

Gender policies in Albania from a European perspective

Dr. Erjon Nexhipi, Dr. Adelina Nexhipi*

University Fan S. Noli, Korçe, Albania

Abstract

Traditionally, the Albanian society was male-dominated. Between the two World Wars, efforts were made to improve the status of women, but these efforts yielded limited results. During the communist regime, a top-down approach led to significant improvements in women's participation in social, economic and political life. A genuine gender movement in Albania began only after the 90s, accompanied by comprehensive reforms aimed at democratizing the country. Despite challenges during the transition period, Albanian women have achieved high levels in education, the labor market and public life. As part of the European integration process, the Albanian governments have adopted and implemented gender equality policies, in line with the European legislation and international conventions.

This study employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches to describe and analyze the efforts and achievements of the Albanian government post-1990s in implementing international gender equality principles, considered as a fundamental right for sustainable societal development. The study analyzes gender equality in Albania, in five indicators; equality before the law, involvement in political life, involvement in the labor market, involvement in education and participation in public life, based on statistical data, empirical studies and legal framework. It draws upon domestic legal frameworks, international conventions, statistics, and analyses by both Albanian and foreign scholars. As Albania has officially commenced negotiations for EU membership, the purpose of this study is to understand Albania's trajectory in gender policies within the scope of its European integration efforts. Albania has made significant improvements in the framework of gender equality, such as the mentality, the legal basis, the establishment of supporting institutions, however these developments still suffer the poor implementation and lack of clear and measurable gender indicators.

Keywords: gender equality, women empowerment, gender quotas, legal framework

Introduction

At the beginning of twentieth century, anthropologists described Albanian society as strongly male-dominated. Women become part of their husbands' family upon marriage and inheritance was passed down through the male line. Historically, men controlled women's social mobility, although to varying degrees across different regions. In the early years of the Albanian state, Sharia law regulated civil relations for Muslims, while the Kanun governed those in Northern Albania. During the interwar period (1920-1939), legislation aimed to establish gender equality:

- Article 206 of the Fundamental Statute of 1928 mandated compulsory primary education for all Albanian citizens and stated that state schools would provide free education.
- The Civil Code of 1929 recognized civil marriage and divorce, and granted women property and inheritance rights, as well as employment opportunities in administration.
- The Law on Engagement of 1934 allowed girls to express their agreement or disagreement with the marital choices made by their fathers. (Academy of Sciences, 2007)

Despite these legislative efforts, particularly under Zog's government, practical implementation failed. On the eve of World War II, 90% of women across the country were illiterate, and females constituted less than 3% of secondary school students. (ISP, 2003) Women's emancipation became a primary objective for the post-war communist government. Although the state imposed women's roles in a top-down manner, some positive developments did occur. For instance, Albanian women gained the right to vote in the elections held on December 2, 1945, marking another milestone as three women, Ollga Plumbi, Naxhie Dume, and Liri Gega, represented them in the Albanian Parliament for the first time. Between 1945 and 1990, women made up approximately 30% of the People's Assembly representatives, a stark contrast to their complete absence prior to 1945. Despite the fact that women gained the right to vote, it did not immediately improve their social status. In theory, women were equal to men, but as Miranda Vickers expressed in her book "Albanians" *"Although they could no longer be sold as men's property, they had now become state property."* (Vickers, 2008)

Among the most notable positive achievements was the significant improvement in literacy rates and increased female participation at all educational levels. By the 1980s, almost half of university students were female. Furthermore, by 1989, approximately 80% of working-age women were employed. (Academy of Sciences, 2007) Nonetheless, three issues warrant emphasis:

- First, the majority of women were employed in sectors traditionally considered female-dominated, such as healthcare, education, social welfare, and the textile and shoe industries. Rural sectors were also highly gender-specific
 - Second, only a few held high managerial positions.
 - Third, paid employment was added to the work women continued to perform within the home. (Vullnetari, 2012)

The deeply-rooted patriarchal norms in the private sphere were not significantly altered. Women bore what is known as the 'double burden' of both productive and reproductive labor, leading many to challenge the notion of true emancipation. The situation in Albania was similar to other Eastern European countries but was exacerbated by persistent societal concepts of "honor and shame." Women like Musine Kokalari (founding member of the Social - Democratic Party, 1946), Sevasti and Parashqevi Qiriazhi, and Sabiha Kasimati, who approached emancipation as independent thinkers, were marginalized and even imprisoned or exiled. Those who remained in decision-making roles largely followed the party line. Although the number of professional women increased, a robust feminist movement did not emerge in Albania until the mid-1990s.

The aim of this study is to analyze the policies and actions taken by the Albanian government post-1990s in relation to gender policies, considering it a fundamental right in democratic societies and in the context of Albania's European aspirations. The study will examine the challenges faced by Albanian women during the transitional period, their efforts to strengthen their societal roles, and the government policies designed to support gender equality. Research methodology employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study analyzes gender equality in Albania, in five indicators; equality before the law, involvement in political life, involvement in the labor market, involvement in education and participation in public life, based on statistical data, empirical studies and legal framework.

Numerous discussions, studies, and social engagements have been conducted within the framework of gender policies. Prominent figures in Albanian sociology and anthropology, such as Artan Fuga, Zyhdi Dervishi, Irena Nikaj, Marina Calloni, and Majlinda Hafizi, have contributed to this discourse. Various civil society organizations and NGOs have also been actively involved in promoting gender equality and protecting women's rights. They have engaged in lobbying with policy-making institutions, organizing scientific symposia, publishing studies, and advocating for specific cases. The publications of the Albanian Parliament "Women in Parliament", INSTAT statistics providing data in every field (education, employment, entrepreneurship, participation in politics, demographic data, etc.) on gender basis; "Gender index in Albania" a yearly publication from INSTAT, UNICEF Albania and UN Woman served as a basis to our own study. It analyses the legal framework in Albania, not only the one related directly to women's rights; also, it analyses how and how much women are protected, encouraging their education and supporting their skill promotion, economic empowerment and political engagement.

Gender equality is both a constitutional and universal obligation of the new millennium. In this regard, Albania has aligned itself with other European countries by establishing a comprehensive legal framework to encourage, promote, and protect women's rights, aiming to build a society founded on principles of gender equality. While this study examines the legal outcomes, it does not focus on the practical implementation of these policies.

1. Gender equality – pre-condition and desirable outcome for sustainable socio - economic development

The economic and political changes of the 90s led to the closure of several manufacturing enterprises increasing unemployment rates. Women were disproportionately affected. During the transition years, the employment rate for women and girls was lower than that for men due to various factors. These include responsibilities child-rearing, domestic chores, limited access to credit, and economic development in sectors traditionally considered male-dominated, such as trade and construction. Other factors, according to Hafizi are: less time for business, less information, less experience, fewer contacts, fewer capital investments resources, limited possibilities for travelling, exposure to violence, lack of self-confidence and missing trust by men on their capacity, fewer opportunities to acquire the common practices of business management in Albania. (Hafizi, 2002)

The collapse of the communist regime led to the disintegration of support systems like kindergartens and day-care centers that had been established to facilitate women's roles in the workforce. Achievements made in the past started to erode, particularly in the early 1990s, amid the power vacuum created by the dissolution of the omnipresent communist state. The position of women became precarious, and they became the group most affected by the lack of personal security and economic opportunities. Consequently, women retreated into the private sphere, where they faced other forms of insecurity, including domestic violence. Many women are compelled to stay in abusive relationships because they lack economic opportunities, but also for the sake of their children and to preserve the ‘honor’ of their family.

Based on INSTAT data, the percentage of employed women is visibly lower than the percentage of employed men. More details are shown in the table below:

Table 1 Employment rate based on gender (in %), 2005-2020

15-64 years	2005	2007	2008	2009	2011	2012	2014	2015	2016	2017	2019	2020
Men	68.5	63.6	63.0	64.3	65.7	62.2	58.0	60.5	61.9	64.3	68	66.9
Women	47	49.3	45.6	43.6	51.8	49.6	43.4	45.5	49.7	50.3	53	52.3

Source: INSTAT, Database, Employment and Unemployment in Albania

The labor market remains an area where gender equality has yet to be achieved. According to INSTAT data from 2020, women primarily work in agriculture, production, public administration, healthcare, and social services. Men, on the other hand, predominantly work in industry, construction, and activities related to trade, transport, and business administration. (INSTAT, 2020) Surveys reveal that women are often employed in family businesses without formal compensation, or in the informal sector. Women have established their own businesses in activities like: dentists, notary, law experts, hairdressing, seamstress,

handcrafts, textile, publications, retail, etc. While legislation advocates for gender equality in the workplace, actual practice reveals significant disparities. For instance, INSTAT data from 2020 show that only 25.5% of companies are owned or managed by women, and the gender salary gap was 10.1% for the same year. (INSTAT, Gender Equality, Men and women in Albania, 2020)

After the fall of communism, women (mostly writers, politicians and intellectuals) began to discuss feminism and gender issues, starting from individual needs to the rethinking of their own life in the light of the “new society”. They had to find a new existential and professional orientation. (Calloni, 2002) Therefore, they initiated to establish groups for public debate and social pressure, to open associations and developing gender oriented programs. In 1991 activities of urban women started with humanitarian help (from food to medicine) to women in remote Albanian areas, supported by international programs of co-operation. With the increase of new forms of exploitation of women due to the transformed social situation and the arising of new “pathologies” (from domestic violence, to prostitution, drug abuse, social insecurity, and so on), gender issues became more and more central in post-socialist countries, as well as forums of resistance. This explains also the increase of specific organizations of civil society in Eastern-Central European countries. In the majority of cases, NGO’s have constituted their programs, praxis and interventions in social issues in the form of self-help against the worsening of present socio-economic conditions. Therefore, the demands for the establishment of crisis centers, research organizations and gender institutes were exponentially growing in post-socialist countries. (Calloni, 2002)

This new step of the Albanian women’s movement was due to their “internationalization”. A formal delegation of Albanian women and representatives of NGO’s participated in the 4th World Conference held in Beijing in 1995. Implementing the main issues stated in the Platform for Action signed in Beijing, in 1998 in Albania was constituted the Women and Family Committee which was created by the Council of Ministries within the structure of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Women. This Committee had the aim to develop gender-oriented institutions and policies. The impact of business NGO-s in the support of women entrepreneurs has been insufficient. The problems have derived from lack of experience, lack of trust in their role and the strengthening of the role of entrepreneur women themselves. Nevertheless, as a matter of fact, the women movement in support to women entrepreneurs became more massive and consolidated. (Calloni, 2002) The positive trend for increasing the number of branches in other districts has to be followed by the increase of the membership. The NGO-s are becoming more and more as representatives of specific interest of women entrepreneurs of those that aim to start a women business and of women that want to improve the managerial skills, before being engaged into a real business.

Continuous efforts became noticeable in coordinating the state initiatives with the increasing involvement of the civil society. Women play an active role in NGO-s, which in turn have played an important role in democratic developments countrywide; therefore,

women have affected indirectly the political decision-making. In the non-governmental sector, women and girls have found their space and freedom to become involved in such issues as: women’s rights, children’s rights and community in general, fight against human trafficking, social and health care, economic development, etc.

2. Inclusion in education

Inclusion in education is a critical factor for achieving gender equality and social development. A well-educated populace, irrespective of gender, contributes to a nation's socio-economic growth and democratic stability. Studies reveal a clear link between the level of education and women's empowerment. Educated women have shown that they are more effective in improving their well-being, in general they are better prepared to self-generate alternative support structures and opportunities, to be independent in decision-making, more active in public life, in increasing potential to earn income, etc. (Morina, 2020)

The legal basis guarantees universal access to education, primary and lower secondary education is obligatory for everyone, Ministry of Education and Sports has the duty to ensure equal opportunities in education. Educational participation by gender in the education levels indicates the existence of gender differences at various education levels. The rate of boys attending pre-university education is higher compared to girls, while most of students in tertiary education are girls.

Table 2 Gender Parity Index (on GER)

Education level	Year						
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Primary and lower secondary	0.98	0.97	0.95	0.95	0.94	0.94	0.93
Upper Secondary	0.93	0.93	0.91	0.95	0.94	0.91	0.94
Tertiary	1.51	1.52	1.48	1.49	1.54	1.48	1.45

Source: INSTAT, Database, education

Beyond the satisfactory statistics for girls' education, special categories continue to drop out of school or attend only compulsory education. This is emphasized in the Roma and Egyptian community, due to the mentality and marriages of girls at young age, whereas the lack of access to schools further increases the inability for education to girls with disabilities. According to INSTAT statistics, during the year 2022, about 10% of girls of school age do not follow the compulsory 9-year education. UNICEF estimates that dropping out of school in Albania is caused by extreme poverty, the low level of inter-institutional and community cooperation, negative phenomena within society, population movements, migrations, etc. (UNICEF, 2021)

The government has undertaken several initiatives to promote gender equality in education. These include: (I) curriculum reforms to eliminate gender stereotypes. (II) career guidance programs to encourage both genders to explore non-traditional fields. (III) scholarships and financial incentives for girls, particularly in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. (MASR, 2021)

Statistical data show that the participation of girls in secondary education is high and the percentage of girls who graduate is equal to or higher than that of boys. However, in professional education, the majority (approximately 82 percent) are boys, mainly due to the existence of stereotypes related to "men's professions", the social environment in professional schools, the types of school programs offered, as well as the prospects for employment of girls after graduation. (UN Albania, 2021) The lack of quality career guidance has caused students to make career decisions based on gender stereotypes.

Table 3 Pupils graduated on upper secondary education

Graduated	2001	2003	2004	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Students	18.843	22.182	24.840	27.905	28.756	34.289	34.823	20.094	40.927	45.899
Girls	10.201	11.750	12.683	15.143	15.679	18.698	18.727	10.090	20.801	22.625
%	54	53	51	54	54.5	54.5	53.7	50.2	50.8	49.2

Source: INSTAT, Database, education

In tertiary education, the majority of students are girls. Girls pursue studies more in the fields of teaching, health and welfare, and social sciences, while boys predominate in the fields of services, engineering, manufacturing and construction, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary medicine. In 2021, 32,690 students graduated from university education, where 66.1% of the graduating students were female. The fields in which more women have graduated are "Education" with 82.3%, followed by "Arts and humanities" with 79.9% and "Social sciences, journalism and information" with 79.1%. The fields in which more men have graduated are "Engineering, production and construction" with 64.4%, "Services" with 63.9% and "Information and communication technology" with 61.6%. (INSTAT 2022) Gender stereotypes limit girls' aspirations for science and engineering careers and discourage boys from pursuing jobs in the care sector.

Table 4 Students graduated in tertiary education

	2019 - 2020		2020 - 2021		2021 - 2022	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Short cycle tertiary (2 years)	669	404	725	597	846	816
Bachelor	6029	11556	5990	11660	5562	10455
Master	4608	9329	4251	9074	3916	9046
Doctorate	102	192	132	261	97	172

Source: INSTAT, 2023

As shown in Table 4, girls invest in their professional and academic growth more than boys. Although the number of girls pursuing master and doctoral studies is greater compared to that of boys, the number of girls who become part of the labor force is lower and does not correspond to the level of their educational qualification. Civil society organizations must play a significant role in advocating for gender equality in education to raise awareness, conduct research, and push for policy reforms. Their efforts have to complement those of the government and international organizations, to ensure that gender equality in education is not just a policy but a lived reality for all.

3. Gender Equality in politics and governance

One out of five indicators for achieving Gender Equality and Women Empowerment clearly determines the importance of increasing the equality in proportion with the number of seats held by women in the Parliament. Setting a gender balance in Government and politics, includes a full, active, and equal participation of women in public and political life in order to encourage changes in policies, so that women's issues and needs are addressed. Low participation of women and girls in decision-making process is a huge barrier in meeting reforms and policies oriented towards women, children, and family's needs. Politicians may not take on board the fact that changes in legislation will often affect men and women differently

Experts agree that active participation of women in political life yields three main benefits:

- *First, regions where women are more politically active tend to be more democratic and have a higher quality of life.*
- *Second, women often prioritize different issues than men, so their participation in decision-making structures can bring overlooked issues to the forefront.*
- *Third, the inclusion of women in decision-making processes generally enhances the quality of governance.* (Social Research Centre, 2007)

Women representation in parliament, government, local government, leading position in political parties was low, during the first two decades after the communist period. The European Commission has critically mentioned the phenomenon in its reports on Albania: *"Women continue to be under-represented in the labor market, policy making and politics. Implementation of existing legislative instruments and policies in the matter keeps on being poor. Coordination among institutions on local and central levels should be increased considerably."* (European Commission, 2011)

Table 5. Women representation in Parliament 1991-2021

Legislation	Years	Nr.of parliamentarians	Nr. of female parliamentarians	Specific influence of women (%)
XII	1991	250	10	4
	1992	140	8	5.7
XIV	1996	140	21	15
XV	1997	155	11	7.1
XVI	2001	140	9	6.4
XVII	2005	140	10	7.1
XVIII	2009	140	23	16.4
XIX	2013	140	25	17.9
XX	2017	140	41	29.3
XXI	2021	140	50	35,7

Source: (Parliament of Albania, 2003) (CEC)

Albania made significant strides towards female representation in legislative and decision-making institutions in 2005. For the first time, a woman was elected as Speaker of the Parliament, and another became the Head of the Supreme Court. Additionally, for the first time the position of the Chief Prosecutor was held by a woman. Despite these advancements, the government still had only one female minister out of 14, and women constituted only 23% of vice-ministers and 10% of Albanian ambassadors abroad; 2 out of 10 members of the High Council of Justice were women; only 1 out of 8 members of the Constitutional Court of Justice was female. The representation of women in local government also remained low, with just one female mayor out of 65 municipalities between 2007 and 2011, and only 13.3% of female members in municipal councils; 9 women (or 16%) were elected Head of the Municipal Councils. 6 women served as head of communes out of a total of 309. (CEC, Zgjedhjet vendore [Local Election]) Women made up also a small percentage in leadership structures of political parties in charge of policy-making, men made programs and decide on priorities in elections.

The issue of gender quotas has been a point of debate in Albania. In 2003, a petition with 109,000 signatures called for a change in the Electoral Code to include quotas. The proposal divided opinions:

- One group opposed the quotas, viewing them as discriminatory against women.
- Another group supported quotas as a positive measure to achieve gender equality.

The Commission did not approve gender quotas in the new Electoral Code. Despite the lack of consensus, both major political parties in Albania adopted a quota system for the 2003 local elections. In May 2003, general Steering Council of the Socialist Party decided a 2/1 ration (2 men – 1 woman) on the candidates lists for the municipal and communal councils. By the end of June 2003, via a leadership decree, the Democratic Party decided to use the

quota system 2/1 ratio in the largest cities, 3/1 ratio in smaller cities and 4/1 ratio on communal levels. It took five years for the gender quotas to become a legal obligation. By December 2008, the new Electoral Code include a 30% quotas for female representation in Parliament.

Amendments on the Electoral Code (approved in August 2012) involved an increase of penalties for the parties that did not respect the gender quotas. That same year, The European Commission in its progress report states *“it is necessary a stricter application of the gender quota ratio while preparing for the next parliamentary elections. Application of existing legislation and policies on women's rights needs to be accelerated.”* (European Commission, 2011) In coming reviews of the Electoral Code, it was decided that the candidates' lists *one out of three first names on the nominal list should be from the underrepresented gender and one out of two members on the local elections' lists should be female*, (Electoral Code, 2008) meaning that 50% of the municipal members should be women.

In recent years, improvements have been observed. By 2019, women made up 44% of municipal councils, an increase from 37% in 2015. As of 2022, the representation of women in various government bodies has become more balanced; 70% of ministers are female, women make up 35.7% of the Parliament, 2 out of 5 members in the Central Election Center, are women; 30% of the ambassadors representing Albania abroad are female; 5 out of 9 members in the Constitutional Court, including its President, are woman; the position of the Head of High Judicial Council is held by a woman, the Speaker of Parliament is also a woman.

Equal gender representation at the national policy-making level is essential for upholding human rights, ensuring legal equality, and strengthening the principle of non-discrimination in society. Sociologist Zyhdi Dervishi notes that *“the right to vote and be elected is essential but insufficient for improving the status of women across various aspects of life”*. (Dervishi, 2011) Meanwhile, academic Mieke Verloo argues that *“despite the fact of being a woman does not automatically make a female politician supportive of women's introduction rights, a high representation of women in politics is always good for gender politics.”* (Verlo, 2010) Therefore the statistics are not sufficient to analyze gender equality in a society. Gender equality must be sanctioned in laws and strongly protected with binding mechanisms.

4. Legal Equality

According to The European Charter for Equality of women and men in local life *“If we are to achieve a society based on equality, it is essential that local and regional governments take the gender dimension fully into account, in their policies, their organization and their practices. And in today and tomorrow's world, the real equality of women and men is also key to our economic and social success – not just at European or national levels, but also in our regions, towns and local communities.”* (CEMR, 2006) In the legal aspect, the Albanian Constitution and the entire legal framework of the Republic of Albania ratifies the equality of all citizens under the law, which means that man and woman *de jure* are treated equally. The

principle of discrimination, including also gender discrimination is sanctioned under a special article of the Constitution (Article 18, Item 2), which affirms that “*No one may be discriminated for reasons such as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, language, political, religious, or philosophical beliefs, economic condition, education or social position or because of who his parents are.*” (Constitution of Albania, 1998) A number of laws, that support gender equality issues and policies, have been written after 1990:

Code of Labor from 1995 (article 9) provides guarantees for non-discrimination on both public and private aspects. Labor law refers to the principle of equal treatment of women and men. The employers pay equal salaries for the same jobs and are applicable on both public and private sectors. Labor legislation provides special protective measures for pregnant women and during lactation period. As far as the financial support is concerned, the Government promotes woman employment, especially those helpless women find a long-term employment. There are included traffic victims, Roma women, disabled people, and women with social problems. The latest changes made in Labor Law addressed the dispositions of EU directives by including labor non-discrimination, parenting rights, information rights, employer-employee relations and telework. (Code of Labor, 1995)

Family Code (2003) ratifies moral and legal equality of spouses; both husband and wife obtain the same rights and undertake the same obligations; each of the spouses can demand a divorce. The Law provides legal measures which support all family members, regardless of their gender or age, so that they do not become victims of domestic violence. Moreover, the law provides the right of heritage, where the spouse, based on law, is first-degree heir. (Family Code, 2003)

Electoral Code (December 2008) recognizes the right to elect and being elected to *every Albanian citizen who has reached the age of 18,... regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, language, political view, religion, physical ability of economic status* (Article 3 Item 3). Article 4 of the Law provides the application of gender equality principle, direct and active participation in political and public life of the underrepresented gender. Electoral Law encourages gender equality in elected entities and election administration by setting gender quotas for the underrepresented gender no less than 30% of the Albanian Parliament composition. Item 6 of Article 67 of the Electoral Law provides that “*for each election area, at least 30% of the nominal list and one out of three first names on the list should be the underrepresented gender, whereas in municipal council elections one in every two consecutive names in the ranking must belong to the same gender.*” (Electoral Code, 2008)

Albania has ratified a series of international convents for the Human Rights especially the *European Charter for Equality*, the Resolution “*On elimination of all discrimination forms against women*” (CEDAW) in 1993, and the Council of Europe Convention on “*Preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*” in 2012. Albania is a member of Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council on Women, Peace and Safety. Having signed the *Millennium Declaration*, Albania ratified

officially the *Resolution of Millennium Development Objectives* in July 2003. Through it, the world leaders are committed in supporting as well as the objective on *Gender Equality and Women Empowerment*, which is one of the eight development objectives and identified as a critical priority for global and national development. The third objective of Millennium Development emphasizes the importance of Gender Equality as an objective of the human right and vital component for achieving other objectives.

Albania is acting to approach its own legislation with the EU legislation, including the European policies on gender equality. Legal dispositions on equal rights were written in a series of life's aspects such as social insurance, education, employment, politics, etc. Law "*On reproductive health*" (Law No. 8876, dated 4.4.2002) provides that, "*Every woman, free of every form of discrimination, obligation and violence, has the right to check herself and decide freely on all matters related to her sexuality, sexual and reproductive health*". (On reproductive health, 2002) CEDAW Convent considers the state's obligation to provide the pregnant woman appropriate free services during pregnancy, birth and postpartum if needed, and appropriate meals during pregnancy, and breastfeeding; as a consequence, Law on "*Encouragement and protection of breastfeeding*" (Law No. 8528, dated 23.9.1999) was approved in Albania. Similarly, Law on "*Measures against domestic violence*", (Law No. 9669, dated 18.12.2006) aims at prevention and reduction of domestic violence in all its forms, through appropriate legal measures and other necessary measures.

Law on "*Gender equality in society*" (Law No. 9970 dated 24.07.2008), presents one of the main requirements of gender equality principle, equal gender representation in all entities of legislative, executive, and legal power and in other public institutions. This representation should be extended not only to members and employees of these entities, but in their steering entities as well. As a criterion, the law sets a representation rate at 30% for each gender. Moreover, it sets a series of guarantees to provide an equal representation as well as the institutional obligation for the appointment of gender officials in ministries and local officials for gender issues. (Gender equality in society, 2008) By Prime Minister decree (No. 3, dated 8.1.2009), National Council for Gender Equality was established, a counseling entity for gender policies. The "*Law on Social Enterprises*" (Law No. 65/2016) was approved. It aims the employment of disadvantaged people such as: people treated with social assistance, disabled people, orphans, women who have been victims of violence and trafficking, etc. The Law (No. 05/L 2021) "*On protection from discrimination*" for prevention and fight against discrimination, including gender discrimination is important too.

Although Albania has made significant progress in harmonizing its legislative framework with international normative standards, it is necessary to make other changes to effectively combat sexual violence, sexual harassment and stalking. According to UN Albania, "*the legal definition of rape in The Criminal Code continues to be a definition based on the use of force and the burden of proof falls on the victim. The legislation has shortcomings in the areas of safety in the use of the Internet and there are no legal provisions for the protection of victims*

of criminal offenses other than domestic violence (such as stalking, harassment or sexual assault)“. (UN Albania, 2021)

The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission announced the European Pillar of the Social Rights in the Social Summit for Employment and Fair Growth in Gothenburg, Sweden on November 17th, 2017. Main framework of EU social protection policies is Europe 2020 Strategy and the open method of coordination for social protection and social inclusion (Social OMC), which aims to promote cohesion and social equality through appropriate, attainable and financially sustainable systems of social protection and policies of social inclusion. On December 4th, 2017, the Albanian Parliament approved the Resolution “*On fighting the violence against girls and women and increasing the effectiveness of legal mechanisms for preventing it*”. In implementing the commitments made in the resolution, the establishment of the subcommittee “On gender equality and prevention of violence against women,” was approved. To implement them, two main strategies have been drafted and implemented in Albania: National Strategy of Social Inclusion and National Strategy of Employment and Skills. Fields under focus are:

1. Improvement of access and quality of social services integrated on local level.
2. Promotion of social inclusion in employment and employment opportunities for young people, men, and women.
3. Enhancement of inclusive quality learning and promotion of education achievements in pre-university system for all boys and girls, with a special focus on Roma community, disabled people, and other vulnerable groups.
4. The employment of disadvantaged people such as: people treated with social assistance, disabled people, orphans, women who have been victims of violence and trafficking, etc. (MMSR, 2016)

Guided by measures and actions provided in the Strategy of Gender Equality 2020-2025 of the European Union, the Albanian government has drafted the “*National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021 – 2030*”, which reflects the obligations resulting from other international documents, such as Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Peking Declaration and Action Platform, European Council Convention on Preventing and fighting the violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). The main principles guiding the strategy are:

1. Progress towards a transformative gender approach.
2. Addressing gender discrimination with other discrimination forms.
3. Following an approach based on human rights.
4. Gender equality and justice,
5. Sensibility and equal treatment to the special needs of both genders.
6. Recognition, appreciation, and respect for diversity.
7. Zero tolerance against gender and domestic violence. (The Council of Ministers, 2021)

The institutional framework related to gender equality, gender and domestic violence extends to the national and local level. The main national authority in charge of these issues since 2017 is the Ministry of Health and Social Protection. The structure covering the gender equality issues in the ministry is “The sector of policies and strategies in social inclusion and gender equality”. Except that, the Minister of Health and Social Protection is the head of the National Council on Gender Equality, which is the highest counseling unit on gender equality and gender integration on policies related to political representation, economic empowerment, social and cultural issues, etc. The Parliament as well has some structures supporting gender equality; the Sub-Commission on Gender Equality and prevention of violence against women, whose task is to supervise the application of the national strategy on gender equality; “Alliance of female parliamentarians” established in 2013 for promoting gender equality in the parliament and involving the gender perspective in the legislation. The Commissioner on protection from discrimination is an independent structure, established in 2010, which protects individuals from discrimination, including gender discrimination. On local level, each municipality has their own local coordinators in the fight against domestic violence.

These policies (along with other factors) have influenced the improvement of the condition of women in Albanian society, from year to year. This is also shown by the UNDP data, regarding Gender Inequality in Albania. It was improved from year to year, although there is still work to be done to reach the same level as the countries of the region.

Table 6 Gender inequality index in Albania

Year	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
GII	0.334	0.306	0.242	0.249	0.230	0.221	0.217	0.207	0.205	0.187	0.186	0.181

Source: UNDP, Gender inequality index

Figure 1. Gender inequality index in Albania compared with Greece, Serbia, World



Source: UNDP, Gender inequality index

Conclusion

In today's Albanian society, women have reached high education levels, made progress in the labor market and the public life. On the other hand, many women find themselves in a dilemma between raising children or pursuing a carrier because of time inconveniences, lack of social services and obstacles caused by traditional gender stereotypes and society's masculine mindset. As in other developing societies, women often become prone to violence, molestation or sexual abuse, trafficking or prejudices. Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms perpetuate and legitimize violence, abuse and discrimination, thus creating major obstacles to achieving true equality between women and men, girls and boys. Often, authorities face a professional uncertainty and lack the protection methods for violence or discrimination victims.

In the face of the reality, public institutions and their policies aim to support the social, cultural, and educational development and economic empowerment of Albanian women. On the legal aspect, the Albanian women enjoy equal rights with men and protection against every form of gender discrimination. Through gender quotas, women's participation in employment and politics has been encouraged. Laws have been approved and institutional structures have been established for promoting gender equality and fights against violence and gender discrimination. Along with its aspirations to join the European Union, Albania has designed and approved a comprehensive legal framework and has applied relevant policies related to gender equality. Albania has already embraced worldwide policies on gender equality reflected on the UN objectives for a Sustainable Development. In this framework, efforts were made in approaching the legal basis with the EU's, national strategies on gender equality, social inclusion, employment and abilities were written. However, these developments still suffer the poor implementation and lack of clear and measurable gender indicators. Albania has a lot of work to do especially towards the involvement of women in employment, creation of equal opportunities in the labor market, decent work and fair working conditions as well as social protection.

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