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UN WOMEN

Empowering Women for Rural Development in Northern Albania

Gender-Sensitive Value Chains Analysis in the Dibër Municipality

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This gender sensitive value chain analysis was developed under the project "Empower Women for Rural Development in Northern Albania", implemented by UN Women and funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Italy. This project is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.

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Municipality of Dibër

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Empowering Women for Rural Development in Northern Albania

Gender-Sensitive Value Chains Analysis in the Dibër Municipality

June 2025

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List of Abbreviations

AICS	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
AIDA	Albanian Investment Development Agency
AKU	National Food Authority
AKVMB	National Authority for Veterinary and Plant Protection
AREB	Regional Agricultural Extension Agency
AU	Administrative Unit
FAO	The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
GMO	Genetically modified organisms
GSVCA	Gender Sensitive Value Chain Analysis
HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
INSTAT	Albanian Institute of Statistics
MAP	Medicinal and aromatic plants
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MEKI	Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation
NCC	National Chamber of Handicrafts
QTTB	Agricultural Technology Transfer Centers
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USAID	The United States Agency for International Development
VC	Value Chain
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment

Rationale

Gender based violence can create a barrier for economic opportunity and growth. In turn, women's economic empowerment (WEE) can increase confidence and independence and reduce the likelihood of living in violent situations; however, increase in WEE also challenges deeply rooted gender stereotypes and social norms, which can manifest in an increase of gender-based violence.

This duality highlights the complex interplay between empowerment and resistance to change, underlining the need for a comprehensive, context-sensitive approach to gender equality. Hence, women's economic empowerment is seen both as a tool to end the cycle of violence for women survivors, as well as a way to enhance women's economic independency and participation in labor force.These dynamics are particularly evident in the municipalities of Bulqizë, Malësi e Madhe, Shkodër, and Dibër, which are targeted by the project ""Empowering women for rural development in Northern Albania"[1] implemented by UN Women Albania with support from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation through the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS Tirana). These areas are affected by persisting gender stereotypes, a systematic lack of social services including public transport and kindergartens, limited or unclear access to property ownership for women, and a significant share of unpaid and informal work performed by women, which may limit the extent to which women in target municipalities could effectively participate in economic activities[2]. To address these challenges, UN Women promotes gender responsive governance, including elements of enhancing the gender-responsiveness of the policy framework on agriculture and local development at national and local level, raising awareness about women's rights and addressing gender stereotypes, including in relation to property rights, and ending violence against women. This gender-sensitive value chain approach is a proactive strategy that not only fosters gender equality but also enhances the efficiency, sustainability, and inclusiveness of rural economies. Grounded in international good practices, social justice principles, and the business case for gender inclusion—such as those articulated by the International Labour Organization (ILO)[3]—this approach recognizes women as active contributors to economic productivity and community resilience. The initiative aims to transform existing power dynamics and expand women's roles as economic agents. **Ensuring that laws, policies, and services are gender-responsive will create an enabling environment that supports not only women's rights but also economic competitiveness and sustainability.** Promoting WEE, in turn, strengthens women's autonomy, enabling them to escape cycles of violence, assert their rights, and contribute more fully to their households and communities. Recognizing the pivotal role of gender equality in achieving inclusive and sustainable rural development, the project is undertaking **location-specific Gender-Sensitive Value Chain Analyses** in each partner municipality. These analyses aim to identify key economic sectors and value chains with development potential, map the differentiated roles of women and men within these chains, and detect bottlenecks that constrain women's participation and leadership. Based on this evidence, tailored interventions are being designed to increase women's access to economic opportunities and to promote equitable value chain development.
This analyzes in the municipality of Dibër through a gender perspective and suggests gender sensitive approaches to enhance gender equality within and through economic value chains, building on UN Women's expertise in this area.[4] It aims to identify actionable strategies for enhancing gender equality **within and through economic value chains**, drawing on UN Women's global expertise and local partnerships. **By promoting inclusive value chains, the project seeks to unlock women's full economic potential and reinforce their roles as change-makers in sustainable rural development.**

1. Project funded by AICS - Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development and implemented by UN Women Albania (2024-2027).
2. Empowering Women in the Rural Economy. See: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_dialogue/%40sector/documents/publication/wcms_601071.pdf
3. Guide to Gender-Sensitive Approaches to Value Chain Development. International Labour Organization (ILO). (2022). See: https://www.ilo.org/publications/guide-gender-sensitive-approaches-value-chain-development
4. https://albania.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/12/gender-sensitive-value-chain-analysis

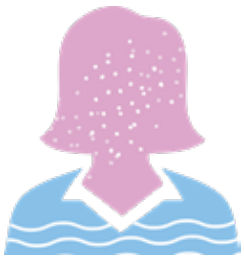
Summary of Main Contextual Findings

Dibër has a rich natural and cultural heritage that provides significant potential for sustainable tourism and economic development. Its agricultural resources offer vast opportunities for diversification, value-added production, and market expansion.

A significant proportion of the population is female, particularly in the 20-24 age group, which is the largest, with 3,941 individuals (1,819 males and 2,122 females). The elderly population is also significant, with 2,880 people in the 65-69 age group and 3,877 in the 60-64 group. Single mothers (772) significantly outnumber single fathers (136), emphasizing the necessity for targeted support in childcare, employment, and financial stability. The labor force participation rate of women (56.4%) remains lower than men (67.2%), indicating barriers in access to employment and entrepreneurship, which require gender-responsive policies to create a more equitable labor market.

The employment landscape in Dibër reflects sectoral and gender-based disparities, highlighting the need for targeted, gender-sensitive interventions. Female-owned businesses have grown by 6.4% in 2023, yet they remain significantly lower than male-owned businesses. Agriculture and services dominate the region's economy, offering diverse employment opportunities; however, these sectors exhibit distinct gender dynamics. Women are predominantly employed in caregiving and low-wage roles, particularly in education, healthcare, and accommodation and food services[5]. The agricultural value chain is male dominated, with women engaging mainly in subsistence farming, dairy production, and unpaid labor. Strengthening women's role in commercial agriculture and agribusiness could enhance economic resilience by providing opportunities for market integration and financial independence. The trade sector, with its relatively higher female participation, represents an entry point for women entrepreneurs, highlighting the need for policies that facilitate their access to capital, training, and support networks to scale their businesses. Dibër's agricultural sector has significant potential for value-added production, particularly in medicinal and aromatic plants, dairy production, and agri-food processing. Medicinal and aromatic plants cultivation covers 10 hectares, producing 17 tons annually, highlighting an emerging sector with potential for women's engagement. Milk production is substantial, totaling 26,094 tons, with 23,147 tons from cows, 1,682 tons from sheep, and 1,265 tons from goats. Expanding women's roles in dairy cooperatives, value-added processing, and supply chain management can create sustainable economic opportunities. Agri-food processing, particularly in cereals

Women are predominantly employed in care-giving and low-wage roles, particularly in education, healthcare, and accommodation and food services.



Female-owned businesses grew 6.4% in 2023 but remain far fewer, needing better access to resources.

Women's participation rate in employment is 56.4% vs 67.2% for men

5. USAID PLGP "GSVCA Dibër" 2019.

and vegetables, remains an untapped opportunity, with 4,675 hectares dedicated to cereal production, including 3,380 hectares of corn yielding 25,170 tons and 1,140 hectares of wheat producing 5,315 tons. Additionally, vegetables cover 593 hectares, producing 17,610 tons, with potatoes being a key crop. Women's participation in food preservation, processing, and niche organic production could strengthen local supply chains and economic resilience. Tourism is another sector where gender-sensitive interventions can enhance women's economic empowerment. In 2024, Dibër recorded 65,567 visitors, with its natural and cultural attractions serving as key draws. Women are involved in guesthouse management, food services, and traditional handicrafts, yet their contributions remain largely invisible in formal economic statistics. There are 22 registered guesthouses, but informal accommodations are widespread, largely operated by women who take on roles in cooking and hospitality management. Additionally, 70% of inhabitants in the "Llixha" neighborhood use their homes for tourist accommodation, with women playing a key role in the sector. Supporting women in tourism entrepreneurship and formalizing their roles through targeted training, business development assistance, and access to funding can drive sustainable economic growth and create new income-generating opportunities. By strengthening linkages between tourism, agriculture, and cultural heritage, Dibër can create an integrated value chain that enhances women's participation and leadership.

Despite these opportunities, the local economy still faces significant challenges, including limited access to capital, infrastructure constraints, and gender disparities across various sectors.[6] From a gender-sensitive perspective, the dominance of agriculture and livestock farming, and natural areas present potential opportunities for women to participate in agri-food and dairy processing. The urban layout of Dibër presents additional barriers to gender equality, particularly in terms of social engagement and mobility. The region lacks communal spaces and cultural venues where women can gather, network, and participate in public life, limiting their opportunities for social interaction, community involvement, and access to support services. Poorly maintained public areas, inadequate lighting, and unsafe walkways further restrict women's ability to move freely and safely within their communities, impacting their economic and social participation. In rural areas, the problem is more pronounced, with women experiencing greater social isolation and reduced access to essential services, exacerbating their economic vulnerability and limiting their role in decision-making processes. Dibër's economic landscape presents numerous opportunities for gender-sensitive interventions in agriculture, tourism, and entrepreneurship.[7] Developing gender-responsive policies in business development, ensuring women entrepreneurs have access to financial resources, markets, and training, and promoting digital and financial literacy can increase their competitiveness in emerging value chains. Strengthening women's participation in value-added agricultural production and tourism, alongside targeted investment in social infrastructure, will enhance their economic resilience and societal inclusion. By addressing gender-specific constraints, Dibër can foster an inclusive economic environment that maximizes the potential of both women and men, ultimately contributing to sustainable and equitable economic development.

Dibër Municipality

Area
1,822 km²
(15 administrative units)

Population
50,775
(25,228 women and 25,547 men)

6. Dibër Municipality; www.dibra.gov.al
7. Dibër Municipality, www.dibra.gov.al

Main Findings

Finding I Around 500 rural families are engaged in spontaneous collection of MAPs. A small number of families continue small-scale cultivation of cornflower in Melan AU (Trepçë and Tren villages). The products are delivered as dried to the collector. Main issues are the use of contaminated sacks during collection and transport and drying facilities with high risk of contamination. The local consolidator is eager to take an active role and promote cultivation and good practices in post-harvest (drying).

Finding II The group of Trepçë consists of 20 women that collect spontaneous plants such as red oregano, linden flowers, marigold, elderflower, wild rose, thyme, etc. The drying of plants is mainly done in the open air or inside the houses on sheets, with high risk of contamination and quality loss. A small number of the women do direct selling either in the local market or fairs. Still, packaging is very primitive and labelling almost inexistent. The main product is sold to the local consolidator wholesale. The women are also engaged in small-scale cultivation. They express interest in cultivating perennial plants that would lower costs and labor. Plants whose main harvest product are their flowers are difficult to manage by the women.

Finding III The visit to the beekeeping family revealed a lack of knowledge and techniques applied and continuous loss of bee colonies (up to 60% in the last year).

Finding IV Hospitality (agritourism, guesthouses, etc.) has a high potential base in the large number of visitors. Still the differences between a simple, low-level investment, woman-led startup and the consolidated agritourism site (built with IPARD funds), demonstrated the need for high budget investments in this VC.

Finding V Around ten women in Staravec village produce jams, compotes, juices (from quince, cherry, cornelian cherry, apple, and plum), and traditional wheat-based food products like jufka and tërhan. They currently operate and produce only for household needs and sometimes participate in the local fairs. This group is in very early stages of operation. The group does not have a common working place, no food safety is applied, packaging is done with used bottles and jars, branding and labelling are inexistent. They also collect spontaneous plants and have expressed interest in cultivation if support and knowledge is provided.

Finding VI The dairy processing facility in Muhurr collects mainly goat milk from 20 farmer families. Women count for more than 60% of people engaged in livestock farming and they are active in all the stages, from taking care of the animals to milking. Milking is done by hand, and most farmers use plastic and old containers that lead to reduced milk quality and high risk of contamination. In addition, women lack proper working gear, tools, and working conditions. The dairy facility owners, Liliana and Selman, are very cooperative and express their commitment to support the development of the VC. If the women engaged in livestock farming had more knowledge and better conditions, they could increase their herds and earn more income. The facility is planning to expand their products portfolio and cooperate with more farmers in the area.

Challenges and opportunities:

- Women are involved in spontaneous collection of MAPs, but their work is often undervalued, informal and invisible. While women have traditional knowledge of MAPs, they lack broader knowledge about cultivation, drying, processing, standards, and marketing stages to add more value to their products and increase income.

- Women face barriers in accessing resources and participating actively in high-potential VCs (hospitality). While the region has significant potential to develop agritourism, limited infrastructure, including regarding accommodation and promotional activities, hampers growth. The municipality has limited resources and capacities to meet visitor demand in the hospitality VC.

- Women operate informally and lack access to information and resources. Lack of youth presence is evident in the explored value chains.

- Traditional agri-food processing is widespread in the entire territory of the municipality. While some of the women groups are more advanced in terms of cooperation, technology and marketing, there is further potential to replicate and scale up existing successful models.

- Women engaged in beekeeping lack knowledge, skills, and do not apply best practices. Their work is undervalued and their role still invisible in this VC. Out of 18 women beekeepers in the area, only one is a member of the local beekeepers' association.

- Livestock farming, especially of small ruminants, is a common activity in Muhurr AU. Women are engaged in animal care, milking and other daily activities in their farms. They lack knowledge on best practices in animal husbandry and have no control on assets. They especially lack tools and equipment that would help reduce their workload and increase productivity.

Part 1
Methodology

The analysis was conducted by UN Women Albania in the framework of the "Empowering women for rural development in Northern Albania" project, funded by AICS - Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development, with the support of Dibër Municipality staff and the cooperation of various VC stakeholders. The primary objectives of this analysis were to identify key economic sectors with potential for economic growth and women's empowerment in Dibër Municipality, assess women's participation in these sectors and the constraints they face, select high-potential value chains for development, and recommend gender-responsive measures to enhance women's roles and eliminate gender biases in the market system. A gender-sensitive approach was applied throughout the study to ensure that women's voices, challenges, and opportunities were integrated into the value chain assessment.

The gender-sensitive approach in value chains is primarily based on the methodology outlined in "MAKING THE STRONGEST LINKS - A practical guide to mainstreaming gender analysis in value chain development" by the International Labour Organization (ILO) published in 2007, the complementary guide "Gender-Sensitive Approaches to Value Chain Development: A Complementary Guide" also published by ILO in 2022, the "Guide for Practitioners and Interested Stakeholders" prepared by USAID in 2019 and republished by UN Women Albania in 2021.

The analyses employed a qualitative research methodology, integrating secondary and primary data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of economic and gender dynamics in Dibër Municipality. The analysis included an extensive examination of secondary data, which included official reports and statistical sources. Secondary sources include the consideration of different reports and data which were mainly gathered from official publications and statistics of the Institute of Statistics in Albania, Municipality reports, Regional Councils reports, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, as well as data and information obtained from previous studies and projects conducted in the relevant field[8]. Municipality reports, (mainly Strategic, Operational Plans, MTPBs), were especially valuable in understanding the general economic structure of the area, and municipal vision for ensuring sustainable economic development.

Primary sources, i.e. field research was used for the value chain selection, including group consultations and brainstorming sessions with the municipality representatives, value chain actors (women and men) producers and experts. During the field research and value chain assessments conducted in the municipality of Dibër a total of 30 individuals were directly engaged through interviews, site visits, and meetings, 28 women and 2 men.

Preliminary Assessment: Discussions and meetings were held with municipal representatives, producers, project team members, and supporting organizations to explore value chain opportunities. Focus group sessions with municipal representatives helped identify constraints, gender-specific barriers, and opportunities related to existing and emerging value chains. Based on this preliminary fieldwork, several key sectors were identified for further analysis due to their potential for economic development and inclusive participation of women in the target areas. These included processed agricultural products (PAPs), **medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs), beekeeping, tourism-related services.** These sectors were prioritized due to their accessibility to women, potential for job creation, existing local knowledge, and cultural relevance.

In line with ILO's Decent Work Agenda, the selection of these sectors emphasizes objectives such as:

- **Promoting productive employment** through locally viable and labor-intensive sectors;
- **Expanding access to fair income opportunities** for women and marginalized groups;
- **Improving working conditions and social protection**, especially in agriculture and informal activities;
- **Enhancing voice and participation** of women in decision-making across value chains.

8. See: https://planifikimi.gov.al/index.php?id=732; http://dibra.gov.al/transparenca-dhe-llogaridhenia-ekonomikofinanciare/programi-buxhetor-afatmesem-vendor/; http://dibra.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Raporti-i-Performanc%C3%ABs-Diber-2022.pdf; http://dibra.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Plani-i-Zhvillimit_PPV-Diber.pdf

The primary data collection was carried out in two phases: an initial sector assessment phase and a more in-depth value chain selection and stakeholder engagement phase. In the first phase, a preliminary assessment of the main sectors was carried out, with discussions and meetings with the municipal representatives, producers, and the project's team, to identify the opportunities for women in the economic sectors and value chains.

This phase started with a focus group session with municipal representatives, during which participants had the chance to bring up additional details, opportunities, constraints and get a clear view and understanding of the value chains.

Building on the findings from the preliminary assessment, field visits, interviews, and stakeholder meetings were conducted to evaluate specific value chains.

The findings from desk research were initially validated with the municipality during the focus group of 21.01.2025 (Ardit Hoxha, Director of Economic Development and Tourism in Dibër Municipality; Jeta Kaba, Head of Tourism Sector; Erion Kola, Specialist within the Tourism Sector), and further explored during field missions. The field work included:

- Visit and interviews on 19.02.2024 with two women's groups located in Pocest and Kërçisht (Maqellarë AU), engaged in traditional processing of local agri-food products (*jufka*, *tërhan*, jams, pickles, desserts, etc.).
- Visit with the MAPs consolidator/company located in Dibër, meeting and interview with the owner Zyber Gjoni on 22.01.2025.
- Visit at the agritourism/guesthouse "Nëna Dashuri" located in Melan AU. Meeting with Fabjon Zerja (Zerja family member) Agritourism and production of PAPs (processed agricultural products) on 22.01.2025
- Site visit and interview with Majlinda Keshi, beekeeper in Majtarë (Maqellarë AU) on 22.01.2025.
- Site visit in a woman startup informal guesthouse (BNB), and interview with Melita Keshi (Pocest, Maqellarë AU), on 22.01.2025
- Site visit and meeting with women group engaged in spontaneous collection and cultivation of MAPs in Trepçë (Melan AU) on 14.02.2025 (Teuta Topuzi, Hajrije Mehmeti, Bashkime Deba, Ibe Kafali, Etmira Mehmeti, Adefije Karaliu, Fatbardha Doda, Dian Dema, Anila Topuzi, Safije Xhaferri, etc.).
- Site visit and meeting with women engaged in (early stage) processing of traditional agri-food products in Staravec, on 14.02.2025 (Emrije Lata, Nafije Kurti, Melita Tapja, Tahire Ramku, Flora Ramku).
- Site visit and meeting with livestock farmer family and dairy facility "Bjeshkët e Runjës" in Muhurr, on 14.02.2025 (Liliana Voka, Selman Voka, Nurie Farruku, Milita Zenehasani, Flutura Lleshi, Bleona Voka).

These visits allowed for on-site observations, semi-structured interviews, and an in-depth understanding of women's roles, constraints, and opportunities in value chains.

The field research provided key insights into the structure and dynamics of selected value chains in Dibër, highlighting economic potential, barriers to women's participation, and areas where targeted interventions can enhance both economic development and gender equality: The following criteria were applied to assess potential value chains:

- Is there a growing demand for the product?
- Are women involved in the steps of the chain?
- Are most steps of the chain based in the municipality?
- Are there existing or recent past initiatives to build on in the value chain?
- Are there opportunities in developing the chain?
- Is there a link between what women are doing and prospects for growth/diversification in the value chain?

The involved stakeholders actively contributed to identifying all key components of the value chains' market system, discussing both the constraints and the role of women at different stages of the processes.

Through on-site visits, direct observation of activities and work environments, and semi-structured interviews with tailored questionnaires for various value chain actors, the study identified value chains with the highest potential for development and women's empowerment to be further evaluated based on the assessment grid of women's empowerment and gender equality in the value chains: MAPs; Traditional agri-food; and Milk/ Dairy (focus in Muhurr AU).

Overall, the process followed these steps:

1. Objectives & Target Group: Establishment of objectives based on national and municipal goals (i.e. Improving livelihoods and promoting gender equality) and definition of the target group and criteria of selection:
   - **Target group:** women and women's groups in Northern rural areas;
   - **Criteria:** the importance of the value chain in creating economic empowerment opportunity for women.

2. **Municipal Scope:** The initial municipal scoping and desk research, based on plans, strategies, previous studies, etc.;

3. **Main sectors:** The identification of the main sectors through the assessment of different reports, data, and publications;

4. **VC Evaluation:** Evaluation, through brainstorming, discussions, focus-groups, of the main value chains belonging to the selected sectors;

5. **VC Selection:** Selection of one to two main value chains and assessment of opportunities, constraints and areas of interventions through field research;

6. **Recommendations:** Provision of recommendations on the improvement of the value chain for the municipality and on the intervention options for the project.

Figure 1. Methodological Approach

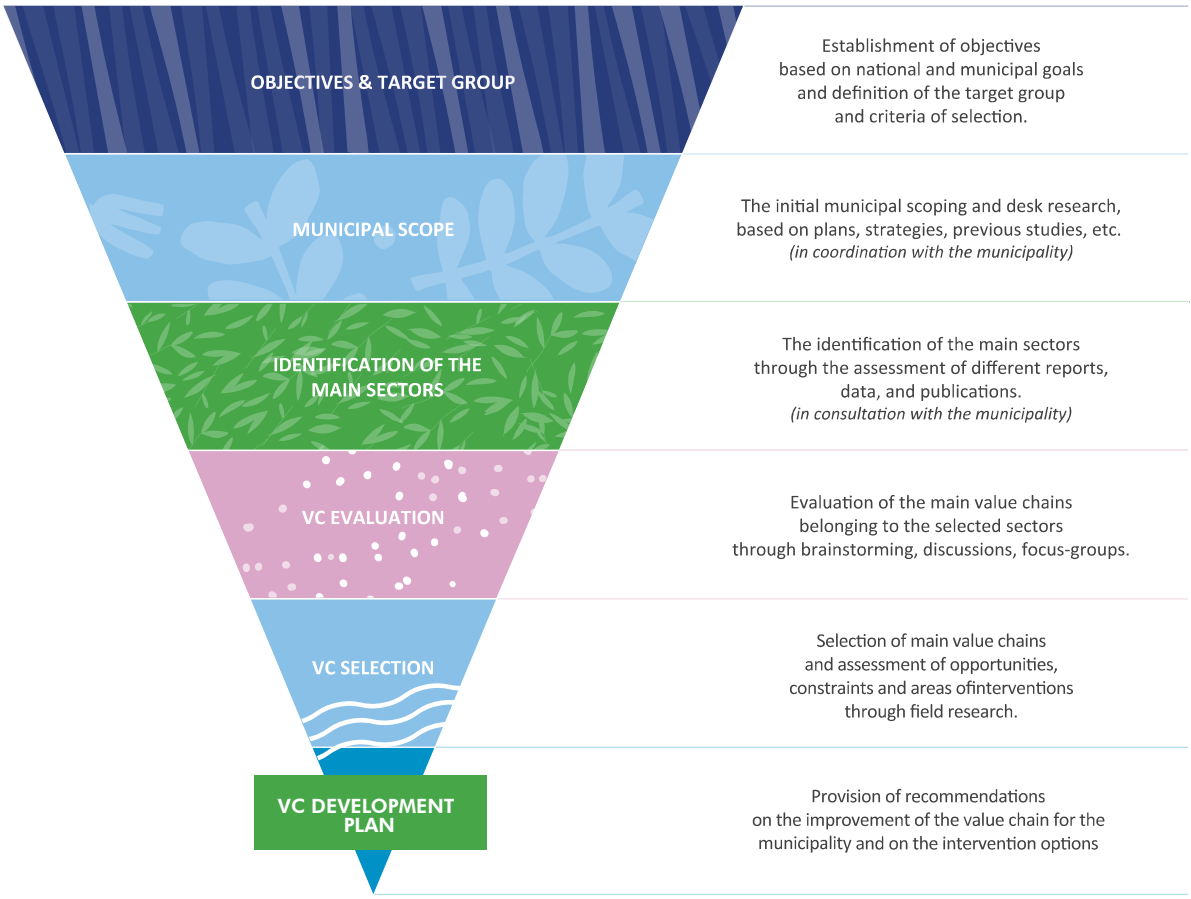


Table 1. Ranking and selection of value chains using gender-sensitive criteria

Criteria	MAPs	Agri-food	Milk
Is there a link between what women are doing and prospects for growth/ diversification in the value chain?	Women participate in most stages of the value chain, including cultivation, harvesting, and primary drying. Some women also transport products to local collectors. A small number have started basic family-scale packaging for the local market, which presents opportunities for further growth and diversification.	Women are actively involved in every stage of the value chain, from input supply to market access. Their role in traditional food processing creates opportunities for scaling up, particularly if they engage in value addition, branding, and commercialization.	Women contribute significantly to animal care, feeding, cleaning barns, and milking. Their involvement in these core activities creates opportunities for growth, particularly in processing milk into value-added dairy products like cheese and yogurt.
Do women have (or can they acquire) the skills needed for value addition through processing or product diversification?	More knowledge is needed, especially in the application of standards, certification, and application of best practices in all stages.	Women operate based on tradition. More is needed in terms of food technology and security, business and marketing skills.	Women have basic farming skills but need additional training in best practices, including good dairy farming practices, hygiene standards, and small-scale processing to enhance their economic opportunities.

Criteria	MAPs	Agri-food	Milk
Does this value chain offer new opportunities for women?	Yes. If there is collaboration and engagement in cultivation and drying.	Yes. Especially if women are oriented towards grouping to collaborate with each-other.	Yes. Equipping women with the necessary knowledge and skills in best practices especially in good dairy farming.
Can the chain improve livelihood conditions for women/families?	Currently, for many women, MAP-related activities represent their primary source of income. Transitioning from wild collection to cultivation would increase income potential, improve working conditions, and enhance the sustainability of the sector.	Yes. This activity can be conducted from home and women can increase their family income. However, small investments in workplace and equipment are needed to enhance productivity.	Yes. Milk, especially from small ruminants, is a highly demanded product by the local dairies and can generate considerable income. The also chain offers transition an opportunity for small-scale processing of milk byproducts to increase income.
Is there a motivated organization in the value chain that can support/ represent value chain actors that can move forward development?	There are local consolidators interested in supporting the VC.	Yes. Existing projects that are making efforts to support this VC, alongside local CSOs like ALCDF, Dibra Turistike, Agritra Vision, CNVP Dibër that could assume such a role. Besides the above, the women group in Maqellarë is supporting other women with creating satellite groups, with knowledge and skills.	Yes. The "Bjeshkët e Runjës" local dairy is highly motivated and interested to further support the actors in the VC. In addition, grouping of local women livestock farmers could further strengthen their role.
Is there an opportunity to make changes with small investments?	Yes, support the producers with materials & equipment, offer training and capacity building sessions and promote them.	Yes. Supporting creation of new groups with basic equipment and further developing the existing ones with packaging and branding to access new markets.	Yes. Small investments for the necessary milking equipment, tools, and standardized containers for milking and transportation, or small equipment for small-size production of milk byproducts.

Table 2. Assessment of women's empowerment and gender equality in the MAP VC

Question	Score*	Weight**	Total	Narrative
Is the share of women employed in the value chain relatively high?	3	2	6	A significant proportion (approximately 70%) of individuals engaged in the MAPs value chain are women. This was confirmed through interviews with women and local consolidators.
Are there many female entrepreneurs in the value chain?	2	2	4	Only small-scale entrepreneurs. Women primarily participate in wild collection and, to a lesser extent, in cultivation, post-harvest processing, and sales to local consolidators. Only a few women engage in small-scale packaging and direct sales.
Do women control equipment and assets?	2	2	4	Average. Land ownership remains an issue, limiting control over assets. Equipment and tools are jointly controlled.
Do women have (or can they acquire) the skills needed for interesting value addition through processing or product diversification?	4	1	4	High. Women can increase their skills not only in post-harvest activities, adding value through packaging and labelling to reach end-markets, but also by introducing best practices in cultivation.

(Continues on the next page)

Question	Score*	Weight**	Total	Narrative
Do women control the sales income and the enterprise?	2	2	4	Average. During interviews with women, some highlighted that they manage the income themselves, others manage jointly with the head of the family (men).
Can the work take place close to home?	3	1	3	Yes, by shifting from wild collection to cultivation.
Is this a value chain with low entry barriers for poor entrepreneurs (small scale of production, low start-up costs, not requiring major capital investment, using low-tech skills)?	4	1	4	High, Cultivation on small plots, with low-tech equipment for post-harvest activities (drying, cutting, packaging), enables entry with minimal investment.
Is this a value chain with low entry barriers for women (time and mobility, access to technology and assets, cultural constraints)?	3	2	6	Yes. Women are already engaged in spontaneous collection, drying, and primary processing of plants through primitive practices. However, access to equipment and market information remains a barrier.
Does this value chain offer new opportunities for women?	2	4	8	Average, except if women aim for the end markets (local).
Is the activity in the value chain in line with livelihood conditions (year-round income, using family labor, rapid returns, keeping the environment intact?	4	2	8	High. Shifting to cultivation, introducing single-harvest perennial plants to lower planting costs and labor force, and applying good agriculture practices.
Is there a linkage between what women are doing and prospects for growth/ diversification in the value chain?	4	1	4	High. Same as above.
Are there gender norms (for example stuck in 'women's work') that prevent women from taking full advantage of value chain opportunities?	3	2	6	The only constraints identified during interviews and meetings with women have resulted lack of knowledge and skills, lack of equipment, and lack of information on market requirements and standards.
Overall total for gender potential			61/102	

** Score: 0 (very low, no, not at all) to 5 (very high, yes, very important).*
*** Weight from 1 to 4 according to the importance and impact that each of the above points carries in achieving the defined objectives.*[9]

9. The prioritization of value chains based on the opportunities they offer for promoting gender equality serves as an effective way to highlight the factors that have a positive impact on women's/young women's employment and income. For this purpose, a 1–4 rating system has been used (where 1 means low, 2 means medium, 3 means good, and 4 means very good). Based on: Women's Inclusion and Value Chain Improvement in Albania – A Guide for Practitioners and Stakeholders. USAID 2019 and UN Women 2021.

Table 3. Assessment of women's empowerment and gender equality in the Dairy farming/Milk VC

Question	Score*	Weight**	Total	Narrative
Is the share of women employed in the value chain relatively high?	3	2	6	Yes. During the meetings and interviews, it was highlighted that women are always involved in livestock related activities.
Are there many female entrepreneurs in the value chain?	2	2	4	At least 20 women in Muhurr engage in small ruminants farming for milk production. Same numbers with cows for milk.
Do women control equipment and assets?	2	2	4	Average. Considering that in most cases men are the farm owners, women lack property rights. Still, they control the equipment used in the stages they are involved.
Do women have (or can they acquire) the skills needed for interesting value adding through processing or product diversification?	3	1	3	Women have basic skills in farming practices, but through necessary training they can further develop their skills towards best practices. Besides milk, as their primary product, small scale processing and product diversification can be promoted considering the high demand for milk byproducts.
Do women control the sales income and the enterprise?	2	2	4	Average. Income control varies between independent management and joint decision-making.
Can the work take place close to home?	3	1	3	Sometimes small ruminant's herds are located far from home. There are also families with smaller herds that keep them near home. Milk processing is mainly done close to home.
Is this a value chain with low entry barriers for poor entrepreneurs (small scale of production, low start-up costs, not requiring major capital investment, using low-tech skills)?	2	1	2	Starting a herd from the ground it is of high cost for poor entrepreneurs. I.e. one sheep/goat cost between 15,000 to 25,000 ALL. Starting a herd is almost impossible for poor families.
Is this a value chain with low entry barriers for women (time and mobility, access to technology and assets, cultural constraints)?	4	2	8	Depending on the size of the herd, but it is still considered a family activity. Access to technology is average and no cultural constraints.
Does this value chain offer new opportunities for women?	3	4	12	Moderate. Women can increase their skills by training on good farming practices as well as add value by product diversification.
Is the activity in the value chain in line with livelihood conditions (year-round income, using family labor, rapid returns, keeping the environment intact?	4	2	8	Yes. Livestock farming ensures a steady year-round income, particularly through milk production.
Is there a linkage between what women are doing and prospects for growth/diversification in the value chain?	4	1	4	Yes. By introducing good practices in livestock farming to ensure animal welfare, milking practices and new technologies to ensure food safety and lower time and workload of women, record keeping for effective herd management.
Are there gender norms (for example stuck in 'women's work') that prevent women from taking full advantage of value chain opportunities?	4	2	8	No. Women are already actively engaged in livestock farming and milk production without major cultural restrictions.
Overall total for gender potential			69/102	

** Score: 0 (very low, no, not at all) to 5 (very high, yes, very important).*
*** Weight from 1 to 4 according to the importance and impact that each of the above points carries in achieving the defined objectives.*[10]

10. The prioritization of value chains based on the opportunities they offer for promoting gender equality serves as an effective way to highlight the factors that have a positive impact on women's/young women's employment and income. For this purpose, a 1-4 rating system has been used (where 1 means low, 2 means medium, 3 means good, and 4 means very good). Based on: Women's Inclusion and Value Chain Improvement in Albania – A Guide for Practitioners and Stakeholders. USAID 2019 and UN Women 2021.

Table 4. Assessment of women's empowerment and gender equality in the Traditional Agri-food cluster VC

Question	Score*	Weight**	Total	Narrative
Is the share of women employed in the value chain relatively high?	3	2	6	The majority of employees (formal and informal) are women. During the field visits, in the visited location (Posterc, Kërçisht, Staravec) there were 17 women and only 2 men who had mainly supporting roles (transport).
Are there many female entrepreneurs in the value chain?	3	2	6	The activities are mainly owned by women, but men contribute to some of the activities in the value chain. Women are also decision-makers regarding financial matters.
Do women control equipment and assets?	3	2	6	Women perform multiple activities, and they control also the equipment.
Do women have (or can they acquire) the skills needed for interesting value addition through processing or product diversification?	4	1	4	Women possess traditional knowledge and skills but need training on new machinery, product diversification, and modern technology.
Do women control the sales income and the enterprise?	4	2	8	Yes. Women decide about the product's selling price, taking into consideration the market price and the cost of production.
Can the work take place close to home?	5	1	5	Yes, the houses and the production location are situated next to each other ensuring ease of access.
Is this a value chain with low entry barriers for poor entrepreneurs (small scale of production, low start-up costs, not requiring major capital investment, using low-tech skills)?	4	1	4	Starting an agri-food production activity based on tradition has low entry barriers for women, but that's only for low-scale production. Starting a more market-oriented activity would require start-up costs related to a facility with all required conditions, machinery, registration costs, packaging and labelling.
Is this a value chain with low entry barriers for women (time and mobility, access to technology and assets, cultural constraints)?	3	2	6	Same as above. Also, there are no time constraints regarding gender differences, since women are engaged in almost all the production processes.
Does this value chain offer new opportunities for women?	3	4	12	Yes, considering that the activity is a women-lead one and women are involved in all the stages.
Is the activity in the value chain in line with livelihood conditions (year-round income, using family labor, rapid returns, keeping the environment intact?	4	2	8	Yes. Agri-food production (jufka, tërhan, pickles, jams, etc..) is a tradition in Dibër. The women group of Pocest shares income generated by their activity based on working hours of each of the women engaged. During different seasons and holidays (Ramadan, New Year's Eve, weddings season, etc.), income can go up to 2,000 ALL/day for each of them.
Is there a linkage between what women are doing and prospects for growth/ diversification in the value chain?	3	1	3	Same as above. Food processing is a tradition. Expanding women's involvement in processing and sales can improve efficiency and overall value chain sustainability.
Are there gender norms (for example stuck in 'women's work') that prevent women from taking full advantage of value chain opportunities?	2	2	4	The agri-food production processes are typically considered as women activities. Usually, this is transmitted from one generation to the other. There are still constraints like control over property, decision making on starting a business, access to finance, etc.
Overall total for gender potential			72/102	

* Score: 0 (very low, no, not at all) to 5 (very high, yes, very important).

** Weight from 1 to 4 according to the importance and impact that each of the above points carries in achieving the defined objectives.[11]

The value chain offers considerable gender potential, given that women occupy central roles in agri-food production.

11. The prioritization of value chains based on the opportunities they offer for promoting gender equality serves as an effective way to highlight the factors that have a positive impact on women's/young women's employment and income. For this purpose, a 1–4 rating system has been used (where 1 means low, 2 means medium, 3 means good, and 4 means very good). Based on: Women's Inclusion and Value Chain Improvement in Albania – A Guide for Practitioners and Stakeholders. USAID 2019 and UN Women 2021.

There are opportunities for growth and empowerment, particularly with the involvement of women in all stages of production, including decision-making and sales. However, challenges such as traditional gender roles, limited access to finance, and technological gaps still hinder their full participation.

The women's group in Staravec faces a significant challenge due to the absence of a common working space, which hinders their ability to collaborate effectively, share tasks, and adhere to food safety standards. While the group was formalized as a cooperative in 2014[12] *and has received support for branding and packaging, they have struggled to keep up with the progress of other groups in the region.*

The lack of a dedicated workspace and the necessary equipment has impeded their ability to streamline production processes and meet market demands. However, the issue is primarily linked to the lack of available public spaces and the fact that the women do not own a shared facility.

To overcome this, substantial initial investments and construction work would be required to set up an appropriate workspace. Given that the current needs are related to infrastructure development rather than capacity-building or market access, investing in a proper workspace has implications such as in relation to property rights, permits, and excessive costs. Additionally, previous projects (USAID's PLGP, AgroCapital, Brand Albania, UN Women, etc.), and ongoing projects, such as the GIZ/SRD and New Perspectives, in Dibër, are already providing significant support to women's groups engaged in agri-food through training, marketing, and access to equipment.

These initiatives are addressing some of the specific challenges faced by women in the agri-food sector, such as improving technical skills, enhancing market access, and providing financial support for equipment. Therefore, intervening in this specific area could result in duplication of efforts and overlap with ongoing initiatives.

Taking in consideration of all of the above, and assignment limitations (up to 2 value chains), the following gender-sensitive value chain analysis will focus on the medicinal and aromatic plants value chain and the milk value chain.

12. The women received support in formalizing their economic grouping as an Association of Agricultural Cooperation. Pursuant to Law No. 38, dated 05.04.2012, "On associations of agricultural cooperation", Law No. 9723, dated 03.05.2007, "On the National Registration Center", and Law No. 9901, dated 14.04.2008, "On entrepreneurs and companies", 20 women supported by this project founded an Association of Agricultural Cooperation named "Staraveci Products". See: https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Final-Booklet_English.pdf

Part 2

Analysis of the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Value Chain

1. Gender Sensitive Analysis of MAP Value Chain

Albania has a long tradition in the production and export of MAPs. The main supply-side sector development driver is the abundance of MAPs growing in the wild. Around 15% of 3,250 species of Albanian plants have medicinal, aromatic, spice, or tannin value. The industry has a long tradition spanning more than 60 years. At present, the harvesting, cultivation, processing, and trade of MAPs represent a major agri-forestry business in Albania.[13]

According to the Albanian Investment Development Agency (AIDA), there are over 85,000 individuals (mainly from rural areas) engaged in the entire value chain from wild collection, cultivation, to export. About a fifth of rural families in mountainous areas are involved in activities that bring income from medicinal and aromatic plants, in collection and cultivation, or other activities in the MAP value chain.

Over 400 MAP species of the Albanian flora have been identified as aromatic medicinal plants, and over 200 species are collected and exported. About 90% of the production of medicinal and aromatic plants is exported, representing nearly 20% of the total agricultural exports of Albania. In 2022, the local production of MAPs was 16,430 tons. Also, in 2022, the total exports of aromatic and medicinal plants reached the value of 63 million Euro, with an increase of 6.7% from the previous year (59 million Euro).[14]

The area under MAPs cultivation reached 7,200 hectares in 2023 with a production of 17,800 tons. Cultivation of MAPs is concentrated in Malësi Madhe (5,200 ha), but is expanding at a fast pace in other regions of the country (in Belsh 478 ha, Cërrik 188 ha, Gramsh 135 ha, etc.).[15]

Dibër's unique conditions support rich biodiversity, where MAPs are vital to local flora and livelihoods for about 500 families.

Even though demand for MAPs in the domestic market is limited, a wide range of MAPs with lower processing grade is sold in fresh fruit and vegetable markets and retail outlets.

The main products traded in the domestic market include herbal teas and spices used for cooking. At present, tea and salep are packaged by Albanian companies and are sold in retail outlets including supermarkets as well as restaurants.

Other herbs and spices are sold in fresh fruit and vegetable markets packaged in basic bags – usually 20-100 gram.[16]

13. Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Sector Study. MARD and GIZ, 2021. See: https://bujqesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/04-MAP-Sector-Study_FINAL.pdf
14. Biofach 2024. AIDA. See: https://aida.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/BIOFACH-24-broshure-1.pdf
15. INSTAT - Agriculture Statistical Yearbook, 2023.
16. Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Sector Study. AASF, 2023. See: https://aatsf.com.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/4Mapcover-EN.pdf

1.1 SITUATION OF MAPS VALUE CHAIN IN DIBËR REGION

The specific climactic and land conditions in the Dibër region have influenced the creation of high biodiversity, where MAPs have an important role in the spontaneous flora of the area. There are more than 100 types of MAPs in Dibër, belonging to 30 plant families. Nearly 98% of these plants grow naturally and about 2% is being cultivated recently. The majority grows at a height of 1,000-1,700 m or even 2,000 m above sea level, which makes them highly valued. Around 500 families in Dibër are involved in MAPs (mainly wild collection).

In 1988, around 91 medicinal and aromatic plants (MAP) were collected and exported from Dibër region. The total quantity of exported MAPs that year was 5,374 tons, generating a value of $1.124 million. Currently, 63 types of medicinal and aromatic plants are collected in this area. Of the plants collected today, 16 are classified under one of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) threat statuses.[17]

Specifically:

- Critically Endangered (CR): Three plants have this extinction status: black alder, birch, and lime tree.
- Endangered (EN): Five plants have endangered status: alchemilla, gentiana, basil flowers, walnut, and oregano (mountain tea).
- Vulnerable (VU): Seven plants have vulnerable status: black juniper, red juniper, common yew, sage, elder, thyme, and blueberry (chokeberry).
- Near Threatened (NT): There are no MAPs collected today with this status.
- Least Concern (LC) or Lower Risk (LR): This includes one species: bearberry.

Table 5. List of wild plants collected in Dibër region

No	Latin name	Albanian name	Threat status
1	Juniperus communis	Dëllinjë e zezë	VU Alb
2	Juniperus oxycedrus	Dëllinjë e kuqe	VU A1b
3	Achillea millefolium	Njëmijëfletësh	
4	Althaea officinalis	Mëllaga e bardhë	
5	Alchemilla catachnoa	Alkemilë kataknoe	EN A1b
6	Arctium lappa	Rrodhe	
7	Anthyllis montana	Antilidë e malit	
8	Arctostaphylos uva-ursi	Rrushi i arushës	LR cd
9	Artemisia absinthium -	Bar pelini	

17. Information from interview with Prof. Dr. Alban Ibraliu, Agricultural University of Tirana.

No	Latin name	Albanian name	Threat status
10	Bellis perennis	Luleshqerra	
11	Betula pendula	Mështekna	CR B2e
12	Castanea sativa	Gështenja	
13	Carlina vulgaris	Ushonjëz e rëndomtë	
14	Centaurea cyanus	Kokoçeli	
15	Corylus avellana	Lajthia	
16	Crataegus monogyna	Murrizi njëbërthamëz	
17	Crataegus oxyacantha	Murrizi dybërthamëz	
18	Colchicum autumnale	Xhërokull vjeshtor	
19	Cynodon dactylon	Grami	
20	Fragaria vesca	Luleshtrydhja	
21	Fraxinus excelsior	Frashër i zi	CR A1b
22	Fraxinus ornus	Frashër i bardhë	
23	Galium verum	Ngjitëse e vërtetë	
24	Gentiana lutea	Sanzi	EN A1b
25	Iris sp	Shpatore	VU A2b
26	Helichrysum arenarium	Lule aku	
27	Hypericum perforatum	Lule basani	EN A1b
28	Juglans regia	Arra	EN A1b
29	Malus sylvestris	Molla e egër	
30	Melilotus officinalis	Jonxha e egër	
31	Melissa officinalis	Melisa	
32	Ononis spinosa	Gjuhë nuse	
33	Origanum vulgare	Caj Mali	EN A1b
34	Papaver rhoeas	Lulëkuqja	
35	Parietaria officinalis	Parietaria	
36	Phaseolus vulgaris	Fasule	

No	Latin name	Albanian name	Threat status
37	Plantago lanceolata	Gjethe delli	
38	Polygonum aviculare	Barpate	
39	Primula veris (=P. Officinalis)	Agulicia	
40	Prunus cerasus (=Cerasus vulgaris)	Qershia	
41	Prunus spinosa	Kulumbria	
42	Robinia pseudoacacia	Akacia	
43	Rosa canina	Trëndafili i egër	
44	Rubus fruticosus	Ferrëmanëza	
45	Rubus idaeus	Mjedra	
46	Salix alba	Shelgu i bardhë	
47	Salvia officinalis	Sherbela	VU Alb
48	Salvia sclarea	Shëngjini	
49	Sambucus ebulus	Qingël	
50	Sambucus nigra	Shtogu	VU Alb
51	Saponaria officinalis	Lule sapuni	
52	Satureja montana	Trumza	VU A1c
53	Taraxacum officinale	Lule shurdha	
54	Teucrium chamaedrys	Arrsi dushk	
55	Thymus serpyllum	Zhumbrica	
56	Tilia platyphyllos (=T. officinarum)	Bliri	CR Alc
57	Tilia tomentosa (=T. argentea)	Bliri i argjendtë	
58	Trifolium pretense	Tërfili i kuq	
59	Tussilago farfara	Thundërmushka	
60	Tussilago hybrida (=Syn. P. officinalis)	Llapoi	
61	Urtica dioca	Hithër	
62	Vaccinium myrtillus	Qershigla, boronica	VU A2b
63	Viola odorata	Manushaqe	

Around 500 rural families are engaged in spontaneous collection of MAPs.[18] A small number of families continue small-scale cultivation of cornflower in Melan AU (Trepçë and Tren villages). The products are delivered as dried to the collector. Main issues are the use of contaminated sacks during collection and transport and drying facilities with high risk of contamination. The local consolidator is eager to take an active role and promote cultivation and good practices in post-harvest (drying).

Women engaged in medicinal plants in Trepçë: The group consists of 20 women that collect spontaneous plants such as red oregano, linden flowers, marigold, elderflower, wild rose, thyme, etc.

They have received support with a small drying machine from GIZ through ADAD Malore, installed in the house of Hajrije Mehmeti. Being a small size dryer, it serves mainly for wild apples, plums, or very limited quantities of plants.

Drying of plants is mainly done in open air or in the house on sheets, with high risk of contamination and quality loss. Few of the women do direct selling either in the local market or fairs. Hajrie is more advanced in the marketing stage with family-sized packaging of different products and direct sales to customers. Still, packaging is very primitive and labelling almost inexistent. The main product is sold to the local consolidator wholesale. The women are also engaged in small-scale cultivation. They express interest in cultivating perennial plant that would lower costs and labor. Plants with flowers as main harvest product are difficult for women to manage. The family of Safie Xhaferri collects wild blueberries from the mountains and earns between ALL 50,000 to 100,000 per year. They collect approximately 10 kg of berries per day and sell them at ALL 500 - 600 per kg. This consists of 12 hours picking in the mountain for the son of the family, and an additional 8 hours each for Safie and her husband to clean the product from the leaves.

Table 6. SWOT analysis of the maps value chain

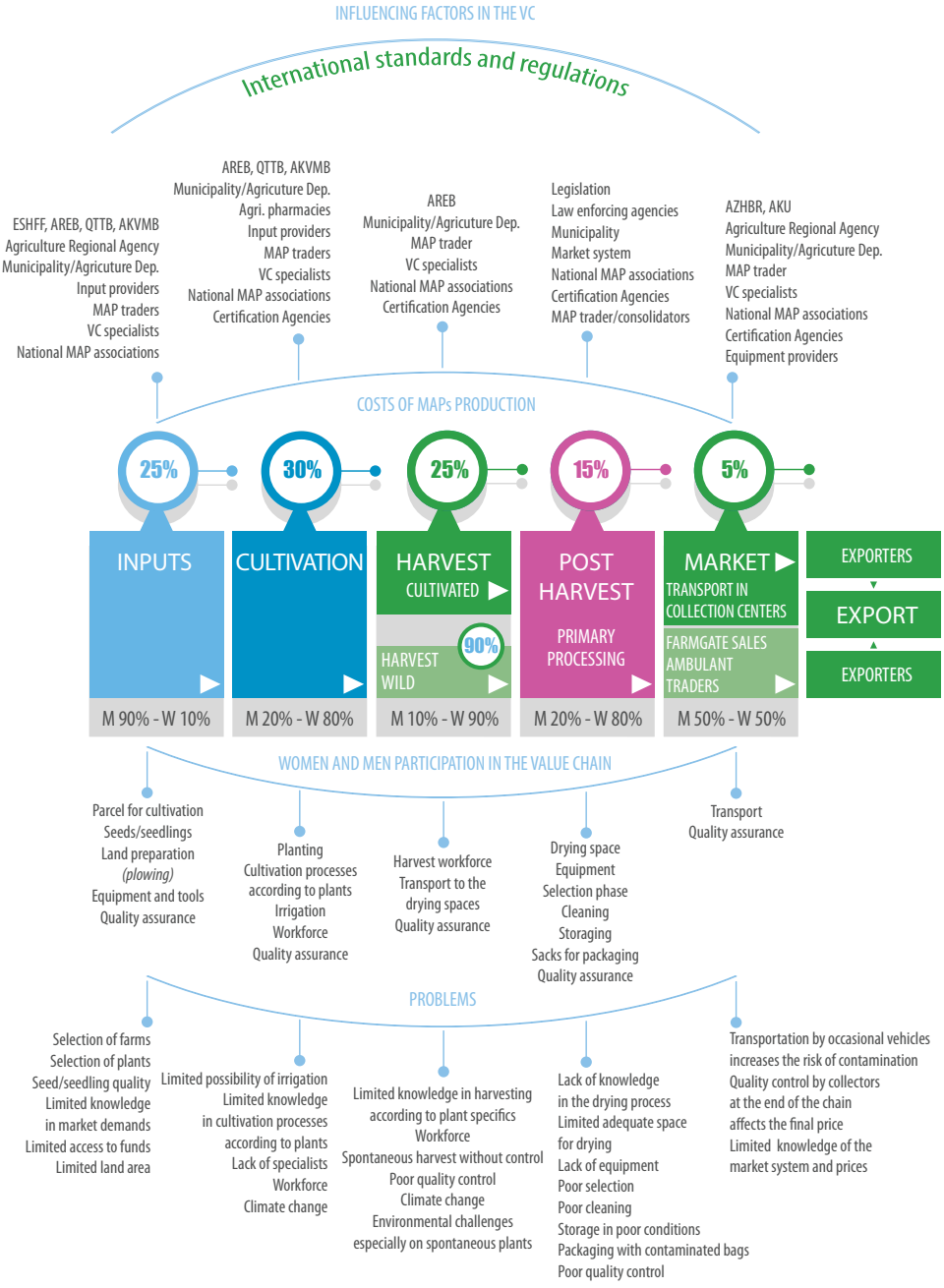
Strengths	Weaknesses
Rich biodiversity and favorable climate. Around 400 types of medicinal plants grow in the country, representing approximately 15% of the total flora, and over 200 of them are collected and traded.	**Farmers have limited knowledge** in the cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs).
Proximity to European markets.	**Lack of financial resources,** and consequently, insufficient investment in technology and processing.
A new consolidation facility has been recently established in Bulqizë.	**Lack of post-harvest facilities** (drying).
Good examples and rapid expansion of cultivated areas in the country, and previous cultivation experiences in the area.	**Absence of certification** for safety and quality standards.
MAPs are considered one of the key renewable potentials for the socio-economic development of rural areas.	**Existence of a technical skills gap** in carrying out all processes (post-harvest, drying, processing).
Willingness of consolidators to collaborate with local farmers.	**Informal operation o**f collectors in the market.
Willingness in cultivation of perennial plants.	**Information asymmetry** regarding market developments.
Commitment of key value chain actors to improving product quality.	**The location of MAP activities,** sometimes requiring workers to travel up to three hours from their homes.
Women's involvement in the spontaneous collection and cultivation of plants and increasing awareness of their contribution.	**Climate vulnerability** may affect MAP production (especially wild production).
Long tradition of MAP spontaneous collection activities and women involvement.	**Distance of the harvesting locations (**mountains) from the collection center.
	Hard work and poor working conditions, especially for women.
	Lack of youth interested in MAPs.
Opportunities	**Threats**
Wide diversity of medicinal and aromatic plant (MAP) species in the area show potential for cultivation.	**Endangered plant species** (wild collection);
Focus on cultivation of perennial plants.	**Negatively affecting the biodiversity** and natural habitat - Overharvesting of wild MAPs and environmental degradation can threaten the long-term sustainability of wild MAPs production.
Good opportunity to make a difference with small investments, including training in application of good agriculture practices.	**High migration rates** affecting the labor force.
Innovative developments and advancements in MAP drying and treatment processes.	**Climate Dependency:** climate change poses a significant threat; particularly as changing weather patterns may affect plant growth and yields.
High demand for MAPs (domestically and internationally).	**Fluctuating market trends** (international).
Small-scale processing for local end-market consumers.	

18. Interview with local consolidator Zyber Gjoni.

2. Mapping of the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Value Chain

Below is the comprehensive map of the value chain links, actors, supporting factors, and key issues identified, based on findings from interviews with stakeholders and local support agencies, field research, and consultations with specialists. The diagram presents the main interest groups, the stages from inputs to the final market, and helps identify challenges in the production flow. The numerical values above the boxes represent costs and the added value for each phase.

Figure 2. Mapping of the MAPs Value Chain



2.1 VALUE CHAIN ACTORS

As seen in the diagram above, the MAP value chain in Dibër is organized into the key levels, namely:

- Input
- Cultivation
- Wild plant collection and harvest
- Post-harvest (drying)
- Market

Below is a brief description of each value chain actor and supporting agencies in the market system, from collection/cultivation to aggregation, processing, and final market distribution.

Input Suppliers play a crucial role in the MAPs value chain. They provide seeds, seedlings, and fertilizers to farmers and often serve as key sources of information and technical guidance.

Technology Providers supply essential tools and equipment for various stages of the MAPs value chain, including harvesting, post-harvest handling, storage, drying, processing, and packaging. Their role is critical in improving efficiency, maintaining product quality, and ensuring compliance with market standards.

There are no input and technology providers located in Dibër. These companies/individuals are mainly located in areas with higher production intensity or nearby the agriculture sector industries.

Cultivators are farmers living in rural and mountainous areas who have started cultivating MAPs in their plots. They dry and store the plants in their homes until they sell them to local collectors or processors.

The cultivation of aromatic and medicinal plants in Dibër is in its early stages. There are very few areas cultivated with MAPs. Two years ago, farmers started the cultivation of red clover on around 5 ha. This is a perennial plant that starts producing the second year after planting. One farmer in Maqellarë reported cultivating 1 ha of cornflower and another farmer in Kastriot said he was cultivating 0.5 ha with the same plant, while in the entire area of the municipality, the cultivation of MAPs reaches about 10 ha with a production of 17 tons.

One farmer (man) is reported to have planted 1 ha of elderberry which is still in the first stages of cultivation. During the pandemic year, 2020, a USAID funded project supported around 20 women farmers of Melan AU in cultivation of mallow. Some of the women, participating during the consultative meeting in Trepçë, emphasized that this plant required permanent daily picking of flowers during harvest season, and replantation every year.

The products are delivered to the local consolidator after going through the drying process in the farmers' homes (in poor and unsuitable conditions).

Wild collectors (harvesters) are individuals living in rural and mountainous areas who gather wild medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) from their local environment. They dry and store the plants in their homes until they sell them to local collectors or processors.

In Dibër, around 500 families (70% women) are engaged in this activity. The harvested plants are dried at home in poor conditions (as the local consolidator emphasized), and delivered to the collection point. The harvesters are paid cash upon delivery.

Local consolidators (150)[19] are warehouses or companies operating in the area that act as intermediaries between wild plant harvesters, cultivators, and regional processors. They play a crucial role in the value chain by distributing pricing information to harvesters and serving as key regulators between cultivators and larger processors.

19. Biofach 2024. AIDA. See: https://aida.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/BIOFACH-24-broshure-1.pdf

Operating with contracts in the value chain is urgently needed to guarantee stable income for the families involved in the medicinal plant business, who are among the poorest in the country.

In Dibër, there is only one main local consolidator, Zyber Gjoni, but there are also three other smaller collectors (men) operating in the area. Altogether they collected around 241 tons of fresh products, or approximately 65 tons of dried plants in 2023. One collector in Maqellarë collected around 20 tons of dried MAPs, the second one in Melan, 10.6 tons, the third collector in Peshkopi 10 tons, and the consolidator in Peshkopi around 25.5 tons of dried MAPs. Juniper berry is the main product, with 15 tons of dried product in 2023. Dried raspberry leaves also hold significant importance with 7.5 tons. Following are products like milkvetch with 6 tons, bearberry, and elderberry with 4 tons each. Prices are often set over the phone, without any guarantee, and payments are not made on time. According to local consolidators, operating with contracts in the value chain is urgently needed to guarantee stable income for the families involved in the medicinal plant business, who are among the poorest in the country.

Regional consolidators (10)[20] are based in different districts and purchase MAPs from local and/or ambulant consolidators. These collectors play a key role in the supply chain, acting as a bridge between local gatherers and larger processors or exporters.

The facility owned by Zyber Gjoni serves also as such by providing their MAP products to large consolidators. He claims that the market is distorted, and revenues are not distributed fairly and honestly by exporters to the lower tiers. He states that the market can be regulated, and profits maximized only if it is formalized and starts working with contracts.

Small processors trade an average of 150 to 500 tons of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) per year. They typically engage in basic processing or packaging activities, focusing on the domestic market with products like mountain tea and other culinary herbs. Occasionally, these companies manage to export their products to international buyers. On the other hand, medium-sized processors handle between 500 and 1,000 tons of MAPs annually. Approximately 31 companies fall into these categories, having established regular export relationships with international buyers. These companies compete for MAP collection and sourcing from local cultivators.[21]

Large processors/exporters (15) handle an average of 1,000 to 1,800 tons of MAPs per year. This accounts for a significant portion of Albania's MAP exports. They source their products from all levels of the supply chain, including large cultivators, consolidators, and small to medium-sized processors. These processors/exporters are equipped with the most advanced processing lines, allowing them to meet international standards and effectively serve global markets.[22]

There are no processors or exporters in Dibër. A problematic aspect highlighted is related to non-payment and the creation of a chain of unpaid debts. Large collectors cannot pay the fees to small collectors in the districts, and the latter do not have the liquidity to pay the farmers. Mr. Gjoni said that he had had to get loans several times in order to pay the farmers.

20. Ibid.

21. Consolidated data from Biofach 2024. AIDA. See: https://aida.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/BIOFACH-24-broshure-1.pdf, Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Sector Study. MARD and GIZ, 2021. See: https://bujqesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/04-MAP-Sector-Study_FINAL.pdf, and Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Sector Study. AASF, 2023. See: https://aatsf.com.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/4Mapcover-EN.pdf

22. Ibid.

2.2 SUPPORT AND CONTROL SERVICES

The four Regional Agricultural Extension Agencies (AREB)[23], located in Shkodër, Lushnjë, Korçë, and Tiranë (which also covers the Dibër region), operate under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, in accordance with Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 147, dated 13.3.2018, "On the establishment, organization, and functioning of regional agricultural extension agencies." These regional agencies aim to become key actors in the development of a competitive and sustainable agricultural sector in the country by working in long-term partnerships with beneficiaries. Their main duties and responsibilities include:

- Provide information and advisory services on the technical and technological development of farms to enhance competitiveness in agriculture.
- Offer information and assist farmers in benefiting from national support schemes, IPARD, and other projects in agriculture and rural development.
- Encourage and support the creation and functioning of various forms of farmer cooperation.
- Organize and conduct professional training for farmers in agriculture and rural development.
- Ensure access to information on standards related to the environment, quality, marketing, organic farming, and products with geographical indications.
- Inform and advise farmers on the selection and use of agricultural machinery and equipment, providing free technical assistance.

The five Agricultural Technology Transfer Centers (QTTB)[24] located in Fushë-Krujë, Shkodër, Vlorë, Lushnjë, and Korçë, were established by Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 515, dated 19.07.2006, "On the restructuring of Scientific Research Institutes under the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Consumer Protection." Among them, QTTB Shkodër is the only center specifically focused on medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs). The main responsibilities of the QTTBs include:

- Identify, test, adapt, and introduce new agricultural methods and inputs into farming practices.
- Develop technological packages for key agricultural crops and livestock breeding.
- Conduct research and testing on farms to address issues raised by farmers in the respective regions.
- Provide training for agricultural specialists, farmers, agricultural science students, and other interested parties.
- Ensure technical expertise for advisory service structures and farmers.
- Demonstrate new cultivation technologies for agricultural crops and livestock breeding.
- Prepare and publish informative materials for agricultural specialists and farmers.
- Support policymaking by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MBZHR) in the fields of agriculture, food, consumer protection, and rural development.

The National Authority for Veterinary and Plant Protection (AKVMB)[25] is responsible for ensuring the health and safety of animals, plants, and agricultural products in Albania. It operates under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MBZHR) and plays a crucial role in safeguarding public health, promoting agricultural sustainability, and facilitating international trade in agricultural and food products. Key responsibilities of AKVMB include:

- **Veterinary Services:** Monitor and control animal

23. See: https://bujqesia.gov.al/drejtorite-e-bujqesise/, and https://www.bujqesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2.1-struktura-AREB-TIRANE.doc
24. See: https://bujqesia.gov.al/qendrat-e-transferimit-te-teknologjive-bujqesore-qttb/
25. See: https://akvmb.gov.al/

health, prevent the spread of infectious diseases, and ensure food safety in animal-derived products.

- **Plant Protection:** Implement phytosanitary measures to prevent and control plant diseases and pests that could harm agricultural production.
- **Pesticide and Fertilizer Regulation:** Oversee the import, distribution, and use of pesticides and fertilizers, ensuring compliance with safety standards.
- **Food Safety and Inspection:** Conduct inspections of farms, food processing facilities, and markets to ensure that products meet national and international food safety standards.
- **Border Control and Biosecurity:** Manage veterinary and phytosanitary border inspections to prevent the entry of pests, diseases, and unsafe food products into the country.
- **Legislation and Compliance:** Develop and enforce laws, policies, and regulations related to veterinary services and plant protection.
- **Capacity Building and Training:** Provide training and support for farmers, veterinarians, and agricultural professionals to improve best practices in plant and animal health management.

AKVMB operates throughout the entire territory of the Republic of Albania and is organized at the central level through the General Directorate, and at the regional level via four regional veterinary and plant protection directorates in Elbasan, Vlorë, Shkodër, and Tirana (which covers also the Dibër region), along with direct veterinary service units. Regional directorates operate within their jurisdiction and carry out the following tasks:

- Assess needs and issues related to veterinary and plant protection services, proposing solutions to the General Directorate.
- Plan and submit needs for veterinary and plant protection services to the General Directorate.
- Coordinate and monitor the delivery of veterinary and plant protection services in their territory.
- Prepare reports on sample collection, pathological materials, and test results for suspected and confirmed diseases.
- Provide periodic reports on plant infection rates and plant product status.
- Detail and implement work plans approved by the General Directorate in compliance with current legal frameworks.
- Issue documents and certificates according to legal provisions, sub-legal acts, and authorizations from the General Directorate.
- Perform additional tasks assigned by law or the General Directorate.

The National Food Authority (AKU)[26] is a government agency under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, responsible for national inspection and management in the fields of consumer protection, plant protection, and animal welfare. AKU operates under Law No. 10,433, dated June 16, 2011, on "Inspection in the Republic of Albania," specifically Article 7 on "Inspection Program Principles." The timing of inspections is defined in the annual inspection program, although random inspections are conducted when required by law.

Article 4 of the same law outlines the purpose of inspections, which include: i) Assessing compliance with legal requirements; ii) Documenting best practices for adhering to legal requirements; iii) Advising inspected entities on proper implementation of legal obligations; iv) Ordering corrective actions for legal violations and eliminating their consequences; and, v) Imposing penalties and taking other administrative measures to mitigate risks to public interest.

The National Food Authority (AKU) in Albania is the regulatory body responsible for ensuring food safety, quality, and compliance with national and international standards. AKU oversees the entire food supply chain, from production and processing to distribution and consumption, aiming to protect public health and ensure food safety. Its main tasks include:

26. See: https://aku.gov.al/

- Monitoring and inspecting food production, processing, and distribution facilities.
- Ensuring compliance with food safety regulations and standards.
- Conducting food quality control and testing to prevent contamination and ensure safety.
- Implementing food safety laws and regulations set by the government.
- Coordinating with other national and international institutions to align food safety standards.
- Providing guidance and training to businesses and stakeholders in the food industry on best practices.
- Issuing certifications and approvals for food products, as required by law.

The State Entity of Seeds and Seedlings (ESHFF)[27], based in Tirana, operates under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. It is funded by the state budget and works in accordance with Law No. 10416, dated April 7, 2011, "On Propagating and Planting Material," as well as the related sub-legal acts. ESHFF's mission includes:

- Protecting farmers' interests.
- Expanding the availability of planting and propagating materials.
- Introducing new varieties into the market.
- Improving the quality indicators of commercial planting materials.
- Ensuring fair market competition.

The institution monitors the regional network for comparative trials that new varieties, either domestically produced or imported, undergo for reproduction, propagation, and commercialization. Based on the results of these trials and laboratory methods, the ESHFF evaluates and registers varieties in the National Catalog.

Agriculture Department in the Dibër Municipality (composed of 10 men and 3 women) is currently mainly focused on data collection and reporting, while not much in providing support to farmers through extension services, which are crucial for improving agricultural practices and increasing productivity.[28]

Certification The basic standards are the **Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points** (HACCP) and **Organic** Certification.

HACCP[29] is an international standard based on the principles of the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, encompassing a full set of principles for food hygiene and safety. It is a preventive system for food safety management, which is mandatory for all food businesses in accordance with European Regulations (EC) 178/2002[30] and 852/2004,[31] as well as National Guideline No. 20, dated November 25, 2010, from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.[32]

The HACCP certification process typically takes between 14 to 30 days, depending on the specific requirements of the business, and includes: On-site visit: A specialized consulting company visits the business to assess its operations and provide recommendations for improvements and adaptations to meet HACCP standards.

27. See: http://www.eshff.gov.al/
28. Findings from meeting and interviews with the municipality.
29. See: https://aku.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Udhezim_Nr.20.pdf
30. See: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32002R0178
31. See: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32004R0852
32. See: https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/alb144203.pdf

- **Preparation of Documentation:** The business must prepare all necessary documentation, including records, procedures, and plans related to food safety and hygiene.

- **Establishment of record-keeping systems:** A system for maintaining records and data must be set up, ensuring that food safety procedures are properly documented and traceable.

- **Inspection by Certification Body:** The certification body inspects the business to ensure that all HACCP requirements are met, checking both documentation and practices.

- Issuance of Certification: After a successful inspection, the certification body issues the HACCP certificate, confirming that the business complies with food safety standards.

Organic certification is a lengthy but valuable process, as it opens up access to global markets and allows businesses to market their products as organic, which can command higher prices and demand. It is a process that ensures that products are produced according to specific organic farming standards, which focus on sustainability, environmental preservation, and the exclusion of synthetic chemicals and genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

The certification is required for businesses that wish to market their products as "organic", especially for international markets. The parliament of Albania has recently approved the Law No. 104/2024 "On organic production, labeling of organic products, and their control"[33].

The purpose of this law is to establish the principles and regulations governing organic production, certification, and the use of indicators referring to organic production in labeling and advertising. It also defines the rules for official control, in addition to those outlined in the existing legislation on official inspections.

Key stages of organic certification:

- **Initial application:** The business submits an application to an accredited organic certification body.

- **Farm or facility inspection:** An on-site inspection is conducted by the certification body to ensure compliance with organic farming and processing standards. This inspection includes reviewing records, production methods, and environmental practices.

- **Documentation and record keeping:** Businesses must maintain detailed records of their farming practices, inputs used (fertilizers, pesticides, etc.), crop rotation, soil management, and other relevant practices. These records help ensure transparency and traceability.

- **Review of practices and procedures:** The certifying body reviews the business's practices against the organic standards. This includes ensuring no use of prohibited substances (such as synthetic chemicals or GMOs) and that the production methods support long-term environmental health.

- **Certification decision:** After the inspection and review, the certification body will make a decision. If the business is found to be in compliance with organic standards, they are granted organic certification.

- **Ongoing inspections:** Organic certification requires annual inspections and audits to maintain certification. Businesses must continue to adhere to the standards, and any changes to practices must be documented and approved.

The certification process takes typically 2-3 years, as businesses need to demonstrate that they have adhered to organic practices for at least that period. During this time, businesses are often given an interim status of "In Process of Organic Certification."

33. This law is partially aligned with EU Regulation (EU) No. 2018/848 of the European Parliament and the Council, dated May 30, 2018, on organic production and labeling of organic products, which repealed Council Regulation (EC) No. 834/2007. For more see: https://bujqesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/ligj-nr.-104-dt.-19.9.2024-prodhimi-organik.docx

2.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on the fieldwork, observations, and interviews conducted with key value chain actors, including producers and processors, and specialists of MAPs value chain, the following data were identified:

Opportunities:

- Increase in demand for MAPs across the country. There has been a noticeable increase in the demand for MAPs in the region and throughout the country, driven by market demand. This is also directly linked to the wide variety of products available, as well as the post-COVID-19 period and the growing demand from international markets.

- Cultivation of MAPs appears to be a good opportunity for engaging farmers based on the progress of initiatives in the country so far. Currently, around ten hectares are cultivated with MAPs in Dibër. Previous tests have proven that the area has all the required agrotechnical conditions in cultivating several plants. Women highlighted that perennial plants with single seasonal harvest are more suitable based on their conditions. Cultivating according to best agricultural practices increases production quantities while ensuring quality in line with international market demands.

  - By engaging in cultivation, women would increase income and improve working conditions. This would require investments starting from seeds/seedlings and training on good agriculture practices.

- Meeting the requirements of standards and obtaining quality certifications would directly contribute to improving the process and increasing the value of products, thus boosting demand for MAP products, raising prices, and increasing income per unit.

  - More knowledge is needed, especially in the application of standards, certification, and application of best practices in all stages in cultivation.

  - Attention needs to be paid to the drying and primary processing stages where, according to local consolidators, the risks of contamination and loss of quality is higher.

- Organizing farmers, especially women, into groups reduces costs in securing inputs, sharing equipment, and markets, unifies and guarantees product quality, enables an increase in the capacities of actors across all links of the value chain, and enhances their role in the value chain.[34]

- Opportunity in expanding the small-scale processing of MAPs for local end-user market.

- Opportunity in applying GAP in cultivation of MAPs:

  - Improve the working conditions of women engaged in MAPs VC.

  - All workers need to be trained, especially in agrochemicals/fertilizer management, hygiene and first aid.

  - Personal protection equipment, above all for the application of agrochemicals.

  - GAP in cultivation (plot history; inspection; soil testing; risk of contamination; field preparation; certified seeds/seedlings; sowing and transplanting; manures and fertilizers; irrigation; crop maintenance and plant protection; harvest and post-harvest (primary processing and drying); packaging; storage and transport; etc.)

Limitation:

Regarding the limitations faced by the MAP value chain, they can be summarized as follows:

34. Development in Practice. E. Oughton, 2020. See: https://www.academia.edu/86746380/Significance_of_farming_groups_for_resource_access_and_livelihood_improvement_of_rural_smallholder_women_farmers

- Most activities are informal, meaning that workers and producers (especially women) are not registered with tax offices or authorities. As a result, they lose their rights to benefit from subsidy schemes, health insurance, pensions, and various programs and projects.

- The areas where spontaneous collection processes take place are often located far from settlements, and especially during the season, women in addition to collection, have to work late hours to clean the product and lay it to dry.

- The economic situation of families. Often, involvement in this activity is the primary source of income for the majority of families. Due to informality, residents are also excluded from subsidy schemes and financial opportunities.

- Poor post-harvest process, including inadequate facilities and farmers capacities.

- Low product quality, resulting in low prices. The lack of professional skills and quality certification directly impacts the quality of the products. There are cases where the harvested/cultivated product loses quality during the drying process or improper packaging for storage and transport.

- Lack of youth interested in agriculture, adding to the high migration rates, limits the labor force.

Below are the main problems identified for the cultivation of MAPs in Dibër. More specifically, the issues (limitations) are related to:

- Input guaranteeing phase:
  - Seedlings and 'Organic' certification
  - Soil analysis - certified
  - Land ownership - access to finance/ registration (other support)

- Cultivation phase:
  - Skills for cultivation and harvesting (how, when, why, what)
  - Adequate working tools and equipment
  - Lack of service providers in application of good agriculture practices
  - Infrastructure (equipment) and qualifications for the post-harvest process

- Post-harvest and drying phase:
  - Lack of quality control
  - Lack of adequate facilities and limited post-harvest and processing equipment
  - Lack of quality packaging
  - Lack of knowledge in the above processes

- Marketing phase:
  - Lack of branding, labelling and packaging according to legal requirements
  - Storage capacities
  - Market linkages
  - Knowledge about market developments and demands
  - Promotion

Regarding Gender Inequality Issues and the Inclusion of Women in the value chain, the information gathered from meetings and interviews shows that women are involved in most activities, especially in the harvesting and drying processes, while also contributing to household chores. This means that women involved in collecting wild plants far from home, or/and engaged in post-harvest stages in late hours are doubly burdened.

There are opportunities for cultivating plants closer to home, which could result in improved quality, quantity, and resource control for women, as well as offering opportunities to cultivate high-demand and high-value plants in the market. Women involved in cultivation, harvesting, and in drying the product, directly influence the value chain, making consolidators dependent on their skills to ensure product quality.

Women are rarely involved in decision-making processes, with men (especially the consolidators to whom women sell their products) being the decision-making authority regarding pricing, business management processes, financing opportunities, etc.

Regarding Financing Opportunities, for many families, the only source of income is generated from this type of activity. Typically, profits are earned once the collected quantity is delivered to the collection unit. Currently, based solely on spontaneous collection, financing opportunities are very low, if not non-existent.

2.4 RECOMMENDED INTERVENTIONS FOR THE MAPS VALUE CHAIN IN DIBËR

Below are some general recommendations regarding the development of the MAPs value chain in the Dibër Municipality, categorized by their impact:

1. Support Cultivation:

- **Enhance good agricultural practices (GAP)**: It is crucial to improve the cultivation practices of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs) by focusing on good agricultural practices. This includes training in essential aspects such as soil testing, contamination risk assessment, field preparation, use of certified seeds and seedlings, sowing, transplanting, fertilization, irrigation, crop maintenance, and plant protection. Additionally, efficient harvesting, post-harvest handling, drying, storage, and transportation practices must be enhanced to maintain the quality and market value of the products. Specialized training in agrochemicals, fertilizer management, hygiene, and first aid should also be incorporated to improve these practices in the short, medium, and long term.

2. Technical Assistance:

- **Soil analysis and certified propagation material**: Support in soil analysis is essential to ensure optimal conditions for MAP cultivation. Support in selection of plants to cultivate based on area's agrotechnical requirements, market demand, and women's conditions and needs. Providing access to certified propagation material (seeds and seedlings) and support for on-site seedling replication will enhance scalability and ensure a sustainable supply for future expansion. This initiative should be pursued immediately and continue over the long term to guarantee the success and expansion of MAP cultivation.

- **Small grants for harvest and post-harvest improvements**: Small grants should be provided to improve harvest and post-harvest practices on farms. This could include grants for equipment such as sacks for storage and transport, environmentally friendly drying equipment, including small equipment for processing and packaging for local market. Such investments will help maintain the quality of the products from harvest to market and should be implemented in the short, medium, and long term.

- **Personal working and protection equipment**: Providing personal protective equipment (PPE) for workers, especially for the application of agrochemicals, is essential for ensuring the health and safety of those involved in MAP cultivation. This support should be provided consistently throughout the short, medium, and long term.

3. Certification of Quality and Safety Standards:

- **Awareness of certifications**: It is important to raise awareness among producers about the value of certifications and how they help gain access to major markets. The process of obtaining certifications, such as organic certification, should be clearly explained to ensure producers understand the steps involved. This awareness-building process should take place in the short term and continue to evolve as the market demands.

- **Support for organic certification**: Producers should receive assistance in obtaining organic certification, ensuring that their products meet the required standards. This support should start in the medium term and continue in the long term to help MAP producers remain competitive in international markets.

- **Coaching and mentoring**: Providing coaching and mentoring to producers in the short, medium, and long term will support their growth and help them better navigate the challenges in the MAP value chain. This will ensure they are continually improving and adhering to market demands.

4. Support for Production Groups:

- **Organizing women into groups**: Organizing women into groups is a key strategy for improving their representation and role in the MAP value chain. Such groups will empower women to have a stronger voice in the market and will be crucial for creating a more robust and competitive sector. This initiative should be pursued in the medium term and sustained in the long term.

- **Capacity building for women farmers**: Providing women farmers with knowledge on business planning, establishing business relationships, marketing, and identifying financing opportunities is essential for empowering them to thrive in the MAP value chain. Training in these areas should be implemented in the medium term, with ongoing support over the long term.

- **Sustainable relationships with consolidators**: Developing sustainable relationships between production groups and local, regional, or national consolidators will help stabilize the market and ensure producers have reliable buyers.

  Advance agreements can promote production and guarantee market access. These relationships should be nurtured in the medium term and maintained in the long term to ensure the continued success of the MAP value chain.

- **Access new markets with a focus to the end-market consumer:** This would allow women to horizontally expand their role in the value chain from cultivation to the end market, and increase their income by adding value with small-scale processing, branding and packaging for the final consumers.

- These recommendations offer a comprehensive approach to strengthening the MAP value chain by focusing on technical assistance, certification, empowering women, and improving market access through strong partnerships. These actions will help create a more sustainable and profitable value chain for MAP producers in Dibër.

Table 7. Recommendations for the MAP Value Chain

No.	Activity	Impact		
		Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
1	Support in cultivation			
1.1	Enhance Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) in the cultivation of MAPs, improving harvesting techniques and post-harvest handling, including proper drying, storage, and transportation. Key areas of focus include: • Plot management: History, inspection, soil testing, and contamination risk assessment. • Support in selection of plants to cultivate based on area's agrotechnical requirements, market demand, and women's conditions and needs • Cultivation Practices: Field preparation, use of certified seeds/ seedlings, sowing, transplanting, fertilization, irrigation, crop maintenance, and plant protection. • Harvest & post-harvest: Efficient harvesting, primary processing, drying, packaging, storage, and transport to maintain quality and market value. Training especially in agrochemicals/fertilizer management, hygiene and first aid.	X	X	X
2	Technical assistance			
2.1	• Soil analysis • Demonstration sites with selected plants • Support with certified propagation material • Support on-site seedling replication to enhance scalability and ensure a sustainable supply for future expansion	X	X	X
2.2	Small grants for improving harvest and post-harvest practices on farms (for equipment such as sacks for storage and transport, environmentally friendly drying equipment, including small equipment for processing and packaging for local market, branding, labelling and packaging)	X	X	X

No.	Activity	Impact		
		Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
2.3	Personal working and protection equipment, above all for the application of agrochemicals.	X	X	X
3	Certification of quality and safety standards			
3.1	Awareness sessions regarding the importance of certifications in accessing major markets and the necessary steps for certification.	X	X	X
3.2	Provide support for producers in obtaining organic certification, ensuring compliance with standards.		X	X
3.3	Coaching and mentoring.	X	X	X
4	Support for production groups			
4.1	Organizing women into group to increase representation and role in the value chain.		X	X
4.2	Capacity building for women farmers related to basic knowledge of business planning, business relations, marketing, financing opportunities, etc.		X	X
4.3	Creation of sustainable relationships between production group and local/ regional and/or national consolidators to promote production with advance agreements.	X	X	X
4.4	Support in new markets with a focus on end-consumer market			

Local Partners/Collaboration: National associations of MAPs; the municipality; the agriculture directorate, the local consolidators, points of sale. These recommendations are designed to address key areas of the MAP value chain, focusing on increasing production efficiency, ensuring quality and safety standards, enhancing market access, and empowering women. By implementing these activities, the value chain can grow sustainably, providing both short- and long-term benefits for farmers, particularly women, and improving the overall economic contribution of MAPs to local communities.

Part 3

Analysis of Dairy Farming Milk Value Chain

1. Gender Sensitive Analysis of Dairy Farming Milk Value Chain

In 2023, Albania's livestock sector was dominated by dairy-producing animals across different categories. The total number of cattle reached 263,385, with dairy cows representing the majority, at 88.24% of the total herd. Sheep farming remained a significant component of the sector, with a total of 1,206,206 sheep, of which 83.43% were dairy sheep. Similarly, the goat population stood at 640,242, with dairy goats making up 79.96% of the total. The pig population in 2023 was 114,833, with breeding sows accounting for 9.18% of the total herd. These figures highlight the continued emphasis on dairy production within the country's livestock sector, with cows, sheep, and goats primarily raised for milk production.[35] The milk industry experienced a notable decline in collection volumes across all categories in 2023. A total of 101,000 tons of milk were collected, reflecting an 8.0% decrease compared to the previous year. This downward trend was evident in cow's milk, which accounted for 80 thousand tons, marking a 7.6% decline. Similarly, sheep's milk saw a 10.6% drop, with 13 thousand tons collected, while goat's milk decreased by 8.2%, reaching 8,000 tons. Of the total milk collected, 13 thousand tons were designated for direct human consumption, while the remaining quantity was processed. The majority of the milk produced for consumption was processed whole milk (88.2%), followed by semi-skimmed milk (8.1%), raw milk (3.2%), and skimmed milk (0.5%). Overall, there is a general decline in milk collection, suggesting potential challenges in the dairy sector. Despite this, the processing industry remains dominant, with most of the milk undergoing transformation before reaching consumers.[36] Livestock farming is a very important agri-food sector in Albania - about half of the farmers are engaged in livestock farming, including in the dairy sector. Dairy products represent an important part of the Albanian household consumption basket. Milk production is by far dominated by cows' milk (more than 80%). Overall, dairy production is destined to the domestic markets, thus the production increase is mainly triggered by increase in the domestic demand, while the dairy trade balance shows a structural deficit. The dairy value chain is considered a priority sector considering import substitution potential.[37] The small ruminant production is done in several ways: a) extensive system with the transhumance 6 to 8 months (all regions); b) the semi-intensive system to transhumance 5 to 6 months; c) grazing system on permanent pasture near to the farm; d) natural pasture within walking distance, with the return of sheep or goats in the evening on the farm. However, for the time being, sheep and goat milk production is organized almost totally as extensive breeding and milk yield per ewe with about 58 liters/year and per doe, with about 112 liters/year, are also low. Comparing Albanian small ruminants' productivity with that one in EU member states is more difficult, as yields are quite variable even in regions with a similar production structure and similar natural conditions, but it is safe to state that available data show yields that range among 30% to 70% of average yields in EU member states comparable regions.[38]

Women play a crucial role throughout the entire dairy value chain, from animal care and milking to transporting milk to dairy facilities.

35. INSTAT. See: https://www.instat.gov.al/media/13520/statistikat-e-blegtoris%C3%AB-2023.pdf
36. INSTAT. See: https://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/bujq%C3%ABsia-dhe-peshkimi/blegtoria/
37. Milk Sector Study. AASF, 2019. See: https://aatsf.com.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/8Milkcover-EN.pdf
38. Milk Sector Study Report. MOARD, 2021. See: https://ipard.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/06-Milk-Sector-Study-Final.pdf
39. Ibid
40. Information gathered through field visit and interview with farmers and the dairy facility in Muhurr show the presence of a larger number of small ruminants in the area.

1.1 SITUATION OF DAIRY FARMING/MILK VALUE CHAIN IN DIBËR REGION

Livestock production efficiency is affected by limited knowledge of farmers on modern farm management. The improvement of farmers' knowledge should start with enhancing the role and performance of the public extension service, the motivation of the advisors and the financial support of the service. In the process of approximation to the European Union, the country is seeking to increase the competitiveness and food standards.[40]

The dairy sector in Dibër Municipality plays a vital role in the local economy, given the region's strong tradition in livestock farming and dairy production. The area's mountainous terrain and rich pastures create favorable conditions for raising cattle, sheep, and goats, which are the primary sources of milk in Dibër.

In 2023, Dibër's livestock sector, with 8,200 cattle (7,710 cows), 35,200 sheep (29,000 milk sheep), and 12,640 goats (11,000 milk goats), demonstrated a strong emphasis on dairy production, alongside meat and other animal-related products.

The total milk production reached 26,094 tons, with cow's milk being the primary contributor at 23,147 tons.

Sheep and goat milk were produced in smaller quantities, amounting to 1,682 tons and 1,265 tons, respectively. The municipality is home to six dairy facilities, supporting milk processing and dairy production.

Of these, two operate all year-round (located in Melan and Maqellarë), while four function seasonally (Muhurr, Kastriot, and two in Kala e Dodës).This structured dairy network plays a vital role in supporting local farmers, ensuring milk collection, processing, and market supply, although challenges such as seasonal production fluctuations and milk supply limitations persist.

Findings

Finding I Livestock farming, particularly of small ruminants (sheep and goats), is a key economic activity in Muhurr Administrative Unit, with around 20-25 farms raising small ruminants and 20 farms specializing in cattle farming, and over 60% of people involved in this activity being women. According to INSTAT, in 2023, Muhurr was home to 618 cattle, of which 588 were cows. Additionally, the area had 620 goats and 830 sheep, contributing to the diverse livestock sector in the region.[41] Despite its importance, several challenges impact productivity and sustainability in the sector.

Finding II Women play a crucial role throughout the entire dairy value chain, from animal care and milking to transporting milk to dairy facilities. However, they lack control over assets, knowledge of best practices, and access to modern tools and equipment, increasing their workload and reducing efficiency. Milking is still done by hand, with plastic and old containers being commonly used, leading to reduced milk quality and a high risk of contamination. Farmers have minimal knowledge of farm management, and there is limited active extension service, crucial on good dairy farming practices.

Finding III The dairy facility "Bjeshkët e Runjës", located in Muhurr, is facing limited milk supply, restricting its cheese production to a maximum of 5 tons. The dairy has a strong market presence and growing demand, but the lack of raw materials hinders expansion. In an effort to secure milk supply, the dairy has introduced a price increase for goat milk to encourage farmers to continue supplying milk. The dairy facility, owned by Liliana and Selman, has demonstrated strong cooperation and commitment to strengthening the dairy value chain. Their approach is driven by the belief that "More and better milk means more higher quality production." Recognizing the potential for further development, the facility plans to expand production by introducing kaçkavall cheese made from cow's milk and partnering with more local farmers to increase milk supply.

Table 8. SWOT analysis of the milk value chain

Strengths	Weaknesses
Livestock farming, especially of small ruminants, is a widely spread activity in Muhurr AU (20-25 farms raising small ruminants and 20 raising cows).	**Lack of financial resources.** Small-sized farmers (less than 10 cattle or 100 small ruminants) are excluded from the agricultural support scheme 2025.
Women, counting for over 60%, are actively engaged in all stages of the value chain, from animal care, milking and delivery to the dairy facility.	**Absence of a testing lab** in the dairy facility.
Women have traditional skills and knowledge in livestock.	**Inadequate raw milk monitoring system:** farm and milk production registers are often incomplete, raw milk quality controls are often not made using proper sampling system.
Existence of examples in good dairy farming practices and modern stables in the region and in the country.	**Existence of limited knowledge** of women and men farmers in good dairy farming practices.
Favorable climatic conditions and tradition in livestock breeding.	**Underdeveloped raw milk collection systems** and poor infrastructure for milk collection in mountainous areas.
Considerable number of small ruminants' breeds that are well adapted to local conditions.	**Milking is largely done by hand,** and most farmers use plastic and old containers that result to reduce the milk quality and high risk of contamination
Willingness of dairy facility to collaborate with local women farmers.	**Scarce compliance with raw milk health** and hygiene standards.
Commitment of key value chain actors to increasing quantity and improving product quality.	**Inadequate women farmers knowhow on milk minimum standards,** hygiene in milk collection, animal husbandry, management of manure and waste.
High demand for milk from the local facility and final product (cheese) from the market.	**High share of non-specialized farms** with very few animals.
Increasing market demand for dairy byproducts.	**Difficulty to source quality milk** from small farmers (hygiene).
	Most dairy farms do not use milking equipment and cooling tanks which pose a risk to food safety.
	Low milk yield from small ruminants.
	Limited attention paid to animal welfare.
	Low level of extension services.
	Commodity chain governance and law enforcement still insufficient, especially milk traceability.
	Distance of the remote dairy farms locations (mountains) from the dairy facility.
	High informality in the milk supply chain.
	High seasonal fluctuations in milk production.
	Hard work and poor working conditions, especially for women, such as milking mainly by hand, manual cleaning of barns, feeding animals, managing manure – all physically exhausting.
	Women lack control on assets, knowledge on best practices in animal husbandry, and especially tools and equipment to reduce their workload and increase productivity.
	Lack of milk supply limits production (up to 5 tons of cheese) of the dairy facility "Bjeshkët e Runjës" located in Muhurr.
	Lack of youth interested in dairy farming and high migration affect the workforce.

Opportunities	Threats
Existence of examples in good dairy farming practices and modern stables in the region and in the country.	**High seasonal fluctuations** in milk production can negatively affect the supply chain.
The legal framework is being broadly harmonized to the EU acquis, which also includes gender equality provisions, providing an opportunity to mainstream gender considerations in national agricultural and dairy development policies.41	**Unresolved issues of property rights management hinder** investments in stables and perennial forage crops, particularly affecting women, who frequently face legal and customary barriers to land ownership and control.
Increasing milk supply from dairy farmers, especially the ones managed by women, could enhance the overall production capacity of dairy facility, while supporting women's income generation and economic empowerment.	**Environment pollution** due to overall farming and industry.
Opportunity of post-project sustainability through the local dairy facility.	**Inadequate monitoring of protection products,** additives and antibiotics residues.
Overall consumers preference for domestic dairy products.	**Animal feed** and inputs price increases.
Small-sized farmers, especially women, can increase productivity by applying good dairy farming practices, with targeted training in animal care, milking hygiene, environmental standards, and socio-economic farm management, helping bridge gender gaps in knowledge and access to resources.	**High migration rates** affect the labor force and lead to increased workloads for women who remain in rural areas, as they take on additional responsibilities in farming.
	The interests of small-sized dairy farmers are scarcely represented by agriculture and sectoral advocacy groups, with women even more underrepresented in these structures, making it critical to strengthen women's voice and participation in decision-making and policy dialogue.
	Climate change poses a significant threat; particularly as changing weather patterns may affect fodder cultivation.

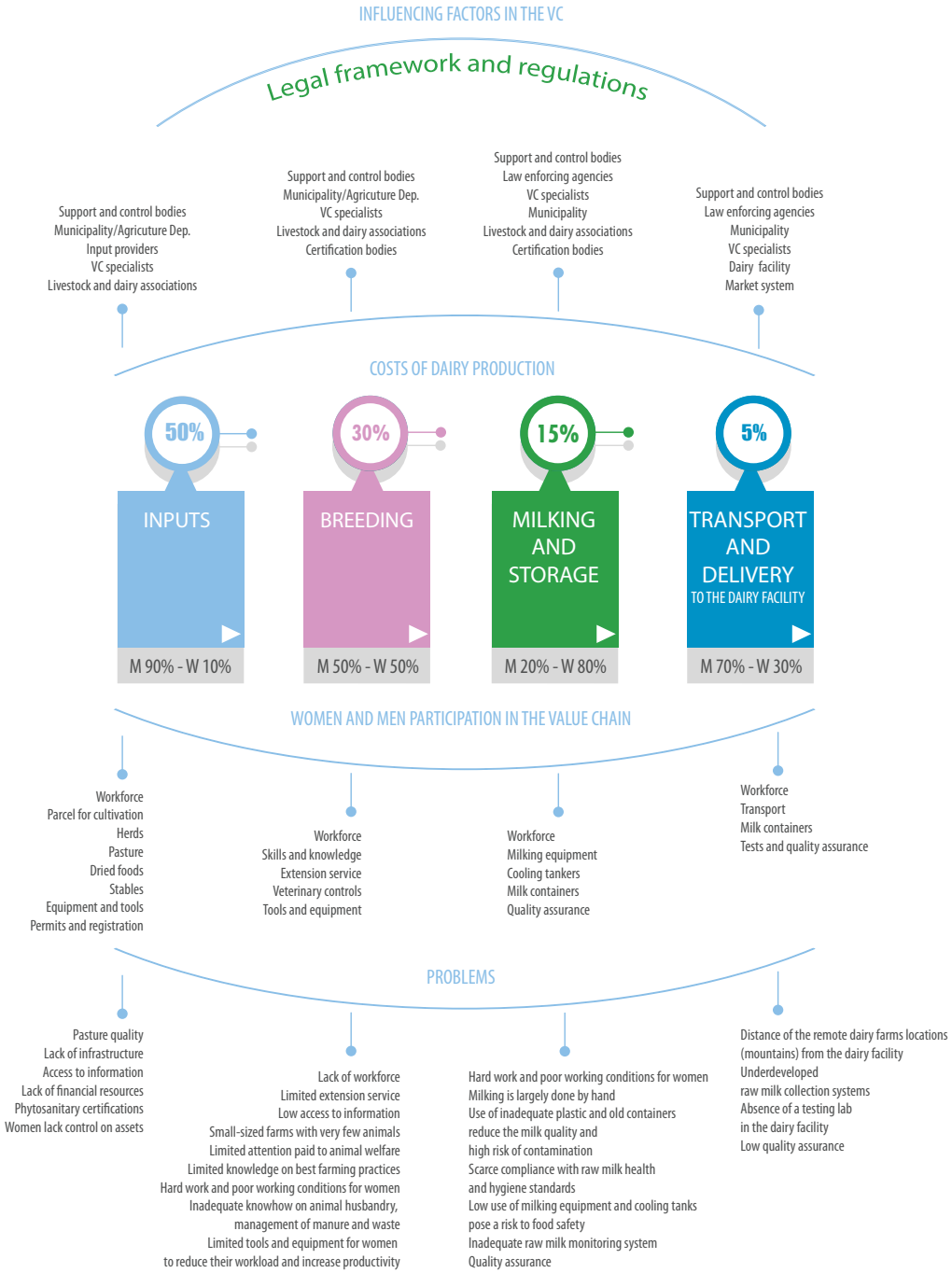
41. Alignment of Chapter 11 with EU GAP III indicators, EU CAP Gender indicators, and SDG indicators. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development. UN Women. 2023. See: https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/ard_web_final.pdf

2. Mapping of the Milk Value Chain in Muhurr AU

Below is the comprehensive map of the value chain links, actors, supporting factors, and key issues identified, based on findings from interviews with stakeholders and local support agencies, field research, and consultations with specialists.

The diagram presents the main interest groups, the stages from inputs to the final market, and helps identify challenges in the production flow. The numerical values above the boxes represent costs and the added value for each phase.

Figure 3. Mapping of the Milk Value Chain



2.1 VALUE CHAIN ACTORS

As seen in the diagram above, the milk value chain in Dibër is organized into the key levels, namely:

- Input
- Livestock breeding
- Milking and storage
- Transport and delivery (to the dairy facility)

Below is a brief description of each value chain actor and supporting agencies in the market system, from input, production, and market distribution.

Input suppliers: Inputs and services in dairy production comprise access to genetic material, feed (both roughage and concentrate), seeds, fertilizers and plant protection products, farm tools and equipment, veterinary medicines, vaccines, and veterinary services. In addition to making these inputs and services available, it is also important to secure their accessibility and convenience to all producers in need. Albanian agricultural production is dependent on imported agrochemical products, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, semen and most of the animal feed or ingredients, which makes the sector subject to international price volatility. As in other emerging countries, the farmers and input dealers in Albania, face major constraints in getting high-quality, consistent supplies. This is caused by financial constraints, low input quality, as well as by limited level of technical information and knowledge. Comparatively high-priced inputs are only available for cash, so the limited purchasing power of farmers restricts their use. In many cases farmers complain about the low quality of forage seeds, pesticides, animal feed, veterinary medicines, and bull semen. Usually, such inputs are supplied by local input suppliers, which are: i) importers/wholesalers and retailers for seeds and pesticides; ii) feed mills or importers for animal feed; iii) veterinary pharmacies for the medicines and iv) importers of livestock or inseminators for the bull semen. Many small farmers have the tendency to buy the cheapest inputs, in order to reduce production cost, but in most cases, they end up with losses due to weak production performance. Small farmers do not have information about inputs and have difficulty finding information, as the public extension services do not have the resources to reach out to all farmers. Farmers lack knowledge and finances in the use the appropriate quantity and quality of animal feed; as a result, the improvements recorded in the genetic potential of milking breeds was not paralleled by improvement in milk yields, as poorly fed animals are not enabled to express their full genetic potential. As a result, milk yields are among the lowest in the region. Most small size dairy farms have scarce information about inputs and find it difficult to find it. Some of input retailers in rural areas are not competent in what they may advise farmers.[42]

Dairy farmers: The livestock production of small ruminants is generally well adapted to the geographic and climatic conditions of Albania. The small ruminants bring value to the natural grasslands and have performances in line with the level of (poor) feeding. They are able to use limited food resources during winter or dry summer periods, to move for long distances during transhumance and resist diseases and parasites. Many breeders prefer local breeds. On the other hand, the productivity of these local breeds is low, and the potential is limited, although not yet fully exploited.

The predominant farming system in hill and mountain regions of Albania is the extensive one. The management of the small ruminants is based on traditional rearing, and the new technologies are little known by the farmers. The reproducers' selection is done by the farmers themselves based on their experience and their empiric information. Animal feeding is mostly based on the utilization of pastoral reserves as the small ruminants are kept in summer pastures for 5 to 6 months (from April to October). The farmers having very few heads do not migrate animals and they use communal pastures. The most labor-consuming process in sheep/goat farming, for example milking, is done manually.

There is a limited awareness or knowledge about requirements, minimal standards and good practices in different aspect of animal husbandry, use of inputs and milking practices.

42. Milk Sector Study Report. MOARD, 2021. See: https://ipard.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/06-Milk-Sector-Study-Final.pdf

Milk primary production development has been hampered for years by several factors, the main ones being: i) high fragmentation of production and small scale of farming, ii) poor farm management practices, especially feeding, iii) limited access to high-quality inputs, iv) aging farm owners, which slow down process of change and reduce the scope for investments, v) inadequate service provision (veterinary service, extension service, natural mating and/or breed) and, vi) lack of farmers' organization and inadequate value chain coordination. These factors lead to lower productivity and farm efficiency; the specific aspects of the most important issues are detailed below.

The low capital intensity of production for both dairy cattle and small ruminant farms resulted in low productivity, relatively high production costs and low profitability, which in turn prevents the accumulation of capital for new investments, thus perpetuating the low production and productivity levels on many dairy farms. Small farms are currently at a turning point, facing the challenge to decide whether to grow and develop to meet the standards or to terminate commercial production.

As a specific case, farms that rear small flocks can hardly see themselves as prospective farms. In general, they have tendency to quit this activity as soon as they find another opportunity. Many of the challenges – such as low milk quality, low average yields and a high degree of seasonality – are linked to the small scale of farming operations. Investments in milking and cold storage equipment, improvements in feed and forage practices, introduction of specialized dairy breeds and advanced techniques for animal husbandry are essential to face this challenge. However, such investments and improvements are unlikely, or even impossible on the small-scale dairy farms that dominate the dairy sector.[43]

Livestock farming is a key economic activity in Muhurr Administrative Unit, with around 20-25 farms raising small ruminants and 20 farms specializing in cattle farming. According to INSTAT, in 2023, Muhurr was home to 618 cattle, of which 588 were cows. Additionally, the area had 620 goats and 830 sheep, contributing to the diverse livestock sector in the region. Despite its importance, several challenges impact productivity and sustainability in the sector. Dairy farmers in Muhurr are categorized by the size of their herds: i) small-sized mixed herds (goat and sheep) of less than 50 heads, and/or no more than 7-10 cows that mainly use their arable land or the communal ones for pasture nearby their homes, and ii) the bigger sized herds (200-300) of mainly goats that use pastures in the mountains. Farmers have minimal knowledge of good dairy farming practices and farm management, and there is limited active extension service, crucial on good dairy farming practices. The local dairy facility arranges the milk collection with its own cars while the smaller farmers, located nearby, deliver the milk directly to the facility. Milking is still done by hand, with plastic and old containers being commonly used, leading to reduced milk quality and with a high risk of contamination. Women play a crucial role throughout the entire dairy value chain, from animal care and milking to transporting milk to dairy facilities. However, they lack control over assets, knowledge of best practices, and access to modern tools and equipment, increasing their workload and reducing efficiency.

Dairy facilities: The milk processing industry in Albania is characterized by a large number of small dairy processing plants (so-called "baxho"), many of which are semi-informal or informal businesses. Medium and large-sized plants are much less numerous; they are devoting efforts and investments in growth and improved compliance with standards and represent the core of the dairy industry.

The small plants/units are in rural and remote areas. Most of them in mountain regions are seasonal ones, as they mainly as are process sheep and goat milk; during the production season they also process small quantities of cow milk. They use old/traditional technology, apply inadequate food safety and quality standards. Hygiene is an issue in most of these plants. These plants do not have adequate storage capacities and milk is processed according to the plant capacity. They face also the marketing problems. Their customers are small shops in urban areas but not in the main regions. They usually have several month delay payments to farmers, who as a result are unable to buy feed and other materials for their animals.

43. Milk Sector Study Report. MOARD, 2021. See: https://ipard.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/06-Milk-Sector-Study-Final.pdf

In addition, they are much less demanding in terms of raw milk quality, as compared with larger and more formalized dairy plants: they measure only density and fat content of milk, but do not test the milk for SCC and microbiological load; in order to ensure food safety, they apply pasteurization for several minutes, thus affecting quality; the water used for dairy processing is not pre-treated; inputs and technological management are approximate. Wastewater management is not applied.[44]

A modest dairy facility, "Bjeshkët e Runjës", located in Muhurr is managed by Liliana and Selman Boka. During the past years, the facility has increased production of goat cheese from 2 to 5 tons. Having a solid customer base mainly from direct consumers and restaurants, the facility is facing limitations in expanding mainly due to limited milk supply. The facility has applied price incentives for farmers to maintain the milk quantity. While facing limitations on expanding production of goat cheese, the facility owners are planning to cooperate with the cattle farmers (20) and expand their portfolio with Kaçkavall cheese produced by cow milk.

The facility is complying with all standards and regulations, applies proper packing with a solid brand and label, and the "Bjeshkët e Runjës" goat cheese has received the "Typical Product" designation. The goat cheese from the Runja highlands is produced by the farmers' cooperative "Dhia Autoktone e Bulaçit" (whose members are six men and one woman) in Muhurr and is made from fresh milk collected from Bulaçi goats, gathered by shepherds who graze their goats in the Runja highlands. This gives the cheese a unique mountain milk aroma, resulting from the grazing system that includes oak, sloe bushes, alpine pastures, and the traditional processing method.

44. Ibid.

2.2 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal framework governing livestock and dairy farming in Albania is structured through a combination of national laws, government regulations, and EU alignment processes. The legal framework focuses on agricultural development, livestock welfare, food safety, and sustainable farming practices. The Strategy on Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries is a national policy with a cross-sectoral approach. The timeframe of the policy is 7 years between 2021 and 2027. The purposes of this policy are to ensure the sustainable development of the agri-food sector to meet the needs of people facing medium and long-term challenges related to food security, livelihoods, climate change, and biodiversity loss, and to develop rural households and become more competitive in rural areas, based on policies that support sustainable use of natural resources, efficient use of agricultural and fishing inputs, and agricultural knowledge and innovation.[45]

Law No. 9441, dated November 11, 2005, "*On the production, collection, processing, and marketing of milk and milk-based products in Albania*". The primary objectives of this law are to ensure the proper production of milk on farms, its collection, processing, and marketing of both raw and processed milk, as well as milk-based products. The law aims to maintain controlled quality in the production and marketing processes, meeting the required standards for both domestic and international markets. It also focuses on regulating the licensing of dairy farms and the centers responsible for milk collection, standardization, and processing. Another key goal is to guarantee consumer safety by ensuring that milk and its derivative products meet stringent safety standards, protecting the health and well-being of the public.[46]

Law No.10465 dated 29.9.2011 "*On the veterinary service in the Republic of Albania*". The Law sets out the framework for the protection of animal health and well-being according to the WOAH and EU standards and the organization, functioning and financing of the veterinary service and inspectorate and protection of public health against zoonotic diseases transmitted from animals.[47]

Law No. 9863/2022 "*On food*". This Law aims at ensuring high levels of protection of human health and consumers' interests with respect to food products. It lays down rules governing food hygiene, business operators' responsibilities, food quality standards, registration of geographical designations of origin, food labelling and marketing standards. The Law also defines the system of food inspection and sets up the National Food Authority. Final provisions deal with offences and penalties.

Law No. 38/2013 amending Law No. 9693 "*On the pasture fund*". This Law concerns the administration and protection of pastures and meadows. It defines tasks and duties of central and local government bodies in this sector and makes provision on specialized research institutions.[48]

Law No. 10431/2011 "*On protected areas*". Protects the environment and biodiversity in Albania, regulating the use of land for farming and ensuring that pastures used for livestock do not negatively impact protected areas and natural habitats. The Law sets out the framework for providing a high-level protection for the environment, its preservation and improvement, prevention and reduction of the human health-associated risks and improvement of the life quality of today and next generations as well as ensuring sustainable development.[49]

As Albania progresses toward EU membership, it is aligning its agricultural and livestock legislation with EU regulations to ensure access to European markets. This includes adopting EU standards for food safety, animal welfare, sustainable farming practices, and market access. Albanian laws on dairy and livestock production are increasingly in line with EU laws governing animal health, veterinary checks, traceability, and hygiene standards. Key changes focus on improving food safety, ensuring humane treatment of animals, promoting sustainable farming, and implementing stricter controls on animal health and veterinary inspections.

45. See: https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/alb211951.pdf
46. See: http://aku.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/LIGJI-Nr.9441-per-qumshtin.pdf
47. See: https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/alb113038.pdf
48. See:https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC132117/#:~:text=Law%20No.%2038/2013%20amending%20Law%20No.%209693%20on%20the%20Pasture%20Fund
49. See: https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/alb112561.pdf

2.3 SUPPORT AND CONTROL SERVICES

The Livestock Production Sector, in alignment with the requirements of Article 95 of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) and in support of the Government's program, aims to analyze, identify, and develop sectorial policies and strategies for the development of livestock farming. This includes guiding and supporting local and national efforts to meet market demands for livestock products through the rational use of resources and the introduction of new techniques and technologies in production.[50] The sector focuses on:

- Harmonizing legislation with EU standards in the context of development and integration policies, through the proposal, development, and implementation of laws and sublegal acts in the field of livestock farming.
- Developing policies and programs for the improvement of animal breeding and production.
- Preparing an appropriate legal framework for the implementation of development policies in the livestock sector.
- Strengthening monitoring systems and enforcing animal husbandry standards.
- Promoting and consolidating sustainable livestock production systems, including specialized farms and industrial complexes for egg, meat, and feed production.
- Properly managing cultivated and indigenous animal genetic resources.
- Improving the control system for the quality and marketing of animal breeds in line with established standards.
- Evaluating trends in livestock development through studies, analyses, and setting priorities for livestock production.

The Livestock Production Sector operates based on the Law No. 9426, dated October 6, 2005, "On animal husbandry" (amended by Law No. 9864, dated January 28, 2008) and several other laws, including Law No. 10137, dated May 11, 2009, regarding licenses, authorizations, and permits in Albania, as well as a number of byelaws. The institutions involved in implementing the livestock objectives are:

- The General Directorate of Agricultural Policies within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which is the competent authority for livestock activities, through:
  - The Livestock Production Sector
  - Livestock specialists in Regional Agricultural Directorates
  - Agricultural Technology Transfer Centers
  - Public and/or private advisory services

The Livestock Production Sector is responsible for the sustainable development of livestock production in the country through the creation of legislation, sectoral strategies, and development policies, as well as programs for the protection, improvement, and preservation of the quality of animal genetic resources. Its goal is to promote the growth of livestock production, the establishment and spread of breed values, and the preservation of the genetic diversity of farm animals. The Livestock Production Sector is responsible for:

- Developing strategies and policies for the livestock sector
- Monitoring, evaluating, and systematically renewing policies and strategies related to livestock production
- Conducting necessary analyses for policy development and creating programs for implementing livestock development policies for the proper breeding of animals
- Drafting and harmonizing legislation in the livestock sector
- Evaluating genetic progress to determine the

50. See: https://www.bujqesia.gov.al/bujqesia-dhe-blegtoria/

profitability of breeds, setting priorities for breed management strategies

- Identifying indigenous and cultivated genetic resources and proposing protective measures for them
- Monitoring and implementing legislation on animal breeding and genetic improvement, as well as protecting and developing indigenous genetic resources, and implementing measures related to animal breeding standards.

Regional Directorates of Agriculture (RDA): At the Regional Directorates of Agriculture, livestock specialists (zootechnic experts) carry out their activities ensuring:

- The implementation of legislation in the livestock sector
- Meeting the conditions for sustainable breeding of farm animals
- Breed improvement
- Animal feed and nutrition
- Trade of breeding materials

Private Zootechnical Service: The Private Zootechnical Service operates in the field of animal reproduction, where 480 qualified inseminators, certified by the Agricultural Technology Transfer Centers (public service), conduct their activities. The Private Zootechnical Service operates within farms, livestock facilities, and animal breeding organizations, with its program approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The five Agricultural Technology Transfer Centers (QTTB)[51] located in Fushë-Krujë, Shkodër, Vlorë, Lushnjë, and Korçë, were established by Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 515, dated 19.07.2006, "On the restructuring of scientific research institutes under the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection." The main responsibilities of the QTTBs include:

- Identify, test, adapt, and introduce new agricultural methods and inputs into farming practices.
- Develop technological packages for key agricultural crops and livestock breeding.
- Conduct research and testing on farms to address issues raised by farmers in the respective regions.
- Provide training for agricultural specialists, farmers, agricultural science students, and other interested parties.
- Ensure technical expertise for advisory service structures and farmers.
- Demonstrate new cultivation technologies for agricultural crops and livestock breeding.
- Prepare and publish informative materials for agricultural specialists and farmers.
- Support policymaking by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MBZHR) in the fields of agriculture, food, consumer protection, and rural development.

The Agricultural Technology Transfer Centers in Fushë-Krujë and Korçë are structures for the transfer of livestock technologies under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Fushë-Krujë QTTB is the National Reference Center (NRC) for:

- Control of feed used in livestock production
- Control of breeding materials (semen, eggs, embryos) QTTBs perform their activities in accordance with policies for the development of livestock production.

Advisory Service: The Advisory Service is involved in the structures of the Regional Directorates of Agriculture (DRB), where zootechnic experts operate, providing guidance and services at the local (communal) level.

The Livestock Council: The Livestock Council is an advisory body appointed by the Minister for a four-year term with the possibility of re-election, in accordance with Article 73 of Law No. 9864, dated 28.01.2008, "On amendments to Law No. 9426, dated 06.10.2005, 'On livestock breeding'." The Council's responsibilities include:

51. See: https://bujqesia.gov.al/qendrat-e-transferimit-te-teknologjive-bujqesore-qttb/

- Advising the Minister on livestock-related policies

- Offering opinions on:
  - Agricultural policies regulating the livestock sector
  - Long-term development programs
  - Proposed breed programs for approval
  - Annual reports on activities related to breed programs
  - Important regulations in the livestock sector
  - Recognition of indigenous breeds
  - Animal feed and nutrition
  - Changes in or introduction of new methods for breed valuation and animal assessment.

Legislative measures: The Livestock Production Sector, following the commitments stemming from the implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), has aimed to implement several policies related to the adoption of a series of legislative initiatives aimed at aligning national legislation with EU standards.

In the legislative measures, the process of harmonizing the legal framework has focused on the development of basic legislation in livestock production related to the zootechnical standards for purebred reproductive animals.

It also includes setting criteria for the use of purebred animals for breeding purposes, as well as establishing zootechnical standards and conditions for the trade of breeding materials, including requirements for the use of purebred animals for natural breeding and/or artificial insemination, and for the use of their sperm.

Legislative measures will further aim to align Albanian legislation in the livestock sector with EU regulations and improve inter-institutional coordination for its implementation.

The current policies in the Livestock Production Sector primarily focus on increasing the number of livestock (cattle and small ruminants) within livestock farms, aiming to consolidate these farms and orient them towards the market.

Additionally, the support for the production of purebred livestock aims to create and promote breed associations and the development of a domestic market for animals with identified genetic value.

Legislation on Livestock Production

1. Law No. 9426, dated 06.10.2005, "On livestock breeding," amended by Law No. 9864, dated 28.01.2008 "On amendments and additions to Law No. 9426, dated 06.10.2005, 'On Livestock Breeding,'" and Law No. 10137, dated 11.05.2009 "On amendments to the legislation in force regarding licenses, authorizations, and permits in the Republic of Albania."

2. Ministerial Order No. 4, dated 09.09.2008, adopting the regulation on "Minimum standards for breeding of domestic animals (Minimum standards for the breeding of cattle - calves)."

3. Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 1708, dated 29.12.2008, "On the implementation of programs for the in-situ conservation of indigenous livestock breeds."

4. Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 436, dated 02.06.2010, "On amendments to Decision No. 1634, dated 17.12.2008, of the Council of Ministers 'On the procedures and methods for financial support for the preservation of the genetic reserve of indigenous livestock breeds.'"

5. Ministerial Order No. 3, dated 05.08.2008, adopting the regulation on "Certification of purebred animals of cattle, sheep, goats, horses, and pigs, and their sperm, eggs, and embryos."

6. Ministerial Order No. 1, dated 04.03.2009, adopting the regulation on "standards for the breeding of pigs and poultry for reproduction."

7. Ministerial Order No. 2, dated 22.07.2008, adopting the regulation on "Reproduction of farm animals, production, and trade of breeding materials."

8. Ministerial Order No. 422, dated 17.12.2009, adopting the regulation on "Conditions for the registration of purebred breeders of cattle, sheep, goats, horses, pigs, and hybrid pigs in the genealogical register."

9. Ministerial Order No. 83, dated 16.03.2010, adopting the regulation on "Animal breeding organizations."

10. Ministerial Order No. 300, dated 08.10.2010, adopting the regulation on "Methods for measuring and evaluating production and other traits, as well as methods for evaluating the genetic values of purebred cattle breeders."

11. Ministerial Order No. 333, dated 17.11.2010, adopting the regulation on "Methods for measuring and evaluating production and other traits, as well as methods for evaluating the genetic values of purebred sheep and goats."

12. Ministerial Order No. 332, dated 17.11.2010, adopting the regulation on "Methods for measuring and evaluating production and other traits, as well as methods for evaluating the genetic values of purebred pigs and hybrid pigs."

13. Ministerial Order No. 303, dated 04.11.2011, adopting the regulation on "Zootechnical standards for purebred reproductive cattle species."

14. Ministerial Order No. 318, dated 14.11.2011, adopting the regulation on "Zootechnical standards for purebred reproductive sheep and goat species."

15. Ministerial Order No. 6, dated 09.01.2012, adopting the regulation on "Determining criteria for the use of purebred cattle for breeding purposes."

16. Ministerial Order No. 360, dated 27.12.2011, adopting the regulation on "Determining criteria for the use of purebred sheep and goats for breeding purposes."

17. Ministerial Order No. 237, dated 26.07.2012, adopting the regulation on "Zootechnical standards for purebred pigs for breeding purposes."

18. Ministerial Order No. 298, dated 10.10.2012, adopting the regulation on "Determining the criteria for the use of purebred pigs for breeding purposes."

19. Ministerial Order No. 346, dated 13.12.2012, adopting the regulation on "Determining the criteria for the use of hybrid pigs for breeding purposes."

The Veterinary Service in Albania is regulated by Law No. 10465 adopted on 29.09.2011, which aims to protect the health and welfare of animals, as well as control infectious diseases in animals. The main authority in this field is the Directorate of the Veterinary Service (DSHV), which is responsible for:

- **Development of health policies and strategies for animals**:
  - Creating programs for the prevention and control of infectious diseases in animals.
  - Proposing improvements to veterinary legislation in line with European Union legislation.
  - Monitoring the epidemiological situation of infectious diseases and informing the relevant institutions.

- **Supervision of veterinary activities**:
  - Control of sanitary-veterinary conditions and food safety for animals.
  - Registration of farms and livestock facilities, entities that trade animals, and individuals who transport animals.
  - Supervising the work of official veterinarians and monitoring animal health in rural and public areas.

- **Regional veterinary service**:
  - The regional veterinary service is organized under the Regional Directorates of Agriculture and has representatives in each district of Albania. They perform functions such as controlling sanitary conditions, protecting against infectious diseases, and monitoring animal husbandry conditions.

- **Animal identification and registration system**:
  - This sector is responsible for the identification and registration of animals and livestock farms, as well as the implementation of national legislation regarding these processes.

- **Control of animal trade and transport**:
  - The veterinary service supervises the trade and transport of animals and embryonic products to ensure that they meet safety and animal welfare requirements.

- **Monitoring and control of infectious diseases**:
  - The veterinary service is responsible for monitoring parasitic and infectious diseases and implementing measures to prevent and control them.

In this context, the DSHV is a key structure to ensure the health of animals and protect against diseases, aiming to safeguard public health and the sustainable development of the livestock sector.

The Institute of Food Safety and Veterinary Services (ISUV) is the national reference laboratory center for veterinary services (according to Law No. 10465). It operates under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and is responsible for developing strategies for tracking and combating infectious and parasitic diseases in land animals, aquatic animals, and poultry, in collaboration with the Directorate of Veterinary Services (DSHV). The Institute conducts veterinary diagnoses and health prophylaxis tests for animals in accordance with the national program. It also conducts testing programs for controlling epizootic diseases, veterinary medicines, and general disease diagnoses. Additionally, it carries out testing of food products of animal origin in cooperation with the Institute of Public Health. ISUV collaborates with FAO, WHO, WOAH, and other reference laboratories for confirming various infectious diseases.

The Department of Animal Health at ISUV consists of six sectors: bacteriology, virology, parasitology, mycology, veterinary epidemiology, and veterinary medicine control. This department employs 28 individuals, including 23 specialists and 5 laboratory technicians. Also, part of ISUV is the sector for biopreparations production, which consists of 11 people, including 3 specialists and 8 laboratory technicians. ISUV follows a quality management system based on the ISO 17025:2005 standard. The Quality Management Department at ISUV consists of 5 specialists and 13 quality officers (one for each sector at ISUV). Currently, 6 tests have been accredited by the General Directorate of Accreditation (the national accreditation body), and these tests have also been accredited by an external accreditation body (Accredia – the national accreditation body in Italy).

The State Veterinary Control Laboratory (LSHKV) is part of the veterinary service and is responsible for controlling veterinary medical products (medications and bioproducts) produced domestically or imported. Biopreparations in the country are produced by units authorized by the Ministry and are used only after being tested by LSHKV. The fees for conducting analyses are set by a joint directive from the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister responsible for finance.

Main Veterinary Laws

Law No. 10465, dated 29.09.2011 "*On veterinary services in the Republic of Albania*":

- This law establishes the basic principles for the protection of animal health and welfare, according to the international standards of the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) and the European Union.
- It regulates and organizes veterinary services, determining responsibilities, rules, and procedures to protect animal health and welfare.
- It ensures public health protection in Albania from zoonotic diseases transmitted by animals, in alignment with EU legislation.

Law No. 8702, dated 01.12.2000 "*On the system of identification and registration of animals*":

- The aim of this law is to regulate the movement of livestock through individual identification.
- It establishes the registration of livestock farms and assigns them a unique registration number.
- It ensures fast and accurate exchange of data on animal location for veterinary, zootechnical, and statistical purposes.
- It regulates the relationship between the responsible state institution and livestock farm owners.

Decisions of the Council of Ministers (DCM)

- DCM No. 646, 1995 "On the adoption of EU directives in the field of seafood products".
- DCM No. 320, dated 19.03.2008 "On the system of identification of animals and the registration of livestock farms".
- DCM No. 198, dated 19.02.2009 "On an amendment to DCM No. 320, dated 19.03.2008, on the system of identification of animals and registration of livestock farms".
- DCM No. 831, dated 29.07.2009 "On an addition to DCM No. 320, dated 19.03.2008, on the system of identification of animals and registration of livestock farms".
- DCM No. 408, dated 08.05.2013 "On compensation for culled animals".
- DCM No. 230, dated 20.03.2013 "On the determination of functions, specific duties, and standards of the local government veterinary service".
- CM Decision No. 41, dated 02.04.2013 "On the establishment of an inter-ministerial task force for the coordination and control of the oral vaccination campaign against rabies in Albania".
- DCM No. 283, dated 1.4.2015 "On the determination of types, rules, criteria, and procedures for the construction of facilities for the production, storage, and processing of agricultural and livestock products on agricultural land" (Amended by Decision No. 592, dated 1.07.2015; No. 956, dated 25.11.2015; No. 734, dated 20.10.2016; No. 373, dated 5.6.2024) This decision sets out the legal framework governing the construction of facilities intended for the production, storage, and processing of agricultural and livestock products on agricultural land. It establishes the types of permitted facilities, specifying which constructions are allowed within agricultural zones, rules and technical criteria for ensuring environmental sustainability, food safety, and compliance with national and EU standards, and procedures for obtaining permits and approvals from relevant authorities.

Within the framework of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, Article 70 regarding the alignment of legislation, and Article 95 "Agriculture and the agro-industrial sector", several sub-legal acts have been adopted in accordance with Law No. 9308, dated 04.11.2004 "On the veterinary service and inspection" and, later, following its abrogation, in line with Law No. 10465, dated 29.09.2011 "On veterinary services in the Republic of Albania." These acts aim to improve standards in animal health protection, especially regarding zoonotic diseases with a negative impact on human health, and to strengthen official control, enhancing the protection of public health and consumer interests.

The four Regional Agricultural Extension Agencies (AREB)[52], located in Shkodër, Lushnjë, Korçë, and Tiranë (which also covers the Dibër region), operate under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, in accordance with Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 147, dated 13.3.2018, "On the establishment, organization, and functioning of regional agricultural extension agencies." These regional agencies aim to become key actors in the development of a competitive and sustainable agricultural sector in the country by working in long-term partnerships with beneficiaries. Their main duties and responsibilities include:

- Provide information and advisory services on the technical and technological development of farms to enhance competitiveness in agriculture.
- Offer information and assist farmers in benefiting from national support schemes, IPARD, and other projects in agriculture and rural development.
- Encourage and support the creation and functioning of various forms of farmer cooperation.
- Organize and conduct professional training for farmers in agriculture and rural development.

52. See: https://bujqesia.gov.al/drejtorite-e-bujqesise/, and https://www.bujqesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2.1-struktura-AREB-TIRANE.doc

- Ensure access to information on standards related to the environment, quality, marketing, organic farming, and products with geographical indications.

- Inform and advise farmers on the selection and use of agricultural machinery and equipment, providing free technical assistance.

The National Authority for Veterinary and Plant Protection (AKVMB)[53] is responsible for ensuring the health and safety of animals, plants, and agricultural products in Albania. It operates under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and plays a crucial role in safeguarding public health, promoting agricultural sustainability, and facilitating international trade in agricultural and food products. Key responsibilities of AKVMB include:

- **Veterinary services:** Monitor and control animal health, prevent the spread of infectious diseases, and ensure food safety in animal-derived products.

- **Plant Protection:** Implement phytosanitary measures to prevent and control plant diseases and pests that could harm agricultural production.

- **Pesticide and fertilizer regulation:** Oversee the import, distribution, and use of pesticides and fertilizers, ensuring compliance with safety standards.

- **Food safety and inspection:** Conduct inspections of farms, food processing facilities, and markets to ensure that products meet national and international food safety standards.

- **Border control and biosecurity:** Manage veterinary and phytosanitary border inspections to prevent the entry of pests, diseases, and unsafe food products into the country.

- **Legislation and compliance:** Develop and enforce laws, policies, and regulations related to veterinary services and plant protection.

- **Capacity building and training:** Provide training and support for farmers, veterinarians, and agricultural professionals to improve best practices in plant and animal health management.

AKVMB operates throughout the entire territory of the Republic of Albania and is organized at the central level through the General Directorate, and at the regional level via four regional veterinary and plant protection directorates in Elbasan, Vlorë, Shkodër, and Tirana (which covers also the Dibër region), along with direct veterinary service units. Regional directorates operate within their jurisdiction and carry out the following tasks:

- Assess needs and issues related to veterinary and plant protection services, proposing solutions to the General Directorate.

- Plan and submit needs for veterinary and plant protection services to the General Directorate.

- Coordinate and monitor the delivery of veterinary and plant protection services in their territory.

- Prepare reports on sample collection, pathological material, and test results for suspected and confirmed diseases.

- Provide periodic reports on plant infection rates and plant product status.

- Detail and implement work plans approved by the General Directorate in accordance with current legal frameworks.

- Issue documents and certificates according to legal provisions, sub-legal acts, and authorizations from the General Directorate.

- Perform additional tasks assigned by law or the General Directorate.

The National Food Authority (AKU)[54] is a government agency under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, responsible for national inspection and management in the areas of consumer protection, plant protection, and animal welfare. AKU operates under Law No. 10,433, dated June 16, 2011, on "Inspection in the Republic of Albania," specifically Article 7 on the "Inspection program principles." The timing of inspections is defined in the annual inspection program, although random inspections are conducted when required by law. Article 4 of the same law

53. See: https://akvmb.gov.al/
54. See: https://aku.gov.al/

outlines the purpose of inspections, which include: i) Assessing compliance with legal requirements; ii) Documenting best practices for adhering to legal requirements; iii) Advising inspected entities on proper implementation of legal obligations; iv) Ordering corrective actions for legal violations and eliminating their consequences; and, v) Imposing penalties and taking other administrative measures to mitigate risks to public interest. The National Food Authority (AKU) in Albania is the regulatory body responsible for ensuring food safety, quality, and compliance with national and international standards. AKU oversees the entire food supply chain, from production and processing to distribution and consumption, aiming to protect public health and ensure food safety. Its main tasks include:

- Monitoring and inspecting food production, processing, and distribution facilities.
- Ensuring compliance with food safety regulations and standards.
- Conducting food quality control and testing to prevent contamination and ensure safety.
- Implementing food safety laws and regulations set by the government.
- Coordinating with other national and international institutions to align food safety standards.
- Providing guidance and training to businesses and stakeholders in the food industry on best practices.
- Issuing certifications and approvals for food products, as required by law.

Agriculture Sector in Dibër Municipality (composed of ten men and three women) is currently focused on data collection and reporting, while providing limited support to farmers through extension services.[55]

Certification

HACCP[56] is an international standard based on the principles of the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, encompassing a full set of principles for food hygiene and safety. It is a preventive system for food safety management, which is mandatory for all food businesses in accordance with European Regulations (EC) 178/2002[57] and 852/2004[58], as well as National Guideline No. 20, dated November 25, 2010, from the Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Consumer Protection.[59]

The HACCP certification process typically takes between 14 to 30 days, depending on the specific requirements of the business, and include:

- On-site visit: A specialized consulting company visits the business to assess its operations and provide recommendations for improvements and adaptations to meet HACCP standards.
- Preparation of documentation: The business must prepare all necessary documentation, including records, procedures, and plans related to food safety and hygiene.
- Establishment of record-keeping systems: A system for maintaining records and data must be set up, ensuring that food safety procedures are properly documented and traceable.
- Inspection by certification body: The certification body inspects the business to ensure that all HACCP requirements are met, checking both documentation and practices.
- Issuance of certification: After a successful inspection, the certification body issues the HACCP certificate, confirming that the business complies with food safety standards.

55. Findings from meeting and interviews with the municipality.
56. See: https://aku.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Udhezim_Nr.20.pdf
57. See: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32002R0178
58. See: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32004R0852
59. See: https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/alb144203.pdf

2.4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on fieldwork, observations, and interviews conducted with key value chain actors, including producers and processors, and specialists of milk value chain, the following findings were identified:

Opportunities:

- Investment in infrastructure—such as milk collection systems, cooling tanks, and testing laboratory in the local facility in Muhurr—would ensure better milk quality control and food safety.

- Strengthening governance and ensuring better traceability could address issues in the milk supply chain and improve compliance with quality standards, helping the dairy sector grow sustainably.

- Increasing the milk supply from dairy farmers could significantly enhance the final production capacity of the dairy facility, driven by local market demand and consumer preference for domestic dairy products. To ensure inclusive growth, it is essential to support both women and men dairy farmers in scaling up production, particularly by addressing gender-specific barriers such as limited access to resources, training, and services. Additionally, there is an opportunity for post-project sustainability through the local dairy facility, which can be strengthened by promoting women's participation in farm management.

- Existence of examples in good dairy farming practices and modern stables in the region and in the country that could serve as good models for replication in Muhurr.

- Women are engaged in all stages of the value chain, from animal care and milking to milk delivery at the dairy facility. However, they lack control over assets, knowledge of best practices in animal husbandry, and, most importantly, access to tools and equipment that could ease their workload and enhance productivity. While they possess basic skills, they can further develop their expertise through targeted training and support with necessary equipment, enabling them to boost productivity, gain greater control over assets, and simultaneously reduce their workload.

- Small-sized dairy farmers can enhance productivity by applying Good Dairy Farming Practices, particularly in animal care, milking hygiene, environmental management, and socio-economic aspects. By adopting these practices, they can improve milk quality, ensure sustainable farming, and strengthen their economic resilience.

- There is a significant opportunity to apply Good Dairy Farming Practices, specifically in:

  - **Animal care:** Ensuring proper nutrition, health, and welfare of livestock, while also recognizing and enhancing the role of women in daily animal husbandry. Tailored training for women can improve care standards and empower them as knowledgeable livestock managers.

  - **Milking hygiene:**Maintaining cleanliness in the milking process to improve milk quality and safety, with a focus on supporting women, who are frequently responsible for milking activities, by providing access to appropriate equipment, infrastructure, and technical knowledge.

  - **Environment:** Implementing sustainable farming methods to protect natural resources and the environment, while ensuring women are included in decision-making and benefit equally from environmentally friendly innovations such as improved waste management.

  - **Socio-economic management:**Strengthening business skills, resource management, and market access for long-term viability, with specific efforts to build women's capacities in financial literacy, cooperative leadership, and entrepreneurial development, enabling their equal participation in and benefit from the dairy value chain.

Limitations:

Regarding the LIMITATIONS faced by the value chain, they can be summarized as follows:

- Most activities in dairy farming are informal, meaning that workers and producers (especially women) are not registered with tax offices or authorities. As a result, they lose their rights to benefit from subsidy schemes, health insurance, pensions, and various programs and projects.

- Small-sized farmers (fewer than 10 cattle or 100 small ruminants) are excluded from the 2025 agricultural support scheme, limiting their access to financial resources and investment opportunities. This exclusion disproportionately affects women farmers, who are more likely to operate small-scale farms due to limited access to land, credit, and productive assets. Additionally, the high informality in the milk supply chain creates barriers for women to formalize their businesses, access support services, and benefit from market linkages. The situation is further exacerbated by inadequate extension services, which often fail to reach women due to structural biases, limited mobility, and lack of tailored approaches. Moreover, the lack of governance in the dairy commodity chain—especially regarding milk traceability and law enforcement—reduces accountability and safety, with gender implications in consumer health and women's roles as caregivers and household managers.

- Raw milk quality control is insufficient, with incomplete farm registers and improper sampling methods. There is no testing laboratory at the dairy facility, and milking is mostly done by hand by the women, using outdated equipment, leading to contamination risks. Milk collection systems are underdeveloped, particularly in mountainous areas, and many dairy farms lack cooling tanks and proper equipment, which poses food safety risks. Seasonal fluctuations and limited milk supply further constrain production, particularly at local facility in Muhurr which would be able to increase production of byproducts with more milk.

- Farmers have limited knowledge of Good Dairy Farming Practices, particularly in animal care, milking hygiene, and environmental management. Many are unaware of minimum milk standards, proper hygiene in milk collection, or how to manage waste effectively. Small ruminant farms also experience low milk yield due to poor practices.

- Women face poor working conditions, lack control over assets, and have limited access to tools and equipment to improve productivity. The absence of youth in dairy farming, compounded by high migration, limits the workforce and threatens the sustainability of the value chain.

Regarding Gender Inequality Issues and the Inclusion of Women in the value chain, the information gathered from meetings and interviews shows that women are engaged in all stages of the value chain, from animal care and milking to milk delivery at the dairy facility. However, they lack control over assets, knowledge of best practices in animal husbandry, and, most importantly, access to tools and equipment that could ease their workload and enhance productivity.

While they possess basic skills, they can further develop their expertise through targeted training and support with necessary equipment, enabling them to boost productivity, gain greater control over assets, and simultaneously reduce their workload.

Women are rarely involved in decision-making processes, with men (especially the consolidators to whom women sell their products) being the decision-making authority regarding pricing, business management processes, financing opportunities, etc. Women face poor working conditions, lack control over assets, and have limited access to tools and equipment to improve productivity. The absence of youth in dairy farming, compounded by high migration, limits the workforce and threatens the sustainability of the value chain.

Regarding financing opportunities, for many families, dairy farming is the primary source of income, with profits earned after delivering collected milk to the dairy facility. However, small-sized farmers (with fewer than 10 cattle or 100 small ruminants) face significant financial constraints. These challenges are exacerbated by their exclusion from the 2025 agricultural support scheme, limiting their access to financial resources.

Additionally, the milk supply chain remains largely informal, and there is a lack of governance, particularly regarding milk traceability and law enforcement, which further complicates access to financing. Small farmers, especially women, often lack formal contracts and transparent systems, making it difficult for them to demonstrate business viability and secure financial

backing. Microcredit represents an important financing tool for small farmers in Albania, particularly to those excluded from traditional banking systems due to limited access to collateral, a lack of formal business structures, and high risk. Microcredit institutions provide small loans that are more accessible and often come with less stringent requirements compared to traditional bank loans. These loans can help small farmers invest in equipment, improve infrastructure, or enhance productivity. However, there are challenges associated with microcredit for small farmers in Albania. While microcredit is available in rural areas, access to such financial products is still limited, particularly in remote areas where farmers may not be aware of available services or may face difficulties in qualifying for these loans. Microcredit institutions may charge higher interest rates compared to traditional financial institutions, which can increase the financial burden on small farmers, making it harder for them to repay loans. Many small farmers, especially women, have limited knowledge of how to manage finances, apply for loans, or assess the costs and benefits of borrowing, which can lead to poor decision-making and difficulties in repaying microcredits.[60]

Opportunities for improving microcredit access

Raising awareness about available microcredit options and financial literacy can help women and farmers better understand and access these resources. Providing guidance on how to apply for loans, as well as how to manage repayments, would empower farmers to use microcredit more effectively.

Developing loan products that are specifically tailored to the needs of women dairy farmers (e.g., low-interest loans for purchasing milking equipment or building milk storage facilities) could reduce the financial burden and improve productivity.Facilitating group lending programs where women and small farmers can collectively apply for loans as a cooperative could reduce risk and improve access to credit.

Strengthening partnerships between microcredit institutions and government support schemes could increase access to low-interest loans and other financial products, enabling small farmers, particularly women, to invest in long-term improvements to their operations.

60. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development. UN Women. 2023. See: https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/ard_web_final.pdf

2.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MILK VALUE CHAIN

The intervention plan outlines a series of activities aimed at improving the dairy farming value chain, with specific attention to enhancing productivity, product quality, gender equality, financial access, and long-term sustainability.

1. Enhance knowledge and application of good dairy farming practices among women farmers in the administrative unit of Muhurr to increase productivity and ensure better quality milk and dairy products

- **Training and capacity building:** Regular training workshops for farmers, especially women, to improve their knowledge of good dairy farming practices. This should include topics such as animal care, milking hygiene, and socio-economic management. Specialized training in animal husbandry, waste management, and animal welfare should also be provided. **Impact**: Improved productivity and higher quality dairy products in the short, medium, and long term.

- **Pilot programs for good dairy practices:** Pilot programs at selected women farms, where modern practices can be demonstrated. These pilot farms can also showcase the use of modern stables and cooling tanks, acting as role models for the wider community. **Impact**: Demonstration of successful dairy practices, enhancing local adoption over time.

- **Support for equipment and tools**: Increase women's access to necessary equipment, including milking machines, cooling tanks, and hygienic containers, through microcredit schemes, partnerships, and local grants. Women farmers need support with basic tools (such as gloves and proper containers) to reduce contamination risks. **Impact**: Enhanced productivity and improved product quality, with continuous benefits in the long run.

2. Improve infrastructure and quality monitoring systems to enhance production capacity and product quality

- **Support establishing a testing laboratory**: A testing lab needs to be established at the dairy facility to ensure the quality and safety of raw milk before processing, and training should be provided to female personnel. This is a critical step in maintaining milk standards and ensuring the production of high-quality dairy products. **Impact**: Improvement in product quality and safety in the short, medium, and long term.

- **Develop raw milk monitoring system**: Improvements need to be made in the raw milk collection infrastructure, particularly in mountainous areas. A new transport system for hygienic and timely delivery of milk to the dairy facility should be developed. **Impact**: Increased milk quality and quantity, sustained over time

3. Improve farmers' access to financial resources to enhance their productivity and sustainability

- **Promote financing schemes**: Work should be done with microcredit institutions to provide low-interest loans tailored for women and small farmers, helping them purchase equipment and improve their farms. Financial literacy training to be organized to ensure farmers understand how to navigate microcredit systems and loan applications.

  Impact: Better financial access, leading to increased productivity in the short, medium, and long term.

- **Advocate for inclusion in agricultural support scheme**: Efforts will be made to include small-sized farmers, particularly women, in the 2025 agricultural support scheme, providing them with necessary financial assistance. **Impact**: Improved financial access and sustainability for small farmers, especially women, with long-term benefits.

4. Empower women and enhance gender equality

- **Promote women's leadership in decision-making:** Initiatives should be launched to involve women in decision-making processes both at the farm level and within the dairy facility's management. Women's group should be created to encourage knowledge exchange, joint decision-making, and collective investments.

Impact: Increased empowerment of women in decision-making, leading to more inclusive practices in the medium and long term.

- **Conduct women-only training sessions**: Specific training programs for women focused on advanced dairy farming techniques, asset management, and entrepreneurship. These sessions provide women with the skills needed to manage milk quality, finances, and business strategies. **Impact**: Enhanced capabilities and leadership roles for women, contributing to long-term sustainability.

- **Support for women's access to tools and equipment**: Support women with tools and equipment, including milking machines and cooling tanks, to improve their productivity and reduce their workload. **Impact**: Increased productivity, efficiency, and quality of work for women in the dairy farming sector.

5. Build local and institutional capacity to ensure long-term sustainability and resilience of dairy farming

- **Enhance extension services and increase stakeholder collaboration**: local extension services need to be strengthened to offer ongoing support to dairy farmers, especially women, particularly in remote areas. Field visits, demonstrations, and farmer exchange programs should be organized to foster knowledge sharing. Encourage collaboration between farmers, the dairy facility, agricultural authorities, and financial institutions. **Impact**: Enhanced support and collaboration leading to sustained growth in the dairy sector.

6. Build resilience to environmental challenges and reduce the environmental impact of dairy farming

- **Promote climate-resilient farming practices**: Training on water-efficient irrigation, improved fodder management, and climate-resilient crops to help farmers adapt to climate change. These practices reduce vulnerability to changing weather patterns and improve long-term sustainability. **Impact**: Increased climate resilience in farming practices, with medium- to long-term sustainability.

- **Encourage environmental sustainability**: Waste management and recycling systems should be introduced on farms to reduce pollution. Sustainable farming techniques, including the use of organic fertilizers and animal feed, need to be promoted to reduce environmental impact. **Impact**: Reduced environmental footprint of dairy farming, promoting sustainability over time.

7. Ensure a stable and sustainable labor force by addressing migration issues and improving working conditions

- **Attract youth to dairy farming**: Incentives such as scholarships, mentorship programs, and career development pathways in agriculture will be developed to attract youth to the dairy farming sector. Awareness campaigns also highlight the opportunities available in dairy farming. **Impact**: Increased youth participation in dairy farming, ensuring a sustainable workforce in the medium and long term.

- **Improve working conditions for women**: Labor-saving technologies and practices should be introduced to ease the workload of women, improving their working conditions. Efforts need also to be made to ensure fair wages and better labor rights for women in the dairy sector. **Impact**: Improved working conditions and fair labor practices, particularly benefiting women in the medium and long term.

This intervention plan offers a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges within the dairy value chain while capitalizing on available strengths and opportunities. The outlined activities are designed to improve productivity, quality, gender equality, financial access, environmental sustainability, and labor conditions. Each activity contributes to the sector's long-term resilience and profitability, ensuring a sustainable future for dairy farming in the region.

Table 9. Recommendations for the Milk Value Chain

№	Activity	Impact		
		Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
1	**Enhance knowledge and application of good dairy farming practices to increase productivity and ensure better quality milk and dairy products.**			
1.1	Training and Capacity Building o Organize training workshops for farmers, especially women, on good dairy farming practices, including animal care, milking hygiene, and socio-economic management. o Provide training on modern milking techniques and the importance of hygiene standards in dairy farming. o Offer specialized training in animal husbandry, waste management, manure management, and animal welfare.	X	X	X
1.2	Pilot Programs for Good Dairy Practices o Implement pilot programs in selected farms where farmers can showcase modern practices and act as role models for the community. o Introduce modern stables and cooling tanks at pilot farms to demonstrate their effectiveness.			
1.3	Support for Equipment and Tools o Support access to milking equipment, cooling tanks, and hygienic containers through microcredit schemes, partnerships with municipality, projects and local grants. o Support with basic tools (such as gloves, proper containers, etc.) to women farmers to reduce the risk of contamination.			
2	Improve infrastructure and quality monitoring systems to enhance production capacity and product quality			
2.1	Support establishing a testing laboratory to ensure the quality and safety of raw milk before processing.	X	X	X
2.2	Develop Raw Milk Monitoring System o Improve milk collection infrastructure, particularly in mountainous areas, to ensure better access and reduce milk spoilage. o Support the development of a transport system for timely and hygienic delivery of milk to the dairy facility.		X	X
3	**Improve farmers' access to financial resources to enhance their productivity and sustainability**			
3.1	Promote Financing Schemes: o Work with microcredit institutions to provide tailored financial products for small farmers, such as low-interest loans for equipment purchase and farm improvements. o Organize financial literacy training for farmers to understand the microcredit system, loan application processes, and repayment plans.	X	X	X
3.2	Advocate for the inclusion of small-sized farmers, especially women, in the agricultural support scheme to help them access necessary financial assistance		X	X
4	**Empower women and enhance gender equality**			
4.1	Promote Women's Leadership in Decision-Making o Facilitate women's involvement in decision-making processes, both at the farm level and within the dairy facility's management. o Create women's group for knowledge exchange, joint decision-making, and collective investments.		X	X

№	Activity	Impact		
		Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
4.2	o Conduct women-only training sessions on advanced dairy farming techniques, asset management, and entrepreneurship. o Provide women with skills in managing milk quality, farm finances, and business strategies.		X	X
4.3	Support for Women's Access to Tools and Equipment o Ensure women have access to the tools and equipment they need to improve productivity and reduce their workload, such as milking machines, proper containers, and cooling tanks.	X	X	X
5	**Build local and institutional capacity to ensure long-term sustainability and resilience of the dairy farming**			
5.1	Enhance Extension Services and Increase Stakeholder Collaboration o Strengthen the local extension service infrastructure to provide ongoing support and advice to dairy farmers, particularly in remote areas. o Organize regular field visits, demonstrations, and farmer exchange programs to promote knowledge sharing. o Foster collaboration between dairy farmers, the dairy facility, agricultural authorities, and financial institutions to ensure long-term success and sustainability. o Advocate for better governance within the milk supply chain to enhance traceability and quality controls.	X	X	X
6	Build resilience to environmental challenges and reduce the environmental impact of dairy farming			
6.1	Promote Climate-Resilient Farming Practices o Introduce practices that help farmers adapt to climate change, such as water-efficient irrigation, improved fodder management, and climate-resilient crops. o Provide training on sustainable farming techniques to mitigate the impact of climate change on fodder cultivation.		X	X
6.2	Encourage Environmental Sustainability o Support the development of waste management and recycling systems on farms to reduce pollution. o Promote the use of organic and sustainable fertilizers and animal feed to lower environmental impacts.		X	X
7	Ensure a stable and sustainable labor force by addressing migration issues and improving working conditions			
7.1	Attract Youth to Dairy Farming o Develop incentives to encourage youth participation in dairy farming, such as scholarships for training programs, mentorship, and career development pathways in agriculture. o Promote the dairy sector as a viable career choice for young people by organizing awareness campaigns about opportunities in dairy farming.		X	X
7.2	Improve Working Conditions for Women: o Implement labor-saving technologies and practices, especially for women, to reduce their workload and improve working conditions. o Advocate for better labor rights and fair wages for women working in the dairy sector.		X	X

Local Partners/Collaboration: the municipality; the agriculture directorate, the local dairy facility, livestock associations. The intervention plan is designed to address the various challenges faced by small-sized dairy farmers in Muhurr AU while leveraging existing strengths and opportunities. By focusing on improving farming practices, infrastructure, financial access, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, the plan aims to create a more resilient and profitable dairy sector. The involvement of all stakeholders, including women, youth, and local institutions, will be key to ensuring the long-term success of this intervention.

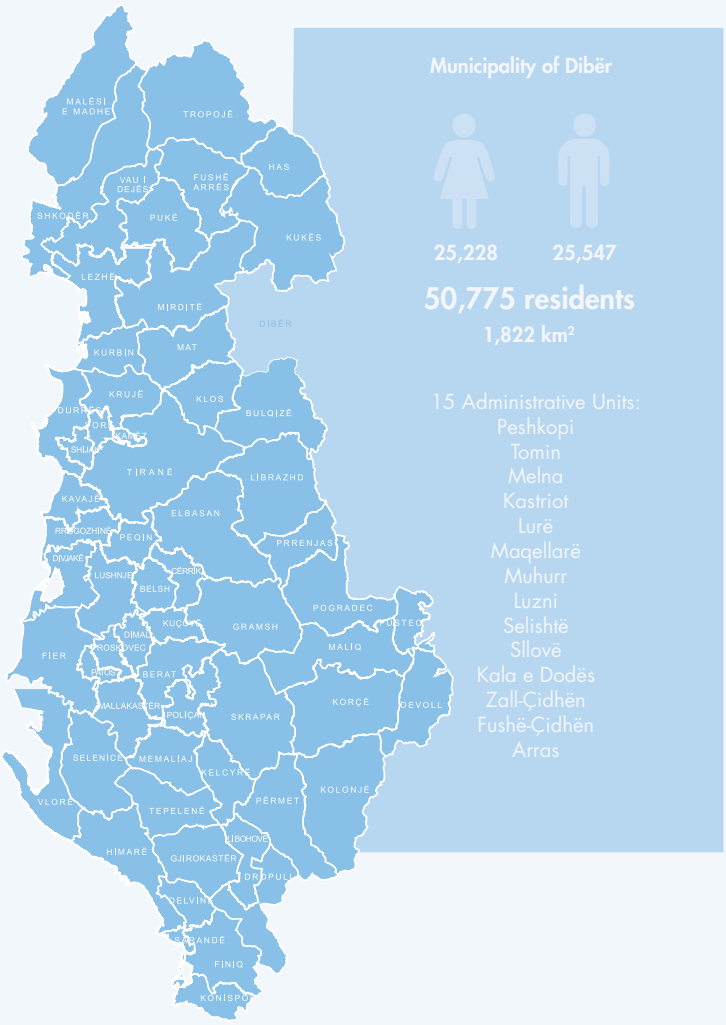
Part 4
Annexes

Annex 1. General Background of the Municipality of Dibër

Dibër Municipality is located in the northeastern part of Albania, bordered by the Republic of North Macedonia to the east. The municipality covers an area of approximately 1,822 square kilometers, making it one of the larger regions in Albania. The territory is defined by a diverse topography, with the River Drini i Zi (Black Drin) running through it. The municipality is surrounded by the Korab-Deshat mountain range, the highest in Albania, and the Lurë-Selishtë mountain range. These mountain ranges are part of important national parks: the Korab-Korritnik Nature Park and the Lura National Park. The region is renowned for its natural beauty, including 23 glacial lakes. Approximately 90% of the territory is rural, consisting of 141 villages, while the remaining 10% is urban, centered around the town of Peshkopia, the administrative heart of the municipality.

Dibër Municipality is composed of 15 administrative units, namely: Peshkopi, Tomin, Melan, Kastriot, Lurë, Maqellarë, Muhurr, Luzni, Selishtë, Sllovë, Kala e Dodës, Zall-Dardhë, Zall-Reç, Fushë Çidhën, and Arras. In 2023, the population of Dibër Municipality was 50,775, with a nearly equal distribution of 25,547 males and 25,228 females.

Figure 4. General information on Dibër Municipality



The economy in Dibër is predominantly agricultural, with fertile lands in the Drini i Zi Valley supporting the cultivation of cereals, vegetables and fruits. Livestock farming is also an essential part of the local economy, with small ruminants commonly raised in the area. The region is also known for its natural resources, including forests, and for its non-timber forest products.

The urban center of Dibër is located in the town of Peshkopia, which serves as the municipality's economic and administrative hub. While basic infrastructure such as roads, schools, and healthcare facilities exist in the urban area, the rural population – which makes up 90% of the municipality - faces challenges in accessing advanced services and infrastructure.

Dibër has a rich cultural heritage, influenced by traditional elements, as it has historically been a crossroads of various civilizations. The municipality is known for its folklore, traditional music, and festivals. Its architectural landscape is marked by old stone houses, some of which date back centuries.

The natural environment of Dibër is of significant importance. The municipality is home to various protected areas, including the Korab-Deshat and Lurë-Selishtë mountain ranges, which are part of Albania's broader conservation efforts. These regions provide habitats for many endemic species, contributing to the municipality's commitment to environmental preservation.

Population

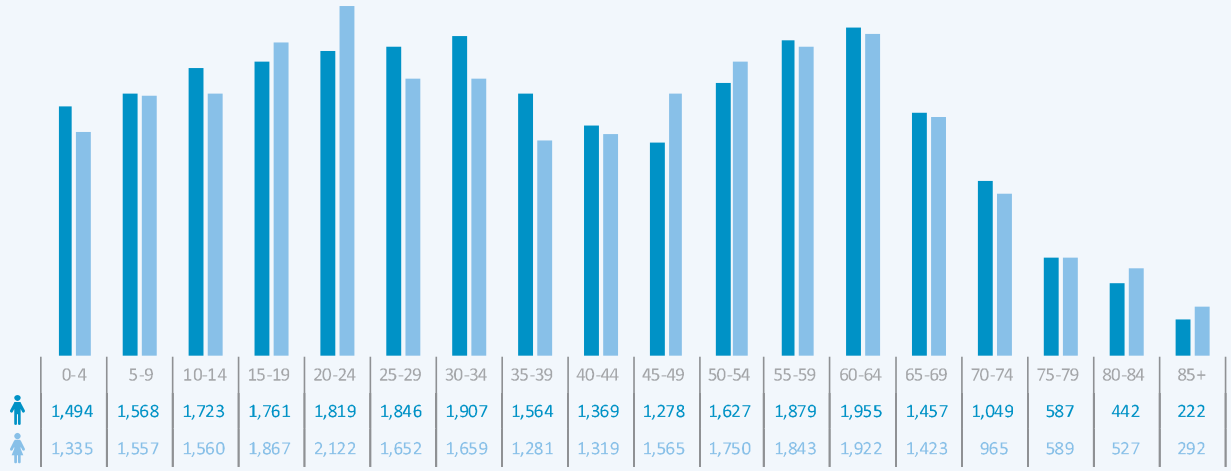
The largest population group is in the 20-24 age range, with a total of 3,941 people, of which 1,819 are male and 2,122 are female. The age group with the smallest population is that aged 85 and older, with just 514 people, of which 222 are male and 292 are female.

In most age groups, there are more females than males, particularly in the younger and older age ranges. For instance, in the 20-24 age group, there are significantly more females (2,122) than males (1,819). This trend continues in the older age groups, where the female population outnumbers males, especially in the 75+ age groups.

The population in the 0-34 age groups constitutes a significant portion of the total population, with the 20-24 age group being the largest. This reflects a young and potentially economically active population, which is vital for future development and labor force participation.

The share of elderly individuals (65+) is considerable, with 2,880 people in the 65-69 age group and 3,877 in the 60-64 group. The number of elderly individuals decreases with the increase in age, with 514 people the 85+ group.

Figure 5. Population by age group and gender



Source: INSTAT 2024.

The following data provides insights into family structures and living arrangements within Dibër Municipality in 2023. Married couples (21,842): The majority of family units in Dibër consist of married couples. Gender-sensitive interventions could focus on ensuring equal access to resources, rights, and services for both husbands and wives within these households.

Cohabiting partners (104): A relatively small number of families live in cohabitation without formalizing their marriage. This group may face challenges in terms of legal recognition, especially regarding inheritance, social protection, and access to benefits. Policies could aim at improving the legal rights and recognition of cohabiting couples.

Children living with married parents (13,779): A significant portion of children in Dibër live in traditional family structures with married parents. Gender-sensitive support in these households could focus on parenting resources, education, and promoting gender equality in caregiving roles.

Children living with unmarried parents (56): The number of children in unmarried households is relatively low, but it may still indicate the need for policies that provide additional support and protection for children and parents in non-traditional family arrangements.

Single fathers (136) and single mothers (772): Single-parent households, especially those headed by women, often face challenges in terms of financial stability, social support, and access to services. Gender-sensitive policies should focus on providing targeted support, such as financial aid, childcare services, and employment opportunities for single parents.

Children living with single parents (1,481): There is a larger number of children living with single parents, primarily with mothers. These children may require additional social services, including support for education, healthcare, and emotional well-being.

The data highlights a significant number of single mothers who could benefit from enhanced support mechanisms in Dibër Municipality, such as financial assistance, housing, and childcare.

Table 10. Population by family status, 2023

Total Population	50,775
Family members	38,170
Married couples	21,842
Cohabiting partners	104
Children living with married parents	13,779
Children living with unmarried parents	56
Single father	136
Single mother	772
Children living with single parents	1,481

Source: INSTAT 2024.

The highest concentration of household members is in Peshkopi (14,710), the urban center of the municipality, while smaller units like Lurë (501) and Zall Reç (335) have fewer households.

Table 11. Number of household members, 2023

Administrative unit	Number of household members
Total	50,775
Zall Reç	335
Zall Dardhë	419
Lurë	501
Selishtë	847
Kala e Dodës	1,045
Fushë Muhurr	1,652
Sllovë	1,761
Luzni	1,811
Arras	1,866
Fushë Çidhën	2,378
Melan	2,992
Kastriot	5,222
Qendër Tomin	6,531
Maqellarë	8,705

Source: Dibër Municipality, 2024.

Infrastructure: Land, Water, Electricity, and Social Life

Dibër Municipality covers a total area of 93,787.60 hectares (ha), comprising various categories of land use and natural resources. The distribution of land is as follows:

Table 12. Land distribution

Category	Area (ha)
Total urban area	2.00 ha
Agricultural land	15,639 ha
Natural territory	74,389 ha
Water bodies	532 ha
Area covered by infrastructure	1,211 ha
Protected natural and cultural areas	26,637 ha

Source: Territorial Development Plan.[61]

61. Territorial Development Plan, General Local Plan, Dibër, http://dibra.gov.al/transparenca-dhe-llogaridhenia-ekonomikofinanciare/plani-strategjik-i-zhvillimit-te-bashkise/

The data reveals that natural areas dominate the territorial landscape of Dibër, comprising approximately 79% of the total area (74,389 ha). This reflects the region's rich biodiversity, natural forests, and mountainous terrain, which play a critical role in supporting ecosystem services, tourism, and local livelihoods. The protected natural and cultural areas (26,637 ha) form a significant portion of the territory, highlighting the region's commitment to preserving natural heritage and promoting sustainable development. Agricultural land accounts for 16.6% of the total area (15,639 ha), which is vital for the local economy as it supports crop cultivation, livestock farming, and rural livelihoods. The urban area of Dibër is notably small, at just 2 ha, indicating that urban development is minimal compared to the overall size of the region. The infrastructure area (1,211 ha) likely represents road networks, public services, and facilities essential for transport, logistics, and community well-being.

Utilities: Water and Electricity Services

In rural areas of Dibër, residents have faced issues with water supply, particularly during adverse weather conditions. The local government has taken steps to manage and improve water supply and sewerage systems in Dibër's villages, aiming to provide more reliable access to clean water for residents.

Albania relies almost entirely on hydropower for its electricity needs. In Dibër, the Gjoricë Hydro Power Plant contributes to local energy production. Constructed between 2014 and 2015, this plant was developed by ATB Riva Calzoni Rinnovabili[62].

Table 13. Housing units and water supply systems, 2023

Category	Housing units	Household units
Total	10,074	10,455
Water supply network (inside the house)	8,180	8,483
Water supply network (outside the house but within the building)	901	941
Water supply network (outside the building)	579	607
Other water supply system	284	287
No water supply system	130	137

Source: INSTAT, 2024

Dibër has 10,074 inhabited housing units and 10,455 household units. The availability of water supply systems directly impacts women's time use, health, and capacity for education, employment, and community engagement. About 81.2% of housing units (8,180 out of 10,074) and 81.1% of household units (8,483 out of 10,455) have access to water within the house. Among the households relying on water from outside their home but within the building, 8.9% of housing units (901 out of 10,074) and 9% of household units (941 out of 10,455) experience limited but manageable disruption in supply.

However, 5.7% of housing units (579 out of 10,074) and 5.8% of household units (607 out of 10,455) rely on water supply from outside their building, which has a significant impact on women's daily activities. Households that rely on other water supply systems, such as wells or rainwater collection, account for 2.8% of housing units (284 out of 10,074) and 2.7% of household units (287 out of 10,455). These systems are less reliable and, during dry periods, the pressure to secure water often increases the unpaid labor of women and girls. The most vulnerable households in Dibër are the 1.3% of housing units (130 out of 10,074) and 1.3% of household units (137 out of 10,455) without any water supply system at all. Women and girls in these households are often forced to walk long distances to collect water.

62. Territorial Development Strategy, Dibër Municipality. http://dibra.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Plani-i-Zhvillimit_PPV-Diber.pdf

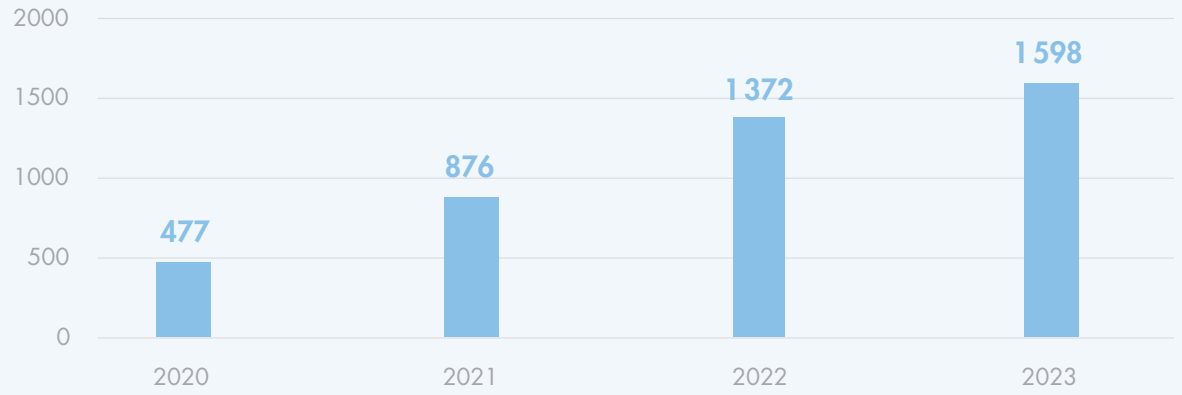
Public Infrastructure and Social Life

The urban layout of Dibër presents significant challenges for social engagement, particularly for women. The region faces a shortage of communal spaces and cultural venues where women can gather, network, and participate in public life. This absence limits opportunities for social interaction, community involvement, and access to support services. The lack of well-maintained public areas with adequate lighting and secure walkways further restricts women's ability to move freely and safely within their communities, impacting their mobility and daily activities. In rural areas, the problem is more pronounced, with women experiencing greater social isolation and reduced access to essential services. These limitations affect their mental well-being, economic opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes within their communities.

Social Services and Economic Aid

The provision of social services in Dibër is primarily aimed at supporting families in need, promoting the well-being of children, and enhancing the quality of life for at-risk populations. Key services include childcare support, access to education, healthcare services, and social welfare programs.

Figure 6. Families in receipt of economic assistance



Source: MTBP 2022-2024, Dibër Municipality.

The data shows a consistent increase in the number of families receiving economic assistance in the Dibër region.

Table 14. Social housing demand

Municipality	Number of families without housing	Average number of members per family	Total residents without housing (n)	% of residents without housing
Dibër (initial)	750	5.08	3,810	6.18%
Dibër (adjusted)	715	5.08	3,632	5.89%
Total	**1,465**	**5.08**	**7,442**	**12.07%**

Source: Dibër Municipality

In Dibër Municipality, the population with disabilities in 2023 is reported as 2,568 individuals. These difficulties are categorized into various areas, including vision, hearing, walking, memory, daily self-care, and communication. Below is a detailed breakdown of the data:

Table 15. Population with disabilities by gender

Category	Total (Dibër)	Males	Females
Total population with disabilities	**2,568**	**1,207**	**1,361**
Vision impairment	863	384	479
Hearing impairment	740	353	387
Walking difficulties	1,653	734	919
Memory difficulties	779	361	418
Difficulty with daily self-care	809	401	408
Communication difficulties	630	296	334

Source: INSTAT 2024.

In 2022, ten requests were submitted to the municipality to act as a third party in the District Court of Dibër regarding applications for protection orders.[63]

Education

In terms of primary and secondary education, Dibër has a relatively high enrollment rate, though the completion rates at higher levels, such as post-secondary education, show room for improvement. While education plays a vital role in the socio-economic development of the region, gender disparities in educational attainment also persist, with more females completing higher education compared to males in certain areas.

The following table presents a detailed breakdown of educational attainment and school attendance patterns in Dibër for 2023, offering an insight into the current state of education in the municipality and helps identify areas that may require targeted policy interventions.

Table 16. Educational attainment by gender, 2023

Education Level	Total	Male	Female
Total	**41,538**	**20,762**	**20,776**
No educational level completed	210	77	133
Primary education	2,518	1,088	1,430
7/8/9-year school	20,185	9,756	10,429
Lower technical school	92	74	18
Secondary education	11,285	6,659	4,626
Post-secondary education, but not higher	267	141	126
Short-cycle higher education	516	276	240
Bachelor's degree	2,221	866	1,355
Master's or Doctorate	2,709	1,144	1,565
Never attended school	1,535	681	854

Source: INSTAT 2024.

63. Dibër Municipality, Social Services Sector.

Although there is a general gender parity in school attendance and educational attainment, there are notable gender-specific trends: Females are slightly more likely to have completed primary education (1,430 females vs. 1,088 males), and they are also leading in the completion of higher education, especially Master's and Doctorate levels. Males show a higher tendency towards completing secondary education and 7/8/9-year schools, indicating that more intervention may be needed for males in higher educational levels.

2,518 individuals have completed primary education, with a higher number of females (1,430) compared to males (1,088).

11,285 individuals have completed secondary education, with more males (6,659) than females (4,626).
There are 5,446 individuals who have graduated higher education, including Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degrees. Males (2,286) slightly outnumber females (2,160) in this category. Notably, Master's or Doctorate degrees are more common among females (1,565) compared to males (1,144).

A significant portion of the population (1,535 people) has never attended school, with a slightly higher number of females (854) compared to males (681). This may indicate potential challenges for these individuals in accessing education, especially in rural areas.

Table 17. Number of nurseries and kindergartens

Number of nurseries	Number of kindergartens	Number of pre-school teachers
3 (located in Peshkopi)	74	267

Source: Dibër Municipality.

The number of kindergartens and pre-school teachers in the Dibër region, particularly the presence of nurseries in Peshkopi, highlights the availability of early childhood education services. There are 267 preschool teachers serving in 74 kindergartens. Dibër Municipality has 96 nine-year schools (only 1 private school) and 9 high schools.

Table 18. Number of students in primary education by gender

Total (F+M)	Female	Male	Total (%) (F+M)	Female (%)	Male (%)
8,866	4,031	4,835	99.2%	99.3%	99.1%

Source: Dibër Municipality.

As regards primary education completion rates for the academic year 2015-2016, Dibër exhibits an impressive completion rate of 99.2% for both boys and girls, with a slight gender difference. Female students (99.3%) had a marginally higher completion rate compared to male students (99.1%), which is an indicator of gender parity in access to education and academic progression highlighting positive outcomes in ensuring that both boys and girls complete their primary education.

Health

The healthcare system in Dibër is predominantly supported by primary care services, with nurses and doctors serving as the backbone of medical care in both urban and rural areas.

Table 19. Health indicators

Municipality/AU	Nurses (no.)	% nurses per population	Doctors (no.)	% doctors per population
Peshkopi	29	0.15%	6	0.03%
Arras	14	0.37%	1	0.03%
Fushë Çidhën	10	0.28%	1	0.03%
Fushë Muhurr	13	0.38%	1	0.03%
Kala e Dodës	9	0.30%	1	0.03%
Kastriot	20	0.27%	2	0.03%
Lurë	8	0.54%	1	0.07%
Luzni	9	0.28%	1	0.03%
Maqellarë	42	0.31%	3	0.02%
Melan	19	0.43%	1	0.02%
Tomin	29	0.34%	3	0.04%
Selishtë	8	0.41%	1	0.05%
Sllovë	14	0.45%	1	0.03%
Zall Dardhë–Zall Rec	13	0.54%	2	0.08%
Dibër	237	0.30%	25	0.03%

Source: Dibër Municipality, 2022.

The data reflects a varying distribution of healthcare professionals across Dibër's municipalities and communes. The overall ratio of nurses (0.30%) and doctors (0.03%) per population in the district is relatively low, suggesting potential challenges in healthcare accessibility, particularly in more remote communes.

The Socio-Economic Context

Dibër has a diverse and evolving economy characterized by a mix of agricultural, industrial, and service-oriented activities. The region's economic structure is predominantly driven by agriculture, and services, with a significant concentration of economic units in the trade, accommodation, and food services sectors.

Agriculture remains a key pillar of the economy, although industrial development and the service sector have gained prominence in recent years. Despite the region's reliance on traditional industries, there is a growing trend toward businesses and small enterprises, particularly in retail and hospitality. However, the economy still faces challenges such as limited access to capital, infrastructure constraints, and gender disparities across various sectors.[64]

Active Businesses

In the Dibër region, the business landscape has seen a diverse mix of businesses, ranging from producers of goods to providers of services. The goods production sector, which includes industries such as manufacturing, agriculture, and construction, has experienced noticeable growth, contributing significantly to the region's economic output.

64. USAID PLGP "GSVCA Dibër" 2019.

Table 20. Active businesses, years 2020 to 2023

Year	Total businesses	Producers of goods	Producers of services
2020	960	141	819
2021	955	129	826
2022	967	132	835
2023	990	147	843

Source: INSTAT 2024.

The number of producers of goods decreased by 8.5% in 2021, but then increased by 2.3% in 2022 and surged by 11.4% in 2023, showing significant growth in the goods production sector, particularly in the last year.
The number of service producers grew modestly, with a 0.9% increase in 2021, 1.1% in 2022, and 1.0% in 2023, indicating steady but slower growth compared to the goods production sector.

Table 21. Active businesses by gender

Year	Total businesses	Male businesses	Female businesses	% change total	% change male	% change female
2020	960	747	213	-	-	-
2021	955	738	217	-0.5%	-1.2%	1.9%
2022	967	747	220	1.3%	1.2%	1.4%
2023	990	756	234	2.4%	1.2%	6.4%

Source: INSTAT 2024.

The number of male-owned businesses decreased slightly in 2021 by -1.2%, remained stable in 2022 (no change), and increased by 1.2% in 2023. Despite the fluctuations, male-owned businesses have remained the majority throughout the period.

Female-owned businesses have shown consistent growth, with a 1.9% increase in 2021, 1.4% in 2022, and 6.4% in 2023, indicating a positive trend and an increasing involvement of women in business. The largest growth in female businesses occurred in 2023, reflecting an encouraging development.

Table 22. The number of registered businesses by administrative units and size

Administrative unit	Enterprises	Small businesses
Peshkopi	56	580
Maqellarë	16	136
Tomin	9	23
Kastriot	1	17
Melan	6	12
Sllovë	2	9

Administrative unit	Enterprises	Small businesses
Muhurr	2	8
Arras	2	6
Fushë-Çidhën	1	3
Lure		7
Kala e Dodës		4
Zall-Dardhë		2
Luzni		1
Zall-Reç		
Selishtë		
Total	**95**	**808**

Source: Dibër Municipality, 2024.

Labor market, Employment and Unemployment in Dibër

The overall labor force participation rate is 61.9%, indicating that slightly over half of the working-age population is engaged in the labor market. Men have a higher participation rate (67.2%) compared to women (56.4%), suggesting that societal or structural barriers may limit women's involvement in economic activities.

Table 23. Labor market indicators, 2023

Gender	Labor force participation rate (%)	Employment rate (%)	Inactivity rate (%)	Unemployment rate (%)
Total	**61.9**	**51.0**	**38.1**	**17.6**
Men	67.2	50.4	32.8	24.9
Women	56.4	51.7	43.6	8.3

Source: INSTAT, 2024.

The overall employment rate is 51.0%. Women have a slightly higher employment rate (51.7%) than men (50.4%). This suggests that although fewer women participate in the labor force, those who do are more likely to find employment compared to their male counterparts. The overall inactivity rate is 38.1%, reflecting a significant portion of the population not engaged in the labor force. Women have a higher inactivity rate (43.6%) compared to men (32.8%), likely due to caregiving responsibilities, lack of job opportunities, or cultural norms. The overall unemployment rate is 17.6%, indicating a significant challenge in finding jobs for those actively seeking work.

The employment landscape in Dibër reflects sectoral and gender-based disparities, highlighting the need for targeted, gender-sensitive interventions. The predominance of agriculture and services in the region's economy provides diverse employment opportunities, yet these sectors exhibit distinct gender dynamics. Women are predominantly employed in caregiving and low-wage roles, particularly in sectors such as education, healthcare, and accommodation and food services[65]. The trade sector, with its relatively higher female participation, represents an entry point for women entrepreneurs, emphasizing the need for policies that enhance their access to capital, skills development, and support networks to scale their businesses.

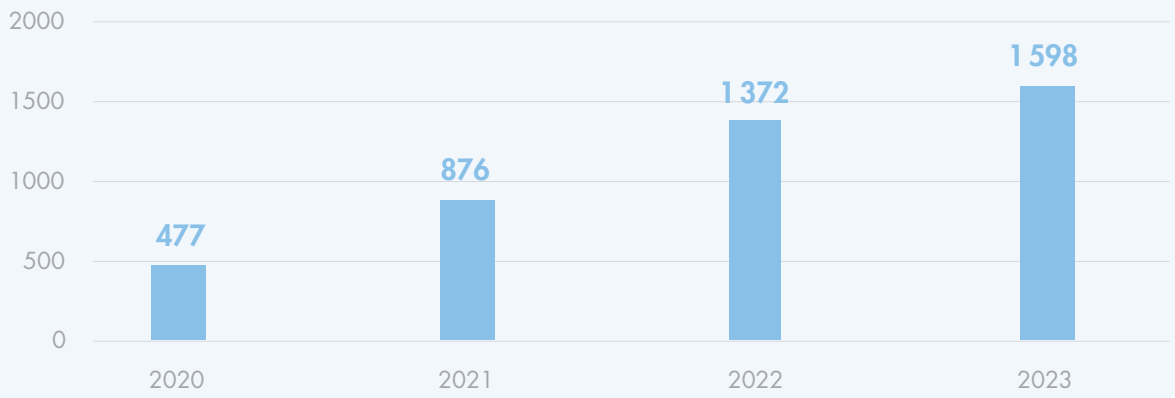
65. Dibër Municipality.

Agriculture And Livestock Farming

The number of registered[66] farmers in Dibër has significantly increased over the last years.

- From 2020 to 2021, the number of farmers grew by 399 (an 83.7% increase).
- From 2021 to 2022, the number increased by 496 (a 56.6% increase).
- From 2022 to 2023, the increase was 226 (a 16.5% increase).

Figure 7. Number of registered farmers



Source: INSTAT 2024

Agriculture and livestock farming are integral components of the economy in the Dibër region of Albania, offering diverse opportunities for local communities, especially in rural areas. The region's agricultural landscape is characterized by a mix of crop cultivation, livestock farming, and emerging sectors such as beekeeping, which together form a complex value chain. The dominance of crops like corn, wheat, and potatoes, alongside robust livestock production, including small ruminants and cattle, reflects the region's strong agricultural traditions. Additionally, the significant production of dairy products, meat, eggs, and honey demonstrates the importance of animal husbandry to Dibër's rural economy.

Table 24. Livestock in figures, 2023

Administrative unit	Cattle		Small ruminants		Poultry		Beekeeping
	Total	Cows	Sheep	Goats	Total	Laying hens	Beehives
Maqellarë	1,571	1,549	2,470	1,020	23,325	21,123	2,216
Melan	507	474	951	514	5,179	4,624	1,140
Tomin	1,094	1,069	1,516	300	34,052	30,850	1,135
Kastriot	698	660	2,630	336	7,547	6,824	1,073
Fushë Çidhën	461	426	1,431	156	4,934	4,462	378

66. NUIS registered farmers.

Administrative unit	Cattle		Small ruminants		Poultry		Beekeeping
	Total	Cows	Sheep	Goats	Total	Laying hens	Beehives
Kala E Dodës	688	659	10,520	135	5,579	5,050	1,140
Luzni	447	414	697	890	5,298	4,793	849
Muhurr	618	588	620	830	4,932	4,460	1,201
Selishtë	359	315	890	762	5,116	4,629	716
Arras	460	427	2,127	1,927	6,981	6,324	2,450
Zall Dardhë	235	199	1,338	1,145	3,431	3,026	1,310
Zall Reç	190	157	1,230	1,187	2,779	2,430	1,227
Lurë	167	133	1,230	1,164	2,613	2,260	1,335
Peshkopi	109	67	0	0	0	0	692
Total	**8,200**	**7,700**	**29,000**	**11,000**	**118,100**	**106,500**	**18,200**

Source: Dibër Municipality, 2024.

In 2023, livestock byproducts produced in Dibër consisted of a mix of dairy, meat, and other animal-related products. Milk production is significant, with a total of 26,094 tons, predominantly cow's milk (23,147 tons), which is the largest contributor. Sheep and goat milk are also produced in smaller quantities, contributing 1,682 tons and 1,265 tons, respectively. Meat production totals 3,217 tons, with beef (1,927.5 tons) and lamb (812 tons) being the most prominent. Goat (264 tons) and poultry meat (213 tons) are also produced, pork is absent from the region's livestock sector in 2023, which indicates a cultural and religious preference.
The egg production is also noteworthy, with 17,040,000 eggs produced in total, pointing to a significant poultry sector. Additionally, wool production is at 72.9 tons, indicating high potential in the wool value chain. Honey production is another valuable output with 163.8 tons produced, highlighting beekeeping as an important value chain in Dibër's agricultural activities.

Table 25. Livestock products in Dibër, 2023

Product Type	Production in tons
Total milk	**26,094**
- Cow milk	23,147
- Sheep milk	1,682
- Goat milk	1,265
Total meat	3,217
- Beef	1,928
- Lamb	812
- Goat	264
- Poultry meat	213
Wool	72.9
Honey	163.8
Eggs	17,040,000

Source: INSTAT 2024

There are six dairy facilities located in Dibër Municipality. Two dairies (one in Melan and one in Maqellarë) operate all year round and four are seasonal (one in Muhurr, one in Kastriot, and two in Kala e Dodës).

In 2023, Dibër's agricultural production relied heavily on cereal crops and vegetables, with notable production in corn, potatoes, and forage crops.

- Cereals cover a large portion of the agricultural area, with a total of 4,675 ha. Corn is the dominant cereal crop with 3,380 ha, contributing 25,170 tons of production, wheat occupies 1,140 ha, producing 5,315 tons, while barley, oats, and rye are produced on smaller areas.

- Vegetables cover 593 ha, with a total production of 17,610 tons. The potato crop is particularly strong, covering 310 ha with a high yield of 33 tons/ha, indicating an efficient cultivation system. Beans are produced on 140 ha but have a very low yield of 1.5 tons/ha, indicating challenges in cultivation especially due to climate change.

- Forage crops are produced in a large area of 11,853 ha, resulting in 233,175 tons of production, which is mainly used for livestock feed. There are no specific statistics on the actual crop yield in this category, however the large cultivation area suggests its importance to the local farming economy.

- Medicinal plants are cultivated on 10 ha, yielding 17 tons with a yield of 1,7 tons/ha, highlighting an emerging value chain in Dibër.

Table 26. Field crops, 2023

Crop Type	Area (ha) 2023	Production (tons) 2023
Cereals	4,675	30,996
- Wheat	1,140	5,315
- Corn	3,380	25,170
- Barley	99	296
- Oats	37	150
- Rye	19	65
Vegetables	593	17,610
- Potatoes	310	10,220
- Beans	140	2,420
Forage crops	11,853	233,175
Medicinal and aromatic plants	10	17

Source: INSTAT 2024.

In 2023, Dibër's vegetable production consisted of several categories, including both field and greenhouse-grown crops:

Total vegetable cultivation across both field and greenhouse cultivation covered 592.8 ha, with a total production of 17,610 tons. This indicates a significant area dedicated to vegetable farming, although the yield per hectare is not specified in the data.

Fresh vegetables in fields and greenhouses accounted for 393.3 ha, with 11,760 tons of production. This category is likely dominated by high-demand vegetables like tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers, which are often grown in greenhouses for extended growing seasons. Dry vegetables were grown on 170.0 ha, yielding 4,700 tons. Dry vegetables could include crops such as beans, which typically require field cultivation rather than greenhouses. Melons and watermelons occupy 29.5 ha and yield 1,150 tons of produce.

Table 27. Vegetable area and production

Crop Type	Area (ha) 2023	Production (tons) 2023
Total vegetables (field + greenhouses)	592.8	17,610
Fresh vegetables (field + greenhouses)	393.3	11,760
Dry vegetables (field only)	170.0	4,700
Melon and watermelon (field + greenhouses)	29.5	1,150

Source: INSTAT 2024.

In 2023, fresh vegetable production in Dibër consisted primarily of tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers, all of which cultivated on open field (the data does not specify greenhouse production for these crops).

Tomatoes were grown on 48.0 ha of land, with a total production of 1,680 tons, with a yield of 35 tons/ha. Cucumbers covered 57.0 ha and yielded 1,660 tons of produce, with a yield of 29.1tons/ha.

Peppers were cultivated on 30.0 ha, producing 540 kg of peppers, with a yield of 18 tons/ha.

In 2023, Dibër had a diverse fruit tree sector with a total of 1,263 hectares dedicated to fruit trees, and 1,059 hectares of this land was actively producing fruits, yielding a total of 14,888 tons of fruit.

Apples were the most widely cultivated fruit, with 343 hectares of total area, producing 6,739 tons of apples. The area in production was 324 hectares, showing that apples have a strong foothold in Dibër's fruit production. Plums followed, with 208 hectares of land, producing 2,289 tons. Of these, 192 hectares were in active production.

Cherries also covered a considerable area, with 372 hectares and a production of 1,920 tons from 335 hectares in active production.

Nectarines/peaches had a much smaller share of land (7 hectares) and a production of 197 tons from the same area, suggesting these fruits are less common but still part of Dibër's agricultural mix.

Chestnuts and walnuts had a combined total of 236 hectares in production, yielding 1,997 tons of product. Of these, chestnuts occupied 64 hectares and yielded 884 tons, while walnuts used 172 hectares to produce 1,113 tons. These nuts are likely of significant importance to Dibër's agricultural economy, albeit at a smaller scale compared to fruit trees like apples.

The above fruit tree production data demonstrates Dibër's agricultural potential, particularly for fruit types such as apples and plums, which are more widely cultivated. However, the same data suggest there may be room for improvements in agricultural practices, through better irrigation systems, crop management, or pest control.

Table 28. Fruit trees and production

Fruit type	Total area (ha)	Area in production (ha)	Production (tons)
Total fruit trees	1263	1059	14,888
Apples	343	324	6,739
Plum	208	192	2,289
Cherries	372	335	1,920
Nectarine/peach	7	7	197
Chestnut	64	47	884
Walnuts	172	77	1,113

Source: INSTAT 2024.

In 2023, Dibër had a total area of 64 hectares dedicated to vineyards, all of which were actively producing, resulting in a total production of 645 tons of grapes.

Tourism, Cultural and Historical Heritage

A significant historical symbol of Dibër is its association with the birthplace of Albania's national hero, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, whose 24 battles against the Ottoman Turks were fought in this region. The territory of Dibër also hosts archaeological ruins, many of which remain unexplored. These ruins are linked to Illyrian, Byzantine, Christian, and Medieval civilizations, reflecting the region's deep historical roots.

Dibër's natural wealth represents a significant potential for the municipality. Due to its morphological and morphogenetic diversity, the area boasts a rich and unique natural heritage.

The Dibër region has many archaeological finds that demonstrate the region's rich history. These finds provide evidence of continuous cultural development, dating back to prehistoric and protohistoric periods – from the early Neolithic era (when the first true Neolithic civilizations appeared) to the end of the Archaic period, marking the beginning of the Illyrian civilization. Among the most important archaeological sites with Category I Monument status are Gradishta of Peshkopi, Gradishta of Bellova, and Skanderbeg's Town.

Dibër offers rich tourism experiences all year round; with greater opportunities to explore in the summer, attracting nature lovers, hikers, explorers of caves and old castle and church ruins, and visitors to the glacial Lura and Balgjaj lakes.

While tourism opportunities are unlimited and the number of tourists continues to grow, this growth has not managed to jumpstart the local economy, whose income remains in the lower figures.

From the statistics kept by the tourism office, 65,567 visitors visited the Dibër Municipality during the period January-October 2024. The most frequented areas are the Lura Lakes, Grama, Korab Mountain, Rabdishti, Drin i Zi Valley, the Seta Canyon. There are 22 registered guesthouses operating in Dibër municipality that offer hospitality and accommodation services.

Table 29. Guesthouses

Location	Guesthouses
Melan	4
Kala e Dodës	5
Tomin	3
Peshkopi	2
Maqellarë	1
Lurë	2
Selishtë	2
Kastriot	1
Arras	2
Total	22

During the field work it was observed that the number of informal guesthouses and B&Bs has grown, and this business is becoming more widespread due to the increasing number of visitors in the territory. This data is inexistent, and women's role remain relatively invisible considering the majority of the employed persons in the sector are women and girls as the main activities they get involved in are cooking and maintenance activities.
Regarding the curative tourism sector, nearly 70 percent of the "Llixha" neighborhood inhabitants offer their houses for tourist accommodation and the majority of people employed in the sector are women. In this area, data from the municipality show that there are over 30 guesthouses with more than 15 beds, 50 guesthouses with 10 to 15 beds, and 170 guesthouses with less than 10 beds.[67]

Table 30. Monuments in Dibër

Natural Monuments in Dibër Municipality[68]		
Geo-monuments	Bio-monuments	Hydro-monuments
The Karst of the White Mountain at Sllovë	The Flower Lake	Karst at Pocest
The Red Rock	The Black Lake	The Boroviku Forest at Begiunec
The Rus Cave	The Big Lake	The Lura Forest
The Township Cave	The Lakes of Kacnia	The plane trees at Kërçisht
The Ice Cave	The Waterfall at Pocest in Maqellarë	The Bllica pines Polje
The Grama Mirror	The Cold Water	The Bllica beeches
The Fair Trough	The Karst Source of Kërçin	The oak-tree in Polje village
The Highland of the Ladies at Grama	The King's Spring	The Kaba oak tree
The Great Lura Gorge	Thermal Spring Waters at Peshkopi	The Sina Sacred Tomb
The Salt Rock at Kërçin	The Bellova Springs	The Lura oak tree
The Kërçin Rock	The Sopanishta Cave and Spring	The Black Poplar at Çidhën
The Korabi Plateau		
The Lura Lowlands Moraines		
Lura Crown Circle		
The Money Hill (Bllicë) Kukaj village		
The Field of Mares		

67. USAID PLGP "GSVCA Dibër" 2019
68. Territorial Development Plan, Dibër Municipality.

Traditional Food

The traditional cuisine is another distinguishing feature of Dibër's rich tradition, which is preserved to this day. A little has changed, but it is still delicious. The secret of its taste is that it has been prepared the same way for centuries, with lots of love. The relatively warm climate of the region provides excellent growth conditions for a variety of fruits, herbs and vegetables. Beans, chicken with jufka (a traditional pasta), sarma (cabbage or vine leaves prepared with meat and rice), stuffed peppers with cottage cheese, potato stew and sheqerpare (a lovely dessert) are considered the most famous traditional dishes. Dibër is also famous for growing tasty walnuts, chestnuts and hazelnuts as well as fruits such as cherries, apples, pears, plums, which are also used for preparing nice compotes.[69]

Annex 2. National Context on Gender Equality

Legal framework in Albania, especially in relation to gender equality, is built on constitutional and legislative provisions aimed at ensuring equal rights for men and women.
Article 18(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, establishes the principles of equality and non-discrimination, stating that all individuals are equal before the law, and no one should face unfair discrimination based on gender, race, religion, ethnicity, language, political beliefs, or other characteristics.

Over time, Albania has made continuous efforts to align its national legal framework with international standards concerning gender equality and combating gender-based discrimination, violence, and domestic abuse. The key legislative acts contributing to this legal framework include:

1. **Law No. 9970/2008,** "*On gender equality in society*": This law addresses fundamental issues of gender equality in public life, ensuring equal opportunities for men and women in exercising their rights and contributing to various sectors of society. It also mandates temporary special measures, including a 30% gender quota for political and decision-making positions.

2. **Law No. 10019/2008,** *The Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania*: This code, with the amendments made in 2012 introduced gender quotas in the electoral process, ensuring that neither gender is represented by less than 30% in political party candidate lists for parliamentary elections. Besides, specific provisions to guarantee the gender quota were introduced during 2020 and 2024 amendments. Amendments made in 2015 and 2020 further expanded gender quotas, including a 50% male and 50% female quota for candidates in local elections.

3. **Law No. 57/2016,** "*On amendments and additions to Law No. 9936, dated 26.06.2008* 'On the management of the budget system in the Republic of Albania,' as amended, for the first time includes the concept of gender-responsive budgeting in the management of the budget system, by adding gender equality as a principle of its functioning, ensuring that men and women enjoy equal opportunities and access to rights and benefits of the same nature.

4. **Law No. 68/2017** '*On the finances of local self-government*' has created opportunities for the effective inclusion of gender-responsive budgeting in all phases of the local financial management cycle (annual and medium-term budget programming, monitoring and reporting, evaluation, and auditing). Among other things, this law aims to ensure that through the creation and distribution of financial resources to local self-government units, gender equality is accelerated and achieved.

69. See: https://visitdiber.com/maps/guides/visit_diber_english.pdf

5. **Law No. 7961/1995,** *The Labour Code*: The Labour Code prohibits discrimination in employment, mandates reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities, and prohibits moral harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace. It also includes provisions to promote gender equality in employment and professional rights.

6. **Law No. 93/2014,** "*On persons with disabilities*": This law guarantees equal opportunities and access for persons with disabilities, including ensuring that women with disabilities have the same opportunities as men with disabilities in accessing the rights guaranteed by this law.

7. **Law No. 104/2014,** "*On social security*": This law recognizes the rights of both mothers and fathers for parental leave, including the extension of maternity leave to 63 days and the introduction of bonuses for mothers with newborns.

8. **Law No. 9669/2006,** "*On measures against domestic violence*": This law aims to prevent and reduce domestic violence in all its forms, offering protection to victims through quick, affordable, and simple procedures. Amendments in 2018 and 2020 enhanced the provisions related to domestic violence prevention and victim protection.

9. **Law No. 221/2010,** "*On protection from discrimination*," as amended. According to this law, no one can be discriminated against on the grounds of gender, race, color, ethnicity, language, gender identity, sexual orientation, political, religious, or philosophical beliefs, economic, educational, or social status, pregnancy, parental affiliation, parental responsibility, age, family or marital status, civil status, residence, health status, genetic predisposition, disability, membership in a specific group, or for any other reason. This law was also improved by Law No. 124/2020 "On amendments and additions to law No. 221/04.02.2010 on protection from discrimination," which further clarifies the scope of this law, adds definitions, emphasizes hate speech, provides a definition for severe forms of discrimination, etc.

10. **Law No. 22/2018,** "*On social housing*," which emphasizes the principle of non-discrimination in planning, equipping, distributing, and managing housing for social groups in need of accommodation. The specialized housing program benefits vulnerable groups, including victims of trafficking, domestic violence, and young mothers.

11. **Law No. 110/2018,** "*On notaries*", which empowers women's economic independence and is the main guarantor of their property rights, introducing innovations in gender equality issues concerning the protection of assets.

12. **Law No. 111/2018,** "*On cadaster*", which also addresses gender equality issues related to the registration of joint community property.

13. **Law No. 15/2019,** "*On employment promotion*," where victims or potential victims of trafficking, gender-based violence, domestic violence, or mothers under the age of 18 are specified as special groups of job seekers/disadvantaged job seekers in the labor market, who benefit from employment promotion services and programs.

14. **Law No. 57/2019,** "*On social assistance in the Republic of Albania*," which defines as beneficiaries of economic assistance, among others, victims of trafficking who have left social care institutions until they are employed, as well as victims of domestic violence, for the period of validity of a protection order or immediate protection order, who are not treated in social care institutions.

15. **Law No. 34/2019,** "*On the administration of seized and confiscated assets*," which emphasizes the proper administration and efficient, effective, and economic use of assets seized and confiscated by the judiciary and assets seized by the order of the Minister responsible for finance, the return of illegally acquired assets to the community, and the financial compensation of crime victims.

The National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2030 (NSGE) serves as a roadmap towards a society where all individuals—women, men, youth, girls, boys – regardless of age, gender, origin, place of residence, ethnic or social

group, disabilities, religious affiliation or belief, gender identity expression, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics, are provided with equal opportunities to develop their potential; participate equally in political and public decision-making; choose and be chosen; receive education and lifelong learning; be employed and employ others, advancing towards new professions while challenging stereotypes and gender-based division of labor; influence the socio-economic development of the country and receive support for their social and economic development; create healthy families where parents share responsibilities equally and communication is key to solving problems; live free from harmful practices and violence; and where vulnerable groups are prioritized and supported until they are empowered and enjoy equal rights and opportunities in all areas of life—essentially, a society where equality is not confused with uniformity and where no one is left behind.[70]

At a local level, promoting inclusion and gender equality is a component of legal and policy frameworks, which underline the obligations of local government units in the area of gender equality (UN Women, 2019). For example, the Law "On gender equality"" elaborates on the need for promoting gender equality in local governance. Special units that are responsible for the presentation, supervision, and monitoring of performance and service, including gender equality. Efforts have been made by several municipalities to meet the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) regulations and EU standards, with a clear structure, priorities, responsibilities, and budgets that respond to the needs of women, men, girls and boys equally (UN Women, 2018). Eighteen LSGUs have signed the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, several of them with assistance of UN Women, and 15 have developed a Local Gender Action Plan.

As a result of these laws, policies, and plans, Albania has seen improvements in many aspects of gender equality, for example, in women's role in private sector development. The percentage of enterprises owned or run by women has increased in all regions of Albania. However, successful decentralization and implementation of legal and development frameworks are still challenging, and the pace of change in women's economic empowerment through private sector development is slow, especially for rural women. Gender norms, roles, responsibilities and gender bias in women's access to productive resources (such as land, finance, networks, technology, and equipment) and business services mean that there is still not a level playing field for women and men in economic and social spheres.

Some impacts of gender bias visible in Albania in economic empowerment through enterprise development are, for example:

- 31.2% of enterprises are managed by females71; The percentage of women owners or administrators in 2022 has decreased, compared to 2021, both in terms of businesses with productive economic activity and the service sector. The number of businesses with women owners or administrators is greater in the Service Sector than in the Manufacturing Sector, respectively 33.4 % and 17.1 %.

- The employment rate for the population in 2023 aged 15-64 is 72.9 % for men and .9 % for women in this age group. The structure of employees according to activity status shows that 45.4% of women are employed with a salary, while 23.5% of them are unpaid workers in the family business[72].

- In Albania, households headed by men are 4 times larger than households headed by women. The age group 55-64-year-old presents the highest number of families with men heads of households and the age group 74+ year old for women. For all age groups, the number of male-headed households is higher[73].

Women play an important role in agriculture and rural development in Albania making up a significant share of the agriculture workforce, although in most cases informal. In 2023, 37.3 % of employed women will be employed in the agricultural sector, experiencing an increase of 0.1 percentage points, compared to the previous year. Agriculture is the most important source of work for women living in rural areas.

70. DCM No. 400, dated 30.06.2021 "On the adoption of the he National Strategy for Gender Equality, 2021–2030, and Its Action Plan"

71. INSTAT Business Registers, 2023. https://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/industria-tregtia-dhe-sh%C3%ABrbimet/regjistrat-e-biznesit/#tab3

72. Women and Men in Albania, 2022, https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/demography-and-social-indicators/gender-equality/#tab3

73. Ibid.

Gender inequalities in agriculture are also often perpetuated by discriminatory administrative procedures. These include practices that (i) prevent women from (co-)owning land; (ii) inhibit women earn personal income or access support schemes (e.g., through being refused the use of a tax number); (iii) training programs and extension services that ask for "farmer certification" as a criterion for participation; and (iv) water user associations that use land ownership as a criterion for membership[74]. Unavailability of public transport in rural areas and restrictions on mobility are further inhibiting factors. In Albania, men own and drive the vast majority of motor bikes and cars, and the prevailing social norm is that it is not suitable for women to travel alone. Limited mobility makes it difficult for women to access markets[75]. Many women are still not registered as (co-)owners of their houses, land, and other property, which largely remain registered under the name of men spouses or other male relatives. Among women who do own property, the majority (approximately 76 per cent) have their names on the property title or deed for a house, not land.[76] Women play a crucial role for the development and economic growth of rural communities. Yet their key role - especially in agricultural production - is often 'invisible' and not recognized.[77]

Annex 3. Agriculture and rural development: Key gender issues in Albania

Women's work in agriculture substantially contributes to the economy, yet their role remains largely unrecognized

In 2022, agriculture represented 17.7 per cent of Albania's GDP.[78] It remains a pivotal sector of the country's economy and engages 33.9 per cent of its active workforce.[79] Women comprise 40.1 per cent of the agricultural labor force, compared to 28.7 per cent for men. Agriculture is the most important source of work for women living in rural areas. Similar to other sectors, the agricultural industry is characterized by gender segmentation of the labor market. Women employed in agriculture are more likely to hold low-wage, part-time, seasonal jobs, whereas men tend to occupy more rewarding and higher skilled positions.[80] Overall, women are overrepresented in informal employment, in unpaid work, and as contributors in family work. Analysis of the structure of employment and activity status of employees reveals that 23.5 per cent of women are family workers while the share of male family workers is significantly lower at 13.2 per cent. The sector is additionally characterized by a considerable amount of women's unpaid work.[81] In informal employment, the share of women contributing as family workers is twice as high as men's (54 per cent versus 28 per cent).[82] […] Although women bear a significant share and burden of agricultural labor, their contribution remains largely unappreciated in economic terms.[83] […][84]

74. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development, UN Women, 2024
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. INSTAT [online]. National Accounts (GDP) 2023 data. See: https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/economy-and-finance/national-accounts-gdp/
79. INSTAT [online]. Employment and unemployment, Quarterly Labour Force Survey Q3–2023. See: https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/labour-market-and-education/employment-and-unemployment-from-lfs/
80. FAO (2011). The Role of Women in Agriculture. See: https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/a605b688-83e0-4e3a-ad47-874f0d6f63b1
81. INSTAT (2023). Labour Market, 2022. Available at: https://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2023/labour-market-2022/
82. ILO estimation for the year 2019 (ILOSTAT). See: ILO (2023). Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Update. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/publications/women-and-men-informal-economy-statistical-update
83. FAO (2016). Gender, Agriculture and Rural Development in Albania. See: https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/no.52-%20Gender%2C%20agriculture%20and%20rural%20development%20in%20Albania.pdf
84. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development. UN Women. 2023. https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/ard_web_final.pdf

Gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices limit women's access to essential resources for basic agricultural production

At the root of discriminatory practices is the entrenched preconception that women are supplementary workers to men, who are considered the main breadwinners in Albanian households. Thus, while male household heads often own and manage household assets and agricultural inputs (e.g., seeds, fertilizer, agricultural machines), women in those households are often not free to use the resources or jointly decide on crop varieties, types of fertilizers and chemicals used, or the timing of their application. In such cases, women cannot use their knowledge and experience for productive activities. […] Gender inequalities in agriculture are also often perpetuated by discriminatory administrative frameworks. These include practices that (i) prevent women from (co-)owning land; (ii) inhibit women earn personal income or access support schemes (e.g., through being refused the use of a tax number)[85]; (iii) training programs and extension services that ask for "farmer certification" as a criterion for participation; and (iv) water user associations that use land ownership as a criterion for membership. Unavailability of public transport in rural areas and restrictions on mobility are further inhibiting factors. In Albania, men own and drive the vast majority of motor bikes and cars, and the prevailing social norm is that it is not suitable for women to travel alone. Limited mobility makes it difficult for women to access markets.[86] […][87]

Agricultural extension services predominantly cater to men

Under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the National Agricultural Extension Service (NAES) operates through four regional agricultural extension agencies (RAEAs) and, at local level, agricultural information centers. The public advisory service also includes five specialized agricultural technology transfer centers. […] gender capacity and skills are not yet among the required qualifications of staff, and respective trainings are lacking. Weak gender-responsiveness of the service, in conjunction with women's social status and low levels of land titling, has resulted in women's limited access to support.[88] Agricultural extension services have primarily targeted and supported men: among the 70,000 farmers contacted and assisted by extension services in various regions in 2016, just around 11 per cent were found to be women.[89] Since then, the share of women beneficiaries of extension services has further shrunken and reached just 8 per cent in 2023.[90] As a result of limited access to agricultural and market information, women's productivity levels remain low. […][91]

The current level of farm (co-)registration limits women's access to economic opportunities

The legislation guaranteeing women's equal property and inheritance rights has improved considerably.[92] Yet, data on women's (co-)ownership of land is unavailable. Currently, 10 percent of land titles are digitally registered,

85. Guideline No.19, 'Implementation of a special regime of compensation scheme for agriculture producers for the purpose of value added tax', dated 03/09/2014, requires farmers who sell their products to register at the tax offices and hold a unique taxpayer identification number. The registration is obligatory for farmers to benefit from national support schemes. The vast majority of tax number holders is men, even though, in principle, co-registration of (women) spouses is permitted/possible. See: https://www.tatime.gov.al/c/3/12/23/fermere

86. FAO and UN Women (forthcoming). National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods Albania.

87. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development. UN Women. 2023. https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/ard_web_final.pdf

88. FAO (2024). Ensuring that rural advisory services are responsive to women: good practices from FAO experiences in Europe and Central Asia. See: https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/c69ef2a6-4381-4e16-b624-a090e94b5710

89. UNDP & UN Women (2016). Albania Gender Brief. See: https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/10/albania-gender-brief

90. Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2024 data, cited in: FAO and UN Women (forthcoming). National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods Albania.

91. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development. UN Women. 2023. https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/ard_web_final.pdf

92. Law No.111/2018 on Cadaster, adopted 02/02/2019. Available at: https://www.ashk.gov.al/2021/04/16/2066/. (English version at: https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC220473/); and Law No.110/2018 on Notary, adopted 20/12/2018. Available at: http://www.nchb.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Ligj-nr.-110-2018-Per-Noterine.pdf. (Unofficial English translation at: https://euralius.eu/index.php/en/library/albanian-legislation?task=download.send&id=160&catid=25&m=0). The new legislation aims to protect women from alienation, acquirement and relinquishment of their immovable property including land. It foresees the application of a one-stop-shop system for land transactions in public notary and the introduction of a comprehensive system to ensure the accountability of notaries.

10 per cent are not registered at all, while 80 per cent are registered in paper format only. […] Many women are still not registered as (co-)owners of their houses, land, and other property, which largely remain registered under the name of men spouses or other male relatives. Among women who do own property, the majority (approximately 76 per cent) have their names on the property title or deed for a house, not land.[93] […] In turn, this has barred women farmers from accessing benefits like agricultural extension services, financial support, and formal contracts with traders, negatively impacting on women's productivity.[94] Women also encounter challenges in accessing formal credit from commercial banks, primarily due to inadequate collateral, which is exacerbated by weak or non-existent de facto property rights. Achieving greater equality concerning land rights and access to credit would significantly enhance women's profitable participation in the agricultural economy.

Lack of land ownership also affects women's membership in farmer organizations, such as irrigation and water user associations and producer associations. Since these organizations often require land ownership or household headship to qualify as a member, it is difficult for women to join. When extension services only target registered farmers or association members, women are automatically excluded due to their ineligible status and, therefore, do not benefit from such services. […][95]

Women have limited (co-)ownership of farms and agricultural enterprises

In 2022, of the 84,369 farmers officially registered with tax offices in Albania, 10.8 per cent were women.[96] The bulk of women's contribution to the agricultural sector is through informal employment in family farming.[97] In this type of farming, men tend to be identified as farm managers and "heads of household" while women are registered as "helpers" under the category of "contributing family workers".[98] Men typically control agricultural assets, decision-making, finance, and tasks involving mobility, while women predominantly handle manual agricultural work such as pre- and post-harvest activities, food processing, and household chores. This unequal division of labor restricts women's access to agricultural assets.

Enterprises that operate under the economic activity of "Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing" represent just 1 per cent of total active enterprises.[99] More than 80 per cent of active agricultural enterprises are owned and/or managed by men: in 2022, women (co-)owned just 18,5 per cent of the active enterprises in agriculture, forestry, and fishing.[100] Since 2016, the overall share of women business owners and managers in Albania has increased. Yet, the scope and pace of women's economic inclusion through private sector development remains slow, especially for women in rural areas. The impact of restrictive gender norms that result in women's direct and indirect discrimination is apparent at all levels of the rural economy. […][101]

Women in rural areas have limited access to the resources required to engage in business

Many women in Albania face issues of access to business resources. Those who do not have a bank account, or land for collateral, face limited access to financial services, which makes it difficult to start, manage, and expand their businesses. Bank accounts are generally required in order to receive financial services. However, there is a clear rural-urban divide: in 2017, just 31 per cent of the population living in rural areas reported having a

93. INSTAT (2018). Albania Demographic and Health Survey II (2017-2018). See: https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR348/FR348.pdf
94. UN Women (2016). National Study: Economic Diversification for Women Living in Albanian Rural Areas. Available at: https://albania.un.org/en/46581-economic-diversification-women-living-albanian-rural-areas
95. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development. UN Women. 2023. https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/ard_web_final.pdf
96. INSTAT (2022). Business Registers, 2022. Available at: https://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2023/business-registers-2022/
97. *Ibid.*
98. FAO (2016). Gender, Agriculture, and Rural Development in Albania. See: https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/no.52-%20Gender%2C%20agriculture%20and%20rural%20development%20in%20Albania.pdf
99. INSTAT (2022). Business Registers, 2022. Available at: https://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2023/business-registers-2022/
100. *Ibid.*
101. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development. UN Women. 2023. https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/ard_web_final.pdf

bank account, compared to 52 per cent among the urban population.[102] In addition, a significant gender gap is apparent: among the age group 15-45 years, only 17 per cent of women and 25.9 per cent of men living in rural areas reported having a bank account, compared to 44.7 per cent women and 48.2 per cent men among urban residents.[103] These findings illustrate the intersecting disadvantage that arises from characteristics of gender (i.e., being a woman) and residence (i.e., living in a rural area). Furthermore, rural women are faced with limited access to training on business-related knowledge and skills, such as those used for processing and marketing. In order to effectively market a business, it is important to get timely and accurate information through a mobile phone, radio, or information and communications technology (ICT). Whether a woman has such sources can influence her business's success. Although the use of ICT for marketing is progressing overall, rural women have limited access to the internet and ICT. Overall, ICT infrastructure is well developed in urban centers. However, in rural areas, where electricity coverage and broadband infrastructure are less well developed, costs can be high and penetration low – and fewer individuals have access to and use of the internet. Among households in rural areas, less than 10 per cent have access to Internet, while only 28 per cent have a computer.[104] The lack of rural connectivity in Albania has been identified as one of the gaps hampering growth in the country.[105] In addition, when a family has only one mobile phone, the male household head often uses it while female family members cannot do so freely. Studies on rural women's internet access and ICT use are currently lacking.

Women farmers are weakly represented in rural organizations, associations, and decision-making bodies

Despite rural Albanian women's important roles in agricultural production, their participation in decision-making at the household, community, and administrative levels tends to be limited. Women are rarely members of, or represented in, formal associations or committees, and they remain significantly underrepresented in decision-making and leadership positions.[106] At the community level, men are the leaders of producer groups and cooperatives while women are directly or indirectly excluded from decision-making. Farmer organizations usually have small numbers of female members since predominantly male household heads join these associations. Thus, women are rarely present in discussions, and their knowledge, perspectives, needs, and entitlements are not reflected in group decisions. There is also concern about the lack of participation of women in processes related to natural resource management, such as integrated water management, and the weak inclusion of rural women in climate change and biodiversity and cultural heritage preservation initiatives.[107] […] Furthermore, women also lack economic power, political clout, and information on decision-making processes. Finally, due to limitations to women's mobility, physical distance from administrative centers - where decisions are made - further limits women's opportunities to participate. […][108]

Rural service provision and infrastructure do not meet women's and girls' needs

In Albania, limited access to basic services such as health care, sexual and reproductive healthcare, and social protection in rural and remote areas - especially for women and girls - remain a concern.[109] In addition, poor water and sanitation infrastructure, lack of time-saving technologies, insufficient early childcare provision, unsafe transportation infrastructure, and lack of affordable public transport all have direct negative impacts on women's ability to dedicate time to productive and paid work, and to access markets.

102. INSTAT, Institute of Public Health, and ICF (2018). Albania Demographic and Health Survey *2017-18*. Available at: http://www.instat.gov.al/media/5050/adhs-2017-18-pdf.pdf

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*

105. ITU (2022). Albania – Digital Development Country Profile. See: https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Regional-Presence/Europe/Documents/Publications/2022/Digital%20Development/Digital%20Development%20Country%20Profile_Albania_final_02.22.pdf

106. UN Women (2020). Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020. See: https://albania.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/12/country-gender-equality-brief-albania-2020-0

107. *Ibid.*

108. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development. UN Women. 2023. https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/ard_web_final.pdf

109. UN CEDAW (2023). Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Albania, 2023. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FALB%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en

Agricultural vocational education does not support career perspectives for women and girls

As Albania aspires to join the EU common market, new levels of professional training are required so young women and men can engage as farm-level workers, technicians, agricultural business entrepreneurs, and rural development decision-makers. Vocational schools play an important role in building qualified human capacity and equipping young women and men with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that the market needs. However, despite promotional activities and support to encourage students from rural areas of Albania to participate in vocational education and training (VET), attendance in vocational schools has dropped. The decrease in enrolment was particularly pronounced among vulnerable groups (minus 30 per cent).[110]

There are eight agricultural vocational schools in Albania, and they remain heavily male dominated. Girls' participation is low (roughly 16 per cent), with negligible participation of those from rural areas. […][111]

National policies, programs, budgets, and support schemes in agriculture respond insufficiently to women's needs

Overall, policies, plans, programs, and budgets in Albania tend to be developed on the assumption that all individuals engaging in farming are men. As evidenced by the 2021-2027 Strategy for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries[112], strategic documents cater to the male farmer. Officials and extension workers disseminating agricultural technologies, policies, information, and innovations to farmers also tend to be men. While the overall number of women benefiting from National Support Schemes increased during the period 2018–2023, women's share among total beneficiaries dropped from 22 per cent in 2018 to 16 per cent in 2023.[113] To encourage women's participation, the Agriculture and Rural Development Fund (ARDF) awards additional scoring points ("bonus") to women applicants. However, the reported share of women applicants and women beneficiaries of ARDF programs remains extremely low.[114] […]

The Rural Development Programme 2021-2027 under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance of the Republic of Albania (IPARD III) makes explicit reference to gender equality obligations and goals.[115] It refers to the respective international framework Aide-Mémoire[116] on gender mainstreaming in the UN Disaster Risk Reduction Action Plan, the obligations under the EU Gender Action Plan III17, and activities and results foreseen under the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2021-2030), Objective 3.1 "Economic empowerment of women in rural areas".[118]

110. European Commission (2023). Albania Report 2023. See: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ea0a4b05-683f-4b9c-b7ff-4615a5fffd0b_en?filename=SWD_2023_690%20Albania%20report.pdf

111. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development. UN Women. 2023. https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/ard_web_final.pdf

112. Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2022). Strategy for Agriculture, Rural Development, and Fisheries 2021–2027, approved by Decision No.460, dated 29 June 2022. Available at: https://qbz.gov.al/eli/fz/2022/100/6dea9d2c-c264-48a8-a9e1-d041781a823c;q=strategjia%20e%20bujqesise%20dhe%20zhvillimit%20rural

113. Agriculture and Rural Development Agency, 2024 data, cited in: FAO and UN Women (forthcoming). National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods Albania.

114. In 2018, 779 women applied for the national agricultural support schemes, out of whom 627 became beneficiaries. Five women each benefited from "Support for investments in agritourism", "Incubator support to produce local traditional products", and "Support to build or reconstruct rural tourism premises with at least six to ten rooms". In 2019, the share of women applicants for ARDF subsidies was 19 per cent. Source: Agriculture and Rural Development Agency, 2019 data; and: Ombudsperson of the Republic of Albania (2020). Alternative report on the implementation of the CEDAW convention in Albania 2016 – 2020. Available at: https://albania.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/12/alternative-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-cedaw-convention-in-albania

115. Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2022). See: https://bujqesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Programi-IPARD-III_2021-2027_English.pdf

116. UN Women - Women's Resilience to Disasters Knowledge Hub (2017). Aide-Memoire on integrating gender equality in the UN plan of action on disaster risk reduction for resilience. Available at: https://wrd.unwomen.org/practice/resources/aide-memoire-integrating-gender-equality-un-plan-action-disaster-risk-reduction

117. European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2020). Objectives and Indicators to Frame the Implementation of the Gender Action Plan III (2021–2025), p.27. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020SC0284

118. National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030, published in the Official Gazette No.112, dated 15/07/2021. See: https://qbz.gov.al/eli/fz/2021/112. The English version is available at: https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/WEB_Strategjia%20Kombetare%20-%20EN.pdf

The overall aim of IPARD III is to increase employment and income "generated by women and young entrepreneurs in rural areas".

The document defines the regulations for accessing IPARD III funds, which include:

- Explicit adherence to standard EU gender equality requirements, i.e., gender mainstreaming across programs;
- Gender analysis;
- Sex-disaggregation of data;
- Use and monitoring of gender indicators;
- Gender mainstreaming training for Operating Structures;
- Cooperation with women's organizations/associations;
- Women's equal participation in official groups and bodies (such as Local Action Groups);
- Women's representation in leadership and decision-making positions;
- The involvement of government bodies responsible for promoting gender equality;
- Affirmative action (quota, preference to women applicants);
- Reporting on gender equality outcomes.

Information on the level of adherence to and compliance with the set of gender equality regulations during IPARD III implementation is unavailable. In 2023, IPARD III was suspended by the European Commission and remains inactive.

The EU regulations defined under IPARD III for addressing and promoting gender equality in agriculture serve as valuable guidance for aligning with EU standards. National policy responses and regulations are needed that result in closing the gender gap and fostering an environment in which women can equitably access resources so they can effectively contribute to agricultural production, competitiveness, growth, and rural development.

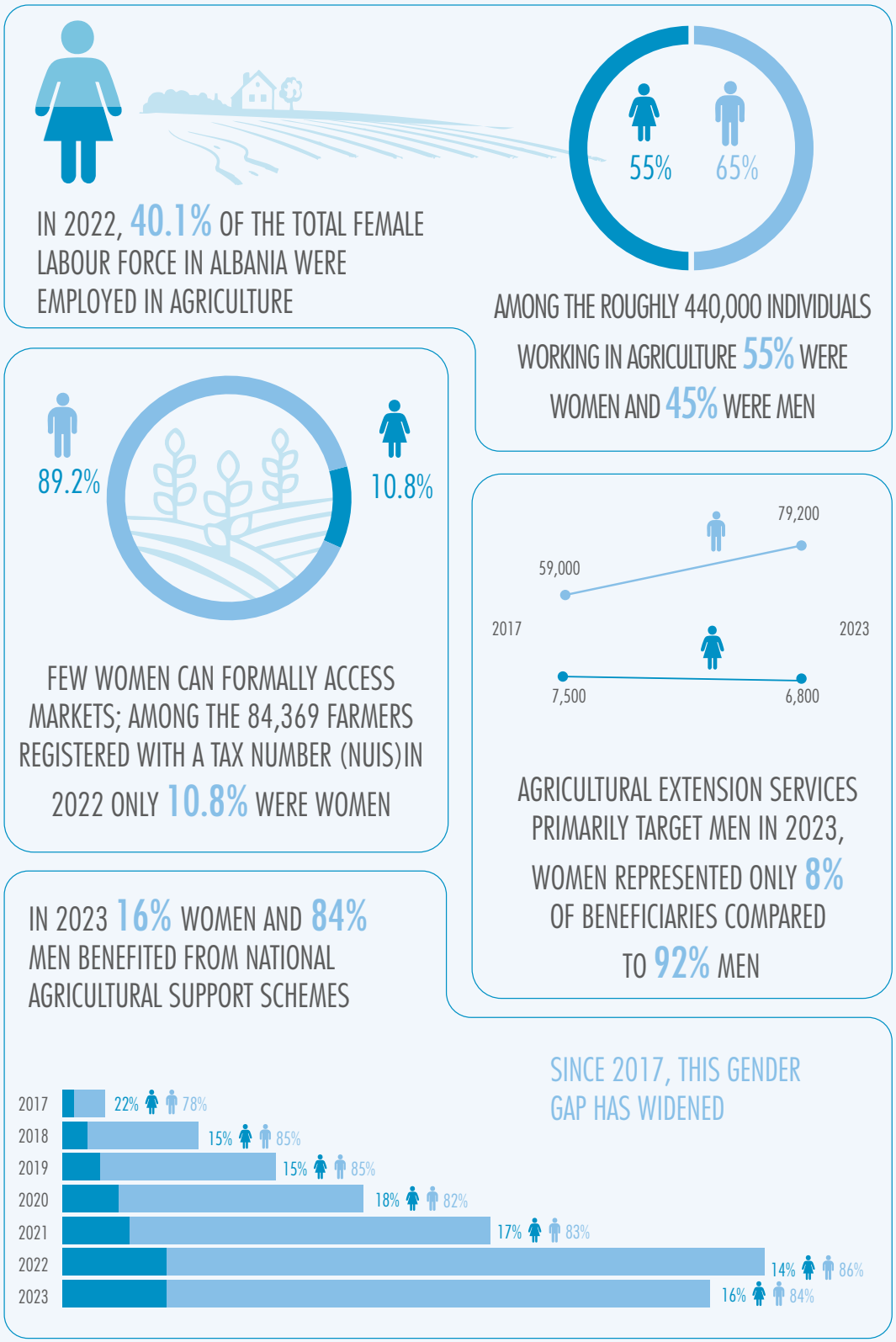
Gaps in gender statistics and data on agriculture and rural development

Sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics are essential for understanding the situation women and men face in Albania's ARD sector. They are also key to conducting gender analysis, developing gender-responsive policies, and designing measures that address inequalities and gender-specific challenges. However, current data gaps hinder the design and implementation of policies, programs and budgets related to agriculture and rural development that adequately address inequalities, tackle gender-specific challenges, and monitor progress in closing gender gaps.[119] [...][120]

119. UN CEDAW (2023). Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Albania, 2023. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FALB%2FCO%2F5&Lang=en]

120. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development. UN Women. 2023. https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/ard_web_final.pdf

Figure 8. Women, men and agriculture in Albania



Source: INSTAT (2023). Labour Market, 2022; Agriculture and Rural Development Agency, 2024 data, cited in: FAO and UN Women (forthcoming). National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods Albania.

Empower Women for Rural Development in Northern Albania

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MINISTRY OF HEALTH
AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

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UN WOMEN