

Enlargement countries

Albania

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: General elections were held on 25 April 2021, following the cross-party agreement of 5 June 2020 that led to a wide-ranging electoral reform, in line with the recommendations of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR). Its final assessment found that elections were generally well organised. The new electoral administration gained the trust of most stakeholders. Concerns remained related to the misuse of public resources or official functions, to allegations of vote buying, and to the leaking of sensitive personal data covering the political preferences of citizens. These cases are being investigated. With regard to EU reforms, the parliament adopted a number of significant pieces of legislation, the government maintained a focus on reforms required for the country's path towards the EU, despite the challenge of addressing the negative social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the new legislature, the majority and the opposition will need to improve political dialogue and work together with all parts of society to further advance the EU reform agenda and accession negotiations. Limited progress has been made to implement the roadmap on creating an enabling environment for civil society. Nonetheless, Albanian civil society has been able to provide support and services to people in most vulnerable situations affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Albania complies overall with international human rights instruments and has ratified most international conventions related to the protection of fundamental rights. During 2021, there was progress on property rights as regards the registration, digitisation and implementation of the compensation scheme. On the rights of persons belonging to minorities, there was progress in the adoption of implementing bylaws related to the 2017 framework law on the protection of national minorities. The country has to adopt the remaining implementing legislation, including on self-identification and use of minority languages. The Population and Housing Census Law was adopted in line with international standards. The legal framework on anti-discrimination further improved but the case law has not yet substantially developed. Discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) persons remains pervasive and dominant in the Albanian society, and policy initiatives need appropriate financial resources and political will to produce visible results. Progress was made in other aspects of fundamental rights, for instance on the enforcement of the rights of persons with disabilities and on gender equality, with a new strategy on gender equality 2021-2030 adopted in June 2021. By-laws linked to the Law on Social Housing were adopted.

For more information please refer to the [European Commission's 2021 Report for on Albania](#).

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continues to monitor the protection of human rights, including the progress on the first registration of properties and transitional ownership rights, the protection of minorities and of persons in vulnerable situations, as well as improvement of detention and probation conditions in the Albanian prison system. Significant attention was given also to independence of media and freedom of expression, as well as to actions in the area of the right to life, prevention of torture and ill-treatment in the prison system, protection of personal data and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

In the context of the COVID 19 pandemic and the 2021 elections, the EU urged the authorities to make further efforts to prevent, protect and provide services to groups in vulnerable situations and to victims of violence.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Albania continues to fulfil the conditions for opening accession negotiations. Discussions continue in view of adopting the Negotiating Framework and holding the first Intergovernmental Conference as soon as possible. Human rights and democracy remained a central focus of the political dialogue with the authorities in 2021, notably in the context of the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Council, as well as its sub-committees.

4. EU financial engagement: During the reporting period, the EU pursued the implementation of programmes and projects in the field of human rights and democracy.

An Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) project implemented by the OSCE (EUR 650,000) contributed to strengthening the public broadcaster and the public school of journalism, while three IPA 2020 (approx. EUR 600,000) projects aimed at enhancing investigative journalism and reinforcing independent journalism through multimedia and data quality. The implementation of additional support (approx. EUR 799,000) deployed from the IPA 2018-2019 instrument for the recovery of children and families in vulnerable situations – including children with disabilities – affected by the COVID-19 pandemic continued. The IPA 2019 programme on Social Inclusion with a budget of EUR 70 million is focusing on families in vulnerable situations, including those affected by COVID-19 crisis, Roma and Egyptian families, and older persons. Regarding property rights, implementation of two projects under the IPA 2020 (EUR 1.36 million) has started.

The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) contributed with a budget of EUR 2.2 million supporting in particular the rights of the child, promotion of the rights of LGBTI persons, human rights of persons in detention, inclusive education, missing persons and the role of civil society in the democratic process.

The IPA Civil Society Facility and Media Programme provided a budget of EUR 3.44 million of EU contribution with projects focusing notably on youth and civil society's role in implementation of human rights, support to investigative journalism and independent media institutions, as well as social inclusion.

Cooperation under the EU/Council of Europe Horizontal Facility phase II continued with focus on ensuring justice, fighting corruption and organised crime, promoting equality, human rights and social inclusion. The allocation for Albania is more than EUR 4 million.

5. Multilateral context: Albania continued its dialogue and cooperation with national, European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. Following the adoption of the Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council (in September 2019), national institutions engaged in a dialogue on human rights in order to better integrate human rights in strategic and development policies and to identify focus areas. Several Council of Europe and OSCE missions took place during the reporting period.

Bosnia and Herzegovina