

CONTROL STUDY

Position Of the NEET Youth

in Albania



2024.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The control study on the position of the Youth Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) in Albania provides a comprehensive analysis of their current status, discernible needs, encountered challenges, and potential opportunities. The primary objective of this study is to augment comprehension regarding the circumstances of this demographic cohort and to provide insights that can guide the formulation of strategies, policies, and interventions aimed at their amelioration and enhanced support. Building upon a foundational baseline research conducted earlier by Partners Albania for Change and Development, this study serves as a comparative dossier, delving into the evolving landscape concerning NEET youth and evaluating the advancements in policies and interventions at country level.

The study was prepared in the frame of the project Western Balkan & Turkey for EmploYouth, funded by the European Commission. The project is implemented by Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation (Serbia), Partners Albania for Change and Development¹ (Albania), Prima Association (Montenegro), Youth Alliance – Krusevo (North Macedonia), and Community Volunteers Foundation (Turkey).

The control study provides a comprehensive overview of policies and statistical insights pertaining to NEET youth in Albania. It encompasses an analysis of the legislative framework, an evaluation of stakeholder cooperation, an assessment of institutional capabilities, and a critical scrutiny of the government's delineation of NEET youth, subgroup categorization, and data gathering methodologies employed by the Statistical Office. Concluding with actionable recommendations, the study underscores the importance of collaborative endeavors and bespoke strategies aimed at facilitating the substantive integration of NEET youth into educational and vocational pathways.

The methodology utilized in the control study embraces a comprehensive framework primarily focused on desk research and informed analysis. This entails an exhaustive review of published literature, strategies, reports, and authoritative records pertinent to the subject matter. By conducting this thorough analysis, the study endeavors to attain a profound insight into the socio-economic determinants influencing the status of NEET youth in Albania.

1. Partners Albania for Change and Development. (2020). Retrieved from "AN ANALYSIS OF NEET AND VULNERABLE YOUTH": <https://www.partnersalbania.org/publication/an-analysis-of-neet-and-vulnerable-youth/>

The control study on NEET youth in Albania serves as a noteworthy resource, offering distinctive perspectives on the circumstances of this demographic group and distinguishing itself as one of the few documents in the country with a specific focus on this cohort.

Through its policy recommendations, the document advocates for the adoption of more inclusive and efficacious policies, strategies, and initiatives, customized to address the requirements of NEET youth and bolster the empowerment of marginalized populations. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of cultivating cooperation, networking, collaboration, and coordination among all stakeholders involved in youth-oriented endeavors.

Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of gender-inclusive mechanisms and supportive measures as pivotal elements in mitigating the NEET rate in the country and facilitating the smooth integration of NEET youth into the labor market. This holistic approach aims to tackle the distinct challenges encountered by NEET youth, ultimately fostering enhanced opportunities and substantive engagement in the workforce.

1. NEET YOUTH AT POLICY LEVEL

This section offers a comprehensive analysis of the entire legislative framework concerning the employment of young individuals from vulnerable groups, with a specific focus on NEET youth. It encompasses an examination of strategies pertaining to employment, youth, and social issues, as well as laws, bylaws, directives, decisions, and support programs/measures at the national, regional, and local levels aimed at addressing the needs of NEET youth. The primary emphasis lies in understanding the presence and efficacy of these initiatives in supporting and facilitating the social and economic integration of NEET youth.

1.1. Constitution

Article 54 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania stipulates special protection for young people: "Children, the young, pregnant women and new mothers have the right to special protection by the state." The rights of young people are guaranteed in the framework of human rights and freedoms provided by this fundamental document of Albania (Constitution of the Republic of Albania).

1.2. Law on Youth

In Albania according to Law Nr. 75/2019 "For Youth" enacted in November 2019, young people are defined as young individuals aged 15-29.

The law does not explicitly define or specify NEET Youth. Notably, it does highlight young people with disabilities, emphasizing adherence to legislation for the inclusion and accessibility of YPWDs, particularly in the context of "safe youth space" and projects related to the construction or reconstruction of public facilities and youth infrastructure (Law Nr.75/2019 "For Youth").

1.3. Law No. 15/2019 "On Employment Promotion"

This law outlines the regulations and functioning of the public employment services system, along with active and passive labor market programs, and designates the bodies responsible for their administration, except in cases regulated by specific legislation. Its objective is to enhance the employability of the workforce by offering public employment, self-employment, and professional qualification services and programs.

The Ministry of Finance and Economy is the responsible institution for the implementation of the law and for the development of active labor market programs. These programs encompass mechanisms geared towards retaining individuals within the labor market, assisting unemployed job seekers in securing employment, enhancing productivity and labor income, and refining the functioning of the labor market. Active labor market programs comprise: a) employment services; b) employment promotion programs; and c) professional training programs.

Within this legislation, regulations also extend to young individuals of employable age. According to the law, those under the age of 29 fall into "special groups" and are recognized as disadvantaged job seekers in the labor market, making them eligible for support outlined in the law. However, specific measures for addressing NEET Youth are not outlined in the legislation (Law 15/2019 "On Employment Promotion").

1.4. National Youth Strategy and National Youth Action Plan (2022 -2029)

The National Youth Strategy (NYS) 2022-2029 prioritizes areas including education, employment, talents, and the diverse needs of young individuals across various sectors. The overarching goal of the strategy is to formulate national integration policies aimed at tackling a spectrum of challenges encountered by young people. These challenges encompass their involvement in decision-making processes, access to employment and education, leveraging technology and innovation, fostering engagement in arts and crafts, promoting participation in sports, as well as encouraging volunteerism.

The national youth strategy is structured around three overarching policy goals, complemented by nine specific objectives and supported by eighteen indicators. The total fund for the implementation of the NYS is € 53,793,103 (state budget €38,210,869; foreign funding €5,534,616; €10,047,618 financial gap)².

While the National Youth Strategy may not explicitly outline a strategic objective directly targeting NEET youth, it does prioritize marginalized and vulnerable youth. The strategy channels national policy and programming efforts towards fostering equitable rights and opportunities, as well as providing support and engagement for vulnerable and marginalized youth. This includes individuals affected by poverty, violence, maltreatment, disability, and social exclusion.

Under the **Specific Objective 2.3**: In any condition or situation, youth enjoy special attention in training, employment, and entrepreneurship policies, a particular emphasis is placed on youth, in all circumstances and situations with regard to training, employment, entrepreneurship, and employment policies tailored to offer diverse support mechanisms during their transition from education to the labor market and adulthood. **Additionally, the 3rd Policy Goal**: Active, healthy, physical, social and mental well-being of youth. Youth safety, protection and inclusion across their diversity spectrum, particularly youth at risk or youth at risk of social exclusion concentrates on fostering the active, healthy, physical, social and mental well-being of youth, prioritizing safety, protection, and inclusive measures, especially for youth at risk or youth at risk of social exclusion. (National Youth Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2029)

The monitoring for the initial year of implementation of the Youth Strategy (2022 - 2029) has concluded, achieving a progress rate of 68%. Plans are underway for forthcoming consultations to further advance this trajectory.

2. The original values are in Albanian Lek (ALL) and have been converted to Euro according to the exchange rate: 1ALL =0.0097 Euro

1.5. National Employment and Skills Strategy (2019-2022) & (2023-2030)

Since the last baseline study, Albania has adopted two National Employment and Skills Strategies: one covering the period from 2019 to 2022 and another spanning from 2023 to 2030. The primary aim of these strategies is to pinpoint and formulate effective policies that foster employment and vocational training within the country, with the overarching goal of generating high-quality jobs and lifelong skill development opportunities. They concentrate on enhancing prospects for decent employment through the implementation of efficient labor market policies, providing high-caliber vocational education and training options for both youth (including NEET youth) and adults, promoting social inclusion and cohesion, and fortifying the labor market and qualification system.

The NESS 2019-2022, operating under the motto "Higher skills and better jobs for all women and men," was developed based on the midterm review of the NESS 2014 - 2018 report, maintaining continuity in vision and focusing on the same four strategic priorities:

- (A) Foster decent job opportunities through effective labour market policies;
- (B) Offer quality vocational education and training to youth and adults;
- (C) Promote social inclusion and territorial cohesion;
- (D) Strengthen the governance of the labour market and qualification system.

Within this strategy, particular attention was dedicated to NEET Youth, notably within its **strategic priority A**, which entails the implementation of comprehensive policies aimed at enhancing employment opportunities with a broader scope of action. One significant initiative involved the overhaul of Active Labor Market Programs (ALMP) to provide inclusive services and programs tailored to individuals encountering adverse circumstances in the labor market. This targeted approach encompassed individuals with low levels of education and qualifications, women, youth, other vulnerable groups, and residents of regions lacking employment services.

The redesigned ALMPs were diversified based on the needs of groups with high risk of becoming long term unemployed, involving evaluation of the needs, legal framework reviews, the introduction of self-employment programs, and a feasibility study for the development, implementation, and analysis of the cost-benefit of an active labour market program that targets NEET Youth. Additionally, the strategy included the development and implementation of a national action plan for the **Youth Guarantee**, specifically addressing NEET youth, with ongoing improvement of active labor market policies based on monitoring results.

Strategic priority B and C focused on the inclusion and effectiveness of employment and vocational education and training services for young people and adults including the population threatened by exclusion, targeting all the marginalized youth. (National Employment and Skills Strategy 2019-2022)

According to the annual progress report of NESS 2019 - 2022, some of the main results of the implementation of the strategy focusing on NEET youth are: the development of the national plan for the implementation of the Youth Guarantee (focusing on NEET youth = not in training or employed), which was approved by the inter-institutional working group for the youth guarantee. This plan was adopted as an integral part of

the new national employment and skills strategy for 2023-2030.

An additional noteworthy outcome was the establishment and functioning of the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES). This agency is tasked with overseeing and implementing employment policies, managing public Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, and executing the Youth Guarantee initiative. Furthermore, in 2022, preparations were made for the restructuring of NAES's regional and local employment offices, with a focus on enhancing workforce professionalism and ensuring appropriate compensation for both regional and headquarters personnel.

According to performance indicators, there has been an improvement in the number of women and men aged 15 - 29 who are not in education, employment, and training (NEET) registered with NAES. The data shows an increase of 2105 young people registered from 2020 (14,035) to 2022 (16,140), facilitating their identification and subsequent support through training and employment opportunities. (Annual Progress Report 2022 - National Employment and Skills Strategy (2019-2022))

Albania's new Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030, encompasses an inclusive approach, particularly focusing on fostering opportunities for young people, and especially those categorized as NEET.

This comprehensive strategy comes complete with action plans, outlining the meticulous implementation of both the overarching strategy and the Youth Guarantee. Its primary goal is to ensure decent employment for all, with a special emphasis on the economic integration of NEET youth, supported by the robust implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

Significantly, pivotal strategic objectives, as **better functioning of the labor market for all (1.3)** under the Policy goal 1: Skills development and better matching of demand with supply in the labour market for more employment; **ensuring decent work for everyone, everywhere (2.2)** under the Policy goal 2: **Enabling decent employment for women and men through the implementation of inclusive labour market policies**; through inclusive labour are noteworthy aspects of the strategy. (National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030). (National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030)

1.6. Youth Guarantee

Under the Economic Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, published by the European Commission, **Albania has started the implementation of the Youth Guarantee (YG)**.

This initiative emerges as a prominent program within the country, specifically addressing the employment, education, and training needs of NEET Youth. The Youth Guarantee (YG) entitles to individuals under the age of 30, ensuring they receive a high-quality offer within four months of registering as unemployed jobseekers or exiting formal education. The program encompasses opportunities in employment, continuing education, vocational training (apprenticeships), and professional development.

The Youth Guarantee Operational Program 2024-2027 is structured into **two key support areas** for NEET Youth:

1. **Youth Employment**, with a total budget of €29,200,000 (€25,200,000 funded by the EU and € 4,000,000 from the State budget).

2. **Youth Education and Training** allocated a total budget of €24,000,000 (€20,000,000 from the EU and €4,000,000 from the State budget). Additionally, other support is offered in the form of technical assistance for activities related to the support of the Managing Authority, implementation, and alignment with the acquis, with a total budget of €5,800,000 (€4,800,000 from the EU and €1,000,000 from the State budget).

In summary, the budget for the Youth Guarantee Operational Program 2024 - 2027 is €59,000,000, with 84.75% (€50,000,000) funded by the European Union and €9,000,000 provided by the state budget.

As of February 24, 2022, the Prime Minister of Albania issued an order establishing two working groups: **the technical working group** and **the inter-institutional working group**, which includes partners of the Ministry of Finance and Economy such as: the Minister of State for Youth and Children, Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Ministry of Education and Sports, Minister of State for Entrepreneurship, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the key implementing agencies in the area of employment, education and vocational training. Both groups include active members from youth umbrella organizations, social partners and various stakeholders.

The implementation of the Youth Guarantee scheme will involve various institutions, including the National Agency of Employment and Skills (NAES), along with other entities primarily focused on education and youth affairs.

The technical working group developed the draft National Plan of Youth Guarantee during April - August 2022. This draft was approved by the inter-institutional working group in August 2022. After that, the final National Plan of Youth Guarantee 2023 - 2024, also reflecting the suggestions from the European Commission, was approved on March 24, 2023, by the Council of Ministers as an integral part of NESS. The National Plan for the implementation of the YG provides several reforms divided into four phases: mapping, engagement, preparation and delivery.

In the mapping phase, programs and instruments will be developed to prevent an increase in NEET youth, including strengthening in-school career guidance and establishing a monitoring system for early dropouts. **The engagement phase** involves community-based information campaigns and innovative social media approaches to spread information and reach the young people in location. **The preparation phase** includes enhancing registration instruments, increasing employment office staff capacities, and forming partnerships for specialized services.

The delivery phase focuses on the development of tailored employment and training programs such as employment supporting programs, vocational secondary, post-secondary and part-time education programs, and continuous training and internship programs to enhance basic and professional skills.

The implementation of the Youth Guarantee Scheme envisages that around 18,000 unemployed young people registered at employment offices within a 4-month period will receive an offer of employment, training, or vocational training.

The YG scheme has now entered the pilot phase in the three main cities such as Triana, Shkodra and Vlora, where approximately 300 young people will initially benefit. Within 4 months from the moment of application in e-Albania or NAES, young people will receive an offer of employment, training or vocational training. Vacancies are mainly in

the priority areas of hotel tourism, energy, agriculture, and IT.

The registration process is now open in e-Albania portal, and the relevant institutions are promoting the registration of the NEET youth. The program will also introduce elements of the dual system, where the role of the employer is more proactive and important in dealing with and employing young people. For this purpose, NAES has also designed a portal dedicated to the YG, which will function as an entry and information portal for all young people. (Youth Guarantee integrated within NESS 2023-2030)

2. ANALYSIS OF NEET YOUTH SITUATION IN ALBANIA

Exploring NEET Youth: Definition and Current Landscape in Albania

The concept of NEET – young people not in employment, education or training – has been useful in enabling policymakers to better address the disjunctions between young people and the labour market. While the traditional labour market dichotomy of employed or unemployed is valid, it fails to capture modern school-to-work transitions and the legions of young people who are outside the labour market and not accumulating human capital and hence who may be vulnerable to a range of social ills. NEET has put previously marginalized populations such as young mothers, young people with disabilities and young labour market drop-out back into the policy debate about youth unemployment.

NEETs is a broad category encompassing a heterogeneous population. Disentangling the subgroups within it is essential for a better understanding of their different characteristics and needs, and for tailoring effective policies to reintegrate them into the labour market or education.

Identifying the subgroups also aids in identifying who is most vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. While individuals in the NEET category often experience multiple disadvantages, including a low level of education, poverty and difficult family backgrounds, the population of NEETs is made up of both vulnerable and non-vulnerable young people who have in common the fact that they are not accumulating human capital through formal channels. (Who are the NEETs?, n.d.)

NEET rate according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is defined as an indicator that presents the share of young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET), as a percentage of the total number of young people in the corresponding age group, by gender. NEET youth can be either unemployed or inactive and not involved in education or training. Young people in NEET are at risk of becoming socially excluded – individuals with income below the poverty line and lacking the skills to improve their economic situation. (OECD , n.d.)

In Albania there is no explicit definition of NEET youth, however, in the main directives and government documents, it is implied that it refers to young people 15-29, not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). Similarly, documents like the Youth Guarantee, Action Plan, and NESS 2023-2030 lack a specific definition for NEET Youth but consistently refer to youth aged 15-29 not involved in Employment, Education, or Training.

However, the official website of the National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) provides a definition of NEET youth, which is among the indicators measured by the institute. The definition of the INSTAT is the same and matches the definition of the NEET indicator by EUROSTAT. Definition as follows:

The indicator young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET), corresponds to the percentage of the population of a given age group and sex who is not employed and not involved in further education or training.

The indicator refers to persons meeting these two conditions:

- they are not employed (i.e. unemployed or inactive according to the International Labour Organisation definition);
- they have not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. The denominator is the total population of the same age group and sex, excluding the respondents who have not answered the question 'Participation in regular education and training'. (INSTAT, n.d.) and (EUROSTAT, n.d.)

INSTAT gathers data on youth across three primary age brackets. Below are the percentages of young people categorized by gender and age group:

- the % of young people 15-19 years old to the average population in 2022 was 6% (1% lower than in 2019)
- the % of young people 20-24 years old to the average population in 2022 was 7% (8% lower than in 2019)
- the % of young people 25-29 years old to the average population in 2022 was 8% (same as in 2019)

There is a notable absence of specific research studies on NEET youth in Albania. The exclusive data available originate from the National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) starting from 2010. These statistics can be accessed through the INSTAT database and are featured in the Labour Market document, albeit occupying a limited section of the publication. The data include the percentage of young NEET individuals categorized by age (in two groups: 15-24 and 15-29), gender, and educational level. Regrettably, there is a lack of information on NEET youth who are not currently enrolled in education or training, further broken down by age and gender. (INSTAT, Labour Market , 2022)

In 2022, Albania witnessed a youth population constituting 22% of the overall population, encompassing 601,622 individuals aged 15-29. However, a concerning trend emerged, as 25.2% of this youth demographic, equivalent to 151,609 individuals, found themselves in the NEET category – neither employed nor participating in education or training.

This percentage notably exceeds the EU-27 average of 11.7%. An interesting gender dynamic is revealed, with **55% of NEET youth in Albania being female**, contrasting with the remaining **45% who are male**. These statistics highlight significant challenges faced by a substantial portion of the young population in Albania, emphasizing the urgency for targeted initiatives to address the elevated rates of disengagement from education and employment, particularly among young women.

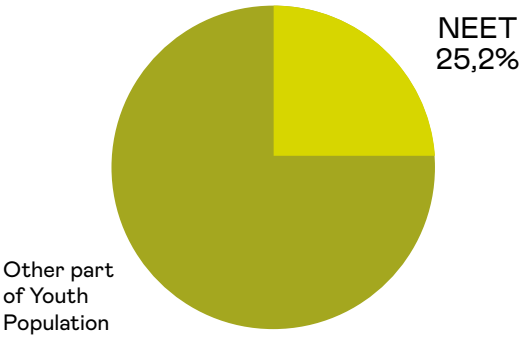


Figure 1: NEET Youth (15-29) as a share of the Youth Population, 2022

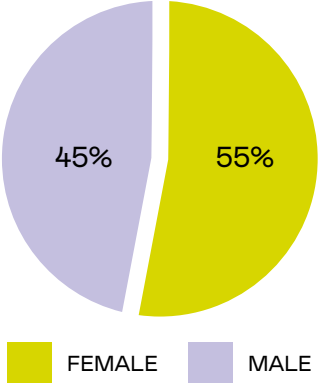


Figure 2: NEET Youth (15-29) Total According to Gender

Significant disparities in NEET rates among individuals aged 15-29 are evident, notably with a higher percentage of young women (27.8%) being categorized as not in education, employment, or training (NEET) compared to their male counterparts (22.6%).

An intriguing trend emerges in relation to education levels, where individuals with higher educational attainment, such as tertiary education (27%) and upper secondary education (27.6%), are more prominently represented in the NEET category. Conversely, those with lower education levels, particularly youth with lower secondary education, exhibit a comparatively lower NEET rate at 21.9%. These findings highlight the intricate interplay between gender and educational background in shaping the NEET status among young individuals. A deeper exploration into the factors influencing these patterns could offer valuable insights for the development of targeted interventions and support strategies.

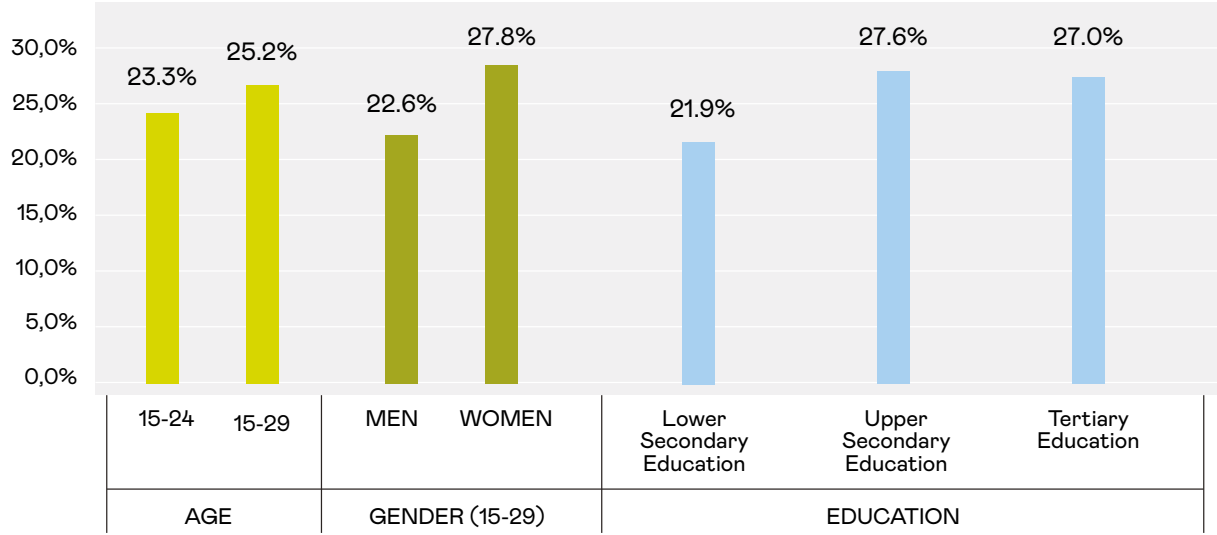


Figure 3: NEET Rate by Age, Gender and Education Level, 2022

According to INSTAT, the NEET population is categorized into four main groups: unemployed individuals, discouraged workers, those fulfilling domestic and family responsibilities, and others. The majority of NEET individuals (41.8%) fall into the unemployed category. The remaining portion is outside the labor force for various reasons, including being discouraged workers (8.9%), individuals not motivated to work or losing hope in entering the labor market. Those fulfilling domestic and family responsibilities account for 10.6%. Notably, 38.7% of NEET individuals belong to the "other NEETs" category, which represents a highly heterogeneous group. Unfortunately, specific data on the composition and characteristics of this diverse group are not currently available.

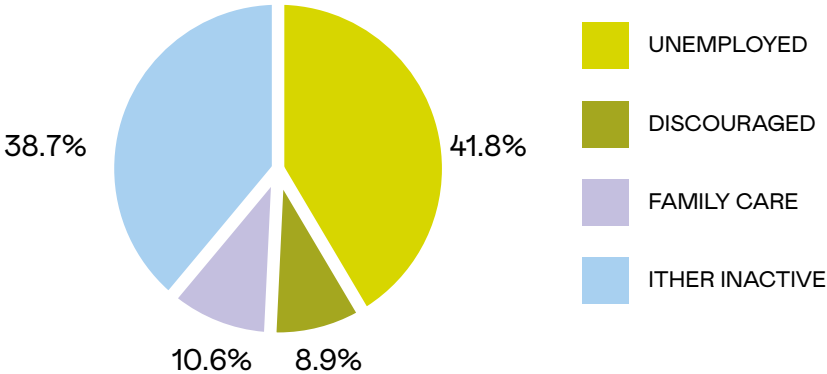


Figure 4: NEET Youth (15-29) by labour market status, 2022

Young men in the NEET category are predominantly represented in the unemployed group (50.9%) and the discouraged group (9.1%). In contrast, young women in the NEET category are more prominently represented in family care, with 17.2% fulfilling domestic and family responsibilities, and the other inactive group, accounting for 39.7%. A significant proportion of NEET individuals, specifically 10.6% in 2022, were unable to work due to family care responsibilities, with a majority of them being females. Furthermore, a comparison of youth not in employment, education, or training by gender and their status in the labor market reveals that males are more active.

Specifically, 44.3% of males in this category are actively seeking employment and are available to work, whereas for females, this percentage is lower at 27.0% (INSTAT, 2022). These findings underscore the gender-specific nuances within the NEET population and their engagement in the labor market. (INSTAT, Labour Market , 2022)

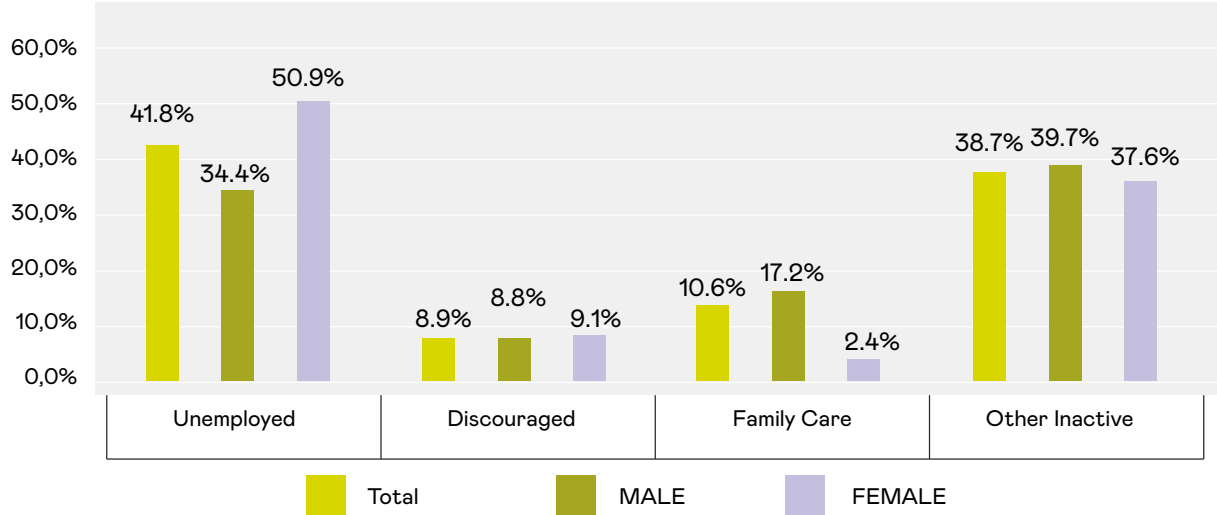
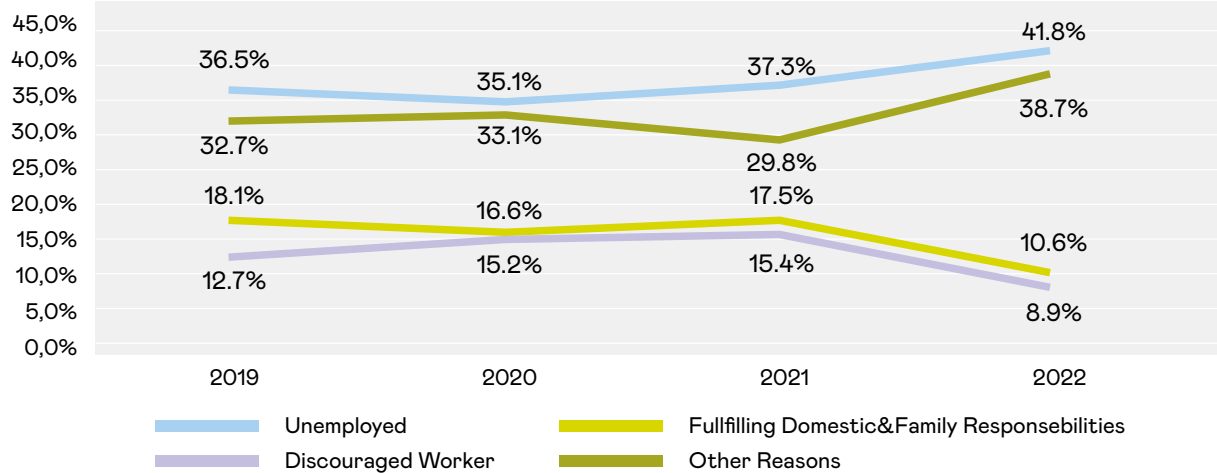


Figure 5: NEET Youth (15-29) by labour market status and gender, 2022

The data for 2022 reveals notable trends within the NEET youth population. There has been a significant increase in the percentage of unemployed NEET youth, with a rise of 5.3% compared to the figures from 2019. This upward trend is mirrored in the "other reasons" category, indicating a similar increase in NEET youth for reasons beyond unemployment or family responsibilities.

Conversely, there is a considerable decrease in the proportion of NEET youth categorized as discouraged workers. Additionally, there is a decline in the percentage of NEET youth fulfilling domestic and family responsibilities. These contrasting trends suggest a shifting landscape in the reasons behind youth disengagement from education and employment, with a notable decrease in the prevalence of certain factors, such as discouragement and family responsibilities, and an increase in others, particularly unemployment and miscellaneous reasons. Further analysis may provide insights into the factors contributing to these shifts.

Figure 6: NEET Youth (15-29) by labour market status (2019- 2022)



The NEET rate for the narrower age range of 15-24 in 2022 is slightly lower at 23.3%. This observation suggests a marginal decrease in disengagement as individuals progress towards the age of 25. The data implies that a proportion of individuals may reengage in education, training, or employment as they transition from the younger age group to the slightly older age bracket. This shift could be influenced by various factors, including educational pursuits, career choices, and other life transitions that typically occur as individuals move through their early twenties. Understanding these dynamics can contribute to the development of targeted interventions to support and encourage the active participation of youth in education and the labor market.

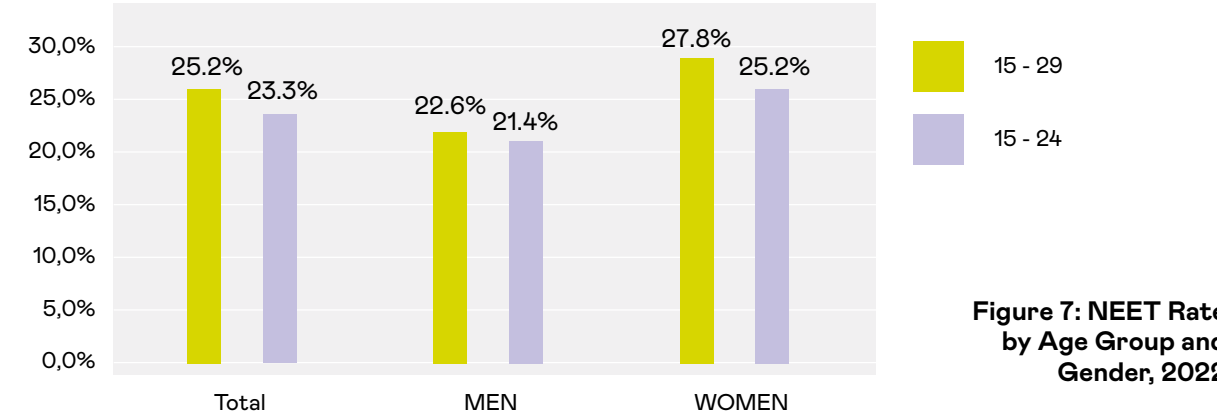


Figure 7: NEET Rate by Age Group and Gender, 2022

The disparities in NEET rates among young men and women across different education levels from 2019 to 2022 raise awareness of various influencing factors. The persistent higher percentage of women in the NEET category across all education levels indicates the presence of potential gender-related challenges. These challenges may stem from societal expectations, cultural norms, or specific barriers that disproportionately affect young women in their efforts to pursue education or employment.

Analyzing these gender-based variations can unveil systemic issues that hinder the active participation of women in education and the labor market. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that considers both social and structural factors, aiming to create an environment where young women have equal opportunities to engage in education and employment pursuits. This understanding is crucial for the development of targeted interventions and policies that promote gender equality in educational and vocational pathways. Moreover, the contrasting NEET rates based on educational levels for young men and women may reflect disparities in educational attainment.

The higher percentage of NEET women with tertiary education could indicate challenges in translating higher educational qualifications into suitable employment opportunities. Conversely, the observation that young men with upper secondary education have a higher NEET rate compared to those with tertiary education may be linked to the type and availability of job opportunities for individuals with different educational backgrounds. Economic factors, such as the demand for specific skill sets in the job market, may contribute to these disparities.

Additionally, societal, and cultural dynamics, influencing traditional gender roles and expectations, might impact the choices and opportunities available to young men and women, affecting their participation in education and employment. A comprehensive understanding of these multifaceted factors necessitates further research to inform targeted interventions aimed at addressing gender-based discrepancies and supporting youth in both education and workforce participation.

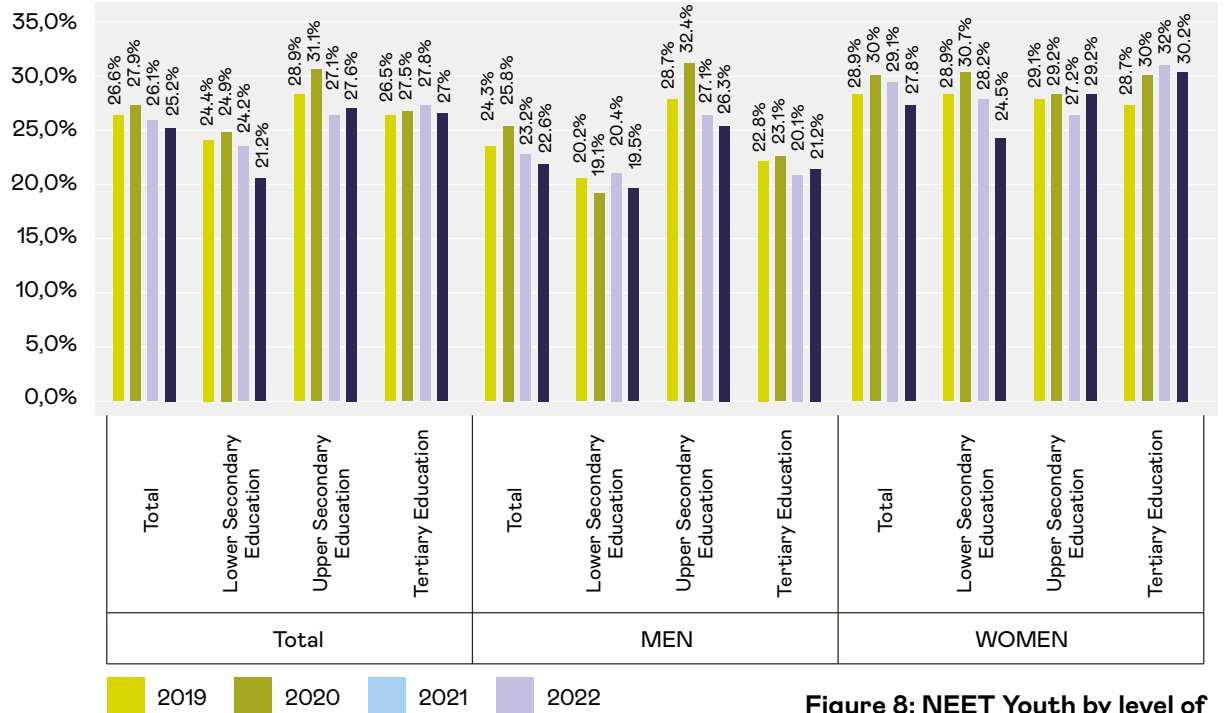


Figure 8: NEET Youth by level of education and gender, 2019-2022

The findings from the Monitoring Report on the Political, Social, and Economic Participation of Youth in Albania indicate only marginal **improvements in the economic participation of youth from 2019 to 2022**. The employment rate for youth aged 15-29 stands at 44%, implying that only 2 in 5 young individuals are employed in Albania. Notably, there has been a slight increase of 2.8% in the employment rate since 2019, suggesting limited progress over the specified period.

Furthermore, the report highlights a persistent gender disparity in employment, with the employment rate for young men remaining higher compared to that of young women. This indicates that challenges or barriers affecting the economic participation of young women in Albania persist, reflecting a need for targeted interventions to address gender-based discrepancies in the labor market.

The report underscores the importance of ongoing efforts to enhance economic opportunities for youth, with a particular focus on addressing gender-specific challenges to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for young individuals in the workforce.

The unemployment rate among youth in Albania is 20.72%, which is more than double the overall unemployment rate at the country level (10.9% in 2022). This discrepancy highlights significant challenges faced by a considerable number of young people in securing employment opportunities that align with their expectations. The struggle for employment not only affects their personal economic prospects but also contributes to their exclusion from national economic activity.

This exclusion often results in dependency on support from family, the state, or relatives, especially those working abroad or within the country. The reliance on external support systems underscores the economic vulnerability of a significant portion of the youth population.

Moreover, the report notes a slightly higher unemployment rate among young women compared to young men. This gender-specific disparity in unemployment rates suggests the existence of additional challenges or barriers that young women may face in accessing and securing employment opportunities. Addressing these gender-based discrepancies is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable labor market for youth in Albania.

Indicators of Economic Participation	Total	Women	Men
NEET Rate	25.2%	27.8%	22.6%
Youth Unemployment Rate	20.7%	20.7%	20.7%
Youth Long Term Unemployment Rate	12.5%	11.7%	13.3%
Youth Labour Force Participation Rate	55.5%	50.6%	60.5%
Youth Employment Rate	44.0%	40.1%	48.0%
Youth Self Employment Rate	16.6%	12.4%	20.7%

Figure 9: Data on Economic Participation of Youth, 2022

The unemployment rate among young people (15-24) with tertiary education (32.5%) is higher than the unemployment rate among young persons with basic education. Meanwhile, the long-term unemployment among university graduates (12.4%) is almost the same as the long-term unemployment among young persons with basic education.

This pattern suggests a significant mismatch between the outcomes of university education and the demands of the labor market in Albania. The higher unemployment rate among young individuals with a university degree, compared to those with secondary education, raises concerns about the alignment of educational qualifications with the available job opportunities. This mismatch may indicate challenges in the relevance of tertiary education to the specific needs of the labor market or issues related to the skills acquired during university studies not adequately meeting the demands of employers.

Addressing this misalignment requires a multifaceted approach, involving collaboration between educational institutions, employers, and policymakers to ensure that educational programs are tailored to the evolving needs of the job market, fostering a more seamless transition from education to employment for young graduates.

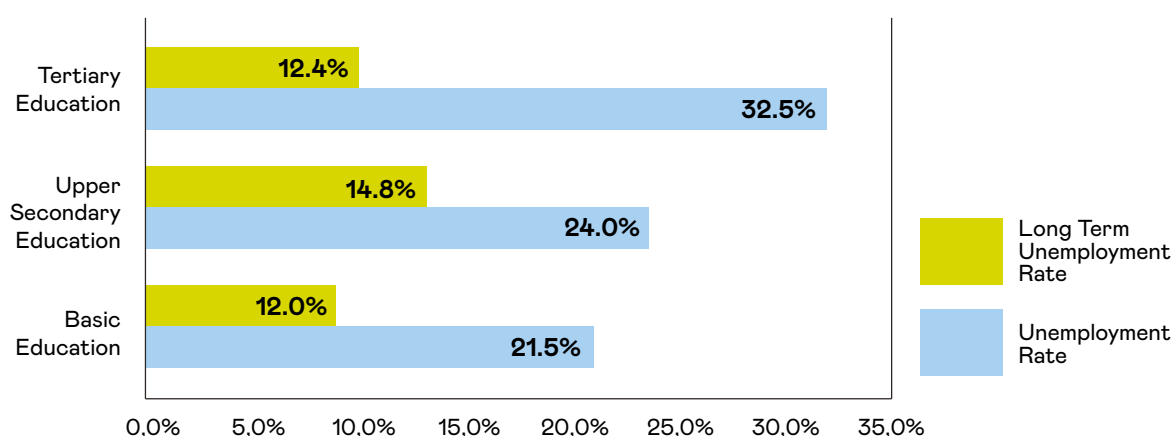


Figure 10: Unemployment rate and Long term unemployment rate by Level of Education, 2022

The recent trend in **long-term unemployment rates** has shown a slight increase of **1%** compared to the figures from four years ago, indicating potential challenges in sustaining employment for certain segments of the youth population.

On a positive note, **the participation of youth in the labor force has consistently grown**, reaching its **highest recorded rate of 55.5% in 2022**. However, discernible gender disparities persist across various economic participation indicators. The youth labor force participation rate for males (60.5%) has consistently been substantially higher, with an average difference of 12.6%, compared to females (50.6%). Furthermore, there is a noteworthy rate of 12.4% of young people who are self-employed in Albania. However, this rate is higher for young men compared to young women, suggesting differences in entrepreneurship opportunities and participation.

In summary, the data underscores discernible gender disparities in economic participation indicators. Young men generally exhibit higher levels of inclusion in youth employment, labor force participation, and self-employment, and they register lower percentages in NEET and youth unemployment rates. In contrast, young women continue to encounter difficulties in accessing equal opportunities, contributing economically,

and attaining financial independence. Addressing these gender disparities requires targeted interventions to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for young individuals in the workforce.

In summary, there are discernible gender disparities in economic participation indicators, young men exhibit higher levels of inclusion than young women in youth employment, youth labor force participation, and self-employment, and register lower percentages in NEET and youth unemployment rates.

Young women continue to encounter difficulties in having equal opportunities, to contribute economically and attain financial independence.

The provided information highlights critical gaps in monitoring, understanding, and addressing the vulnerabilities faced by youth in Albania. The percentage of young people at **risk of poverty is notably high at 24.2%**. This indicates a higher susceptibility of young people falling into poverty, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address economic vulnerabilities specific to the youth population. Moreover, the persistent trend of higher risk of poverty for women compared to men underscores a gender-based disparity that has persisted over the years. This disparity requires focused attention to create strategies that mitigate economic vulnerabilities for young women.

An additional concern is **the lack of data regarding young people in the social welfare system**, highlighting a gap in understanding the challenges and support needs of vulnerable youth.

The rate of **leaving secondary education in 2021 is noted at 1.5%**, with a higher rate in rural areas (3.3%). Most of the leaving students are young men, indicating a potential disparity in educational opportunities and outcomes based on gender and geographical location.

On a positive note, young women exhibit a higher level of dedication to education compared to young men. They demonstrate a lower dropout rate from secondary education, a greater eagerness to pursue tertiary studies, and a higher rate of graduation from tertiary institutions. This highlights the resilience and commitment of young women to educational pursuits and suggests the importance of creating an environment that supports and encourages educational attainment for all young individuals, irrespective of gender or location. Addressing the identified gaps will be essential in developing comprehensive strategies to support and uplift vulnerable youth in Albania.

The persistently high rate of NEET youth in Albania, despite a gradual improvement from 34.5% in 2014, underscores the challenges faced by young individuals in actively participating in the labor market.

Several factors contribute to the non-participation of youth in the labor market might be:

- **Lack of appropriate Education and Training**

Misalignment between the skills acquired through education and the demands of the job market can lead to difficulties in finding suitable employment for young individuals.

The issues within **the educational system in Albania**, particularly the perceived low quality of education and curricula in universities, contribute to a mismatch between acquired skills and the demands of the job market. This mismatch, in turn, leads to difficulties for graduates in finding suitable employment. Barriers to accessing quality education further exacerbate the challenges, emphasizing the need for a more tailored and practical approach in educational programs. The educational system should be designed to better align with the real-world demands of the job market, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared for employment.

Disparities in accessing education, particularly in rural areas, compound the NEET situation. Infrastructure and financial constraints often impede educational pursuits in these areas, limiting opportunities for young individuals and contributing to their non-participation in the labor market.

Despite existing laws and policies aimed at promoting the inclusion and employment of people with disabilities, individuals with disabilities continue to face challenges in integrating into the labor market. This highlights the need for comprehensive infrastructure and a cultural shift to encourage greater inclusivity and support for individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

Adequate training programs that align with the current needs of the job market can enhance the employability of youth. Continuous skill development is essential to meet evolving industry requirements. Limited access to information about available opportunities, vocational training, contributes to disengagement, necessitating improvements in awareness and accessibility.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that involves reforms in the education system, infrastructure improvements, and a cultural shift towards inclusivity.

Collaboration between educational institutions, policymakers, employers, and the broader community is essential to create an environment that fosters equal access to quality education and promotes the inclusion of all individuals, in the labor market.

- **Access to the Labor Market:** Barriers to entry, such as limited job market access, can impede youth from actively seeking and obtaining employment opportunities.
- **Lack of Experience:** Entry-level positions often require some level of experience, creating a challenge for young individuals who may face difficulties in securing their first job due to a lack of prior work experience.
- **Social and cultural factors**, encompassing traditional gender roles and expectations, influence the choices young individuals make regarding education and employment, further contributing to the NEET rate. Additionally, the effectiveness of policies addressing youth engagement and employment is crucial, with inadequate implementation or gaps in policy measures resulting in persistently high disengagement rates. Addressing the multifaceted nature of these factors requires targeted interventions, comprehensive policies, and collaborative efforts between government, educational institutions, and the private sector to create better opportunities for young people in Albania.

- **Insufficient financial and social support**, particularly for individuals at risk of poverty and other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, adds complexity to the challenges faced by young people in Albania. This highlights the urgent need for comprehensive policies and targeted interventions to address these multifaceted issues and create an environment that fosters the active participation of all youth.
- **Gender disparities** play a significant role, with societal expectations and cultural norms affecting young women more, resulting in higher NEET rates in this demographic.

Societal pressures, particularly related to early marriage and family responsibilities, can significantly impact the choices young individuals make regarding education and employment. These pressures often lead to prioritizing familial duties over pursuing educational or employment opportunities, creating challenges in the transition from education to employment, known as the school-to-work transition. Insufficient support structures, guidance, and mentorship programs further complicate this transition.

Addressing gender disparities in NEET youth is of utmost importance and requires focused attention and proactive measures. In-depth studies and research are essential to understanding the root causes of this phenomenon, enabling the development of targeted interventions.

The fact that some NEET women are often responsible for family care duties highlights the need for additional support tailored to their circumstances. Implementing measures such as on-site childcare facilities, flexible working hours, or family-friendly policies can create an environment where women can actively participate in the workforce while fulfilling familial responsibilities. This approach not only promotes economic engagement but also recognizes and accommodates the multifaceted roles women often play.

By fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment, societies can contribute to bridging the gender gap in NEET rates, empowering women to balance both economic participation and family responsibilities effectively. This not only enhances the well-being of women but also contributes to overall societal progress by utilizing the full potential of all individuals, irrespective of gender.

Educated women in Albania, particularly those with secondary and tertiary education, exhibit higher levels of employment underscoring the pivotal role of education in empowering women and enhancing their economic participation. This correlation suggests that promoting and empowering education among young girls is not only beneficial for their personal development but also contributes to economic independence. Initiatives such as offering scholarships can significantly facilitate access to education, particularly for those facing financial barriers. Educating families and young women about the advantages of being educated and employed is a crucial aspect of fostering a mindset shift. This involves dispelling stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding women's roles, emphasizing the positive impact of education on personal growth, career opportunities, and overall societal progress.

The lack of direct research studies on NEET in Albania highlights a significant gap in understanding the characteristics and needs of this specific group of young individuals. Conducting such research is crucial for gaining insights into the factors contributing to the NEET status, which can inform effective policies and interventions tailored to address the challenges faced by NEET youth in the country.

The initiation of the **Youth Guarantee** in Albania presents an opportune moment to

implement such analyses. The youth guarantee, aimed at ensuring that all young people under a certain age receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, or training within a specified period, provides a framework for addressing the challenges faced by NEET youth. Research studies conducted within the context of the youth guarantee can help identify specific barriers and challenges that NEET youth encounter, allowing policymakers to design targeted interventions. This could involve measures to improve education and training opportunities, address mismatches between education and the job market, and provide support for overcoming socio-economic obstacles.

The observation of a relatively stable NEET rate over the years, with only slight changes but no substantial improvements, underscores the persistent nature of the issue. This stability suggests that existing strategies may not be sufficiently impactful, necessitating a re-evaluation of policies and the introduction of targeted measures. The imperative is to move beyond incremental changes and devise policies that lead to tangible improvements, engaging more young people in the process. This could involve a comprehensive review of current programs, identification of gaps in support structures, and a closer examination of the specific challenges faced by NEET youth.

Implementing targeted measures may include:

- 1. Enhanced Career Guidance:** Providing comprehensive career guidance and mentorship programs to assist young individuals in making informed decisions about their education and career paths.
- 2. Skill Development Programs:** Designing and implementing skill development programs that align with the current needs of the job market, ensuring that NEET youth acquire relevant and marketable skills.
- 3. Tailored Support for Vulnerable Groups:** Developing targeted support programs for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, addressing specific barriers they face in accessing education and employment opportunities.
- 4. Collaboration with Stakeholders:** Facilitating collaboration between educational institutions, employers, government agencies, and community organizations to create a coordinated and supportive ecosystem for NEET youth.
- 5. Flexibility in Education and Training:** Introducing flexible education and training options to accommodate the diverse needs and circumstances of NEET individuals, allowing them to acquire skills at their own pace.

By reevaluating policies and introducing targeted measures, policymakers can strive to break the cycle of persistent NEET rates and foster a more inclusive environment that empowers young individuals to actively participate in education and the workforce.

3. DEVELOPMENT TRENDS IN THE POSITION OF NEET YOUTH

The positive trend from 2019 to 2022, marked by a reduction in the NEET rate by 1.4%, reaching 25.2% in 2022 compared to 26.6% in 2019, is a promising development. Notably, the most significant decline has been observed in the NEET rate for young men, decreasing by 1.7%.

Despite this progress, the NEET rate in 2022 remains considerably high at 25.2%, notably higher than the EU NEET rate of 11.7%. This indicates that while there has been improvement, there is still a substantial gap to bridge to align with European standards.

Achieving the EU's 9% NEET target by 2030 requires concerted efforts and incentives. Policymakers may need to focus on targeted interventions.

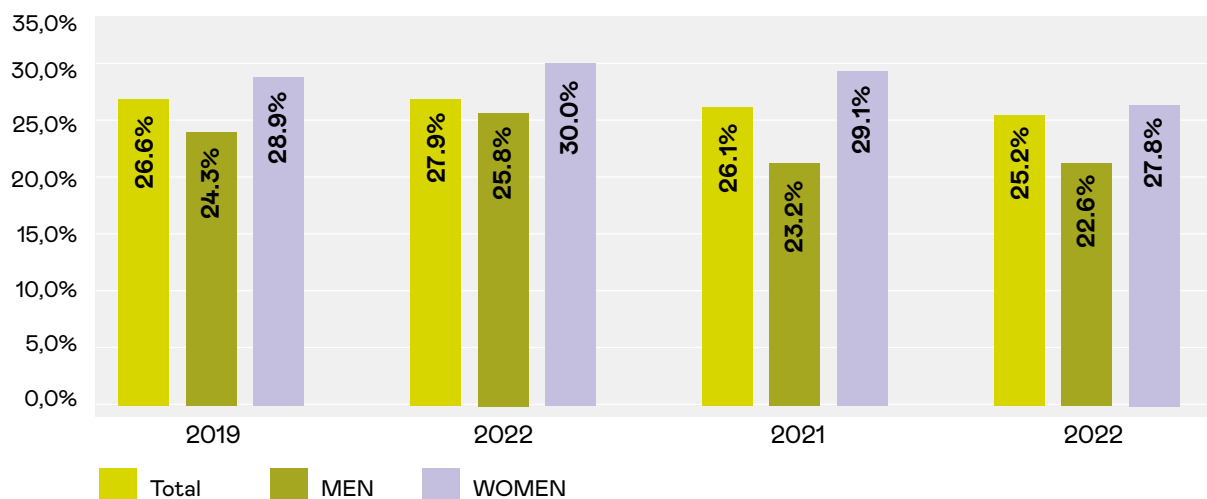


Figure 11: Youth NEET rate 2019-2022

The recognition of the persistent challenge of NEET youth in Albania has prompted the government to take proactive measures over the last four years. The specific emphasis on youth, especially those in the NEET category, signals a commitment to fostering better opportunities and outcomes for young people in the country.

A significant step in this direction, with direct implications for the improvement of the NEET rate in the coming years, involves the development and implementation of the **Youth Guarantee** Action Plan (2024-2027) adopted as an integral part of the National Employment Skills Strategy (NESS 2023-2030). The NEET rate already has a decreasing trend, and the implementation of the Youth guarantee will address the challenge of youth unemployment, through offering training and employment opportunities. Currently in the pilot phase, the scheme is being implemented in three main cities, Tirana, Shkodra, and Vlora. In addition, the action plan foresees the

establishment of a mechanism that identifies young people who are not in employment and are not involved in a relevant education or professional training, with the aim to support them in the future with all the necessary measures to improve the situation in which they are. Another objective of the Youth guarantee is also the establishment of a platform for young people, through which young people can identify opportunities for further education, training, internships, and employment opportunities.

Development of three new strategies; National Youth Strategy (2022-2029), and 2 National Employment and Skills Strategy (2019-2022) & (2023-2030) have been adopted in Albania since the last baseline study. They especially focus on youth and NEET youth education, employment, and engagement.

National Youth Strategy (2022-2029), objectives aim to improve the skills and inform youth about the opportunities to actively participate in the civic, social and political spheres, inform about employment opportunities and increase their capacity to make autonomous choices, inform about youth education opportunities related to labour market, and offer quality learning in both formal and non-formal education by contributing toward competence, skill and virtue building. **Under specific objective 2.3: In any condition or situation, youth enjoy special attention in training, employment, and entrepreneurship policies**, a special attention is put to training, employment, and entrepreneurship support policies for youth, targeting young women, young people with disabilities and youth at risk of dropping out of school.

Meanwhile, the two strategies for employment and skills are the continuation and completion of each other to increase capacities, skills and to improve the employment of young people. In the later strategy, **under the 2nd policy goal of the new NESS (2023-2030); Enabling decent employment for women and men through the implementation of inclusive labour market policies**, specific measures will be undertaken to support an inclusive school-to-work transition for young people NEET through the implementation of the Youth Guarantee scheme. Another noteworthy development in the realm of institutions dedicated to youth is the establishment of a **state minister for Youth and Children in Albania** since September 2021. This new ministry has brought heightened attention to the needs of young people, undertaking initiatives that directly support their well-being. With a dedicated minister closely overseeing and prioritizing youth development, young individuals now have a government figure actively advocating for their improvement. Among the ministry's notable initiatives is the introduction of the new youth strategy (2022-2029), marking the first eight-year plan solely focused on empowering and uplifting youth.

Another development is **the establishment and consolidation of the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES)** structures with professionals and staff, to better support young people through employment and training, and to successfully implement the Youth Guarantee scheme. Over the past two years, there has been a concerted effort to establish youth councils in the municipalities of Albania. As of 2024, this campaign has successfully led to the establishment of **youth councils** in all 61 municipalities across the country, playing a pivotal role in engaging and representing the youth at the local level throughout Albania.

The establishment of **youth councils** in all 61 municipalities across Albania over the past two years is a significant and commendable achievement. This concerted effort reflects a commitment to engaging and representing the youth at the local level, providing a platform for their voices and concerns to be heard and addressed. The establishment of youth councils is a positive step toward building a more inclusive and participatory

governance structure in Albania. Ongoing support, resources, and collaboration with these councils will be crucial for ensuring their effectiveness in addressing the diverse needs of the youth population across the country.

The integration of **Career Guidance Service** into lower secondary education, specifically in the ninth grade, through the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029 is a noteworthy initiative. This program aims to instil a culture among young individuals, encouraging them to seek and utilize career counseling services from an early age. The objective is to help them identify and pursue the right career direction early on, acquiring professional skills and reducing the existing mismatch between young people's skills and the needs of the labor market. On the local government level, the initiative to establish career guidance services in municipalities, with offices already established in Tirana, Lushnje, and Elbasan, extends the support for young individuals beyond the school setting. Career guidance services can provide personalized support, taking into account regional opportunities and challenges. These combined efforts indicate a holistic approach to youth development, emphasizing the importance of informed decision-making, skill development, and tailored support at both the national and local levels in Albania. Ongoing evaluation and expansion of such initiatives will be crucial for their sustained impact.

4. RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTIONS AT CENTRAL & LOCAL LEVEL

Main institutions responsible for youth related issues, education, employment and skills are: Minister of State for Youth and Children, Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Finance and Economy, National Agency for Employment and Skills, National Youth Agency, National Youth Council, National Agency of Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications.

4.1. Minister of state for Youth and Children

The Minister of State for Youth and Children is an institution established by the new government in 2021, and it plays the main and fundamental role in organizing and supporting youth. The Minister is responsible for general youth policy and legal framework, monitoring the implementation of youth policies and representing the Government of Albania at the international level regarding youth issues.

The Minister holds responsibility for overseeing general youth policy formulation and establishing the legal framework governing youth affairs. Furthermore, a monitoring of the implementation of youth policies and representing the Government of Albania on international platforms concerning youth-related matters is another important aspect.

Until 2021, the Ministry of Education and Sports had a youth portfolio and was fully responsible for youth policies. A Deputy Minister dedicated to Youth was a vital part of the general youth policy framework, while the Directorate for Youth within this ministry was responsible for issues related to youth policies. This ministry continues

to play an important role in youth policies, because it is responsible for two important areas in the lives of young people aged 15- 29, such as education and sports.

The Minister of State for Youth and Children holds the primary authority concerning the protection of young people's rights and ensuring their active participation in social life. This entails drafting, developing, and overseeing youth policies, as well as coordinating matters related to the protection, care, health, well-being, and education of children and youth. The Minister aims to enhance youth engagement in decision-making processes, safeguard their rights, and foster conditions conducive to their activation and participation. As a dedicated institution focusing on youth and children, the Minister establishes collaborative connections between young people in Albania and those within the diaspora, alongside representatives from both public and private sectors, as well as civil society organizations engaged in youth-related activities.

Two of the main initiatives in which the Minister of State for Youth and Children is involved are National Youth Strategy and Youth Guarantee. The National Youth Strategy 2022-2029 is the first strategy dedicated to youth in Albania, giving focus and importance to youth, education, their talents and the demands they have in various fields.

The National Youth Strategy 2022-2029 aims the drafting of integrative national youth policies, to address the various problems faced by young people today and related to challenges such as their involvement in decision-making processes, employment, education, technology and innovation, increasing activities related to arts and crafts, increased sports activities, volunteering, etc.

Meanwhile Youth Guarantee is focused on the empowerment of the NEET youth through offering training, education or employment opportunities for young people within 4 months of registering as unemployed. A lot of other initiatives have been undertaken to support the development of the youth in Albania, which are categorized under 4 main programs for youth.

4.1.1. Coding program

The Albanian government has initiated a series of measures aimed at fostering the effective education and professionalization of young Albanians in the field of technology. One such measure involves the promotion of coding skills among young people, as part of the implementation strategy outlined in the National Youth Strategy 2022 - 2029.

The Coding Program, which commenced its application process on January 23rd, 2023, is administered by the Ministry of Finance and Economy through the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES). This program offers professional development courses supported financially by the Albanian government, providing €1449 for job seekers and €2897 for the unemployed. Additionally, individuals with disabilities receive extra assistance, ensuring equitable access to these opportunities, with an additional support value of €1931³.

This program is open to individuals aged 16 years and above, including pupils, students, and employees alike.

3. The original values are in Albanian Lek (ALL) and have been converted to Euro according to the exchange rate: 1ALL = 0.0097 Euro

The purpose of the program is to train young people for the labor market, but not only. The program also aims to connect young people with the labor market, to simplify the interaction between profiling young people and their employment. Applications for the Coding Program continue to be open on the e-Albania government portal in the 'Application for the professional training course with financial support' service.

4.1.2. National work internship program

The primary objective of the National Work Internship Program (NWIP) is to facilitate the provision of professional internships to young individuals within state administration institutions and other public entities, fostering their professional growth. Participation in this internship initiative is complimentary, yet the duration of the internship serves as recognized work experience for recruitment purposes within public administration institutions.

The National Work Internship Program is open to all young people between the ages of 21 and 26, who have completed at least the first cycle of "Bachelor" studies and have not been part of the program in previous calls. The aim of the program is a qualifying experience for the further development of the professional, academic and personal skills of young people, in the State Administration, Local Self-Government Units, Independent Public Institutions, other private institutions as well as in non-profit organizations which were included during 2022 in the scheme.

More specifically, the National Work Internship Program is in its 7th Call, part of which young people were offered 1714 internships. The first phase of the program was successfully completed on December 12, 2022 and in January 2023 the young people were provided with a certificate issued by the Minister of State for Youth and Children and the Department of Public Administration. In January 2023 was the last stage of Call VII of the National Work Internship Program, which coincides with the employment of interns proposed by the relevant institutions where they have completed their internship, with a one-year contract within the framework of Call VII of the NWIP. 1096 young people applied for the VII Call of the Work Internship Program, from which 457 of them were selected, who fulfilled the application criteria. 157 of them, evaluated with maximum points, were employed with a 1-year contract at the institutions where they developed their practice. In the VI Call of the National Work Internship Program, 572 young people completed the work experience and 196 of them were employed with a 1-year contract in the host institutions.

4.1.3. National program of extracurricular activities

The Program of Extracurricular Activities offers young people the opportunity to attend free after-school courses, which include courses in painting, music, choir, theatre, craft, technology, sports and permaculture. This program brings several benefits such as: higher learning results; higher school attendance; reduction of early school leaving; lower likelihood of alcohol or drug use.

The purpose of the program is to increase pro-social-community orientation among children and young people, transforming schools into centers of community; to improve student learning by providing informal learning opportunities in coordination with and as a supplement to the formal curriculum; improve career readiness and awareness; to support the physical and psycho-social health of students.

The implementation of the program began in January 2023 during the second semester of the 2022 - 2023 school year, from the first grade to the twelfth grade in 200 schools throughout Albania. In total, 1041 thematic courses were opened, and more than 10,000 students were engaged in them.

4.1.4. Sports teams program in schools

The Sports Teams Program aims to bring back the sports culture, which promotes an active, healthy sports life. The aim is to create a national program for sports, which during the year 2022-2023 was developed in two sports, in basketball and volleyball. This program was developed by the Albanian Government and is implemented at the national and local level by the Albanian National Olympic Committee.

As part of the implementation of the Sports Teams Program, during November 2022, uniforms and materials were distributed for the girls and boys of the sports teams, which are completely covered by the Albanian government fund. This project involved about 10,000 children and young people of volleyball and basketball sports teams from 61 cities of Albania, with 225 participating schools. About 700 basketball and volleyball teams have been formed for both sexes, in pre-university education, which have already started training to prepare for the sports championships.

The vision of the Sports Teams program is to expand and extend it to other schools in Albania. (Minister of State for Youth and Children, n.d.)

4.2. Minister of state for Youth and Children

Ministry of Education and Sports is a government ministry in Albania that is responsible for the development and implementation of policies related to education and sports. Its main tasks include:

- Planning and implementing policies related to pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education, as well as adult education and vocational training.
- Managing and overseeing public schools and universities, including ensuring the quality of education and promoting student achievement.
- Encouraging and supporting scientific research and innovation.
- Promoting physical education and sports activities in schools and communities.

The Ministry of Education and Sports for the education sector aims to build a quality education system, which successfully addresses the individual needs of all children, pupils and students, treating them equally and with respect, based on their diversity. Inclusion is a prerequisite to ensure the development of all individuals to their full potential and to narrow the educational achievement gap between different social groups.

The Ministry of Education and Sports designs and implements policies aimed at ensuring a quality education system, the prospective development of education, respecting the interests of the individual, the community and society and equipping

them with the necessary knowledge to face the demands of the economy market, in accordance with national and European priorities, creation, transmission, development and protection of knowledge through teaching, scientific research and services. The Ministry of Education and Sports designs and implements policies for the development of scientific research and innovation, in support of the country's development policies. The Ministry of Education and Sports designs, programs, develops and coordinates the work for national policies in the field of sports; drafts protective and promotional policies, as well as creates the necessary spaces for the development and improvement of Albanian sports. (Statistical Yearbook on Education and Sports, 2021-2022)

In the 2022 state budget, education has been one of the priorities of the budget and will continue to be financed with 3% of GDP and it focused on improving the quality and comprehensive education, the provision of free textbooks for 236,000 students attending basic education, as well as textbooks free for students from needy social strata in secondary and higher education; providing transportation for students in rural areas, increasing salaries by 6%, provided for about 36,000 teachers of the pre-university cycle. The goal was also to increase the number of students attending vocational secondary education from 17.5% of the total number of students in public secondary education in 2022 to 18.2% in 2024.

While the education measures may not specifically target NEET youth, the ministry takes into account the needs of young individuals from rural areas and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As part of their efforts, they implement supportive measures to aid these youths in accessing educational opportunities. (Budget 2022)

4.3. National Agency for Employment and Skills

The National Agency for Employment and Skills is a public service, under the Minister responsible for employment and skills development. NAES is a set of administrative institutions and providers of employment, self-employment and vocational education and professional training services, an integral part of the system of the ministry responsible for employment and skills development. It operates through Regional and Local Employment Offices, Regional Directorates of Public Vocational Training as well as Public Vocational Education Schools.

NAES is established and regulates its activity, based on the provisions of Law No. 15/2019 "On promoting employment", as well as Law no. 15/2017 "On vocational education in the Republic of Albania", as well as with the Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 554, dated 31.07.2019 "On the establishment, organization and operation of the National Agency for Employment and Skills. The main structures and their competencies are regulated in the Prime Minister's Order No. 172, dated 24.12.2019 "On the approval of the structure and staff of the National Agency for Employment and Skills" as well as the Orders of the Minister on issues of employment and skills For the Organizations of Vocational Education Schools. (National Agency for Employment and Skills, n.d.)

The National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) is responsible for the implementation of public policies and provision of direct employment policies, as well as management of vocational education and training providers. (National Report of NAES(2021), n.d.) Therefore, NAES is responsible for the implementation of the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2023-2030 and Youth Guarantee.

Under the policy goal 2 and priority measure of the National Employment and Skills Strategy (2023-2030) the new registration instruments will be developed on the NAES portal, the employment offices staff capacities will increase to serve new jobseekers, and the partnerships created between individual service providers and various other public authorities and non-public organizations to deliver more specialized services for NEET youth will be used. In order to administer and monitor the Youth Guarantee, the labour market information management system will expand to track the NEET youth journey before, during and after their inclusion in the Youth Guarantee scheme. Within the framework of the NAES initiatives aimed at enhancing employment opportunities, various programs are incorporated, such as the employment program, professional internship program, job training program, and community work program.

NAES is also responsible for the implementation of the Social Fund. The purpose of the Social Employment Fund is to provide and administer financial mechanisms for the promotion of employment, integration and social inclusion of persons with disabilities, including deaf persons and work invalids assessed as partially able to work by the relevant commissions. The income and contributions of the Social Employment Fund are transferred to the National Agency for Employment and Skills, as the institution responsible for employment and skills and constitute a separate item in its budget.

The Social Employment Fund is used exclusively for the following purposes: a) financing of programs aimed at employment, self-employment, rehabilitation for work, professional training and retraining, orientation and counseling for employment, support services, reconstruction and adaptation of the workplace of persons with disabilities, b) financing of social reintegration programs, support for promoting the employment of family members of persons with disabilities c) for subsidizing the reconstruction and adaptation of employment facilities or institutions in which services and training are offered, to guarantee accessibility and reasonable adaptation for any person with disabilities) for the preparation and support of informational and awareness-raising initiatives and campaigns related to the employment of persons with disabilities.

4.4. Ministry of Finance and Economy

The Ministry of Finance and Economy does not have a direct focus on youth, addressing the needs and policies for young people. However, the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE) has the leadership in the area of labor market and skills policies and is responsible for the integration in the labor market and policies to improve the conditions of the labor market, to have a better work offer and to increase the wages of employees.

Therefore, MoEF has the leading role in the implementation of the National Employment and Skills Strategy (2022-2029) as the institution in charge for the area of employment and vocational education. The MoFE is also responsible for the coordination of the Youth Guarantee. The ministry has direct powers to draft strategic policies and legal frameworks, as well as to ensure institutional coordination and cooperation among the key sector institutions. The Ministry of Finance and Economy is engaged in promoting the implementation of the appropriate mechanisms and cooperation with all actors: business, employment offices, schools and professional centers, central and local government.

In 2024, the Ministry of Finance and Economy underwent restructuring and was divided into two separate entities: the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy, Culture,

and Innovation. It remains to be determined which ministry will assume responsibility for vocational education and employment matters.

4.5. National Youth Agency (NYA)

The National Youth Agency (NYA) is created in support of Article 100 of the Constitution, Law no. 75/ 2019 "For youth", VKM no. 681, dated 02.09.2020 "On the method of creation, organization and operation of the National Youth Agency". NYA is an institution that guarantees and promotes the rights of young people through support for non-formal education, interaction and youth activism and the financing of youth activities, based on and in implementation of the state policies in the field of youth.

The activity of NYA is spread throughout the territory of the Republic of Albania, organizing its functional responsibilities with the aim of ensuring the conditions for the support and promotion of youth activities, the development of structured dialogue to strengthen the position of young people in society, the creation of mechanisms for promoting youth policies as well as making professional, qualitative and independent decisions in the selection of programs and projects that focus on Albanian youth and youth importance in society.

With the implementation of the open calls for youth organizations/for young people and those for units of local self-government. NYA provides opportunities where young people can learn and practice knowledge in a variety of fields such as sports, ICT, arts, foreign languages and mental and physical health.

So far, NYA has opened three calls for youth project proposals, which are being financed with the support of the government through NYA.

The first call was open in 2021 to provide funding for projects proposed by Youth Organizations and/or targeted towards young people, as well as for projects financed by Local Self-Government Units aimed at benefiting young people. The total grant allocated was €278,136 for organization projects and €185,423 for local self-government units. From this inaugural call, support was extended to 12 youth organizations and/or projects for young people, while 4 local self-government units received backing.

In August 2022, the second call was opened for the financing of projects by youth organizations and/or for young people with focus on projects addressing the priorities of the national youth strategy and with a total grant for this call of €560,134. As well as for the financing of projects from local self-government units, with a focus on the construction or reconstruction of public buildings and youth infrastructure with a total grant of €482,874.

From the second call, 24 youth organizations and/or for young people and 5 local self-government units were supported. In April 2023, the third call was opened for the financing of projects by youth organizations and/or for young people with focus in projects that address the priorities of the national youth strategy and specifically these priorities: encouraging the participation of young people in decision-making processes; encouraging decent jobs creation and connecting young people with the labor market; supporting the active, healthy, physical, social, cultural and mental well-being of young people. The total grant for the support of youth organizations and/or for young people in this call was €560,134. From this call, 23 projects of organizations

that are currently under implementation have been supported.

Meanwhile, in December 2023, the third call was opened for the financing of projects from local self-government units, with a focus on providing grants for youth infrastructure for municipalities such as youth centers, libraries and recreational centers for young people. The total grant for this Call is: €482,874⁴.

NYA also participates and is active in youth activities such as school fairs, cultural activities and is constantly in contact with young people who express their needs and desires. NYA is always in support and in function of the Youth.

RIN Camp is an event that focuses on young people and aims to activate and support more young people on the possibilities of their engagement in the youth sphere, raising personal and professional capacities, and empowering them.

During four days, young people engage in a variety of activities and address and expand their knowledge through several topics in full cohesion with the specific goals and objectives of the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029, which aims to empower the voice of young people and engage them in the sphere of education, labor market and physical and mental well-being. RIN Camp 2023 took place from August 31st - September 3rd.

The Education, Training and Employment Fair for Young People is an initiative which, from 2023, is taking place in all cities of Albania with the main goal of acquainting young people with local and national opportunities in education, training and employment, presented by actors who provide services to young people. (National Youth Agency, n.d.)

4.6. National Youth Council

The National Youth Council is an advisory body that functions under the minister responsible for youth. The National Youth Council is chaired by the Minister Responsible for Youth and has 14 to 16 members, where at least half of the members represent youth and/or youth organizations. The members of the

The National Youth Council are appointed by order of the minister responsible for youth. The members of the national youth council are elected through open calls and public voting. In 2023, NYA has opened the second call for members of the National Youth Council.

The National Youth Council performs these functions: It presents priority policies, the budget and activities in the field of youth to the minister responsible for youth, it proposes the main directions and programs for supporting and strengthening the participation of young people, offers suggestions on the drafting of the national strategy for youth, its monitoring and implementation, approves the annual report on the implementation of the national strategy for youth and the situation of young people. (National Youth Agency, n.d.)

4. The original values for the calls from NYA are in Albanian Lek (ALL) and have been converted to Euro according to the exchange rate: 1ALL =0.0097 Euro

4.7. Local Youth Council

In accordance with Law No. 75/2019 "For Youth," every municipality in Albania has the responsibility to establish official local youth structure in the form of local youth councils. By 2024, all municipalities in Albania have successfully established their respective local youth councils, which will organize various activities to engage and involve young people in social, economic, and political aspects at the local level.

The local youth council functions as an advisory body, which works under the mayor and serves as a liaison mechanism between the municipality and the youth community. Its purpose to assist young people of each city to identify the problems and challenges they face in the territory where they live, to convey their requests and needs to the respective municipality, and at the same time to strengthen their voice in local decision-making processes and to increase their involvement in policy making.

The local youth council exercises the following duties:

- a) advises and provides guidance to local authorities regarding the orientation of youth-related policies and local youth development plans.
- b) evaluates the situation of young people and the implementation of youth plans and policies at the local level;
- c) proposes improvements to local youth policies, and suggests initiatives tailored to the requirements of youth in their jurisdiction
- d) cooperates and shares information with the National Youth Council.

The local youth council is chaired by the mayor and consists of at least 4 to 6 members, where at least half of the members represent youth and/or youth organizations. Members of the local youth council are appointed by order of the mayor of the municipality.

The criteria and procedures for the selection of members of the local youth council, along with its organizational structure and operations are approved by decision of the municipal council. Whenever feasible, these criteria and procedures align with those endorsed by the Council of Ministers for the National Youth Council.

5. FOREIGN DONORS SUPPORT

Several donor support programs are actively contributing to youth education, training, and employment initiatives in Albania. These programs often involve partnerships between international organizations, governmental bodies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Entities such as the European Union, United Nations agencies, and various bilateral aid organizations are key contributors.

EU Support in Albania

The EU is the largest provider of financial assistance to Albania. The EU is supporting the socio-economic development and reforms in the enlargement region, including in Albania, with financial and technical assistance through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). The EU pays special attention to youth, education, and innovation. It helps the Western Balkans in implementing Youth Guarantee schemes to support youth employment. 11,500+ participants took part in exchanges between the EU and Albania in the areas of education, training, youth, and sport under ERASMUS+ (2014-2020).

The EU is supporting the establishment of the new College of Europe campus in Tirana. (DG NEAR, 2023). For 2021-2023, the IPA III funding for national programmes amounted to close to **€250 million** for Albania. The 2022 programme (IPA22) included an EU contribution of **€82.6 million**, covering actions in the areas of environmental protection, **developing perspectives for youth**, strengthening democracy, EU acquis alignment, continuing the fight against organized crime, strengthening the judiciary as well as supporting reforms to fulfil EU standards and norms.

Among the actions in IPA22 programme, “EU for youth” was the main action that directly supports the participation and empowerment of youth in the political, economic and social life of Albania with a budget of EUR 5 million.

In comparison to previous actions this action puts a specific aim on the NEET youth. The Action aims to increase the employability of youth through the implementation of qualitative and labour market relevant education and training or vulnerable youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) through the pilot action for a Youth Guarantee as well as support the Albanian institutions in the coordination, institutional capacity building, implementation and monitoring mechanisms for the Youth Guarantee in alignment with the Youth Guarantee flagship roadmap and the Youth Guarantee national action plan.

The third strand is directed to providing 21st century youth life skills, through their integration in secondary education curricula and the provision of school careers guidance. Meanwhile, IPA23 programme provides a further €80 million to support Albanians with the socio-economic consequences of the energy crisis by funding the Government of Albania’s response to the energy crisis, foreseeing a support to 168,000 small and medium enterprises in Albania to offset high energy prices. (EU Delegation in Albania, 2023), (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), 2023)

German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ)

ProSEED 2.0 - Sustainable Economic and Regional Development, Employment Promotion and Vocational Education and Training (2022-2026) is a project commissioned by German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and cofinanced by European Union, implemented by the Ministry of Finance and Economy (now subject to change and new ministry in line) to be decided which one will take the responsibility. The budget available is EUR 10.5 Mio+ EUR7.65 Mio EU funds.

The main objective of the Project is improving the employment situation of young people in Albania, taking into account green and digital elements.

ProSEED 2.0 programme is planned to be implemented for the period 2022-2026 and entails three main components under one umbrella:

Vocational education and training (VET): The activities under this pillar are focused to improve vocational education and training (VET) by integrating digital and green elements into 10 VET courses. The programme also provides training to VET personnel and the requisite equipment to partner institutions. Approximately 5,000 people are now gaining green and digital skills via non-formal and formal qualification measures. Piloting 10 VET curricula as offers of modernized qualification measures, including green or digital elements;

Private Sector Development: Pro- SEED under this pillar supports MSMEs with a focus on improving the competitiveness of around 800 MSMEs by digitalizing their business processes and introducing green business elements. Five new business development services will be established for promoting MSME-competitiveness intermediary organisations at national, regional, or local level. Also, it will provide advisory services and grants to MSMEs, whose business models require adjustments due to pandemic and other current crises.

Policy Development Support: this pillar provides policy development support to enhance the capabilities of the Ministry of Finance and Economy and its subordinate institutions to develop four new employment-related strategies or action plans that include digital or green economic aspects.

This involves creating at least 4 new employment-related strategies or action plans, integrating digital and green economic factors. Additionally, it provides training to employees in relevant national ministries and agencies to enhance their skills in formulating employment-related strategies.

ProSEED 2.0 joins forces with the co-funded project **EU4Innovation**. This multi-Donor Action strives to improve the business environment, innovate the ecosystem and investment climate as well as increase the exposure of Albanian start-ups regionally and internationally. (German Corporation for International Cooperation, GIZ)

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) continues to support the development of vocational education and training systems in Albania, with the goal to increase students' employability through projects such as Skills for Jobs (S4J) which is being implemented in Albania from 2015, and now is in its 3rd phase of implementation (2023-2027), with a budget of 7,780,000 EUR. The implementing partner in SWISS contact. S4J promotes work-based learning, digitalization and diversification of the VET offer, as per the labour market needs. To sustain the reform process, the exit phase consolidates the transfer of these innovative processes to additional VET providers and companies.

Results of the previous phases of the S4Js:

- Phase 1: Increased enrolment rate (+30%) and employment of graduates (+15%) in 7 partner providers. 325 companies hosted 709 apprentices. 3'741 (14.4% female) students and 4'855 (36.6%f) trainees benefit from an improved VET offer.
- Phase 2: 10'300 (20%) students and 2'297(51%) trainees benefit from an improved VET offer in 11 partner providers. 709 companies host 7'131 (22.4%) apprentices. 71% (58%) of graduates employed one year after graduation.
- Shifting from a largely school-based public VET system to one with a significant component of work-based learning (WBL). VET digitalization benefited 85% of all VET students. (Skills4Jobs, n.d.), (Swiss Contact)

Another project of Swiss Agency for development and Cooperation (SDC), that has in focus the support of skills development and increase employability especially putting focus on women, youth and people with disabilities and low income, is through the project Skills Development for Employment (SD4E), implemented by UNDP.

The project has been implemented for a decade in Albania and has entered the final phase (2023-2027) with a budget CHF 2000000. This final phase puts the focus on strengthening the capacities of the line ministry and its subordinated national agencies as well as on consolidating, upscaling and transferring the developed policies and regulations as well as best practices to complete the reform process.

The main objective is to increase the employability of young and adult women due to improved attractiveness and labour market relevance of inclusive employment services and VET offer.

All VET population (17'000 students and 11'000 adults) and Active Labour Market Measures beneficiaries (5.4% of the registered jobseekers) of Albania are expected to benefit from an improved VET offer driven by labour demand. Specific targeted measures are designed to increase the employability of women as well as people in low-income households and with disability.

Results from previous phases of SD4E:

- Phase 1: Local level responses for disadvantaged youth employment challenges in selected municipalities. Contribute to setting up the public active labour market measures (ALMM) system.

- Phase 2 and 3: Setting-up the legal framework and fostering the national VET reform (work-based learning and Quality Assurance in VET provision, decentralization of VET management), incl. a monitoring and evaluation framework. Diversification of ALMMs (labour market information system, skills need analysis, self-employment programme for youth).
- Capacity building and institutional strengthening have resulted in stronger and better governed national agencies as well as an accreditation system for all VET providers.

The development of the new project phases of S4J and SD4E was inspired by and based on the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2030 and the portfolio of the Swiss Cooperation Program in Albania, aligning their activity frameworks and further integrating their support into the education and vocational training sector in Albania. This common portfolio will ensure that interventions create synergies for greater impact. (UNDP Albania), (SWISS Agency for Development and Cooperation)

US Embassy in Albania

US Embassy in Albania is also a supporter of the youth development in the country and over the years has taken many initiatives in this direction.

The US Embassy in Albania actively promotes and contributes to the advancement of youth development within the country. Over the course of several years, the embassy has taken numerous initiatives tailored to address the diverse needs of the youth. These endeavors encompass a range of activities and programs aimed at empowering young individuals, fostering their personal and professional growth, and making a positive impact on the overall landscape of youth development in Albania.

Advancing Youth Activism and Engagement is one of the 6 programs of the US Embassy. This program seeks to develop the next generation of Albania's leaders by fostering a culture of civic engagement, volunteerism, and activism. Through Youth Activism Program FY2024, the U.S. Embassy Tirana opened a competition for organizations to submit proposals for funding. The proposals should include opportunities for youth to gain meaningful connections with their peers around Albania while enhancing leadership skills and implementing principles of diversity and inclusion. The program will use various methods of engaging youth such as digital tools, hands-on activities, networking, and mentoring. 1 project will be awarded in the amount of \$50,000. (US Embassy in Albania)

The US Embassy Youth Council Albania (USEYCA) is an initiative of the US. Embassy in Tirana which brings together a cross-section of young, dynamic Albanians who give their input in the society through activism, participation in the socio-political dialogue, community services and effective advocacy. It aims to strengthen the sense of active citizenship among the youth of Albania through leadership, outreach and civic engagement activities. The Youth Council seeks to empower the Albanian youth by connecting and inspiring change, raise awareness on different youth issues, address their concerns, discuss and find possible platforms to implement solutions. (US Embassy Youth Council, n.d.)

USEYCA has an ongoing open Youth Program, aimed to activate young people and involve them in the local community, with the main goal to raise your voice on issues affecting Albanian youth.

Youth Lead project is another supportive initiative of US Embassy. Through Youth Lead, young leaders form groups and lead initiatives to improve their communities with support from the Embassy and the National Youth Congress. Through Youth Lead 1 project, Youth Council in 2022 created sustainable youth local clubs in 6 regions of Albania, Lezhe, Shkoder, Peshkopi, Pogradec, Permet, Berat, that will be active for a period of 29 weeks. The local groups are led by a community organizer, who is responsible for gathering the group every weekend, leading the discussion, working on different aspects of project cycle writing and youth issues. At the end of this initiative, each group from each city came up with a concrete platform to address a local problem of their choice. In an open and competitive challenge, the 2 best projects are supported by the US Embassy to implement further the proposed solutions. 2 projects of young people from Permet and Peshkopi were the winners of the Youth Lead 1, which are continuing organizing activities.

In October 2023 it was opened the call for Youth Lead 2 project, which will begin its journey in other six cities around Albania: Elbasan, Fier, Saranda, Mirdita, Shkodra and Tropoja. (US Embassy in Albania)

American Corner Tirana is a space that serves as the embassy's platform to run outreach programs as well as special conferences and workshops and it is located on the first floor of the National Library of Albania.

American Corner Tirana hosts daily educational and cultural programs for a variety of ages. It also provides information for those who wish to study in American universities. Thanks to support from English Language Fellows, Alumni, embassy staff, and volunteers, the Corner offers U.S. cultural programming and English Language teaching through a number of resources and a wide range of activities for youth.

Other activities at the Corner include: Technology and Innovation Classes, Presentations/workshops/discussions/conversation hour (with Embassy speakers, English Language Fellows, and volunteers); Clubs (Reading Club, Kids Club, Drama Club, Book Club); Film screenings/Movie Hour, Poster shows; and holiday celebrations.

6. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the past four years have witnessed a heightened focus on addressing the challenges faced by NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth in Albania, evidenced by increased institutional attention and the implementation of various measures and strategies.

Despite these efforts, the persistently high NEET rate at 25.2% underscores the urgency for sustained and collaborative actions by stakeholders involved in youth-related initiatives. While commendable progress has been made, there is a crucial need for effective implementation of existing strategies and policies, emphasizing the integration of NEET youth into the workforce through targeted measures in education, employment, and training. The proposed policy recommendations offer actionable steps to create an enabling environment for the successful execution of current strategies and to enhance the overall position of NEET youth in the country.

Collaborative efforts and continued commitment are essential to bring about meaningful change and opportunities for Albania's young population.

The first recommendation pertains to the **effective implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Albania**, emphasizing the necessity for close collaboration and coordination among all stakeholders within the country.

This entails:

→ Collaboration among government institutions, youth organizations, and youth workers at both local and national levels is crucial. This collaboration will aid in identifying NEET Youth and ensuring the smooth provision and delivery of services to young people. Given that youth organizations work directly with young individuals, their involvement is integral to effectively addressing the needs of NEET Youth.

→ Collaboration between educational institutions and businesses or industries is essential to align the skills acquired through education with the demands of the job market. This collaboration includes promoting vocational training programs aimed at enhancing practical skills among young people. By working together, education institutions and businesses can ensure that young individuals are equipped with the relevant skills needed for employment in various industries.

→ Effective communication and collaboration with NEET Youth, as the primary target group, are imperative. This involves implementing specific communication strategies to ensure that NEET Youth are reached and engaged effectively. By prioritizing communication efforts tailored to the needs and preferences of young people, the scheme can be implemented equitably and successfully across Albania for all youth.

→ Also since we are at the very first step of implementing Youth Guarantee, an institutional cooperation among the WB countries, would be very helpful, to exchange about successful practices, lessons learned, and challenges, therefore contributing to a better and successful implementation of the scheme in the country.

In Albania, there is a **pressing need to enhance the education system** by updating, improving, and aligning the curricula and teaching methodologies, particularly in universities, with the latest developments. This includes ensuring that the education system is responsive to the introduction of new technologies and advancements such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). By modernizing the education system to match current and emerging trends, Albania can better prepare its students for the evolving demands of the workforce and contribute to overall societal progress. There is also a need to improve the access to education and infrastructure for young people in rural areas, young people with disabilities, minorities in the country etc. Investing in research can remain very important. Also, investment in the capacity building of the teachers and professors will contribute to a more update and qualitative education system.

Gender - inclusive economic policies should be enacted and enforced to actively dismantle gender barriers in the economy, **ensuring equal access, opportunities, and resources for young women**. The fact that some NEET women are often responsible for family care duties highlights the need for additional support tailored to their circumstances. Implementing measures such as on-site childcare facilities, flexible working hours, or family-friendly policies can create an environment where women can actively participate in the workforce while fulfilling familial responsibilities.

Establish Support Mechanisms for Vulnerable Groups: Design specific measures and support systems for NEET youth from vulnerable backgrounds, such as those with

disabilities, coming from low-income families, or residing in rural areas. Furthermore, there is a critical need to bolster the social protection system in Albania, particularly by establishing standardized mechanisms and transparent, unified systems for data collection and processing. This infrastructure will facilitate more accurate identification of groups within the social protection scheme and enable the implementation of necessary support measures and policies tailored to their needs. Strengthening the social protection system is essential for ensuring the well-being and security of vulnerable populations in Albania.

Financial incentives, such as providing soft loans for young Albanians to purchase homes, can serve as a powerful tool to promote youth employment and deter brain drain. By facilitating home ownership, this initiative not only contributes to economic stability but also fosters a sense of rootedness, encouraging young individuals to invest in their local communities. To enhance the impact of **career guidance services**, innovative promotional methods and heightened awareness campaigns are essential. Ensuring that young people understand the importance of career guidance and have access to these services can significantly aid in making informed career choices. Additionally, it is crucial to invest in the continuous training and qualification of career counseling staff, equipping them with the latest knowledge, tools, and methods to effectively guide young individuals in their career trajectories.

The establishment of systematic and integrated data collection, processing, and monitoring mechanisms for NEET youth is pivotal. By implementing comprehensive data systems, policymakers can gain deeper insights into the characteristics and challenges faced by this group, enabling them to tailor interventions more effectively. Furthermore, encouraging targeted studies and research focused specifically on the NEET demographic provides valuable opportunities to identify nuanced issues and implement initiatives that holistically improve their position.

Create Targeted Employment Opportunities: Collaborate with the private sector to create entry-level job opportunities and internships for NEET youth. Encourage businesses to provide mentorship programs and on-the-job training. These recommendations aim to create a supportive environment that empowers young individuals, fosters their engagement, and ultimately contributes to the overall improvement of their position in the country.

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Funded by
the European Union

This publication was funded by the European Union. The content is the sole responsibility of the Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation and does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.