

# **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the Workplace in Albania:**

*Frameworks and Recommendations*

**Study Report**

## **Study Report: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the Workplace in Albania: Frameworks and Recommendations**

July 2025

This study is supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Business for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion project, implemented by ICC Albania in cooperation with Streha Center. This study report is commissioned to private consultants and the content of this policy study represents the opinions and analysis of the authors and does not necessarily reflect those of ICC Albania, Streha Center and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The information provided in this publication is presented “as is”; no representations are made that the content is error free.

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Printed in July 2025

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines the current legal and institutional framework surrounding Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in the workplace in Albania, as well as the effectiveness of strategies, policies, and programs aimed at fostering EDI, with a focus on marginalized groups. Through a combination of legal analysis and insights derived from focus group interviews with civil society organizations, key findings and actionable recommendations have been identified to enhance the country's EDI landscape.

The institutional framework in Albania comprises a range of bodies, including ministries, national and regional councils, state agencies, and independent institutions like the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. These entities work together to oversee the creation and enforcement of labor market policies, gender equality initiatives, and protections for marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and youth. However, despite the broad and comprehensive nature of these institutions, concerns about weak implementation and insufficient enforcement remain prevalent, particularly with regard to workplace inclusion.

At the strategic level, a number of national strategies, action plans, and programs have been adopted to promote EDI, focusing on areas like women, persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and youth. While these strategies have a broad mandate to improve employment prospects and combat discrimination, focus group feedback indicates that these initiatives have not been fully effective. There is a notable gap between the existence of these frameworks and their actual impact on the ground, with civil society organizations reporting systemic barriers that hinder marginalized groups' access to the labor market.

The legal framework in Albania has made significant strides, aligning with international standards by ratifying numerous UN and Council of Europe conventions related to human rights and non-discrimination. Furthermore, EU legislation plays a crucial role in reinforcing the national legal environment, with specific obligations to combat discrimination and promote social inclusion. Despite this, monitoring reports from international organizations, such as the UN and ILO, highlight persistent challenges in areas like gender equality, the rights of ethnic minorities, and the integration of LGBTIQ+ individuals into the workforce.

Focus group interviews reveal that civil society organizations perceive the implementation of EDI policies as weak. Key challenges include a gender and social pay gap, systemic discrimination, workplace harassment, and inadequate working conditions, particularly for vulnerable groups. Many employers, both in the public and private sectors, lack formal EDI policies, and there is little discourse surrounding these issues in the workplace. Notably, while the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination has been responsive in addressing complaints, the overall response remains inadequate, with recurring instances of discrimination and exclusion reported.

## Key Recommendations

### ✔ Strengthen National Action Plan Implementation

There needs to be a rigorous effort to ensure that the National Action Plan on LGBTIQ+ Rights and other similar programs translate into tangible outcomes. This includes improving access to employment, offering long-term support, and creating sustainable job opportunities for marginalized groups.

### ✔ Promote Workplace EDI Policies

It is crucial to enhance the enforcement of EDI policies across both public and private sectors. Employers should be mandated to adopt formal written EDI policies and undergo regular training on workplace inclusion. Training on EDI issues, especially gender and ethnic diversity, should be made mandatory for all employees.

### ✔ Increase Monitoring and Accountability

Independent bodies such as the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination should be provided with more resources to monitor and investigate complaints effectively. Establishing stronger accountability mechanisms for both employers and institutions will ensure that EDI policies are not just on paper but are actively enforced.

### ✔ Enhance Legal Protections and Accountability

Strengthen mechanisms for reporting discrimination and ensure that victims feel safe and supported in doing so.

### ✔ Expand Access to Employment Programs

Programs like the Social Employment Fund and Social Enterprises should be expanded to ensure that marginalized groups, especially ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and persons with disabilities, have equitable access to vocational training and employment opportunities.

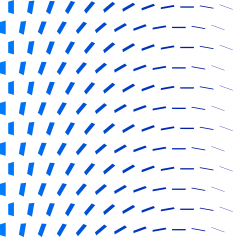
### ✔ Promote Workplace Education and Dialogue

Employers should be encouraged to engage in ongoing dialogue around EDI to foster an inclusive work culture. This includes addressing the gender pay gap, tackling workplace harassment, and ensuring equal opportunities for all employees.

### ✔ Foster Public-Private Sector Collaboration

Build stronger collaboration between civil society organizations, public, and private sectors. Employers, especially in the private sector, must be encouraged to engage in dialogue with vulnerable groups and incorporate diversity and inclusion into their recruitment and management practices.

In conclusion, while Albania has made commendable progress in its legal and institutional framework regarding EDI, substantial challenges remain in ensuring that these policies translate into real-world improvements. By addressing systemic barriers, implementation gaps, enhancing monitoring, and fostering collaboration across all sectors, Albania can create a more inclusive and equitable workplace for all its citizens.

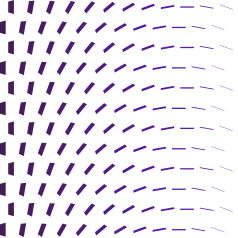


## INTRODUCTION

ICC Albania and Streha Center are implementing the project Business for Equality, Diversity, Inclusion (B4EDI), supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Tirana. The B4EDI project has created a platform for cross-sectoral dialogue and practical engagement at the intersection of human rights and business. It emphasizes workplace inclusion as a measure of social integrity and sustainable development. Grounded in the international and national institutional and legal frameworks, and enriched by focus-group consultations with civil society and business actors, this report represents a roadmap for coordinated government action and incentivized private sector leadership to bring Albania's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) framework into full alignment with international and European conventions and norms. The main goal of this report is to provide a solid ground for common understanding among the business community and focus groups in Albania regarding the existing legal, institutional and policy frameworks on EDI. To this end, the report seeks to encourage discussion and propose concrete steps to be taken to improve the EDI climate in the workplace in Albania.

The Report is the result of research based on a well-developed methodology combining desk and empirical research. The desk research was conducted during the period April 2024 – 15 February 2025; therefore, any developments in the policy, legal, or institutional framework occurring after 15 February 2025 are not reflected in the Report. As part of the empirical research, interviews were conducted on 18.04.2025 with organizations representing LGBTI, Roma & Egyptians, Youths, and other vulnerable groups, and on 28.04.2025 with an organization focused on the protection of employees.

The report starts with a mapping of the international frameworks regarding EDI in Albania. The national frameworks in Albania will be discussed subsequently. This discussion ends with an analysis of legal risks and consequences in cases of any infringement of the EDI legal framework. The Albanian policy and legislative frameworks on EDI are closely monitored by various UN committees and agencies, including the International Labor Organisation (ILO), as well as by the EU and international NGOs such as ILGA Europe. Hence, a discussion of their monitoring and evaluating reports provide a very good overview of the steps that still need to be taken to improve the EDI climate in the workspace in Albania. The report concludes with the key findings and recommendations from focus-group interviews reflecting their perception on the effectiveness of implementation of EDI strategic and legal framework in the workplace.



# INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

## I. International Conventions

There is a vast body of conventions, adopted by the UN or Council of Europe (CoE), which in one way or another relate to EDI. Albania has ratified most of them and therefore, they are directly applicable to the Albanian legal order. The most relevant conventions are discussed below.

### 1. Council of Europe Conventions

#### 1.1. European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

While the ECHR does not explicitly cover employment, the European Court of Human Rights has advanced workplace equality, diversity and inclusion via Article 8 (private life), Article 14 (non-discrimination) and Protocol 12. The Court often considers employment part of private life and addresses direct and indirect discrimination based on sex, race, religion and other grounds.

#### 1.2. Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

This is the first binding instrument for national minority rights. It ensures protection from discrimination and the right to participate in cultural, social, economic and public life. Member States must promote effective equality and minority participation, potentially through reserved seats or advisory councils, adapted to each context.

## 2. UN Conventions

#### 2.1. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

This convention promotes equal enjoyment of rights by persons with disabilities, including their right to work in inclusive environments. It defines disabilities broadly and emphasizes principles like non-discrimination, accessibility and participation. States must address multiple discrimination and ensure equal employment opportunities through legal measures.

#### 2.2. International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions

The most relevant ILO conventions are highlighted here. Their implementation is monitored continuously, and recommendations from this process are addressed in the report's final section.

##### 2.2.1. C100 - Equal Remuneration Convention

This fundamental convention establishes the principle of equal pay for men and women for work of equal value and requires Member States to enforce it through laws, wage-setting mechanisms or collective agreements.

### **2.2.2. C111 - Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention**

It obliges Member States to adopt policies promoting equality and eliminating employment discrimination based on race, sex, religion, political opinion and other grounds, in cooperation with employers' and workers' organizations.

### **2.2.3. C122 - Employment Policy Convention**

By ratifying this, Albania committed to promoting full, productive and freely chosen employment as a means to foster economic growth, improve living standards and reduce unemployment.

### **2.2.4. C168 - Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment Convention**

Albania must coordinate unemployment protection with employment policy, ensuring benefits support job-seeking and do not discourage employment. Focus is given to disadvantaged groups like women, youth, disabled persons and migrant workers.

### **2.2.5. C183 - Maternity Protection Convention**

This guarantees at least 14 weeks of maternity leave and prohibits job termination due to pregnancy. Women must be reinstated in the same or equivalent role post-leave, and employers bear the burden of proving dismissals are unrelated to maternity.

### **2.2.6. C190 - Violence and Harassment Convention**

This convention addresses the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the workplace, including gender-based violence. It mandates that State Parties implement accessible and effective remedies, such as complaint and investigation procedures, dispute resolution mechanisms and protections for victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers. The convention also emphasizes safeguarding privacy and confidentiality, enforcing sanctions where appropriate, and ensuring gender-responsive support and services for victims. Additionally, it grants workers the right to withdraw from dangerous situations without retaliation and empowers relevant authorities to enforce immediate protective measures, including halting work in cases of imminent danger.

## **II. Legal Frameworks**

The EU has paid special attention to adopting a comprehensive legislation that promotes equality and social inclusion of marginalized groups in the workplace, by posing specific obligations to fight discrimination.

### **1. Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (2000/C 364/01)**

The Charter protects fundamental rights within the EU, adapting to societal and technological changes. It reaffirms rights rooted in Member States' constitutional traditions and international obligations, such as the European Convention for the



Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. The Charter enhances legal clarity and certainty. Chapter III includes Article 21, banning discrimination based on characteristics such as sex, race or disability; Article 23, ensuring gender equality in areas like employment and pay; and Article 26, affirming the rights of persons with disabilities to measures supporting independence and community participation.

## **2. Directive 2000/43/EC — Equal treatment irrespective of racial or ethnic origin**

This directive combats racial and ethnic discrimination to foster economic and social inclusion. It prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimization across employment, training and participation in professional organizations. Limited exceptions apply where ethnicity is a genuine occupational requirement. Legal avenues must be accessible to victims, with the burden of proof shifting to the respondent once discrimination is presumed. The directive encourages social dialogue, codes of conduct and collective agreements to reinforce non-discrimination in workplaces.

## **3. General Employment Legislation**

### **3.1. Council Decision (EU) 2022/2296 on guidelines for the employment policies of Member States**

Article 148 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union establishes annual employment guidelines that Member States must incorporate into their employment policies to ensure a coordinated EU-wide strategy. The current guidelines – boosting labor demand (5), enhancing labor supply and skills (6), improving labor market function and social dialogue (7), and promoting equal opportunities and inclusion (8) – are integral to broader EU policy frameworks. Decision 2022/2296, effective since 24 November 2022, highlights updates in Guidelines 6 and 8. These updates emphasize addressing educational inequalities, providing tailored support to the unemployed, removing participation barriers, reducing gender gaps, combating discrimination, ensuring equal treatment for under-represented groups and integrating income support, inclusive labor markets and access to quality services. Member States must reflect these principles in their employment strategies and report progress as required by Article 148(3).

### **3.2. Council Directive 2000/78/EC — Establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation**

This directive aims to prevent discrimination based on religion, disability, age or sexual orientation in employment. It covers all aspects of employment, from recruitment to working conditions. It prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination, including harassment. Legal protections and remedies must be available to affected individuals, even post-employment. EU Member States are obliged to ensure that judicial and/or administrative procedures are available to all persons who consider themselves wronged by a failure to apply the principle of equal treatment to them.

### **3.3. Directive 2002/14/EC — General framework for informing and consulting employees in the EU**

This directive sets minimum standards for informing and consulting employees, allowing Member States to define scope and implementation. Consultation should be meaningful, timely and relevant to work-related changes, ensuring employee representatives can respond and negotiate effectively.

### **3.4. Directive 2009/38/EC — 3 on the establishment of a European Works Council or a procedure in Community-scale undertakings and Community-scale groups of undertakings for the purposes of informing and consulting employees**

This directive ensures employee consultation on transnational matters in large EU companies via European Works Councils. Central management must provide necessary information and negotiate terms with employee representatives. Confidentiality and training rights are safeguarded for representatives.

## **4. Gender-Based Legislation**

### **4.1. Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC)**

The Employment Equality Directive provides a robust EU framework to guarantee equal treatment in employment by prohibiting discrimination based on religion or belief, age, disability and sexual orientation across all sectors and forms of work. It covers direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and discriminatory practices in recruitment, pay, promotion, training and working conditions. The directive requires reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities unless it imposes a disproportionate burden, allows for positive action to address disadvantages, and ensures enforcement through legal protections, a shift in the burden of proof and safeguards against retaliation. Member States must also raise awareness and promote social dialogue to support equal treatment through workplace monitoring, codes of conduct and the exchange of good practices.

### **4.2. Directive 2006/54/EC — on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation**

Equality between men and women is a core principle of EU law, particularly in employment, where it prohibits direct and indirect discrimination in areas such as recruitment, pay, working conditions, promotion, training and membership in workers' organizations. Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union specifically bans sex-based pay discrimination for the same work or work of equal value, including in job classification systems. While limited exceptions may be allowed for legitimate and proportionate occupational requirements, Member States are required to provide effective remedies, such as conciliation and judicial procedures, and to protect employees from retaliation when asserting their rights. Penalties and compensation mechanisms must be established, and in legal disputes, once a presumption of discrimination is shown, the burden shifts to the accused to prove there was no breach of equal treatment.

#### **4.3. Directive (EU) 2019/1158 — Work-life balance for parents and carers**

Aimed at promoting gender equality, this directive introduces minimum standards for paternity, parental and carers' leave and supports flexible work arrangements. It seeks to increase women's labor market participation and encourage men to share caregiving responsibilities.

#### **4.4. Directive (EU) 2022/2381 — On improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies and related measures**

This directive mandates that listed companies achieve at least 40% non-executive or 33% total director positions held by women by 2026. Companies must use gender-neutral, merit-based criteria in selection processes and report on gender representation annually. Non-compliant companies must explain their shortfall and planned corrective actions.

#### **4.5. Directive (EU) 2023/970 — On strengthening the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms**

This directive establishes minimum rules to uphold the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women, prohibiting direct and indirect pay discrimination based on sex, and strengthening pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms. It requires employers to implement gender-neutral, objective pay structures based on criteria like skills, effort and working conditions. Employers are prohibited from inquiring about applicants' previous pay, must ensure non-discriminatory recruitment practices, and are obliged to make pay determination criteria accessible. Employees have the right to request and receive pay information, including average pay levels by gender. From June 2027, larger employers must report gender pay gaps and other pay-related metrics and collaborate with worker representatives to address unjustified pay gaps. Member States must support compliance through analytical tools, technical assistance and training, particularly for smaller employers, and ensure robust legal remedies are available to individuals and organizations with a legitimate interest in enforcing equal pay rights.

### **III.Strategies and Action Plans**

There are several policy and strategic documents at the EU level that address issues regarding gender equality or the rights of marginalized communities. The reminder of this section discusses some of the most relevant and important strategies and action plans of the EU.

#### **1. European Commission Communication – A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025**

This strategy outlines the EU's gender equality objectives and actions for 2020-2025. It aims to eliminate gender-based violence, discrimination, and inequality. Key goals include a gender-equal economy by addressing the pay gap, leadership equality via board representation initiatives and enhancing gender equality in external EU actions.

The Commission emphasizes gender mainstreaming through the appointment of a Commissioner for Equality and an equality task force.

## **2. Communication from the Commission — Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030**

This strategy aims to realize the rights of people with disabilities and reinforce the EU's global role in promoting equality. It supports implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities through coordinated national and EU-level actions. It addresses the diverse nature of disability, including intersecting identities, and focuses on removing barriers and tackling discrimination. A major pillar is ensuring equal access to justice, employment, skills and protection from violence.

## **3. Communication (COM (2011) 173 final) on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020**

This 2011 communication called on Member States to adopt strategies to improve Roma inclusion in line with the Europe 2020 goals. It aimed to close disparities in employment and social access by encouraging national reforms and strengthening the European Platform for Roma Inclusion.

## **4. Commission communication — A Union of Equality: EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation and the Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation**

The new framework enhances Roma inclusion through effective equality, participation and socioeconomic integration. It sets 7 priority areas: equality, inclusion, participation, education, employment, health and housing. It includes measurable targets – like halving discrimination and employment gaps – and guidance for Member States to develop support systems, promote Roma employment and meet strategic goals over the next decade.

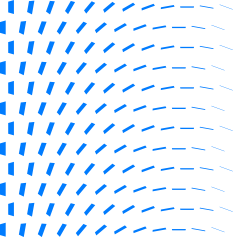
## **5. LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the Guidelines for Strategies and Action Plans to Enhance LGBTIQ Equality**

Equality and non-discrimination are foundational EU values, reflected in treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, with increasing efforts made to advance the rights of LGBTIQ people through legislation, policy and awareness. Despite progress, discrimination remains widespread, as shown by rising reports of bias and exclusion, with many LGBTIQ individuals still facing insecurity, poverty and reluctance to report abuse. In response, the European Commission adopted the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, aiming to combat discrimination, ensure safety, foster inclusive societies and promote LGBTIQ equality globally. This strategy is supported by tools like the EU Platform of Diversity Charters, the use of the ESF+ to uplift marginalized groups and a European action plan for social economy to boost inclusion via social enterprises.

Further guidance is provided by the LGBTIQ Equality Subgroup's guidelines, which help Member States develop effective strategies that address employment, poverty and multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination, especially affecting trans, non-binary, intersex individuals and those from other vulnerable groups.

## **6. Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on Establishing a Youth Guarantee (2020/C 372/01)**

The Youth Guarantee, established in 2013, ensures all under-25s receive quality job, education or training offers within 4 months of unemployment or leaving school. The 2020 revision extends the age limit to 29 and emphasizes inclusion of vulnerable youth like NEETs, young women and those with disabilities. Implementation occurs through national and local schemes, focusing on outreach, preparation, job placement and post-placement support.



# NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

In recent years, Albania has made progress toward improving the national legal framework on human rights, equality and non-discrimination, diversity and inclusion as well as harmonizing this framework with the international one. The adopted legal framework consists of national legislation and international obligations undertaken by ratifying several conventions. It is impossible to include and identify in this study all binding legal acts related to EDI. Therefore, the most significant and relevant framework will be mapped and treated below. During the last years, important steps have been taken in Albania toward strengthening and improving the services of employment policies and skills, especially through the strengthening of the role of the public sector in the provision of employment services, as well as the modernization of the education and professional training system. The following laws and institutions play a key role in promoting an equal, diverse and inclusive environment in the workplace in Albania.

## I. Legal Frameworks

### 1. Constitution of the Republic of Albania

The Constitution of the Republic of Albania emphasizes equal rights for all, stating in Article 18/2 that everyone is equal before the law and protected from discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, beliefs and other factors. Article 15 declares fundamental human rights central to the legal order. Article 17 permits limitations only when lawful, proportionate and consistent with the European Convention on Human Rights.

### 2. Labor Code

The code establishes comprehensive provisions to foster an equal, diverse and inclusive work environment by prohibiting discrimination in all aspects of employment and occupation, including job postings, recruitment, training and termination. Discrimination is broadly defined to include any unjustified differential treatment based on numerous grounds such as sex, race, age, disability, sexual orientation, political beliefs, health status, or union membership, among others. Employers are required to provide reasonable workplace accommodations for persons with disabilities, with failure to do so considered discriminatory. In discrimination and harassment claims, the burden of proof shifts to the employer or alleged perpetrator once the employee presents initial evidence. The code also bans discriminatory pay practices, moral and sexual harassment, and degrading behavior, and mandates special protections for pregnant employees and new mothers, covering maternity leave, workplace health and safety, and job security before and after childbirth.

### **3. Law No. 152/2013 “On Civil Servant”**

This law ensures equal, merit-based access to civil service employment. The principles of equality and non-discrimination apply throughout the employment lifecycle, from recruitment and training to promotions, evaluations and disciplinary actions, all based on professional merit through transparent processes.

### **4. Law No. 9970/2008 “On Gender Equality”**

The law ensures equal rights and opportunities for men and women in public life and mandates 30% gender representation in decision-making roles. It prohibits discrimination in sectors like education and employment, requires gender-disaggregated data and supports gender budgeting through sub-legal acts like the 2012 Council of Ministers’ Decision No. 465.

### **5. Law No. 10221/2010 “On Protection from Discrimination”**

Since 2010, Albania's Law “On Protection from Discrimination” has ensured equality and banned discrimination based on a wide range of personal characteristics, including race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and more. It defines discrimination as any act that hinders equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms and establishes the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination as the national oversight body. Amendments made in 2020 clarified the law's scope and added definitions for hate speech and severe forms of discrimination.

### **6. Law No. 93/2014 “On Inclusion and Access of Persons with Disabilities”**

This law ensures the rights of persons with disabilities by promoting their full, equal participation in all areas of society and supporting independent living through accessible services and inclusive policies. It assigns responsibilities to public and private bodies to remove barriers and uphold principles of non-discrimination, equality and inclusion. Support services are designed to give individuals with disabilities autonomy and equal access to education, employment and daily life opportunities. The law also establishes the National Council for the Disabled and designates the Ombudsman and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination to monitor its implementation.

### **7. Law 65/2016 “On Social Enterprises in the Republic of Albania”**

This law governs the operation of social enterprises, setting the criteria for obtaining and losing their status, with the goal of promoting employment for vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, orphans, long-term unemployed individuals and women victims of violence or trafficking. It outlines how these enterprises function, the rights and duties of their members and employees and mandates oversight by the Ministry responsible for social affairs. Social enterprises may receive state support through subsidies or other forms of aid under relevant state and tax laws.

## **8. Law 121/2016 “On Social Care Services in the Republic of Albania”**

This law ensures social services for vulnerable individuals, emphasizing non-discrimination. It identifies groups such as people with disabilities and single parents as key beneficiaries. Rehabilitation for work and social integration are also included, funded by the Social Fund.

## **9. Law No. 15/2017 “On Education and Vocational Training in the Republic of Albania”**

This law aims to create a unified and modern Vocational Education and Training (VET) system in Albania that aligns with socio-economic and technological changes and meets local and global labor market needs, while ensuring equal access for all individuals. It defines the roles of key institutions such as the Ministry responsible for VET, the National Agency for Employment and Skills and the National Agency for Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications. Both public and private institutions can offer VET under this law, which also sets detailed rules on qualifications, curricula, certification, provider accreditation and quality standards.

## **10. Law No. 96/2017 “On Protection of Ethnic Minorities in the Republic of Albania”**

The law guarantees the protection from discrimination of the Greek, Macedonian, Aromanian (Vlach), Roma, Egyptian, Montenegrin, Bosnian, Serbian and Bulgarian national minorities. Also, the law provides that persons belonging to any of the national minorities have the right to equal and effective participation in the public, economic, social and cultural life of the country. This clause gives the opportunity to individuals who belong to any of the minorities defined by the law to be included in the same way and without discrimination in employment.

## **11. Law No. 15/2019 “On Encouragement of Employment”**

This law regulates the operation of public employment services and labor market programs in Albania, aiming to enhance workforce employability through employment services, self-employment and vocational training. It prioritizes support for vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, NEET youth under 29, Roma and Egyptian communities, and others. The law provides for both active measures – like public works, and training – and passive support, including unemployment assistance. A key amendment introduced the Youth Guarantee Scheme, offering NEET individuals an employment, education or training opportunity within four months of registration. The law also establishes the Social Employment Fund, financed by employer contributions when disability hiring quotas are not met.



## **12. Law No. 75/2019 “On Youth”**

The law establishes the framework for protecting and promoting the rights of young people aged 15 to 29 in Albania and the diaspora, aiming to increase their participation in policymaking and decision-making at both central and local levels. It emphasizes principles of equality, non-discrimination and equal opportunities, supporting youth engagement in areas such as education, employment, social inclusion and volunteering. Key concepts include non-formal education and youth work, which focus on informal, participatory activities that foster personal and social development. The law outlines responsible institutions like the National Youth Agency and National Youth Council and mandates the creation of a national youth database to inform and guide youth policy implementation.

## **II. Strategies and Action Plans**

There is a comprehensive body of strategic and policy documents approved by the Government of Albania. Several documents are of general nature, however, they do have strong components on improving the employment climate in Albania through equity, diversity and inclusion. Other documents have a special focus on women, persons with disabilities, Roma and Egyptians communities, LGBTI+, ethnic minorities and youth. These documents aim to increase employment, combat discrimination and encourage inclusion in the public and private sector. Furthermore, there are several programs, strategies and initiatives, which aim to improve the employment situation of different categories of people such as youth, persons with disabilities, etc. The remainder of this section gives an overview of the most relevant strategies and policy documents in Albania.

### **1. National Strategy for Development and European Integration 2022-2030**

This strategy is Albania’s core framework for sustainable economic and social development, guiding EU integration. It comprises sectorial and cross-sector strategies. Employment is part of Pillar III: “Social Cohesion.” The vision for employment is “qualitative employment and continuous training for all,” with two goals: (1) improve skills and link job seekers with labor market demands; (2) promote decent work through inclusive labor market policies. The strategy outlines current conditions and sets mid- to long-term goals for labor market participation and equal access to decent work.

### **2. National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2023-2030**

The vision of the strategy is “qualitative employment and lifelong learning for all.” It outlines two main policies: improve skills and job matching (with three objectives: reduce skills mismatch, enhance skills for working-age individuals and improve labor market functioning); and ensure decent employment via inclusive labor policies, with objectives on mediation programs and decent work conditions.

The strategy complements the National Strategy for Development and European Integration 2030 and supports goals like youth employment and gender equality. It stresses inclusive growth and the need for cooperation with all stakeholders, including support for youth, minorities and marginalized groups. Priority measures include strengthening VET systems, involving the private sector, promoting digitalization and improving labor market intelligence.

### **3. National Strategy for Social Protection 2024-2030**

The strategy highlights ongoing gender inequality in employment, with women facing lower pay, informality and lack of implementation monitoring. It also notes high poverty and exclusion rates, especially for people with disabilities, who are severely affected by crises. The vision of the strategy is “social protection in an enabling and empowering environment ensuring a dignified life”, attained through two policies: reduce poverty and empower persons with disabilities through gender-sensitive and crisis-resilient financial schemes; and strengthen assessment and service systems for persons with disabilities.

### **4. National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030 and its Action Plan**

The strategy promotes equal opportunities regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability or other traits. It emphasizes eliminating gender stereotypes and discrimination to ensure inclusive development. The vision of the strategy is “a society that values equality and gender justice, ensuring no one is left behind and promoting zero tolerance for gender-based violence.” Its key principles are addressing intersecting discrimination, especially among marginalized women and girls, applying a human rights-based, inclusive approach and recognizing diversity in gender, ability and background.

It seeks to accomplish this by:



**Promoting women's  
inclusion in all work  
sectors.**



**Supporting rural  
women through  
social enterprises.**



**Expanding access to  
social services via the  
Social Fund.**



**Implementing  
ILO Convention C190**



**Implementing  
EU Equality Directives.**

## 5. National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2025

The National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025 is a cross-sectoral initiative by the Government of Albania aimed at promoting the integration of persons with disabilities into socio-economic life, aligning with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Its vision is to advance the rights, independence and full participation of persons with disabilities in all areas of life, ensuring equality and freedom of choice.

Among its eight key policy areas, policy 3, focused on increasing labor market participation and ensuring equal access to decent work for persons with disabilities, is particularly relevant. This policy emphasizes training and employment as central to integration. For the implementation of this policy, the state institutions, which have responsibility in this field, in partnership with public and private institutions and other organizations, will focus on three specific objectives.

### Three Objectives of Policy 3 of the NAP for Persons with Disabilities

#### **Objective 1: “Increasing the quality of training services to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labor market.”**

One key factor influencing the employability of persons with disabilities is their access to free training through Vocational Training Centers (VTCs). A unified curriculum focused on basic skills has been implemented in all public VTCs to enhance their capacities. Plans also include expanding vocational and lifelong learning courses – both general and specialized – aligned with labor market needs, while promoting successful employment outcomes for persons with disabilities as positive examples of vocational training impact.

#### **Objective 2: “Increasing opportunities for employment and self-employment for persons with disabilities.”**

Albania’s updated employment legislation promotes the inclusion of persons with disabilities through the Social Employment Fund (SEF), operational from January 2024, and a new counselling and mentoring package for employers and employees. The goal is a 20% annual increase in beneficiaries of employment promotion programs. Key measures include funding workplace accessibility adaptations and strengthening cooperation between the National Agency for Employment and Skills, universities and employers to support internships and employment for educated jobseekers with disabilities. Additionally, Law No. 65/2016 on Social Enterprises provides subsidies to support employment and social services for vulnerable groups, including coverage of social and health insurance.

### **Objective 3: “Improving the quality and efficiency of services aimed at promoting the integration of persons with disabilities in the labor market.”**

The restructuring of the central institution, the National Agency for Employment and Skills, responsible for the implementation of employment policies, also determines the appropriate measures that will be taken to achieve the objective. In addition to designing new curricula to provide training in “Basic Skills”, measures will be taken to design and approve guidelines on service provision manuals for jobseekers and employers. In this process, priority is given to the assessment of persons with disabilities related to their profiling and employability.

## **6. National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians 2021-2025**

The protection of human rights and anti-discrimination, particularly for Roma and Egyptians, is a core priority in Albania’s EU integration agenda.

The national action plan acknowledges the systemic discrimination these communities face, especially in employment and vocational training. Its vision is to ensure equality, inclusion and participation of Roma and Egyptians across all areas of social life – education, employment, housing, healthcare and social services – while reducing socio-economic and cultural disparities. To achieve this, the plan outlines seven strategic priorities, grounded in equality, non-discrimination and international human rights standards.

Policy 5 specifically targets the creation of equal opportunities for quality, sustainable employment for Roma and Egyptians. For the implementation of this policy, the following specific objectives have been defined.

### **Three Objectives of Policy 5 of the NAP for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians**

#### **Objective 1: “Promoting the employment of Roma and Egyptians through education, vocational training and active labor market programs.”**

The plan addresses the low registration of Roma and Egyptian minorities – especially youth and women – as unemployed jobseekers by promoting awareness of employment programs and enhancing access to career counselling services. It aims to boost their participation in skills development, professional training, self-employment and community public works programs. Key measures include prioritizing young Roma and Egyptians in the national work practice program, introducing employment quotas in public administration and explicitly targeting them in Youth Guarantee schemes.

## **Objective 2: “Promotion of (social) entrepreneurship and self-employment of Roma and Egyptians.”**

Although Roma and Egyptians are key beneficiaries under Law No. 65/2016 on Social Enterprises, no individuals from these groups have benefited to date. To address this, the action plan emphasizes creating an enabling environment for their involvement in social enterprises by prioritizing and training Roma and Egyptian NGOs in legal, financial and business management aspects. The plan also aims to formalize undeclared work by supporting at least 300 Roma and Egyptians in entrepreneurship and self-employment by 2025. Measures include reducing local taxes and fees for Roma-owned or Roma-inclusive businesses, fee exemptions for Roma peddlers, reserving commercial spaces with proper infrastructure and prioritizing access to IPARD II grants for agriculture and rural development.

## **Specific Objective 3: “Increasing the capacities and improving the work performance of the staff of the National Agency for Employment and Skills and of the education and professional training for the integration of Roma and Egyptians in the labor market.”**

Mediation is a key strategy in addressing employment, health and education inequalities faced by Roma and Egyptians, though integrating mediators into Albanian state institutions has been challenging. The action plan proposes employing mediators in employment offices to improve communication, access and impact of employment services for these minorities. It also addresses the distrust Roma and Egyptians often feel toward public institutions by promoting awareness on anti-discrimination, cultural inclusiveness and conducting mandatory training for employment service staff. The plan includes developing tools to prevent workplace discrimination based on ethnicity and ensures continued economic assistance for Roma and Egyptians enrolled in employment programs until they secure long-term jobs. Additionally, it prioritizes support for beneficiaries exiting assistance programs to start social enterprises or income-generating initiatives.

## **7. National Action Plan for LGBTI+ 2021-2027**

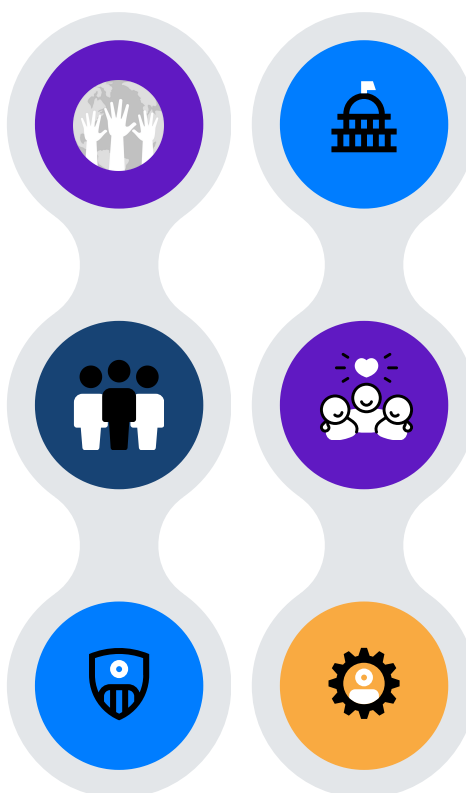
This third national action plan focuses on protecting the rights of LGBTI+ persons in Albania by promoting inclusion, reducing societal discrimination and ensuring equal access to quality services. Reflecting the Government of Albania's commitment to fairness, transparency and non-discrimination, the plan envisions an inclusive society where LGBTI+ individuals can live freely and participate equally, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation or other characteristics. Spanning seven years, the plan aims to meet national and international standards through legal, policy and service improvements, with special attention to those facing multiple discrimination, and to allocate sufficient resources to create a safe and equitable environment for all.

## Principles of the Action Plan

**Universal human rights**  
Everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics, is entitled to full human rights and dignity.

**Non-discrimination in services**  
Services must treat everyone equally, without bias based on identity or characteristics.

**Confidentiality and protection of personal data**  
LGBTI+ personal data must be kept confidential and handled lawfully, with strict professional obligations.




**Protection from the state**  
All individuals have the right to be protected by the state from violence and discrimination, regardless of their identity.

**Affirmation and respect for personal identity**  
LGBTI+ people need safe, affirming spaces to openly express their identity without fear of discrimination or exclusion.

**Do no harm & person-centered services**  
Services must prioritize safety, dignity, and individual needs, ensuring no harm is caused and that diversity is respected.

The action plan consists of three policies, of which the ones containing objectives with focus on employment are policies 1 and 3.

 **Policy 1: “Improving the access of LGBTI+ persons to effective, quality and available specialized public services and support services throughout the country, in accordance with their specific needs and with national standards harmonized with European/international ones”.**

Policy 1 of Albania’s national action plan aims to enhance LGBTI+ individuals’ access to inclusive, high-quality public services across sectors, including education and employment, aligned with national and international standards.

Objective 4 of this policy focuses on reducing labor market barriers for LGBTI+ persons and increasing their access to decent work, particularly in non-traditional fields such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics. It seeks to create more inclusive employment and vocational training services and to promote the participation of LGBTI+ individuals in innovative sectors like environmental economics and digitalization. Progress will be measured by the number of employment service providers trained to serve LGBTI+ people without discrimination and the number of LGBTI+ persons supported to develop innovative projects in targeted fields.

### **Policy 3 “Creation of an inclusive, accepting and non-discriminatory society against LGBTI+ persons in Albania”**

Policy 3 of Albania’s national action plan focuses on building an inclusive, accepting and non-discriminatory society for LGBTI+ individuals by emphasizing public awareness and education. It outlines two key objectives: first, to educate society – citizens, NGOs, the private sector and professionals – on principles of equality and inclusion, aiming to foster a new, open-minded generation; and second, to raise awareness among public and private employers to create a more welcoming and inclusive work environment for LGBTI+ individuals. These goals are to be achieved through persistent public education and targeted measures that promote acceptance and non-discrimination across all sectors.

## **8. National Strategy for Youth 2022-2029**

The strategy envisions empowering young women and men to actively contribute to Albania’s development, with a mission to enhance opportunities, services and support for youth through collaboration. Among its three main policies, policy 2 specifically addresses employment by promoting youth innovation and skill development through quality education in ICT and digital fields, thereby improving their prospects for entering the labor market.

### **Objective 1: “Young people are skilled, well-informed about employment opportunities and able to make autonomous choices when they join the economically active population”.**

To achieve this, the strategy promotes youth employment and entrepreneurship through collaboration with local youth councils, startups and enterprises; supports jobs in ICT and digitalization; develops inclusive career guidance services near educational institutions; and encourages youth-led innovation through supportive policies, legal frameworks and initiatives like co-working spaces.

### **Objective 2: “Young people are well informed about the educational opportunities related to the labor market and are provided with quality learning both in formal and non-formal education, contributing to the development of competences, skills and virtues”.**

To achieve this objective, young people – especially young women – must be supported during key transitions with counseling that links education choices to labor market opportunities, while also promoting safe use of technology and the development of digital skills.



### **Objective 3: “Young people, in all conditions and situations, represent a special focus in training, employment, entrepreneurship and employment policies.”**

The key employment challenge is promoting stable, decent jobs for young people, especially women and those with disabilities, through youth-friendly policies that support employability, entrepreneurship and access to information on employment rights. This includes fostering innovation, part-time work opportunities and integrated approaches to prevent early school leaving and support vulnerable youth.

## **III. Schemes, Programs and Initiatives**

### **1. Youth Guarantee Scheme**

The Government of Albania, in alignment with European Commission recommendations, is committed to ensuring that every young person under 29 who is not employed, educated or trained (NEET) receives a decent offer of employment, training or education within a few months of identification. To achieve this, the Ministry of Economy launched the Youth Guarantee Scheme in October 2023, supported by the European Union. This initiative, part of an EU-wide commitment, aims to integrate young people into the labor market by providing quality offers within four months of registering as unemployed or leaving formal education. The program targets employment, continuing education, vocational training and apprenticeships, with a focus on sectors like Tourism and Energy.

The Youth Guarantee Scheme is integrated into Albania’s National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2023-2030 and managed by the National Agency for Employment and Skills. It involves expanding the labor market information system to monitor NEET youth before, during and after participation, and establishing task forces to build partnerships between public institutions and private service providers. This initiative is particularly crucial for young people from families receiving economic assistance, addressing Albania’s high NEET rate, which was more than double the EU average in 2020. The scheme relies on cooperation across sectors to ensure effective implementation and support for vulnerable youth.

### **2. Social Enterprises**

Social Enterprises in Albania aim to create employment opportunities for disadvantaged individuals through subsidies from the Social Enterprise Fund. The Law “On Social Enterprises” was approved in 2016 and activated in 2018 with specific procedures for obtaining social enterprise status. Although a fund of 249.76 million ALL was allocated for 2019-2021, it remained unused. In 2023, the government established new regulations and a support fund of 240 million ALL for 2023-2025. Currently, nine NGOs hold social enterprise status, with financing expected to begin in 2023.



### 3. Social Employment Fund

The Social Employment Fund, established in 2019 and managed by the National Agency for Employment and Skills, is a key tool under Albania's National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2023-2030 to promote the employment and integration of persons with disabilities. Financed by employer contributions and donors, the fund supports employment, training, self-employment and job modifications, aiming to employ at least 9,030 people with disabilities in public and private sectors. From January 2024, employers must either hire a designated number of persons with disabilities or pay into the fund. The framework includes programs like subsidized employment and vocational training reforms to ensure accessible, quality education and support. Institutions are tasked with assessing employability, creating individual employment plans and promoting inclusive workplace culture through awareness campaigns and adaptations in infrastructure and staff training.

## IV. Legal Remedies and Enforcement Mechanisms Against Discrimination

As outlined above, the legal and policy framework includes a combination of laws, strategies, programs, and funding schemes aimed at promoting equality and combating discrimination. Within this framework, the following legal instruments and enforcement mechanisms are available to ensure accountability and protection against discriminatory practices.

Complaint Mechanism	Civil Action	Administrative Sanctions
Individuals or groups may file a formal complaint to the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, who is mandated to investigate and act on alleged discriminatory practices in accordance with national anti-discrimination law.	Employees can seek court indemnification for discrimination <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• up to 12 salaries for discriminatory dismissal (Labor Code, Art. 9 &amp; 146);</li><li>• compensation under gender equality (Law 9970/2008, Art. 29) and</li><li>• anti-discrimination laws (Law 10221/2010, Art. 34) even without dismissal.</li></ul>	Employers may face fines – <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• up to 50 times the minimum salary (Labor Code, Article 202)</li><li>• 60,000-100,000 ALL (Law 9970/2008, Article 28), and</li><li>• 60,000-600,000 ALL or double for serious violations (Law 10221/2010, Article 33).</li></ul>

## V. Institutions

A range of institutions support the promotion of equality and the fight against discrimination, each with complementary roles. These include ministries and policy-making bodies, implementation agencies, and coordination structures such as the National Councils, which promote dialogue, advocacy, and public awareness. Together, they form the backbone of the national equality framework.

<b>Ministry of Finance</b>	Oversees labor market and skills policies via the Directorate of Employment and Professional Skills Policies; responsible for VET policy development, coordination, quality assurance and approval of VET program changes.
<b>Ministry of Education and Sports</b>	Plays a key role in the implementation of employment and skills development policies through coordination with its implementing agencies and with self-government local units; responsible for approving general programs for lifelong learning; organizing continuous professional training for teachers/trainers who are engaged in VET.
<b>Ministry of Health and Social Protection</b>	Responsible for social issues such as gender equality, control and supervision of social enterprises, administration of the social care system, licensing and accreditation of social service providers, drafting policies, legislation and programs for the social assistance and supervising their implementation.
<b>State Minister for Youth and Children</b>	Responsible for all issues related to youth, designing and monitoring the implementation of policies, legislation, programs and strategies related to youth. The Minister collaborates closely with central and local institutions.
<b>National Labor Council</b>	Employer's organizations and the Government of Albania are equally represented in the Council where they discuss issues related to labor legal framework, national strategies related to employment, professional trainings, protection of employees, health and safety measures in the workplace.
<b>National Council of VET (Vocational and Education Training)</b>	An advisory body created and operating under the Ministry of Finance, the composition, operation and field of activity of the National Council of VET are determined by decision of the Council of Ministers.
<b>The National Agency for Employment and Skills (AKPA)</b>	Responsible for implementing public policies and providing direct employment services (such as job vacancies, unemployment fees, working programs, etc.), as well as administering public VET providers.
<b>Regional Tri-Parties Consultative Council</b>	Established as part of the Labor Code in 2015, it consists of representatives of the employer's unions, employee's unions and state bodies. The Council takes under review matters that are of interest to both the employer's unions and the employee's unions, aiming to reach an agreement for all parties.

<b>National Agency for Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications (AKAFPK)</b>	Ensures a unified professional qualifications system aligned with the Albanian Qualification Framework; manages the National List of Professions and Catalogue of Qualifications; oversees VET teacher training, curriculum development and accreditation standards.
<b>State Inspectorate of Labor and Social Services (ISHPSSHSH)</b>	Oversees labor law compliance, workplace safety and social insurance in both public and private sectors; monitors implementation of social care legislation.
<b>Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination</b>	National body addressing discrimination across sectors; investigates complaints, conducts administrative investigations and imposes sanctions; ensures protection based on a wide range of characteristics, including disability.
<b>National Council for Gender Equality</b>	Advisory body under the Ministry of Health and Social Protection; promotes gender equality in policies and programs; consists of government and civil society members; collaborates with the National Labor Council on major issues.
<b>National Council on Disability</b>	Advisory body chaired by the Minister responsible for disability issues; includes members with disabilities and their organizations; advises on accessibility, inclusion and legislation to protect the rights of persons with disabilities.
<b>Committee for National Minorities</b>	Under the Prime Minister's authority; protects and promotes rights of ethnic minorities; provides legislative and policy recommendations; coordinates monitoring and reporting on minority rights at central and local levels.
<b>State Social Service</b>	Under the Ministry of Social Affairs; monitors implementation of social services and assistance; cooperates with the National Employment Service to support reintegration of families in need.
<b>National Youth Council</b>	Advisory body under the Minister for Youth; composed of 14-16 members, half representing youth or youth organizations; proposes youth support programs, contributes to strategy development, and monitors youth policy implementation.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Albania is closely monitored by various international bodies regarding strategic and legal frameworks and their implementation. The UN, through its relevant committees and ILO, is very active in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the UN conventions ratified by Albania. The EU is also an active actor in evaluating and monitoring the Albanian strategic and legal frameworks in the context of its path toward EU accession. International NGOs with a focus on special groups, such as ILGA, are continuously monitoring the situation in Albania with respect to LGBTI rights. The remainder of this section will give a summary of the most relevant and most recent findings of these organizations. These findings serve also as concrete recommendations in the context of the report.

### Recommendations from Monitoring and Evaluation Agencies

#### I. Recommendations of the UN Committees

##### 1. United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

The Committee notes that the number of cases and investigations concerning racial discrimination remains low, indicating that cases of racial discrimination remain underreported, related, in part, to the low level of trust that victims of racial discrimination have in the authorities handling such cases. The Committee also expresses concern at the challenges faced by victims of racial discrimination in accessing legal aid services. In its latest report on 23 May 2024, CERD recommends that Albania:

- ✔ Continues to strengthen the functioning, effectiveness and coordination of the Ombudsman and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and intensifies its efforts to strengthen the monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations of the Ombudsman and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination.
- ✔ Ensures the effective implementation of the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania (2021-2025), by allocating sufficient human, technical and financial resources, as well as by guaranteeing the effective and active participation of the Roma and Egyptian communities in its implementation.
- ✔ Adopts appropriate and effective measures to ensure that all victims of racial discrimination have access to effective remedies, adequate reparations and legal aid services.
- ✔ Establishes a system for collecting disaggregated data on cases of racial discrimination, including measures taken in the administration of justice.

- ✔ Strengthens the training of law enforcement officials to ensure that they effectively handle cases of racial discrimination, as well as prevent any retaliation against persons who report acts of racial discrimination.
- ✔ Undertakes campaigns to inform rights holders about their rights, legal remedies and the legal framework for protection against racial discrimination.

## **2. United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**

In its latest report on Albania on 14 November 2023, CEDAW among other things:

- ✔ Notes concern over the lack of temporary measures beyond electoral quotas to address discrimination against rural women, ethnic minorities, women with disabilities and LGBTI women. Recommends adopting such measures under Article 4(1) of the Convention and General Recommendation No. 25 to promote equality in areas like politics, education, employment and health.
- ✔ Highlights concern over the 6.6% gender pay gap driven by low formal sector participation, informal work, unpaid care roles, poor labor conditions, and high unemployment among rural women, ethnic minorities and women with disabilities and the fact that women working in some industrial sectors are often paid below the minimum wage set by law, are denied paid annual leave and sick leave, and are provided with insufficient equipment for working in unsafe conditions.
- ✔ Regrets limited tangible results in eliminating intersectional forms of discrimination against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women from the National Action Plan for LGBTI+ Persons, 2016-2020. Recommends strengthening protections, raising awareness, and addressing stigma in the National Action Plan for LGBTI+ Persons, 2021-2027.
- ✔ Notes with concern that women with disabilities in Albania often face intersecting forms of discrimination, particularly in access to justice, education, employment and health care. Recommends ensuring full access, including to sexual and reproductive health services.

Therefore, in line with target 8.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals on promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men the Committee recommends that Albania:

- ✔ Effectively implements the principle of equal pay for work of equal value by conducting regular labor inspections; implementing gender-neutral job classification and evaluation methods; conducting regular wage surveys; and encouraging employers to publish a narrative of their data on the gender pay gap, with a view to taking appropriate corrective measures.
- ✔ Increases women's access to formal employment, particularly for disadvantaged groups of women, and expand social protection schemes for women employed in the informal economy.

- ✔ Recognizes the burden of unpaid care work falling on women, by providing affordable childcare and eldercare services and promoting the equal sharing of family and household responsibilities between women and men; ensures that women employed in family businesses are adequately remunerated and have access to social protection schemes.
- ✔ Strengthens monitoring mechanisms, including regular labor inspections, and increases women's access to independent and confidential complaint mechanisms, to address discrimination in employment against women.
- ✔ Improves access to employment and training opportunities for disadvantaged groups of women, such as women belonging to ethnic minorities, women with disabilities and migrant women.

### **3. United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**

In its latest report on Albania on 14 October 2019, CRPD notes with concern that Albanian legislation still allows persons with disabilities to be declared incapable of work. The Committee is also concerned about the lack of comprehensive and comparable data on the situation of persons with disabilities employed in the public sector and the impact of Law No. 15/2019. The Committee therefore recommends that Albania:

- ✔ Amends its legislation by adopting effective safeguards to ensure that disability is not used as a reason to avoid employment of persons with disabilities, in line with the human rights model of disability enshrined in the Convention.
- ✔ Further promotes employment in the open labor market, in both the public and private sectors, with a particular focus on women, in close consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.
- ✔ Collects statistical data on the level and employment situation of persons with disabilities, disaggregated by gender, age, type of employment and salary, as well as on the impact of Law No. 15/2019.

## **II. Recommendations of ILO**

In 2022, ILO presented to Albania a series of recommendations regarding the implementation of conventions to which Albania is a party.

### **1. With regard to the Equal Remuneration Convention (C100-3 June 1957) the ILO Committee requests:**

- ✔ **Addressing the gender pay gap and its underlying causes (art. 1 and 2)**  
While the Government of Albania reports no gender pay gap in the public sector due to uniform salary scales, the ILO notes that such scales can still reflect gender bias in task valuation. In the private sector, according to the Assessment Report of

At the National Strategy for Gender Equality for the years 2016-2020, the gender pay gap was 10.1% in 2020. The ILO has requested detailed information on measures taken to address horizontal and vertical occupational gender segregation and to boost women's participation in the formal labor market.

✔ **Defining work of equal value (articles 1(b) and 2).**

ILO notes discrepancies between definitions of “work of equal value” in the Law on Gender Equality and the Labor Code, and that job descriptions often ignore objective criteria set out in the Labor Code. It urges the Government of Albania to align these definitions and improve implementation.

✔ **Clarifying objective job evaluation (Article 3)**

ILO has asked the Government of Albania to clarify whether the criteria used for classifying jobs in the public sector are objective, and to clarify how the criterion of “importance of the position in relation to the mission of the institution” is measured and free from gender bias. Finally, ILO asks for information on any such measures taken in the private sector.

**1. With regard to the Equal Remuneration Convention (C100-3 June 1957) the ILO Committee requests:**

- ✔ The Government of Albania, referring to Article 32.5 of the Labor Code, to clarify whether, even if unintentional, conduct can still constitute harassment because it may have the effect of violating the complainant's dignity; and who has the burden of proving that the employer has taken all necessary measures to have a harassment-free working environment.
- ✔ The Government of Albania to consider revising the list of prohibited jobs for women in light of the development of scientific and technological knowledge and the principle of gender equality, with a view to ensuring that the prohibitions applicable to the employment of women are not based on stereotypes regarding women's abilities and professional skills and that these prohibitions are strictly limited to the protection of maternity.

### **III. Recommendations of the EU Commission**

The European Commission's 2024 Report on Albania highlights that while some progress has been made, the legal and institutional framework for non-discrimination is still only partially aligned with EU standards, particularly in areas such as gender equality, LGBTIQ rights, and protection for persons with disabilities.

Full alignment with the EU's Employment Equality Directive and the directive on work-life balance remains incomplete. Implementation gaps persist in the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030, with gender disparities in employment continuing: men's employment rates notably surpass those of women, and women's labor force participation has declined.



Monitoring and implementation of inclusion policies for marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities and Roma and Egyptian communities, remain weak. While registration of persons with disabilities as job seekers has increased, their access to education, employment and political participation needs substantial improvement. The National Action Plan for Roma and Egyptians (2021-2025) is poorly implemented, and systemic barriers like low employment, skill gaps, discrimination and segregation continue. More dedicated resources and political commitment are needed to close the inclusion gap and ensure meaningful participation and equality.

LGBTIQ rights also face serious challenges. Most of the National LGBTIQ Action Plan 2021-2027 remains unimplemented, and discrimination is widespread across key areas of life, such as healthcare, housing and employment. In 2023, over half of Albania's LGBTIQ population reported discrimination, exceeding the EU average. On employment policy, the country has launched a new National Employment and Skills Strategy and piloted the Youth Guarantee but needs to evaluate and expand it nationwide. While the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination continues to function steadily, staffing shortages limit its effectiveness, and further institutional strengthening is required.

## IV. Recommendations of ILGA

ILGA Europe's Annual LGBTI Map ranks Albania 25th out of 49 countries, with a score of 36.38%, in all areas assessing the respect and protection of the human rights of LGBTI+ persons. However, in terms of employment, ILGA's Human Rights Review (2024) highlights that 40.8% of LGBTI respondents do not have formal employment. During 2023, the Alliance supported the employment of 19 members of the community through mediation. In December, UNDP Albania and PINK Embassy, together with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the Ministry of Finance, organized a workshop on anti-discrimination in the private sector, with the aim of promoting better cooperation between the private sector and LGBTI organizations.

## V. Recommendations from Focus Group Interviews

Recommendations of the report were based on in-depth interviews with disadvantaged groups such as LGBTI+, Roma and Egyptian minorities, youths as well as employees' organizations. Participants were asked mostly "open-ended" questions and so had the opportunity to respond more elaborately and in greater detail than is typically the case. Topics discussed with the organizations representing the main focus groups included:

- ✔ Implementation of national employment strategies and action plans.
- ✔ Engagement with the public and private sectors to enhance access to employment.
- ✔ Existence and monitoring of the gender pay gap for each focus group.



- ✔ Utilization of vocational training mechanisms and capacity-building programs and assessment of their effectiveness.
- ✔ Awareness and application of employment programs and evaluation of their impact.
- ✔ Identification and monitoring of the existence of EDI policies in the workplace.
- ✔ Reporting of workplace discrimination and submission of complaints to law enforcement authorities.

These interviews were conducted on 18.04.2025 with organizations representing LGBTI, Roma & Egyptians, Youths, and other vulnerable groups, and on 28.04.2025 with an organization focused on the protection of employees.

## **1. LGBTI+ Community, Youths and other Vulnerable Groups**

- ✔ **Knowledge and effectiveness of the national action plan**  
Although non-governmental organizations working with the LGBTI+ community are aware of the National Action Plan on LGBTI+ Rights, they report that it has not yielded practical benefits in terms of employment access.
- ✔ **Interaction with public and private sector**  
Collaborative efforts with public and private sector entities remain weak, partly because the involvement of advocacy organizations is perceived as further stigmatizing and creating bias barriers for accessing employment. Notably, there is effective cooperation with the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination.
- ✔ **Gender pay gap**  
In this focus group the gender gap pay is mainly associated with lack of access to employment. Members of the LGBTI+ community, particularly transgender individuals, face persistent and systemic barriers to employment. Discrimination is often based on appearance or gender identity, even in cases where such characteristics are not outwardly visible. A significant challenge lies in the mismatch between personal presentation and official identification, contributing to heightened vulnerability during hiring processes.
- ✔ **Working conditions and harassment**  
Even when employment is formal, it is frequently in remote or non-traditional arrangements, often not by choice but as a protective response to workplace hostility. Instances of verbal abuse and bullying by employers render the work environment untenable, forcing many to resign or avoid formal employment altogether.
- ✔ **Vocational training and programs mechanisms and their effectiveness**  
These organizations conduct training programs that have led to successful employment outcomes and psychosocial empowerment. Experience with social enterprises remains virtually nonexistent.
- ✔ **EDI policies in the workplace**  
The organizations observe that most private employers lack written policies on EDI, and often demonstrate a lack of awareness or sensitivity regarding LGBTI+ issues.

### ✔ **Reporting discriminations**

In the public or private sector there are reportedly no formal complaints regarding EDI violations – likely due to a lack of training and trust in the system rather than an absence of discrimination. Complaints to law enforcement agencies are rare as well, and even when filed, seldom result in any substantive institutional response. Nonetheless, positive responses have been received from the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination.

## **2. Roma and Egyptian Communities**

### ✔ **Knowledge and effectiveness of the national action plan**

Access to employment is primarily achieved through employment promotion programs established under the Law on Social Assistance. While these programs have facilitated the temporary employment of individuals from minority groups, many participants return to unemployment upon program completion. The individuals engaged through these schemes are generally vulnerable and lack vocational training and professional qualifications.

### ✔ **Interaction with public and private sector**

Cooperation with local employment offices has historically been minimal. Efforts have been made to advocate for positive discrimination within public administration, including reserved quotas for minority representation, however, there is still no system of merit-based quotas to ensure minority representation or career development in public institutions. Engagement with the private sector remains limited, marked by low trust and minimal contact.

### ✔ **Gender pay gap**

Roma and Egyptian communities continue to be disproportionately excluded from the formal labor market. Approximately 95% of individuals from these minorities are engaged in informal employment, primarily in the cleaning sector, with minimal and often non-transparent compensation. Access to higher-paying or more secure job positions, such as drivers or inspectors, is systematically denied to minority applicants.

### ✔ **Working conditions and harassment**

There are serious concerns about violations of labor rights, including the absence of employment contracts, non-payment for workplace injuries, and unfair dismissal. In at least one documented case, the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination found that termination occurred as a result of discrimination, while the court for the same case awarded compensation accordingly.

#### ✔ **Vocational training and programs mechanisms and their effectiveness**

Legal changes in recent years have introduced exclusionary criteria, disqualifying an estimated 30,000 individuals from accessing training. Employment through active labor market measures under the Social Assistance Law, such as the Community Public Works Program, has offered only temporary opportunities. While some 20 individuals have pursued self-employment initiatives, continuous mentoring and monitoring are needed to ensure stability and avoid dependency on social assistance.

#### ✔ **Reporting discriminations**

The organization noticed no reporting, save isolated cases treated by Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination against public authorities (one being in formal employment with a public institution) evidencing discrimination against Roma and Egyptian minorities.

### **3. Employees' Organization**

#### ✔ **Gender pay gap**

Gender and ethnic wage disparities are particularly evident in the private sector, where women and minority individuals are underrepresented in leadership roles. The private sector remains predominantly male-led in both business ownership and managerial roles. Although public sector salaries have increased, such adjustments have not directly addressed pay equity.

#### ✔ **Working conditions and harassment**

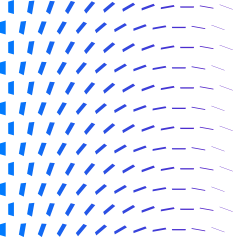
Notably, instances of exploitation have been identified among Roma and Egyptian workers in the cleaning sector, where language barriers contribute to uninformed consent to labor contracts.

#### ✔ **Vocational training and programs mechanisms and their effectiveness**

There is no clear implementation of employment quotas in either public or private institutions. The Youth Guarantee scheme remains at a nascent stage, is geographically limited, and does not adequately reflect the employment needs of young people. Although some successful cases of social enterprises supported by donor-funded NGOs exist, many fail within their first year of operation due to sustainability challenges.

#### ✔ **Reporting discriminations**

Discriminatory practices are rarely reported, often due to lack of awareness, access, fear or trust in the complaints' mechanisms.



## CONCLUSIONS

This is a pivotal moment for Albania. As the country advances in its EU accession journey and deepens its social and economic reforms, the imperative to translate strategic commitments into real transformation is both timely and necessary.

Albania's public institutions and business community are uniquely positioned to build workplaces that reflect the country's democratic commitments and economic ambitions.

The findings of this EDI Report make clear that inclusion must not remain an aspiration on paper. It is a call to turn Albania's EDI commitments into sustained, system-wide change. The success of this endeavor will not be measured solely in laws passed or strategies written, but in workplaces transformed – and lives empowered.

The findings from the focus group interviews reveal significant gaps in the implementation of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies in the workplace in Albania, despite the existence of a broad legal and institutional framework. While national action plans and strategic initiatives have been established to promote the rights and inclusion of marginalized groups, such as the LGBTIQ+ community, Roma and Egyptian minorities, and youth, these efforts have yet to translate into meaningful improvements in employment access, working conditions, and overall integration into the labor market.

For vulnerable groups, persistent barriers to employment, such as discrimination, a lack of access to vocational training, and systemic exclusion, continue to undermine the effectiveness of existing policies. The LGBTIQ+ community, for example, faces severe challenges in securing and retaining employment, often due to discrimination based on gender identity and appearance. Similarly, Roma and Egyptian minorities remain overwhelmingly employed in the informal sector, where job security, pay transparency, and labor rights protections are severely lacking. Both groups experience harassment, exploitation, and a lack of formal complaints processes, which further compounds their marginalization in the workforce.

Moreover, the absence of written EDI policies in most private sector workplaces and the lack of awareness or sensitivity toward inclusion issues are key factors that preserve inequality and exclusion. While some positive responses have been seen from the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, the overall impact of the legal and institutional framework remains insufficient. The focus group interviews have consistently shown that discrimination is rarely reported, not because it doesn't exist, but because of fear, lack of trust in reporting mechanisms, and a lack of effective recourse.

To truly foster a diverse, inclusive, and equitable workforce, it is essential that Albania strengthens the implementation of its existing frameworks, ensuring that policies and action plans result in tangible changes. This includes promoting employer accountability through the adoption of formal EDI policies, improving access to vocational training and employment programs, and ensuring that marginalized groups are actively included in both public and private sector initiatives. Moreover, a more robust system for reporting and addressing discrimination must be established, providing clear, accessible mechanisms for individuals to seek remedy.

Ultimately, creating a truly inclusive labor market will require determined effort from all stakeholders, government institutions, private sector employers, civil society organizations, and the marginalized groups themselves. By addressing the systemic barriers that hinder employment, reducing discrimination in the workplace, and strengthening the support structures available to vulnerable groups, Albania can make significant strides toward a fairer, more equitable society for all its citizens.



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