelings of comparison, negatively affecting the mental health and self-perception of young Albanians.

In line with trends observed in former communist Southeast European nations, the social identities and values of young Albanians are undergoing a significant transformation from altruistic, collective values towards a focus on personal dignity.² When prompted in the Next Generation survey, just over a third (34%) of young people considered ‘honesty’ as their most significant value, followed closely by ‘personal dignity’ by just under a quarter (24%) of respondents.

Importance placed on community-focused values has seen a relative decrease. Values like tolerance (5%), religious faith (1%), rule of law (4%), and hospitality (2%) are the least likely to be selected as the most important by this generation's youth. This contrast is notable when compared to Albania's historical values and culture, centred on trust, hospitality, and obligation to others.³ Despite the prevalence of traditional values in rural areas, the shift towards the personal is also seen among rural youth due to economic pressures and lack of opportunities and well-paying jobs in rural regions.

Social marginalisation: significant perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation, disability, and race/ethnicity

Beyond the social repercussions of discrimination, marginalised communities in Albania, including youth with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, and members of the Roma and Egyptian communities, have borne the brunt of the country's economic challenges. According to a European Commission report, this has exacerbated unemployment, which is particularly high among women, young people, Roma and Egyptians, and those with disabilities.⁴ These marginalised groups often face limited access to essential resources, pervasive mental health issues, and encounters with discrimination in their everyday lives. Additionally, equal access to education remains a persistent issue.

Our Next Generation survey data highlights relatively low awareness of discrimination among young Albanians, with 50% acknowledging discrimination based on disability, 48% on sexual orientation, and 45% on ‘Race/Ethnic background’ group. Our survey also uncovers other forms of discrimination, including those related to gender, economic status, and political beliefs, which are significant concerns.

Young people with disabilities express concerns about inadequate infrastructure, isolation, and job insecurity, while Roma youth face challenges like high unemployment, stigmatisation, and early marriages. To address these issues, suggested improvements include inclusive representation in institutions, enforcing job security for people with disabilities, promoting community engagement, offering tailored support for education and employment, and enhancing local infrastructure accessibility.

Education: the quality of education and preparedness for employment dominate concerns

While Albania has made substantial progress in its education reforms, challenges remain. Perceptions of the quality of education are mixed both in terms of the current quality of education and improvement. We found a declining trend in perceptions of education quality, with only 32% of respondents in our Next Generation study agreeing that ‘the quality of education is good’,⁵ compared to satisfaction levels of 55% in 2015 and 38% in 2019.⁶ When asked whether the ‘quality of education in Albania is improving’, 34% disagree compared to just 30% who do agree – showing that overall scepticism remains significant over the performance and improvement of the education system in the country.

A pressing concern is the education system's ability to prepare youth for employment. Views on this matter are divided, with just over a third of participants believing that education equips young people well for work (38%) and life (39%), while nearly one-third feel otherwise (32%). Career counselling is not widespread, meaning that most young people are not well informed on career options and next steps on career development, particularly in Northern regions, with young people in these areas being the least likely to report receiving such support. Additionally, the lack of practical work experience and internship opportunities in Albania leaves many young people without previous work experience, making their access to employment difficult.

Equipping Albanian youth with foundational soft skills, particularly communication skills (34%), is seen as crucial for employment. Overall, respondents identify soft skills as main contributors to success in the job market, which may need to be more holistically developed in the education system to ensure that young people feel prepared to enter employment.

To address these concerns, recommendations include incorporating soft skills training into the curriculum, establishing partnerships with employers for internships and apprenticeships, enhancing career counselling services, and expanding teacher training programs. Additionally, there is a call for promoting diversity education, focusing on entrepreneurial skills, and addressing regional disparities in education access and attainment.

² Flere, S., Hurrelmann, K., Klanjšek, R., Lavrič, M., Reimbold, H., Taleski, D. (2015). Lost in democratic transition? Political challenges and perspectives for young people in south east Europe. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

³ Schwandner-Sievers, S. (1999). Humiliation and reconciliation in northern Albania: The logics of feuding in symbolic and diachronic perspectives. Sociologus, Supplement 1, 133-152.

⁴ European Commission. (2020). *Albania 2020 Report: Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*. Author.

⁵ 31% of our Next Generation respondents disagree, and 37% neither agree nor disagree.

⁶ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Employment: lack of opportunities, low wages, and mixed interest in entrepreneurship

Albania has transitioned from one of Europe's poorest nations to achieving upper-middle-income status, attributed to the implementation of substantial structural reforms aiming to promote equitable growth, enhance productivity and competitiveness in the economy, create job opportunities, improve governance and public service delivery.

Despite this promising backdrop, unemployment, low wages, and poverty remain key concerns for young Albanians. Over eight in ten respondents (83%) believe low wages are the biggest challenge faced by young people in employment in Albania. In addition, there are significant concerns about nepotism, lack of transparency and influence of informal connections when looking and applying for jobs. The mismatch between educational output and labour market demand means that even well-educated youth struggle to find employment.

However, experiences of difficulty obtaining formal employment has not translated to strong entrepreneurialism amongst Albanian youth. According to our survey, young Albanians demonstrate varying levels of interest in starting a business within the next five years, with 38% expressing interest and 44% indicating a lack of interest. Young men, youth from Southern regions, and those with the highest levels of educational attainment report the highest interest in starting a business. The primary perceived obstacle hindering business start-up is the deficiency in skills and experience (39%), followed by lack of financial support (23%) and information (17%).

To positively support young people, recommendations include strengthening anti-nepotism hiring policies, improving access to employment search support, creating job opportunities for marginalised youth, promoting mentoring programs, expanding support for entrepreneurship, and enhancing access to finance initiatives. Additionally, measures to provide affordable and accessible transportation, particularly for regions with limited job opportunities and for people with disabilities, are crucial for labour market integration.

Migration: motivated by a quest for better employment, contributing to the highest brain drain in Europe

Since the 1990s, Albania has experienced significant migration, both internationally and internally, a trend that remains highly relevant today. On average, around 42,000 people leave the country each year, making Albania the leader in migration rates in Central and Eastern Europe relative to its population.⁷

In our survey, 65% of young Albanians expressed a willingness to move to another country. Of those willing to move, almost eight out of 10 respondents (79%) indicated they intend to move for employment opportunities. Factors such as economic constraints, limited prospects in their home regions, and a desire for international experiences drive the intent to emigrate, particularly among rural youth, and youth in the Northern region.

Albania faces the highest human flight and brain drain levels in Europe, with a substantial proportion of highly educated individuals seeking employment abroad. Three-quarters of our Next Generation survey respondents with Master's or Bachelor's degrees expressed an intention to emigrate for employment opportunities.⁸ The economic impact on the country is significant – estimated by The Westminster Foundation for Democracy to represent a loss of approximately €559 million annually.⁹

Tackling youth migration is a key focus of the Government of Albania, and increased efforts are being introduced to provide opportunities for young people to stay in the country. Our Next Generation respondents present a clear picture for what needs to change for more young people to stay in the country – young people need to feel adequately remunerated for their work and offered relevant opportunities for employment, entrepreneurialism, and mentoring.

Life in Albania has improved compared to the previous generation's experience, but the standard of living still leaves more to be desired

Over three-quarters (78%) of our Next Generation respondents believe that the lives of today's youth surpass those of their parents. This sentiment is closely tied to the sense of economic opportunity and freedom enjoyed by the post-communist generation, enabling them to prioritise aspects of life beyond work. However, it's worth noting that the importance of work remains a shared value across generations. Nevertheless, a significant portion of respondents, nearly one in five, still perceive their lives as worse than their parents', pointing towards the economic marginalisation experienced by some youth.

Despite progress, when assessing their standards of living, nearly twice as many young Albanians perceive it as 'bad', as opposed to 'good' (34% vs. 19%), with almost half (47%) indicating that it falls somewhere in between. Insights from qualitative research consistently point to the rising cost of living and stagnant salaries as contributors to the declining standard of living.

Participants' outlook on Albania's future reflects a balanced mix of optimism and pessimism regardless of age, urban or rural residence, and gender. Key concerns of low wages, escalating living costs, and limited job prospects remain. However, there is a prevailing sense of belief and positivity regarding the country's potential for advancement, contingent on the younger generation choosing to stay in Albania. A notable trend that fuels hope and optimism, as evidenced in the qualitative data, is the surge in sectors such as tourism. This phenomenon is viewed as a promising opportunity to challenge and reshape international stereotypes associated with Albania and provide an opportunity for economic growth.

Young people are clear about the structural support needed to shape a more optimistic future. Greater investment in tourism, infrastructure, personal development, internships, practical and vocational education, well-paid employment, and greater representation of youth voices and issues are cited as the foundation to improving these issues.

⁷ INSTAT. (2022). *The population of Albania*. Author. <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/statistical-literacy/the-population-of-albania/#:~:text=Decreasing%20population,2011%20has%20decreased%20by%203.9%20%25>

⁸ This is of the 67% of Master's and 62% of Bachelor students who are willing to move.

⁹ Westminster Foundation for Democracy. (2019). *Cost of Youth Emigration in the Western Balkans*. Author.

Political engagement: young Albanians are politically frustrated around youth voices not being heard and the inability of the political system to represent their voices

A prevailing sentiment of distrust in political parties, candidates, and the electoral system is pervasive among Albanian youth. Markedly, 65% express little or no trust in the political system. This scepticism is notably pronounced among central, rural, Egyptian, and unemployed youth.

Contrary to prior studies indicating political disinterest and apathy among Albanian youth, the prevailing sentiment is one of political frustration rather than disinterest. Previous research, including a 2015 study where only 28% of 18-27-year-olds claimed to vote consistently, and a 2018-19 study where 62% expressed no interest in politics, may not fully capture the current sentiment. In our study, 55% of young people aged 18-30 report feeling very disengaged with politics. However, a closer look at both quantitative and qualitative data reveals a sense of frustration around youth voices not being heard and a variety of day-to-day actions that young people undertake relating to politics, although they may not define it that way.

While scepticism toward politics exists, it does not translate to disengagement from national and community affairs. When asked about specific activities, 51% of young people reported participating in at least one political activity in the past year.

The frustration around youth voices not being heard may be linked with relatively limited youth representation within political parties or the government. In the 2017 parliamentary elections, for example, only 5% of young people reached parliamentary positions, despite 32% of the youth being nominated initially.¹⁰

The study also reveals a limited awareness of youth forums and the National Youth Congress, by just over a quarter of young respondents (27%).

A significant recommendation arising from this Next Generation programme is the imperative to bolster the reach and influence of local youth councils across Albania. These councils are seen as pivotal platforms for enhancing young people's involvement in political decision-making processes, with a need to ensure genuine representation and recognition of young voices during these deliberations.

Youth voice in the community: engaged, but in a fading sense of community

Young Albanians, particularly in rural areas, and Roma and Egyptian youth, show a notable level of engagement in community life, although the concept of a closely-knit community has diminished over the years. Most young individuals display some degree of affiliation with their local communities, with 76% expressing a sense of belonging, varying from feeling 'somewhat,' 'very much,' or 'a part' of their local community. However, approximately one-quarter (24%) show weaker connections, stating that they 'do not feel at all' or feel 'not much a part' of their local community.

Our research suggests that youth engagement in community activities is mainly centred around social events, accounting for 53% of respondents involved in community participation. Development activities, such as environmental upkeep and community maintenance, constitute 16% of participation. Qualitative insights shed light on the reluctance of some young Albanians to actively participate in their local communities linked to the diminishing concept of a closely united community over the years.

Most young people believe they have the potential to voice their opinions in the community, but they harbour doubts about the extent to which their input will be acknowledged and integrated into decision-making processes. Only 4% of our Next Generation survey respondents are actively involved in community planning and decision-making. Ethnic minorities and those with lower educational attainment are less likely to engage in these activities. This reflects the need for trust in institutions and leaders to motivate youth to participate in community affairs.

To enhance youth involvement in local communities, suggested actions include promoting youth engagement in projects, increasing funding for local youth centres, building trust in community leaders, encouraging youth volunteering, and creating opportunities for youth leadership within local government units.

Global outlook dominated by pragmatic and economic considerations

Young Albanians show pragmatism when evaluating Albania's global relationships with the UK and the EU. Recent diplomatic relations with the UK and discourse on migration has increased caution on perceptions of UK-Albania relations, with young people increasingly focused on ensuring accurate portrayals of Albanians on the global stage.

Regarding the relationship between the EU and Albania, despite a historically positive outlook, some young Albanians perceive it as complicated, with challenges relating to Albania's efforts and the EU's dealing with Albania's application for membership.

When it comes to global issues, climate change is a key challenge for Albania. The country faces a heightened susceptibility to the impacts of climate change, including floods, droughts, forest fires, and landslides especially given its infrastructure needs and impoverished rural areas.¹¹ Despite Albania's climate vulnerability, youngsters showcase a degree of hesitancy concerning the impact of climate change, with only one in four (40%) expressing concerns, suggestion a need for increased awareness and education of climate risks. Understandably, immediate challenges, such as employment and the economy, overshadow climate concerns.

Young Albanians acknowledge the government's efforts, including the introduction of various climate-related initiatives and strategies and welcome government action and expect that technological advancements and cleaner technologies will help mitigate pollution and address environmental concerns. However, they predominantly agree that substantial and effective change in tackling climate change needs global policies, government action, and engagement from societal "elites."



While scepticism toward politics exists, it does not translate to disengagement from national and community affairs

¹⁰ Partners Albania for Development and Change. (2018). *Youth political participation in Albania*. Author. <https://www.partnersalbania.org/publication/youth-political-participation-2018/>

¹¹ Republic of Albania (2016). Third National Communication of the Republic of Albania under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. URL: <https://www.undp.org/albania/publications/third-national-communication-united-nations-framework-convention-climate-change>

Introducing the research

About Next Generation research

The British Council's flagship **Next Generation** series aims to understand the needs, potential, and aspirations of young people globally and seeks to analyse the conditions that support young people and allow them to reach their potential as fulfilled, productive, and active citizens. Next Generation reports look at young people's views on a wide range of aspects such as education, employment, political engagement, lifestyle, hopes and fears, values and beliefs, international outlook, and opinions on the wider world. At the heart of this series is a commitment to exploring youth voice and choice, with a view to achieving three main aims:

1. Exploring young people's attitudes and aspirations, and how the changes around them form their life choices and constructs their worldviews.
2. Amplifying youth voice by placing youth in the spotlight.
3. Supporting better youth policymaking by ensuring their voices are represented in decisions that may have lasting implications on their lives.

The British Council commissioned **M&C Saatchi World Services**, and **IDRA Research & Consulting**, to conduct **Next Generation Albania – the first of the Next Generation series to be conducted in the Western Balkans**. Next Generation Albania provides a distinct, maiden opportunity to gather in-depth insights into the lives of Albanian youth as they face a unique set of challenges, as well as providing a platform for developing plans for subsequent Next Generation studies in the Western Balkan region.

At the time of this research, young Albanians are faced with a crippling cost-of-living-crisis,¹² high unemployment levels, perceptions of political corruption and migration trends reminiscent of the 1997 post-communist wave.¹³ Accordingly, the primary objective of this research study is to provide an understanding of young Albanians' perceptions, aspirations, priorities, and key needs in this context. This will not only serve as a comprehensive reference point for the experiences of young Albanians, but also support the British Council's ability to understand, develop, and advocate youth-based interventions across the development sector and within policy making circles.

Albania's youth are pragmatically optimistic about their futures and the future of their country, keenly aware of the challenges the country faces, but readied with a set of solutions to tackle them. Recognising how far Albania has come since their parents' generation, young Albanians can see a path to a more optimistic future. Understanding the future young people want to see for Albania and the actions to affect that change is crucial now more than ever.

Our research explored six main themes:

- **Values and influences:** What are key influences guiding young Albanians' value systems? What matters the most to this generation's youngsters? How do they navigate information, news, and social media platforms? Which sources do they think are trustworthy?
- **Lived experience and perceptions:** What are the perceptions and daily experiences of young adults in Albania? What routines and activities shape their daily lives? How do they view their lives in comparison to those of their parents and peers? What levels of optimism do they hold for the future? What are the biggest issues affecting young people today? What is the impact of these challenges on young people's lives?
- **Engagement in society and amplifying voices:** To what extent are young adults involved in the civic and political aspects of Albania? What aspirations do they hold regarding their impact on their community, country, and the global stage? How do they interpret the evolving dynamics within the Albanian society, and how does this impact their commitment to civic engagement and social involvement?
- **Global outlook:** What attitudes do young people hold toward foreign countries, and how have their experiences with other countries and cultures—through education, travel, etc.—shaped their perspectives? How do they envision Albania's relationship with the UK, the EU, and the broader global context, both presently and in the foreseeable future?
- **Policy needs:** What policy initiatives are essential to empower young individuals throughout Albania, enabling them to reach their potential as active, creative, and fulfilled citizens?

Throughout this research, our esteemed Next Generation Albania Youth Task Force has been our constant collaborator at key junctures of the programme. Their insights, expertise and reflections have been invaluable to the shaping of the study and exploration of the key challenges youth face today.

Young Albanians in this research

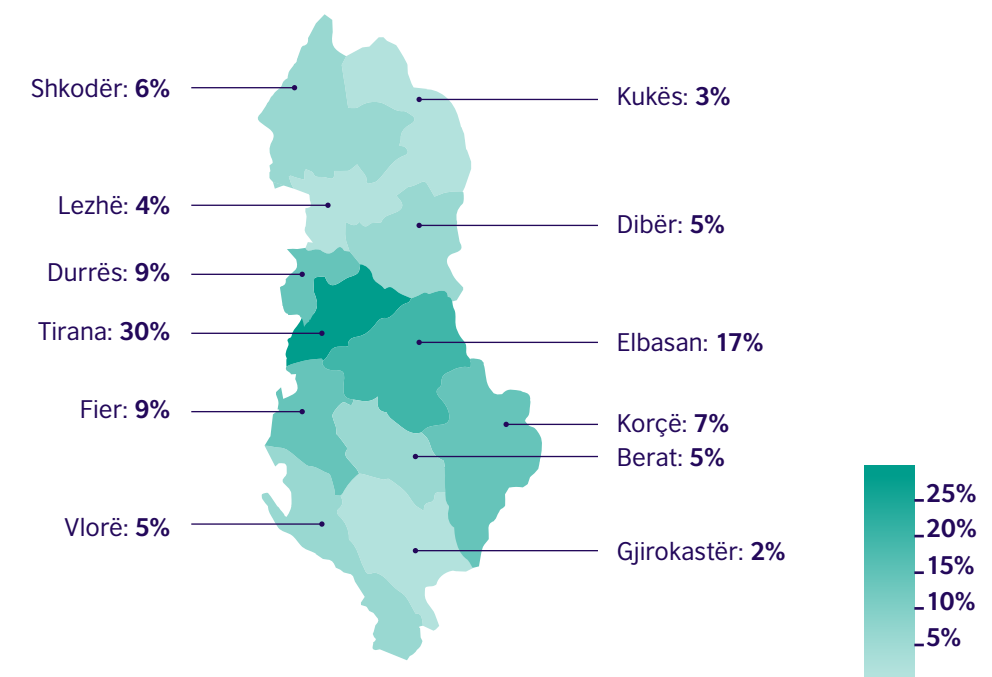
Next Generation Albania defined 'young Albanians' as those aged 18 to 29 years old, currently living in Albania.

Given regional disparities in development patterns, especially between the Capital, Tirana, and the rest of Albania,¹⁴ it was particularly important to speak to young Albanians dispersed across the country to understand their varied experiences and perspectives. For the nationally representative quantitative survey, we spoke to 1,155 respondents in Albania aged 18-29 years old across all twelve regions of Tirana, Elbasan, Vlorë, Korçë, Dibër, Kukës, Durrës, Shkodër, Fier, Lezhë,

Berat and Gjirokastrë. As a result of a strict stratification and probability approach, and sampling quotas based on Census data from INSTAT,¹⁵ the breakdown of young people is in line with the Census across age, gender, regions, and urbanity from the survey and the available Census data, with very minor deviations at a maximum of 2.7%. Below is a breakdown of the sample by region, mirroring the national spread of 18–29-year-olds per Census data.¹⁶

Our sample was recruited through both face-to-face methods and via IDRA's own online platform, an online survey panel (thought to be the only poll panel in the Albanian market) created by IDRA to expand market research and surveys through online means. Most of the project (90%) consisted of the face-to-face method. Across both methodologies, we spoke to a nationally representative mix of age and gender and had representative numbers of participants from each location.

Map 1. Breakdown of respondents by region



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

¹² Economist Intelligence Unit. (2023). Albania Economy, Politics and GDP Growth Summary.

¹³ Westminster Foundation for Democracy. (2019). *Cost of Youth Emigration in the Western Balkans*.

¹⁴ Dumani, B., Nurja, I., Subashi, B., Dumani, N. (2020). Regional Inequality of Economic and Social Developments in Albania. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*. www.researchgate.net/publication/342965508_Regional_Inequality_of_Economic_and_Social_Developments_in_Albania.

¹⁵ INSTAT. (2011). Main Results of population and housing census. www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/censuses/census-of-population-and-housing/publikimet/2011/publications-of-population-and-housing-census-2011

¹⁶ INSTAT. (2011). Main Results of population and housing census. www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/censuses/census-of-population-and-housing/publikimet/2011/publications-of-population-and-housing-census-2011

To ensure we spoke with marginalised and hard-to-reach youth segments which, by virtue of their minority status, are not typically easily captured in a nationally representative survey, we introduced boost samples. As such, the main national sample was made up of 1005 respondents, with an additional 150 respondent boost for marginalised groups. We selected two main sub-groups for the boost sample: participants from the Roma and Egyptian community and participants with disabilities. The former is suggested due to being the largest minority ethnic/racial groups (<2% of the national population). In addition to Roma communities and youth with disabilities, we integrated other intersectional characteristics to ensure coverage of marginalised youth, including areas with high level of deprivation, women and girls, unemployed/under-employed and youth with low or no education. As we provide intersectional analysis of subgroups, inevitably the insights are gleaned from smaller base numbers. To ensure statistical relevance, we have omitted any intersectional analysis with base numbers lower than n=20. Additionally, where relevant we provide the base numbers in the report text, to contextualise results.

The quantitative data provided us a comprehensive baseline to understand the youth landscape, however our qualitative workstreams gave space to deep dive, uncover, and hear the full story from young Albanians. We spoke to a diverse sample of 94 young Albanians in each key geographic region in all our qualitative workstreams. In each region, respondents were spread evenly across rural and urban locations to capture the diversity of youth experiences living in different environments. Throughout this, we ensured a mix of socio-economic status, ethnicities, gender, and disability.

Overall, we engaged 1,249 young Albanians for this research. The national sample of n=1,155 respondents was calculated with a margin error of $\pm 3.10\%$ and confidence interval level of 95%. This means that the results of the survey are expected to deviate from the actual population parameters by no more than 3.10 percentage points in either direction. This level of precision is appropriate for drawing meaningful conclusions and making accurate inferences about the attitudes, behaviours, and opinions of young people in Albania. A 95% level of confidence is widely promoted in statistical practice as it provides a balance between precision and practicality. It ensures a high likelihood that the survey results accurately reflect the population characteristics.

Our approach

To achieve and accurately address the objectives and research questions of Next Generation Albania, we implemented an iterative, participatory, and mixed-method approach, with research taking place over five key workstreams:

1. Workstream 1 - Landscape analysis including a literature review and key informant interviews:

A comprehensive review of published research (contextual analysis, relevant statistics, and insights) on the attitudes, aspirations, and behaviours of young people in Albania, including differences by ethnicity, gender, disability, socio-economic grouping and by geography. **Workstream 1** consisted primarily of a **review of existing literature** as well as **eight key informant interviews (KIIs)** with key stakeholders - defined as **'young leaders'** within their communities - locally and nationally - to take part and guide the research at the initial stages.

In this phase, we identified four dimensions of the Albanian youth landscape which we deemed as imperative preliminary research avenues:

- **Demographics:** The make-up of Albanian youth including present and future patterns and trends, as well as marginalised youth groups.
- **Identity and belonging:** How Albanian youth feel about their place in society and their voices being heard.
- **Engagement:** The extent to which young Albanians are and/or feel involved in civic, political, economic, and social life, and their perceptions of such.
- **Progress and the future:** Youth concerns, perceived barriers, opportunities, and aspirations for the future.

2. Workstream 2 - Nationally representative survey:

A 40-minute online or face-to-face interview capturing all key data points on young people's outlooks, priorities, and perceived barriers to success, particularly focusing on the Next Generation pillars of education, employment, digital and media, politics, and overall aspirations. This database allows horizontal (across countries) and longitudinal (across time) comparisons, presenting a huge asset for future studies. We included and expanded upon the Next Generation standardised survey template, alongside additional lines of questioning.

3. Workstream 3 - Online community platform:

We used the collaborative, qualitative capabilities of an online community platform which enabled engagement with youth audiences and the generation of quick turnaround results. The online community was active for two weeks, with 20 youth participants involved. The FlexMR platform was used, which provides a variety of methods to explore emerging themes from Workstreams 1 and 2 through a range of methodologies such as focus group discussions, digital diaries and 'a day in a life' exercise.

4. Workstream 4 - One-on-one youth immersion sessions:

Going beyond traditional qualitative in-depth interviews (IDIs), we conducted one-on-one human-centred design (HCD) exercises with 18 individuals aged 18-29 with a focus on marginalised and underrepresented groups. Each immersion session lasted up to two hours. The HCD approach is explicitly focused on facilitating discussion in an empathetic and empowering way and using an ethnographic approach which emphasises building trust and understanding between the researcher and the participant in the pursuit of a holistic understanding of participants as situated within their cultural context. This workstream aims to uncover rich insights relating to youth life priorities, perceived roles in communities, opportunities to exercise their voice, and barriers to education and employment.

5. Workstream 5 - Group workshops:

We conducted six participatory workshops each with eight participants lasting two hours. The youth workshops provide a foundation for interrogating topics and themes arising from Workstream 2 and complemented insights generated through Workstreams 3 and 4. The workshops used the participatory action research (PAR) approach to work *with* participants, not *on* participants.

The PAR approach emphasises collaboration between researchers and participants to define and understand situations as they are experienced by a particular group. As such, workshops were designed to empower participants to build relationships, find consensus, collectively define barriers and opportunities, map their communication assets, and plan future collaboration to use these assets to achieve change.

Stakeholder engagement in this research

To foster research engagement and involvement throughout the process and ensure input from pertinent individuals at key junctures, we incorporated four distinct stakeholder engagement opportunities spanning the research lifecycle. These engagements began shortly after the project kick off and extended through to the final reporting of findings.

Various institutions, including those in government, education, arts, entrepreneurialism, digital skills, and youth leadership, were represented in the Task Force, providing the research expert and holistic perspectives.

Report structure

The report is structured in four parts. We start the report with a comprehensive overview of young Albanians in context, looking at key challenges and previous research identified in our landscape analysis. This provides a situated picture from which to understand and interpret the Next Generation findings.

The rest of the report then flows to explore the perceptions and attitudes of young Albanians from the Next Generation primary and exploratory research, exploring the factors influencing their views and engagement with the broader society.

Chapter 1 – The Albanian context

Chapter 2 - Young Albanians' economic concerns and aspirations for the future

Chapter 3 – Youth values and influences

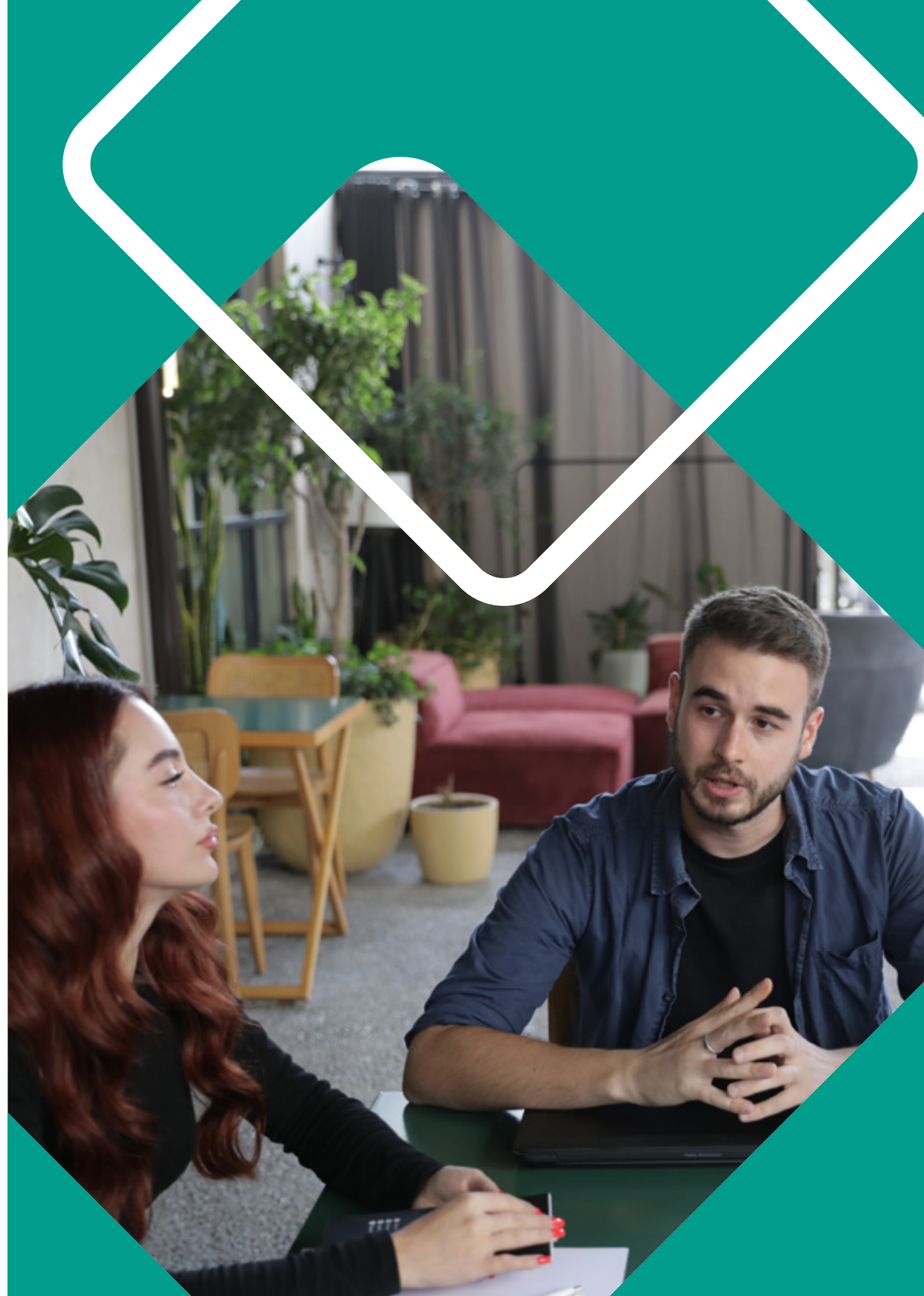
Chapter 4 – Political outlook and engagement

Chapter 5 – Youth engagement

Chapter 6 – Global outlook

The concluding section of the report outlines a set of strategic recommendations concerning institutional, policy, and programmatic responses based on the insights garnered throughout the research programme.

We provide an intersectional analysis of demographic differences among key audiences including gender, age, region, ethnicity and disability alongside employment and education status.



Chapter 1

The Albanian context

The following section provides an overview of key Albanian context to lay the foundation for understanding the perspectives of Albania's next generation, considering recent changes and its historical post-communist landscape.

1.1. Geography

Albania, nestled in the heart of southern Europe, offers a strategic location on the western part of the Balkan Peninsula. It shares borders with Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Greece. To the west and southwest, it is surrounded by the Adriatic and Ionian seas, with Italy just 50 miles away.¹⁷



1.2. Population

The Albanians constitute an ethnic group indigenous to the Balkan Peninsula, unified by shared Albanian heritage, culture, history, and language. Albania exhibits significant linguistic homogeneity, with ethnic Albanians representing the majority of its populace.¹⁸ Three groups — Greeks, Macedonians, and Montenegrins — are officially acknowledged in Albania as national minorities. The Roma and Vlachs/Aromanians receive recognition on linguistic or cultural grounds, whereas the Egyptians do not attain any formal recognition. According to the 2011 Census, 97.8% of the country's inhabitants identified as ethnically Albanian, a figure that several local and international entities have debated.¹⁹ The gender distribution revealed 50.2% of the population as male and 49.8% as female, with 53.7% residing in urban areas.²⁰ While 98.76% of the populace declares Albanian as their native tongue, other languages, including Greek, Romani, Aromanian, and Macedonian, are also in use. In terms of religious affiliation, Albania primarily comprises followers of Islam (59%), Roman Catholicism (10%), and Eastern Orthodoxy (7%).²¹

1.3. Timeline

Albania's history since gaining independence in 1912 has seen significant shifts, from early Ottoman rule to periods of monarchy and foreign occupation.²² The 20th century brought communist rule under Enver Hoxha, followed by a transition to democracy and efforts to join international organisations like NATO and the EU. These historical changes highlight Albania's ongoing evolution and aspirations for the future.

1.4. Economy

Economically, Albania's progress over the years is noteworthy. Once ranked among Europe's most impoverished nations, the country has made remarkable strides to position itself within the middle-income category.²³ This transformation is not just a testament to its resilience but also to its commitment to growth and reform. Current endeavours are focused on aligning more intricately with the European Union's integration objectives. The nation's ability to bounce back, even in the face of adversity like earthquakes, pandemics, and fluctuating global prices, became evident between 2021 and 2022. It was during this period that sectors such as tourism, construction, and extractive industries spearheaded an economic resurgence. However, the shadows of challenges like an escalating public debt and looming inflationary tendencies and unemployment cannot be ignored.²⁴

1.5. Political and media context

The early 1990s marked a pivotal phase for Albania as it transitioned from an isolated communist regime to embrace a multiparty democracy. As with any significant transformation, this shift was accompanied by challenges ranging from unemployment and corruption to infrastructural bottlenecks. However, the subsequent years witnessed Albania's determined march towards a fair democratic process, with the elections of the late 1990s and beyond receiving international affirmation for their integrity. The nation's current reformist agenda is driven by strong leaders, President Bajram Begaj and Prime Minister Edi Rama, known for his unwavering advocacy for the rapid EU integration of the Western Balkans.²⁵ The aspiration of Albania to integrate more closely with the European Union has been a significant theme in recent years — and accelerated by the current geopolitical context — resulting in talks formally commencing in 2022.²⁶

While television remains the dominant medium in Albania's media landscape, the rise of the internet is steadily reshaping the narrative, even though the spectre of self-censorship looms occasionally due to vested media ownership interests.²⁷ The transition from communism has ushered in a myriad of societal changes, mirrored in the values, beliefs, and attitudes of today's generation. Understanding the values of young Albanians today provides invaluable insight into the guiding principles that inform the behaviours and decision making of this generation.

¹⁷ BBC. (2023). *Albania country profile*. Author. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17679574

¹⁸ INSTAT. (2016). *Population of Albania*. Author. <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/demography-and-social-indicators/population/publication/2016/population-of-albania-1-january-2016/>

¹⁹ INSTAT. (2011). *Population and housing census*. Author. <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/censuses/census-of-population-and-housing/#:~:text=Census%20%2D%202011,the%20community%20and%20business%20users>

²⁰ INSTAT. (2016). *Population of Albania*. Author. https://web.archive.org/web/20171015202133/http://www.instat.gov.al/media/322941/press_release_population_of_albania_1_january_2016.pdf

²¹ Minority Rights Group International. (n.d.). *World directory of minorities and indigenous peoples: Albania*. Author. <https://minorityrights.org/country/albania>

²² BBC. (2023). *Albania country profile*. Author. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17679574

²³ World Bank. (2023). *The World Bank in Albania*. Author. www.worldbank.org/en/country/albania/overview

²⁴ World Bank. (2023). *The World Bank in Albania*. Author. www.worldbank.org/en/country/albania/overview

²⁵ CIA. (2023). *Albania*. www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/albania/

²⁶ Associated Press. (2023). *Western Balkan heads of state press for swift approval of their European Union membership bids*. <https://apnews.com/article/western-balkans-european-union-expansion-89e8b33afeddf6136adb0bc81b65de40#:~:text=A%20joint%20declaration%20from%20the,but%20not%20later%20than%202030.%E2%80%9D>

²⁷ CIA. (2023). *Albania*. www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/albania/



Chapter 2

Influences and value

2.1. What influences young Albanians’ values?

Our Next Generation survey and qualitative deep dives identified three vital influences shaping Albanian youth’s value systems:

- The family
- The economic and employment landscape
- Social media

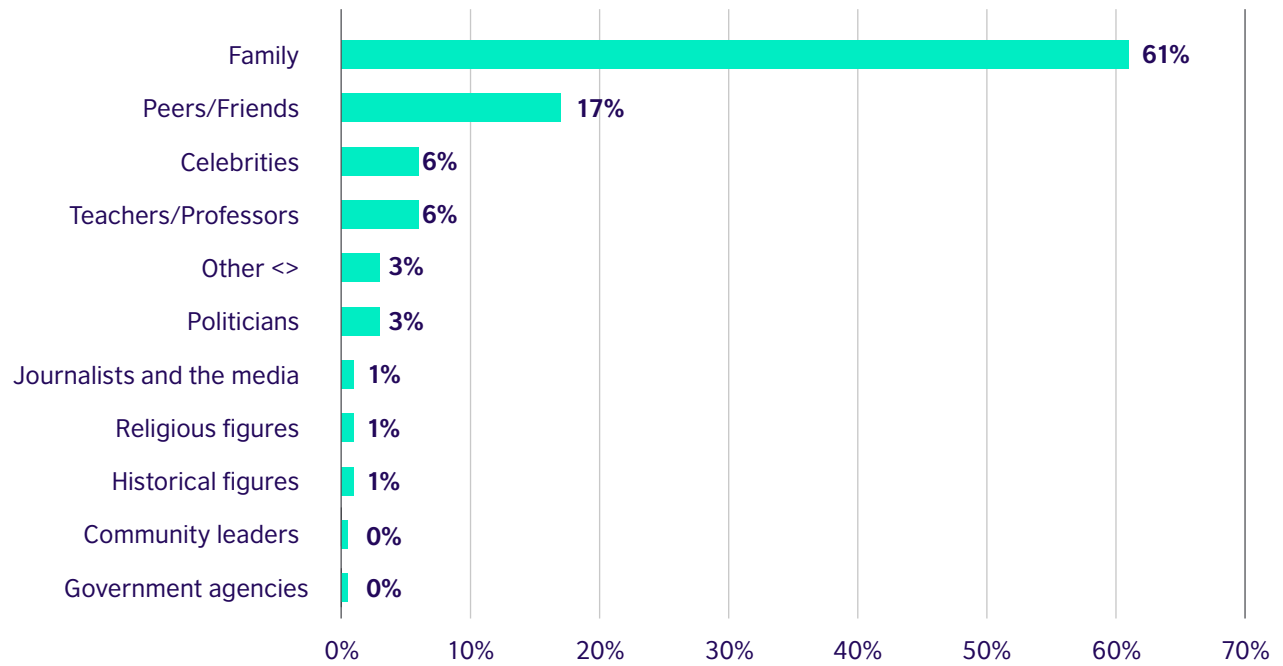
2.1.1. Family is at the heart of the fabric of Albanian society and the main influencer of young Albanians

The family is revealed to be a significant influence for young Albanians across various indicators, including national pride, trustworthiness (as advisors and sources of information), and as markers of personal success

and happiness. Albanian culture has always been highly characterised by placing large value on one’s family and ethnic heritage.²⁸

Previous Friedrich Ebert Stiftung studies in 2013 and 2019 have found that most young Albanians view their families as a foundation of emotional and economic stability, reinforcing the significance of familial ties and interdependence.²⁹ Our Next Generation survey furthers this, identifying the family as the primary influencer of young people’s views in Albania (61%), closely followed by peers/friends (17%) (see Figure 1). This pattern suggests a direct correlation between proximity of relationships and influence on the perspectives of young individuals. Indeed, qualitative discussion further cemented the role and pervasiveness of the family, where it was confirmed that “*family is the base of everything, so if you are good person in your society, it is because your family raised you to be like this*” (25-29, F, employed, Elbasan).

Figure 1. Who influences your views the most?



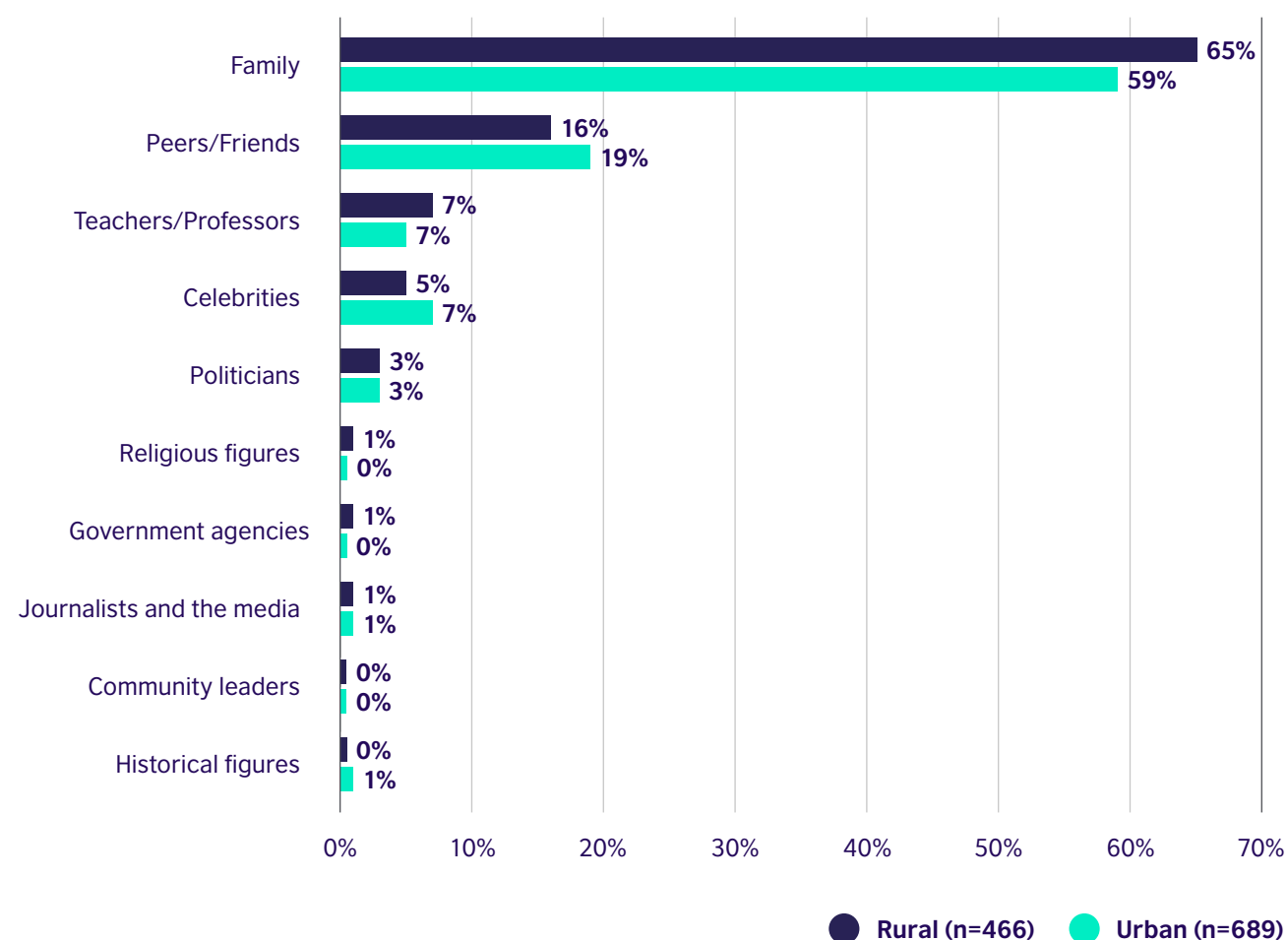
Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

²⁸ Schwandner-Sievers, S. (2008). Albanians, Albanianism and the strategic subversion of stereotypes. *Anthropological Notebooks*, 14(2), 47-64.
²⁹ Çela, A., Fshazi, T., Mazniku, A., Kamberi, G., & Smaja, J. (2013). *Albanian youth 2011: “Between present hopes and future insecurities!”*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

This pattern is further apparent when disaggregated by urbanity, as a larger proportion of rural respondents, 65%, are influenced by their family, compared to 59% of urban respondents (Figure 2). Insights from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's 2019 study support this dominance of rural family influence. The study showed that young people in rural areas were twice as likely to report 'my parents decide about everything' than those in urban areas (6% versus 12%). This variation in the urban/rural divide points to a continued influence of traditionality in rural areas in Albania's society, which has been widely documented.³⁰

When analysed by ethnic backgrounds, we indicatively find that those who identify as Egyptian exhibit the highest likelihood of being influenced by their family (76%, n=36), surpassing the influence levels observed among Roma respondents (54%, n=23) and Albanian respondents (61%, n=653).³¹ A 2021 study into Egyptian and Roma Adolescents' Perspectives on Their Developmental Assets in Albania During the COVID-19 Pandemic supports family as a fundamental structure and developmental asset for these youth.³²

Figure 2. Who influences your views the most? By urbanity.



³⁰ Kadiu, B., & Kadiu, E. (2018). Challenges of integration of families that have committed internal migration. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 1(3), 137-147.

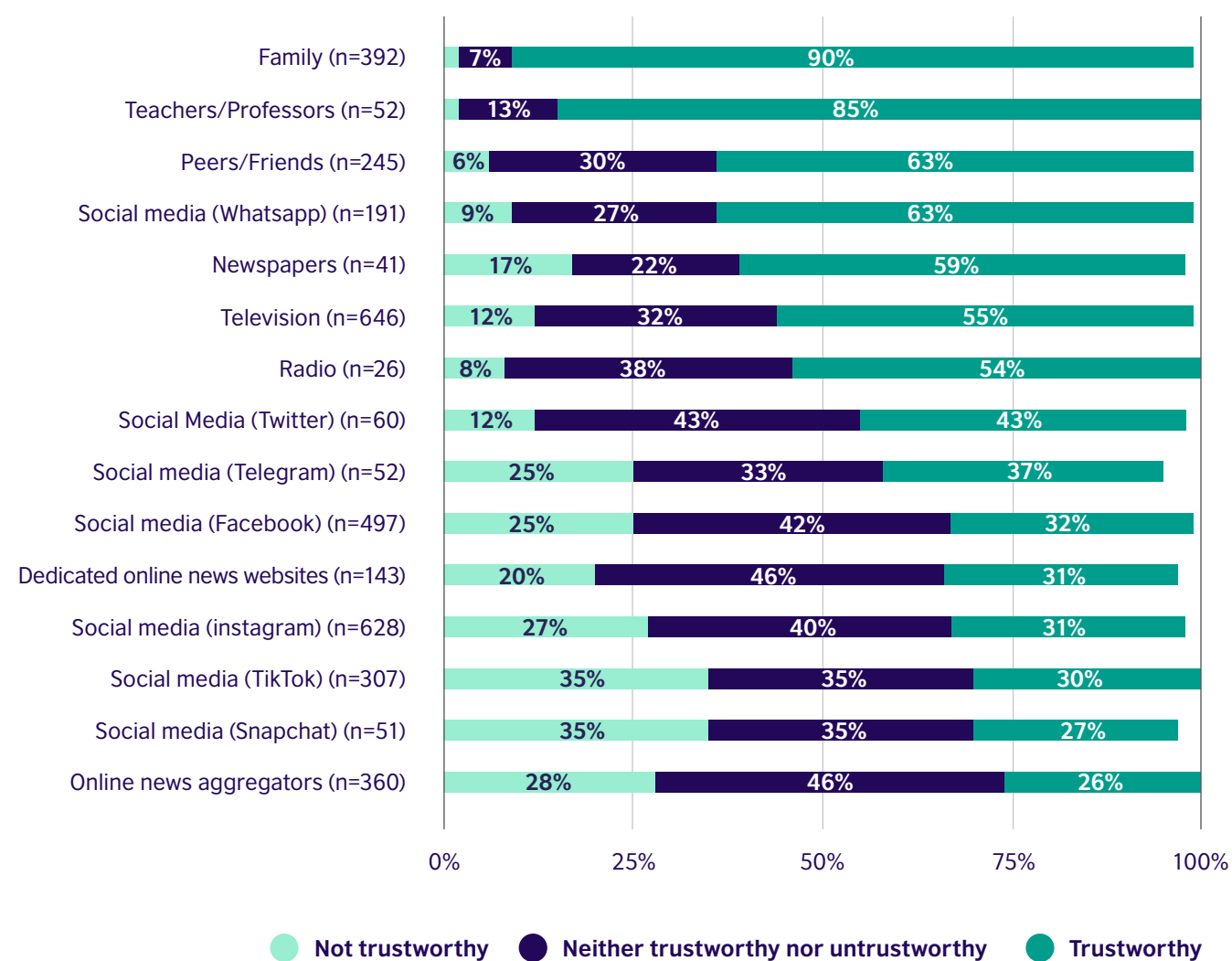
³¹ Please note that these are percentages of a small sample base number. The overall sample of Roma respondents was n=42, and the overall sample of Egyptian respondents was n=49. The threshold for statistical significance is 20 and above.

³² Miconi, D., Dervishi, E., Wium, N., Johnson-Lafleur, J., Ibrahim, S., & Rousseau, C. (2021). Egyptian and Roma Adolescents' Perspectives on Their Developmental Assets in Albania During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of research on adolescence: The official journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 31(3), 576-594.

Capacity for influence across young people is intrinsically intertwined with trust, as shown by nine in ten (90%) respondents expressing their trust in family as a reliable source of information (Figure 3). Previous youth studies over the last decade strongly support this, consistently identifying the family as the most trusted source of information, with generally low levels of trust beyond family and relative structures.³³

The clear role of the family in Albanian youth's lives is clear when compared with other countries in the Southeastern Europe region, with Albanian youth ranking the highest trust in family at 9.79/10, only surpassed by Kosovo at 9.84/10.³⁴

Figure 3. Trustworthiness of sources of information young people use



³³ Çela, A., Fshazi, T., Mazniku, A., Kamberi, G., & Smaja, J. (2013). Albanian youth 2011: "Between present hopes and future insecurities!". Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

³⁴ Çela, A., Fshazi, T., Mazniku, A., Kamberi, G., & Smaja, J. (2013). Albanian youth 2011: "Between present hopes and future insecurities!". Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

This emphasis on trust in the family is further confirmed through the social network mapping exercise, which highlighted that family members and close acquaintances emerge as the most trustworthy sources for life advice across domains such as employment, financial support, crime response, and community engagement (Examples 1 and 2).

Figure 4: Example 1. 25-28, F, employed, Shkoder

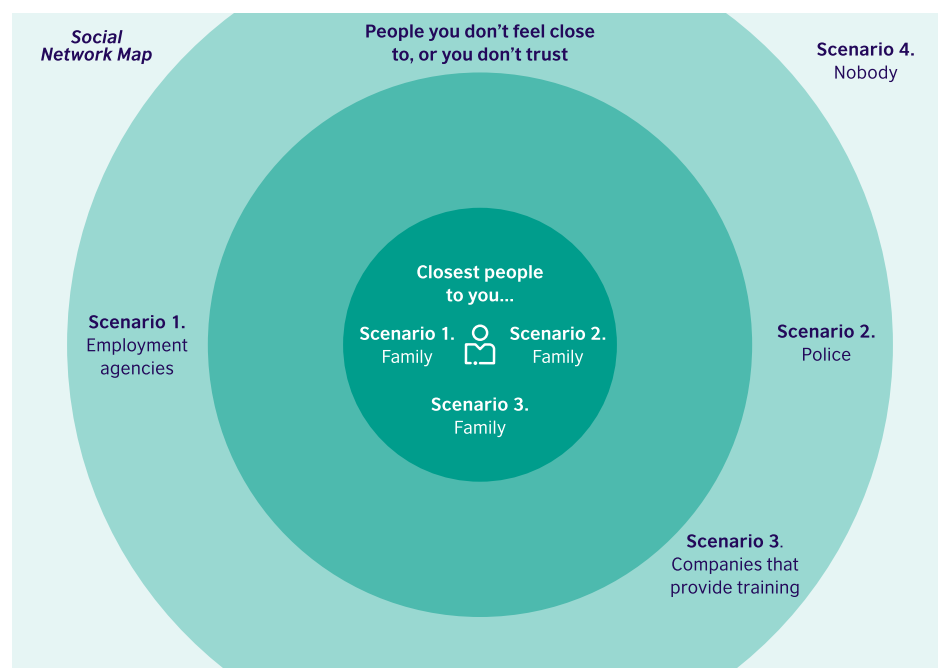
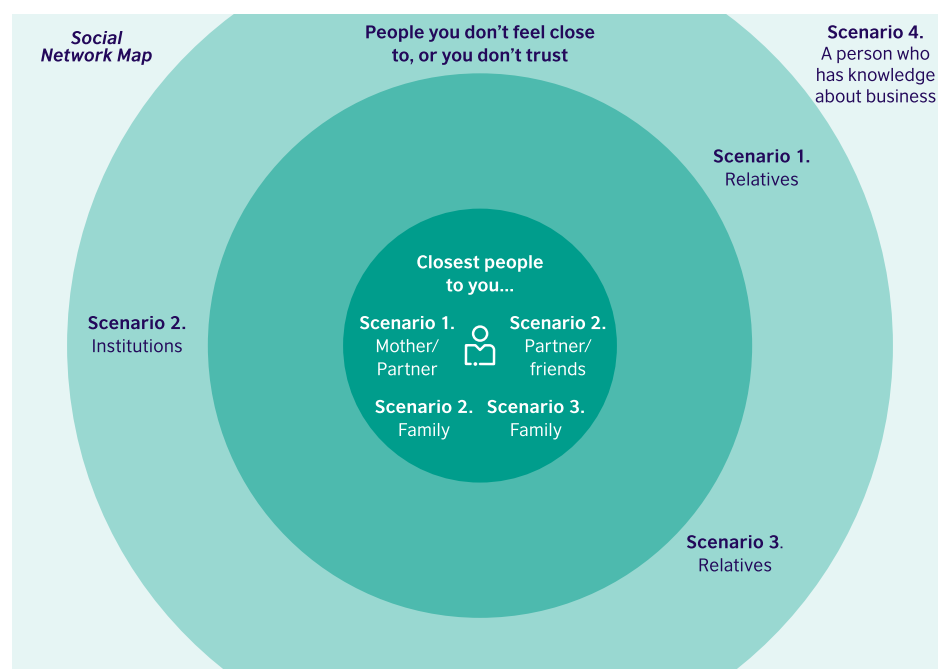


Figure 5: Example 2. 18-24, M, Employed, Fier.

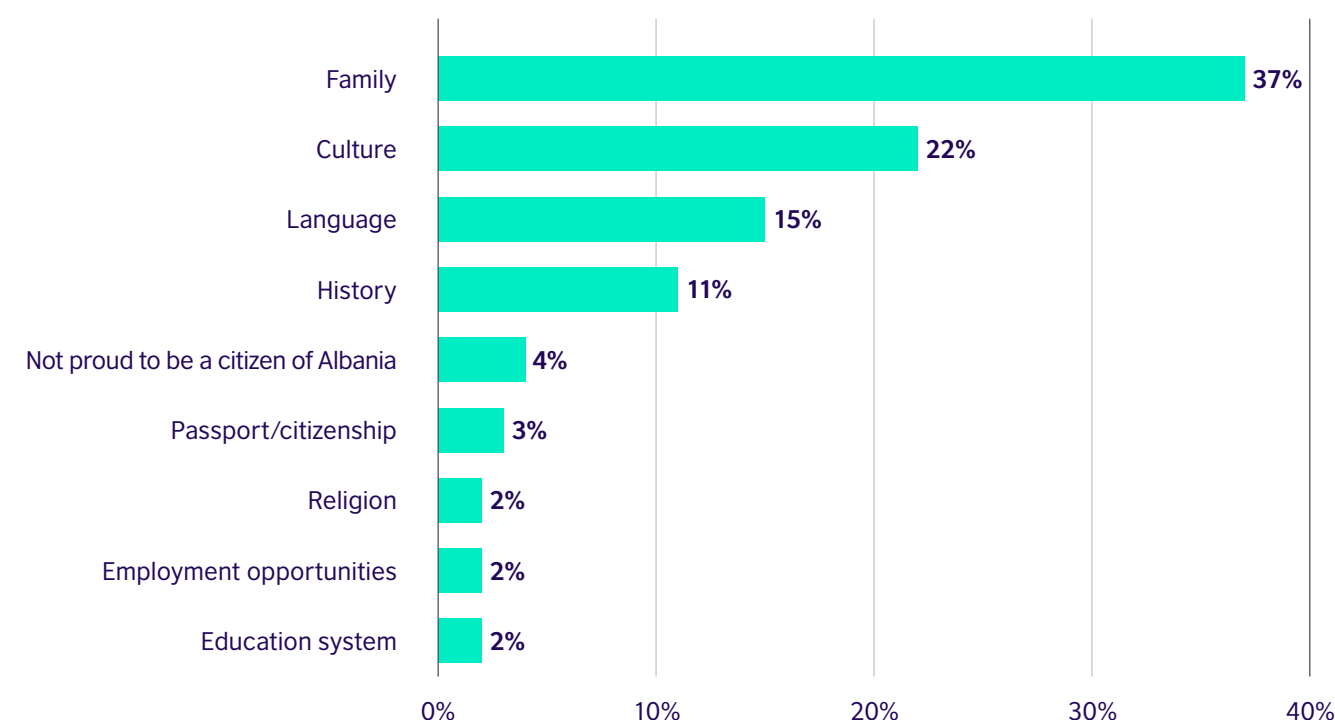


There is palpable scepticism towards seeking assistance from political parties, other community members, and institutions such as the police. Supporting this, a study from the Institute for Democracy and Mediation emphasised that “*trust on the family and relatives is [in Albania] in relatively high levels, feeding a clan-based mentality, which seems to not support the trust in public institutions*”.³⁵

Lack of trust in different stakeholders beyond blood connections has been attributed by scholars as a consequence of the communist system, as “*the citizens of post-communist societies trust their relatives and friends more, and the people in general less*.”³⁶ As we can see anecdotally in the below examples, institutions such as employment agencies and police are placed in the furthest social networking and trust circle from young people.

Considering the significance of family influence, it is unsurprising that family is also considered to be key to the Albanian identity. Our Next Generation survey reveals that family is the driving force of Albanian pride. When asked what factors make young people proud to be a citizen of Albania, ‘family’ is clearly considered the most significant factor with 37%, followed by ‘culture’ (22%) and language (15%) (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. What factors make you proud to be a citizen of Albania?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

³⁵ Institute for Democracy and Mediation. (2011). *Social trust and institutional authority in the Albanian democracy*. Author. <https://idmalbania.org/social-trust-and-institutional-authority-in-the-albanian-democracy>

³⁶ Sapsford, R., & Abbott, P. (2006). *Trust, confidence and social environment in post-communist societies*. *Frontiers of Sociology*, 39(1), 59-71.

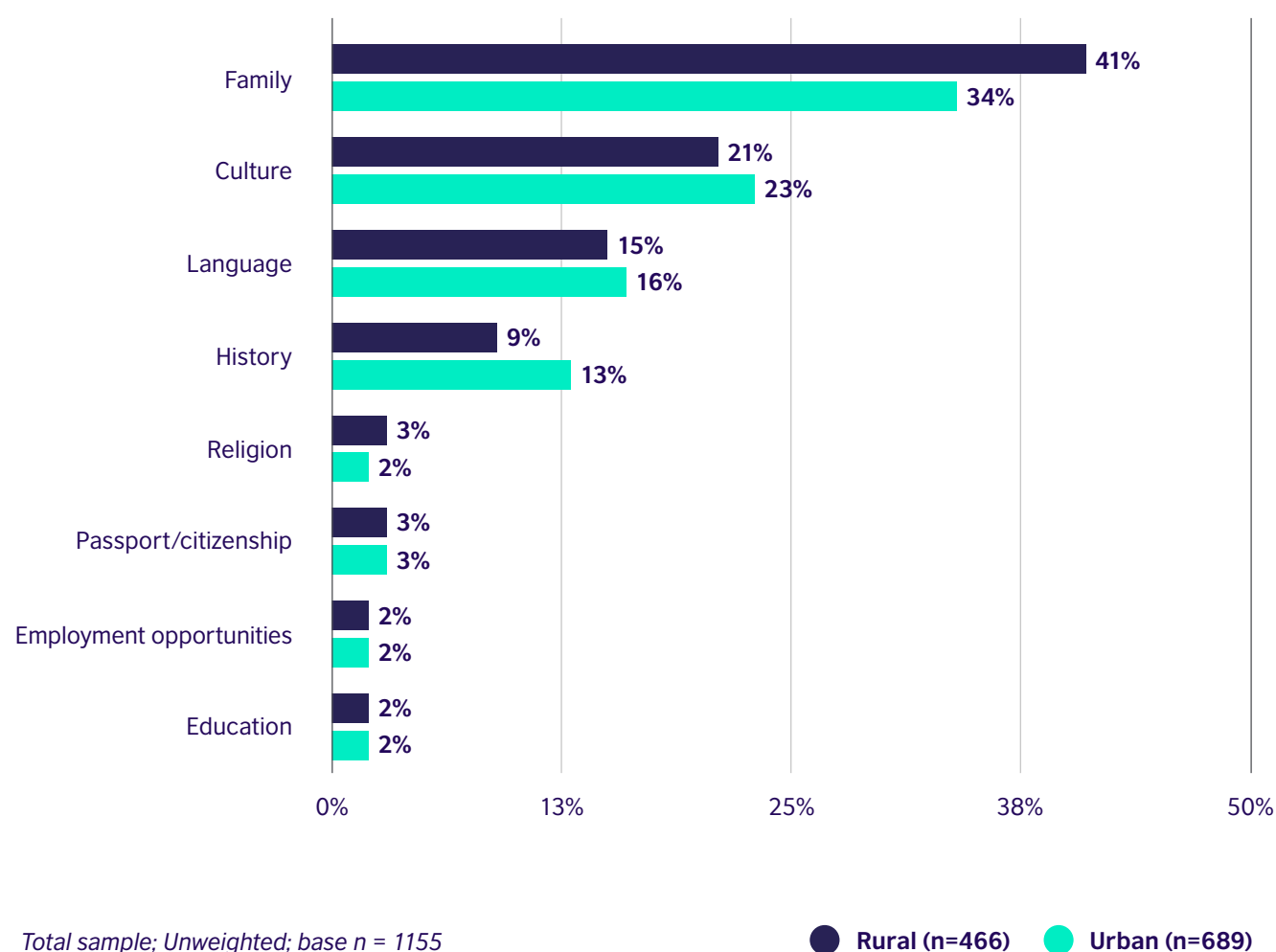
Whilst family remains the most significant factor driving Albanian pride across urban/rural and regional breakdowns, we can see slight variations in this investment of pride. We see that the positive significance of family is slightly stronger for those in rural areas, with just over four in ten rural respondents (41%) showing the family as their source of Albanian pride, compared to just over one in three of urban respondents (34%) (see Figure 7). This can be related to urban/rural cultural characteristics of Albania, where urban society is largely characterised by more individualised ways of living and secondary relationships.³⁷ Comparatively, rural areas of Albania are often characterised by stronger communities, and

social and cultural systems based on kin ties and family, reflecting their attitudes and views on the identity of the country.³⁸

2.1.2. The challenging economic landscape and lack of employment opportunities drives increasing individualism and comparison

Our Next Generation survey finds that the challenges confronting young individuals in Albania are deeply rooted in economic uncertainties and limited employment opportunities, explored further in *Chapter 4. Experiences and expectations*.

Figure 7. What factors make you proud to be a citizen of Albania? By urbanity



³⁷ Fuga, A., & Dervshi, Z. (2010). *Among the Village and Global Civilization*, Dudaj, Tirana.

³⁸ Titili, D., & Nikaj, I. (2023). Between rurality and urbanity: Indicators of social integration of Albanian rural to urban migrants. *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 8(2), 30-41.

This difficult landscape is increasingly challenging and is a key influence and shaper of young Albanians' values, priorities, and aspirations, the consequences of which are outlined below. Anecdotally, qualitative discussions reveal that the pervasiveness of low wages and youth unemployment³⁹ is driving an insularity and sense of individualism among young people, who feel an increasing focus on the individual and immediate family, compared to their parents' generation. They suggest that whilst young people's parents' generation would *"cooperate for the greater good"*, the difficulties in employment and securing a stable wage have resulted in *"everyone in competition about who gets a better job and the highest salary"* (18-24, M, Student, Tirana). Indeed, in a landscape where young people *"are not living, but we are trying to survive"* (Young person with disabilities, F, 25-29, Legal specialist, Tirana), it is understandable that young people focus on their immediate surroundings. A recent 2020 study into how the cultural scores of Albania have shifted over time supports the idea of this

increasing tendency towards individualism and looser interrelations, with a comparatively higher score on the Individualism Index compared to an earlier Value Survey Module in 2013.⁴⁰

2.1.3. Social media exacerbates feelings of comparison, negatively affecting young Albanians' mental health and self-perception

Amid these economic hardships, the pervasive influence of social media acts as a magnifying glass, intensifying stressors through comparison.

The use of social media by Albania's youth is widespread, with most young people using different platforms several times a day (see Table 1). Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and WhatsApp are the most engaged with platforms, often used daily. Other platforms like Pinterest, X (formerly known as Twitter), Telegram, and Viber also show varying degrees of usage, often with a majority using them at least a few times a week or more.

Table 1: Social media use by frequency

Social media platform	1. Once a month	2. A few times a month	3. A few times a week	4. Almost daily	5. Several times a day
Instagram (n= 628)	0%	2%	6%	11%	80%
Facebook (n=497)	0%	4%	11%	16%	67%
TikTok (n=307)	0%	2%	10%	9%	79%
WhatsApp (n=191)	0%	0%	6%	8%	86%
X (Twitter) (n=60)	2%	5%	28%	20%	43%
Snapchat (n=51)	0%	0%	12%	12%	76%
Telegram (n=52)	4%	10%	23%	13%	46%
Viber (n=22)	0%	9%	18%	14%	59%
Pinterest (n=21)	0%	19%	24%	19%	38%

Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

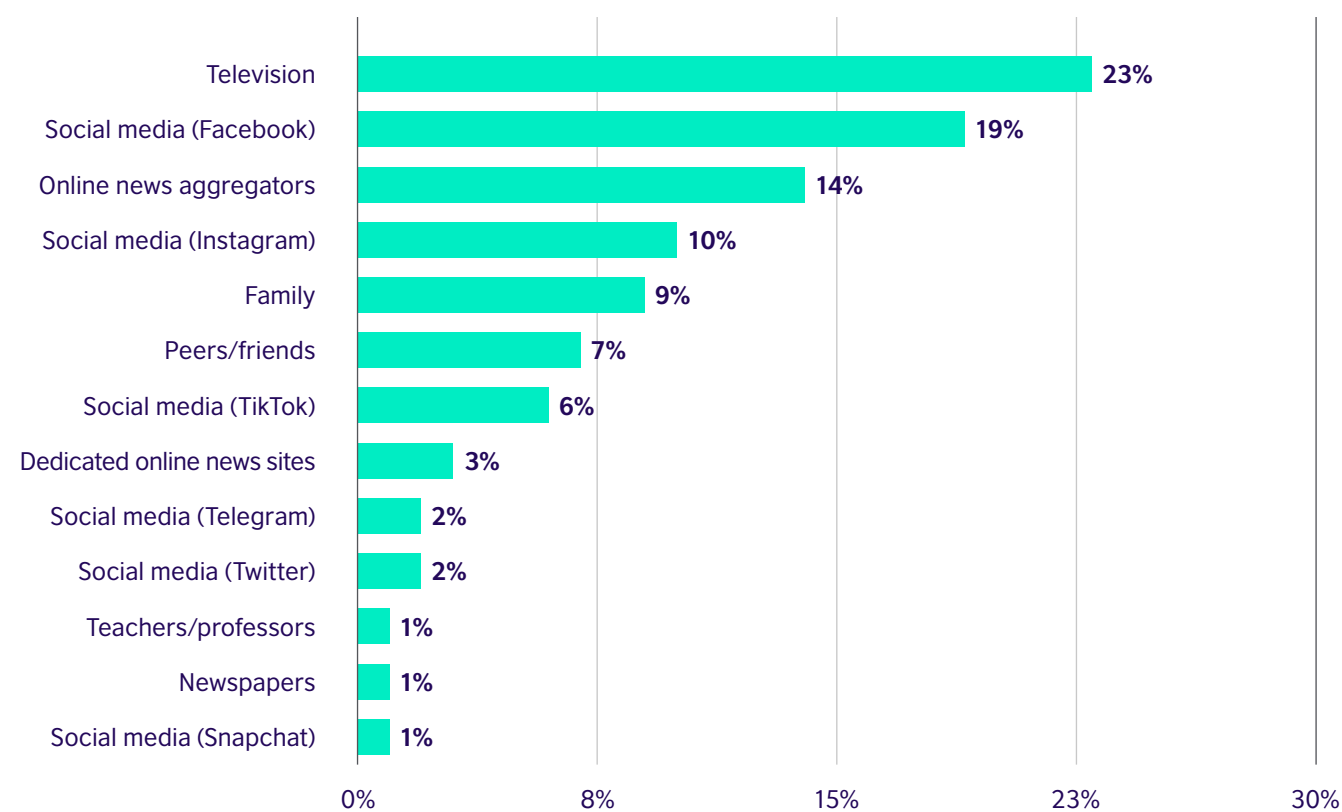
³⁹ Uraguchi, Z. B. (2018). *The future they want: Making sense of youth aspirations in East and Southeast Europe*. Helvetas. www.helvetas.org/en/eastern-europe/about-us/follow-us/helvetas-mosaic/article/December2018/The-Future-They-Want

⁴⁰ Gjana, I. (2020). Hofstede's culture values survey in Albania: How the cultural scores have shifted over time? *Journal of Innovative Business and Management*, 12(1), 49-60. <https://doi.org/10.32015/JIBM/2020-12-1-7>.

Largely, there is not much notable variation between this frequent daily use of social media generally by gender, urbanity, age, and region. However, by platform, we can see trends, where Snapchat is most often used by young men, those aged 18-24, and urban youth, and X (Twitter) is used more often by rural youth.⁴¹

Young people also use social media to get information on news and current events. Whilst television emerges as the prominent source of information (23%), this is closely followed by social media, with a hierarchy of platforms. Facebook is the dominant platform for information at 19%, trailed by Instagram at 10%, and TikTok at 6%. This cascade indicates a preference for platforms that deliver news content in a manner familiar to the audience (see Figure 8). It is noteworthy that no robust statistically significant gender, age, regional or urban/rural bias exists in terms of preference for specific information sources.

Figure 8. When looking at news and current events, where do you get your information?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

⁴¹ **Snapchat several times a day:** 88% Male, 58% Female; 79% 18-24, 63% 25-29; 82% Urban, 67% Rural.
Twitter several times a day: 48% Male, 31% Female; 48% Rural; 38% Urban.

2.2. The outcome of these influences: Young Albanians' value systems and identity

The balance of traditional influences of family, and contemporary influences and pressures of the economic situation and comparison on social media produce an interesting value landscape, with shifting values and increased significance of the personal. The following section explores this shift in detail.

2.2.1. A shift from collectivist to increasingly individualist and personal values

A significant example of a critical shift in the values young Albanians hold is the emphasis placed on altruistic values. Between 2011 and 2014, their importance dramatically waned, with values such as tolerance and altruism witnessing a decline.⁴² Core values show a notable emphasis on personal dignity as a primary principle, which aligns with observations made across former communist Southeast European nations, suggesting shared cultural and societal foundations.⁴³ Whilst personal dignity has repeatedly emerged as the key value across Albanian youth across various studies,⁴⁴

our research builds on these values, with just over a third (34%) of young people most significantly valuing 'honesty' when prompted in our Next Generation survey, followed by 'personal dignity' for just under a quarter (24%) (see Table 2).

Building on the fluctuation of the social identity and values of young people, it is also interesting to note the relative lack of importance placed on community focused values. Values such as tolerance (5%), religious faith (1%), rule of law (4%) and hospitality (2%) are least likely to be selected as most important, contrasting with historical values and culture of Albania such as "Besa", a traditional honour code centred on trust, hospitality, and obligation to their "guest" (miku).⁴⁵

Considering the top values deemed important by young Albanian women and men, it is important to highlight that the overall top three values are ranked very similarly, with the largest deviation at 2%. However, young women are more likely to value tolerance (70% female versus 30% male), and work ethic (60% female versus 40% male). Young men are more likely to rate hospitality (60% male versus 40% female), and rule of law (58% male versus 42% female). This suggests an enduring traditionality across young Albanian men, with continued value in historical values of Albania.

Table 2. Which are the most important values for you personally?

Ranked choice	Personal dignity	Tolerance	Family values	Religious faith	Hospitality	Rule of Law	Work ethic	Honesty
First choice	24%	5%	19%	1%	2%	4%	11%	34%
Second choice	12%	11%	44%	5%	7%	5%	5%	11%
Third choice	28%	11%	11%	6%	7%	7%	11%	20%

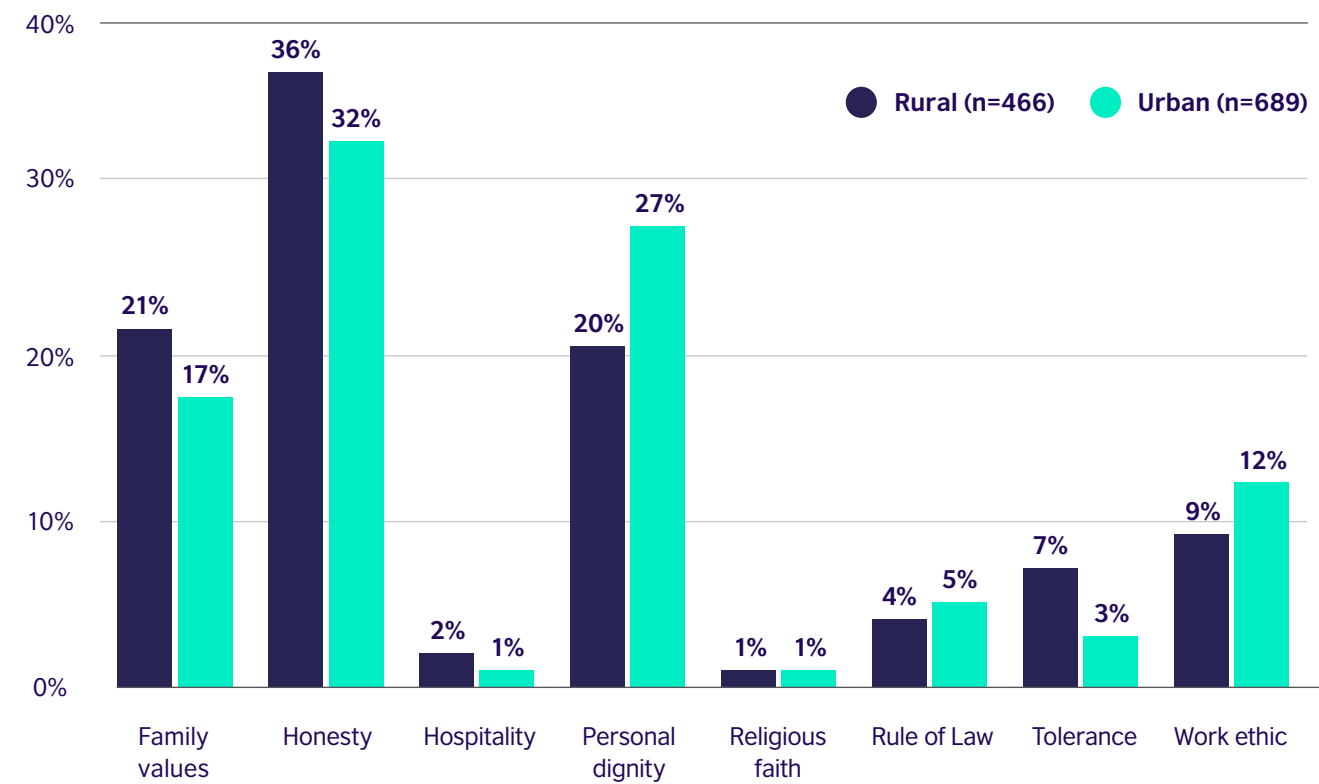
⁴² Çela, A., Kamberi, G., & Pici, E. (2015). Albanian youth 2015: "Slow change, internet dependency and ... EU trust". Freidrich Ebert Stiftung.

⁴³ Çela, A., Fshazi, T., Mazniku, A., Kamberi, G., & Smaja, J. (2013). Albanian youth 2011: "Between present hopes and future insecurities!". Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/10056.pdf>; Flere, S., Hurrelmann, K., Klanjšek, R., Lavrič, M., Reimbold, H., Taleski, D. (2015). Lost in democratic transition? Political challenges and perspectives for young people in south east Europe. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/11505.pdf>

⁴⁴ Çela, A., Fshazi, T., Mazniku, A., Kamberi, G., & Smaja, J. (2013). Albanian youth 2011: "Between present hopes and future insecurities!". Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/10056.pdf>; Flere, S., Hurrelmann, K., Klanjšek, R., Lavrič, M., Reimbold, H., & Taleski, D. (2015). Lost in democratic transition? Political challenges and perspectives for young people in southeast Europe. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/11505.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Schwandner-Sievers, S. (1999). Humiliation and reconciliation in northern Albania: The logics of feuding in symbolic and diachronic perspectives. *Sociologus, Supplement 1*, 133-152.

Figure 9. Which are the most important values for you personally?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155⁴⁶

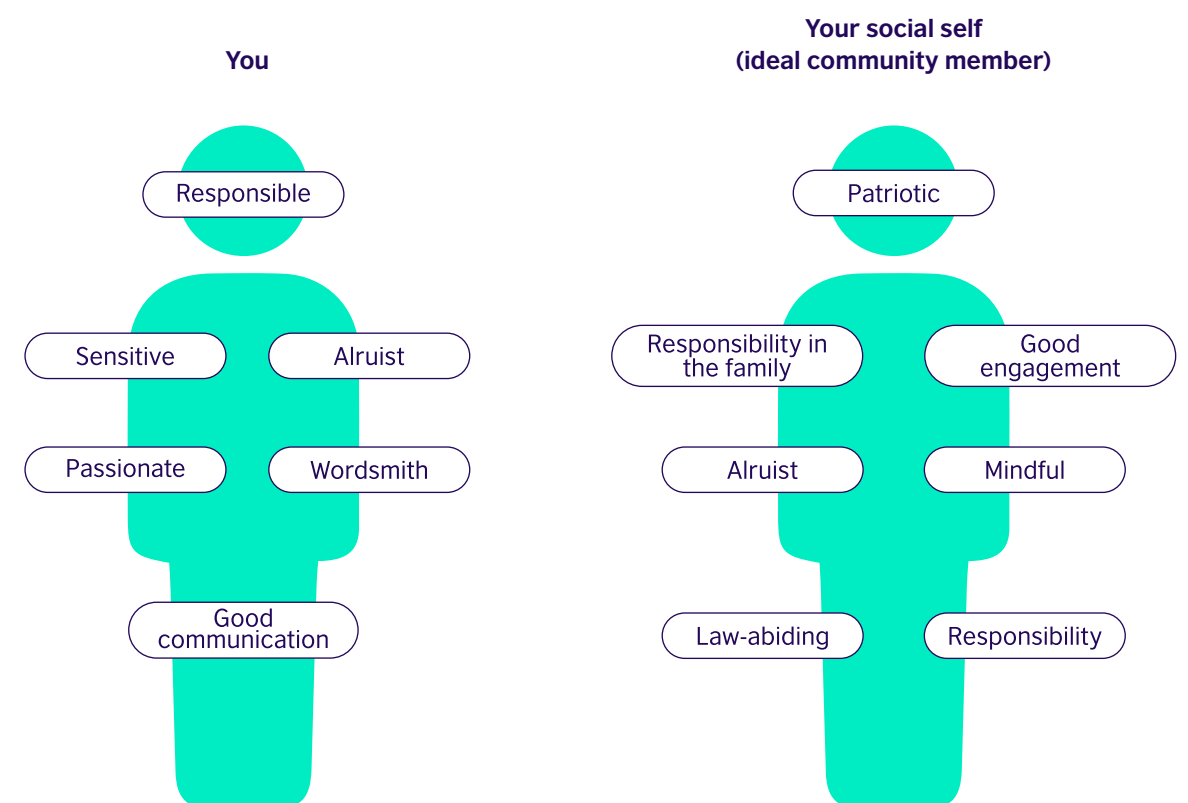
Similarly, we can indicatively see that young people from rural areas rate traditional values more significantly than urban youngsters, with higher rates of family values (21% rural versus 17% urban), tolerance (7% rural versus 3% urban), and hospitality (2% rural versus 1% urban).

⁴⁶ Please note the highlight in blue is only indicating the highest rates, not statistical significance.

The way that young people view themselves seems to be intrinsically linked to their core values. Qualitative discussions and role modelling with young people revealed self-perceptions reflective of the top values found in our Next Generation Survey (see Box 1 for example). Characteristics such as personal integrity, sociability, an understanding nature, and honesty with others are frequently cited by participants, which were in turn attributes that young people wished for the people around them to have. Notably, many wish to be seen by others as they see themselves, while some aspire to be recognised for their success, echoing this focus on personal dignity and focus on the self-mentioned previously.

It is important to note that this doesn't mean that they reject traditional collective values altogether, but rather that they have developed more self-focused values that are based on other people's positive perception of them.

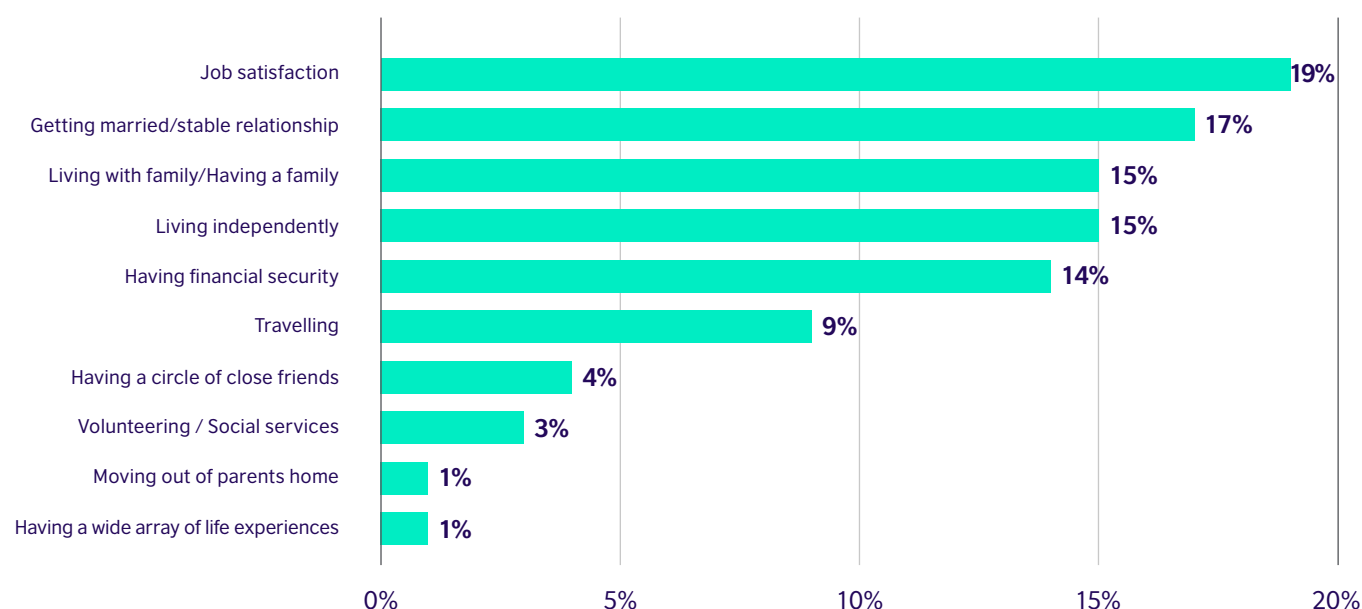
Box 1. 'Mini-me' map from 'Asdi', 25-29, employed in private sector, Durrës



Despite some shifts in cultural values, family is still significant. Given the influence of family in forming value systems explored above, it is unsurprising to see 'family values' as a top three personal value across the whole sample (19% - Figure 10).

In line with this, on aggregate, factors related to positive family relationships emerge as the top contributors to young people's views of personal success and happiness. Almost one third of respondents (32% - see Figure 10) point to family being central to their happiness, with 17% pointing to 'getting married' and 15% choosing 'living with family/having a family'. Qualitative discussions further highlight the centrality of family to success and happiness. The priority mapping exercise emphasises having a family as a long-term goal for many - *"being in a healthy family is very important because, in the end, the family is the foundation of society"* (18-24, F, Student, Youth with a physical disability, Tirana).

Figure 10. Which factors contribute to personal success and happiness (both now and the future)?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

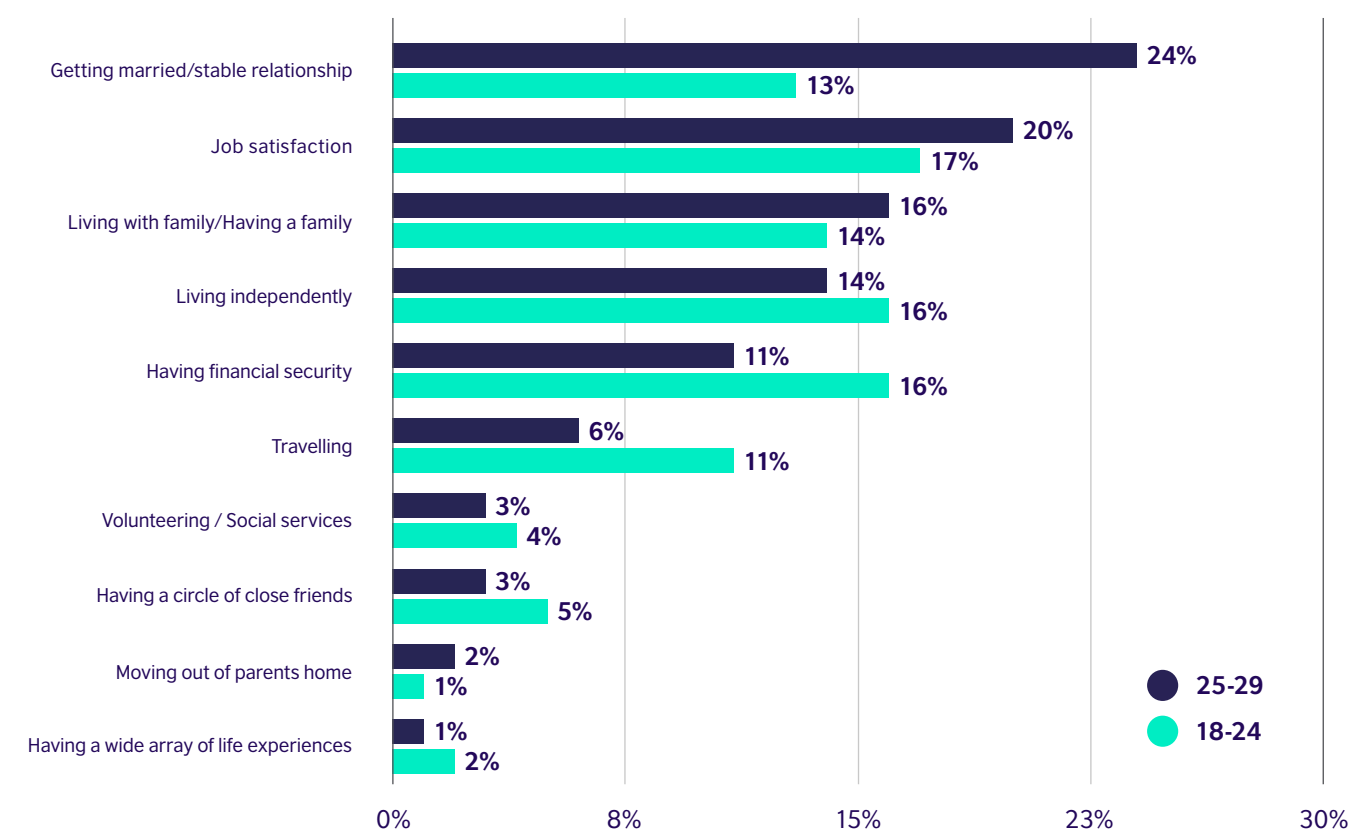
When analysed by age groups, we can see a delineation, where family contributes to personal success for a larger portion of the older respondents, with just under one quarter (24%) of respondents aged between 25-29 reporting 'getting married/stable relationship' as a marker of happiness, followed closely by job satisfaction at 20% (see Figure 11). The qualitative research highlights further context here, providing a clear link between 'job satisfaction' and the goal of starting a family for that age group, as they feel that job satisfaction is often linked to earning a good salary, in turn allowing them to support themselves and their family.

Evidence of individualist values and priorities, particularly for younger youth aged 18-24, can be seen

when reflecting on what they consider most important for happiness and success. Indeed, the key drivers of their happiness are 'job satisfaction' at 17%, 'financial security' and 'living independently' at 16% respectively.

Qualitatively, job satisfaction largely relates to obtaining employment in their studied profession as they finish their schooling. This seems to be motivated by a trend of difficulties in obtaining employment in studied professions, for example, mentions of *"lawyers working as waiters"* (Young person, F, 18-24, full-time student). In this context, graduates are driven to compromise on a lot to access employment in their field of competence, meaning that they look for *"regardless of the level, but something concrete in my profession"* (Young person, M, 18-24, Law graduate, unemployed, Kukes).

Figure 11. Which factors contribute to personal success and happiness (both now and the future by age).



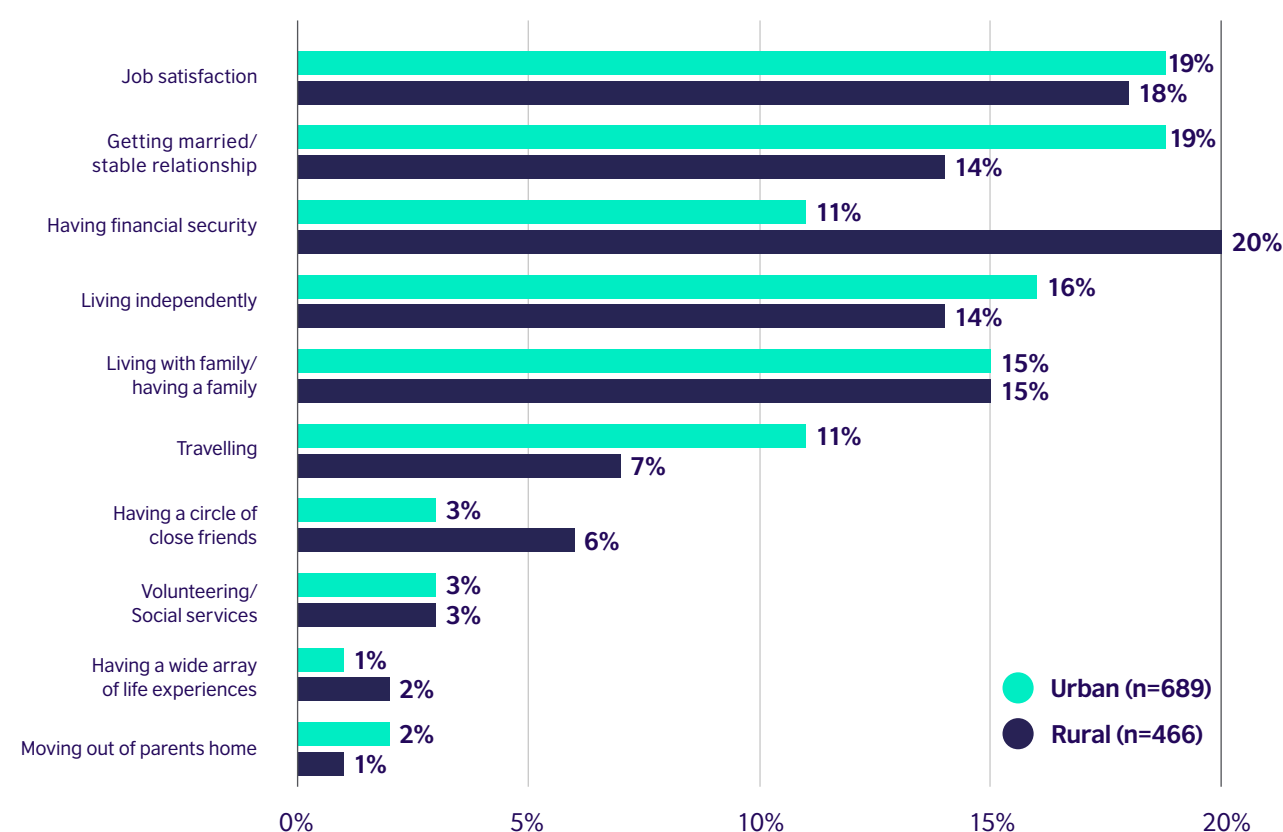
Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

The widespread concern among youth that job offers in the labour market do not match their qualifications is confirmed in previous research, whereby 48% of employed young people in Albania say that their current job does not fit with their profile of education and qualification, and 36% of employed young people say their job requires a lower level of qualification/education than their own.⁴⁷ This is explored further in *Chapter 4. Experiences and expectations*.

Despite a stronger retention of more traditional values in rural areas as shown above, youngsters in rural areas are having to balance this with increasing individualist

economic aspirations. The top three indicators of success and happiness are financial security (20%), job satisfaction (18%), and living with/having a family (15%). Comparatively, youth in urban areas prioritise their happiness slightly differently, with less of an economic focus related to equal value in job satisfaction (19%), getting married/stable relationship (19%), and living independently (16%) (see Figure 12). This speaks to the well-documented lack of opportunities and well-paid opportunities in rural areas, which has driven urban migrations,⁴⁸ and the influence of a difficult economic situation outlined above.

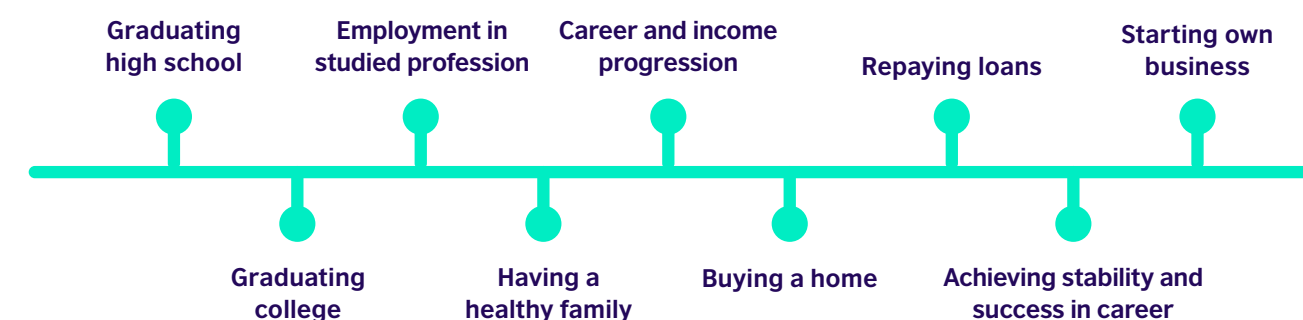
Figure 12. Which factors contribute to personal success and happiness (both now and the future urban/rural breakdown)?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

Qualitative findings confirm that other urgent priorities are tied to generating an income and financial independence. From the life priority mapping, we see those priorities in 'chronological order' exemplified in Figure 13:

Figure 13. Timeline of priorities as identified in life priority mapping



⁴⁷ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15261.pdf>

⁴⁸ Kadiu, B., & Kadiu, E. (2018). Challenges of integration of families that have committed internal migration. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 1(3), 137-147.

2.2.2. Young people also value education as an institution and marker of status and leadership, despite concerns about the Albanian education system

Our Next Generation survey also finds that young Albanians place strong value in education, viewing it as a driver of personal, societal, and global development (see Table 3). Respondents acknowledge education's contribution to societal change (81%), improved understanding of the world (80%) and fostering confidence in tackling challenges (76%). Education is also seen as the key tool to deal with the world's most pressing challenges (38%), followed by research and innovation (18%) and fostering creativity and innovation (13%).

However, interestingly, probably due to the current economic situation, when asked whether young Albanians agree that 'it is more important to pursue a career than to complete their education', answers are mixed. Just over a third disagree with the statement (37%), but 34% agree and 30% neither agree nor

disagree (see Table 3). This suggests that even in a competitive employment market, with increasing pressure to earn money, young people still value the goal of being 'educated' but are also pragmatic about their needs.

Being educated in Albania brings several benefits. It appears to be considered a marker of aspirational status and leadership, and a way to succeed in Albania. Indeed, a common theme from the in-depth immersion sessions with young people across Albania is that 'ideal' community leaders should be educated. Interestingly, the 2019 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung study also found that educational background plays a key role when it comes to choosing a marriage/life partner for young Albanians – 70% of young respondents mentioned education as important or very important.⁴⁹ This could be linked to the belief that a good education is essential for receiving support within Albania. 55% of our Next Generation survey respondents disagree that 'my country will support me even if I don't get a good education' (see Table 3).

Table 3. How far do you agree with the following statements?

How much or how little you agree with each of these statements:	Disagree	Neither agree not disagree	Agree
Education helps drive change in society	4%	15%	81%
Good education can improve knowledge and understanding of the world/ the way things work	4%	16%	80%
Education gives the confidence to take on challenging situations	7%	17%	76%
I believe that society does not adequately reward educational attainment	12%	29%	58%
My country will support me even if I don't get good education	55%	24%	19%
My views, opinions and preferences regarding education are very different from those of my parents	24%	34%	43%

Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

Conclusion

Albania's young people are balancing traditional and modern influences, as well as the collective and individualist values that flourish in these environments. These influences and values manifest across various aspects of the youths' lives, including how they perceive their current lives, invest their time, and view their future. We discuss this in detail in the next chapter.

⁴⁹ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15261.pdf>

Chapter 3

Overall perceptions of life in Albania and views on the future

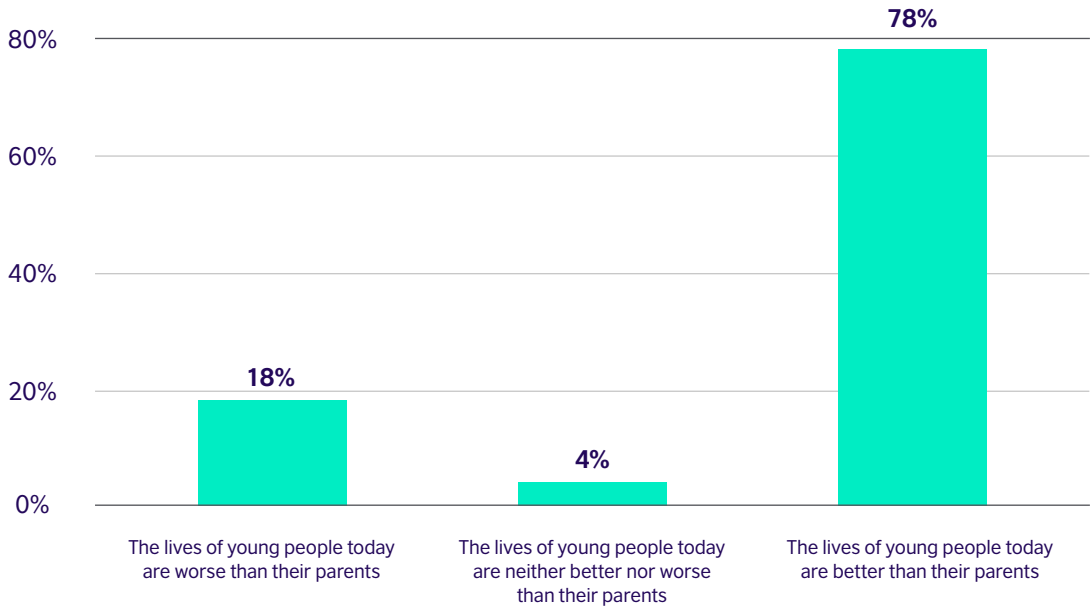
As Albania reforms and changes, so have the lives of its youth. Helped by globalisation, the daily lives of young Albanians now resemble those of most European youths, and in many ways is perceived as improved compared to their parents' generations. Despite their quest for financial independence being gravely impacted by the economic context, they remain optimistic about their future.

3.1. Life in Albania has improved compared to the previous generation, but the standard of living still leaves more to be desired

Just over three quarters (78%) of Next Generation survey respondents indicate that they believe the lives of young people today are better than their parents' (see Figure 14). This is largely linked to the sense of economic opportunity and freedom that today's post-

communist generation benefits from, and the ability to have priorities in life other than work - although the importance of work is a commonality across generations, as explored in the previous chapter. The sense of opportunity is enabled by the freedom of expression, movement, mobility, and education their parents didn't benefit from. Indeed, the previous generation had *"grown up not being free"*, and for them *"the idea of going out or travelling is very strange"*. (Young person, F, 25-29, Employed, Korçë). The economic burden is seen to have been so heavy for the previous generation, today's youngsters largely agree that *"the Albanian youth today has more chances and opportunities than our parents ever did"* (Young person, M, 25-29, employed in family business, Elbasan). However, a not negligible proportion of respondents – nearly 1 in 5 in the survey – still feel that their lives are worse than their parents, highlighting the level of economic marginalisation of some of the youth.

Figure 14. How would you say the lives of young people in Albania today compared to their parents?



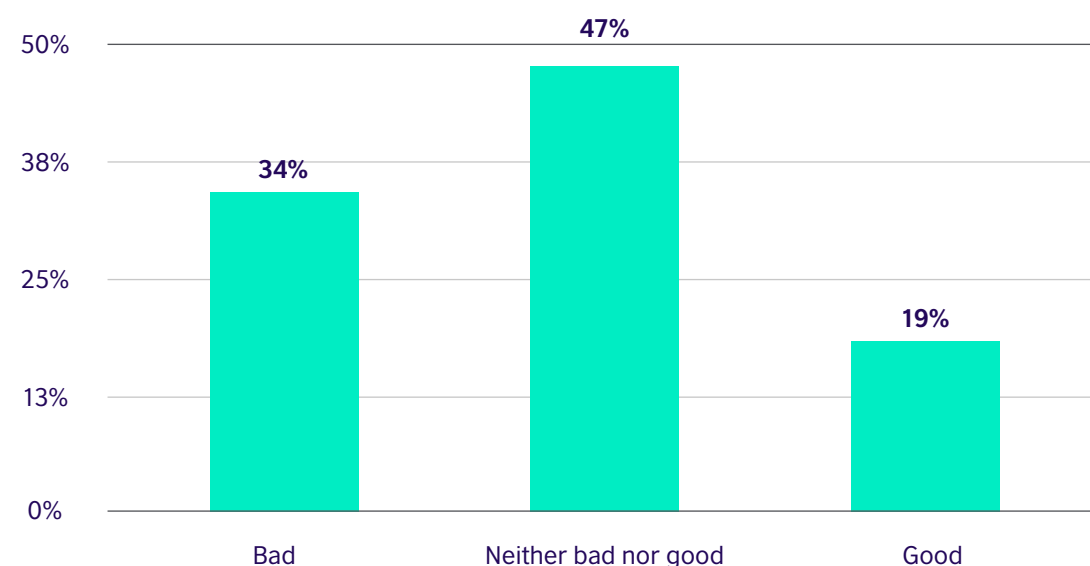
Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

Interestingly, the urban youth tend to view the lives of young people more negatively (worse – 21% of urban versus 14% of rural). Insights from the qualitative discussions further suggest that youth in urban areas have slightly higher expectations for the quality of their current lives, which are currently not being met due to the state of the economy and lack of employment opportunities. Expectations are at least partially established through influence of comparison on social media, as explored in the previous chapter. This different level of expectations from urban and rural youth is not new though. In a 2019 youth study, when asked the main reason for emigrating, already a larger proportion urban youth (60%) chose ‘improvement of the standard of living’, compared to half of the rural youth (50%).⁵⁰

3.1.1. Negative perceptions of the standard of living

When it comes to evaluating their standards of living, almost twice as many young Albanians judge the standard of living to be bad as opposed to good (34% v. 19%) and almost half declares it is neither good nor bad (see Figure 15). Insights from the qualitative workstreams repeatedly points to the increasing cost of living crisis and salary stagnation contributing to a decline in the standard of living. This is supported by the fact Albania has the lowest average wage in the region, with approximately €520 per month whilst in the EU the average wage is estimated to be just over €2000 in 2023.⁵¹

Figure 15. How would you rate the standard of living of a young person in your country?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

⁵⁰ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15261.pdf>

⁵¹ EUROSTAT. (2023). Minimum Wage statistics. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Minimum_wage_statistics.

Older participants (25-29) report more negative perceptions on today's standard of living (Bad - 30% of 18-24: versus 40% of 25-29).

Regionally, respondents in Southern regions of Albania reflect more positively on the standard of living – 34% rate it ‘good’, whilst in the Northern regions, this group represents 19% of those interviewed and 11% in the Central region (see Figure 16). These results echo previous research suggesting a lower standard of living in Northern Albania.⁵² Qualitative data in our study further builds on this, highlighting the economic “neglect” of the North (F, 25-29, Unemployed by volunteering, Kukes), and how this has driven migration, explored further below in Chapter 4.

As well as showing the lowest level of positive ratings on their standard of living, young people from the Central regions also report slightly more negative perceptions of the standard of living across Albania than those from the Northern regions (39% versus 36%).

This may be due to those from the Central regions being most likely to live in urban areas⁵³ and as we saw in the previous section, may therefore be more likely to compare their standard of living to those in other countries and cities and view it more negatively as a result. *“The challenges start from the moment when people open social media networks and there is an unprecedented competition between everyone”* (18-24, F, University student, Gjirokastër)

Echoing this negative perception of the standard of living by young people is the fact that in the survey, poverty (27%) and unemployment (20%) are the two most important issues facing the world today.

Indeed, the World Bank estimates that 22% of Albanians lived in poverty in 2022, a proportion which has been decreasing from 40% in 2016, but the decrease trend could be threatened by current high inflation rates and the cost-of-living crisis.⁵⁴

Figure 16. Regional breakdown of rate of standard of living in Albania.



⁵² Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

⁵³ ‘Central’ Albania is made up of Tirana and Elbasan. Tirana is the Capital city of Albania and as of June 2023, holds 2,761,785 inhabitants (INSTAT, 2023).

⁵⁴ World Bank. (2022). Poverty and Equity Brief. https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/previous/Global_POVEQ_ALB.pdf.

Conclusion

Whilst young people believe that their life is better than their parents', this does not mean they do not face challenges. One could also argue that compared to their parents' lives (most of whom would have lived a significant part under the communist regime), the pressures of finding employment and being successful are new to this generation. To understand this picture further, in the next section we provide a deep dive into the everyday lives of today's youth.

3.2. Young people's daily lives – striving for financial stability whilst looking for work-life balance

The leisure choices made by young Albanians hold considerable significance as they offer insights into their current lifestyles and future aspirations.

Previous research suggests the activities that young people engage in frequently—almost daily or at least several times a week—include listening to music (85% of respondents report doing this very often or often), socialising with friends (70% engage in this activity frequently), watching films (72% do so), unwinding or simply hanging out (69% very often or often), and echoing the importance of the family circle, spending quality time with their families (92% very often or often).⁵⁵

In terms of other leisure activities, half of the surveyed youth in a previous study indicate that they often spend their leisure hours in cafes and bars, while an additional 21% do so occasionally. Café culture in Albania is very strong, particularly in Tirana, where cafés filled with young people is a traditional feature. Of course, income levels greatly impact young Albanians' daily lives, as the youth from lower-income backgrounds are less likely to engage in leisure activities.⁵⁶ Looking at hanging out with friends in Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's 2019 study, nationally, only 1% of youth never did this, compared to 8% of young people from the poorest income bracket surveyed.⁵⁷ This lack of space for leisure and relaxation due to economic worries came through as a common concern in our qualitative research.

To build on previous studies and our survey and provide an in-depth and holistic picture of the daily lives of young Albanians, we engaged 20 young people from across the country in a digital diary and 'day in the life' exercise over a 2-week period (see graphic 1). The exercise provided them with an opportunity to share more details about a typical day in their life, beyond

stereotypes and assumptions. The exercise reveals that daily lives of young Albanians are diverse, representing a broad spectrum of experiences, ranging from vibrant social interactions to balancing the pressures of employment and financial stability, in many ways echoing previous research mentioned above.

However, the exercise also highlights the discrepancies between the daily lives of urban and rural youths. Urban youth and those from Tirana report going out socialising and participating in activities such as the gym, cafes, NGOs, attending church, and participating in group activities such as book clubs or sports events, amongst others. However, young people from rural areas often report socialising with friends and family but also highlight the lack of opportunities for a social life and personal development, with *“not many options to entertain, places to spend their free time, youth centres, or other options to spend the day, develop themselves, and increase their capabilities”* (M, 25-29, employed in a local organisation, Kukes). This is in line with previous findings that suggest that there is a need for rural youngsters, particularly girls, to have more opportunities to improve the quality of their social lives.⁵⁸

Qualitative discussions with young Albanians also reveal that the impact of grappling with the demands of employment and financial stability often come at the expense of leisure and relaxation. This is particularly the case for young people thinking about starting a family who report long working hours, *“up to 12 hours a day”* (M, 25-19, Employed, Tirana), with the pressure of work and ensuring security through salary, leaving no space for socialising, and *“forgetting everything else like pleasure, hobbies, and vacations and yet we fail to be where we want”* (F, 25-29, Lawyer, Tirana).

Interestingly, respondents who indicated having a disability or long-term impairment are significantly more likely to report volunteering in their community than those who did not, (24% versus 13%). Workshops and interviews with a group of youth with disabilities suggests that volunteering and working with charities and NGOs (non-governmental organisations) is often one of the avenues for engagement where they do not face barriers, where *“the support of organisations has always been there”*, (Young person with a disability, F, 18-24, Student, Tirana), particularly when compared with education, politics, and employment.

⁵⁵ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

⁵⁶ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

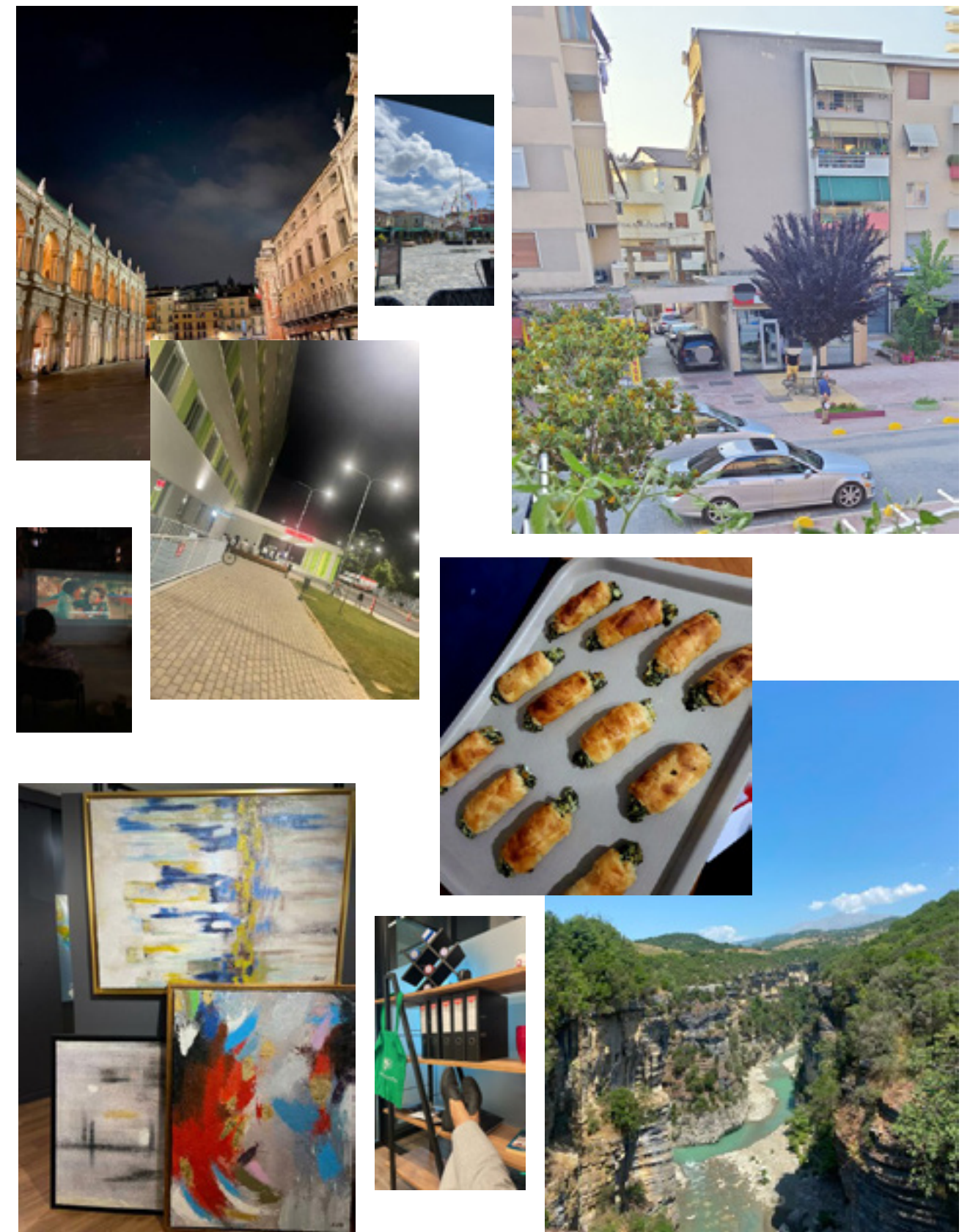
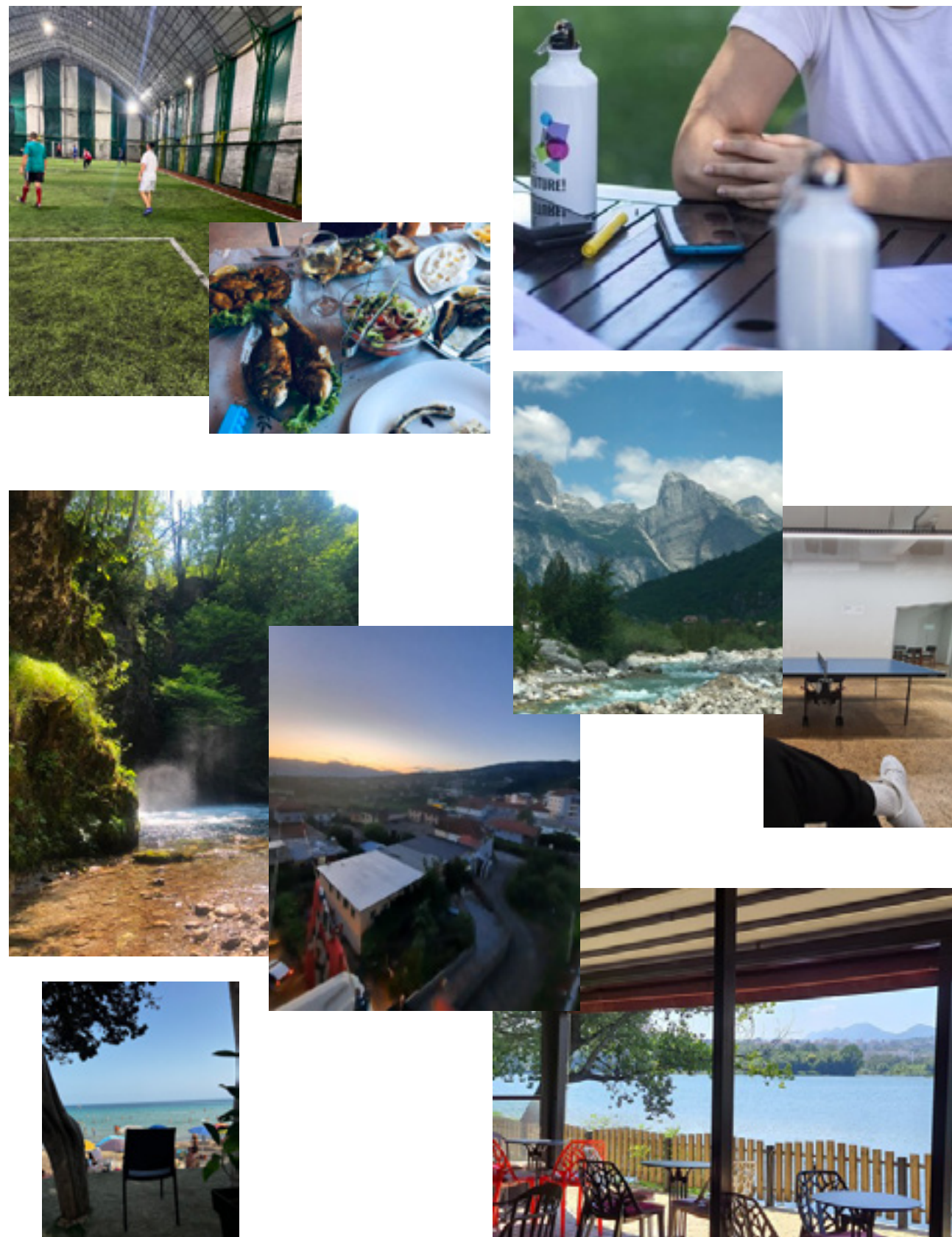
⁵⁷ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

⁵⁸ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.



Graphic 1. Tapestry of Digital diary 'day in the life' submissions.

Photo credits: Online Community Members



3.2.1 ‘Scrolling through the day’ – social media is integral to a young Albanian’s daily routine

We cannot understand young people’s daily lives without mentioning the role of social media. As explored in Chapter 2, the use of social media daily is pervasive across today’s youth, with most youth – across gender, age, urbanity, and regions, using social media several times a day (see Table 3 above). The high percentages of respondents using platforms multiple times a day presents great opportunities for direct interaction/activation with the youth segment going forward.

Conclusion

The fabric of young Albanians’ daily lives is woven with threads of social and familial engagement, social media, work-related endeavours, and the pursuit of financial security as a key priority. Their experiences provide a picture of young people balancing a blend of traditional occupations and contemporary pressures, echoing their traditional and contemporary values – all of which shape how young people view their future.

3.3. Optimism in Albania’s future is connected to personal potential

Optimism and pessimism across age, urbanity, and gender are largely balanced in participants’ views of Albania’s future. As explored above, current concerns include low wages, rising costs and employment opportunities. However, there is overwhelming belief and positivity about the potential for improvement if the younger generation remain in Albania.

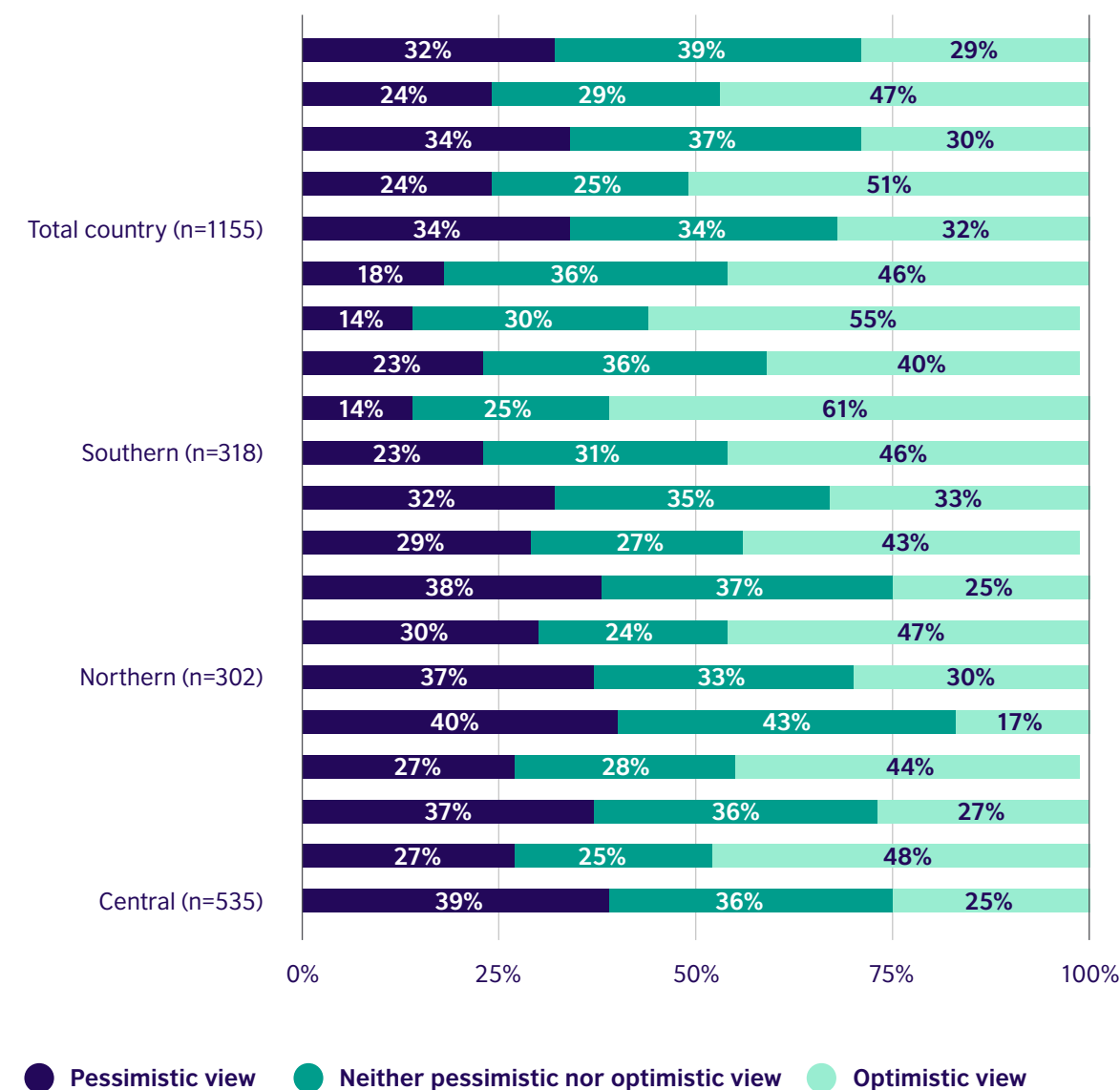
When specifically prompted on which aspects of the future young people perceive positively or negatively, overall, those surveyed feel more optimistic about aspects of their lives they have more control over, including their future career (51%) and quality of life (47%). Within this, younger Albanians aged 18-24 are significantly more likely to report optimism (Optimistic - Career: 57% of 18-24 versus 41% of 25-29; Optimistic – Life quality: 53% of 18-24 versus 37% of 25-29). Qualitatively, participants anticipate a better future, primarily focused on career advancement and personal growth. They view the next five years as crucial for establishing themselves professionally, possibly even starting businesses, as explored in Section 2.1.2. The potential for emigration to other countries is also raised as a consideration as it provides young people with a sense of autonomy and opportunity. In line with this, 75% of respondents also feel empowered to decide about their future.

A common thread across qualitative discussions is the balance of young people who want to leave Albania and those who want to stay and “*make a difference*” (Young person, 18-24, F, High School Student, Vlore). Migration is explored further in the next chapter.

Respondents feel markedly less optimistic when reflecting on the future various communities – namely their local community with only 30% optimistic views, their country (22%), and the global community (29%). This disconnect between personal and national optimism is supported by earlier youth studies, which had found that only 55% believe Albania’s future will be better. But this also suggests that there has been a considerable decrease in optimistic outlooks in the future of Albania compared to earlier studies.

Regionally, slight variations in optimism can be observed, with Southern regions remaining the most optimistic across all indicators (Figure 17), a trend that has remained since previous research in 2019.⁵⁹ In line with these and previous findings above, young people in the Northern and Central regions are the least optimistic when considering their future quality of life (Northern: 43%; Central: 44%; Southern: 55%) and local community (Northern: 25%; Central: 27%; Southern: 40%). Despite this, Northern youth are relatively more optimistic about the future of the global community, with a higher rate of optimism than the total sample (33% versus 29%) and a much more positive global outlook than those from the Central regions – amongst who only 17% are optimistic. This may be linked to recent increases in international support for Northern regions through development programmes or linked to the Northern optimism for migration.

Figure 17. Regional breakdown of outlook on future

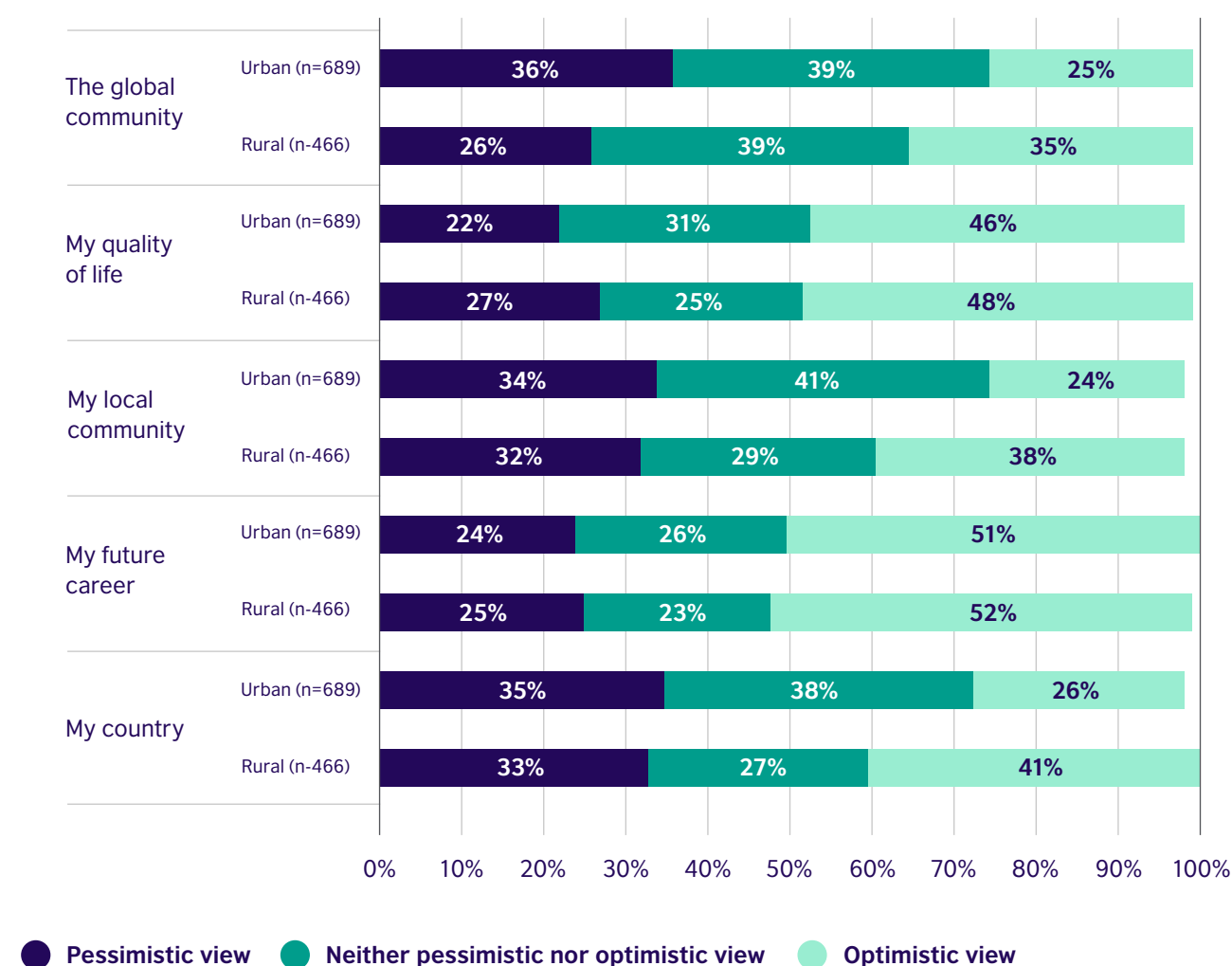


⁵⁹ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

When considering rurality, the split between optimism and pessimism is largely balanced for ‘career’ and ‘quality of life’, in line with the total sample. Where we can see significant variations is when considering ‘global community’, ‘local community’, and ‘my country’ (see Figure 18). Across all these factors, rural youth are more likely to report optimistically – reporting a positive 15-percentage-point difference compared to urban youth for ‘my country’, and a positive 14-percentage-point difference for their ‘local community’. This once again confirms the positivity gap seen between rural and urban youth, evidenced above in the exploration of youth value systems, and supported by earlier literature.⁶⁰

Similarly, rural youth also view the ‘global community’ more positively – over a third of rural youth (35%) view the future of the ‘global community’ negatively, compared to just over a quarter of urban youth (25%). Qualitative discussions with urban youth suggest a certain defeatism when looking at the future of the global community, with a recognition that many of the challenges faced by Albania, are global in nature - generating feelings of uncertainty, where there is a “*global problem of young people who are not sure what they will do in the future*” (F, 25-29 Employed, Durrës).

Figure 18. Breakdown of outlook on future by urbanity.



⁶⁰ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15261.pdf>

3.3.1. Immigration and tourism to Albania contribute to Albania gaining an increasingly positive position globally, giving young people hope in Albania’s future

One key trend promoting hope and optimism for Albania’s future in the qualitative data is the increasing immigration and tourism to Albania, which is seen as an opportunity for positive shifts against stereotypes of Albania internationally.

Indeed, increasing tourism is a key factor in the Government of Albania’s strategy for full recovery following the consequences of the pandemic, and current price crisis.⁶¹ In the summer of 2022, Albania saw an all-time high in tourism, with more than 6.8 million visitors between January to October.⁶² The National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development 2019-2023 aimed at boosting the contribution of sustainable and responsible tourism to Albania’s economic growth, with a unique focus on cultural heritage. In 2023, Albania’s Minister of Tourism and Environment was noted to have said:

“What we want is tourism that is friendly to the environment, responsible and sustainable. We don’t want tourism concentrated only in certain areas, but tourism that focuses on cultural heritage, gastronomy, hiking, rafting, nature ... there are so many little farms that people can go to and enjoy all of this”.⁶³

Our qualitative discussions revealed a sentiment amongst young people that this burgeoning tourism sector is contributing to a slowly improving Albanian global reputation. Prominent tourist destinations and successful Albanian individuals abroad also contribute to a growing positive recognition of the nation. Anecdotally, experiences were shared of encounters with tourists whose first impressions were rooted in stereotypes, often tied to Albania’s past under dictatorship. These can overshadow the country’s

modern realities, however increasingly it is felt that these are being dispelled, where “*the more they visit, the more the news spreads that Albania is a beautiful place with good people*” (25-29, F, employed, Tirana).

While positive strides are being made, there is recognition of ongoing challenges, including the need for improved services to enhance the overall experience of international visitors and more investment in the tourism sector. Moreover, discussions emphasise the importance of dispelling stereotypes through proactive efforts that showcase Albania’s diverse strengths and assets. Youth hold a vital role as ambassadors who can challenge misconceptions and contribute to fostering a more nuanced understanding of Albania’s present and future.

Conclusion

Today’s young people live daily lives that much more closely resemble their European peers than their parents’ generation, with increased opportunities for freedom of choice, expression, and opportunity. Life is considered to have dramatically improved to the future young people feel they can control is bright. However, the structural issues of Albania’s future as a country remain contentious, with clear calls for improvement in economic opportunity, the current standard of living and financial security that can support young Albanians to flourish in all avenues of their lives, from career to personal.

⁶¹ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15261.pdf>

⁶² INSTAT. (2023). *Tourism*. Author. <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/industry-trade-and-services/tourism/#tab2>.

⁶³ Smith, H. (2023). Albania sets its sights on high-end eco-tourism. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2023/feb/24/albania-sets-its-sights-on-high-end-eco-tourism>

Chapter 4

Youth experiences and expectations

Despite having a generally positive outlook on their future, young Albanians feel that their experiences and reality are challenging, with challenges in education, employment, migration, and social marginalisation.

4.1 Education

As part of its transition process towards democracy and open-market economy, Albania has undergone several significant education reforms since the 2000s. These included measures such as the increase in compulsory education age, decentralisation of school governance and the introduction of a competency-based curriculum which have delivered significant improvements on key indicators. Demographic transformations in Albania have had an impact on enrolment rates in domestic education systems, and shares of enrolment in primary education and lower secondary have declined. However, on the positive side, Albania has managed to halve the proportion of early school leavers which was down to 16% in 2019 versus 32% in 2010. In contrast to primary and secondary education, the share of enrolment in tertiary education programmes has significantly increased in Albania – to 25%, 7 percentage-points higher than in 2010.⁶⁴

However, there are questions over whether students are acquiring the essential skills they need and questions on the overall level of funding of education, pegged at around 3.6% of its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) versus 5% on average in the OECD and in markets such as Germany.⁶⁵

As a result, Albania's youth are navigating a complex landscape of educational challenges within which quality of education and preparedness for employment are most prominent. However, it is also important to acknowledge signs of positive improvements at play.

4.1.1. Learning levels remain generally low

Despite significant improvements, issues remain around learning levels. The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 publication reveals that learning levels in Albania remain low compared to the OECD and EU averages.⁶⁶ It also shows however that learning levels have improved quickly. As a result, learning levels are now similar to the average of the Western Balkans economies. Reforms are ongoing to keep improving learning levels and in 2021, Albania approved the National Education Strategy for 2021-2026, which integrates the pre-university education strategy and the university education strategy which focuses on inclusiveness and equality in education, strengthening the competencies of teachers, mastery of lifelong learning competencies, digitalisation of education, and quality management and assurance.

However, a study by the OECD shows that 52% of 15-year-olds have insufficient basic reading skills.⁶⁷ Part of the issue seems to be that the teaching quality in Albania remains inadequate. Despite having recently adopted a competency-based curriculum and having increased the number of years in compulsory education, pre-university education provision is inadequate, especially in rural and isolated areas.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ European Training Foundation. (2022). 'Use it or lose it!' How do migration, human capital and the labour market interact in the Western Balkans? Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-04/Migration_Western%20Balkans.pdf

⁶⁵ European Training Foundation. (2022). 'Use it or lose it!' How do migration, human capital and the labour market interact in the Western Balkans? Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-04/Migration_Western%20Balkans.pdf

⁶⁶ OECD. (n.d.). PISA 2018 Database. Author. https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/?_ga=2.79632212.1174702435.1694535719-1907873432.1694535719

⁶⁷ Maghnouj, S., Fordham, E., Guthrie, C., Henderson, K., & Trujillo, D. (2020). Albania. OECD. https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/2871/file/OECD_Reviews_of_Evaluation_and_Assessment_in_Education_Albania.pdf

⁶⁸ European Commission. (2020). Albania 2020 Report: Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Author. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/albania_report_2020.pdf

4.1.2. Perceptions of the quality of education are mixed, with urban youth more sceptical compared to rural youth

In our survey (see Table 4), perceptions of the quality of education are mixed both in terms of the current quality of education and in terms of improvement. More respondents neither agreed nor disagreed (37%) that the ‘quality of education is good’, while 31% disagree versus 32% who do agree. When asked whether the ‘quality of education in Albania is improving’ 34% disagree versus 30% who agree – showing that overall scepticism remains significant over the performance and improvement of the education system in the country. This is a worsening trend since 2015, where 55% of youth claimed to be somewhat satisfied with the quality of education in Albania, dropping to 38% in 2019,⁶⁹ and now 32% in 2023.

“
Overall scepticism remains significant over the performance and improvement of the education system

Table 4. How far do you agree with the following statements?

How far do you agree with the following statements:	Disagree (strongly + somewhat)	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree (strongly + somewhat)
The quality of education in my country is improving	34%	36%	30%
The quality of education in my country is good	31%	37%	32%
Teachers in Albania are knowledgeable about their subjects	19%	35%	46%

Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

⁶⁹ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Concerns over the quality and improvement of Albania’s education were felt more deeply by urban youth, which has been echoed in earlier research which found that only 11% of young people in Tirana claim to be very satisfied with the quality of their education.⁷⁰

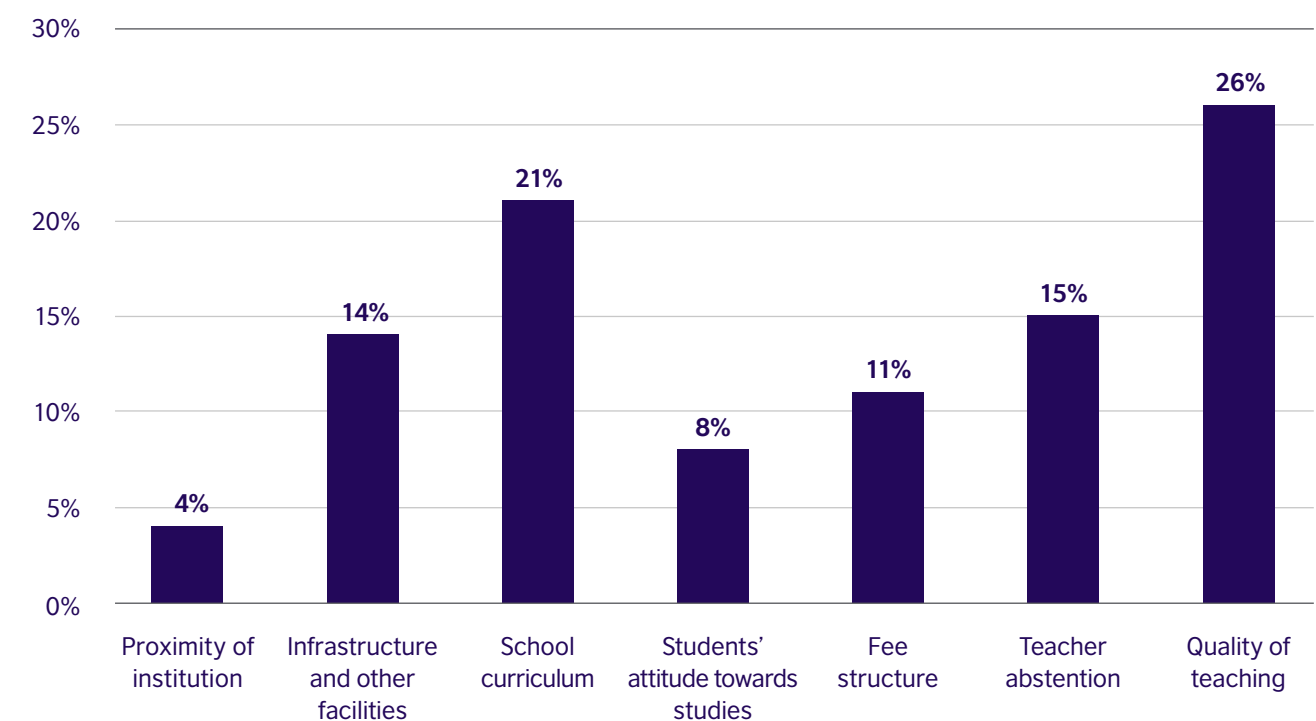
The scepticism over the quality of education between urban and rural youth is particularly evident among the younger age group (18–24-year-olds). For example, 18–24-year-olds living in urban areas are more likely to disagree that the quality of education is improving than their counterparts in rural areas (39% versus 26% respectively). This trend deepens when reflecting on whether the quality of education is currently good, with a significantly higher share of 18–24-year-olds in urban areas expressing disagreement that the quality of education is good compared to their rural counterparts (37% versus 21% respectively).

Further, young rural women reflect more positively on the quality and improvement of education than their urban peers, with over a third (36%) of young

rural women agreeing that it is improving, compared to just under a quarter (23%) of young urban women. It is almost an identical breakdown when reflecting on whether the current quality of education is good (agree: 37% of rural young women; 24% of urban young women). A similar difference is seen across young rural and urban men when reflecting on the current quality of education. Rural men were slightly more optimistic than urban men that the quality of education is good (agree: 38% of rural young men; 32% of urban young men), but were most likely to feel ambivalent, with 1 in 4 neither agreeing nor disagreeing (40% of rural young men; 30% of urban young men).

Our survey also shows that despite 46% of respondents agreeing that teachers in Albania are knowledgeable about their subjects, when prompted on which elements of education require the greatest improvement, just over one quarter of the sample (26%) voted for the quality of teaching (Figure 19), closely followed by the school curriculum with 21%.

Figure 19. Which of the following requires the greatest improvement in our education system?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

⁷⁰ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Indeed, the nature of Albania's curriculum is perceived to overload young people as opposed to other countries, such as the UK (United Kingdom) and Germany, which support students to excel in different areas based on their skills. "... abroad, there's a division from an early age where you have the inclination not to burden your mind. (...) It gives everyone the opportunity to find themselves where they fit and then transform into their talent" (M, 18-24, University student, employed, Kukes).

'Fee structure'⁷¹ is identified as needing improvement by 11% of those interviewed and, interestingly, is driven by female youth who represent 65% of those who think it is a priority (versus 35% male), highlighting a potential gender imbalance in economic accessibility in education.

Concerns about the quality of education discussed so far are ultimately perceived to have a negative impact

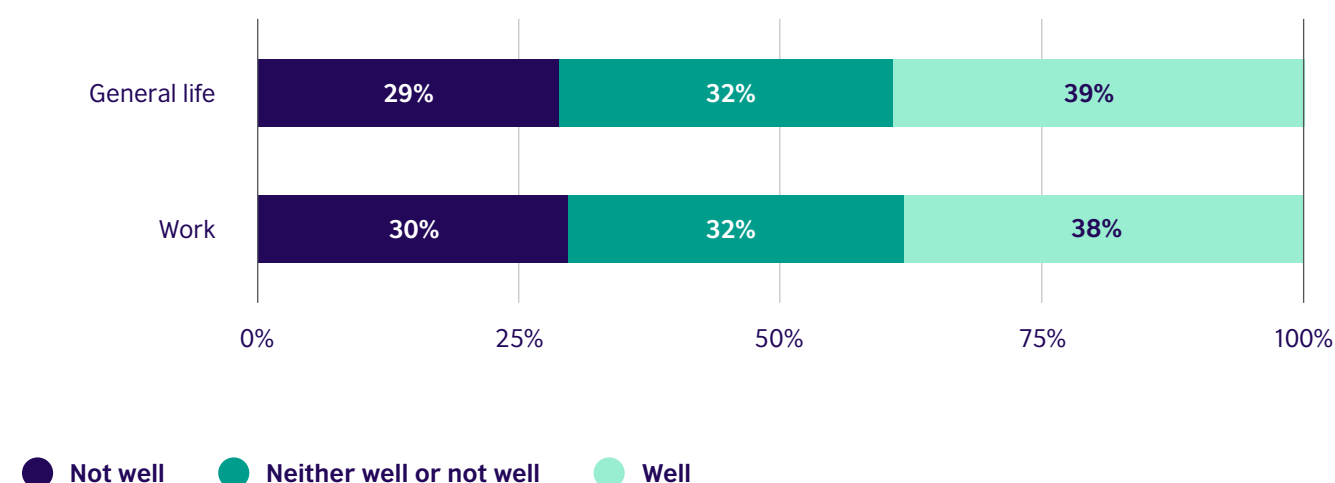
on the education system's ability to prepare the youth for employment.

4.1.3 Scepticism about the ability of the education system to prepare young Albanians for employment

The challenge for any education system is to ensure that it prepares its youth for their future and equips them with the right skills to obtain and sustain employment.

Once again, views of young people are split – just over a third of those interviewed think that education prepares young people for work and for general life well (38% and 39% respectively), but worryingly, just under a third also feel that education has not prepared them well for work (30%) and life (29%) (see Figure 20).

Figure 20. How well do you think your education has prepared you for:



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

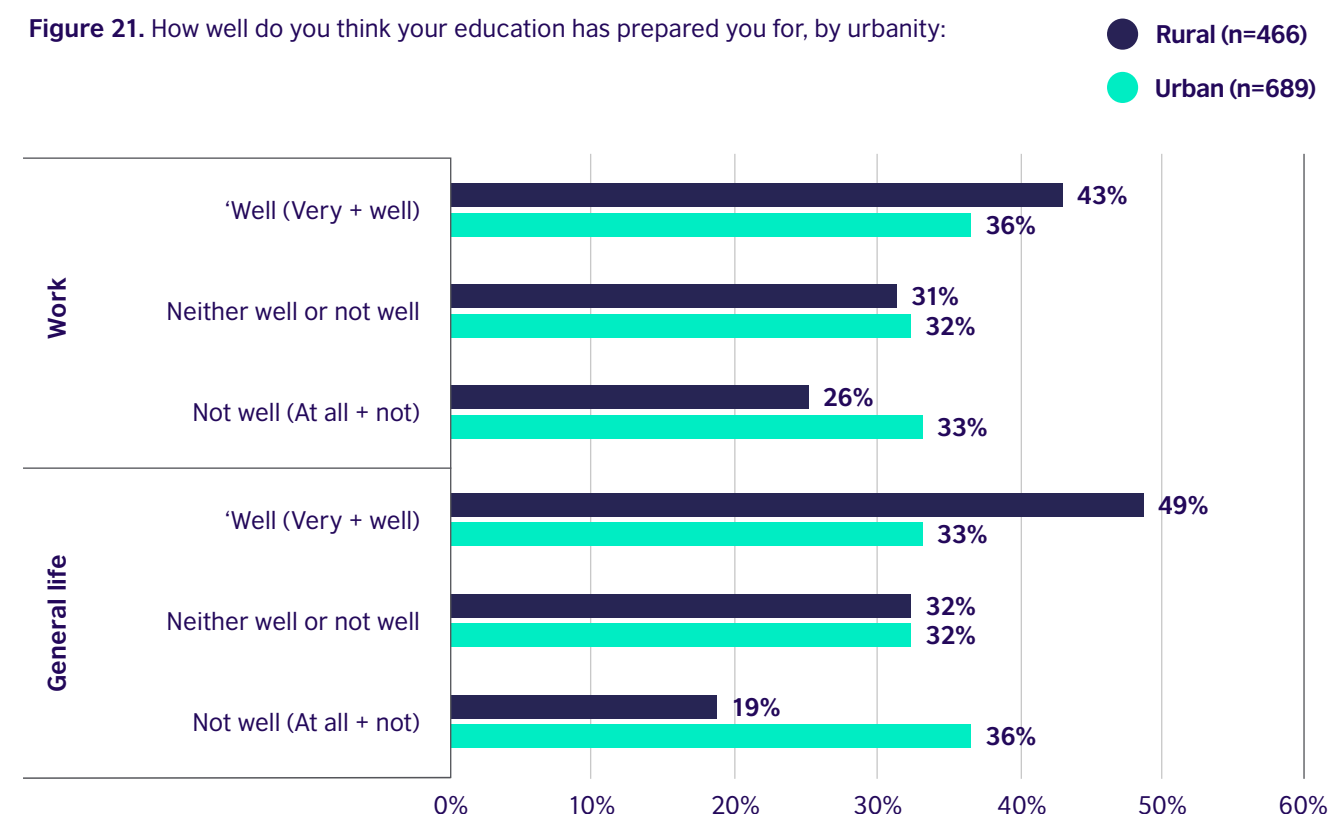
⁷¹ Fee structure refers to how fees are organised and paid, as opposed to the pricing of fees.

Urban, Roma and Egyptian youth are most likely to report feeling that their education has not prepared them well for work or life. Whilst just over a quarter of Albanian (ethnicity) youth reported not being prepared well for work or life (26% respectively), markedly higher levels are seen for Roma and Egyptian youth (not well for work: 86% of Roma youth, and 71% of Egyptian youth; not well for life: 73% of Roma youth, and 71% of Egyptian youth).

Additionally, one third of urban youth (33%) believe they have not been well prepared for work, compared to just over a quarter (26%) of rural youth. Similarly, in general life, almost half (49%) of rural youth believe they were well prepared, compared to only a third of urban youth (33%) (see Figure 21).

Transitioning from education to a suitable job position is a particularly challenging task for Albania's youth, particularly those with higher education qualifications.⁷² Recent data indicates very high 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training' (NEET) rates, which stood at 24% in 2021, especially among those with secondary and tertiary education.⁷³ This discrepancy between educational achievement and job prospects causes real concern and highlights a series of specific issues, including the lack of career counselling in school, the lack of practical experience, the need for better vocational learning options and the need to increase focus on key skills.

Figure 21. How well do you think your education has prepared you for, by urbanity:



⁷² European Commission. (2020). *Albania 2020 Report: Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*. Author. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/albania_report_2020.pdf

⁷³ INSTAT. (2022). *Unemployment in Albania*. <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/statistical-literacy/unemployment-in-albania/>

4.1.4. Career counselling is uncommon, especially in the Northern region

In our Next Generation survey, over two-thirds of young people reported not receiving any career guidance at their last educational institution (68%). Of the 32% who did, half (51%) found their career guidance useful, 35% found it neither useful nor unhelpful and 14% found it not useful, hinting to a need to increase both the quality and the prevalence of such support.

In terms of access to career counselling, there is no significant variation by urbanity or gender. However, youth in Northern regions and the older age cohort of 25–29-year-olds are the least likely to report receiving career counselling. Regionally, only just under a quarter (23%) of Northern youth received counselling, compared to a third (33%) of Central youth, and 1 in four Southern youth (40%) (see Figure 22). Over a third of younger respondents aged 18-24 (35%) report receiving counselling, compared to 29% of 25–29-year-olds, which suggests a positive trend that career counselling may be increasingly offered.

Many young people express a lack of clarity about their career paths prior to university enrolment. *“I noticed lacking in the part where students are advised on the fields they should choose or, in other words, career education”.* (18-24, High School Graduate, Fier).

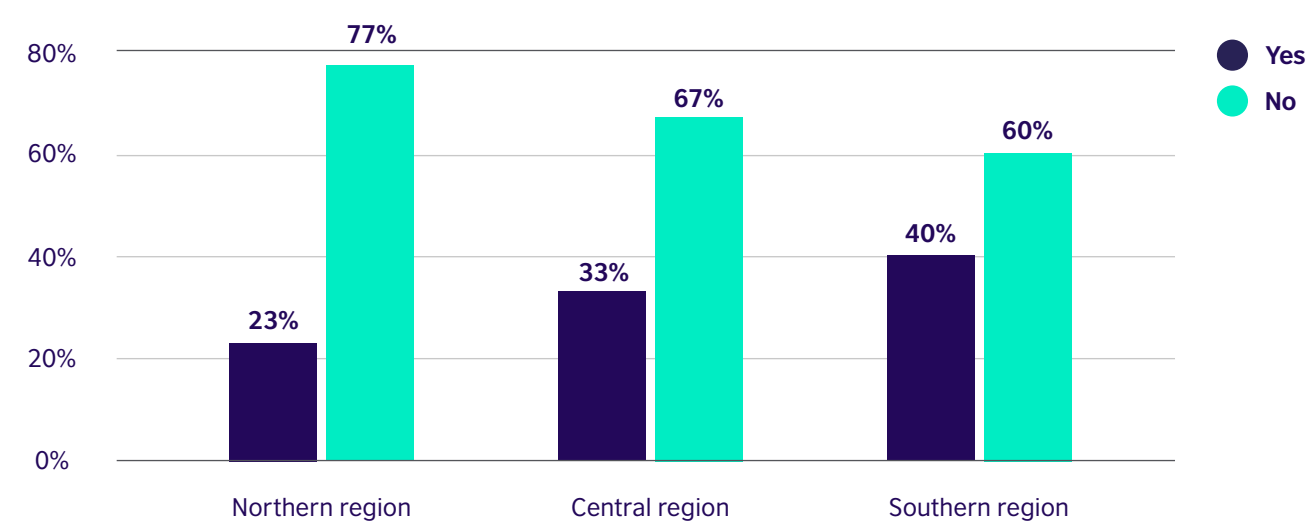
There is also a sense amongst those with higher education attainment that young people are not well-prepared for the job market and lack practical experience.

4.1.5. Lack of internships is a missed chance to prepare young Albanians for employment

The lack of practical work experience and internship opportunities in Albania means that many young people look for jobs without earlier experience. As of 2014, a mere 17% of the youth had engaged in internships.⁷⁴ But many entry-level jobs still require some experience, making it difficult for those who have just graduated to access those jobs. *“After university, (...) when you apply for a new job, they require work experience.”* (Workshop with Youth from Northern Albania).

For this reason, many believe that internships and work experiences should be encouraged through the education system. *“I believe that experiences like internships or practical work experiences should always exist and that these practices should not only serve for learning but also for motivating young people and orienting them”* (Workshop with youth from Southern regions).

Figure 22. Have you ever received career guidance at your last educational institution? By region



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

⁷⁴ Çela, A., Kamberi, G., & Pici, E. (2015). *Albanian youth 2015: “Slow change, internet dependency and ... EU trust”*. Freidrich Ebert Stiftung.

The government has set-up a number of initiatives already trying to boost the number of young people being able to access internships or workplace learning, particularly for those engaged in vocational education, but this should be extended to all streams of the education system to yield real impact.

4.1.6. Significant value is still placed on university over technical education, especially among females and youth from Southern and Northern regions

According to the Regional Cooperation Council, the Vocational Education and Training (VET) school system in Albania attracted only 18% of school students in 2019 (compared to over half of all secondary students in the other Western Balkan economies) – an increase from 13-14% in 2013.⁷⁵ The increase was due to investments made by the government budget and donors in the infrastructure, equipment, and capacity building. But issues remain notably around the ability for students to access workplace learning, according to teachers, only 38% of students receive at least 10% of their learning in the workplace.⁷⁶ On a positive side, the government is trying to increase funding and public/private partnerships.

Regarding vocational options, our survey shows that 34% of those interviewed recognise that technical education may be ‘more the need of the hour’, however value of a formal university education over vocational remains significant (see Table 5). This is echoed by OECD’s recommendations to develop stronger vocational options to better breach the gap between the educational system and the needs of the job market.

Table 5. How far do you agree with the following statements?

How far do you agree with the following statements:	Disagree (strongly + somewhat)	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree (strongly + somewhat)
Technical education is more need of the hour than the formal education	29%	37%	34%
I believe that a university education is more valuable for my career than vocational or technical colleges	28%	32%	41%

Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

⁷⁵ Regional Cooperation Council. (2021). *Study on Youth employment in Albania*.

⁷⁶ Regional Cooperation Council. (2021). *Study on Youth employment in Albania*.

Male and youth in the Central region reported the highest values in vocational education, with one third of Central youth (33%) and 31% of young males disagreeing that a university education is more valuable for their career than vocational or technical colleges, with female, Northern and Southern respondents much more likely to value university education over vocational study for their careers (see Table 6).

The call for a more practical and diverse education system is echoed throughout the qualitative engagements, encompassing non-formal education to accommodate varying strengths and talents. *“I think that our schools have a lot more theory than they should have. They should become more practical, so students can have an easier time understanding what they want to do in the future.”* (18-24, M, High-school student, Dibër).

Table 6. University education is more valuable for career than vocational or technical college by region and gender.

I believe that a university education is more valuable for my career than vocational or technical colleges	Northern	Central	Southern	Male	Female
Disagree (strongly + somewhat)	23%	33%	23%	31%	24%
Neither agree nor disagree	37%	32%	27%	34%	30%
Agree (strongly + somewhat)	40%	36%	50%	35%	46%

Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

4.1.7. Foundational soft skills are highly valued for employment

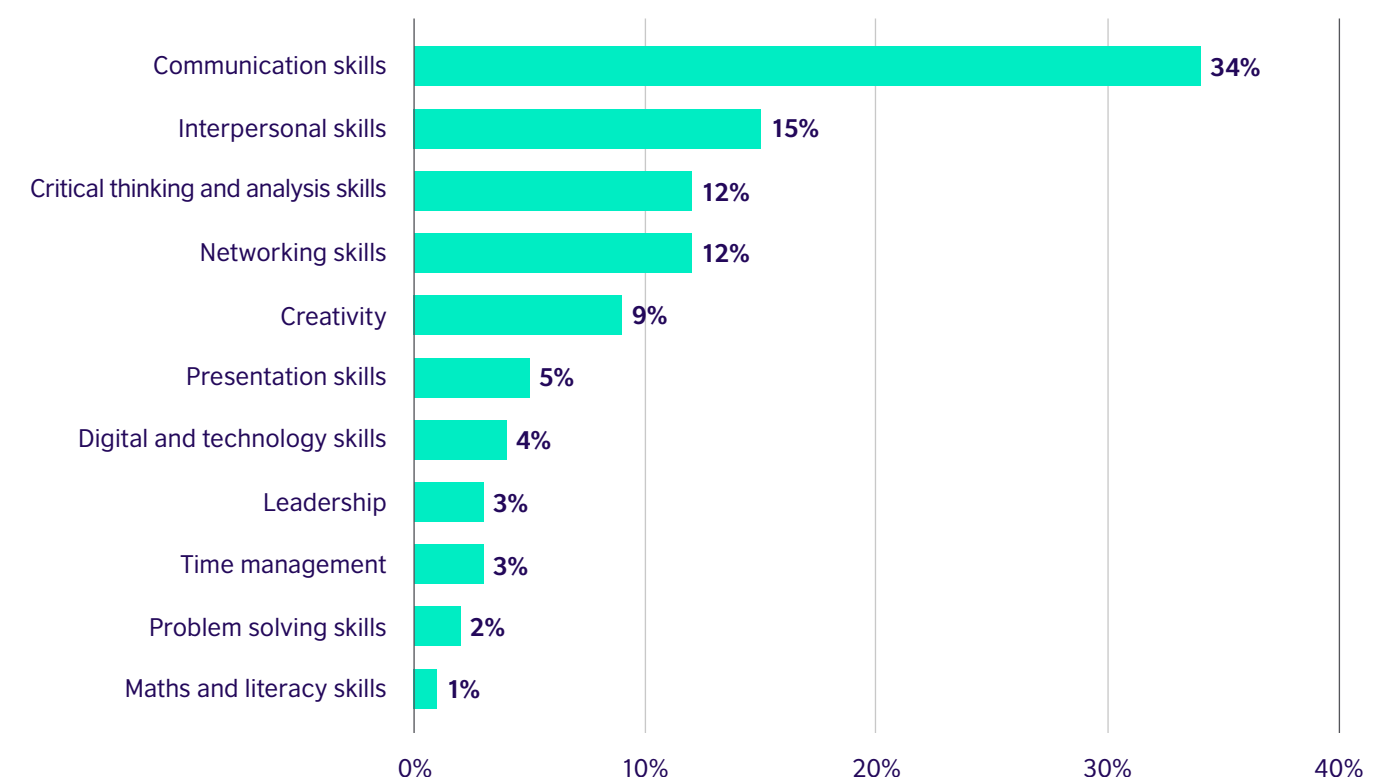
Equipping the Albanian youth with foundational soft skills is an important issue. Communication skills are thought to be by far the most important skills for employment, with 34% outlining the need for these when it comes to employment (see Figure 23 below). Other soft skills such as interpersonal skills at 15%, and networking and critical thinking (both at 12%) follow. Overall, respondents identify soft skills as main contributors to success in the job market, which may need to be more holistically developed in the education system to ensure that young people feel prepared to enter the job market.

There is no significant difference on the importance of skills for employment by age, gender, urbanity or region. We can see that respondents who reached higher levels of educational attainment are more likely

to value critical thinking, with just under a quarter (22%) of Master's or equivalent level respondents valuing this, compared to 12% of Bachelors, 8% of upper secondary and 7% of lower secondary education. This is to be expected, as critical thinking is often a skill cultivated and encouraged at this higher level of education.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills are also generally recognised as being increasingly essential and the government is focusing on this through measures developed as part of the Albanian Digital Agenda 2015–2020 which highlights the importance of integrating the use of ICT in the education system. The National Pre-University Curriculum Framework also mentions it as one of seven key competencies for general and vocational education. However, both are perceived to lack a concrete framework on how digital skills and competencies should be integrated into the learning practice.⁷⁷

Figure 23. What general skills do you think are most important when it comes to employment?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

⁷⁷ European Training Foundation. (2018). *Digital factsheet December 2018: Digital skills and online learning in Albania*. Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2019-02/digital-factsheet_albania.pdf

Overall, the issues highlighted in this section results in a situation where many young people struggle to find employment corresponding to their field of study. A report by the European Training Foundation shows that 48% of employed young people say their job does not fit with their profile of education and qualification, and 36% of employed young people say their job requires a lower level of qualification/education than their own.⁷⁸

This results in situations where many enterprises cannot find staff with appropriate skills for their needs. According, to the OECD, 44% of firms report being constrained by an inadequately educated workforce.⁷⁹ This is particularly acute in the Information and Communications Technology sector – one of Albania’s fastest growing industries attracting foreign investors. But surprisingly, there’s also lack of non-formal education in Albania compounding the skills gap required and the way the education system prepares young Albanians for their careers.

4.1.8. The lack of informal education is compounding the lack of skills inherited from formal education

According to a report from the OECD, in 2016, only 9.9% of Albanian adults aged 25-64 years participated in some form of formal and/or non-formal education, compared to 43.7% in the EU.⁸⁰ Of course the issue is that the context of a work force with relatively low educational achievement – the same report that in 2019, almost half (44.7%) of this age group had low educational attainment (meaning primary education or less), which is double the EU-27 average (21.6%).

One specific area mentioned in the previous section is ICT skills. Given the lack of ICT skills acquired by students in the formal education, Albania could benefit from an IT adult requalification programme. However, Albania’s Employment and Skills Strategy 2019–2022 does not address digital skills as a priority – unlike countries such as Serbia who have developed a comprehensive digital Skills Strategy since 2021.

Before we conclude this chapter on education, it is important to note that strong disparities exist in access to education - especially among marginalised communities like people with disabilities, the Roma and Egyptian communities.⁸¹ Notably, within the Roma community, the educational attainment remains low, with only 1% of its youth having completed secondary education. Similarly, the figure is just 5% for Balkan Egyptians.⁸² More detailed analysis of the level of marginalisation of these communities is explored in the chapter on social marginalisation.

Many of the educational challenges highlighted in this section have a direct impact on the ability of some of the Albanian youth to find jobs when they finish their education – and even more so to find the right jobs. But this is of course compounded by the state of the economy of the country.

⁷⁸ European Training Foundation. (2021). *Albania: Education, training, and employment developments 2021*. Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/CFI_Albania_2021.pdf

⁷⁹ OECD. (2022). *Multi-dimensional review of the Western Balkans: From analysis to action*. OECD Development Centre. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/eeac4c0b-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/eeac4c0b-en>

⁸⁰ OECD. (2022). *Multi-dimensional review of the Western Balkans: From analysis to action*. OECD Development Centre. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/eeac4c0b-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/eeac4c0b-en>

⁸¹ European Commission. (2020). *Albania 2020 Report: Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*. Author. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/albania_report_2020.pdf

⁸² UNESCO. (2017). *Albania education policy review: Issues and recommendations*. Author. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259245>

4.2. Employment

Albania has undergone a remarkable transformation, progressing from being one of Europe’s poorest nations to achieving upper-middle-income status. This achievement is attributed to the country’s ongoing implementation of significant structural reforms aimed at fostering equitable growth, boosting productivity and competitiveness within the economy, generating employment opportunities, and enhancing governance and the delivery of public services.⁸³

However, employment emerges as a key issue in Albania in general, and more specifically for young Albanians. This chapter explores the state of employment in Albania, the issue of youth unemployment, the impact on wages, the concerns about nepotism, job satisfaction and entrepreneurship in Albania, outlining the key challenges and how these challenges may differ depending on their circumstances.

4.2.1 Unemployment and poverty are key issues facing young Albanians

The national unemployment rate of 11.5% hides the extent to which young Albanians find their integration into the economic world particularly strenuous.⁸⁴ Youth unemployment in Albania stood at 27.8% in 2021, nearly twice the EU average of 14%.⁸⁵ Data further indicates that 24% of the youth were neither in education nor employment, or training (NEET) as of 2021.⁸⁶

And of course, this is echoed in the national survey, where poverty and unemployment are highlighted as the two biggest issues facing the world (see Table 7). This is in line with previous nationwide study by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung which indicates that “being poor, unemployed, and/or affected by corruption are the most pressing concerns for young people”.⁸⁷ It is important to note that there are no statistically significant variations across these challenges by age, gender, urbanity or region, suggesting there is much consensus on these issues.

Table 7. Which, if any, of these do you think are the most important issues facing the world today?

	Total
Poverty	27%
Unemployment	20%
Violence and conflict	10%
Economic inequality	9%
Globalisation	7%
Misinformation / disinformation/ fake news	4%
Health crises and pandemics e.g., coronavirus.	4%
Lack of access to education	4%
The state of the global financial system	3%
Economic growth	3%

Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

⁸³ World Bank. (2023). *The World Bank in Albania*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/albania/overview>.

⁸⁴ Uraguchi, Z. B. (2018). *The future they want: Making sense of youth aspirations in East and Southeast Europe*. Helvetas. www.helvetas.org/en/eastern-europe/about-us/follow-us/helvetas-mosaic/article/December2018/The-Future-They-Want

⁸⁵ INSTAT. (2022). *Unemployment in Albania*. www.instat.gov.al/en/statistical-literacy/unemployment-in-albania

⁸⁶ INSTAT. (2022). *Unemployment in Albania*. www.instat.gov.al/en/statistical-literacy/unemployment-in-albania

⁸⁷ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

The survey also shows that the main driver of success for young Albanians is job satisfaction (19% - higher than getting married) highlighting the importance of the employment topic for them. *“The biggest problem is the lack of employment opportunities throughout Albania, there are employment opportunities only in Tirana and Durres. (M, 25-29, employed, Tirana).*

This is particularly the case for many Roma youth and youth with disabilities, who report a lack of employment opportunities and low-paid work because of discrimination, which is explored further below in Section 4.4.

4.2.2. Even well-educated youth struggle to find suitable employment

There is evidence to suggest that higher-educated young people also find it hard to secure jobs that are aligned with their skill level in Albania, and to find a position in their studied profession.⁸⁸ As explored above in Chapter 2, an increasing concern and priority for young people in our research was finding suitable employment in their studied profession.

Research from ETF finds that Albania has a mismatch in terms of the demand and supply for qualified and specialised jobs within the country. The supply of Albanian students, while falling due to the low birth rate, is notably higher than the demand for qualified jobs. As a result, this drives many highly qualified and educated young people to migrate.⁸⁹

Furthermore, highly educated and qualified youth are dissatisfied with the country's working conditions, the significance of clientelist networks and personal connections in securing well-paying jobs, the scarcity of skilled and satisfactory employment opportunities, limited prospects for career advancement, and the overall lack of job security.⁹⁰

4.2.3. Low wages remain a prominent concern for young Albanians

As explored in Chapter 3, living standards are a constant concern for young Albanians, particularly acute in the current context of high inflation. Despite a series of decisions by the Albanian government to increase the minimum wage, according to the July 2023 update of Eurostat, Albania continues to have the lowest minimum wage in the Balkans (excluding Kosovo) when considering purchasing power (PPS (Probability Proportional to Size)).⁹¹ Since June 2023, the national minimum wage in Albania is fixed at €375 per month – placing Albania in the 54th place in a list of 120 countries. It also has the lowest average wage in the region, with approximately €520 per month whilst in the EU the average wage is estimated to be just over €2000 in 2023.

Most respondents surveyed (83%) believe that the biggest challenge faced by young people in employment in Albania are low wages. While other challenges are mentioned – namely long working hours (7%) and unfavourable working environments (2%) – they pale in comparison to the former. This is the case across various factors, including gender, age, urbanity, region, income level and those working in the public vs private sector, with minimal variations within groups. Indeed, 82% of those within the top income brackets (75,001-More than 100,000 ALL) believe that low wages are a key challenge. Similarly, 9 in 10 (90%) with a Master's degree point to low wages. Qualitative evidence points to the belief that the evaluation of work and related wages in Albania are increasingly low compared to other countries, with young people needing a *“fair income for the work they do”* (M, 18-24, Law Student, Berat).

The perception is that even where there are opportunities for employment, salaries remain too low. Young people are concerned about the impact of starting their career on a low wage, on their ability to support themselves: *“(…) due to starting from the extremely low initial salaries (…) it's been keeping me from meeting some of my primary requirements.”* (25-29, employed, from Vlora but living in Tirana).

4.2.4. Concerns around nepotism

Well publicised cases highlight the potential “interventions” and nepotism in appointments in various areas of the public and private sector. This is echoed by those interviewed for this programme - *“The lack of meritocracy is a serious problem. Corruption cases, both active and passive, nepotism, and getting jobs without merit”* (18-24, F, high-school graduate, Fier). Many young people shared the perspective that it is increasingly difficult to obtain well-paid employment without connections in Albania – either politically or with those in high places. *“You finish school, and you must pay again to get a job or have a friend who is a deputy or someone in a position to get you a job.”* (Young person with disabilities, 18-24, unemployed, Tirana).

The specific relationship between political parties and employment opportunities in Albania was also raised, with young people highlighting that *“you have to be politically engaged to get a job”* – (25-29, F, Unemployed, Kukes). There are individual experiences of observing those who return from big cities with employment, along

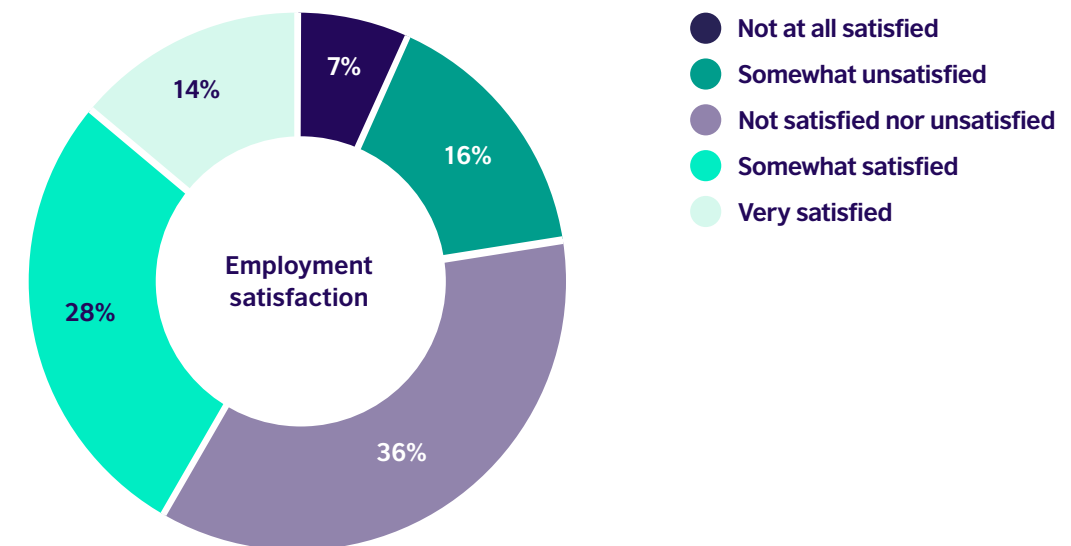
with political affiliations: *“Those who come back, usually return with a friend, with a political party, whatever that means”* (18-24, F, Masters student, Kukes).

Nepotism is perceived to be linked to both obtaining employment and being able to progress professionally. One young person practicing law felt this particularly strongly, suggesting that *“the law here is corrupted. Firstly, they will judge you for being too young and secondly if you don't have connections, you can't go far”* (F, 25-29, Employed, Elbasan).

4.2.5. Job satisfaction is also a concern for young Albanians

There is a level of scepticism regarding young people's current employment situation. Just over a third (35%) of those who currently work are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their situation. However, as explored above in Chapter 2, job satisfaction is a key priority for young people, which according to Figure 24, 43% have achieved (Somewhat satisfied + Very satisfied: 43%).

Figure 24. How satisfied are you with your current employment situation?



Partial sample; Unweighted; base n = 494

⁸⁸ European Commission. (2020). *Albania 2020 Report: Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*. Author. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/albania_report_2020.pdf; Jorgoni, E. (2021). *Albania's preparedness to address the youth employment challenge through the youth guarantee*. European Social Policy Network. [https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24689&langId=en&:text=The%20Youth%20Guarantee%20has%20been,school%2Dto%2Dwork%20transition;Memia,A.\(2020\).Youth\(un\)employmentinAlbania:AnanalysisofNEETandvulnerableyouth.PartnersAlbaniaforDevelopmentandChange.https://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/An-analysis-of-NEET-and-vulnerable-youth-Baseline-study_web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24689&langId=en&:text=The%20Youth%20Guarantee%20has%20been,school%2Dto%2Dwork%20transition;Memia,A.(2020).Youth(un)employmentinAlbania:AnanalysisofNEETandvulnerableyouth.PartnersAlbaniaforDevelopmentandChange.https://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/An-analysis-of-NEET-and-vulnerable-youth-Baseline-study_web.pdf)

⁸⁹ European Training Foundation. (2021). *Albania: Education, training, and employment developments 2021*. Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/CFI_Albania_2021.pdf

⁹⁰ European Training Foundation. (2021). *Albania: Education, training, and employment developments 2021*. Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/CFI_Albania_2021.pdf

⁹¹ Euronews Albania. (2023). *Albania has the lowest minimum wage compared to regional and EU countries*. Author. <https://euronews.al/en/albania-has-the-lowest-minimum-wage-compared-to-regional-and-eu-countries/#:~:text=In%20July%202023%2C%20Albania's%20minimum,wage%20was%20around%20360%20euros>

Interestingly, we see that those who are self-employed/entrepreneurs are extremely satisfied with their employment, with 71% reporting satisfaction, and only 6% unsatisfied.⁹² Employees in the public sector also report higher levels of satisfaction compared to those in the private sector (satisfied: 53% of public sector versus 39% of private sector). It is unsurprising that half of those earning less than minimum wage reported being not satisfied nor unsatisfied, with an additional 29% not satisfied. Those earning 50,001 and above were the most likely to report job satisfaction (Satisfied: 54% of 50,001-75,000 ALL; 60% of 75,001-More than 100,000 ALL), which further suggests the link between job concerns, satisfaction, and wages.

When asked why they are satisfied or unsatisfied, those who are satisfied mention that they ‘like the work they do’ (17%), that they benefit from ‘good income/salary’ (8%), and ‘good working conditions’ (5%), or ‘I feel valued’ (3%) and that their job ‘fulfils their needs’ (3%). On the other hand, unsurprisingly the key factors for those who are unsatisfied is ‘low salary’ (26%), and to a much smaller extent ‘not working in their profession’ (5%), echoing issues previously highlighted in this section.

4.2.6. Mixed interest in entrepreneurship, with lower educated youth in Northern regions least interested in starting their businesses

Albania has always had a remarkably high percentage of self-employment since the transition to an open market economy. According to the World Bank, the proportion of self-employed people in 1991 was 64.4% and remains high in 2023 at 53% - for comparison, the proportion of self-employment in the EU in 2023 stands at 14.4%.⁹³

Young Albanians in the survey reported mixed entrepreneurial aspirations. Understandably, there is slightly less interest in starting a business in the next 5 years amongst the youth, with 38% being interested and 44% reporting not being interested. The main perceived barrier to starting a business is a lack of skills and experience (39%).

Young men, youth from Southern regions, and those with the highest levels of educational attainment report the highest interest in starting a business. Young men are more likely to be interested in starting a business within the next 5 years than young women (Interested: 41% of male versus. 34% of female; Not interested: 39% of male vs. 49% of female). The largest concern for young women in Albania is a mixture of lack of skills and experience (35%), access to finance (25%), and lack of information (21%). Efforts to increase female entrepreneurship should focus on enhancing these areas, with specific female entrepreneurship grants, outreach programmes that provide information on how to start a business, and skills development for the basics in entrepreneurialism.

Regionally, we see that youth from Northern regions are the least interested in entrepreneurship (51% not interested), while youngsters in Southern regions report markedly higher interest at 46% (see Figure 25).

Young people with a Master’s degree were the most interested in starting a business (47% interested versus 34% uninterested). As the level of educational attainment lowers, so does entrepreneurial aspiration, with 64% of those with lower secondary education or below reporting disinterest. This may be linked to a sense of a lack of achievability and preparedness to start their own business, where the key concern for this group was a ‘lack of skills and experience’ (39%).

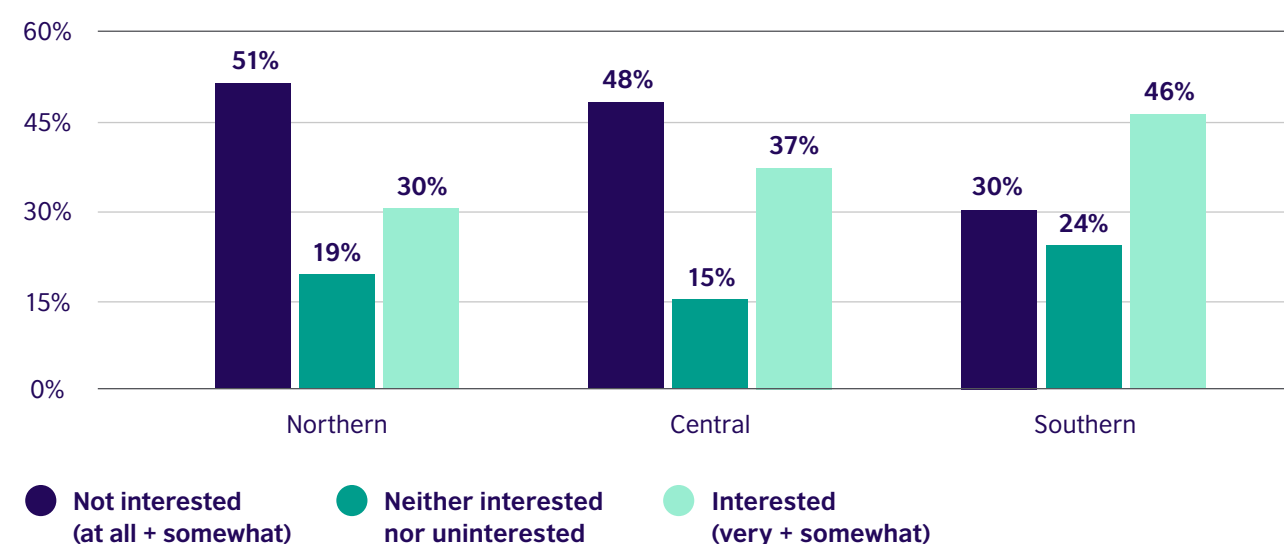
It seems the idea of setting up their own business eventually is attractive - many using the word DREAM: “I always dreamt of having my own business” (Young person from a low-income family, 18-24, F, Fier), “My dream is to have my own business someday” (25-29, F, employed, Dibër). This suggests a certain unattainability associated with self-employment.

Other main concerns with starting a business are around access to finance (23%), lack of information (17%), government regulations and requirements (8%), access to mentors (4%), connections and networks (3%), social/cultural constraints (1%), and gender constraints (1%).

“I think young people need to be empowered to become self-employed. We should give them opportunities for start-ups.” (25-29, F, Unemployed but engaging as an activist and volunteer, Kukës).

Overall, employment remains a major concern for the Albanian youth, and this directly impacts their aspiration to emigrate to other countries – those they consider offer better short- and long-term prospects and more potential for success.

Figure 25. How interested are you in starting your own business within the next 5 years? By region.



⁹² Please note this is indicative due to the small base number, n=35

⁹³ World Bank. (2023). *Albania: Indicators*. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.EMP.SELF.ZS?locations=AL>

4.3. Migration

Demographically, Albania has been affected by both international and internal migration since the 1990s and the trend is still very current today. Between 1989 and 2001, approximately 20% of the total population (710,000 people) lived outside the country. Recent figures show that an estimated 40% of the Albanian population (around 1.2 million to 1.4 million people) has emigrated since the fall of communism in 1991, and approximately 42,000 people leave the country each year on average, establishing Albania as the country with the highest rate of migration in Central and Eastern Europe (relative to its population).⁹⁴ The largest community of Albanians outside of Albania are found in Greece (600,000) and Italy (250,000) – most likely driven by linguistic and cultural similarities and geographical proximity.

As a result, data from the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) from January 2022 shows that the Albanian population stood at 2.79 million people, reflecting a decline of 3.9% since 2011⁹⁵ - 27% of them are aged between 15 to 29 years. Notably, a considerable proportion of these young individuals, as captured in official statistics, have already emigrated. In this section we will explore the motivations for youth emigration, the brain drain phenomenon and the economic impact of emigration on Albania.

4.3.1. Youth emigration is mostly motivated by a quest for better employment

The European Training Foundation underscores that half of Albanians with intentions to emigrate belongs to the 18 to 34 age bracket.⁹⁶ Despite a recent decline in the aspiration to work abroad, dropping to 42% from 50% in 2019, this still constitutes a significant trend.⁹⁷ Unsurprisingly, Western Europe emerges as the preferred destination for economic opportunities as Albania's per capita income is 31% of the EU's average in 2019.^{98/99}

Countries like England, Italy, and Germany emerge as the preferred destinations for these emigrants. The determination of these individuals is not solely restricted to the act of emigration but extends to their anticipated roles in their host nations. Many envisage playing integral roles by assimilating into local cultures, acquiring language proficiency, and significantly contributing to the workforce.

In the survey, two thirds of the young Albanians interviewed (65%) say that they would be willing to move to another country. Qualitative discussions revealed that some feel that Albania is currently seeing another wave of migration, reminiscent of the post-communist, post-collapse of 'pyramid' investment schemes migration in 1997.^{100/101} There is also a sense that despite many young people having left already, there is still a generation of young Albanians, aged 16 and above, who want to leave Albania - *"When looking at my community or friends, a considerable number of people are gone, while the rest that is still here wants to leave and only a few are left in Albania."* (F, 25-29, Lawyer, Tirana).

For example, in Kukës, a largely rural county in Northern Albania and one of Albania's poorest regions, we see marked pessimism on the perceptions of the standard of living, and linked emigration. Recent polling suggests that Kukës has lost more than half of its population to emigration since the 1990s due to the low quality of life and opportunity.¹⁰² Almost three quarters (73%) of respondents in Kukës rated the standard of living in Albania to be 'bad',¹⁰³ nearly twice the proportion of those with the same opinion in Tirana, (39%: 'bad'). This is in line with earlier reports, which found in 2021, living standards in Kukës are 19% of the EU average, comparing GDP per capita according to purchasing power parity, with Tirana reporting a standard of living equal to 42.6% of the EU.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁴ Hoxhaj, A. (2022). *Written evidence submitted by Dr Ando Hoxhaj*. Home Affairs Select Committee. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/114643/pdf/>

⁹⁵ INSTAT. (2022). *The population of Albania*. Author. <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/statistical-literacy/the-population-of-albania/#:-:text=Decreasing%20population,2011%20has%20decreased%20by%203.9%20%25.>

⁹⁶ European Training Foundation. (2022). *'Use it or lose it! How do migration, human capital and the labour market interact in the Western Balkans?* Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-04/Migration_Western%20Balkans.pdf

⁹⁷ Regional Cooperation Council. (2023). *Balkan Public Barometer*. <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/results/2/public>

⁹⁸ Regional Cooperation Council. (2023). *Balkan Public Barometer*. <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/results/2/public>

⁹⁹ International Labour Organisation. (2023). *Statistics in Europe and Central Asia*. <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/europe-and-central-asia/>

¹⁰⁰ In 1997, one third of Albania's population lost money in the collapse of multiple pyramid schemes. This collapse led to mass evacuation of foreign nationals and emigration of Albanians.

¹⁰¹ Jarvis, C. (2000). *The Rise and Fall of Albania's Pyramid Schemes*. *International Monetary Fund*. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2000/03/jarvis.htm>

¹⁰² House of Commons. (2023). *Asylum and Migration: Albania*. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmhaff/197/report.html>.

¹⁰³ Please note the total n=30 respondents.

¹⁰⁴ EuroStat. (2023). *Actual Individual consumption per capita in 2022*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230620-2>.

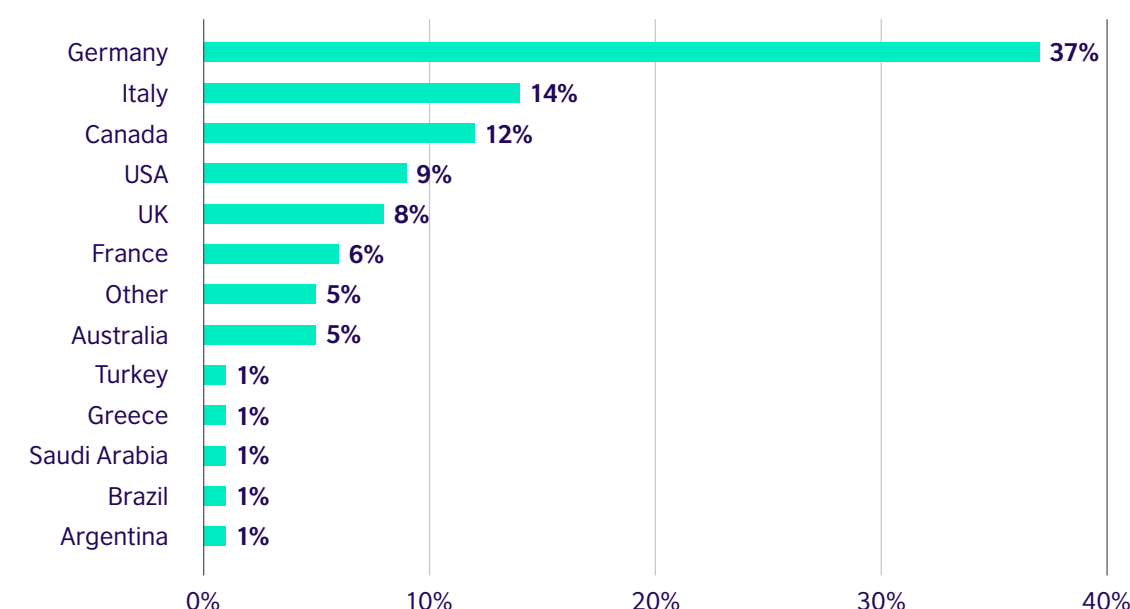
Qualitative insights from young people from Kukës suggest that a major contributor to young people emigrating from the county is the standard of living, which is simultaneously further affecting the economic and social potential of the county. Kukës residents interviewed shared concerns of the symbiotic nature of this migration difficulty: young people have left Kukës due to a lack of job opportunities, which has now led to a lack of inhabitants to both support and work for businesses, lower birth rates, and a population decrease. It was suggested that *"Job opportunities exist, but people are missing, and those who have left before, of course, won't come back when they see that there are no people"* (Young person, F, 18-24, employed, Kukës). Indeed, it appears to feel a self-fulfilling prophecy that high levels of migration out of Kukës due to low living standards feeds even worse standards for those who remain.

And overall, of those who indicated a willingness to move across the sample, 79% reported that they intend to do so to pursue employment opportunities. *"The difference is money. There, they have more money than here, and the idea is that when you work there, you get the value of your work."* (M, 18-24, Young person from a Roma background, Unemployed, Tirana). 91% of young people who are currently unemployed but searching for work and are willing to move indicate their intention to emigrate for employment opportunities.

When considering those who currently have no income (a subgroup largely made up of students), intention to emigrate increases to 84% along with 83% of those on less than minimum wage – hence confirming the strong link between employment prospects, wages, and intent to emigrate. Similarly in rural areas and the Northern region, the desire for international experiences and intention to emigrate is strong. 83% of rural youth who indicated willingness to move are intending to emigrate to pursue employment opportunities, compared to 76% of urban counterparts. Factors such as economic constraints and limited prospects in their home region prompt considerations of emigration. *"In recent years, there has been massive emigration from Kukes. Many young people have left."* (18-24, F, Masters student, Kukes).

Overall, the most attractive countries across all Next Generation Albania survey respondents are Germany (37%), Italy (14%), and Canada (12%) (see Figure 26 below). The UK comes in 5th position, with 8% of respondents considering it most attractive.

Figure 26. Which of the following countries do you think are most attractive to you personally?



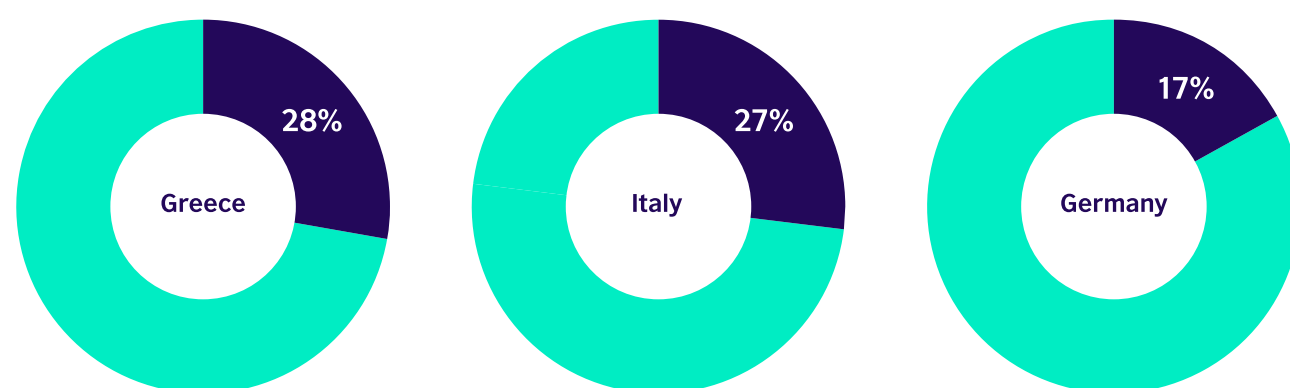
Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

Once again, the primary reasons these countries are perceived to be attractive are employment opportunities (50%) whilst qualitatively there are also related mentions of 'better pay' and 'meritocracy'. Language, history, and culture (22%), education (17%), quality of life (8%), are also significant motivators.

Similar aspirations are echoed by those who had previously lived abroad for more than 3 consecutive months (21% of the survey sample - 61% of which are male versus 39% female). The primary reason for living in another country was due to work (54%), followed by family (24%), and study (13%). The top three countries that respondents had lived in previously are reflected in Figure 27 and unsurprisingly the first 2 of these countries are those with the largest Albanian communities outside of Albania.

Interestingly, the reasons for living abroad are gendered. Male respondents are over three times more likely to have lived abroad for work than those who identified as female (77% M vs. 23% F). Female respondents are significantly more likely to have lived abroad for family than those who identified as male (63% F vs. 37% M), with a relatively more even gender split of those living abroad to study (59% F vs. 41% M).

Figure 27: Top three countries lived in previously most recently.



Partial sample - those who reported living abroad; Unweighted; base n = 242

Two thirds of the young Albanians interviewed (65%) say that they would be willing to move to another country

4.3.2. Albania has the highest human flight and brain drain in Europe

One of the most worrying impacts of this emigration phenomenon is its impact on the educational composition of the workforce and human capital formation, often referred to as "brain drain", experienced by Albania. Our Next Generation Survey found that three quarters of respondents with a Master's (75%) or Bachelors (76%) degree intend to emigrate to pursue employment opportunities.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, emigration rates are higher among the highly educated in Albania according to research by the European Training Foundation, and they also show lower return rates, where the highly educated account for around 40% of the cumulative outflow.¹⁰⁶ *"I know many young people in the technical and information department who have been super capable, and of those people who know many in Albania and they are going abroad. So, they migrated"* (Young person, 25-29, social worker, Tirana).

Fund for Peace's "Human Flight and Brain Drain Indicator" shows Albania has the highest human flight and brain drain level in Europe (8.1/10), and joint sixth highest in the world behind only Samoa, Micronesia, Somalia, Sao Tome and Principe, Syria, and Honduras.^{107/108} The trend of young, and higher educated people being the most likely to emigrate in recent years is opposite to that of around a decade ago, where the desire to migrate was higher among generally less educated young people (had lower qualifications, likely to be unemployed, and/or on a low income).¹⁰⁹

The Albanian government is trying to address this in different ways – for example, facing the increased migration of newly qualified doctors from Albania, a new measure requires them to work in Albania for five years before getting their diplomas.¹¹⁰ However, perceptions of this recent measure are mixed. Some think that *"people are free to follow their hearts and desires for life. I think emigration happens because our country*

does not offer good living conditions" (Young person, M, 18-24, High School student, Vlora) whilst others feel that *"the wrong thing is that if everyone leaves, no doctors will be left, and all the time and effort spent on them will be for nothing."* (Young person, M, 25-29, Computer Engineering student, Berat).

The impact of emigration is also felt generally by those young people still in Albania across employment sectors. They fear that the phenomenon will lead to labour shortages and various economic challenges. *"I would say it has a negative impact because whether we like it or not, the youth constitute a significant part of the workforce."* (F, 18-24, Student, Tirana).

In many ways, these fears are justified as the current rates of emigration are having a real economic impact on Albania, explored in the next section.

4.3.3. The economic impact of emigration

The youth dependency ratio in Albania stands at 24%, underscoring the significance of Albania's young demographic in shaping the nation's future trajectory but also underlining the imperative that they will be pivotal in charting the future direction of Albania.¹¹¹

The persistent issue of youth emigration in Albania is having an increasingly pronounced impact on the nation's socio-economic landscape. The estimated economic cost of emigration is estimated at 1.9% of GDP, highlighting the very significant loss made on investments channelled into human capital.¹¹² The Westminster Fund for Democracy estimates the loss to represent approximately €559 million annually (€14,900 of potential annual GDP per person emigrating).¹¹³ The opportunity costs of emigration on education are also high: education spending is around 3.6% of GDP, combined with emigration costs at 1.9% of GDP, which implies a loss of investment in human capital due to emigration far from negligible.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁵ This is of the 67% of Master's and 62% Bachelor students who are willing to move.

¹⁰⁶ European Training Foundation. (2022). 'Use it or lose it!' How do migration, human capital and the labour market interact in the Western Balkans? Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-04/Migration_Western%20Balkans.pdf

¹⁰⁷ European Training Foundation. (2022). 'Use it or lose it!' How do migration, human capital and the labour market interact in the Western Balkans? Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-04/Migration_Western%20Balkans.pdf

¹⁰⁸ Fund for Peace. (2020). *Fragile States Index Annual Report 2020*. Author. <https://fundforpeace.org/2020/05/11/fragile-states-index-2020/>

¹⁰⁹ European Training Foundation. (2021). How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Albania. Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/migration_albania.pdf

¹¹⁰ Balkan Insight. (2023). Rama Conditions medical degrees on five year work in Albania. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/07/05/rama-conditions-medical-degrees-on-five-years-work-in-albania/>.

¹¹¹ INSTAT. (2015). *Youth in Albania: Challenges in changing times*. https://www.instat.gov.al/media/1583/youth_in_albania_challenges_in_changing_times.pdf

¹¹² European Training Foundation. (2022). 'Use it or lose it!' How do migration, human capital and the labour market interact in the Western Balkans? Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-04/Migration_Western%20Balkans.pdf

¹¹³ Westminster Foundation for Democracy. (2019). *Cost of Youth Emigration in the Western Balkans*. Author. <https://www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/cost-youth-emigration-western-balkans>

¹¹⁴ European Training Foundation. (2022). 'Use it or lose it!' How do migration, human capital and the labour market interact in the Western Balkans? Author. https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-04/Migration_Western%20Balkans.pdf

However, on a more positive note, remittances from those who emigrated are thought to account for at least 31% of Albania's GDP in the second quarter.¹¹⁵

In conclusion, the trend of youth emigration from Albania presents many challenges for the country with far-reaching implications for its socio-economic future. Underpinning these migration trends are a number of economic issues, demographic characteristics, and regional preferences, all of which contribute to a complex picture that invites scrutiny.

4.4. Social marginalisation

As mentioned in previous chapters, social marginalisation is well documented in Albania. This section delves into a crucial aspect of societal dynamics: the reality and impact of discrimination against marginalised groups. Focusing on communities that have historically faced challenges in accessing equal opportunities and rights, such as the Roma and Egyptian communities, and individuals with disabilities, we explore social cohesion and the discrimination that may have shaped their experiences.

Aside from the social consequences of discrimination, the economic tribulations of Albania have disproportionately affected marginalised communities such as migrants, youth with disabilities, the LGBTQI+ community, as well as members of the Roma and Egyptian communities. As highlighted by a report from the European Commission, this has further implications for unemployment, which is notably high, especially among women, the youth, Roma and Egyptians, and those with disabilities.¹¹⁶ Their lived experiences recount tales of inadequate access to resources, pervasive mental health challenges, and encounters with discrimination.¹¹⁷ Equal access to education also remains a challenge. Notably, within the Roma community, the educational attainment remains low, with only 1% of its youth having completed secondary education. Similarly, the figure is just 5% for Balkan Egyptians.¹¹⁸

In a landscape rife with contrasts, the experiences of minorities demonstrate the pressing need for comprehensive policy interventions to counteract the still pervasive social stigmas.

4.4.1. Significant perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation, disability, and race/ethnicity

The landscape of discrimination and tolerance in Albania as perceived by its youth is full of contrasts. Last decade, there was evidence that the youth recognised the existence of discrimination, particularly rooted in regional and rural backgrounds, their tolerance levels for specific communities differ and that across the SEE region, that there was a lack of social sensitivity toward discrimination.¹¹⁹ The same studies also raised concerning observation on intolerance towards the LGBTQI+ community, with a significant proportion of young Albanians expressing discomfort at the thought of homosexuals living in their vicinity.

The Balkan Barometer depicts a general acceptance of the Roma community among Albanians.¹²⁰ More recently though, Albanians (non-youth specific) in the Balkan Barometer show tolerance of Roma communities. For instance, 90% said they would be comfortable working with a Roma, 85% agreed that the government should do more to ensure better housing conditions for Roma (97% for people with disabilities), and 93% said the government should provide affirmative measures – promote opportunities for equal access to Roma population when applying for a public or private sector job (98% for people with disabilities). However, only 17% would be comfortable marrying a Roma.¹²¹

Despite this, the analysis of our Next Generation survey data offers a slightly different picture as discrimination on the basis of 'Race/Ethnic background' is the third most recognised type of discrimination (45% disagree that this group is treated equally to others) following discriminations based on disability (50%) and sexual orientation (48%) (see Figure 28).

These results show not only a much lower level of recognition and acknowledgement of these discriminations versus other studies but more importantly an overall relatively low absolute level of recognition of these discriminations.

Other types of discrimination based on gender, economic status and political views surface clearly in our survey as significant.

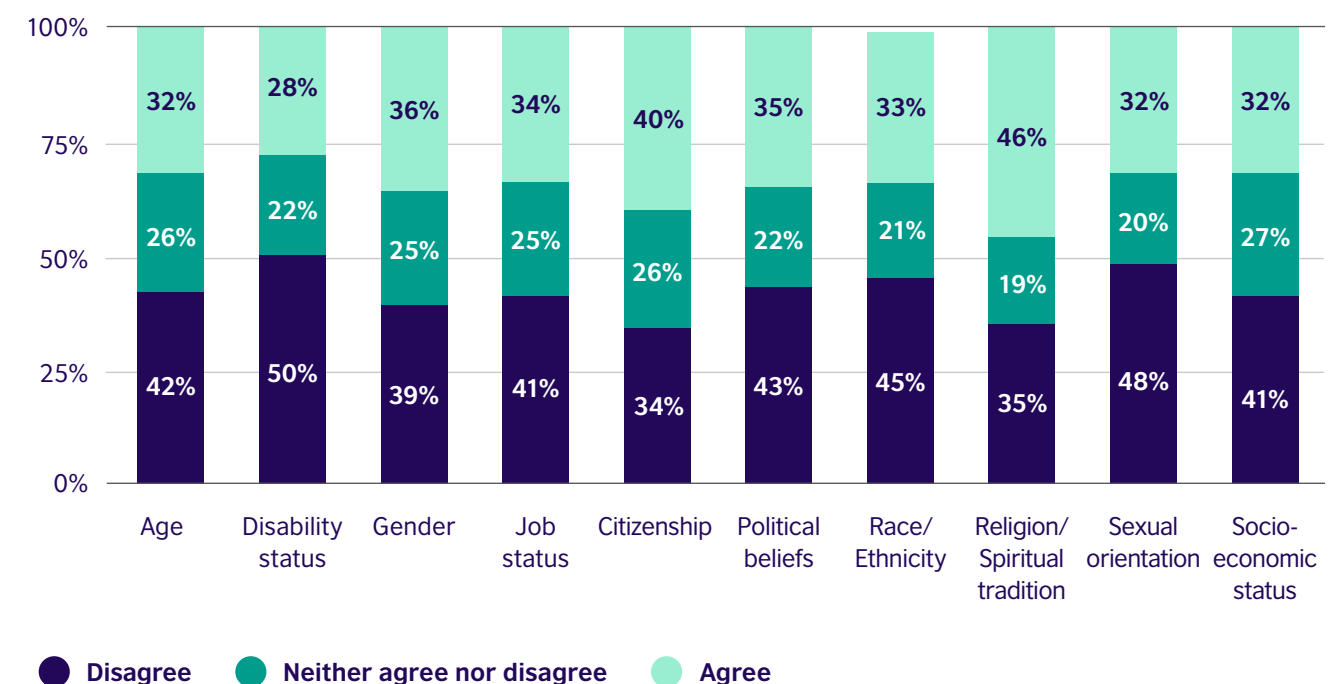
These results show not only a much lower level of recognition and acknowledgement of these discriminations versus other studies but more importantly an overall relatively low absolute level of recognition of these discriminations.

Other types of discrimination based on gender, economic status and political views surface clearly in our survey as significant.

4.4.2. People with disabilities suffer from discrimination but some display high education achievement through sheer determination

According to a report by USAID, there are over 143,000 officially registered people with disabilities in Albania, many of whom experience high levels of unemployment, often lack access to basic medical and education opportunities, and suffer stigmatisation and isolation from society.¹²² Despite Albanian legislation providing for protection of human rights, this has done little to integrate people with disabilities into Albanian society. And unfortunately, data concerning people with disabilities remains scarce.

Figure 28. In Albania, people are treated equally regardless of their...



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

¹¹⁵ Hoxhaj, A. (2022). Analysis: Albania's ghost towns - the crisis that caused the exodus. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2022/nov/analysis-albanias-ghost-towns-crisis-caused-exodus>

¹¹⁶ European Commission. (2020). Albania 2020 Report: Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Author. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/albania_report_2020.pdf

¹¹⁷ Miconi, D., Dervishi, E., Wiium, N., Johnson-Lafleur, J., Ibrahim, S., & Rousseau, C. (2021). Egyptian and Roma Adolescents' Perspectives on Their Developmental Assets in Albania During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of research on adolescence : the official journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 31(3), 576–594.

¹¹⁸ UNESCO. (2017). *Albania education policy review: Issues and recommendations*. Author. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259245>

¹¹⁹ Çela, A., Fshazi, T., Mazniku, A., Kamberi, G., & Smaja, J. (2013). Albanian youth 2011: "Between present hopes and future insecurities!". Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/10056.pdf>; Flere, S., Hurrelmann, K., Klanjšek, R., Lavrić, M., Reimbold, H., & Taleski, D. (2015). Lost in democratic transition? Political challenges and perspectives for young people in southeast Europe. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

¹²⁰ Regional Cooperation Council. (2023). Balkan Public Barometer.

¹²¹ Regional Cooperation Council. (2023). Balkan public barometer. Author.

¹²² USAID. (n.d.). Fact sheet: Support for persons with disabilities. Author. <https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/albania/news-information/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-support-persons-disabilities-and-disability-rights>

Despite the law “On Promotion of Employment of Persons with Disabilities” in 2019 (establishing quotas on employing people with disabilities to 4% percent of all employees) and “On the Adoption of the National Action plan for Persons with Disabilities - 2021-2025”, employment rates of people with disabilities remain low. In our Next Generation survey, 27% of young people with a disability **report being currently unemployed**, compared to 17% of those who do not. According to a report by UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) from 2019, people with disabilities tend to hold low-paid jobs and tend to be the first ones to lose their jobs, this is in the context of higher living expenses (estimated to 2 to 3 times higher than people without disabilities).¹²³ In line with this, 19% of our respondents who considered themselves to have a disability are currently **earning less than minimum wage**, compared to just 10% of those who do not. One of the barriers mentioned is the lack of ability of Employment Services staff to be able to support their needs. Despite this, it is noteworthy that 38% of youth with disabilities in our survey earn within the medium income brackets (34,001-75,000 ALL), compared to 36% of those who do not have a disability, suggesting a potential shifting of opportunity and earning potentially for some youth with disabilities.

Similarly, **access to education** remains more limited for children with disabilities. Figures show that only 75% of children with disabilities are registered in primary school versus 96% of those with no disability.¹²⁴

As a result, adults and children experience **feelings of disconnection and marginalisation**, with the wider society scarcely recognising their value. This is echoed qualitatively in the Next Generation data, exposing societal constraints these young people encounter, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness due to the lack of inclusive opportunities. *“I’ve experienced more depression than things that make me happy. (...) they (my friends) would go to school or do things, and I would be left alone. (...) I started a hairdressing course and completed it, but I didn’t get a job because they didn’t accept me being in a wheelchair.”* (25-29, M, young person with a physical disability, unemployed, Tirana).

Part of the issue is of course the **lack of adequate infrastructure** restricting mobility for people with physical disabilities. *“Infrastructure is the first part, it’s what hinders us from separating the home from the outside life. And another thing is transportation.”*

Every time we want to use public transport, most of the buses have the ramp we need, but they don’t use it.” (25-29, F, young person with a physical disability, employed, Tirana).

However, amidst these challenges, we uncovered a perseverance among most participants with disabilities to achieve significant educational milestones, such as high school completion, bachelor’s and master’s degrees, and the acquisition of valuable skills. In our Next Generation survey, just under a quarter of young people with a disability (24%) reported receiving a master’s or equivalent level – on par with those who do not have a disability (22%). In some cases, these experiences catalysed personal growth and resilience within individuals, fostering the cultivation of inner strengths, effective coping mechanisms, and determination to contribute to positive change. Participants strongly advocated for improved accessibility, inclusive education, and expanded opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

4.4.3. Roma and Egyptian communities experience discrimination in every facet of life – including schooling, housing and employment

The Roma and Egyptian communities are among the most politically, economically and socially neglected groups in the country. According to a 2003 World Bank report, the end of communism in Albania marked the beginning of the Roma’s steep decline into extreme poverty.¹²⁵ Low skills, the collapse of state-run industries and agricultural enterprises impacted harshly on Roma and Egyptians. In addition to widespread societal discrimination, these groups generally suffer from high illiteracy, particularly among children; poor health conditions; lack of education; and marked economic disadvantages. A report by the European Commission in November 2006 noted that 78% of the Roma lived in poverty and 39% in extreme poverty. There are no official figures for the size of either community, but it is estimated that the Roma community counts between 80,000 to 150,000 and the Egyptian community 200,000 to 250,000 by the Union of the Egyptians of Albania (although the figure is contested).¹²⁶

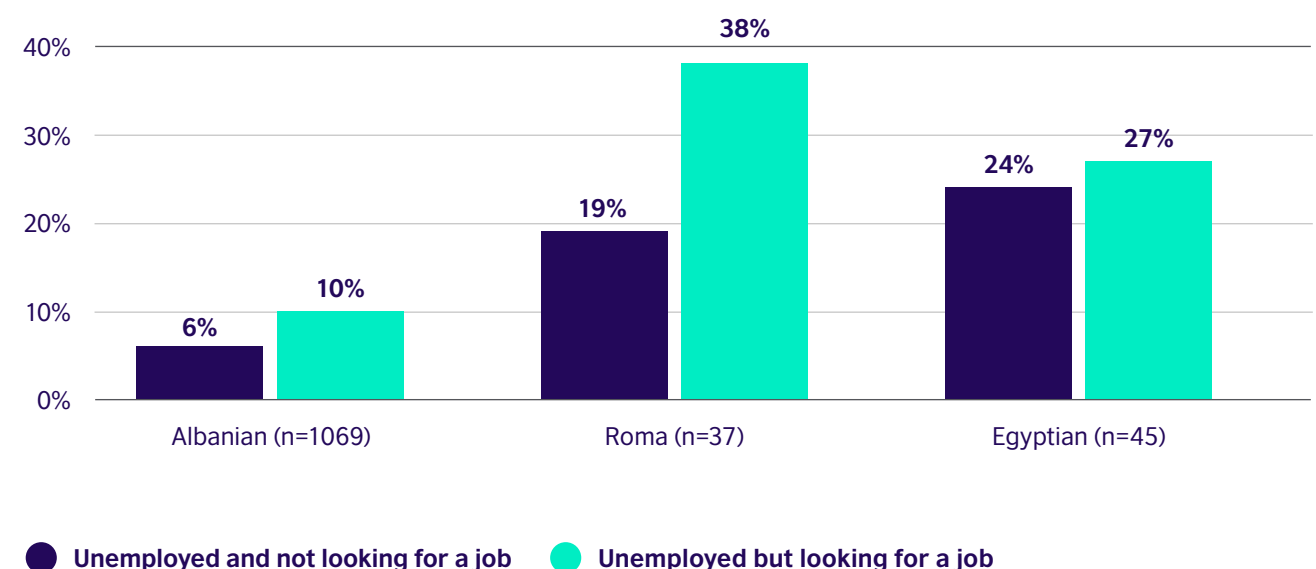
The adoption of the National Action Plans for Roma and Egyptian minorities (2021-2025) affirms the Albanian Government’s commitment to further advance “antigypsyism” and address it in public policies through systemic and structural change in order to contribute to an Albanian society free from discrimination against Roma and Egyptians.

Economic hardships of the Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania is well documented.¹²⁷ Low levels of education have a significant impact on their ability to gain employment and in turn restrict their earning. A UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) report highlights that in Roma communities, only 1% of youth (ages 7 to 20) have completed a secondary education, and this figure stands at just 5% for Balkan Egyptians.¹²⁸ The overall **unemployment rate remains high**, although no official data is available. According to a UNICEF study, almost half of the surveyed Roma are in long-term unemployment. Almost 78% of Roma families are categorised in the “very poor” group.¹²⁹ For all these reasons, those from minority groups feel marginalised,

facing systemic barriers and discrimination, in all parts of life. *“Now, we are in 2023, and young people will listen to some music, and you have Noizy with all those songs, mentioning discrimination and using discriminatory insults like “gypsy,” etc”.* (25-29, M, Roma community, employed, Tirana).

Our Next Generation survey found comparably high levels of unemployment of Roma and Egyptian youth, compared to Albanian (see Figure 29). Whilst only 10% of Albanian respondents are currently unemployed and looking for a job, this increases to 27% of Egyptian youth and 38% of Roma youth. Roma and Egyptian youth are also more likely to report being currently unemployed and not looking for a job compared to Albanian counterparts. Qualitative insights suggest this lack of searching for employment may be linked to a sense of despondency where many Roma and Egyptian youth noted that they are discriminated against in the workplace, so they have more opportunity abroad, as in Albania “just because we are Roma, they won’t hire us” (F, 25-29, Employed in informal sector, Roma youth, Tirana).

Figure 29. Unemployment by ethnicity.



¹²³ United Nations Development Programme. (2019). Employment and vet policy reform in Albania: The Employment Social Fund. Author. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/al/WEB_technical-note-1-.pdf

¹²⁴ Regional Cooperation Council. (n.d.). *Employment of persons with disabilities in Albania*. www.esap.online/download/docs/PWD%20analysis_AL.PDF/547db2cf334355bd41e082516f963c0f.pdf

¹²⁵ De Soto, H. (2000). *Roma and Egyptians in Albania*. World Bank.

¹²⁶ United Nations Development Programme. (2015). Roma and Egyptians in Albania: A socio-demographic and economic profile based on the 2011 census. www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/al/Census-2011-Profile-of-Roma-and-Egyptians-final.pdf.

¹²⁷ UNICEF. (2021). *Albania: Country Office Annual Report 2021*. Author. www.unicef.org/media/115791/file/Albania-2021-COAR.pdf

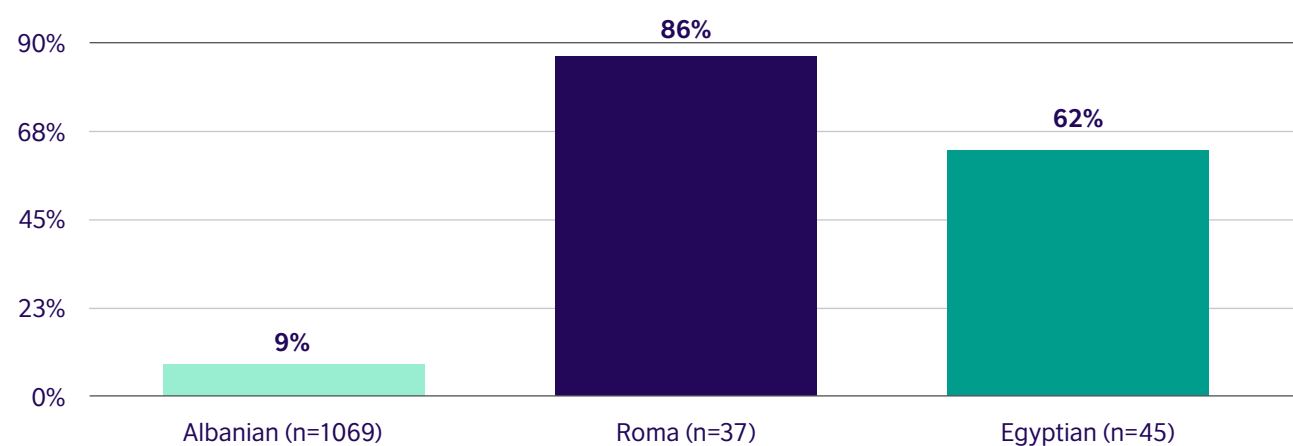
¹²⁸ UNESCO. (2017). *Albania education policy review: Issues and recommendations*. Author. www.unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259245

¹²⁹ United Nations Development Programme. (2015). Roma and Egyptians in Albania: A socio-demographic and economic profile based on the 2011 census. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/al/Census-2011-Profile-of-Roma-and-Egyptians-final.pdf>.

In line with the context, unsurprising patterns emerge when examining responses from different marginalised communities in the Next Generation, showing that marginalised groups exhibit a higher level of awareness regarding discrimination than those from majority groups. For instance, a substantial majority of Roma (79%, n=33) and Egyptian (63%, n=31) respondents disagree that people are treated equally regardless of their race or ethnicity.¹³⁰ In contrast, a significantly smaller proportion (23%) of Albanian respondents share the same perspective. This discrepancy underscores the pronounced awareness and lived experience of discrimination within marginalised communities, reflecting a heightened sensitivity to issues of inequality based on race and ethnicity.

Indeed, young people from the Roma community shared experiences of pervasive discrimination and difficulties throughout their lives, from difficult childhoods marked by financial limitations to a lack of access to proper education and disconnection from society. For most Roma youth (86%) in our survey, the highest level of education attained was lower secondary education or below, followed by 62% of Egyptian youth (Figure 30). When compared with only 9% of Albanian youth, we see a stark contrast speaking to various levels of exclusion. Qualitatively, some Roma youth report feelings of being viewed as 'other'. As one young person shared: *"They see us with a different eye. Imagine speaking your language, and they say "gypsy""* (25-29, M, From the Roma community, Unemployed, Tirana).

Figure 30. Respondents whose highest level of education is lower secondary education or below by ethnicity.



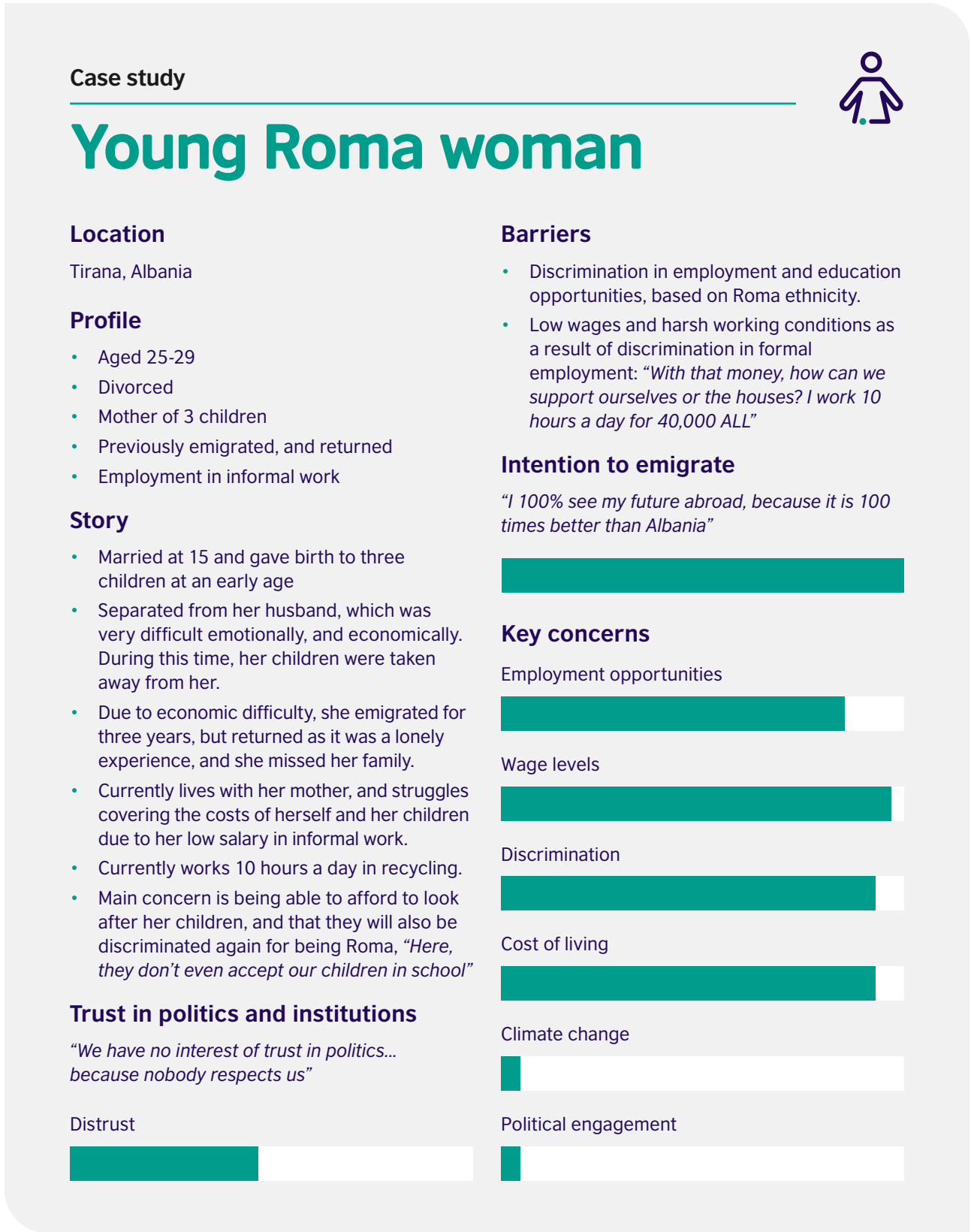
¹³⁰ Please note this is indicative as a result of the small base number.

Different social norms also affect these communities' experiences. Some face early responsibilities, such as **working from an early age** to support their families. This often impacted their educational opportunities and emotional well-being. **Early marriages** are prevalent. The 2011 census is confirming these observations with 19% of Roma women being married in the age group 13 to 17 years old. The gender gap is pronounced at this early age: if almost half of the Roma women aged 18 were already married, this was the case of only a quarter of the Roma men. Some participants to the Next Generation programme had encountered abusive relationships and divorces, which affected their emotional and mental health (see Figure 31 as an example).

Through the 'river of life' journeys, one young Roma woman recounted *"My childhood was not beautiful as we faced many economic difficulties. I got married at 15 and gave birth to three children. After the birth of my three children, there was a separation, and I went through a difficult emotional time. I have faced many economic difficulties and lack work opportunities."* This is explored in the below case study. Key concerns for 'Lindita' are employment opportunities, wage levels, the cost of living and discrimination.¹³¹

¹³¹ Pseudonym. Content in the case study has been extracted from qualitative interview.

Figure 31. Case study of ‘Lindita’, 25-29, employed in informal work, Tirana.



Chapter 5

Youth engagement

Civic and political engagement are low in Albania but there's a growing sense that change will require further participation. While the country is still transitioning politically, economically, and socially, the perspectives and participation levels of the young people will have a massive impact on its future and are therefore worthy of exploration.

5.1 Political outlook and engagement

Political history and present-day politics of Albania

Political history

Albania's political history has been marked by a series of transitions and geopolitical shifts. It served as a bridgehead for various empires, including the Ottoman Empire. After gaining independence in 1912, political instability persisted, with foreign powers like Italy, Greece, and Serbia exerting influence. World War II saw occupation by Italy and later Germany, followed by Yugoslav-backed communist rule under Enver Hoxha. Albania's path to political isolation began when it broke ties with Yugoslavia in 1948 and subsequently aligned with the USSR and later China.¹³⁸ By 1990, decades of isolation and economic hardship led to anti-government protests. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1991 led to multi-party elections, but political dissatisfaction, fraud claims, and the Pyramid Scheme crisis fuelled unrest and the Albanian Civil War in 1997.¹³⁹ Rexhep Meidani presided over the country's transition until 2002. In the 21st century, Albania focused on European integration, becoming an EU candidate in 2014 and holding intergovernmental conferences with the EU in 2022.¹⁴⁰

Present-day politics of Albania

Albania currently operates as a unitary parliamentary constitutional republic, following its 1998 constitution. The President is elected by a three-fifths majority vote in Parliament every five years, while the Prime Minister is elected through universal suffrage without term limits. The country's separation of powers and checks and balances align with international and European standards, per the Council of Europe's assessment.¹⁴¹ Since the 1991 democratic reforms, the Democratic and Socialist parties have dominated elections, with the Socialist Party, led by Prime Minister Edi Rama, winning the 2021 election. Despite democratic principles and peaceful elections, Albania is regarded as a "flawed democracy" due to procedural shortcomings and allegations of electoral irregularities.¹⁴² The constitution prohibits discrimination and upholds civil rights, with active involvement of ethnic minorities and women at the national level, though disparities exist between urban and rural areas in terms of political inclusiveness. The Albanian government faces multiple challenges, including addressing the cost-of-living crisis, advancing judiciary reform, and making strides in EU accession negotiations. The country's high poverty rates and low political trust make it vulnerable to political instability and social unrest.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Danja, E. (2022). *Women, Migration and Gendered Experiences: The Case of Post-1991 Albanian Migration*. Springer.

¹³⁹ Danja, E. (2022). *Women, Migration and Gendered Experiences: The Case of Post-1991 Albanian Migration*. Springer.

¹⁴⁰ Danja, E. (2022). *Women, Migration and Gendered Experiences: The Case of Post-1991 Albanian Migration*. Springer.

¹⁴¹ Parsons, S. (2020). *Albania Country Strategy*. European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. www.readkong.com/page/albania-country-strategy-2020-2025-approved-by-the-board-1205068

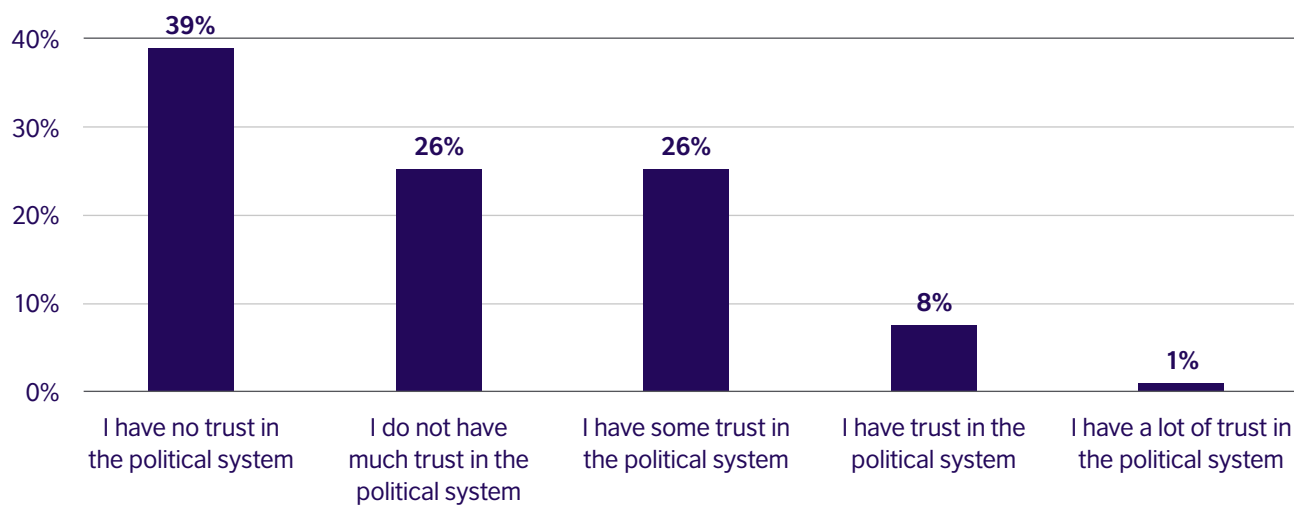
¹⁴² Economist Intelligence Unit. (2022). Democracy Index 2022. Author. www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022

¹⁴³ Economist Intelligence Unit. (n.d.). *Albania*. Author. <https://country.eiu.com/Albania>

5.1.1 Widespread distrust in political parties, candidates and the electoral system linked to perceptions of corruption and nepotism in the political system

There is a high degree of distrust in the political system among the Albanian youth, with 65% indicating they have no or not much trust in the political system (Figure 32). The trust tends to be especially low amongst central, rural, Egyptian and unemployed youth. This is consistent with previous studies which indicate that the Central Electoral Commission, political parties, and parliament were the least trusted entities, a sentiment echoed in a more recent study showing that 58% of the youth had no faith in political parties.^{144/145}

Figure 32. What level of trust do you have in your political system?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

¹⁴⁴ Çela, A., Fshazi, T., Mazniku, A., Kamberi, G., & Smaja, J. (2013). *Albanian youth 2011: "Between present hopes and future insecurities!"*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/10056.pdf>

¹⁴⁵ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

This was further explored in qualitative discussions, where young people pointed to corruption, news stories about corrupt politicians, and negative perceptions of political figures as factors contributing to this lack of trust. Many young people also shared the perception that those who are engaged in political parties do so to secure employment or for individual gain, as opposed to having a genuine interest in politics and being able to freely express themselves.

“I think today some young people see involvement in politics as an opportunity for employment. I think this is very wrong because in our context, politics is a real trap.” (25-29, F, employed, Korçë).

Previous studies also show that politics is often considered by young people as a non-transparent space associated with scandals, illegal and criminal activities.¹⁴⁶

These perspectives generate a sense of the potential repercussions of political involvement and a general sentiment that politics in Albania are associated with risks. One participant pointed out that political engagement is regarded unsafe, particularly beyond urban centres like Tirana. In more remote areas, discussions are influenced by individuals who may not have honest intentions but rather are connected through neighbourhood affiliations. This dissuades genuine participation, leading to a lack of representation from genuine and honest citizens.

“One of the reasons I believe that young people are so unwilling to engage, is a deep problem as politics is not safe in Albania. Perhaps in Tirana, people can gather to discuss in youth forums but in the farthest or smallest cities, these discussions are usually not made by thoughtful people but are made by neighbourhood gangsters.” (25-29, F, employed, Tirana).

As a result of the negative associations with politics, young people often feel that there is a certain stigma with being engaged in politics which can act as a potential barrier for future political participation among young people.

“Our society thinks that everyone that decides to participate in politics is bad, because of our actual politicians now. So, they think everyone is the same as them and they don’t think that a young activist can change something for better in our society” (18-24, M, Youth activist in student and youth activities).

5.1.2 Young people feel politically frustrated rather than disinterested and apathetic

Previous youth studies in Albania paint the picture of widespread disinterest in politics and political apathy on the part of young people. For example, in the 2015 study, only around 28% of surveyed 18-27-year-olds stated consistently voting in past elections.¹⁴⁷ In the 2018-19 study, 62% of young Albanians claimed to be not at all interested in politics.¹⁴⁸

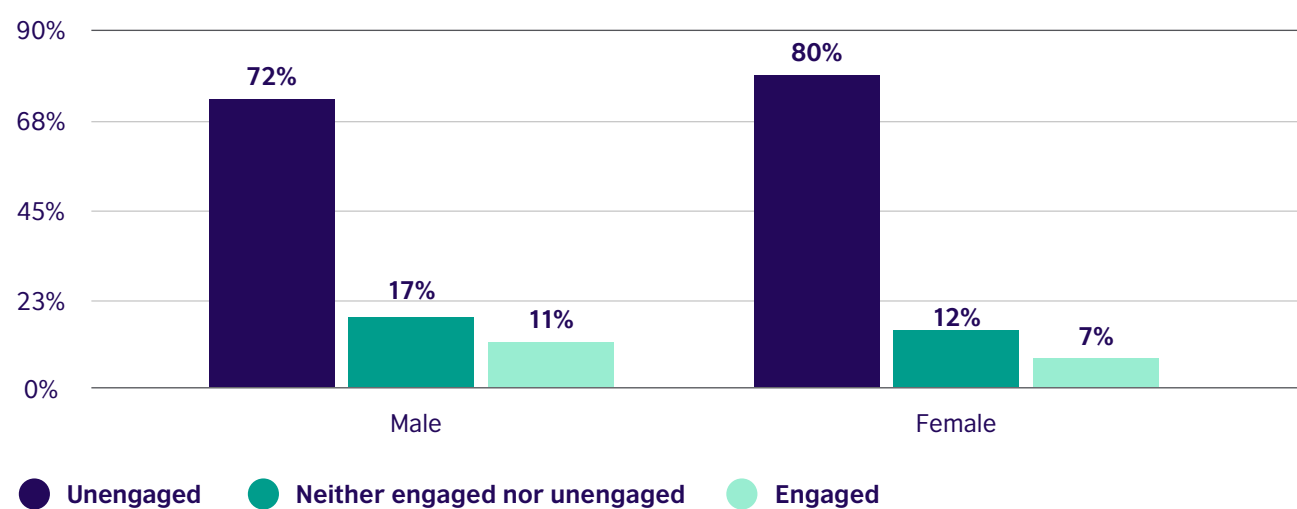
At first glance, our study confirms this narrative – over half of young people aged 18-30 (55%) report feeling very unengaged with politics. This relatively high level of disengagement is constant across age, urbanity, region, ethnicity, and gender groups, although young women are significantly more disengaged with politics (80%), reportedly more so than young men (72%) (see Figure 33).

¹⁴⁶ Westminster Foundation for Democracy. (2019). *National survey: Young people and politics in Albania*. Author. www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/national-survey-young-people-and-politics-albania

¹⁴⁷ Çela, A., Kamberi, G., & Pici, E. (2015). *Albanian youth 2015: "Slow change, internet dependency and ... EU trust"*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

¹⁴⁸ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Figure 33. How engaged would you say you are personally with politics in general? By gender.



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

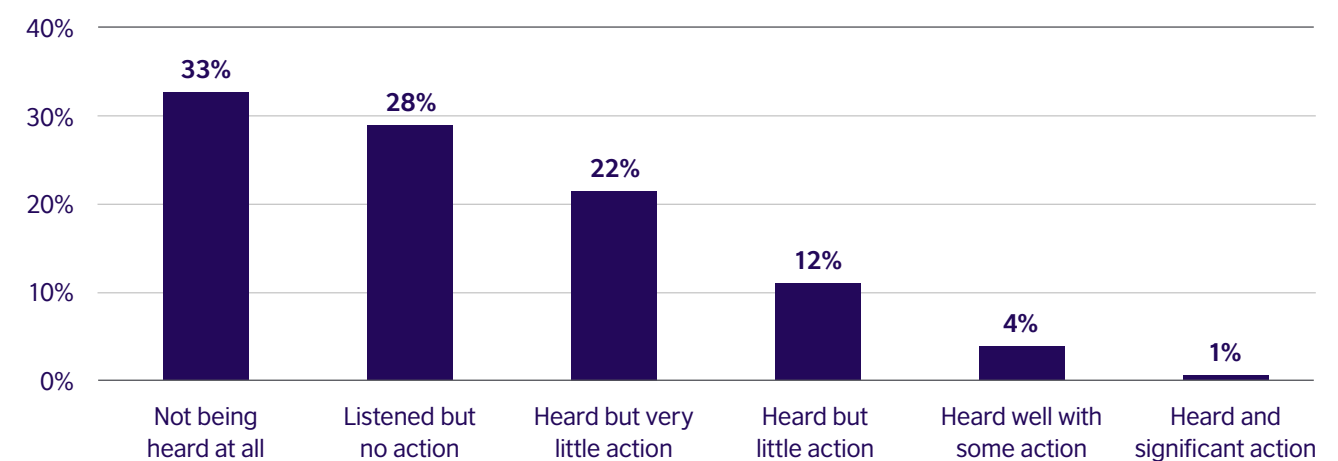
However, a closer look at both quantitative and qualitative data reveals a sense of frustration around youth voices not being heard and a variety of day-to-day actions that young people undertake relating to politics. As shown in Figure 34, a significant proportion of young people do not believe their voices on national issues are being heard in the country (33%), and half of them feel heard but that no or little action is taken as a result ('no action' 28% and 'very little action' 22%). Only 5% of young people feel they are heard and that there is some action as a result. Rural youth and the younger group are more likely to feel unheard (Not heard at all: 38% of Rural versus 30% of Urban; 36% of 18-24 versus 29% of 25-29).

“Seeing how politics has been self-managed during this 32-year period, I believe young people are very

disappointed. Many of them say it’s better to leave and create a life elsewhere than to stay in Albania and engage in politics where their voices are not heard, unfortunately” (25-29, M, University student, young person with a disability, Tirana).

Importantly, the sentiment of youth voices being unheard in the country is particularly pronounced among minority ethnic groups. Indeed, we see that Roma youth feel the most unheard by the political system with 51% feeling not heard at all,¹⁴⁹ versus 33% among the general youth population. In addition, 87% of Egyptian youth (base total n=45) reported feeling very unengaged with politics as opposed to 54% of Albanian respondents.

Figure 34. Do you think the voices of young people on national issues are being heard in your country?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

¹⁴⁹ Base number is 42.

The frustration around youth voices not being heard may be linked with relatively limited youth representation within political parties or the government. In the 2017 parliamentary elections, for example, only 5% of young people reached parliamentary positions, despite 32% of the youth being nominated initially.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, youth representation in mayoral positions stood at a mere 6% between 2015 and 2018.¹⁵¹ At the national level, in 2018 there were no young ministers in the government, with only 2.9% of deputy ministers being youths.¹⁵²

5.1.3 Despite the low reported engagement with politics, many young people participate in a variety of political activities and civic activism when prompted

If there's strong scepticism from young Albanians regarding politics in general and political engagement, this does not mean that they are disengaged from what is happening in their country and communities, and they do engage in more informal forms of interaction, such as voting, sharing political opinions with friends and family or discussing issues at an informal forum.

In fact, when probed about specific activities, over half of young people (51%) reported participating in at least one political activity in the last 12 months. The most common activity undertaken is voting in local/national elections (23%), followed by other forms of civic engagement such as attending a discussion on local/national issues (7%), taking part in a protest (6%), expressing opinions on the internet and/or social networks (4%), attending a political rally (4%), participating in a meeting of the municipality council (3%), and contacting a local councillor (2%). There is no significant variation across gender, urbanity, region, educational attainment, or employment situation in political activities undertaken. However, older respondents and those who consider themselves to have a disability are more likely to have voted in the last 12 months, and the least likely to have not participated in any of the above activities. Over half of respondents aged 18-24 have not undertaken any of the political activities outlined, compared to 42% of 25-29-year-olds. Additionally, only 19% of the younger age group voted, as opposed to 30% of older respondents.

We also see high engagement in political activities from young people with a disability, as over half (53%) voted in the last election and only 22% had not engaged any of the activities. This suggests a significant effort of young people with disabilities to get their voices heard and engage in the political sphere, despite concerns these may not be heard, explored further below.

Beyond these more formal political activities listed above, it is clear from the qualitative data that young people engage in lively conversations, discussions, and exchange opinions on current affairs, political news with their friends and family members.

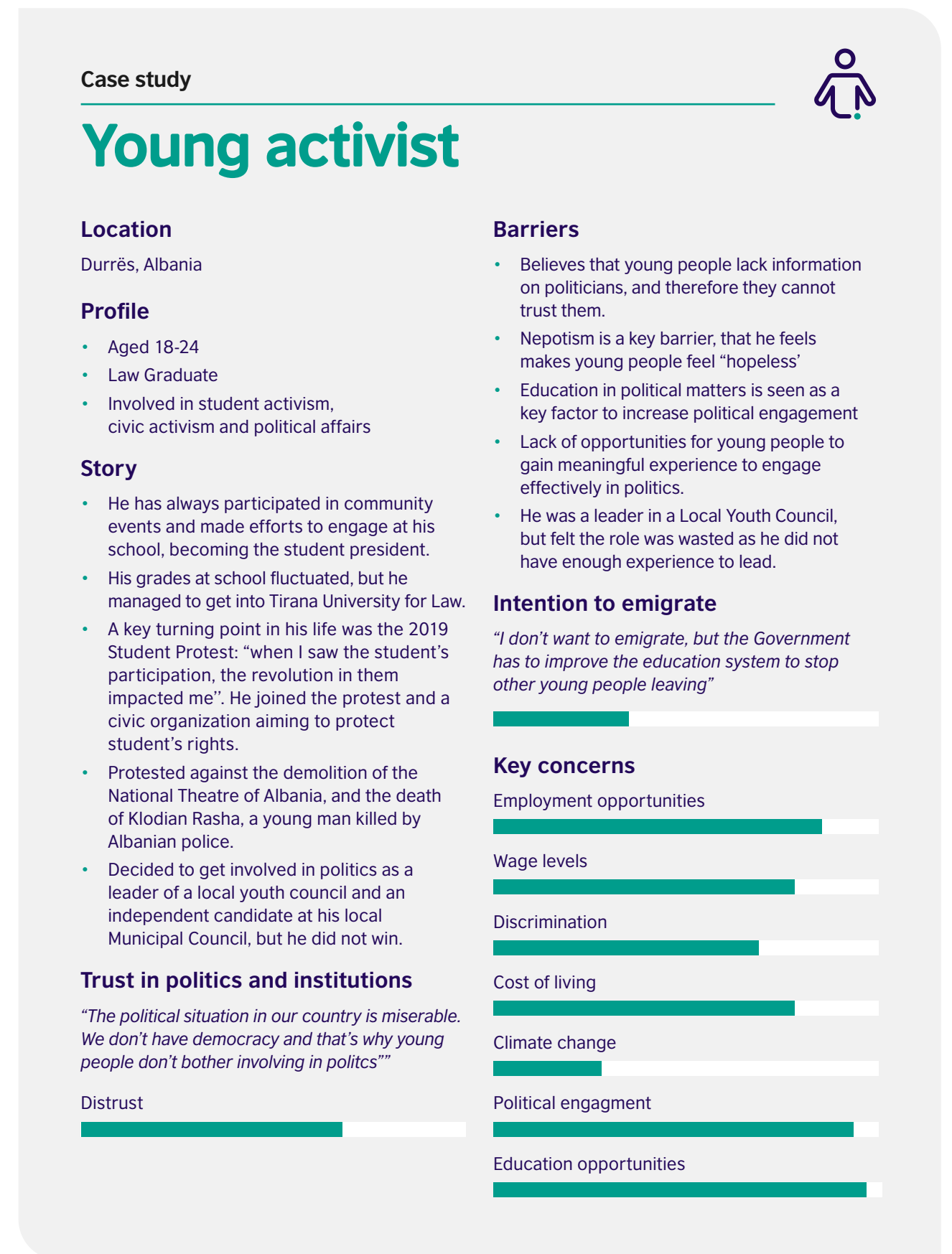
Sharing views and opinions related to politics extends beyond the immediate circles of friends and family too. Qualitatively, a few participants mention sharing views and expressing their disagreement with the current government freely on social media. Other young people express hesitation at engaging in public discussions online on politics as they feel it can lead to arguments and disagreements.

“We Albanians are all politicians at family gatherings or in coffee shops ...most of the time we talk about current news like scandals or government decisions. It’s something that sparks a discussion.” (M, 25-29, NEET youth, Tirana).

“It may sound strange, but it’s true – when we talk about politics, we are always happy, as if we are releasing a certain feeling we have from the soul.” (M, 18-24, Recent graduate, Kukës).

Below is a case study of Fisnik,¹⁵³ a young man who has been engaged in civil society and politics throughout his life, recently standing for election as an independent at his local Municipal Council. From his perspective, there is a lack of information and opportunity for young people to gain meaningful experience to engage more formally in Albania's politics.

Figure 35. Do you think the voices of young people on national issues are being heard in your country?



¹⁵⁰ Partners Albania for Development and Change. (2018). *Youth political participation in Albania*. <https://www.partnersalbania.org/publication/youth-political-participation-2018/>

¹⁵¹ Youth Bank Hub for Western Balkan and Turkey. (2018). *Monitoring report on political, social and economic participation of youth in Albania*. http://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/YBH_Jan_June_2018_ENG.pdf

¹⁵² Partners Albania for Development and Change. (2018). *Youth political participation in Albania*. http://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Youth_Political_Participation_Albania_2018.pdf

¹⁵³ Pseudonym. Content in the case study has been extracted from qualitative interview.

5.1.4 Significant willingness to participate in elections

As mentioned previously, voting in local and national elections is the most common political activity young people participated in. Importantly, most of the young people who did not vote in the 12 months (57%) prior to the survey indicate they do intend to vote in the next local/general elections. On this point, there are no significant differences by age, gender, urbanity, ethnicity, or region.

The main reason for voting among young Albanians centres around the national duty and civic responsibility (43%). We can observe slight variations in this intention when analysed by ethnicity, where there appears to be a stronger influence of personal relationships in voting intention. Within Egyptian youth, 20% intend to vote because ‘all my friends are going to vote so I also want to’ (compared to only 2% Albanian and 4% Roma youngsters), and 17% of Roma youth indicated they intend to vote as ‘someone in my community expects me to vote’ (compared to 4% Albanian and 0% Egyptian respondents).

Other motivations across the whole sample relate to influencing change and decision-making, with 18% of young people believing that their vote will impact changes in Albania and 14% that voting offers a chance to influence Albanian decision-makers.

“When I see my city, I refer to Shkoder, which is degrading day by day, it motivates me even more to vote because I want to see changes in it” (25-29, F, employed, Shkoder)

“I wanted to vote for change, I have been hoping to find a job in my profile. I said to myself ‘My vote is important, and it should be given to someone who will try to do good’” (18-24, F, unemployed, Tirana)

The top three issues driving how young people will vote are improving healthcare, employment, and the economy (93% for each factor). When considering all main factors (top 7 - those scoring 89% and up – see Table 8), there is no significant variation in age, urbanity, ethnicity, or age. However, rural youth are more likely to consider tackling climate change, promoting arts and culture, and improving international alliances, important in influencing their vote (Tackling climate change: 76% of rural versus 62% of urban; Promoting arts and culture: 76% of rural versus 67% of urban youth; Improving International alliances: 78% of rural versus 70% of urban).

Table 8. How important are the following issues in deciding how you will vote.

How important are the following issues in deciding how you will vote	Not important (Not at all + not very)	Neither important nor unimportant	Important (Important + very important)
Improving healthcare	2%	5%	93%
Improving employment	2%	5%	93%
Improving the economy	2%	5%	93%
Reducing poverty	2%	6%	91%
Ending corruption	3%	6%	91%
Improving education	2%	7%	91%
Improving the justice/police system	2%	9%	89%
Providing reliable access to water, electricity, and gas	3%	11%	86%
Improving emergency response in case of disasters	3%	11%	85%
Improving the security and conflict situation in Albania	4%	11%	85%
Promoting tolerance	5%	17%	77%
Improving international alliances	8%	19%	73%
Promoting arts and culture	9%	21%	70%
Tackling climate change	12%	21%	68%

Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

The relatively high voting intention may be linked to a growing recognition of the need for the youth to be more engaged politically. In a 2019 youth study, almost seven in 10 young people aged 18-30 (69%) believed that youth should be involved in politics and six in 10 that youth should become part of political parties (60%). However, this general sentiment is not supported by personal willingness to engage in politics – 47% of youth distanced themselves from any possibility of future involvement in politics.¹⁵⁴

While there are multiple reasons for this, including the negative associations around politics explored earlier, failure of the education system to prepare young people for political engagement can be one of the factors. Our survey findings indicate that over two thirds (69%) of young people irrespective of age, gender and location, think that education has not prepared them well for engagement in politics.

5.1.5 Young people relate to individual political figures, not political parties

The key finding from our research is that young people tend to relate to individual political figures, rather than political parties. Political and civic journey mapping reveals a tendency of young people to vote for candidates, as opposed to parties, citing distrust in the party system. Indeed, there was a belief that even for those who have joined parties, young people do so out of necessity for employment, and in return *“they [young people] do what they are told to do”* (18-24, F, Employed, Fier).

“Like I said before I voted for the candidate not the party, if I were to vote only for the party, I wouldn’t vote at all. The candidate was intellectual, and, in my opinion, he was the right choice because he had a lot of experiences in politics”. (25-29, F, employed, Elbasan)

“...even if he joined another party, I would still vote for him”. (18-24, F, unemployed, Tirana).

Value appears to be placed in having political figures who can relate to and understand the issues affecting

young Albanians, with 16% responding that they want their politicians to ‘understand the problems facing people who have as much money as I do’ and 14% wanting a politician who has a ‘strong programme of policies to solve the issues most important to me’. Echoing a similar sentiment, when asked what would encourage political engagement, 20% of respondents chose ‘if politics reflected more of my personal views and opinions’, and 12% responded ‘if I could vote on more decisions that affect me’. Of course, the key value of candidates is that they must *‘be honest and free from corruption’* (31%). These sentiments carry across age, gender, urbanity, region and ethnicity, with no significant variation.

For many young Albanians, there do not appear to be many political figures to easily identify with beyond the local level. Not knowing who to vote for is one of the key reasons for not having previously done so for 35% of young people. This can be linked with the fact that there are few credible youth role models in politics, with *“no one with a vision or a trustworthy person whom we can believe can improve Albania”* (M, 18-24, Recent graduate, Kukës), something pointed out in previous studies. For example, the youth survey conducted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy found that more than 60% of young people could not identify successful youth role models in politics. There was also a widespread perception of young politicians in the parliament or government institutions as lacking weight and imitating their party leaders.¹⁵⁵

5.1.6 People with disabilities feel underrepresented in politics, leading to insufficient consideration of their needs and concerns

People with disabilities perceive a notable lack of representation in politics, resulting in inadequate attention being paid to their needs and concerns. Among the youth with disabilities, the need for active engagement of individuals with disabilities in shaping policies and legislations that directly impact their lives strongly resonates. One participant highlights that although there is some representation of people with disabilities in political positions, their influence tends to be marginalised and their input often overlooked – for example when new developments are built without vital infrastructure such as accessibility features.

“We are not sufficiently involved in politics. Even if we were more involved, I don’t think it would be taken seriously. In our case, there are some people with disabilities who hold higher positions in politics that could have some influence on our behalf, but I don’t think it’s considered seriously. For example, when something new is built in Tirana, the necessary infrastructure we need is not considered. There’s always this aspect of bypassing people with disabilities.” (25-29, F, young person with a physical disability, employed, Tirana).

For example, as seen in Box 3, despite feeling “very good” and “positive” whilst using his voice politically and having advocated for change, across these experiences, ‘Ardian’, a young man with physical disabilities, faced continued difficulties and barriers to engagement due to a lack of necessary infrastructure and accessibility for people with physical disabilities. Whilst voting, Ardian shared that *“It was very embarrassing, because in my neighbourhood it was the first time that a person with limited abilities participated and there were eyes and ears and there was that panic, let’s say”*. Outside of these activities, ‘Ardian’ also engages with *“Organizations that fight for the rights of people with disabilities, that fight to employ people with disabilities. I try to go there often.”*

Box 3. Political and civic engagement journey mapping cards, ‘Ardian’, young person with a physical disability, M, 25-29, unemployed, Tirana.

Take part in a protest/demonstration

- I protested for the rights of people with disabilities
- We were an organised group who were affected by this
- It wasn’t difficult for me to decide whether to participate or not, as I feel strongly about the issue
- The experience was a bit uncomfortable as I faced difficulties accessing the protest due to a lack of road access

Emotions:

:) Good because we were all united

Vote in a local/national election

- I voted to make a change
- I got to know the candidate from the election campaign
- It was my decision to vote
- My experience with voting was embarrassing because I was the first person with limited abilities to vote in my neighbourhood
- The voting process was easy

Emotions:

:I Neutral because it was a bit awkward

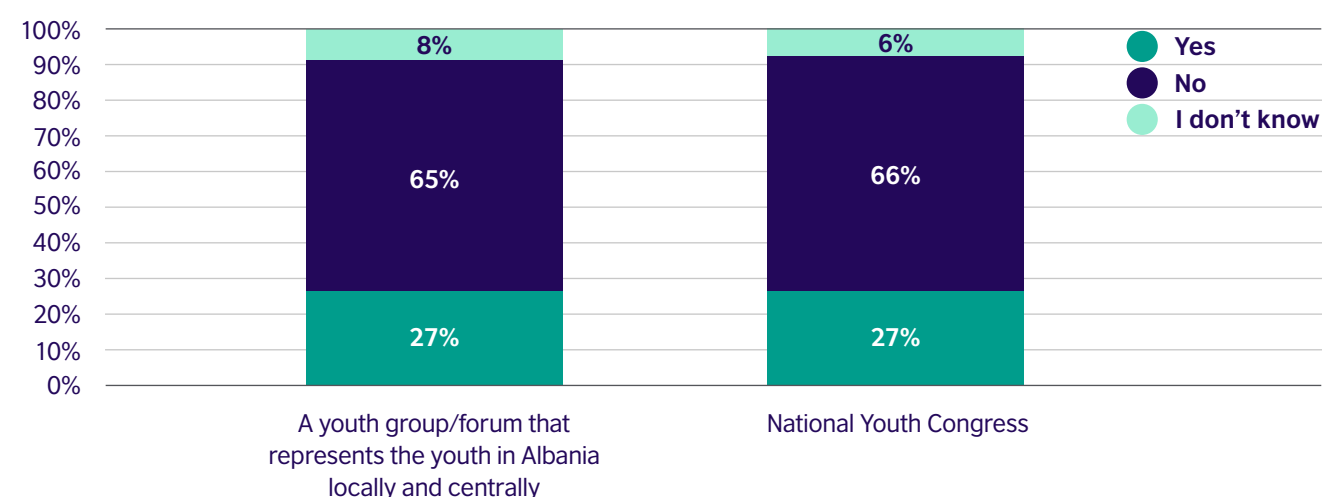
¹⁵⁴ Westminster Foundation for Democracy. (2019). *National survey: Young people and politics in Albania*. Author. www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/national-survey-young-people-and-politics-albania

¹⁵⁵ Westminster Foundation for Democracy. (2019). *National survey: Young people and politics in Albania*. Author. <https://www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/national-survey-young-people-and-politics-albania>

5.1.7 Lack of awareness of youth opportunities in politics

The study reveals a limited awareness of youth forums and the National Youth Congress, with only slightly over a quarter of young respondents (27%) indicating they are aware of both institutions (see Figure 36). Interestingly, both unprompted and prompted awareness are virtually equal.¹⁵⁶ Among those who lacked awareness of the National Youth Congress, a majority (64%) have also expressed strong disengagement from political matters.

Figure 36. Are you aware of the following institutions? (Prompted and unprompted)



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

An important recommendation arising from this Next Generation programme is the need to strengthen the reach and influence of local youth councils throughout Albania. A compelling opinion surfaced, proposing local youth councils as a crucial platform for fostering young people's involvement in political decision-making processes, although, there is a need to ensure that the voices of young people are genuinely heard during these sessions. A few young people who had previously engaged in a youth council highlighted a disparity between expectation and reality. Despite their participation, their inputs were disregarded, leaving them disheartened by the lack of follow-up actions.

“In my opinion, the best way to help young people participate in political decision-making is through local youth councils. It's a very good way for young people to directly participate in local budgets. However, young people need to be heard in these sessions, as I have been in a youth council, and our voices were never heard. They left us there to chat, and they said they would think about it later and there was no follow up” (18-24, F, Student, Fier).

¹⁵⁶ Unprompted awareness was measured by asking respondents whether they are aware of 'a youth group/forum that represents the youth in Albania locally and centrally'. This was followed by prompt for the 'National Youth Congress'.

This underscores the importance of ensuring already existing platforms for youth engagement are optimised to maximise their impact and support meaningful participation, where young voices are not merely tokenistic additions to the conversations.

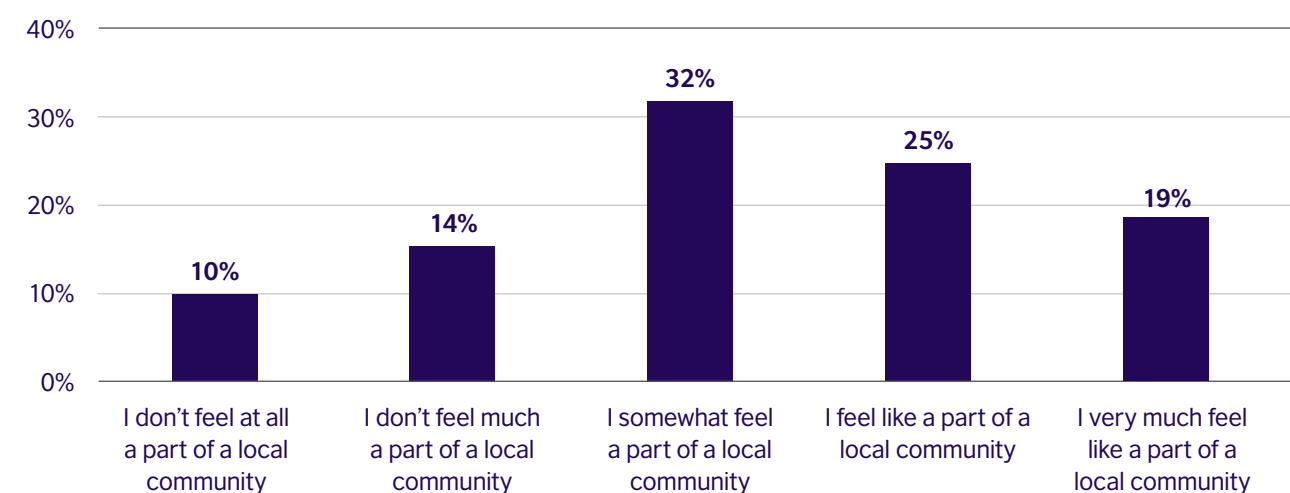
5.2 Youth voice in the community

The following section explores how young people engage in their community, and how this is defined by young Albanians. The use of youth voice, and the extent to which young people feel able to make decisions about things that matter to them is a key focus of this section.

5.2.1 Young Albanians largely engage in community life, but the idea of a community seems to have faded throughout the years

The research findings reveal a nuanced landscape of youth engagement and community belonging in Albania. Many young people demonstrate a degree of affiliation with local communities, with 76% reporting some level of belonging - claiming to feel either 'somewhat,' 'very much,' or 'a part' of their local community. However, around one quarter (24%) express less attachment, noting 'not feeling at all' or 'not much a part' of their local community (see Figure 37). There appears to be a significant relationship between perceptions of community belonging and ethnicity/race. Roma respondents are over twice as likely to report feeling 'very much a part of a local community' (57%) than Egyptian respondents (24%) and three times more likely than Albanian respondents (17%).

Figure 37. Do you feel that you are part of a local community?



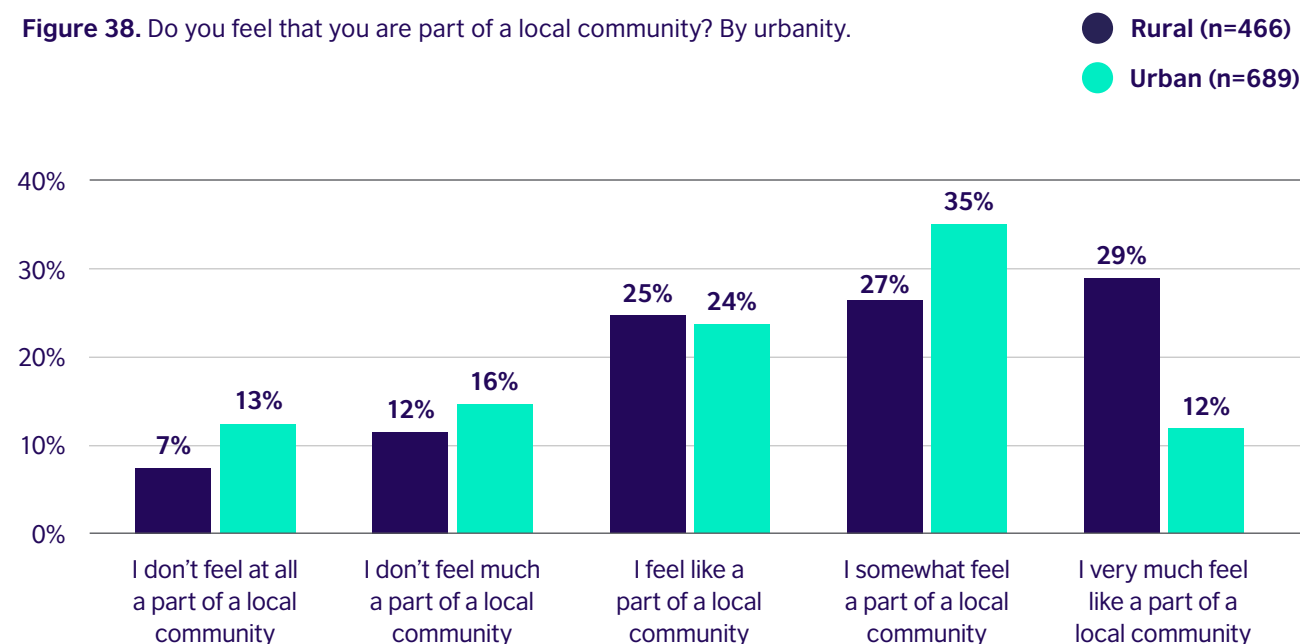
Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

We also see a stronger sense of community among rural respondents (see Figure 38). Almost twice as many urban youths do not feel at all a part of a local community (13% of urban youth versus 7% of rural youth). Indeed, on the other side of the spectrum, rural youth are over twice as likely to feel very much a part of their community (29% of rural youths versus 12% of urban youths). And one third ('very much a part' 33%) of young rural men feel more connected to the community in comparison to just a quarter ('very much a part' 25%) of young rural women. This links to previous findings from *Chapter 2. Values and influences*, which highlights that rural youth continue to hold more traditionalistic, collective values, which appears to translate into a sense of community belonging.

Young people largely define their local community as their neighbourhoods. As described in Chapter 3, most participants spend their time at home, work, and cafés, interacting with family members, colleagues, and friends. It is these closest networks that have the strongest influence on youth's views, however some also feel that the local community played a role in shaping their perspectives.

"I'm committed. It's bigger than family, in the community I include all the neighbours in my neighbourhood and maybe everyone I know to do something better for this community" (25-29, M, Employed in audio and video production industry, Tirana).

Figure 38. Do you feel that you are part of a local community? By urbanity.



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

Engagement in community life manifests itself through a range of activities. Earlier research suggests that civic engagement in Albania seems to be rising slowly. While it was once low, with 16% of young Albanians engaging in volunteering work in 2013, between 2013 and 2015, this figure rose slightly from 16% to 20%.^{157/158} While these numbers may be low as a share of the overall population, they nonetheless indicate an encouraging trend of increasing civic engagement amongst young people.

Our research suggests that social activities dominate community participation for today's youth. The Next Generation survey finds that over half of respondents (53%) who are involved in some form of community participation do so through social activities such as funerals, weddings, religious, and cultural festivals. Development activities, encompassing tasks like environmental upkeep and community maintenance follow at 16%. Volunteering activities are reported by 9% of respondents, while an additional 5% contribute their time in disadvantaged areas. Notably, only 4% of youth are engaged in planning and decision-making within their communities, reflecting the point made above about the lack of effective young voices in key local matters.

Qualitative evidence speaks to the reluctance of some young Albanians to engage actively in their local communities. It can be attributed to several factors that have led to a fading sense of community involvement. A combination of social dynamics, information access and perceived responsibilities shape their disengagement. Despite some young people acknowledging shared common issues within their community, there appears to be a lack of communication and collaboration among neighbours to address these concerns collectively. For example, one young person shares:

"Local community for me is my neighbourhood. I may have the same problems as my neighbours about our neighbourhood, unpaved roads for example, but we never talk about it with each other or address it as a problem" (25-29, M, Employed, Tirana).

One key reason young people feel the community does not work together, despite shared concerns, is due to a diminishing concept of a united community over the years, where *"no one is involved because the idea of a community has faded throughout the years"* (18-24, F, University Student, Tirana). This point of difference of community engagement between today's generation and the previous generation is highlighted qualitatively:

"I think that it's quite different. My parents have a better perspective and were always involved in their local community. Since they come from a different generation, they were raised with a lot of love for their country" (25-29, F, employed, Fier).

"People, day by day, are becoming more selfish, and they don't think about what's best for the community but only what's best for themselves. I have always tried to get involved and discuss about different problems, but I think I've come up to that point where I don't care anymore" (25-29, M, Employed, Tirana).

5.2.3 Disconnect between young people and community leaders

Despite young people largely sharing a sense of belonging to their local communities, there appears to be a disconnect between young respondents and community leaders. Findings indicate that family members have the most substantial influence over young Albanians (61%), with peers/friends (17%) and teachers/professors (6%) following. In contrast, community leaders and government agencies hold minimal sway, not being considered influential voices at all, indicating a disconnect between youth and these figures in positions of authority.

¹⁵⁷ Çela, A., Kamberi, G., & Pici, E. (2015). *Albanian youth 2015: "Slow change, internet dependency and ... EU trust"*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/12300.pdf>

¹⁵⁸ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15261.pdf>

As observed previously, this divergence is mirrored in perceptions of trustworthiness. While community leaders are often considered central figures in local decision-making, they emerge as one of the least used sources of information¹⁵⁹ and the least trustworthy, with the highest rate of ‘not at all trustworthy’ responses (25%) of those who use them as sources of information. This scepticism likely contributes to the diminished influence these leaders hold among young people. Indeed, qualitative insights reflect that *“it comes from being disappointed from time to time. If people addressed their problems and the leader didn’t do anything about them, of course they won’t trust him again”* (18-24, F, Student, Gjirokastër), particularly for those in villages. It is felt that community leaders should be advocating for investment in infrastructure, cleaner environments, better quality education and more job opportunities in the local area, but are currently not doing so.

Young people have a strong perception of the ideal community leader, but do not believe this is reflected in their current community leadership. In describing the ideal community lead, the overwhelming majority described characteristics such as supportive, empathetic, understanding, polite, educated, cultured, cooperative, courageous, just, and responsible:

“Being a leader is to understand your role, but on the other hand you should also understand the needs of the people that surround you. A person who is in charge of a responsibility like this must have personal integrity, social integrity and family integrity. He should know his terrain well, with whom to work and with whom he should raise his voice for the community’s rights. He should protect their rights and bring change in the best way possible” (25-29, F, Roma Community, Lawyer, Tirana).

However, many young people do not feel that their current leadership reflected this:

“Currently, there is no leader, manager, or administrator in the community who truly embodies the characteristics of an ideal community member” (18-24, M, University Student, Kukes).

Whilst most young people feel they are too young to be a leader in the community themselves, some young people shared inspiring stories of acts of leadership in their communities, as showcased below in Box 4.

Box 4. Young leader in Central Albania: case study

Case study



Young leader in Central Albania

I was born in Cerrik and I always wanted to go back there. My friends were telling me that they wanted to leave and the fact that I wanted to stay seemed somehow stupid. I feel really sad for the young people living there because they are not able to engage in different activities. 2 years ago, I started something small but important. In Cerrik, there is no church, and for the first time we organised a beautiful big Christmas Eve where the mayor was present. There were 11 different organisations from Albania and some of them were Catholic and Orthodox. It was something blessed and motivational. After this I did something else with the municipality about young people and it was a bit disappointing because they didn’t have motivation. When I went to different school doors, I wasn’t expecting them to show up, but 60 people came. I chose to talk about a topic called “You can” which is an important topic to me. I wanted to show them that I am a young girl born in Cerrik just like them. I am a girl who was present in a lot of televisions talking about what I believe and leaving a small impact in Cerrik. Now we helped create a camp for 60 people. This is a thing I do with a lot of love and passion. I want to be a motivational voice to people in Cerrik.

“I feel really sad for the young people living there because they are not able to engage in different activities.”

¹⁵⁹ Please note this is indicative due to small base number of those who use community leaders as a source of information (n=3). It only points to a very small number of people turning to community leaders for information.

5.2.4 Most young people believe they can use their voice in the community but are unsure to the extent that it will be heard

Qualitative data suggests that most young people share the belief that they can use their voice in the community. However, this conviction is often coupled with an uncertainty regarding the extent to which their words will be acknowledged and incorporated into decision-making processes. Indeed, only 4% of our Next Generation respondents engage in planning and decision making in their community. Ethnic minorities and those with lower educational attainment are the least likely to be involved with this, as none of the Roma or Egyptian respondents indicating doing so, and only 1% of those with lower secondary education or below, compared to 7% of young people with a masters. For example, one 26-year-old participant encapsulated this viewpoint, stating,

“I can contribute as long as I have ideas and opinions...It begs the question of how many of these opinions are taken into account by those in power” (25-29, F, Youth employee, Kukes).

Several participants echo this sentiment, indicating a scepticism about the responsiveness of those in positions of authority to their opinions.

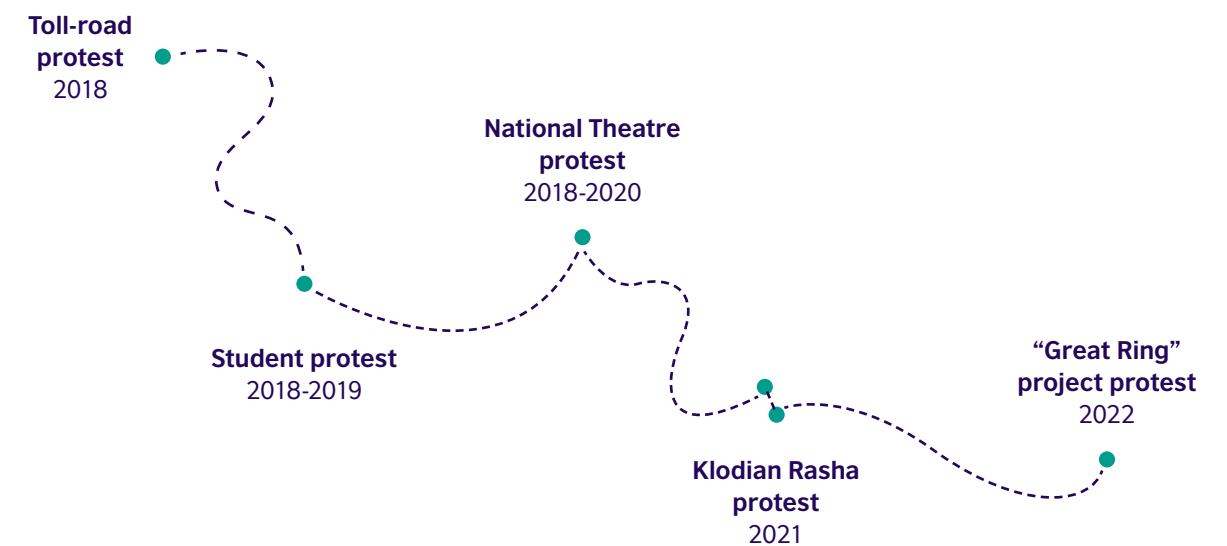
“Perhaps they may not be heard, do not take into account their requests, or pretend to take into account the requests or opinions they have on various issues that are worrying young people today and this is one of the reasons that young people are not perhaps represented in decision-making bodies” (18-24, F, University graduate, Fier).

Despite these reservations, many young people see it as their responsibility to speak up and emphasise the importance of genuine self-expression in community matters.

“I see it as a responsibility, I must express it even though I know it won’t be considered. I know that feeling prevents young people from expressing all their problems, they know that no one will hear from the voices” (25-29, F, part-time employment, Lezhe)

In line with this responsibility, young people in the qualitative discussions shared numerous examples of where they have brought their voices together to protest, outlined below in Figure 39.

Figure 39. Key moments at which youth have joined their voices for change.



When reflecting on their participation in these events in qualitative discussions, many young people view their role within a larger purpose, highlighting the collective nature of community activism. Despite in some cases the ultimate outcome not aligning with their initial intentions, much of the experiences are characterised as positive due to their active pursuit of a perceived just cause:

“I had a role like everyone else for a specific purpose, but it didn’t work out. Nevertheless, the experience was positive because I fought for something I thought was fair. One should do the impossible regardless of the outcome. We live in a country where justice, unfortunately, is not given” (18-24, M, employed youth from a low-income family, Tirana).

This sentiment underlines the significance of engagement beyond mere success or failure in some cases, emphasising the intrinsic value of standing up for principles deemed essential for the community’s betterment.

5.2.5. The most common community support young Albanians are aware of are related to employment, education, and entrepreneurship

The awareness of community support among young Albanians spans various domains, primarily focusing on employment, education, and entrepreneurship.

Among the available community support options, the most frequently cited are bursaries and grants for education, with 21%. Additionally, support for initiating a business venture (15%) and assistance in job search efforts (15%) emerge as prevalent community resources and nearly 1 in 5 respondents (19%) expressed a lack of awareness concerning available community support programmes, marked by ‘don’t know’ responses.

Whilst the urban/rural breakdown of those who ‘don’t know’ is evenly split, Northern youth appear to have the least awareness of community support available (see Figure 40). As the Northern region has been identified as a hotspot for high net migration, various development programmes and efforts have been made to introduce community support to help give young Northern Albanians the opportunity to stay in their hometown. Indeed, in 2019, the British Embassy in Tirana and UNDP introduced a programme of employment and social services in Northern Albania in Shkodër, Dibër and Kukës to address this.¹⁶⁰ This suggests that rather than a lack of community support offered, there needs to be concerted efforts to raise awareness of that support.

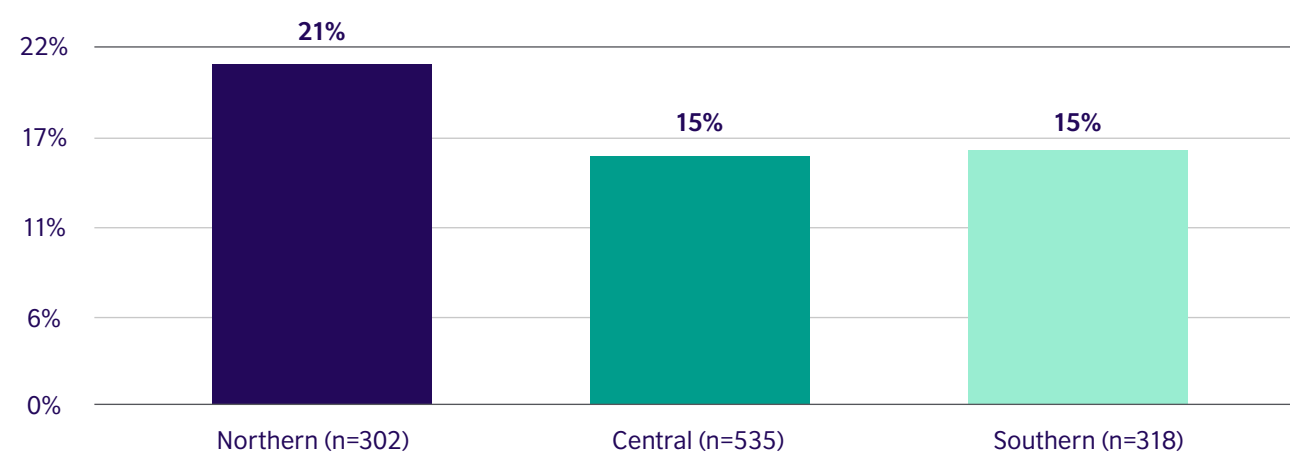
Moreover, there is a significant relationship between gender and the awareness of available community support. Among males, we observe a higher awareness

of ‘cultural facilities’ (71% male vs. 29% female), ‘sporting facilities’ (64% male vs. 36% female), and ‘support for substance abuse’ (86% male vs. 14% female). This gender-based distinction underlines potential disparities in the visibility and accessibility of community support initiatives across various sectors.

Conclusion

If political engagement of young Albanians remains limited, there is clear evidence of their acknowledgement of the need for change and reforms, and of an appetite for sharing their views and opinions. But of course, trust in institutions and those who lead them are key to motivating them to get involved. In the next chapter, we explore their global outlook, focusing on how they relate to the UK and the EU and how they perceive climate change as an issue relating to their day-to-day priorities.

Figure 40. Respondents who ‘don’t know’ what community support is available by region.



¹⁶⁰ UNDP. (2019). Employment and social services in Northern Albania. www.undp.org/albania/projects/employment-and-social-services-northern-albania.

Chapter 6

Global outlook

Looking at young Albanians' global outlook is key to understanding how they see the future of Albania, the global community and the common challenges facing all of us. The global relationships with the UK and EU bring with it tempered optimism, with young Albanians being committed to sharing a picture of Albania that reflects their lived realities, not stereotypes. When it comes to climate change, today's youngsters are concerned of the global impact, but the challenges of the day – unemployment, cost-of-living, and the economy – overshadow those worries. Given Albania's structural vulnerability to climate shocks, raising awareness and unifying concern is an imperative next step across Albania's next generation.

6.1 Global relationships

6.1.1 Mixed relationship between Albania and the United Kingdom

Albania's Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs acknowledges the UK as one of the earliest nations to contribute to and mould the shaping of the rule of law, upholding human rights, and establishing transparent market economy regulations in Albania post-1990s.¹⁶¹ The UK has also been a strong supporter of Albania's aspiration for Euro-Atlantic integration into NATO and the EU.

Recent developments in the relations between Albania and the United Kingdom since 2020 have largely centred on migration, economic cooperation, and security. In 2022, the UK and Albania signed the UK-Albania Joint Communiqué: Enhancing bilateral cooperation in areas of common interest. This Communiqué seeks to enhance cooperation in three key areas: 1) security and home affairs (including organised crime and illegal immigration); 2) economic growth and investment; 3) innovation, youth, and education.¹⁶² In terms of actions in the third, youth, culture, and education are key, with specific focus on:

- Fostering avenues to retain young talent within Albania.
- Facilitating skills development in collaboration with the British Council and the Albanian Education Ministry.
- Continuing to provide opportunities for Albanian students to pursue postgraduate studies in the UK through the British Chevening scholarships and Cyber Security Fellowships for Albania (and the wider Western Balkans).
- 21st Century Schools is an ambitious education programme implemented by the British Council and funded by the UK Government aiming at developing critical thinking, problem solving and coding skills.

Despite the negative focus on migration that has dominated recent public discourse, causing a slight strain on UK-Albania relations in the previous year, recent talks in 2023 between President Edi Rama and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak have “*set up a clear path towards tackling together whatever has to be excluded from our relations and from our world of law and justice but at the same time making sure that some rotten apples do not define the Albanian community here and our relations*”.¹⁶³

Our Next Generation project seeks to provide more context and a deeper understanding of how young Albanians view their country's relationship with the UK. While many Albanians aspire to emigrate to the UK for what they perceive to be a better life, there is also a recognition that negative stereotypes impact how Albanians are perceived as immigrants in the UK. Over half of respondents (56%) are either unsure (33%) of whether the relationship between Albania and UK is positive or see it to be ‘neither positive nor negative’ (23%) (see Figure 41 below). Youth from the Roma community (70%), Egyptian community (87%), and young females (36%) are the most likely to report not knowing how to define the relationship.

¹⁶¹ Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. Relations between Albania and the UK: Country Brief.

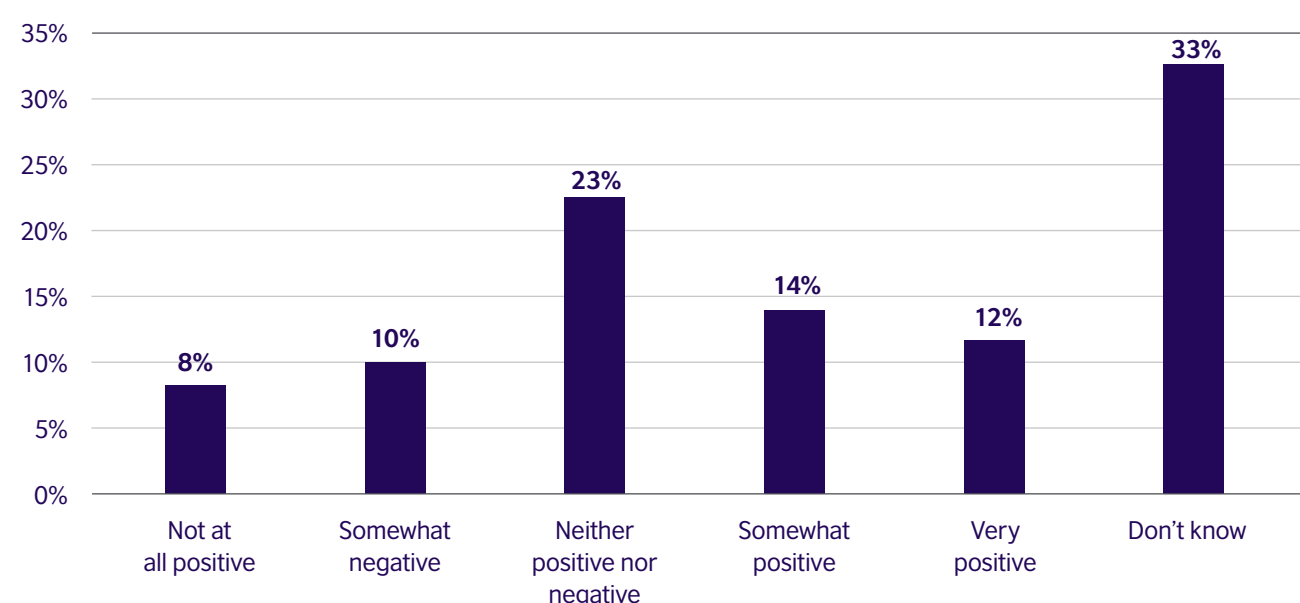
¹⁶² Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street. (2022). UK-Albania Joint Communiqué Enhancing bilateral Cooperation in areas of common interest. www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-albania-joint-communique-enhancing-bilateral-cooperation-in-areas-of-common-interest/uk-albania-joint-communique-enhancing-bilateral-cooperation-in-areas-of-common-interest.

¹⁶³ Government of Albania. (2023). Interview of Prime Minister Edi Rama for BBC Radio 4 Today Program. www.kryeministria.al/en/newsroom/interviste-e-kryeministrit-edi-rama-ne-studion-e-programit-today-te-bbc-radio-4/.

However, overall, respondents reflect slightly more positively (26%) than negatively (18%) on the UK-Albania relationship. Youths aged 18-24 and from Southern regions are the most positive when reflecting on the relationship ('very positive' 14% of 18–24-year-olds versus 9% of 25–29-year-olds; 17% of those from Southern regions, versus 9% of Central versus 12% of Northern regions). Many young people who view Albania's relationship with the UK favourably link this to having family living there. The UK is also seen as an attractive destination due to its economic situation, education opportunities, and geopolitical significance. It is mentioned as the country favoured for emigration by 8% of respondents when asked where they would choose to emigrate if they did.

On the other hand, respondents who view the UK-Albania relationship negatively do so because of the 'measures taken against illegal migration', 'discrimination of Albanians', and because the 'UK has not supported Albanians'. Discussions with activists noted that the UK's donations to Albania are often directed towards immigration-related issues and combatting organised crime. There is a sense of unease about the UK's approach, with some participants expressing disagreement with the way the UK addresses immigration and organised crime, and the way it stigmatises Albanians.

Figure 41. From your perspective, do you think the relationship between Albania and the UK is positive?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

“(…) A statement from the British Minister about Albanians being criminals, which created negative publicity for our country (…) Our Prime Minister said a very nice phrase there, that we shouldn’t put all Albanians in the same bag because we’re not all characters from the movie Taken” (25-29, F, employed, Korçë).

In line with this, some young people feel strongly about diversifying the perceptions of Albanians in the UK, noting that many Albanians are working in reputable jobs and contributing to the economy, and not that they “just go and work with drugs” (Young person with a disability, 25-29, F, employed, Tirana).

6.1.2. Mixed views on the relationship between Albania and the European Union

Whilst the perception of the relationship between the EU and Albania has historically been and still is largely positive, some perceive it as complicated, with challenges relating to Albania's efforts and the EU's dealing with Albania's application for membership.

Earlier studies have found overwhelmingly positive perspectives of young Albanians towards the European Union (EU). A pronounced 87% of them support EU integration, a figure higher than their counterparts in Kosovo and Bosnia.¹⁶⁴ To place this in a comparative perspective, support for the EU in neighbouring Kosovo stood at 82%, while Bosnia, often considered a pivotal state in the Western Balkan region, displayed a relatively modest figure of 55%.¹⁶⁵

This robust affinity is not merely a superficial one; it is embedded within the hopes and aspirations of the Albanian youth. As elucidated by Çela et al., the majority of young individuals, albeit holding fervent pro-European sentiments, were realistic in their assessments, not expecting Albania to secure membership within the EU in the subsequent decade.¹⁶⁶ This realism, however, did not temper their optimism. Young Albanians were found to associate EU membership with a plethora of benefits, notably economic opportunities, and the freedom of movement. The Government of Albania too, from the perspective of its youth, was viewed as being earnestly committed to the process of EU integration. This is echoed in our qualitative data, where it is noted that accession

to EU is a beacon of hope as “it would be a significant achievement for us. It would provide better development opportunities. Things have started to move, to change, with hope” (25-29, M, employed, Kavaje).

While the support for the EU remains unwaveringly strong, it is essential to discern between broad support and complete trust. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung highlights a nuanced dichotomy in this relationship. While the EU remains a sought-after destination, embodying hopes of prosperity and stability, only half of the young Albanians surveyed claimed to have “complete” trust in the EU. This ambivalence suggests a complex interplay of factors shaping the youth's perspectives, warranting deeper exploration and understanding.¹⁶⁷

Our study explores these perceptions in qualitative workshops. Concerns centre around the potential loss of cultural identity, alignment with EU policies and the country's readiness to meet the necessary criteria. It is also suggested that joining the EU may result in further mass migration from Albania as free movement would be so easy, which would essentially collapse the state, as it is not yet secure enough to encourage people to stay. “If we are members of the EU then mass immigration of Albanians would be three-folded, 5-folded because we would be completely free to go whenever we want” (18-24, F, high school student, Fier).

Further than this, some young people reflect that even with EU laws and protection, some young Albanians would continue to work illegally, and the introduction of a legal framework may make them worse off. “Albanians would still operate in the “black market” avoiding taxes. We would have broken the laws and will bring us more problems than benefits” (25-29, F, employed, Tirana).

Conclusion

To conclude this section, young Albanians show deep realism when evaluating Albania's global relationships with the UK and the EU, suggesting a pragmatism to their approach. Despite clear will of young people to join the EU, there remain practical concerns. Recent diplomatic relations with the UK and discourse on migration has increased hesitance on UK-Albania relations, with young people ever focused on ensuring accurate portrayals of Albanians they know are shared globally.

¹⁶⁴ Çela, A., Fshazi, T., Mazniku, A., Kamberi, G., & Smaja, J. (2013). *Albanian youth 2011: “Between present hopes and future insecurities!”*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/10056.pdf>

¹⁶⁵ Flere, S., Hurrelmann, K., Klanjšek, R., Lavrič, M., Reimbold, H., Taleski, D. (2015). *Lost in democratic transition? Political challenges and perspectives for young people in south east Europe*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/11505.pdf>

¹⁶⁶ Çela, A., Fshazi, T., Mazniku, A., Kamberi, G., & Smaja, J. (2013). *Albanian youth 2011: “Between present hopes and future insecurities!”*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/albanien/10056.pdf>

¹⁶⁷ Çela, A., & Kamberi, G. (2019). *Youth study Albania*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15261.pdf>

6.2 Climate change

In this subsection, we delve into the perceptions of climate change held by young Albanians. It is essential to contextualise this discussion within the backdrop of Albania's vulnerability to climate change, a fact underscored by a range of factors such as political, geographic, and socio-economic conditions. As per the 2020 ND-GAIN Index, Albania's vulnerability is notably pronounced, ranking 75 out of 181 countries. This ranking inversely correlates vulnerability with resilience, meaning that the lower the score, the higher the vulnerability and the more pressing the need for enhancing resilience.¹⁶⁸

6.2.1 Day-to-day economic and employment challenges overshadow climate change concerns

Albania faces elevated susceptibility to climate change repercussions, further exacerbated by its infrastructure requirements and areas of poverty in rural regions.¹⁶⁹

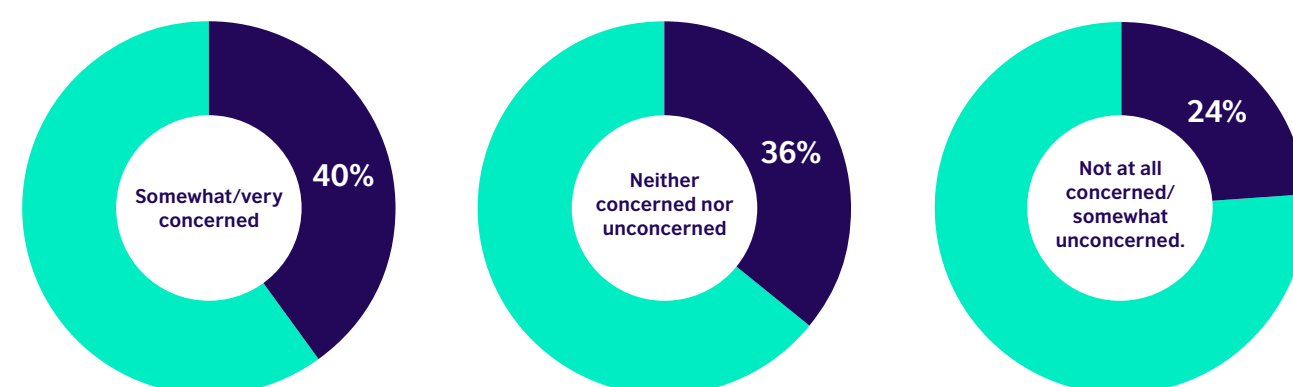
Climate change in Albania is likely to manifest primarily through the increased frequency of extreme weather events and temperature fluctuations. These changes

are projected to substantially impact critical sectors, the national economy, and the population at large. Among the various natural disasters, floods loom as a particularly perilous threat for Albania, given that the country's river and stream systems are vulnerable to floods, often triggered by relatively minor rain events.

An assessment of the 2019 earthquake indicated that on average, damages resulting from earthquakes and floods are estimated at around US\$147 million annually, with a catastrophic event, such as a 1-in-100-year earthquake, potentially incurring over US\$2 billion in damages.¹⁷⁰ This intricate web of vulnerabilities and potential consequences underscores the imperative nature of understanding how young Albanians perceive and respond to climate change.

In our survey, there is relative hesitancy around the impact of climate change, with 1 in 4 respondents (40%) reporting concerns, but just under a quarter (24%) claiming they are not concerned (see Figure 43). Higher levels of concern are seen across young women (45% of young women are concerned by climate change, as opposed to 35% of young men) and those aged 25-29 (47% of 25-29-year-olds are concerned, compared to 36% of 18-24-year-olds)

Figure 43: To what extent are you concerned with the environmental impact that climate change has in your country?



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 1155

¹⁶⁸ World Bank. (2021). Climate risk country profile.

¹⁶⁹ Republic of Albania (2016). Third National Communication of the Republic of Albania under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. URL: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Albania%20NC3_13%20October%202016.pdf.

¹⁷⁰ GFDRR (2020). Disaster Risk Finance Diagnostic – Albania. December 2020.

“Among the various natural disasters, floods loom as a particularly perilous threat for Albania, given that the country's river and stream systems are vulnerable to floods

Additionally, when ranked and compared to other pressing issues, such as employment and poverty, climate change does not rank in the top 10 concerns amongst young people. As explored above in Chapter 5, 68% of respondents deem 'tackling climate change' important when deciding to vote in 14th position, while employment and the economy top the list of issues impacting how young people vote with 93% of respondents reporting that they influence their votes. This is showcasing the way day-to-day challenges overshadow young Albanians' priorities over climate change.

Despite this, many young people report that they feel they are currently experiencing the effects of climate change. The record hot temperatures in the summer of 2023, the lack of rainfall and impact of biodiversity are keenly noted. “A concrete example is the increase in temperatures, there has rarely been 40 degrees in Kukës before...The rivers are drying up and without water there is no life...It is a very big problem, and we must do something” (18-24, M, High School Graduate, Kukës).

The effects of climate change on agricultural production, the river ecosystems and human health are highlighted across discussions. Some young people are particularly concerned about the connection between climate and health, particularly for older generations during the dramatic climate shift in the 2023 summer period. “If the environment is damaged, we are also damaged” (25-29, F, employed, Korçë). Other young people shared that “especially this year, in the village, there is very little agricultural production this year” (18-24, F, youth activist, Tirana) and that “in Lana River or other rivers, no fish live there now due to high pollution of its waters” (25-29, M, Young person with a disability, student, Tirana).

6.2.2. Young people believe climate action should be led by local governments and global alliances, but every personal contribution helps

The Government of Albania has taken several initiatives to address climate change in the mid to long-term, such as the introduction of the Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Climate Change (2014), the National Climate Change Strategy in 2019, the Action Plan of the National Strategy on Climate Change (NSCC) 2020-2030, the Climate Change Law (2020), and the implementation of various adaptation programs.¹⁷¹

Qualitative data in our study shows that young Albanians welcome government action on climate change, with some young people believing technological advancements and shifts towards cleaner technologies would mitigate pollution, including addressing pollution and improving transportation systems. Indeed, on a personal and local level, just over a quarter (16%) of our Next Generation respondents engage in developmental activities, including environment cleanliness and upkeep in the community. In our political and civic journey mapping we see clear examples of responsible, climate conscious youth who are happy to make their contributions to a cleaner world. *“Everyone has roles, like keeping our living environment clean, which is crucial. No matter how small our actions might be, they have a significant impact both on the planet and in other aspects”* (25-29, M, NEET Youth, Tirana).

However, young people largely agree that actionable and impactful change to tackle climate change can only come from global policies, governments, and the *“elites”* (25-29, M, Employed, Berat). The interconnectedness of climate change is clear to young Albanians, and qualitative discussions highlight the *“domino effect”* (18-24, F, High School Graduate, Vlore) and interrelation with neighbouring countries, as well as the need for concrete global and local policies. *“If each country has clear environmental policies, then even small steps can make a difference”* (18-24, F, High School Graduate, Fier). Qualitative discussions highlight that much of this power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of actors, and no matter how much personal contributions young people make, *“regardless of how much we recycle or how much we tell our friends not to litter”* (18-24, F, High School Graduate, Vlore), global action is imperative.

Despite increased structural vulnerability to climate change and relative concern of climate change amongst young people, the awareness of the impact of climate change and the actions the Government of Albania is taking needs to be increased. Whilst a minority of young people do engage in personal and local activities to tackle recycling, litter and pollution, real power for change is seen in to in the hands of global actors and governments.



¹⁷¹ United Nations Framework on Climate Change. (2022). The Fourth Communication of Albania on Climate Change.

Conclusion and Action plan

All the recommendations provided below stem from insights gathered from the research findings and the Next Generation Task Force, as well as the perspectives of young Albanians who engaged in the research. Considering this, the following action plan summarises recommendations in two phases and outlines key actors. The initial set of recommendations is geared towards optimising the inclusiveness, diversity, and effectiveness of the contexts that are already integral to the daily lives of young Albanians. Many of these contexts already provide a platform for them to express their voice. This approach focuses on crafting initiatives and policies that align with the present experiences and lifestyles of young Albanians, rather than expecting them to adapt to new norms.

The latter set of recommendations is tailored to tackle the specific barriers to political engagement and leadership highlighted in Chapter 4 of the report, utilising solutions workshopped by young Albanians themselves. The aim is to ensure that all young people receive the necessary support to actively participate in democratic decision-making and contribute to the governance of their nation.

Education

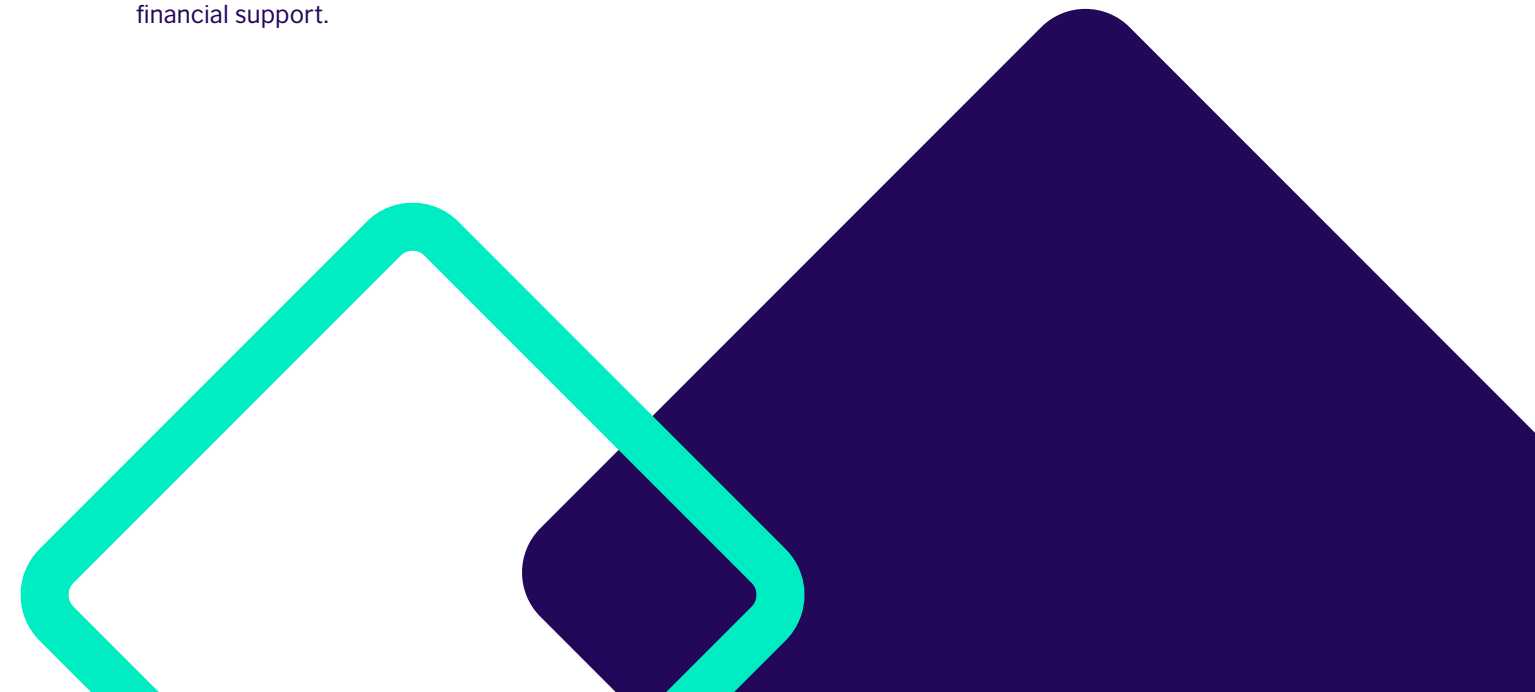
Young Albanians express significant scepticism over the quality of education and its ability to prepare them for employment and future life. Young people feel an emphasis on theoretical knowledge within curriculum and less on practical foundational skills that can help them in real life, such as communication, critical thinking and ICT skills. Whilst a lot of value is still placed on university education, very few students have access to workplace learning via internships and work placements. Career counselling is also relatively limited, especially in Northern regions. With these challenges in mind, we propose the following recommendations:

- Encourage more educational institutions to incorporate foundational soft skills training, independent learning, and practical applications into their curriculum. This should include communication, interpersonal, critical thinking, and networking skills for the professional advancement of teachers and students, especially in Northern regions where educational opportunities are fewer. Introducing extracurricular activities at schools, such as debating and entrepreneurs' club, may contribute towards this. Secondary education should incorporate instruction on business start-up skills, equipping young individuals with the necessary tools for embarking on entrepreneurial careers.
- Develop links and partnerships between educational institutions (at both vocational and higher education levels) and employers to provide internships, apprenticeships and work placements, especially in high growing industries (e.g., tourism, ICT).
- Map discrepancies amongst various areas in terms of access to education, educational attainment and other key indicators, and prioritise investment and support in those areas.
- Enhance the expertise and accessibility of career counselling services, catering to young Albanians' growth and employment requirements. Educators should also broaden their understanding of the labour market to effectively guide students along their career paths, considering practical routes outside of higher education. Provide essential job seeking skills, such as preparing a CV, writing a cover letter and job interview preparation.
- Utilise student-led initiatives and feedback aimed at improving or reshaping higher education, such as through the creation of student co-operatives or increasing youth representation in school governing bodies.
- Incorporate education on racial, religious, sexual, and cultural diversity within schools to foster heightened awareness, sensitivity, and inclusivity within society.

Employment

Unemployment, low wages, and poverty are key concerns for young Albanians. In addition, there are significant concerns about nepotism, lack of transparency, and influence of informal connections when looking and applying for jobs. The mismatch between educational output and labour market demand means that even well-educated youth struggle to find employment. However, there is a significant interest among young people to start their own businesses, especially among men and in the Southern region. There are therefore several areas where changes can be made to positively support young people:

- Strengthen anti-nepotism policies in hiring practices in public and private sectors. Promote the benefits of hiring based on merit rather than personal connections to the employers (e.g., increased productivity, diversity of thought, positive team dynamic).
- Improve access to employment search support throughout the country, this could be through the development of centralised job search websites or through information dissemination at youth centres.
- Create specific job opportunities to mainstream low-income earners and marginalised youth, such as those from Roma and Egyptian communities and those with disabilities to acquire skills aligned with present and future private sector demands.
- Expand opportunities for young people to support their entrepreneurial ambitions through essential training, networking, mentoring through peers on developing business plans and information about financial support.
- Enhance support for access-to-finance initiatives geared towards fostering entrepreneurship. Development schemes should meticulously devise strategies to aid young people in securing the necessary funds. This entails thorough examination of various financial models and the creation of products tailored to the specific requirements of participating youth.
- Family support in initiating and running a business profoundly impacts entrepreneurial progress, particularly for rural youth. Establishing methods to engage and garner backing from families and communities holds pivotal importance.
- Implement measures to offer affordable and accessible transportation, or subsidised transport, especially for those in regions with limited employment prospects. The provision of transport services is crucial to the integration of people with disabilities in the labour market.



Political engagement

Young Albanians are politically frustrated about their voices not being heard and the inability of the political system to represent their voices. Despite this, young people participate in a variety of political activities and engage in lively conversations, discussions, and exchange opinions on current affairs both online and offline. There is also a significant willingness to participate in future elections and recognition of the need for the youth to be more engaged politically. Providing more opportunities for genuine participation and two-way communication between youth and the local/national government can help counteract the feelings of frustration. The following suggestions can help improve political engagement among youth:

- Support capacity building and strengthening of youth councils, and share best practice across the country, allocating funding to those where the issues affecting young people are most acute, such as where it relates to education, employment, social inclusion, and community disengagement and other issues. Young people identified local youth councils as a key platform for taking part in local decision-making and budgetary processes.
- Share good practices from effective youth councils where young people genuinely participate and influence local decisions and budgets. Adopt and replicate these good practices across other municipalities where youth participation is ineffective. Raise awareness of available avenues for youth voice and involvement at various levels (e.g., local youth council, the National Youth Congress and Parliamentary youth clubs). Highlight specific examples and case studies in which youth involvement led to tangible benefits to various key stakeholders, including young people themselves, wider community, policymakers and civil society.
- Promote meritocracy in politics, ensuring appointments and opportunities are based on skills and competence rather than political affiliations, informal connections, and corrupt practices. This can help counteract the negative associations around politics voiced by young people and encourage more young people to enter politics.
- Integrate comprehensive civic and political education into the curriculum at secondary and higher education levels. This should include key principles of democracy, government and how laws are made and upheld. Teaching should equip pupils with the skills and knowledge to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, debate and make reasoned arguments.
- Leverage social media platforms to disseminate political information in an easy-to-understand way, stimulate discussions, and encourage young people to participate on issues that affect them. Social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, are widely used by young Albanians to seek information and discuss political issues.
- Establish and publicise measures to make political processes more transparent at various levels (local level, central government, parliament) to enhance trust and understanding among young citizens.
- Provide a platform for channelling student-driven initiatives, political activism and discontent among student populations. This can be through political clubs or hubs within universities, Student Councils or student wings of political parties.

Youth voice in the community

There is significant degree of affiliation with local communities among young Albanians, especially those living in rural locations and amongst minority groups (Roma and Egyptian youth). However, engagement in community planning and local decision making is limited, with a lot of young people reluctant to engage actively in their local communities. This is partly because community leaders emerge as one of the least used sources of information and the least trustworthy, despite being considered central figures in local decision-making. Considering these findings, the following suggestions are proposed to improve youth voice in local communities:

- Encourage youth to actively engage in community projects and initiatives, fostering a sense of responsibility and contributing to both community and political advancement. Young people suggested using existing platforms within municipalities as a first step (e.g., youth councils), but also supporting spontaneous, grassroots youth initiatives and projects.
- Strengthen and allocate additional funding to **local youth centres** in various communities, with a specific focus on the Northern regions. These centres would serve as physical hubs for community activities and platforms to expand successful initiatives that promote youth involvement in inter-community interactions.
- Strengthen the credibility of community leaders by demonstrating genuine interest and desire from local leaders to interact with young people and involve them in issues that interest young people.
- Provide local opportunities for volunteering among young people. Communicate the value and benefits of volunteering to the local community. Promote specific examples of where the involvement of young individuals has positively impacted their communities.
- Introduce community schemes to promote youth leadership, including roundtables with local municipality members, youth ambassadors, and establishing a youth position in Local Government Units.

Promoting social inclusion

Roma and Egyptian minorities, people with disabilities and the LGBTQI+ community face discrimination in many facets of their lives, including access to education, housing, employment and healthcare are more limited as they are still seen as 'other'. Lack of adequate infrastructure, feelings of isolation and disconnection, and limited job security were specifically mentioned

by young people with disabilities. Meanwhile, Roma youth face a unique set of challenges, including persistently high unemployment rate, stigmatisation and early marriage. Contributing to the issue is the relatively limited awareness of their struggles by the majority and the lack of meaningful representation. The following suggestions can improve the situation for these young groups:

Enable representation of marginalised groups in institutions (through quotas if necessary to start with), to include them in local policies and implementation. This would include young people with disabilities, diverse sexual orientations, and ethnic minorities. Ensure that people from marginalised groups are actively engaged in crafting legislation and governing matters that directly affect their lives.

Enforce policies that can make it more difficult for employers to dismiss people with disabilities unfairly from jobs. Earlier studies found that people with disabilities tend to be the first ones to lose their jobs, but also have higher living expenses (estimated to 2 to 3 times higher than people without disabilities).

Support local initiatives that aim to bring together and connect diverse members of communities through social events and other local initiatives. This can help tackle the sense of disconnectedness and alienation amongst people with disabilities, Roma and Egyptian young people, and LGBTQI+ youth.

Provide tailored local support for young people with disabilities and minority youth in terms of education, skills acquisition, and employment. One of the barriers mentioned by study participants was the perceived inability of Employment Services staff to be able to support their needs.

Include local funding for improving the accessibility of local infrastructure that affect day-to-day lived experience of people with disabilities. This includes, for example, improving pedestrian walks, access to buildings via ramps, lifts, introducing traffic lights for pedestrians with disabilities, etc.

Communicate short and longer-term benefits of education amongst Roma and Egyptian communities to encourage them to remain in school for as long as possible, therefore helping their prospect of better employment.

The Next Generation initiative strives to understand the experiences and aspirations of young individuals and amplify their voices, enabling them to better influence decisions and policies that impact their lives.

Annex

Key research questions addressed within the workstreams

Workstream 3 - Online community platform:

- How do young people in Albania feel about their daily lives and futures, including in comparison to their parents' generation?
- What are the values that affect the lives and decisions of young people in Albania?

Workstream 4 - One-on-one Youth Immersion Sessions:

- How do young people in Albania feel about their daily lives and futures, including in comparison to their parents' generation?
- What are the personal, national, social, and political priorities of young people in Albania?
- How do young people in Albania engage in the social and democratic life of their country?
- How do young people in Albania perceive themselves and their role in their communities?

Workstream 5 - Group Workshops:

- What are the personal, national, social, and political priorities of young people in Albania?
- What are the values that affect the lives and decisions of young people in Albania?
- How do young people in Albania view their relationship with the UK, EU, and wider world?

These workshops also provide a space for group reflection and collaboration, with the intention to connect participants and build future relationships.

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