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Introduction

1. The Centre for Voters Initiative & Action presents this report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee ahead of the 143rd Session for the review of Albania. The Centre is a non-governmental organisation based in the Americas with an international focus. The Centre acknowledges there can be no secure tomorrow without ensuring civil societies have knowledge to vote, participate, and engage with the democratic processes.
2. The Centre works with multiple international mechanisms to convey dialogue, conduct research, and bring awareness to the thematic issues of electoral engagement around the world. We closely follow and participate in the United Nations human rights mechanisms in Geneva and abroad, including the Human Rights Committee, to promote civil society participation in the public affairs process.
3. The Centre submits this ahead of the third periodic review of Albania under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. Recognizing the complex nature of the recent challenge Albania faces, the Centre hopes to provide valuable information to the Committee regarding the State’s compliance with issues exacerbating in compliance under Article 25. Indeed, this report is focused solely on Article 25, and we encourage Committee members to understand the nature of civic education as a tool to combat this contemporary turmoil; hopefully, the Committee will find this report valuable.
4. The Centre has submitted this petition to the Committee to focus on five specific violations: 1) systemic barriers to civic education and participatory access; 2) sustained societal inequities cultivating a weakened democracy; 3) historical legacies instilling norms of civic inefficacy; 4) inadequate access to political information fostering misrepresentation and ignorance; and 5) insufficient mechanisms for citizen involvement in governance.

Systemic Barriers to Civic Education and Participatory Access

Chronic Absenteeism of Female Students

5. Albania has historically faced significant gender inequality, particularly within the education system, stemming from patriarchal elements within its society rising to the surface in light of the rise of the nation's communist regime, which proliferated disturbing phenomena including violence and human trafficking, instilling fear among Albanian women and girls, in turn, perpetuating "old mentality".
6. From ratifying the Millennium Declaration in the year 2000, which pledged to eliminate sex-based discrimination in all levels of education by 2015, to continuing their vow through the 2016 adoption of the National Strategy for Gender Equality and Action Plan 2016–2020, Albanian women and girls continue to suffer discrepancies in schooling, exhibiting insufficient action taken to address the conflict.¹
7. According to the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), in 2022, 10% of school-aged girls were not registered in the compulsory nine-year education system, an 8% rise from the number recorded in 2014.² These issues of inequity not only influence intellectual capability, but also the capacity of an individual to be a catalyst for change. Especially among female students, patterns of truancy may open vulnerable communities to a proliferation of crime, trafficking, as well as other prominent human rights violations in Albania.

Indeed, gender inequality in Albania is prevalent in a majority of everyday aspects of Albanian civil society, undermining the rights of women under Article 2 of the Covenant. The Committee should be mindful of the diminished societal status of women when considering their broader participation in the public and political life.

Regional Disparities in Educational Resources

8. Although Albania has seen a reduction in its poverty rates, with a recorded 22% in the year of 2021, it is largely considered to be among the poorest of European countries.³ Coupled with the nation's urban-favouring wealth distribution, it is evident that public pre-collegiate education, funded by local systems of government, is subject to significant regional discrepancies.⁴

¹ Kindly refer to the information provided from

<https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/115410/bk-beyond-access-010905-en.pdf>.

² Information received from the Albanian government's education enrolment statistics (2022-23):

<https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/labour-market-and-education/education/publications/2023/education-enrollment-statistics-2022-2023/>.

³ Information received from World Bank metrics: Poverty & Equity Brief on Albania, published April 2022:

https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F-4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/previous/Global_POVEQ_ALB.pdf.

⁴ Published by the Albanian government's "Demographic and Health Survey" collected from 2017-18.

Information gathered in tandem with the *Swiss Government, United Nations Women, UNFPA, UNICEF, et al.*: <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/5050/adhs-2017-18-pdf.pdf>

9. Due to the rural digital divide, these economic disparities create significant barriers to quality education, limiting students' access not only to local schooling and necessary resources, but also to established online learning opportunities.
10. Consider the Kukës region: composed of largely rural counties, it lacks the public infrastructure needed for students to sustain their educational pursuits.⁵ Low secondary school enrolment rates highlight the challenging journey young people must undertake just to reach school. Representing merely one example of the many areas within the State facing inadequate resourcing preventing effective education, rural students will undoubtedly face challenges in their career trajectories, putting their future financial stabilities at grave risk for impairment.
11. Further exacerbating systemic obstacles in public engagement, individuals deprived of quality education will limit comprehension of civic mechanisms, reduce opportunities for political involvement, and constrain capacities to connect with government, thus disempowering communities from having a voice and playing a direct role in the exercise of democracy.

Inadequate Structures of Professional Development for Educators

12. Access to professional development programs for educators is critical to addressing and overcoming historical and systemic issues in the democratic participation of young people because teachers are central to shaping students' understanding of political processes, ability to engage meaningfully with government, and provide great influence on the way young people ultimately take charge of their civic lives as adults. Ensuring effective delivery of educational content, inclusive learning practices, the promotion of critical thinking skills, as well as the ability of students to engage beyond the classroom, educators immediately mould an individual's aptitude to affect tangible change in their community.
13. The Learning Policy Institute asserts professional development for educators to be essential to maintaining quality of curricula in an ever-changing world, promoting active and engaging models of learning, as well as fostering an elevated learning experience.⁶ Albania's 2012 Law on Pre-University Education System mandates three days per year for the professional development of educators, while the nation's 2014-2020 National Strategy for Development of Pre-University Education urges the

⁵ Published by the Faculty of Education, "Aleksander Moisiu" University, Durrës. "Education and Gender Issues in Albania: Kukës Region Case Enkelejda Cenaj". *Journal of Educational and Science Research*, Vol. 2, 6 April 2022. <https://www.richtmann.org/journal/index.php/jesr/article/view/12068/11670>.

⁶ Information gleaned from Linda Darling-Hammond, Maria E. Hyler, and Madelyn Gardner, with assistance from Danny Espinoza. "Effective Teacher Professional Development", *Learning Policy Institute*, May 2017. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Effective_Teacher_Professional_Development_BRIEF.pdf.

strengthening of pre-existing systems.^{7 8} However, Albanian pre-collegiate educators persist in reporting gaps in programming.

14. A 2022 study conducted by faculty at the Aleksandër Moisiu University in Durrës reveals that gender, age, and experience impede access to training initiatives, with respondents detailing work schedule conflicts (23.6%), monotony in regard to course materials (12.0%), as well as the attitudes of colleagues (14.4%) standing as the most difficult barriers to professional development. Unveiling flaws in current training systems and programs, it is clear that the State must lay out definitive actions to revisit standards for improvement.⁹
15. Knowledge, and thus education, reflects power itself. When actions are taken to progress the calibre of the educational experience, power is more effectively spread to traditionally marginalized communities, ensuring their representation in a government which upholds their values.

Civic Disillusionment Resulting from Lack of Education

16. Following the fall of the Party of Labour of Albania and its Hoxhaist regime, the State began interweaving systems of civic education into pre-collegiate coursework. However, early attempts only resulted in the nurturing of ambiguity, giving rise to misconception and fallacy in regard to political engagement.¹⁰
17. The 2010 Civil Society Index for Albania evaluated several tenets of the civil society: civic engagement, level of organization, the practice of values, perceptions of impact and the environment. Civic engagement, at 47.6%, scored staggeringly low, the least established of the five. With 18.1% of surveyed individuals taking part in charitable work through a social welfare organization, and only 24.5% reporting membership within a political group, the evident widespread apathy is symptomatic of deeper issues: disillusionment towards civic engagement and political participation.¹¹
18. Given that previous methods of civic education resulted in significant misinformation surrounding civil society, it is necessary to reform systems of civic education to put an end to cyclical and generational passivity. Though the subject is considered as a “graded” course, largely, as it is not a component of the State Matura, or graduation

⁷ "PËR SISTEMIN ARSIMOR PARAUNIVERSITAR NË REPUBLIKËN E SHQIPËRISË", Nr.69/2012, <https://app.box.com/s/zdnac71qyw1rhi6tclf11jhr8g6euszu>.

⁸ Report from the government of Albania, titled "DOKUMENTI I STRATEGJISË SË ZHVILLIMIT TË ARSIMIT PARAUNIVERSITAR 2014-2020". Published in 2014, https://www.arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Strategji_APU_dokumenti_perfundimtar_24_03_2015.pdf.

⁹ Information from a report: Dr. Klodiana Leka. "Gawe" Factors Affecting Teachers' Barriers to Professional Development: The Albanian case, *European Journal of Training and Development Studies*, Vol.9 No.3, pp.16-28. <https://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Gawe.pdf>.

¹⁰ "Mapping Civic Education in Europe: Albania". Written by: Emiljano Kaziaj, PhD, *IREX Albania*, <https://ratiuforum.com/mapping-civic-education-in-europe-albania/>.

¹¹ Information received from *CIVICUS* and *UNDP Albania* from a report titled "Civil Society Index for Albania". https://ratiuforum.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/csi-albania-acr_eng.pdf.

exam, relevant social studies are irrelevant to college admissions and therefore, are regarded as such by students.

19. Political disengagement limits the capability of individuals to accurately participate in systems of government, consequently, we strongly recommend the Committee to consider reforms to Albanian civic education as well as invest further into practices for promoting student interest in the study.

We urge the Committee to ask what steps the Albanian government is taking to strengthen the civic education of Albanian civil society in light of this information provided and ask what specific measures it is taken to combat political apathy.

Furthermore, the Centre strongly urges the Committee to focus on the status of civic engagement centres and similar educational institutions, in light of Albania's civic engagement being at a record-low level at 47.6% for civil society.

Sustained Societal Inequities Cultivating a Weakened Democracy

Proliferation of Unchecked Domestic Violence Against Women Leading to Voting Coercion

20. A 2019 INSAT survey records an unforgiving 61.1% of women “currently” experiencing physical violence in their household and while Albania has made strides in recognising and addressing domestic violence, but much is left to be desired in terms of curbing its spread.¹² In many instances domestic violence is indeed used as a tool to coerce women especially in rural and conservative areas of the country. Victims of violence can be denied their right to vote and make independent political choices due to physical and or emotional abuse and control.
21. As is common with domestic violence, many victims are discouraged from reporting violence due to fear of further abuse or social stigma. Law enforcement and judicial systems in rural areas often fail to address or investigate domestic violence adequately, leaving women vulnerable to ongoing abuse and coercion.¹³ As a result, these women are not only victims of violence but also disenfranchised voters whose democratic rights are being eroded.

Lack of Language Assistance for Limited Albanian Proficiency Voters Primarily Impacting Roma Communities

22. Albania's electoral process has failed to fully accommodate citizens who are not proficient in the Albanian language, notably those among the Roma community. Freedom House's Freedom in the World Official Report on Albania confirms this lack of linguistic inclusion in the electoral process.¹⁴ Consequently, many of those who

¹² Consider reading the National Population-Based Survey from 2018, "Violence Against Women and Girls in Albania". Published by the *United Nations Albania, UNDP, UN Women, et al.*:
<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/al/Research-Brief-VAW.pdf>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Refer to <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/freedom-world/2024/>.

speak Romani or other local dialects, are disproportionately affected by the lack of language assistance making the gap in language support effectively disempower a significant portion of the population, preventing them from making informed decisions at the polls.

23. The lack of translators, ballots in Romani or even public awareness campaigns in languages other than Albanian, contributes to the continued marginalisation of the Roma community. These barriers effectively undermine and therefore hinder their political participation. By limiting their right, the institutions failing to accommodate these populations further reinforce systemic inequality and marginalisation.

Albania must prioritise inclusive voting procedures by ensuring that all citizens, especially those from linguistically diverse communities, have access to language assistance during elections. This should and must include multilingual ballots, interpretation services and community outreach efforts to ensure full participation for vulnerable communities, like the Roma.

The Committee should ask what steps the Albanian government is taking to enshrine the political participation of marginalised groups such as the Roma, including the use of multilingual ballots to ensure electoral centres are accessible for all persons.

Non-Enforceable Accessibility Requirements for In-Person Polling Centres regarding Disabled Voters

24. Despite legal mandates requiring polling stations to be physically accessible to voters with disabilities and having north of 6.2% of their population suffering from some sort of disability, Albania's implementation of these laws is inconsistent at best.¹⁵ Voting infrastructure and polling stations often fail to meet accessibility requirements and have inadequate wheelchair ramps, lack of assistance for visually impaired voters, and poorly designed spaces that limit accessibility.¹⁶ This lack in adequate amenities furthers the gap in political participation for marginalised communities through indirect discrimination.
25. To ensure equal participation, Albania needs to enforce stronger regulations and penalties for non-compliance with accessibility standards. The electoral bodies must collaborate with disability advocacy groups to regularly assess and improve polling station accessibility throughout the country.

¹⁵ Read the law made by the Republic of Albania's Assembly on protection from discrimination: <https://rm.coe.int/lmd-updated-version-english-translation/1680a0c1fc/>.

¹⁶ Refer to the Albanian government's official report on Population and Housing: https://www.instat.gov.al/media/3058/main_results_population_and_housing_census_2011.pdf.

Restricted Civic Mobility for Marginalized Groups in Political Candidacy

26. Marginalised individuals and communities, such as women, the Roma people, and people with disabilities, face systemic barriers to running for political office. These groups experience exclusion due to socioeconomic status, lack of political networks and discriminatory attitudes within political parties. As a result, they are underrepresented in positions of power, weakening the inclusivity of Albania's democracy.¹⁷
27. Political parties in Albania tend to prioritise established elites, often side-lining candidates from disenfranchised backgrounds.¹⁸ Roma candidates, for instance, rarely secure political positions, despite their significant representation in Albanian society. Societal expectations and stigma also contribute to the challenges that women, disabled individuals and members from minority communities face when attempting to run for office, further limiting their mobility within political structures.
28. Political reform should focus on opening candidacy processes to marginalised groups by promoting affirmative action policies or quotas that ensure depreciated communities are included in political life. Training and mentorship programmes can help improve the participation of candidates issued from such communities or backgrounds.

Historical Legacies Instilling Norms of Civic Inefficacy

Extreme Political Polarisation and Party Fragmentation Contributing to Voter Apathy

29. Albania's political landscape is highly fragmented, the European Commission citing in their 2024 report a "partially satisfactory" functioning of democratic institutions "stemming mainly from the deeply polarised political situation".¹⁹ Due to this clear divide between left- and right-wing factions' political debates often become hostile, leaving little room for cross-party collaboration or dialogue.²⁰
30. Hostility and deep opposition foster instability within the country's political landscape, making the public aware of the inability of political parties to unite or deliver on promises. Many voters begin to feel that their participation is meaningless, a common sentiment particularly in the younger generations. To illustrate, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's report on Young People and Politics in Albania found Albanian politics to be considered by young people as "a

¹⁷ "The 2023 local elections in Albania: Women Representation in the Digital Media". Published in 2023 by the *Balkan Investigative Reporting Network*, <https://birn.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/The-2023-local-elections-in-Albania-Women-representation-in-the-digital-media.pdf>.

¹⁸ Anjeza Xhaferaj, "Appointed Elites in the Political Parties – Albania Case", *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 2(3), November 2013. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5901/ajis.2013.v2n3p307>.

¹⁹ Report on Albania by Gledis Gjipali, with information compiled from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators* 2013. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT13_Albania_3rdProof_0.pdf. Furthermore, consider reading the European Union's report on Albania, 2024, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2024_en.

²⁰ Kindly refer to: <https://isp.com.al/kuvendi-dhe-deputetet-rol-i-kushtetues-bilanci-dhe-kodi-i-sjelljes/>.

non-transparent arena that has often produced scandals and has been involved in illegal activities in general and criminal activities in particular”.²¹

Cultural Inheritance of Authoritarianism Advancing Political Apathy

31. For almost 45 years Albania lived under one of the strictest communist regimes where state surveillance and punishment were rife. This history of authoritarianism pursued with Enver Hoxha’s mandate, leaving a lasting imprint on the political culture of the country. Albania’s transition to democracy in the early 90s has conserved the marks of this regime with many citizens who still view state control with scepticism or indifference.²²
32. Despite several decades putting the communist regime behind Albania, cultural norms of compliance, fear of authority and political passivity continued to dominate. Many Albanians view state institutions as something to be feared or distrusted rather than engaged with. This political inheritance creates a barrier to developing a vigorous democracy as citizens remain reluctant to challenge political authority or participate in meaningful debate and discussion.
33. Whilst younger generations may have less direct experience with the communist regime, they still inherit a cultural legacy that discourages active participation. This historical inheritance of authoritarianism fosters an environment where political engagement is seen as futile, creating a sense of political apathy that is passed from one generation to the next.²³

With reference to Albanian political apathy, the Committee should consider asking the Albanian delegation what steps it is planning to take to enhance civic participation within society, focused on integrating a stronger democratic sentiment especially for youth. The Committee should, in particular, question the Albanian delegation on its civic engagement programmes to increase youth participation in light of the apathy mentioned.

Distrust in Electoral Integrity

34. Albanian citizens are sceptical of the integrity of the electoral process. Corruption within political parties, electoral commissions, and the judicial system often undermines public trust in the fairness of elections. Election fraud and vote buying, remain significant issues, leading many Albanians to question whether they vote truly matters in a system where manipulation is rife.
35. Repeated allegations of electoral fraud, coupled with a lack of accountability for those involved in such activities, have eroded public confidence in the electoral

²¹ Kindly refer to the Foundation’s report here: https://www.wfd.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/national-survey_young-people-and-politics-in-albania-final.pdf.

²² Written by Altin Gjeta, "The Origins of Political Polarization in Albania", *Tirana Observatory*, 24 May 2023. <https://tiranaobservatory.com/2023/05/24/the-origins-of-political-polarization-in-albania/>.

²³ Refer to footnote 21.

system. As a result, many citizens distrust the election results, and voter turnout continues to decline as more people become convinced that elections do not reflect the true world of the people.

36. Despite calls for electoral reforms from domestic and international actors, the Albanian government has made a slow process in addressing these concerns. The lack of transparent electoral processes and accountability mechanisms foster a culture of cynicism and disengagement from the political process.

Inadequate Access to Political Information Fostering Misrepresentation and Ignorance

Diminished Media Pluralism

37. In Albania, media pluralism is severely limited by the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few powerful individuals and political factions.²⁴ This centralisation results in a lack of diversity and political reporting and opinion, therefore leaving much of the public exposed to biased and partisan coverage. Major news outlets often align themselves with specific political parties, distorting the public access to accurate and comprehensive, multifaceted political information.
38. Many media outlets in Albania have been accused of serving as tools for political manipulation, either directly controlled by political elites, or influenced by private interests.²⁵ This limits the range of perspectives offered to the public, reinforcing the polarisation of political views, and contributing to a distorted understanding of political events and policies. As a result, citizens remain informed, and critical issues are often overlooked or misrepresented.
39. Albania's media regulatory bodies, such as the audio-visual media authority (AMA) often face challenges in forcing fair media practices due to political interference and insufficient resources. Journalists face pressure from political figures, or business interests, which prevent a truly independent press from emerging. Without strong legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms media independence continues to deteriorate, leading to a lack of reliable and diverse political information.
40. The diminished media pluralism has a direct impact on civic engagement and democratic participation.²⁶ Without access to a broad spectrum of opinions and objective reporting, Albanian citizens are left with limited opportunities to form informed opinions about candidates, policies, and national issues. This hinders their ability to make well-informed political decisions and fosters a sense of political disempowerment.

²⁴ Refer to the *Freedom House* report: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/freedom-world/2024>.

²⁵ Refer to "Media polarization and media (dis)trust in Albania", Ilda Londo, <https://institutemedia.org/media-polarization-and-media-distrust-in-albania/>.

²⁶ Kindly refer to "Albania: Media pluralism and transparency concerns fuel deterioration in media freedom", <https://rsf.org/en/albania-media-pluralism-and-transparency-concerns-fuel-deterioration-media-freedom/>.

Continual Violence Targeting Political Journalists

41. Albania has witnessed a troubling increase in violence against journalists, especially those reporting on corruption or political scandals. Journalists, especially those covering investigative reporting or sensitive political topics, are often subjected to threats, intimidation, physical violence, and harassment.²⁷ These attacks create a climate of fear, which discourages critical reporting and curtails the flow of political information to the public.
42. Due to the growing threat of violence and retribution, many journalists resort to self-censorship, avoiding topics or stories that may attract the idea of powerful political figures or criminal groups. This stifles journalistic freedom, and limits the scope of political discourse, further deepening public ignorance and misrepresentation of political realities.
43. While some cases of violence against journalists have been investigated, many perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity. The failure of law-enforcement and judicial systems to hold those responsible for these attacks accountable, creates a chilling effect on the press.²⁸ Without strong legal protections and enforcement mechanisms, journalists remain vulnerable, and political reporting continues to be hampered.
44. A free press is the cornerstone of a healthy democracy, and the violence and intimidation, faced by journalists, directly undermines the democratic process.²⁹ Without an independent and protected media, citizens lack the means to hold politicians accountable and democratic decision-making becomes less transparent and more susceptible to corruption.

Restrictions Upon Student Mobilisation and Internationalisation of Tertiary Educational Institutions

45. Political engagement among Albanian students has been traditionally weak, partly due to government restrictions on student mobilisation. In some instances, student organisations and movements that challenge the status quo are suppressed through intimidation or outright government interference.³⁰ These actions limit young people's ability to engage with political issues and participate in democratic processes.

²⁷ Read more specifically about [intimidation](#), [physical violence](#), and [harassment](#), contributing to the culture of fear in the State of Albania.

²⁸ Kindly refer to <https://rsf.org/en/albanian-publication-bans-prosecutors-must-take-account-right-information>.

²⁹ "Albania – Political parties and candidates must respect media freedom & transparency for the general elections of May 11, 2025", *SciDEV Centre*, 27 January 2025, <https://safejournalists.net/albania-political-parties-and-candidates-must-respect-media-freedom-transparency-for-the-general-elections-of-may-11-2025/>.

³⁰ Bruno Hasa, "Student Protests in Albania: When Digital Activism Is Not Enough", 4 March 2019, <https://cmds.ceu.edu/article/2019-03-04/student-protests-albania-when-digital-activism-not-enough/>.

46. Although Albania possesses the legal framework necessary to guarantee academic freedom, the higher education system does face constraints in terms of political discourse.³¹ A lack of open debate and political discussion in universities can further contribute to distrust of the political institutions among the younger population and reduce their capacity to critically engage with political issues.³²
47. According to the European Commission's Mobility Scoreboard (based on the 2011 Council recommendation "Youth on the Move"), Albania's higher education system still has limited opportunities for students to engage with educational institutions abroad or establish international academic partnerships.³³ This lack of mobility reduces students' exposure to differing political perspectives and diminishes their understanding of diverse democratic values, governments, policies, and practices.³⁴
48. Without access to a robust, politically open educational environment, students remain ill-informed about key issues facing the country. This limits their ability to contribute meaningfully to political discourse in the future, perpetuating cycles of civic disengagement and misinformation.

Deepening Digital Divide in Rural Centres

49. Rural Albanians are disproportionately affected by the digital divide and while some urban areas have access to modern technologies and digital platforms, rural areas often struggle with poor Internet connectivity and limited access to technology. In 2020, the ITU found that only 72.2% of people used the Internet in Albania compared to the European region average of 84.9% at the time.³⁵ This lack of connectivity results in inadequate access to political information for rural communities, creating a knowledge gap with urban citizens.
50. Political discourse in Albania is increasingly moving online, through social media, news outlets, and other digital platforms; however, reduced digital access in rural areas has a direct impact on voter participation.³⁶ Even though social media, news outlets and digital platforms increase accessibility to diverse political resources, rural

³¹ Read the specific law: <https://app.box.com/s/zdnac71qyw1rhi6tclf11jhr8g6euszu/>.

³² Kindly refer to https://www.wfd.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/national-survey_young-people-and-politics-in-albania-final.pdf.

³³ "Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 — 'Youth on the move' — promoting the learning mobility of young people", *Official Journal of the European Union*, 28 June 2011, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32011H0707\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32011H0707(01)).

³⁴ Refer to this specific map on the mobility scoreboard of higher education indicators across the EU: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/mobility-scoreboard/higher-education-indicators/information-and-guidance/2023/>.

³⁵ "Digital Agenda of Albania 2022–2026", *The National Agency for Information Society*, June 2022, <https://dig.watch/resource/digital-agenda-of-albania-2022-2026/>.

³⁶ Information derived from the UN report on Albania's digital development profile: https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Digital%20Development%20Country%20Profile_Albania_final_02.22.pdf.

voters are often disadvantaged due to a lack of access to broadband.³⁷ Rural voters often lack the necessary tools to access critical information about candidates, policies, or political events. As a result, they may be more susceptible to misinformation overlay on outdated or both sources. The disparity in information access exacerbates the inequity in political participation between urban and rural populations.

51. To address the digital divide, the Albanian government should and must invest in improving Internet infrastructure in liberal areas, ensuring equal access to political information for all citizens. Furthermore, digital literacy, programs and community outreach initiatives on the subject can help ensure that rural populations are better equipped to engage with political processes in an informed manner, using technology.

Insufficient Mechanisms for Citizen Involvement in Governance

Lack of Effective Public Engagement Platforms

52. In 2020, the National Democratic Institute found that two-thirds of Albanian citizens are discontent with present forms of government and opposition, indicating broader concerns regarding democratic representation.³⁸ Yet, there exist little proper frameworks in which constituents can properly engage in the political sphere. A 2024 report on political participation in contemporary Albania divulged that 25% of citizens contacted a local politician within the previous year, while only 13% reported taking part in public legislative consultation.³⁹ When questioned on the primary factors preventing involvement and engagement in politics, 40% named perceived futility of action, while 22% detailed little opportunity to truly influence policy.⁴⁰
53. Dynamic public involvement forums are essential to correcting the concerns. When constituencies can effectively participate in governance systems, democracies are strengthened and diversity is bolstered, highlighting a transparent decision-making process. The Centre firmly attests to these values, emphasising the role citizen involvement plays in fostering inclusion and accountability, proving how innovative dialogue informs collective action.

It is a basic entitlement of democracy that constituencies must be able to productively participate in political structures, thus, we respectfully urge the Committee to pursue further development in engagement platforms for the Albanian public.

³⁷ "Inclusive and User-Centred Services in Albania", *The World Bank Group*, July 2024, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/5f5d7ed374b0dfd5945b469bbb8c6504-0080012024/original/Albania-Inclusive-Services-Project-Brief-July-2024-FINAL.pdf>.

³⁸ Refer to <https://www.ndi.org/publications/albania-ndi-public-opinion-research-reveals-how-strengthen-public-engagement-politics/>.

³⁹ Joakim Ekman and Gilda Hoxha, "Research on political participation in contemporary Albania", *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 14 November 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25739638.2024.2426325>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

54. The Albanian government requires new legislation to be reviewed by and conferred on with civil society organisations. By and large, this does not hold true. In 2023, several NGOs were consulted on a proposed change to the Academy of Sciences of Albania's regulatory provisions, and objected, stating that its partisan influence would undermine the academic freedom of the institution.⁴¹ However, in spite of the evident dissent, Parliament approved the modifications, and the President signed them into law. Given the import of the role civil society actors play in politics, the neglect on the part of the government serves as a clear example of how effective civic engagement is systematically inhibited.
55. Though Albania's civil society space is reportedly diverse, in 2024, playing host to 11,700 NGOs, the true activity of these organisations is significantly lower, with only 4,767 being registered with tax authorities.⁴²
56. Moreover, there is a high degree of suspicion surrounding civil society, with only 52% of citizens expressing trust in these institutions. Painting Albanian civil society as homogenous, unreliable, and incapable of affecting change, clearly, citizens will not be able to find quality engagement platforms through NGOs, striking civic processes, leading to a decline in active participation and further erosion of social trust and cohesion.
57. The connection between civil society and civic participation is indubitably forthright: without a secure civil society, there cannot exist secure civic participation. In a State where communities find themselves unable to engage politically, democracy will plainly be diminished, contributing to a government far removed from the people it represents.

Weak Local Authoritative Structures Resulting in Diminished Responsivity to Constituencies

58. With 65 municipalities, local government units in Albania are tasked with the responsibilities of providing infrastructure service as well as social welfare to their constituents. In certain cases, municipal systems of governance are often entrusted with the impossible: duties for which they are not legally nor financially capable of carrying out. To illustrate, in 2003, local authorities were directed to "ensure the proper maintenance and operation of all education facilities in their communities"; the funding from which educational infrastructure was (and is) built as well as local directors of education were both managed by the national ministry, rendering this feat unfeasible.⁴³

⁴¹ Again, kindly refer to the *Freedom House* report: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/albania/nations-transit/2024>.

⁴² "Albania Country Report 2024", <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/ALB>.

⁴³ Democracy and Governance Assessment of Albania, *Democracy International*, <https://democracyinternational.com/media/Albania%20Democracy%20and%20Governance%20Assessment.pdf>.

59. When a local government is assigned an unattainable task—one that is predictably beyond their capacity to fulfil—they may become unresponsive to their constituents, as there is little, they can do to meet the demands made. This perception can decrease public trust, as citizens may feel that the government is either unable or unwilling to meet their expectations, further diminishing confidence in local governance. In doing so, apathy begins to spread, leaving a constituency unwilling and unable to participate effectively.

In light of the information provided to the Committee, the Centre urges the Committee to enquire the Albanian delegation on why local governments are politically disadvantaged. In particular, the Committee should ask what steps are being taken to promote local government participation through the reform of legal mechanisms to properly allocate power to different parties beyond the federal government.

Conclusion

60. In conclusion, the current state of voter rights in Albania remains deeply concerning. If the existing barriers to voter participation and civil freedoms continue, they will severely erode the integrity of Albania's democracy and undermine the rights of its citizens. These challenges are not isolated but rather a complex web of systemic issues—ranging from voter suppression to unequal access to polling stations—that collectively hinder the democratic process.

61. As outlined in this report, the Centre strongly advocates for comprehensive reforms focused on ensuring equal voting rights, enhancing public awareness, and strengthening civic engagement.

62. This report lays out a clear vision for reform, but the responsibility now rests with the Albanian government and relevant institutions to adopt these recommendations. To preserve the core principles of democracy in Albania, it is essential to break down the social and political barriers that disproportionately affect marginalised groups and to ensure that every Albanian citizen, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, ethnic origin, or disability, has unfettered access to the ballot box. Political and legal safeguards must be put in place to protect voters from intimidation and disenfranchisement. This is a critical issue that requires concerted effort from all sectors of society, and we trust that the government of Albania will work with us to implement these necessary changes.

63. This submission may be published on the OHCHR website or any other places necessary. For any enquiries regarding this submission, please contact primary contributors Ms. Junya LIU and Ms. Julie LOUSTAUNAU at jliu@cvia.ch and jloustaunau@cvia.ch, respectively.