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Empowering Women for Rural Development in Northern Albania

Gender-Sensitive Value Chains Analysis in the Shkodër Municipality

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Municipality of Shkodër

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Empowering Women for Rural Development in Northern Albania

Gender-Sensitive Value Chains Analysis in the Shkodër 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
MTPB	Medium-Term Budget Program
NCC	National Chamber of Handicrafts
PPP	Plant protection products
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 Value
VC	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 independence 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 study analyses the municipality of Shkodër 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] **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 Development Cooperation 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 the Main Contextual Findings

Shkodër Municipality, covering 872.71 km² and consisting of 11 administrative units and 92 villages, is one of Albania's largest municipalities. With a population of 102,434 (52,209 women and 50,225 men), it has a relatively balanced gender distribution. Its strategic position, linking Albania with Montenegro and Kosovo, contributes to a dynamic economy based on agriculture, agriprocessing, tourism, industry, and trade.

Agriculture is a major pillar of the economy in Shkodër, with 40% of the total area dedicated to farming. The municipality cultivates a diverse range of crops, including potatoes, tomatoes, onions, olives, grapes, figs, peaches, plums, citrus, and chestnuts. In 2023, 1,233 hectares of vegetable farming yielded 28,327 tons, while forage crops covered 7,365 hectares, with a total production of 276,649 tons. Among high-value crops, onions play a significant role, offering opportunities for women in production, processing, and market linkages.[5]

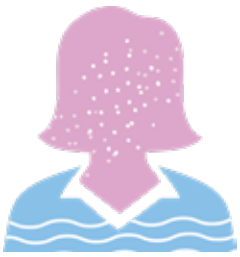
Additionally, decorative plants and vegetable seedlings represent a growing sector where women-led nurseries can thrive. These businesses require relatively low initial investment and align well with women's participation in small-scale farming and entrepreneurship. Livestock farming is well-developed in Shkodër, with 13,871 cows, 19,680 sheep, and 11,865 goats, producing 37,251 tons of milk annually. The municipality supplies 22 dairy processing facilities, which serve both local and national markets.

Beekeeping is another sector with high economic potential, as 22,000 beehives produced 247 tons of honey in 2023. Women's participation in honey production, processing, and branding can be encouraged through financial incentives, business support, and training programs, enabling them to tap into both domestic and export markets.Shkodër is a major tourist destination, known for its cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and natural attractions such as Lake Shkodër.

The tourism sector presents unique opportunities for women, especially in eco-tourism, hospitality, and traditional crafts. Women entrepreneurs can develop guesthouses, artisanal workshops, guided tours, and culinary experiences, strengthening both local heritage and gender-inclusive economic development.

Onions, as a high-value crop, offer women opportunities in production, processing, and market linkages.

The seedlings value chain presents strong opportunities for women-led nurseries to grow and thrive.



29.5% of active enterprises in Shkodër are owned or managed by women.

5. INSTAT. See: https://www.instat.gov.al/

Eco-tourism, in particular, offers a sustainable business model where women can participate in nature-based tourism activities, such as managing farm stays, rural accommodations, and organic food production for visitors. Developing women-led tourism businesses can enhance their financial independence while preserving the cultural identity of the region.

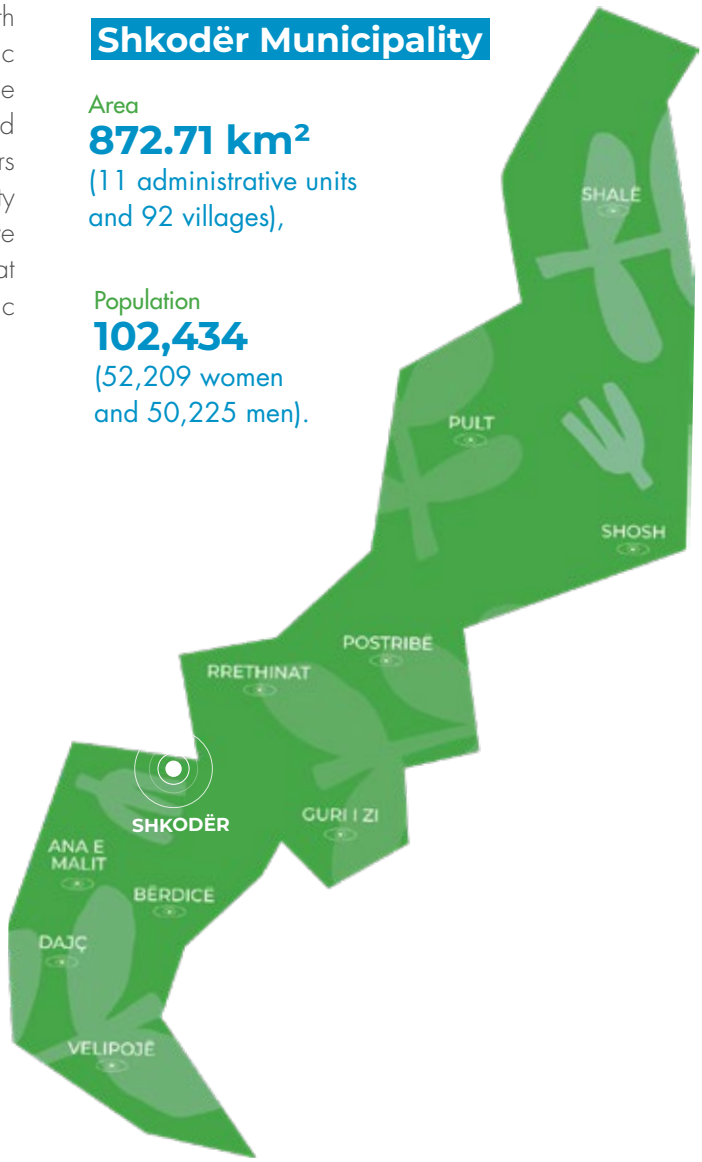
Shkodër has 5,148 active enterprises, but only 1,518 (29.5%) are owned or managed by women. The municipality's economy includes light manufacturing, textile production, handicrafts, and trade. Key barriers to women's economic empowerment include limited financial access, lack of business training, and restricted networks. Shkodër Municipality holds great potential for gender-inclusive economic growth considering that it possesses a diverse economic base, including agriculture, tourism, and small-scale manufacturing, which can be further developed through targeted support for women entrepreneurs and female workforce participation. The municipality also benefits from a vibrant civil society, an active diaspora, and ongoing development initiatives that can be leveraged to promote women's economic empowerment[6].

By increasing women's participation in agriculture, processing, tourism, and entrepreneurship, the municipality can foster a more equitable and diversified economy. Strengthening cooperative structures, vocational training, and market access will enable women to expand their businesses and contribute more actively to local development. Supporting gender-sensitive policies in agriculture, business, and tourism will not only address employment gaps but also ensure sustainable economic opportunities for women and the broader community.

Shkodër Municipality

Area
872.71 km²
(11 administrative units and 92 villages),

Population
102,434
(52,209 women and 50,225 men).



6. Ibid.

Main Findings

Finding I In the Dajç administrative unit (AU), women play an integral role in the production of decorative plants, with over 20 families engaged in the cultivation of around 20 different plant species. While these businesses provide stable income for families, men dominate decision-making processes, including market access and pricing decisions, which are often influenced by informal sources, such as coffee shop discussions. Limited access to training, financial resources, and expertise further restricts the growth potential of women-led businesses. Market access remains a significant barrier. Migration has exacerbated labor shortages, leading to a decrease in the local population, from 3,000 to just 1,000 residents in recent years.[8]

Finding II Handicrafts and artisanal work in Gur i Zi: The Gur i Zi region is known for its tradition in craftsmanship, with an active woman-owned (Laureta Toma) private company "Guri i Zi Albania", which mainly operates with one single client located in Italy. Women who participate in artisanal work are mainly full-time (six at the time of the interview) and part-time workers (depending on the demand) earning around 10,000 ALL/month. There are few other women (Flora and Dranje Ejlli) who operate independently in the handicrafts value chain. The main identified challenges include market (local and export) access and improving working conditions for part-time workers, including addressing informality.

Finding III Women in Postribë are involved in various economic activities, including embroidery, vegetable production, and onion cultivation. A local cooperative, "Qepa e Drishtit," (Drishti Onion) was established in 2021, however, all its founders are men, and it has not yet been fully integrated into the local farming community. Women are involved in nearly every stage of the value chain – from seed preparation to post-drying activities – but they face challenges, including lack of proper working conditions, storage facilities, price fluctuations, tools, equipment, and knowledge of the latest technologies. The onion produced in Drisht is PDO-certified, but there is no clear differentiation from other onions (e.g., those from Korça) or value-added strategies like branding or packaging.

Finding IV In Gur i Zi, approximately 100 families (more than 50% women),[9] are involved in small-scale seedling production, particularly of tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, eggplants, and melons. Women contribute significantly across all stages, including seedling container preparation, transplanting, quality assurance, and sales. The value chain, however, remains rudimentary, relying on traditional methods and low technology. Key challenges include a lack of knowledge in modern agricultural practices, such as plant protection and irrigation, as well as the absence of adequate tools and equipment. Decision-making is based on personal perception rather than scientific guidance, and agriculture extension services are largely unavailable. Migration has also reduced the population in this area, with only around 5,000 residents left in Guri Zi, down from 12,000.

Part 1
Methodology

This analysis was conducted by UN Women Albania within the framework of the Empowering Women for Rural Development in Northern Albania project, funded by Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation through the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS Tirana).

With the support of the Municipality staff and collaboration from key value chain (VC) stakeholders, this study aimed to identify economic sectors with potential for growth and women's empowerment in Shkodër Municipality. Specifically, it assessed women's participation in these sectors, the constraints they face, and selected high-potential value chains for targeted development. Furthermore, it provided gender-responsive recommendations to enhance women's roles and eliminate gender biases in the market system. A gender-sensitive approach was applied throughout the analyses to ensure that women's voices, challenges, and opportunities were fully 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 analysis employed a qualitative research methodology, integrating secondary and primary data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of economic and gender dynamics in Shkodër Municipality. A participatory approach was used to capture the perspectives of key stakeholders, ensuring the findings reflect real-world experiences. A thorough review of official reports and statistical sources was conducted to establish the economic and policy context. Key sources analyzed included reports from the Institute of Statistics of Albania (INSTAT), Shkodër Municipality (e.g., General Local Plan of Shkodër Municipality 2015-2030, Territorial Development Strategy, Local Area Social Plan 2020-2023, Medium-Term Budget Programs (MTBPs) 2023-2025 and 2024-2026),[7] Regional Councils, and relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Tourism and Environment. Additionally, findings from previous studies and projects related to rural development and gender equality were reviewed. This secondary data analysis provided a macro-level perspective on economic trends, institutional priorities, and gender-responsive policy frameworks in the region. By leveraging these sources, the study ensured that primary research was informed by existing knowledge and policy directions. To complement the secondary data, field research was conducted through stakeholder engagement activities, site visits, and participatory consultations.

Primary sources, i.e. field research, were conducted to support the value chain selection process. It included consultations, interviews, and direct engagement with municipal representatives, value chain actors (both women and men), producers, and experts. This step was divided into two phases:

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. These include vegetable seedling production (particularly in Gur i Zi), onion farming (particularly in Postribë), decorative plants (particularly in Dajç), beekeeping, tourism-related services, and traditional handicrafts.

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:

7. See: https://bashkiashkoder.gov.al///wp-content/uploads/Relacioni-permbledhes-Faza-I-PBA-2024-2026.pdf

- 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.

Building on the findings from the preliminary assessment, field visits, interviews, and stakeholder meetings were conducted to evaluate specific value chains. The primary data collection involved direct engagement with women entrepreneurs, municipal authorities, and other key stakeholders.

The following key activities were conducted:[8]

- Meeting in Dajç (07.02.2025) with nine women engaged in decorative plant cultivation.
- Meeting with the Director of Social Services, women in the community center and local administrators (four men and six women) in Gur i Zi and Postribë (13.02.2025).
- Visit to the woman-led artisan business "Guri i Zi Albania" and engagement with ten women in handicrafts and agriculture (13.02.2025).
- Meeting with eleven women and local authorities in Postribë (13.02.2025), including discussions with representatives from education and health sectors.
- Site visits and interviews with two families (two men and one woman) engaged in vegetable seedling production in Gur i Zi (20.02.2025).

Visit to Plangaj family (one man and two women), involved in onion cultivation and marketing in Postribë (20.02.2025).

Follow-up site visit in Postribë with farmers (one man and two women) engaged in onion farming (05.03.2025). These engagements allowed for on-site observations, semi-structured interviews, and a deeper understanding of women's roles, constraints, and opportunities in selected value chains. A triangulation process was used to validate the findings by cross-referencing primary data (field research) with secondary data (official reports and statistics). This helped ensure the accuracy and reliability of the study's conclusions.

Additionally, preliminary findings were presented to municipal representatives and project partners during a validation meeting held on 07.02.2025, where feedback was incorporated into the final analysis.
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?[9]

The involved stakeholders actively contributed to identifying all the key components of the value chain 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 using tailored questionnaires for various value chain actors, an assessment was conducted on women's empowerment and gender equality across three key value chains: the vegetable seedlings VC in Gur i Zi, the onion VC in Postribë, and the decorative plants VC in Dajç.

8. Data gathered form interviews.
9. Data gathered form interviews.

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:

2. **Target group:** women and women's groups in Northern rural areas;

3. **Criteria:** the importance of the value chain in creating economic empowerment opportunity for women.

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

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

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

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

8. **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

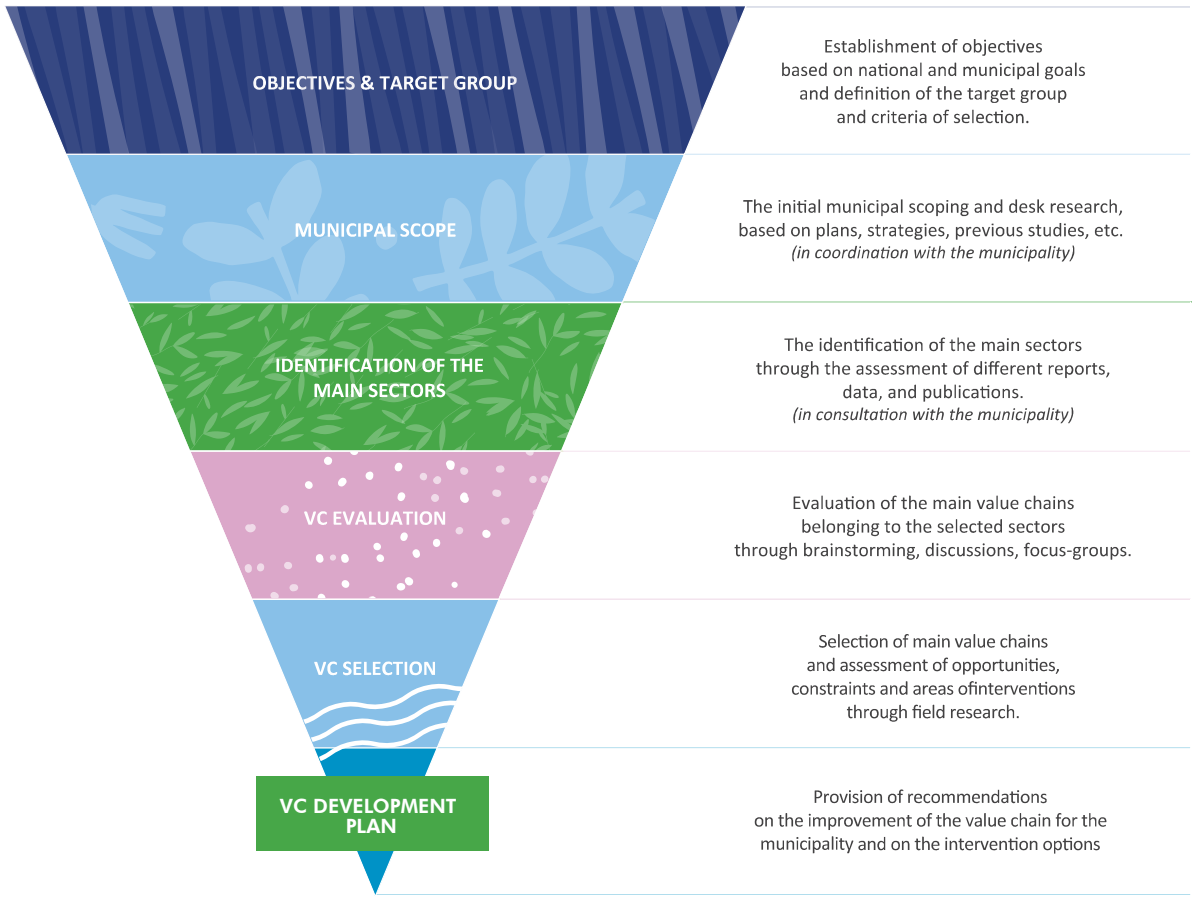


Table 1. Ranking and Selection of Value Chains Using Gender Sensitive Criteria

Criteria	Decorative plants Dajç AU	Vegetables seedlings Gur i Zi AU	Onion Postribë
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, yet men control all decision-making roles and market.	Women are actively involved in every stage of the value chain, from input to market. There are prospects to emphasize their role especially in quality assurance stages, market, and decision-making with increased business skills.	Women contribute to all stages from preparation of nurseries, seeds and seedlings, cultivation, harvest, and post-harvest.
Do women have (or can they acquire) the skills needed for value addition through processing or product diversification?	All applied cultivation techniques are based on men's experience acquired in migration, tradition, and own perception. During the field mission, it was identified that women lack knowledge in agrotechnical aspects. Still, the VC is very short, limiting opportunities for adding value or product diversification.	Women operate based on tradition. More is needed in increasing their knowledge and skills in best practices and latest technologies, business and marketing skills.	Women have basic (traditional) farming skills but need additional training in best practices, including good agriculture practices, post-harvest, and small-scale grading and packaging to enhance their economic opportunities.
Does this value chain offer new opportunities for women?	Low. The VC doesn't offer many opportunities for women regarding empowerment. Men control and the market system (mainly international) limit their opportunities.	Yes. Equipping women with the necessary knowledge and skills in best farming and business practices, grouping to collaborate with each-other, and take more active roles in decision-making.	Yes. Equipping women with the necessary knowledge and skills in best farming practices, and equip with small equipment to improve their working conditions and increase/improve production including storage, and post-harvest processes for added value.
Can the chain improve livelihood conditions for women/families?	For at least 20 families in Dajç, this VC represents their primary source of income. Expanding knowledge towards market demands could orient them better in decision-making processes.	Yes. This activity can be conducted from home and women can increase their family income. However, small investments in workplace and equipment, capacity building in latest technologies and best practices are needed to enhance productivity.	Yes. Especially with equipment to reduce labor costs and lower women workload in cultivation processes and small-scale equipment in product grading and post-harvest processes for added product value.
Is there a motivated organization in the value chain that can support/ represent value chain actors that can move forward development?	During field visit and meeting with women, none was identified. The VC is controlled by 2-3 bigger local companies (men owned). Women didn't show interest in grouping for better representation and take control in decision-making roles.	The local administration has the VC in their focus. In combination with women/farmers grouping there are prospects for better representation and VC development.	A local cooperative, "Qepa e Drishtit," was established in 2021, but all its founders are men, and it has not yet been fully integrated into the local farming community. Work is needed towards increasing women representation in the local cooperative and cooperation among all onion farmers.
Is there an opportunity to make changes with small investments?	Low. Investments would require equipment for small and poor women entrepreneurs, nursery greenhouses for first growth stage, training and capacity building on best practices, explore new markets for demand and price stability.	Yes. Investments are mainly needed in improving the working conditions for women, increased knowledge and skills in best practices, and application of latest small-scale production technologies.	Yes. Small equipment to reduce labor costs and lower women workload in cultivation processes, improve storage facilities, and small-scale equipment in product grading and post-harvest processes for added product value.

Table 2. Assessment of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in the Decorative Plants VC

Question	Score*	Weight**	Total	Narrative
Is the share of women employed in the value chain relatively high?	3	2	6	The share of women employed in the VC is 50%. Some self-employed in their family businesses and few more in the bigger nurseries in the area.
Are there many female entrepreneurs in the value chain?	1	2	2	Even though the share of women active in the VC is high, and they are engaged in all middle processes of the VC, entrepreneurship remains with men. Only one entrepreneur (single mother) was identified during the field visit.
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?	1	1	1	Low. Women can increase their skills in best practices in cultivation, but the VC is very short limiting opportunities for value adding or product diversification.
Do women control the sales income and the enterprise?	2	2	4	Average to low. During interviews with women, it transpired that men control the sales and the enterprise; few manage jointly with the head of the family (men).
Can the work take place close to home?	3	1	3	Yes, in most cases nurseries are located next to the house.
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)?	3	1	3	Seedlings are imported (Italy) and have a considerable cost. Other than that, it's mainly labor force, fertilization, and plant protection.
Is this a value chain with low entry barriers for women (time and mobility, access to technology and assets, cultural constraints)?	2	2	4	Average. Women are already engaged in the VC. However, access to assets, technology, equipment and market information remains a barrier.
Does this value chain offer new opportunities for women?	2	4	8	Low. The VC doesn't offer many opportunities for women regarding empowerment. Men control and the market system (mainly international) limit their opportunities.
Is the activity in the value chain in line with livelihood conditions (year-round income, using family labor, rapid returns, keeping the environment intact?	2	2	4	Average. Return to investment is slow. Some plants take up to 4 years to grow and the market is not stable.
Is there a linkage between what women are doing and prospects for growth/ diversification in the value chain?	2	1	2	Low. 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?	2	2	4	Men roles in the value chain (decision-making) and the market system being distant from women's location limit their opportunities.
Overall total for gender potential			45/102	

* *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]

Table 3. Assessment of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in the Vegetable Seedlings VC[10]

Question	Score*	Weight**	Total	Narrative
Is the share of women employed in the value chain relatively high?	3	2	6	The share of women employed in the VC is over 50% mainly engaged in family business.
Are there many female entrepreneurs in the value chain?	2	2	4	Even though the share of women active in the VC is high, and they are engaged in all middle processes of the VC, entrepreneurship remains with the head of household (men).
Do women control equipment and assets?	2	2	4	Considering that in most cases men are the farm owners, women lack property rights. Still, they can control the equipment used in the stages they are involved.
Do women have (or can they acquire) the skills needed for interesting value addition through processing or product diversification?	3	1	3	Women possess traditional knowledge and skills but need training on latest technologies, product diversification (grafted seedlings), and best farming practices.
Do women control the sales income and the enterprise?	2	2	4	Control over the enterprise remains mostly with men. Decision about the product's selling price is dictated by the market and quality of seedlings.
Can the work take place close to home?	3	1	3	Yes, the houses and the nurseries are situated next to each other ensuring ease of access. Market is located in Shkodër and sometimes in the neighboring cities.
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)?	3	1	3	Starting a nursery based on tradition has low entry barriers for poor entrepreneurs, but that's only for low-scale production. Starting a more market-oriented activity would require start-up costs related to establishing a full-operating nursery, including a small greenhouse, and basic equipment.
Is this a value chain with low entry barriers for women (time and mobility, access to technology and assets, cultural constraints)?	3	2	6	There are no major constraints regarding gender differences, since women are engaged in almost all the stages.
Does this value chain offer new opportunities for women?	3	4	12	Yes. Equipping women with the necessary knowledge and skills in best farming and business practices, grouping to collaborate with each-other, and take more active roles in decision-making.
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. Return to investment is rapid considering the short lifecycle of vegetable seedlings. Applying best agriculture practices can also address issues in waste management.

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 to 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.

Question	Score*	Weight**	Total	Narrative
Is there a linkage between what women are doing and prospects for growth/diversification in the value chain?	3	1	3	Yes. Women possess traditional knowledge and skills but need training on latest technologies, product diversification (grafted seedlings), and best farming practices. Equipping women with the necessary knowledge and skills in best farming and business practices, grouping to collaborate with each-other, and take more active roles in decision-making.
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	Women are already actively engaged in the value chain without major cultural restrictions. Access to information, extension services, technology, transport and credit is still a barrier mainly for women.
Overall total for gender potential			63/102	

** 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]

Table 4. Assessment of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in the Onion VC

Question	Score*	Weight**	Total	Narrative
Is the share of women employed in the value chain relatively high?	3	2	6	Yes. During field work, it was identified that women are engaged in most stages of the VC.
Are there many female entrepreneurs in the value chain?	3	2	6	Yes. Sometimes, women also rent land to cultivate onions.
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 share 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 agriculture practices, post-harvest, product grading and packaging.
Do women control the sales income and the enterprise?	2	2	4	Average. In most of the cases it is a family business, but sometimes women operate independently and control the sales and enterprise.
Can the work take place close to home?	3	1	3	Yes. Land plots are located near their houses.

(Continues on the next page)

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.

Question	Score*	Weight**	Total	Narrative
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)?	5	1	5	Yes. Starting onion cultivation doesn't require major investments. Costs are more related to land preparation, seeds/seedling, and labor force.
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, considering the low entry costs and that women have been traditionally engaged in this VC. Still, access to information, extension services, technology, transport and credit is still a barrier mainly for women.
Does this value chain offer new opportunities for women?	3	4	12	Women can increase their skills by training in good agriculture practices, as well as add value by product diversification and packaging.
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. Return to investment is within the season/year.
Is there a linkage between what women are doing and prospects for growth/ diversification in the value chain?	4	1	4	Yes. Women have basic skills in farming practices, through necessary training they can further develop their skills towards best agriculture practices, farm management, post-harvest, product grading and packaging, and there are prospects to increase their role in the VC.
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	Women are already actively engaged in onion cultivation 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.*[12]

Based on the assessment grid of women's empowerment and gender equality in the value chains, the vegetable seedling value chain in Gur i Zi and the onion value chain in Postribë demonstrated significant potential for both women's empowerment and value chain development.

12. 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.

Part 2

Analysis of Vegetables Seedlings Value Chain

1. Gender Sensitive Analysis of Vegetables Seedlings Value Chain

Vegetable seedling production has evolved over the years. The total area of vegetable nurseries is 117,500 m2. Seedling production varies between 55.1 and 96.1 million seedlings. Seeds are typically imported from/through major distributors.

The number of input suppliers is relatively high, but a few of them also produce and sell quality seeds and seedlings. Vegetable seedlings are produced by at least 17 nurseries, including Agroblend (Vora), Lizar Seedling (Divjakë), Agrokoni (Durrës), groAlba (Divjakë), Saimir Bitri (Divjakë), Ali Lico (Divjakë), etc.[13] One of the greatest challenges faced in the agriculture sector is the quality of inputs, especially plant protection products (PPPs) and seedlings. For greenhouse vegetables, which has the strongest export orientation within the horticulture sector, there is a growing emphasis on using high quality inputs. Quality seedlings are a key input supply for commercial growers.

However, smaller vegetable farmers, who face financial limitations, often tend to buy seeds and produce seedlings on farm. Although it appears that, the farmer can save or lower some costs through this approach, on-farm produced seedling can result in significantly lower performance. But, even in the case of farmers who buy seedlings, there are cases of failures either due to the quality of seedlings, or to the fact that they do not fit to the specific conditions/ environment.

In the case of vegetables, there is a presence of various suppliers, relying on imported seeds, including from leading global seeds producers. Some seeds suppliers cooperate with collection points, to jointly orient farmers towards those varieties which are mostly demanded in the market.[14]

Seedling production in Gur i Zi has become a cornerstone of agricultural livelihoods, engaging around 100 families, with women making up at least 50% of the workforce.

Women and Seedling Production in Gur i Zi: Challenges and Contributions

In the administrative unit of Gur i Zi, seedling production has emerged as a central pillar of agricultural livelihoods, involving approximately 100 families, with women comprising at least 50% of those engaged, according to interview data. For many, it represents not just a seasonal activity but a vital source of income that sustains household economies.

The focus is on cultivating seedlings for tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, eggplants, and melons—staple crops in the region's agricultural calendar. Despite the modest scale of operations, this localized system plays a key role in the continuity of food production in the area.

13. Fruit and Vegetable Sector Study Report, 2021, prepared by AGT SpA & DSA for GIZ. Available at: https://bujqesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/07-Fruit-Vegetable-Report__FINAL.pdf
14. Ibid.

Women are central to every stage of seedling production, yet the sector remains informal and under-resourced, urgently needing formalization to meet national standards and ensure sustainability.

At the heart of this production cycle is the contribution of women, whose labor spans every stage of the seedling process. From the preparation of containers and the management of nursery beds, to transplanting, quality assurance, and sales, women carry a significant portion of both physical and organizational responsibilities. They also engage directly in marketing and client relations, selling to local farmers or in local and regional markets, often managing financial transactions with little external support.Yet the vegetables' seedling value chain in Gur i Zi remains largely informal and traditional. The tools in use are basic, often handmade or improvised, and the work is predominantly manual.

Critical decisions—from seed selection to irrigation timing—are made based on inherited knowledge and individual experience, rather than agronomic science. The absence of structured extension services means that farmers often turn to local agricultural input stores for advice, which, while helpful, falls short of providing the technical expertise required for consistent, quality seedling production.

A major technical limitation is the widespread use of uncertified seeds, frequently saved from previous seasons. This practice is not only risky in terms of disease transmission and genetic degradation but also runs contrary to the regulatory framework set by the State Entity for Seeds and Seedlings. According to Law no. 10416, dated 7 April 2011, "On planting and plant propagating material", and its accompanying legal acts, all seedling producers are required to use registered and certified plant reproductive material. The use and marketing of uncertified seedlings fall outside the bounds of legal compliance, potentially exposing producers to penalties and market restrictions.

Furthermore, under Law No. 7659, dated 12 January 1993, "On seeds and seedlings," any new or locally preserved variety intended for propagation must be approved and registered with the National Catalogue of Species and Varieties, following evaluation by the relevant Testing Commission. This framework is designed to ensure the phytosanitary safety, genetic integrity, and agronomic value of planting material distributed within the country.

In Gur i Zi, nursery beds are typically assembled using repurposed containers or soil patches, with little attention to sterilization or substrate quality. There is limited knowledge or application of soil preparation standards, resulting in suboptimal germination rates and increased vulnerability to pests and diseases.

Irrigation is done manually, often inconsistently, and there is no structured system to regulate water input. Pest control is reactive and based on tradition rather than preventive plant protection plans.Women, who shoulder the brunt of this labor-intensive process, work under difficult physical conditions. Their roles are indispensable yet often underappreciated, and their access to technical training, modern equipment, or protective gear remains minimal. In parallel, the community faces broader demographic challenges. Migration has halved the population of Gur i Zi, from around 12,000 to approximately 5,000 residents, further straining the labor force and generational continuity of farming knowledge. Despite these systemic shortcomings, the seedling production practice in Gur i Zi reflects resilience, resourcefulness, and strong local engagement. However, in order to align with national agricultural standards and ensure long-term sustainability, there is a pressing need to formalize practices in accordance with the legal requirements.

Table 5. SWOT Analysis of the Seedlings Value Chain

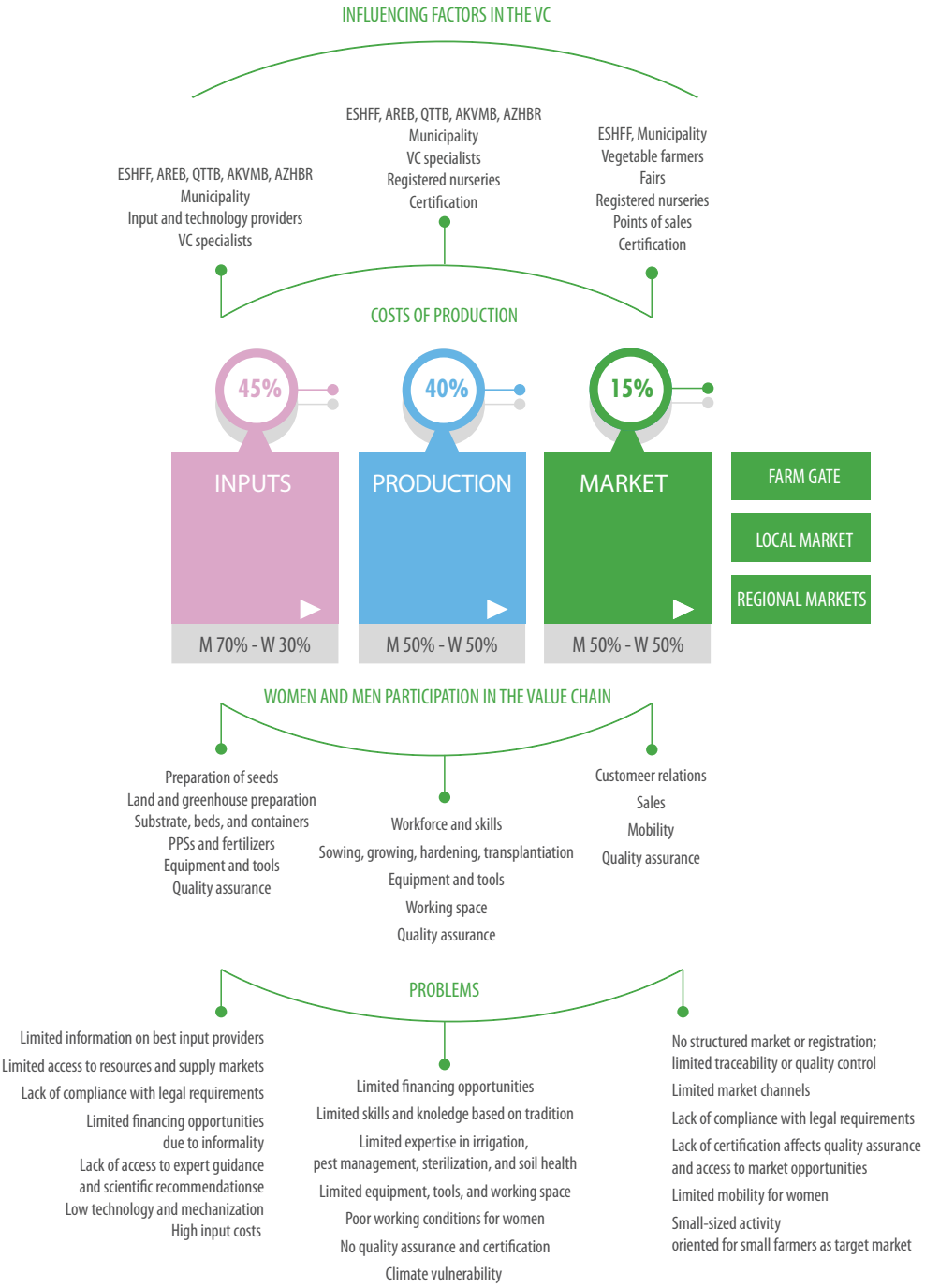
Strengths	Weaknesses
High community involvement: Around 100 families engaged, with women comprising over 50%, indicating strong local interest and participation. **Women's significant contribution:** Women are actively involved across all stages: preparation, transplanting, quality control, and sales. **Established traditional knowledge:** Seed-saving practices and generational experience form the backbone of production. **Diverse seedling types:** Focus on high demand crops like tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, eggplants, and melons. **Market:** Proximity to local markets and farmers who rely on these seedlings and a stable demand for qualitative seedlings. **Income-generating activity:** For many families and women in the area, seedling production is the primary livelihood.	**Lack of compliance with legal requirements:** Widespread use of uncertified seeds and unregistered varieties. **Low technology and mechanization:** Manual processes, limited tools, and poor nursery infrastructure. **Informal value chain:** No structured market or registration; limited traceability or quality control. **Inadequate knowledge of modern practices, especially for women involved:** Limited expertise in irrigation, pest management, sterilization, and soil health. **Absence of extension services:** Lack of access to expert guidance and scientific recommendations. **Undervalued women's labor:** Despite their central role, women work in physically demanding conditions with minimal support or recognition. **Small-sized limited activity** oriented for small farmers as target market. **Lack of financial resources,** and consequently, insufficient investment in technology. **Low interest from youth** in agriculture and high emigration rates. **Market dependency** on seedling quality, with limited quality assurance systems. **High input costs** affecting profitability. **Climate vulnerability** for most of the nurseries.
Opportunities	**Threats**
Formalization of seedling production: Potential to register nurseries and varieties with the State Entity for Seeds and Seedlings. **Training and capacity building for women farmers and their families:** introducing modern agricultural techniques and legal awareness could enhance productivity and compliance. **Gender-sensitive support programs:** Focused interventions can improve working conditions and economic empowerment of women. **Development of certified local varieties:** Recognition and registration of local genetic resources (e.g., landraces) could preserve traditional practices while ensuring quality. **Potential for cooperative development:** Organizing producers could improve access to markets, finance, tools, and legal support.	**Legal risks and market exclusion:** Continued use of uncertified seeds may lead to legal penalties and limited market access for women farmers and their families. **Occupational health and safety risks for women:** Women often work without protective gear or ergonomic tools in nurseries, exposing them to harmful chemicals, physical strain, and long-term health issues, which can reduce productivity and lead to withdrawal from agricultural work. **Pest and disease vulnerability:** Lack of preventive plant protection increases production risks. **Climate challenges:** Without proper systems, weather variability threatens seedling survival. **Depopulation and migration:** Youth migration reduces labor availability and knowledge continuity. **Market competition:** Unregulated production could be outcompeted by more organized or certified suppliers.

2. Mapping of the Seedlings 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 Vegetable Seedlings Value Chain in Guri i Zi



2.1 VALUE CHAIN ACTORS

As seen in the diagram above, the small-scale vegetable seedlings value chain in Gur i Zi is organized into the few levels, namely:

- Input
- Production
- Market

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

The input supply sector is characterized by a mix of informal and formal actors. Local agri-input shops serve as the primary source of seeds and basic materials, though they typically stock uncertified seeds and lack technical expertise. Many farmers continue the traditional practice of saving and exchanging seeds from previous harvests, despite legal restrictions. Registered seed companies and the State Seed Authority have limited penetration in the area, creating a gap in access to certified planting materials. Registered nurseries, which operate under strict regulations (Law No. 10416/2011), must source certified seeds from approved suppliers and maintain detailed records of their inputs. These formal operations contrast sharply with the predominant informal system, where farmers use whatever containers are available (often repurposed plastic bags) and untreated local soil as growing media. The lack of standardization in inputs contributes to inconsistent seedling quality across the region. The seedling production landscape features both registered and unregistered operators, with stark differences in their operations. Registered nursery operators must comply with rigorous standards, including using certified seeds, maintaining proper sanitation protocols, and keeping production records for inspection. They typically invest in better infrastructure like heated greenhouse and proper seedling trays. In contrast, the majority of small-scale producers – predominantly small-scale farmers – operate outside this formal system.

Their production methods remain labor-intensive and traditional, relying on manual watering, visual quality assessments, and home remedies for pest control. Women bear the brunt of this physically demanding work,

Women mainly do labor-intensive seedling work, often lacking access to tools and protective gear.

often without access to labor-saving tools or protective equipment. Registered nurseries tend to have more stable client bases, including contracts with commercial farms, while informal producers sell through unpredictable local channels. The knowledge gap between these two groups is significant, with registered operators more likely to adopt modern techniques like precision irrigation and integrated pest management.

The seedling market operates through multiple parallel channels with varying degrees of formality. Registered nurseries typically engage in more structured transactions, supplying big farmers and commercial growers directly or through local input providers, and sometimes exporting to regional markets. They can command premium prices by providing phytosanitary certificates and quality guarantees. The informal market, which constitutes the majority of transactions in the area, is dominated by small nurseries, often informal, who trade seedlings at local markets or farm gates through verbal agreements. Registered operators benefit from better market information and sometimes government support programs, while informal producers remain vulnerable to price fluctuations and exploitation. Most small-scale seedling producers lack the technology and literacy skills to participate in the broader trading systems.

There is a growing pressure on informal producers, as increasingly quality-conscious buyers demonstrate preference for certified seedlings from registered suppliers.

2.2 SUPPORT AND CONTROL SERVICES

The four Regional Agricultural Extension Agencies (AREB),[15] located in Shkodër, Lushnjë, Korçë, and Tiranë, operate under Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, in accordance with Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 147, dated 13.03.2018, "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:
- Provision of information and advisory services on the technical and technological development of farms to enhance competitiveness in agriculture.
- Provision of information and assistance to farmers in benefiting from national support schemes, IPARD, and other projects in agriculture and rural development.
- Encouragement and support for the creation and functioning of various forms of farmer cooperation.
- Organizing and conducting professional training for farmers in agriculture and rural development.
- Ensuring access to information on standards related to the environment, quality, marketing, organic farming, and products with geographical indications.
- Informing and advising farmers on the selection and use of agricultural machinery and equipment, providing free technical assistance.

The five Agricultural Technology Transfer Centers (QTTB),[16] 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:

- Identifying, testing, adapting, and introducing new agricultural methods and inputs into farming practices.
- Developing technological packages for key agricultural crops and livestock breeding.
- Conducting research and testing on farms to address issues raised by farmers in the respective regions.
- Providing training for agricultural specialists, farmers, agricultural science students, and other interested parties.
- Ensuring technical expertise for advisory service structures and farmers.
- Demonstrating new cultivation technologies for agricultural crops and livestock breeding.
- Preparing and publishing informative materials for agricultural specialists and farmers.
- Supporting policymaking by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) in the areas of agriculture, food, consumer protection, and rural development.

The National Authority for Veterinary and Plant Protection (AKVMB),[17] 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.

15. 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
16. See: https://bujqesia.gov.al/qendrat-e-transferimit-te-teknologjive-bujqesore-qttb/
17. See: https://akvmb.gov.al/

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, along with direct veterinary service units.

Regional directorates operate within their jurisdiction and carry out the following tasks:

- Assessing the needs and issues related to veterinary and plant protection services, proposing solutions to the General Directorate.
- Planning and submitting needs assessments for veterinary and plant protection services to the General Directorate.
- Coordinating and monitoring the delivery of veterinary and plant protection services in their territory.
- Preparing reports on sample collection, pathological materials, and test results for suspected and confirmed diseases.
- Providing periodic reports on plant infection rates and plant product status.
- Detailing and implementing work plans approved by the General Directorate in compliance with current legal frameworks.
- Issuing documents and certificates according to legal provisions, sub-legal acts, and authorizations from the General Directorate.
- Performing additional tasks assigned by law or the General Directorate.

The State Entity of Seeds and Seedlings (ESHFF),[18] 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:

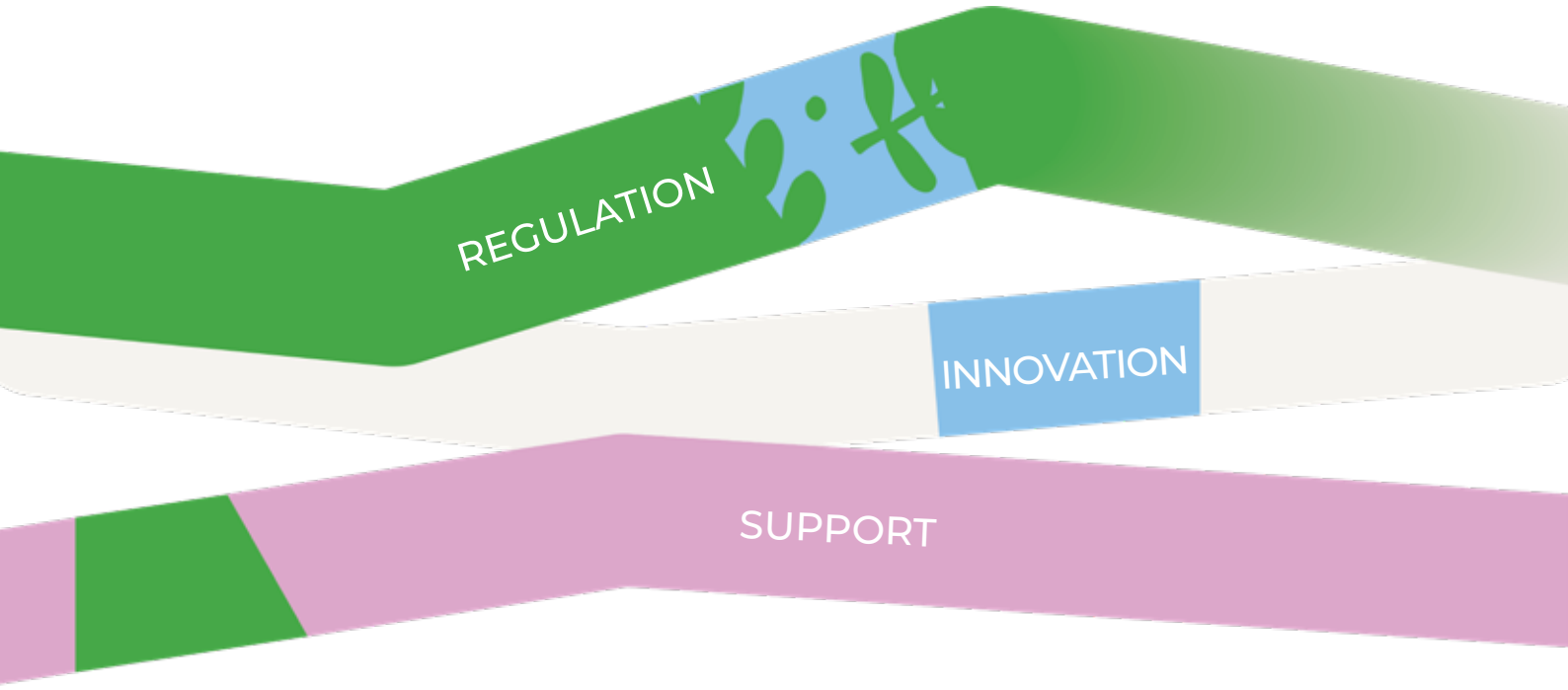
- Protecting farmers' interests;
- Expanding the availability of planting and propagating materials;
- Introducing new varieties into the market;
- Improving the quality indicators of commercial planting materials;
- Ensuring fair market competition.

18. See: http://www.eshff.gov.al/

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 Catalogue.The certification of propagating and planting material in Albania is governed by Law No. 10416, dated April 7, 2011, "On propagating and planting material," along with DCM No. 332,[19] dated April 18, 2013, and DCM No. 530,[20] dated June 13, 2013.

These regulations set the criteria for the trade and certification of vegetable seeds and other planting materials, ensuring they meet quality standards for agricultural use.

The laws aim to regulate the certification process, ensuring that seeds and propagating material, including seedlings, adhere to specific quality requirements for market distribution and agricultural production. Nurseries can apply for certification through ESHFF website or directly through e-Albania portal.[21]



19. DCM No. 332, dated April 18, 2013, establishes the criteria for the trade and certification of vegetable seeds, ensuring that they meet specific standards to be sold within the country.

20. DCM No. 530, dated June 13, 2013, further details the criteria for the trade and certification of planting and propagating material for vegetables, such as seedlings or other forms of reproduction material.

21. See: https://e-albania.al/eAlbaniaServices/ServiceList.aspx?service_filter=INS&institution_id=143&service_type=Y

2.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on fieldwork, observations, and interviews conducted with key value chain actors, including commercial operators,[22] and specialists,[23] the following data were identified:

Limitations:

- **Non-compliance with legal requirements:** Widespread use of uncertified seeds and unregistered varieties, which may lead to legal issues and market exclusion.
- **Low technology and mechanization:** Heavy reliance on manual labor, especially for women, limited tools, and underdeveloped nursery infrastructure.
- **Informal value chain:** Lack of a structured market or registration system, with limited traceability and quality control for the seedlings, making the sector less organized.
- **Inadequate knowledge of modern practices:** Limited expertise of men and women farmers in key areas like irrigation, pest management, sterilization, and soil health.
- **Absence of extension services:** Lack of access to expert guidance, training, and scientific recommendations for improving practices — particularly affecting women, who are often excluded from male-dominated advisory systems and less likely to access available support.
- **Undervalued women's labor:** Women, though central to the operation, work in challenging conditions with minimal support or recognition.
- **Small-scale operations:** Limited activity focused on small farmers, which restricts the market reach and growth potential.
- **Lack of financial resources:** Insufficient funding for investing in technology and modernizing operations.
- **Youth disengagement:** Low interest in agriculture among the youth, coupled with high migration rates, reducing the labor force and continuity of agricultural knowledge.
- **High input costs:** Rising costs for inputs like seeds, fertilizers, and equipment, affecting profitability.
- **Climate vulnerability:** Exposure to weather variability and climate challenges that can threaten the survival of seedlings.

Opportunities:

- **Formalization of seedling production:** Potential for registering nurseries and varieties with the State Entity for Seeds and Seedlings, making the sector more formal and organized.
- **Training and capacity building:** Introducing modern agricultural techniques and legal awareness to improve productivity, quality, and compliance.
- **Gender-sensitive support programs:** Targeted interventions to improve the working conditions and economic empowerment of women in agriculture.
- **Development of certified local varieties:** The possibility of registering and preserving local genetic resources (e.g., landraces), ensuring quality and promoting traditional practices.
- **Group development:** Organizing producers into grouping could improve access to markets, finance, tools, and legal support, fostering growth and collective bargaining power.

22. Rruzhdi Koni and Enea Huqi from AgroKoni company.
23. Prof. Dr. Alban Ibraliu, Prof. As. Dr. Adrian Doko, and Dr. Gjon Gaspri from AUT.

Women play key roles in seedling production, yet their work is undervalued, underpaid, and lacks support and resources.

Regarding Gender Inequality Issues and the Inclusion of Women, the information gathered from meetings and interviews shows in the seedling value chain, gender inequality remains a key issue, despite the significant contribution women make. Women are involved in every stage of seedling production, from preparing the seeds to transplanting, overseeing quality control, and selling the seedlings. However, their labor is often undervalued and underpaid. While women perform crucial tasks, they face barriers in accessing the necessary resources, such as financial support, modern tools, and technology, to improve their productivity and the quality of the seedlings they produce.

Additionally, women typically have limited decision-making power over the production process, sales strategies, and the management of the profits, leaving them with little economic autonomy. Moreover, there is a lack of access to training opportunities in modern agricultural practices, such as pest management, irrigation, and quality control, which restricts their ability to increase productivity and adapt to evolving agricultural practices.

Cultural norms often prevent women from taking leadership roles or making important decisions within the value chain, and the physical burden of their work remains high, often with little recognition or support.

Regarding Financing Opportunities, for many families in Gur I Zi seedling production is the primary source of income, with profits earned after selling their products in the market. However, they face significant financial constraints. They operate mainly informally, 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 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 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.[24]

Opportunities for Improving Access to Microcredit:

- Raising awareness about available microcredit options and financial literacy can help small farmers and women better understand and access these resources.
- Providing guidance on how to apply for loans, as well as how to manage repayments, would empower them to use microcredit more effectively.
- Developing loan products that are specifically tailored to the needs of women farmers (e.g., low-interest loans for purchasing inputs, equipment,

24. *The Impact of Microcredit Services on the Rural Economy: Evidence from Albania.* Acta Universitatis Danubius Oeconomica, 2021. See: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349992166_The_Impact_of_Microcredit_Services_on_the_Rural_Economy_Evidence_from_Albania

or building storage facilities) could reduce the financial burden and improve productivity.

- Facilitating group lending programs where small farmers, especially women, 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 women small farmers to invest in long-term improvements to their operations.

2.4 RECOMMENDED INTERVENTIONS FOR THE SEEDLING VALUE CHAIN IN GUR I ZI

Below are some general recommendations for gender-sensitive value chain development in seedling production in Gur i Zi, categorized by their impact:

1. Formalization and Compliance with Legal Standards:

- Support women-led seedling producers to register and ensure legal recognition and eligibility for public and donor support.

- Provide capacity-building on legal requirements, including certification processes, phytosanitary standards, and traceability rules.

To increase market access and ensure sustainability, it is essential to support the registration of women-led seedling producers, allowing them to gain legal recognition. This will enable them to qualify for public and donor support, enhancing their access to financial resources and technical assistance. Capacity-building programs should be designed to educate producers, particularly women, on legal requirements such as certification processes, phytosanitary standards, and traceability rules.

These efforts will foster compliance with national regulations, thereby building consumer and buyer confidence in their products. Over time, this will improve the overall marketability of seedlings and help establish a reputation for quality and reliability.

2. Targeted Technical Training and Extension Services:

- Develop and implement gender-responsive training modules on:
  - Modern nursery techniques;
  - Soil sterilization and seedbed preparation;
  - Climate-resilient irrigation and pest management;
  - Use of certified seeds and varietal selection.

- Organize mobile advisory teams to reach women directly in their production spaces, considering mobility constraints and care responsibilities.

A major barrier to growth in the seedling production value chain is the reliance on traditional practices and limited technical know-how. To address this, it is crucial to develop gender-responsive training modules tailored to women producers. These training programs should focus on modern nursery techniques, soil sterilization, seedbed preparation, climate-resilient irrigation, pest management, and the use of certified seeds. Such initiatives will empower women farmers, improve productivity, and reduce dependency on outdated practices.

Furthermore, mobile advisory teams should be deployed to meet women producers directly in their production spaces, considering their mobility constraints and caregiving responsibilities. This will ensure that women have access to the support they need to adopt new techniques and improve their practices.

3. Support Access to Inputs and Tools:

- Facilitate women's access to affordable inputs (seed trays, quality substrate, irrigation kits, etc.) through voucher schemes or collective procurement models.

- Introduce gender-adapted tools and ergonomic equipment to reduce the physical burden of nursery work.

For women in seedling production, access to quality inputs and appropriate tools is a significant challenge. To improve efficiency and reduce physical strain, it is recommended to facilitate women's access to affordable inputs such as seed trays, quality substrates, and irrigation kits. This could be achieved through voucher schemes or collective procurement models.

Additionally, introducing gender-adapted tools and ergonomic equipment will help reduce the physical burden on women, improving their well-being and overall productivity. Over time, these improvements will lead to the production of higher-quality seedlings, enhancing the competitiveness of local producers.

4. Financial Support and Investment Facilitation:

- Support designing microfinance and grant schemes specifically for women producers to support investments in:
  - Greenhouses or covered nursery structures
  - Drip irrigation systems
  - Seedling transport and packaging tools
- Support women's access to financial literacy and business planning programs.

Investment in modern agricultural technology is often hindered by limited financial resources. To address this, it is important to design microfinance and grant schemes specifically tailored for women producers. These schemes should support investments in key infrastructure such as greenhouses or covered nursery structures, drip irrigation systems, and seedling transport and packaging tools.

Furthermore, facilitating access to financial literacy programs and business planning workshops will empower women to manage their finances more effectively, enabling them to make informed decisions about investments. These steps will increase financial stability and encourage women to invest in technology, thereby improving the long-term viability of their businesses

5. Cooperative and Group Formation

- Promote the establishment or strengthening of women-led producer groups to:
- Pool resources and reduce input costs
- Facilitate collective marketing
- Increase bargaining power with buyers and institutions
- Ensure that women are represented in decision-making roles within these structures.

To increase bargaining power, reduce input costs, and facilitate collective marketing, it is crucial to promote the establishment of women-led producer groups. These groups can help pool resources, share knowledge, and collectively engage in decision-making processes. Women's representation in decision-making roles within these groups will further ensure that their needs and perspectives are taken into account.

These producer groups will also provide opportunities for women to strengthen social capital, increase their influence, and improve their ability to negotiate better prices for their products.

6. Market Access and Value Chain Linkages

- Establish dedicated local market days or platforms for women producers to sell seedlings directly to farmers or buyers.
- Facilitate linkages with retail nurseries and agrishops, agritourism units, agricultural fairs and exhibitions
- Encourage contract farming agreements with larger farms or agribusinesses.

Improved market access is key to increasing income potential and market stability for women in the seedling production value chain. To support this, it is recommended to establish dedicated local market days or platforms where women producers can sell seedlings directly to farmers or buyers. This will allow women to increase their profits, and improve their market visibility.
Additionally, creating linkages with retail nurseries, agrishops, agritourism units, agricultural fairs, and exhibitions will open up new market opportunities. Encouraging contract farming agreements with larger farms or agribusinesses can also help diversify revenue streams and provide more stable income sources for women producers.

7. Address Youth and Migration Dynamics

- Integrate youth-oriented vocational training in seedling production and agri-entrepreneurship to attract younger generations.

- Promote digital tools and innovation (e.g., mobile apps for pest management, digital extension platforms) to make the sector more appealing and efficient.

Addressing the challenges of youth migration and engaging younger generations in the seedling production value chain is essential for its long-term sustainability. This can be achieved by integrating youth-oriented vocational training in seedling production and agri-entrepreneurship.

Such training will equip young people with the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute to the sector, helping to counteract the effects of rural-urban migration. Additionally, promoting digital tools and innovations, such as mobile apps for pest management and digital extension platforms, will make the sector more appealing to youth, offering them modern, efficient ways of engaging in agriculture.

8. Infrastructure and Working Conditions

- Advocate for investment in basic infrastructure (e.g., centralized nurseries, storage units, covered working areas) with a focus on improving women's working conditions.

- Ensure that future infrastructure development (greenhouses, toolsheds) includes safe and sanitary facilities for women.

Improving the infrastructure and working conditions of women in seedling production is critical for increasing productivity and attracting new workers. Investments in basic infrastructure such as centralized nurseries, storage units, and covered working areas will improve the working environment, especially for women who often work in physically demanding conditions. It is also important to ensure that future infrastructure development, such as greenhouses and toolsheds, includes safe and sanitary facilities that cater to the specific needs of women workers.

Enhancing the working conditions will help retain current workers and attract new ones, ultimately increasing the sector's overall productivity.

These recommendations are designed to address the specific challenges faced by women in the seedling production value chain in Gur i Zi. By focusing on legal compliance, access to inputs, targeted training, financial support, and improved market access, these actions aim to empower women, increase productivity, and promote long-term sustainability within the value chain. With these efforts, it is anticipated that the value chain will become more competitive, resilient, and equitable, creating a better future for all involved.

Table 6. Recommendations for the Seedling Value Chain

No.	Activity	Impact		
		Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
1	**Formalization and compliance with legal standards**			
	Increased access to markets and funding and compliance with standards increases consumer and buyer confidence in the products.			
1.1	Support registration of women-led seedling producers to ensure legal recognition and eligibility for public and donor support.		X	X
1.2	Provide capacity-building on legal requirements, including certification processes, phytosanitary standards, and traceability rules.		X	X
2	**Targeted technical training and extension services**			
	Improved productivity, reduced dependency on traditional practices, and empowered women farmers.			
2.1	Develop and implement gender-responsive training modules on: o Modern nursery techniques o Soil sterilization and seedbed preparation o Climate-resilient irrigation and pest management o Use of certified seeds and varietal selection	X	X	X
2.2	Organize mobile advisory teams to reach women directly in their production spaces, considering mobility constraints and care responsibilities.	X	X	X
3	**Access to inputs and tools**			
	Increased efficiency, physical well-being of women, and higher-quality seedlings.			
3.1	Facilitate women's access to affordable inputs (seed trays, quality substrate, irrigation kits, etc.) through voucher schemes or collective procurement models.		X	X
3.2	Introduce gender-adapted tools and ergonomic equipment to reduce the physical burden of nursery work.	X	X	X
4	**Financial support and investment facilitation**			
	Increased investment in modern technology, and enhanced business viability.			
4.1	Facilitate designing microfinance and grant schemes specifically for women producers to support investments in: o Greenhouses or covered nursery structures o Drip irrigation systems o Seedling transport and packaging tools		X	X
4.2	Support women's access to financial literacy and business planning programs.	X	X	X
5	**Support group formation**			
	Increased bargaining power, access to larger markets, and enhanced social capital			

(Continues on the next page)

No.	Activity	Impact		
		Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
5.1	Promote the establishment or strengthening of women-led producer groups to: o Pool resources and reduce input costs o Facilitate collective marketing o Increase bargaining power with buyers and institutions		X	X
5.2	Ensure that women are represented in decision-making roles within these structures.	X	X	X
6	**Market access and value chain linkages**			
	Higher income potential, improved market stability, diversified revenue streams.			
6.1	Establish dedicated local market days or platforms for women producers to sell seedlings directly to farmers or buyers. o Facilitate linkages with retail nurseries and agrishops, agritourism units, agricultural fairs and exhibitions		X	X
6.2	Encourage contract farming agreements with larger farms or agribusinesses.		X	X
7	**Address youth and migration dynamics**			
	Reduction in rural-urban migration, innovation and sustainability, and increased local employment			
7.1	Integrate youth-oriented vocational training in seedling production and agri-entrepreneurship to attract younger generations.		X	X
7.2	Promote digital tools and innovation (e.g., mobile apps for pest management, digital extension platforms) to make the sector more appealing and efficient.	X	X	X
8	**Infrastructure and working conditions**			
	Improved working conditions, increased productivity, and attraction of new workers			
8.1	Advocate for investment in basic infrastructure (e.g., centralized nurseries, storage units, covered working areas) with a focus on improving women's working conditions.		X	X
8.2	Ensure that future infrastructure development (greenhouses, toolsheds) includes safe and sanitary facilities for women.		X	X

This table outlines key activities under the gender-sensitive value chain development, detailing specific actions, their expected impacts at each stage, and the corresponding timelines. The activities are categorized into short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions to build a sustainable and gender-responsive seedling value chain that not only empowers women but also strengthens the agricultural economy in Gur i Zi. The municipality should play a key role in providing policy support, coordination, and infrastructure development.

Relevant public and private institutions from the agricultural sector, such as agricultural extension services and CSOs can contribute with their expertise in training and technical assistance. Collaboration with local markets and fairs will create opportunities for women farmers to showcase their products and access broader consumer bases. This multi-stakeholder approach ensures the sustainability and effectiveness of the initiatives by leveraging local knowledge, resources, and networks.

Part 3

Analysis of Onion Value Chain

1. Gender Sensitive Analysis of Onion Value Chain

Albania boasts a rich diversity of onion ecotypes – each uniquely adapted to local growing conditions and traditions. This varietal wealth supports both dry and fresh onion production across the country.

Among the most renowned dry onion varieties are the Miras onion, known for its robust flavor, and the vibrant Dishnica red onion. Other notable types include the Bënja, Rehova, Lini, Peshkopia, and Drishti onions—each representing a specific region and its agricultural heritage. In addition to these local treasures, Albanian farmers have also embraced a range of foreign hybrids. Varieties such as Hercules and Stuttgart have become increasingly popular due to their high yields and adaptability, complementing the traditional selections and expanding production potential.

For generations, onions have been central to both the livelihoods and cultural identity of farming families in Postribë, with women playing a key role in sustaining this tradition.

In 2023, approximately 5,327 hectares of land in Albania were cultivated with dry onions, resulting in a total production of 117,110 tons—an 8% increase compared to 2022. The main onion-producing regions included Maliq with 626 hectares, followed by Tirana (365 ha), Fier (268 ha), Divjaka (251 ha), Pogradec (242 ha), and Korça (206 ha).[25]Farmers in the Municipality of Shkodra cultivated 201 hectares, representing about 3.8% of the total national area planted with dry onions. This positioned Shkodra as the sixth-largest onion-producing area in the country, with a total output of 3,927 tons—approximately 3.35% of the national production. However, in terms of yield, Shkodra ranked 23rd, with an average of 195 tons per hectare.[26]In the administrative unit of Postribë, onion cultivation is deeply rooted in the local agricultural tradition and stands as the primary crop produced by farmers in the area. For generations, onions have played a central role in both the livelihoods and cultural identity of local farming families. Among the most cherished varieties is the native Drishti onion, which, according to testimonies gathered during meetings with farmers, has been cultivated and preserved for over 200 years.

This heirloom variety is not only a symbol of local heritage but also valued for its quality and adaptability to the region's soil and climate conditions.

In 2023, the market price for onions in Shkodër ranged between ALL 60 and 70 per kilogram, providing a modest yet stable source of income for farmers. However, the situation changed drastically in 2024, when onion wholesale prices dropped sharply to just ALL 35-40 per kilogram. This significant decline has had a direct and negative impact on the financial well-being of local households, many of whom rely heavily on onion production as their main source of income. The primary market for onions is located in the city of Shkoder, where most of the produce is sold. However, some farmers in Postribë, particularly women, face individual challenges in accessing markets. They often sell directly to consumers or local restaurants, bypassing the main market. While this direct selling approach can be more profitable, it comes with logistical challenges, including storage issues.According to local farmers, the average cost of producing one kilogram of onions in Postribë is estimated at ALL 20-25. This figure includes essential

25. Agriculture Statistical Yearbook 2023. INSTAT. See: https://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/buja%C3%ABsia-dhe-peshkimi/buja%C3%ABsia/#tab1
26. Ibid.

expenses such as land preparation, agricultural inputs (fertilizers, pesticides), and the purchase of onion sets. Notably, these estimates do not account for labor costs of almost seven months from planting to harvest and drying, which are often covered by family members themselves, making the actual production cost potentially even higher. The price drop has thus placed many farmers in a vulnerable economic position, where their profit margins are severely reduced or completely eliminated.

Farmers in the Postribë area express growing concerns about the lack of proper post-harvest storage conditions, noting that there is currently no collection or aggregation point available in the region. This absence significantly limits their ability to preserve the quality of their produce, reduce losses, and access broader markets. The majority of farms in the area are small-scale and fragmented, which further complicates production efficiency and limits opportunities for mechanization. Most land preparation and other mechanized activities are carried out through paid service providers, as farmers do not own the necessary equipment themselves. This dependency adds to production costs and can cause delays during critical agricultural periods.As regards agricultural advisory services, most farmers rely heavily on input suppliers, particularly agricultural pharmacies, for technical advice and guidance. While helpful to some extent, this source of information is often limited and not tailored to the specific needs of individual farms. Farmers point out the lack of access to specialized agricultural extension services, which could provide more accurate, science-based recommendations for improving yields and sustainability. Field visits revealed a lack of essential tools and equipment for mechanized work on small plots.

Additionally, the use of herbicides, pesticides, and other treatments is often based on tradition or personal experience rather than expert consultation. This practice not only affects productivity but may also pose risks to the environment and consumer safety.

Despite playing a central and indispensable role in every stage of the onion value chain, women in Postribë continue to face inadequate working conditions. They are actively involved in labor-intensive tasks such as seed and onion set preparation, planting, cultivation, harvesting, drying, and post-harvest activities—including the traditional practice of braiding onions into decorative strings for storage and sale.

However, much of this work is carried out under physically demanding conditions, often without access to proper tools, protective equipment, or fair compensation. The lack of mechanization and agricultural support services disproportionately affects women, who typically perform these tasks manually.

Their contributions, while essential, often go unrecognized and unsupported—highlighting the urgent need for gender-sensitive interventions to improve working conditions, increase access to resources, and promote equality in agricultural labor.

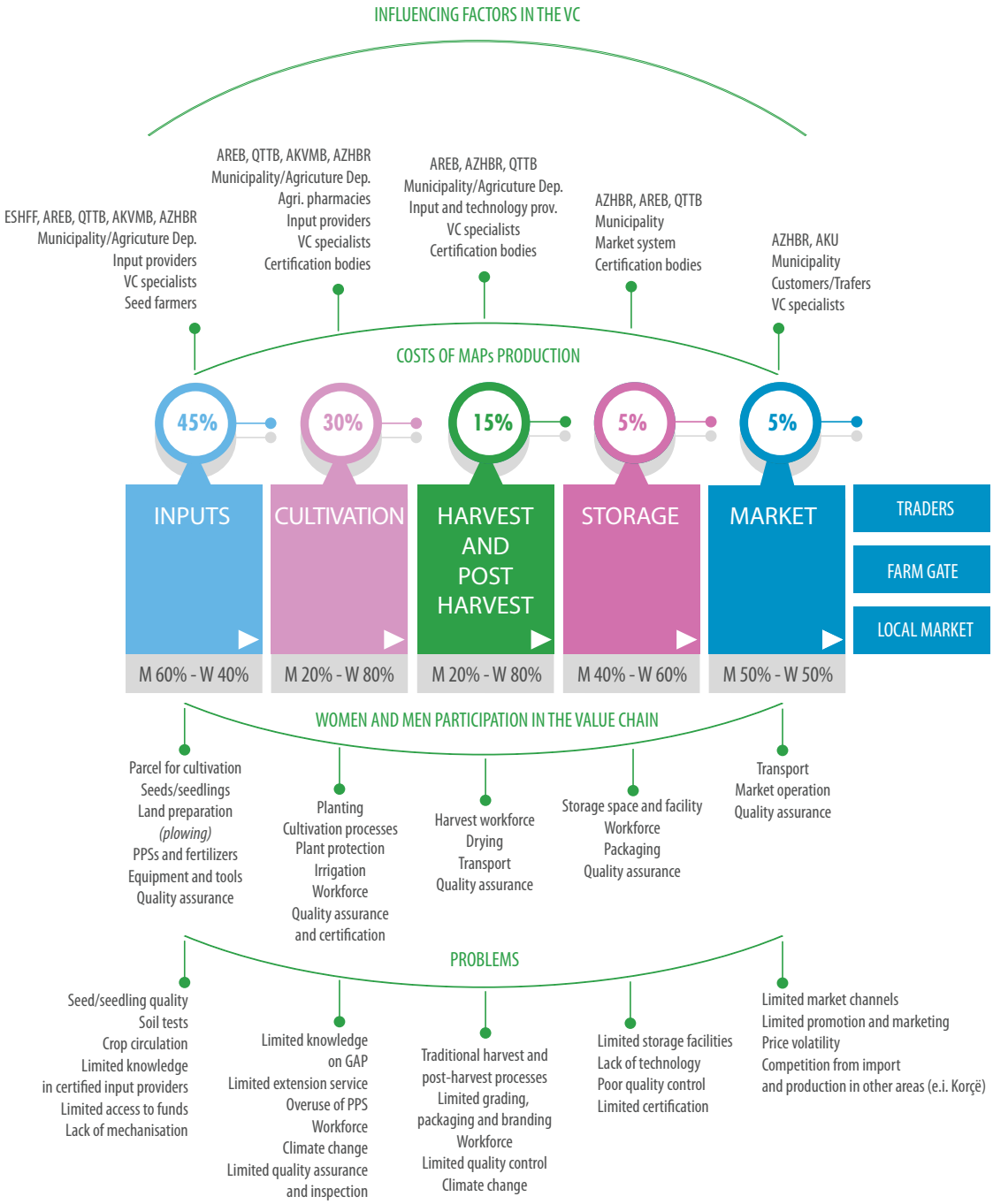
Table 7. SWOT analysis of the Onion Value Chain

Strengths	Weaknesses
Long-standing tradition of onion cultivation, especially of the native Drishti onion, cultivated for over 200 years. Onion cultivation is deeply rooted in the local tradition of Postribë, with the native Drishti onion being a valuable heirloom variety. This provides cultural value and strong local identity. **The Drishti onion has received Geographical Indication (GI) registration,** offering a unique opportunity for branding and market differentiation. **Farmers possess valuable local knowledge** and experience, especially women. **Availability of diverse onion ecotypes** adapted to local conditions. **Active participation of women across all stages of the value chain.** Women are integral to every stage of the onion production process, from seed preparation to harvest and post-harvest processing, providing strong community involvement and a potential for gender-focused empowerment programs. **Close proximity to the Shkodër city market.**	**Sharp price volatility and dependency** on limited market channels. **Lack of mechanization and limited ownership** of agricultural equipment, especially by women. **Inadequate post-harvest infrastructure** (no collection/ aggregation points, poor storage conditions). **Fragmented and small-scale land holdings** limit economies of scale. **High production costs,** especially when labor is factored in. **Limited access to extension services** and professional advice. **Use of agricultural inputs** (e.g., pesticides) based on tradition, not expert guidance. **Gender inequalities** in labor conditions and limited access to equipment and tools. **Lack of financial resources,** and consequently, insufficient investment in technology. **High input costs.** **Absence of certification** for safety and quality standards. **Existence of a technical skills gap** especially in plant protection processes. **Market availability** and price highly conditioned from import. **Climate vulnerability** – dry season affects production. **Hard work and poor working conditions,** especially for women. **Lack of youth interested** in agriculture and high high migration rates. migration rates.
Opportunities	**Threats**
Potential for mechanization: Introducing modern farming techniques and mechanization could increase productivity, reduce labor intensity, and cut production costs, especially for small-scale farmers. **Improved gender equality:** The active participation of women in the agricultural process creates opportunities for gender-sensitive interventions that could empower women through training, better working conditions, and fairer compensation. **Market diversification:** Exploring new market avenues, including direct sales to consumers, restaurants, and local agribusinesses, could help mitigate price volatility and broaden market access. **Direct sales:** Developing direct sales platforms for women producers could enhance visibility, increase sales, and provide additional sources of income. **Climate-resilient practices:** Implementing climate-resilient irrigation and soil management practices could help farmers adapt to changing environmental conditions and improve yields. **Good opportunity to make a difference with small investments,** including training in application of good agriculture practices. **Innovative developments** and advancements in product drying and treatment processes. **High demand for locally produced onion.** **Product differentiation** through grading, packaging, and branding.	**Price drops** (as in 2024) directly threaten household incomes. **Climate variability affecting crop yields and post-harvest losses.** Vulnerability to climate-related events (e.g., droughts, floods) could further threaten production, particularly for small-scale, non-mechanized operations. **Persistent high migration** leading to labor shortages and aging farmer population. **The lack of aggregation points and storage facilities** prevents economies of scale, making it difficult to access larger markets **Increasing costs for inputs** like fertilizers, pesticides, and labor make it harder for farmers to remain profitable, especially without access to affordable financing or subsidies. **Poor recognition** and undervaluation of women's labor. **Exposure to environmental and health risks** due to improper input usage.

2. Mapping of the Onions 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 3. Mapping of the Onion Value Chain in Postribë



2.1 VALUE CHAIN ACTORS

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

- Inputs
- Cultivation
- Harvest and post-harvest
- Storage
- Market

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

Inputs: In Postribë, the onion value chain begins with the acquisition of essential agricultural inputs such as onion sets, fertilizers, pesticides, and tools. Onions are a deeply rooted crop in the area, especially the native "Drishti Onion," cherished for its quality and cultivated for over 200 years. In 2023, the average cost of producing one kilogram of onions ranged between 20–25 ALL, covering land preparation, inputs, and the purchase of onion sets—but excluding the substantial labor cost provided by family members over the seven-month growing cycle. Most farmers rely on input suppliers, like agricultural pharmacies, for technical advice, which tends to be general and not tailored to their specific needs. The absence of specialized agricultural extension services has left a knowledge gap in modern practices such as proper pesticide use, soil health, and sustainability.

Cultivation: The onion value chain in Postribë showcases both the resilience and challenges of small-scale agriculture in northern Albania. Anchored in a rich farming tradition, onion cultivation stands as the primary livelihood for local families, supported by strong community involvement and the continued cultivation of heirloom varieties like the Drishti onion. Within the broader Shkodra Municipality, 201 hectares of land were dedicated to dry onion cultivation, accounting for 3.8% of the national total and yielding 3,927 tons—ranking sixth in overall production, though only 23rd in yield per hectare.
In Postribë, the cultivation process is deeply manual and labor-intensive, shaped by small, fragmented plots and a general lack of mechanization. Farmers often rely on paid service providers for critical

Women in Postribë carry out most of the onion production labor without pay, under unsafe and physically demanding conditions, yet remain unrecognized in the value chain.

operations like land preparation, which adds both financial strain and logistical delays. Women play a pivotal role across all stages of production—from planting and irrigation to weeding—yet their work often goes unsupported. Without access to proper tools, safety equipment, or ergonomic conditions, their labor remains undervalued, highlighting persistent gender disparities. These limitations, coupled with poor infrastructure, absence of extension services, and volatile market conditions, place the entire value chain in a vulnerable position despite its strong traditional roots.

Harvest and post-harvest: The harvest phase typically begins in summer and requires meticulous manual labor, with entire families—especially women—engaged in lifting, cleaning, drying, and sorting onions. Traditional practices such as braiding onions for storage and sale remain common. However, due to a lack of knowledge in post-harvest handling and the absence of proper drying tools, farmers experience quality losses. Labor is unpaid or underpaid, as family members bear the bulk of the workload. These conditions disproportionately affect women, whose contributions, while vital, often remain unacknowledged and unsupported. Pesticide and herbicide use at this stage is typically guided by tradition rather than expert consultation, which can impact both yield and consumer safety.

Storage: Storage is one of the most critical bottlenecks in the onion value chain in Postribë. Farmers report an absence of collective storage infrastructure or aggregation points, making it difficult to preserve produce quality and prevent losses. Onions are stored in makeshift home-based facilities or sheds, often under inadequate conditions that expose the crop to rot and spoilage. This lack of proper storage limits the ability of farmers to time their market entry strategically, pushing them to sell early at unfavorable prices. Women are also heavily involved in storage-related activities, yet they must manage them in environments that lack safety and hygiene standards, adding to their physical burden.

Market: The majority of onions from Postribë are sold in Shkodra's central market. However, the market structure remains informal and fragmented. In 2023, farmers earned a relatively stable price of 60–70 ALL/kg, but in 2024, prices plummeted to just 35–40 ALL/kg. With production costs estimated at 20–25 ALL/kg and labor excluded, the sharp price decline has severely impacted the profitability and financial security of farming households.

Some farmers add to the normal markets to sell directly to consumers or restaurants, which can bring higher returns but also introduces logistical challenges—particularly given limited transportation, storage, and access to buyers. Their market participation is further constrained by mobility limitations, lack of bargaining power, and minimal recognition of their entrepreneurial role.

2.2 SUPPORT AND CONTROL SERVICES

The four Regional Agricultural Extension Agencies (AREB),[27] located in Shkodër, Lushnjë, Korçë, and Tiranë, operate under Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, in accordance with Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 147, dated 13.03.2018, "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:

- Provision of information and advisory services on the technical and technological development of farms to enhance competitiveness in agriculture.
- Provision of information and assistance to farmers in benefiting from national support schemes, IPARD, and other projects in agriculture and rural development.
- Encouragement and support for the creation and functioning of various forms of farmer cooperation.
- Organizing and conducting professional training for farmers in agriculture and rural development.
- Ensuring access to information on standards related to the environment, quality, marketing, organic farming, and products with geographical indications.

Informing and advising farmers on the selection and use of agricultural machinery and equipment, providing free technical assistance.

The five Agricultural Technology Transfer Centers (QTTB),[28] 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:

- Identifying, testing, adapting, and introducing new agricultural methods and inputs into farming practices.

27. 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

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

- Developing technological packages for key agricultural crops and livestock breeding.
- Conducting research and testing on farms to address issues raised by farmers in the respective regions.
- Providing training for agricultural specialists, farmers, agricultural science students, and other interested parties.
- Ensuring technical expertise for advisory service structures and farmers.
- Demonstrating new cultivation technologies for agricultural crops and livestock breeding.
- Preparing and publishing informative materials for agricultural specialists and farmers.

Supporting policymaking by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) in the areas of agriculture, food, consumer protection, and rural development.

The National Authority for Veterinary and Plant Protection (AKVMB)[29] 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 (MARD) 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, along with direct veterinary service units.

Regional directorates operate within their jurisdiction and carry out the following tasks:

- Assessing the needs and issues related to veterinary and plant protection services, proposing solutions to the General Directorate.
- Planning and submitting needs assessments for veterinary and plant protection services to the General Directorate.
- Coordinating and monitoring the delivery of veterinary and plant protection services in their territory.
- Preparing reports on sample collection, pathological materials, and test results for suspected and confirmed diseases.
- Providing periodic reports on plant infection rates and plant product status.

29. See: https://akvmb.gov.al/

- Detailing and implementing work plans approved by the General Directorate in compliance with current legal frameworks.
- Issuing documents and certificates according to legal provisions, sub-legal acts, and authorizations from the General Directorate.
- Performing additional tasks assigned by law or the General Directorate.

The National Food Authority (AKU),[30] 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. 10433, dated June 16, 2011, "On inspection in the Republic of Albania", specifically its Article 7, "Principles of the inspection program." 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:

- 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),[31] 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 Catalogue.

Organic certification is a lengthy but valuable process, as it opens up access to global markets

30. See: https://aku.gov.al/
31. See: http://www.eshff.gov.al/

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, labelling of organic products, and their control".[32] 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 labelling 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 is 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 "Organic certification in process."

32. 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 labelling 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

Key Limitations in Onion Production in Postribë:

1. Market Vulnerability and Price Instability
Onion producers in Postribë are highly exposed to market fluctuations, as seen in 2024 when prices fell by nearly 50%. This dependency on a narrow set of market channels, coupled with the lack of price regulation or contracts, leaves farmers financially insecure and discourages long-term investment.

2. Lack of Mechanization and Post-Harvest Infrastructure
Most farming activities are labor-intensive and performed manually, particularly by women. The absence of mechanization—combined with the lack of storage facilities, collection points, and aggregation centers—limits production efficiency and results in significant post-harvest losses.

3. High Production Costs and Limited Profit Margins
While production costs (excluding labor) are estimated at 20–25 ALL/kg, the sharp decline in market prices in 2024 has drastically narrowed profit margins. With labor often provided by family members, true costs are underrepresented, further hiding the economic burden on households.

4. Limited Access to Extension Services and Technical Knowledge
Most farmers rely on agricultural input suppliers for advice, which is not always reliable or tailored. There is little formal support for good agricultural practices, pest management, climate adaptation, or certification procedures.

5. Gender Inequality in Labor Conditions
Although women are central to onion production, they often work under poor conditions with no access to mechanized tools, protective gear, or formal recognition. Their labor is essential yet undervalued and unsupported.

6. Youth Migration and Aging Workforce
The rural exodus of younger generations is leaving an aging farming population with limited innovation and long-term continuity, threatening the sustainability of onion cultivation in the region.

7. Climate Vulnerability and Unsustainable Practices
Prolonged dry seasons and changing weather patterns affect both production levels and input effectiveness. Traditional practices, including pesticide use without expert oversight, pose risks to environmental and human health.

Key Opportunities in Onion Production in Postribë:

1. Value Chain Strengthening and Branding of the Drishti Onion
The Drishti Onion's recent Geographical Indication (GI) registration offers an excellent platform to promote it as a high-value, traditional product. This could lead to improved visibility, niche market access, and premium pricing if paired with branding and marketing efforts.

2. Targeted Mechanization for Smallholders
Introducing appropriate-scale mechanization and shared equipment can significantly improve labor efficiency, reduce physical burden (especially for women), and increase yields.

3. Establishment of Aggregation and Storage Facilities
Developing basic post-harvest infrastructure, such as onion drying sheds or collection centers, would reduce losses, enable bulk sales, and create access to higher-value markets through improved quality control.

4. Capacity Building and Technical Training
Providing structured training in good agricultural practices (GAP), pest management, irrigation techniques, and sustainable input use would raise productivity and reduce environmental risks. Tailored training for women could also enhance equity and effectiveness.

5. Gender-Sensitive Interventions and Support
Supporting women through targeted investments—like access to tools, credit, training, and marketing channels—would improve livelihoods and enhance the resilience of farming households.

6. Market Diversification and Direct Sales

Empowering farmers, particularly women, to engage in direct marketing (e.g., to restaurants, local fairs, or online platforms) could increase income and reduce dependency on unstable wholesale markets.

7. Adoption of Climate-Resilient Practices

With appropriate training and incentives, farmers could adopt more climate-adaptive practices, such as mulching, drip irrigation, or crop rotation—helping mitigate production risks and improve resource efficiency.

8. Youth Engagement and Innovation Support

Encouraging young people to engage in agriculture through entrepreneurship training, digital tools, or grant programs can inject innovation into the sector and reverse the migration trend.

While women play a central role in planting, harvesting, and post-harvest handling, they face systemic barriers that limit their productivity, income, and decision-making power.

Regarding Gender Inequality Issues and the Inclusion of Women in the value chain, the information gathered from field trips and interviews shows that onion farming in Postribë, relies heavily on the labor of women, yet their contributions often go unrecognized, and their working conditions remain challenging. While women play a central role in planting, harvesting, and post-harvest handling, they face systemic barriers that limit their productivity, income, and decision-making power. At the same time, opportunities exist to empower women farmers, strengthen gender equality, and enhance the overall sustainability of onion production in the region. Women in Postribë are the backbone of onion production, performing most of the manual labor—tasks like weeding, sorting, and drying onions—often without proper tools or protective equipment. Because their work is frequently unpaid (classified as "family labor"), their economic contributions are undervalued. This invisibility extends to access to resources; women have fewer opportunities than men to receive agricultural training, financial services, or market information. Instead, many rely on advice from male-dominated input suppliers, which may not always align with their specific needs. The lack of mechanization further exacerbates gender disparities. While men often handle tasks like plowing (sometimes using rented machinery), women perform the most physically demanding work by hand. This not only increases their workload but also limits their productivity and earning potential. Additionally, because women's labor is rarely factored into official cost calculations, the true economic burden on female farmers remains hidden, reinforcing cycles of inequality.

Despite these challenges, there are clear pathways to improve gender equality in Postribë onion value chain. One key opportunity lies in gender-sensitive mechanization—introducing small, affordable tools (like handheld planters or mechanical weeders) that could drastically reduce women's physical strain while increasing efficiency. Since women are already deeply involved in day-to-day farming, providing them with appropriate technology would have an immediate impact on productivity. Another critical step is tailored training programs for women, covering sustainable farming techniques, pest management, and financial literacy. Given that women often lack access to formal extension services, mobile-based training or women-led farmer field schools could bridge this gap. Additionally, since the Drishti onion now has Geographical Indication (GI) status, targeted support could help women engage in branding, packaging, and direct sales—enabling them to capture more value from their harvests. Strengthening women's cooperatives or producer groups could also amplify their voices in the market. By pooling resources, women could negotiate better prices, access bulk buyers, and invest in shared storage facilities—reducing post-harvest losses and increasing incomes. Furthermore, integrating gender considerations into climate adaptation strategies would make farms more resilient while empowering women farmers as key agents of change. Addressing gender inequalities in onion production in Postribë is not just a matter of fairness—it is essential for long-

term sustainability. When women have access to resources, training, and market opportunities, farm productivity rises, household incomes improve, and the entire value chain benefits. By investing in women farmers through targeted mechanization, education, and inclusive policies, Postribë can transform its onion production into a more equitable and prosperous value chain for all.

Regarding Financing Opportunities, for many families in Postribë the onion cultivation is the primary source of income, with profits earned after selling their products. However, small-sized farmers face significant financial constraints. Small farmers 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 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 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.

Opportunities for Improving Microcredit Access:

- Raising awareness about available microcredit options and financial literacy can help small farmers, especially women, 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 small farmers (e.g., low-interest loans for purchasing inputs, equipment, or building storage facilities) could reduce the financial burden and improve productivity.
- Facilitating group lending programs where 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 to invest in long-term improvements to their operations.

2.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ONION VALUE CHAIN DEVELOPMENT IN POSTRIBË, WITH A FOCUS ON WOMEN

1. **Strengthen Women's Role in the Value Chain through Tailored Support**
   - **Establish women-focused farmer groups or cooperatives**. Facilitate the formation and legal registration of women-led producer groups or cooperatives to enhance their collective bargaining power, improve access to markets, and enable shared use of resources like drying facilities, packaging stations, and transportation.
   - **Provide gender-sensitive technical training and capacity building**. Organize targeted training programs for women on:
     - Good agricultural practices (GAP) and integrated pest management
     - Onion post-harvest handling and storage techniques
     - Financial literacy, digital skills, and recordkeeping
     - Leadership, negotiation, and cooperative governance

- **Introduce labor-saving technologies and tools** Support access to affordable and user-friendly agricultural equipment (e.g., planters, weeders, mini tractors) that ease physically demanding tasks traditionally performed by women. Tools should be designed with ergonomics in mind to fit women's needs.

2. Improve Market Access and Product Differentiation

- **Leverage the Drishti onion's Geographical Indication (GI) status**. Develop a branded marketing strategy for the Drishti onion that highlights its heritage, quality, and women's role in production.

- **Develop women-led direct sales channels.** Pilot women-led marketing initiatives such as:
  - Online platforms for direct-to-consumer onion sales
  - Partnerships with local restaurants and points of sales

- **Facilitate linkages to institutional buyers and exporters.** Support contract farming or forward agreements with buyers such as supermarkets, public institutions (schools, hospitals), and exporters who are increasingly seeking traceable, locally sourced products.

3. Invest in Aggregation and Storage Infrastructure

- **Establish a community-based collection and storage facility.** Construct or rehabilitate a small-scale, women-managed storage and aggregation center in Postribë, equipped with proper ventilation, drying racks, and grading tables. This would:
  - Extend shelf life
  - Enable bulk marketing
  - Reduce post-harvest losses

- **Introduce simple, climate-resilient storage solutions.** Promote low-cost, ventilated onion storage sheds and solar-powered drying units suitable for household or group use—designed and managed by women farmers.

4. Facilitate Access to Finance and Input Subsidies for Women

- **Introduce gender-responsive grant or microcredit schemes.** Collaborate with financial institutions or development partners to provide flexible microloans or small grants targeted at women farmers for:
  - Purchasing equipment
  - Buying certified seeds and inputs
  - Building small storage units or packaging stations

- **Support on subsidies.** Develop schemes to reduce the cost of essential inputs (onion sets, organic fertilizers, protective gear), particularly for women-headed households.

5. Enhance Institutional and Advisory Support

- **Deploy gender-aware agricultural extension services.** Work with public or private partners to ensure that extension services:
  - Actively reach women farmers
  - Include female extension agents or women-friendly formats (e.g., on-farm demos, peer-learning groups)
  - Address gender-specific constraints, such as time poverty and mobility

6. Promote Youth and Gender Inclusion through Innovation

- **Support women and youth agripreneurs.** Launch small innovation or startup challenges encouraging women and youth to propose smart solutions (e.g., eco-packaging, digital tools for farm management, etc.).

- **Provide seed funding and mentoring.**

- **Use ICT and mobile platforms for inclusive communication.** Disseminate market prices, weather alerts, training videos, and input recommendations via ICT tools—designed to be accessible and relevant to women with low literacy or limited mobility.

- **Cross-cutting Recommendation: Monitoring Gender Outcomes.** Establish a gender-responsive M&E system to track how interventions affect women's income, workload, decision-making power, and participation. This can help adjust strategies and demonstrate results to donors and stakeholders.

Table 8. Recommendations for the onion value chain

No.	Activity	Impact		
		Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
1	**Strengthen women's role in the value chain through tailored support**			
1.1	Establish women-focused farmer groups or cooperatives o Facilitate the formation and legal registration of women-led producer groups or cooperatives. o Enhance collective bargaining power, access to markets, and shared resources like equipment, drying facilities, packaging stations, and transportation.	X	X	X
1.2	Provide gender-sensitive technical training and capacity building o Good agricultural practices (GAP) and integrated pest management. o Onion post-harvest handling and storage techniques. o Financial literacy, digital skills, and recordkeeping. o Leadership, negotiation, and cooperative governance.	X	X	X
1.3	Introduce labor-saving technologies and tools o Support access to affordable and user-friendly agricultural equipment (e.g., planters, weeders, mini tractors). o Ensure the tools are ergonomically designed to meet women's needs.	X	X	X
2	**Improve market access and product differentiation**			
2.1	Leverage the Drishti onion's Geographical Indication (GI) status: o Develop a branded marketing strategy for Drishti Onion highlighting its heritage, quality, and women's role in production.	X	X	X
2.2	Develop women-led direct sales channels o Launch online platforms for direct-to-consumer onion sales. o Create partnerships with local restaurants and points of sales for women-led marketing initiatives.		X	X
2.3	Facilitate linkages to buyers: o Support contract farming or forward agreements with buyers such as wholesale traders.		X	X
3	**Invest in aggregation and storage infrastructure**			
3.1	Establish collection and storage facility: o Support establishing small-scale, women-managed storage and aggregation centers in Postribë. o Support to equip the center with ventilation, drying racks, and grading tables. o Extend shelf life, enable bulk marketing, and reduce post-harvest losses.		X	X
3.2	Introduce simple, climate-resilient storage solutions: o Promote low-cost, ventilated onion storage sheds and solar-powered drying units suitable for household or group use.		X	X

No.	Activity	Impact		
		Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
4	**Facilitate access to finance and input subsidies for women**			
4.1	Introduce gender-responsive grant or microcredit schemes: o Collaborate with financial institutions or development partners to provide microloans or small grants for: ✓ Purchasing equipment. ✓ Buying certified seeds and inputs. ✓ Building small storage units or packaging stations.		X	X
4.2	Support on subsidies: o Develop schemes to reduce the cost of essential inputs for women-headed households (e.g., onion sets, organic fertilizers, protective gear).		X	X
5	**Enhance institutional and advisory support**			
5.1	Deploy gender-aware agricultural extension services: o Ensure extension services actively reach women farmers, with female extension agents or women-friendly formats (e.g., on-farm demos, peer-learning groups). o Address gender-specific constraints like time poverty and mobility.		X	X
6	**Promote youth and gender inclusion through innovation**			
6.1	Support women and youth agripreneurs: o Launch innovation or startup challenges encouraging women and youth to propose smart solutions (e.g., eco-packaging, digital tools for farm management, etc.). o Provide seed funding and mentoring.		X	X
6.2	Use ICT and mobile platforms for inclusive communication: o Disseminate market prices, weather alerts, training videos, and input recommendations via ICT tools designed to be accessible to women with low literacy or limited mobility		X	X

The impact of these activities will empower women by enhancing their leadership, market access, and agricultural skills, leading to increased economic independence and productivity. Women will benefit from better bargaining power, improved post-harvest handling, and access to storage and climate-resilient infrastructure, reducing losses and extending shelf life. Financial inclusion through grants and microcredit, along with gender-responsive training and advisory services, will enable women to invest in their farms. Additionally, supporting innovation and youth inclusion will foster entrepreneurship and promote gender equality, driving long-term sustainability and resilience in the agricultural sector.Local Partners/Collaboration: Potential partners for these activities include government agencies such as the Ministry of Agriculture and local governments for policy support, infrastructure, and training programs; development organizations for funding and technical support; private sector partners including input suppliers, agribusinesses, and financial institutions for providing tools, loans, and market access; sector' public and private institutions, including CSOs, for research, capacity building, and grassroots implementation; and retailers, restaurants, and wholesale traders to create direct market linkages for women producers. These partners can collaborate to enhance women's roles in the agricultural value chain through funding, training, infrastructure, and market access.

Part 4
Annexes

Annex 1. Shkodër Municipality: General Background

Shkodër Municipality covers an area of 872.71 km^2 and consists of 11 administrative units: Shkodër, Ana e Malit, Bërdicë, Dajç, Guri i Zi, Postribë, Pult, Rrethinat, Shalë, Shosh, and Velipojë. The municipal authority manages one city and 92 villages.

With the new territorial and administrative division, the municipality encompasses a region that covers coastal and agricultural areas to the south as well as Albania's most mountainous region to the north. To the west, the municipality is bordered by Lake Shkodra, which is of significant national and international importance in relation to Montenegro. Specifically, from the perspective of cross-border relations, the favorable geographical position allows territorial, economic, and natural connections between Shkodër, Montenegro, and Kosovo, thus making it a strategically advantageous location for the entire region. Shkodër Municipality is characterized by a variety of economic activities, with elements of industry, energy, tourism, and economic zones. Its economic base consists of small businesses, which are also catalysts for development, as the creation, development, and the improvement of these businesses represents a significant potential for economic growth. The main businesses contributing to economic development focus primarily on light manufacturing, processing and production of textiles, as well as trade and service businesses. As an area known for its agricultural and livestock products, there is a presence of agriprocessing businesses directly linked to trade. Additionally, there is a pronounced presence of handicraft businesses with a long-standing tradition in Shkodër which continues to this day, which have a special place in the local economy.

Additionally, the processing industry represents one of the greatest development potentials in Shkodër. In the lowland area, there is a significant expanse of agricultural high-quality productive land. Specifically, the administrative units of Bërdicë, Velipojë, Dajç, Guri i Zi, and Postribë have a considerable advantage when it comes to agricultural development. As regards agricultural produce, Shkodër has a variety of agricultural crops grown throughout the territory of the municipality throughout the year.

Table 9. Municipality division into neighborhoods, AUs, and villages

Municipality	AU	Villages
Shkodër	Shkodër	City of Shkodër, five neighborhoods
Shkodër	Ana e Malit	Oblikë, Babot, Muriqan, Shtuf, Dramosh, Oblikë e Sipërme, Obot, Vallas, Velinaj, Vidhgar
Shkodër	Dajç	Dajç, Samrisht i Ri, Samrisht i Sipërm, Belaj, Mali i Gjymtit, Pentar, Rrushkull, Mushan, Darragjat, Suka-Dajç, Shirq
Shkodër	Bërdicë	Bërdicë e Madhe, Bërdicë e Mesme, Bërdicë e Sipërme, Trush, Beltojë, Mali Hebaj
Shkodër	Guri i Zi	Guri i Zi, Juban, Ganjollë, Kuç, Rrencë, Vukatanë, Gajtan, Rragam, Sheldi, Mazrek, Shpor
Shkodër	Postribë	Mes, Dragoç, Boks, Kullaj, Myselim, Drisht, Ura e Shtrenjtë, Domen, Shakotë, Prekal, Vilëz
Shkodër	Pult	Pog, Kir, Gjuraj, Plan, Xhan, Bruçaj, Mgull

(Continues on the next page)

Shkodër	Shalë	Breg-Lumi, Abat, Nicaj-Shale, Lekaj, Vuksanaj, Pecaj, Theth, Ndërlysaj, Gimaj, Nënmavriq, Lotaj
Shkodër	Shosh	Ndrejaj, Nikaj-Shosh, Palaj, Pepsumaj, Brashtë
Shkodër	Rrethinat	Dobraç, Grudë e Re, Shtoj i Ri, Guci e Re, Shtoj i Vjetër, Zues, Golem, Hot i Ri, Bleran, Bardhaj
Shkodër	Velipojë	Velipojë, Pulaj, Luarzë, Baks-Rrjoll, Gomsiqe, Baks i Ri, Reç i Ri, Ças, Mali Kolaj, Reç Pulaj

Source: Shkodër Municipality MTPB 2023-2025.

Demography and Population

According to the 2023 Census, the total population of the municipality is 102,434, with a slightly higher number of females (52,209) compared to males (50,225), indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution.

Table 10. Population by age group and gender (2023)

Age Group	Total Population	Male	Female
Total	102,434	50,225	52,209
0-4	5,017	2,644	2,373
5-9	5,466	2,839	2,627
10-14	5,642	2,909	2,733
15-19	6,120	3,051	3,069
20-24	5,985	2,920	3,065
25-29	6,121	3,083	3,038
30-34	6,179	3,254	2,925
35-39	5,752	2,973	2,779
40-44	5,288	2,528	2,760
45-49	5,832	2,677	3,155
50-54	7,250	3,222	4,028
55-59	7,793	3,743	4,050
60-64	8,772	4,158	4,614
65-69	7,540	3,712	3,828
70-74	5,451	2,673	2,778
75-79	3,897	1,876	2,021
80-84	2,755	1,281	1,474
85+	1,574	682	892

Source: INSTAT 2024.

The 50-54 (7,250 people), 55-59 (7,793 people), and 60-64 (8,772 people) age groups show a higher proportion of females compared to males. The 0-19 years age group includes 21,245 individuals, with females (10,804) slightly outnumbering males (10,441).

The working-age population (20-59 years) is the largest, with males (25,503) and females (26,339) being fairly balanced, showing gender parity in the workforce. The elderly population (60+ years) is substantial, with 4,614 females and 4,158 males in the 60-64 age group.

Table 11. Population demographics by AU, gender, and age group (2023)

Administrative Unit	Total	Age 0-14	Age 15-64	Age 65+	Male	Female
Ana e Malit	2,652	354	1,706	592	1,327	1,325
Bërdicë	4,062	722	2,587	753	2,058	2,004
Dajç	2,494	322	1,497	675	1,236	1,258
Guri i Zi	6,315	1,196	4,013	1,106	3,127	3,188
Postribë	4,744	823	3,021	900	2,349	2,395
Pult	245	40	160	45	128	117
Rrethinat	15,968	2,856	10,251	2,861	7,897	8,071
Shalë	584	92	378	114	308	276
Shkodër (City)	61,633	9,141	39,205	13,287	29,944	31,689
Shosh	90	15	52	23	47	43
Velipojë	3,647	564	2,222	861	1,804	1,843

Source: INSTAT 2024.

The population in Shkodër is relatively balanced between males and females across all administrative units, with slightly more females (52,209) than males (50,225) in the city. The largest age group across all units falls within the working-age range (15-64 years), which is consistent with most global trends, indicating a relatively young and active population.The 65+ age group is notably smaller compared to the younger and working-age groups, except for specific areas like Rrethinat and Shkodër where the proportion is higher. Urban areas like Shkodër, Velipojë, and Guri i Zi have higher total populations and a larger proportion of the working-age group. Conversely, rural and smaller communities like Shalë, Shosh, and Pult have smaller overall population sizes and different age dynamics, with a higher proportion of elderly individuals.

Table 12. Family nuclei by administrative unit (2023)

Administrative unit	Total family nuclei	Married/cohabitating couples without children	Married/cohabitating couples with children	Single parents
Total Municipality	30,163	10,943	15,816	3,404
Ana e Malit	834	364	410	60
Bërdicë	1,241	504	650	87
Dajç	821	410	347	64
Guri i Zi	1,870	721	1,001	148
Postribë	1,443	629	700	114
Pult	64	20	37	7
Rrethinat	4,552	1,586	2,567	399
Shalë	162	56	84	22
Shkodër (urban area)	18,025	6,164	9,461	2,400
Shosh	27	13	12	2
Velipojë	1,124	476	547	101

Source: INSTAT 2024.

The Shkodër Municipality, consisting of various administrative units, has a total of 30,163 family nuclei. Among these, the urban center of Shkodër accounts for the largest share, with 18,025 family nuclei. This includes 6,164 couples without children, 9,461 couples with children, and 2,400 single-parent households.

Other notable units include Rrethinat, with 4,552 family nuclei, where 2,567 are couples with children and 399 are single-parent households. Smaller administrative units such as Shalë and Pult have much smaller populations, with 162 and 64 family nuclei respectively. The data highlights significant variations in family structures across the administrative units.

Socio Economic Context

Shkodër, a region with a rich agricultural and industrial heritage, has a socio-economic landscape shaped by both opportunities and challenges. Agriculture, agriprocessing, and traditional crafts are key sectors, with women playing a significant role in household farming and small-scale businesses.
Although a region with enviable potential and great opportunities to become the epicenter of northern development in terms of economic growth, thanks to its natural and human resources—such as the exceptionally rich and well-positioned Shkodran diaspora—Shkodra also faces various challenges and difficulties.

Social Services

The Shkodër Municipality demonstrates a comprehensive approach to addressing the socio-economic needs of its community through an extensive network of social services. It has 13 operational community social centers that cater to over 6,600 beneficiaries, with a main focus on support for families, children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. Specialized initiatives, such as early autism diagnosis and family homes for persons with disabilities, highlight the municipality's focus on vulnerable populations, though the reach of such services remains limited.

Table 13. Social services in 2023

Indicator	Value
Number of functional community social centers	13
Beneficiaries of 'For the family' community centers	6600
Children and families served by the specialized autism diagnostic center	20
Number of functional family homes supporting persons with disabilities	8
Beneficiaries of residential centers (Opera Madonnina del Grappa + Project Hope)	77
Awareness activities for International Day of Persons with Disabilities	7
Annual trend in existing service beneficiaries (%)	0
Children in need participating in artistic-cultural activities (Event 1)	30
Children in need participating in artistic-cultural activities (Event 2)	25
Orphans supported during year-end celebrations	50
Elderly treated annually in social centers	50
Victims of gender-based violence supported	150

Source: MTPB 2024-2026, Shkodër Municipality.[33]

Under "For the Family" initiative specialized services include early autism diagnostic support for 20 children and their families and eight functional family homes assisting persons with disabilities. Residential services cater to 77 individuals through projects like Opera Madonnina del Grappa and Project Hope.

Awareness and engagement activities remain an essential focus, with seven events organized for International Day of Persons with Disabilities and cultural activities involving 30 and 25 children in need, respectively. Furthermore, 50 orphans and 50 elderly individuals receive targeted support annually. Importantly, gender-based violence victims receive significant attention, with 150 individuals supported through dedicated interventions.

Table 14. Population by AU, disability, and gender

Administrative unit	Total population	With disabilities	Without disabilities	Total males	Males with disabilities	Males without disabilities	Total females	Females with disabilities	Females without disabilities
Total Shkodër	86,309	6,454	79,855	41,833	2,843	38,990	44,476	3,611	40,865
Ana e Malit	2,298	171	2,127	1,131	81	1,050	1,167	90	1,077
Bërdicë	3,340	272	3,068	1,685	132	1,553	1,655	140	1,515
Dajç	2,172	202	1,970	1,075	85	990	1,097	117	980
Guri i Zi	5,119	514	4,605	2,485	200	2,285	2,634	314	2,320

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33. https://bashkiashkoder.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/19.-Programi-10430-PBA-2024-2026-.pdf

Postribë	3,921	272	3,649	1,926	137	1,789	1,995	135	1,860
Pult	205	14	191	114	5	109	91	9	82
Rrethinat	13,112	889	12,223	6,411	400	6,011	6,701	489	6,212
Shalë	492	45	447	267	22	245	225	23	202
Shkodër	52,492	3,624	48,868	25,195	1,592	23,603	27,297	2,032	25,265
Shosh	75	3	72	40	1	39	35	2	33
Velipojë	3,083	448	2,635	1,504	188	1,316	1,579	260	1,319

Source: INSTAT 2024.

In 2023, 6,454 individuals reported to have disabilities (approximately 7.5% of the total population). The majority (79,855 or 92.5%) live without disabilities.

Out of 41,833 males, 2,843 (6.8%) have disabilities and out of 44,476 females, 3,611 (8.1%) have disabilities. Across all administrative units, the percentage of females with disabilities is consistently slightly higher than that of males.

Shkodër city has the largest population (52,492) and the highest number of individuals with disabilities (3,624). Velipojë Unit shows a higher proportion of disabled individuals (448 or 14.5% of the total unit population). Units like Rrethinat and Guri i Zi, host substantial populations with disabilities (889 and 514 respectively).

Table 15. Social Indicators

Month	Economic aid (Total)	Economic aid (City)	Families (6% Fund)	6% Fund (in ALL 000)	Disability scheme (total)	Work disability
January	1673	268	191	530	4199	3373
February	1663	262	193	521	4296	3400
March	1639	251	185	516	4363	3401
April	1724	260	192	530	4385	3401
May	1841	276	207	578	4382	3401
June	1924	283	207	587	4364	3412
July	1853	278	199	564	4339	3347
August	1826	157	196	555	4327	3376
September	1813	268	207	590	4209	3364
October	1775	263	205	554	4168	3357
November	1779	275	205	555	4145	3357
December	1765	270	205	552	4125	3339

Source: Voluntary Local Review on Shkodër Municipality.[34]

34. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/12/shkodra_2021_sq.pdf

The total number of families receiving economic aid fluctuated throughout the year, peaking in June (1924 families) and reaching a low in March (1639 families). For the city of Shkodër, the trend generally mirrors the total numbers, featuring a sharp drop in August (157 families) likely caused by administrative changes or reallocation of resources. The number of families benefiting from the 6% fund ranged between 185 families (March) and 207 families (May, June, and September). The fund amount varied slightly, peaking in September (ALL 590,000) and remaining above ALL 550,000 for most months. Disability in work-related cases followed a similar trend, falling from 3373 beneficiaries in January to 3339 beneficiaries in December.

Migration

Regarding migration figures for Shkodër Municipality, while they are notably high, a significant number of returnees have also been documented. Specifically, the structure of Albanian families with returned members who had stayed abroad for more than 12 months shows that 4% of individuals returned to Shkodër in 2019, compared to 7.5% in 2011. Additionally, according to a survey conducted up to July 15, 2019, the number of returnees to the city amounted to 4,304 individuals, equivalent to 20 individuals per 1,000 inhabitants.[35]

Education

Educational attainment is a key indicator of a community's overall development, influencing individual opportunities, economic growth, and social equity. In the case of Shkodër, educational attainment reflects both progress and ongoing challenges.

Over the years, the region has made strides in improving access to education, yet barriers exist, especially in rural areas, where socio-economic factors, infrastructure, and cultural norms can influence educational outcomes.

Table 16. Kindergartens in Shkodër

Type of institution	Public	Private	Total
Preschool (kindergartens) and nurseries	59	7	66

Source: Shkodër Municipality.

The data in Table 16 highlights the distribution of preschool institutions in Shkodër, emphasizing the prominence of public facilities in the provision of early childhood education. With a total of 66 kindergartens and nurseries operating in the municipality, 55 (approximately 83%) are public institutions, while only 7 (around 11%) are private.

Table 17. Enrolment and staffing in kindergartens

Category	Children
Total number of children attending kindergartens	1,862
Number of girls attending kindergartens	989
Number of teachers	172

Source: Shkodër Municipality.

35. Local Action Plan for migration and diaspora 2022-2025, Shkodër Municipality.

There are 1,862 children enrolled in kindergartens in Shkodër Municipality. Out of these, 989 are girls, representing a near-balanced gender distribution in preschool education. There are 172 staff members responsible for supporting the children in the kindergartens.

Table 18. Schools in Shkodër

Total number of schools in Shkodër	90 schools
Total number of boarding schools	2 boarding schools
Total number of students benefiting from education services	17,200 students
Students in city schools	11,227 students
Students in the administrative units	5,973 students

Source: MTBP 2022-2024.

Shkodër Municipality has 90 schools, including 2 boarding schools, serving a total of 17,200 students. Of these, 11,227 students are in urban schools and 5,973 students are spread across the administrative units

Table 19. Schools and students by administrative unit

Administrative unit	Number of schools	Total students	Girls
Rrethina	9	1,749	838
Gur i Zi	7	1,012	530
Postribë	10	1,098	559
Ana e Malit	6	399	188
Bërdicë	5	632	294
Velipojë	6	562	273
Dajç	6	267	124
Shalë	5	136	63
Shosh	3	24	14
Pult	7	95	38

Source: Shkodër Municipality.

The data in table 19 is broken down further by administrative unit. The largest concentration of students is in Rrethina (1,749 students, with 838 girls), followed by Gur i Zi (1,012 students, with 530 girls). The smallest number of students is in Shosh (24 students, with 14 girls), and Pult (95 students, with 38 girls). There are seven vocational schools, including schools like Kolë Idromeno, Arben Broci, Technological school and Kolë Margjini. These institutions provide specialized education that is crucial for the local workforce. In addition to pre-university education, there is also the "Luigj Gurakuqi" University, which consists of the following faculties:

Faculty	Departments
Faculty of Social Sciences	- Department of Linguistics
	- Department of Literature
	- Department of History
	- Department of Geography
Faculty of Natural Sciences	- Department of Mathematics
	- Department of Informatics
	- Department of Physics
	- Department of Biology-Chemistry
	- Department of Nursing
Faculty of Education Sciences	- Department of Social Work
	- Department of Teaching
	- Department of Physical Education and Sports
	- Department of Arts
Economic Faculty	- Department of Business Administration
	- Department of Finance-Accounting
	- Department of Tourism
Faculty of Law	- Department of Public Law
	- Department of Civil Law
	- Department of International and European Law
Faculty of Foreign Languages	- Department of English
	- Department of German Studies
	- Department of Romance Languages

Source: Shkodër Municipality.

The literacy rates in Shkodra Municipality are very high, with 89,535 people (out of 91,951) able to read and write, meaning an overall literacy rate of about 97.4%.

Table 20. School attendance and literacy

Administrative unit	Total population (2023)	Literacy (reading and writing)	Illiterate
Total	*91,951*	*89,535*	*2,416*
Ana e Malit	2,429	2,365	64
Bërdicë	3,577	3,463	114
Dajç	2,277	2,230	47
Guri i Zi	5,540	5,448	92
Postribë	4,221	4,132	89
Pult	223	211	12
Rrethinat	14,169	13,565	604
Shalë	518	464	54
Shkodër	55,636	54,432	1,204
Shosh	79	76	3
Velipojë	3,282	3,149	133

Source: INSTAT 2024.

The lowest literacy rates are seen in Shalë and Pult, where smaller populations (518 and 223 people respectively) show illiteracy, but still, these communities have over 90% literacy.The number of illiterate people in Shkodra Municipality is 2,416, which represents 2.6% of the total population. In smaller areas like Shosh, Velipojë, and Shalë, illiteracy remains low. Shkodër itself, being the urban center, has the highest number of literate individuals (54,432) and 1,204 illiterate people.

Healthcare

In Shkodër, the provision of health services has seen both progress and challenges. While the region benefits from a range of health facilities, including primary healthcare centers and specialized services, certain barriers persist, particularly in remote areas, affecting the accessibility, quality, and efficiency of healthcare delivery.

Table 21. Health Institutions

Functional health centers	14
Newly built	3
Regional Hospital	1
People receiving services in these centers	173,029

Source: Shkodër Municipality.

There are 14 functional health centers, providing essential medical services to the region. Out of these, three health centers have been newly constructed, reflecting improvements in healthcare infrastructure. Additionally, the region is served by one regional hospital, providing more specialized and advanced healthcare services. A total of 173,029 people has benefitted from the services provided in these facilities, showcasing the health system's role in catering to the population's medical needs. The inclusion of a regional hospital indicates an emphasis on both primary and advanced medical care in the area.

Economic Activity

The economic activity in Shkodër reflects a dynamic interplay between traditional sectors and emerging opportunities. Agriculture, livestock farming, and agriprocessing form the backbone of rural economic activity, providing employment and contributing to the local food value chain. The fertile lands and favorable climate in Shkodër facilitate the cultivation of key crops, alongside the production of milk, meat, and honey, which are integral to its economy.

The urban areas of Shkodër host a vibrant business environment with a significant number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) engaging in trade, services, and light manufacturing.

Tourism remains a growing economic driver, fueled by Shkodër's cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and natural beauty. Seasonal tourism, particularly around Lake Shkodër, draws visitors and creates opportunities in hospitality, retail, and recreation. However, challenges such as employment disparities, a high rate of inactivity among women, and limited industrial diversification underscore the need for targeted policies and gender-sensitive approaches to stimulate inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Table 22. Number of active enterprises by gender, 2023

Total	5,148
Men	3,630
Women	1,518

Source: INSTAT 2024.

In 2023, Shkodër had a total of 5,148 active enterprises. Of these, 3,630 were owned or managed by men, while 1,518 were run by women. While men are still the majority in enterprise ownership and management, women are actively participating in the entrepreneurial landscape, constituting about 29.5% of the total.

Table 23. Enterprises by size, 2023

Total	5,148
1-4 employees	4,472
5-9 employees	334
10+ employees	342

Source: INSTAT 2024.

In 2023, Shkodër had a total of 5,148 active enterprises. A significant majority of these enterprises (4,472) were small businesses with 1 to 4 employees, which reflects the prevalence of micro-enterprises in the local economy. The number of medium-sized enterprises (5-9 employees) was 334, while larger businesses employing 10 or more people amounted to 342 enterprises. This distribution suggests that the economy in Shkodër is largely driven by small businesses, but there is still a notable presence of medium and larger enterprises.

Table 24. The number of active enterprises by industry, 2023

Total	5,148
I. Producers of goods	628
II. Producers of services	4,520

Source: INSTAT 2024.

In 2023, Shkodër had a total of 5,148 active enterprises. Of these, 628 were involved in the production of goods, while a significantly larger number, 4,520, were engaged in providing services. This distribution highlights the dominance of the service sector in the local economy.

Labor Market, Employment and Unempolyment in Shkodër

Labor force indicators in the Shkodër Region, for the year 2023 show that the total participation rate in the labor force is 63.8%, with a notable difference between men (72%) and women (56%).

Table 25. Labor market indicators, Shkodër region, 2023

Indicator	Total	Men	Women
Labor force participation rate	63.8%	72.0%	56.0%
Employment rate	59.4%	67.5%	51.7%
Inactivity rate	36.2%	28.0%	44.0%
Unemployment rate	6.9%	6.2%	7.8%

Source: INSTAT, 2024.

In 2023, Shkodër's labor force participation rate was 63.8%, with men at a higher rate (72.0%) compared to women (56.0%). This suggests that men are more likely to be engaged in the labor market compared to women. The employment rate was 59.4% overall, with men (67.5%) having a higher employment rate than women (51.7%). The inactivity rate was notably higher for women (44.0%) compared to men (28.0%), reflecting a gender gap in terms of women not engaging in the workforce.

Employment

In 2022, Shkodër Municipality has a total of 30,296 people in employment. The data indicates that a significant portion the workforce in Shkodër is employed in the private sector, suggesting a local economy with private businesses making a significant contribution to job creation.

Table 26. Employment in public vs private sector

Sector	Total employment	Percentage of total employment
Public sector	6,627	28%
Private sector	23,669	72%

Source: MTBP 2024-2026.

The largest concentration of employment is in the city of Shkodër. The Rrethina administrative unit comes second in terms of the number of employed individuals. 28% of the total employed people in Shkodër are employed in the public sector, totaling 6,627 individuals. The remaining 72% of the employed people are in the private sector, totaling 23,669 individuals.

Infrastructure: Land, Water, Electricity, and Social Life Electricity Production in Shkodër

Shkodër is strategically located near three major hydroelectric plants: Ashta, Vau i Dejës, and Koman. These plants play a vital role in Albania's energy production, contributing significantly to the national electricity grid. The Vau i Dejës Hydropower Plant, operational since 1971, includes the Zadejë and Qyrsaq dams built on the River Drin cascade. These dams create the Vau i Dejës reservoir, which has a storage capacity of 580 million cubic meters of water. The facility has been instrumental in electricity generation for decades.

The Ashta Hydropower Plant, located 10 kilometers from Shkodër, is a modern energy infrastructure. It is divided into two sections: Ashta I, which utilizes Hydro Matrix turbines for electricity generation, and Ashta II, which uses water transported through a 5-kilometer canal. Together, Ashta I and II have a total capacity of 53 MW, producing approximately 240 million kWh of electricity annually.

The Koman Hydropower Plant began operations in the mid-1980s, with its first turbines functional by 1985. Its dam, constructed with stones and reinforced concrete, creates an artificial lake covering 12 square kilometers, with a storage volume of 450 million cubic meters. Koman is one of the most significant hydropower facilities in the country. Overall, Shkodër Municipality serves as a key area for renewable energy production in Albania, with its hydroelectric plants supporting both the country's energy needs and water management.

Table 27. Key details of hydropower plants in Shkodër

Hydropower Plant	Details	Capacity	Annual Production	Reservoir Capacity
Vau i Dejës	Operational since 1971, includes Zadrejë and Qyrsaq dams.	Not specified	Not specified	580 million cubic meters
Ashta (I & II)	Modern Hydro Matrix turbines, divided into two sections with a 5 km canal.	53 MW	240 million kWh	Not specified
Koman	Stone dam with reinforced concrete; artificial lake of 12 km² built in 1985-1986.	Not specified	Not specified	450 million cubic meters

Source: Territorial Development Strategy, Shkodër Municipality.

Shkodër is a critical region for Albania's renewable energy sector. The three hydropower plants contribute significantly to electricity production, with modern technologies such as the Hydro Matrix turbines at Ashta highlighting advancements in energy efficiency. Additionally, the large reservoir capacities support water storage and management, emphasizing the region's strategic importance in energy and environmental sustainability.

Irrigation and Drainage

Irrigation and drainage are among the key factors for sustainable growth in agricultural production in the country. However, due to the ongoing lack of investments, this sector remains in critical condition. The irrigation and drainage system in the Shkodër Municipality, comprises 729 km of secondary and tertiary drainage canals and 213 km[36] of irrigation canals. As a result of the lack of investments in the drainage and irrigation system, the condition of the secondary and tertiary drainage canals (KU-II/III) and irrigation canals (KK-II/III) is severely deteriorated and nearly non-functional.The tertiary drainage canals have almost never been cleaned, leading to the accumulation of soil sediments, weeds, and other inert materials. There are significant shortages in their system maintenance and cleaning, as well as in infrastructure elements such as culverts, bridges, siphons, etc., which have resulted in their non-functionality. This situation has caused vast agricultural areas to remain uncultivated or to yield minimal production.

Land Composition in Shkodër Municipality

Shkodër Municipality spans a total area of approximately 873 square kilometers, making it one of the largest municipalities in the country. Agricultural land accounts for a significant portion, with around 40% of the total area dedicated to farming activities.[37] The fertile plains surrounding Lake Shkodër are a hotspot for cultivating grains, vegetables, and forage crops, supporting both local consumption and commercial agricultural ventures. Forested areas make up approximately 35%, providing ecological balance, biodiversity, and resources for traditional practices like firewood collection and grazing. Urban and semi-urban land uses have also grown in recent years, reflecting population and economic expansion, with residential zones, industrial parks, and recreational areas becoming prominent features of the municipality. While the municipality's land composition highlights its agricultural potential and natural beauty, there is growing pressure to balance development with sustainability. The increasing demand for housing and infrastructure, particularly in urban centers like Shkodër city, necessitates careful land-use planning to preserve the ecological integrity of the region while fostering economic growth.

Road Infrastructure in Shkodër Municipality

Shkodër Municipality benefits from a road network of over 1,200 kilometers[38] that connects urban centers, rural areas, and international borders. The municipality is traversed by major national roads, such as the SH1 highway, which connects Shkodër to Tirana and the border with Montenegro, facilitating both domestic and cross-border trade. Additionally, secondary roads provide crucial links to rural communities, ensuring access to markets, healthcare, and education. However, many of these roads, especially in remote areas, remain unpaved or poorly maintained, limiting economic opportunities and accessibility.

Despite its strategic location and connectivity, Shkodër's road infrastructure requires substantial investment. A report from the Ministry of Infrastructure (2023) indicates that 25% of the roads in the municipality are in need of significant upgrades to meet safety and functionality standards. Efforts to improve road quality and expand the network could dramatically enhance economic activity, particularly in agriculture and tourism.

Tourism, Cultural and Historical Heritage

The Shkodër Municipality is working to develop various thematic itineraries, improve tourism infrastructure, and promote different types of tourism, including mountain, ecotourism, and coastal tourism. Table 28 provides an overview of initiatives presented in a table format:

36. Medium Term Budget Program 2024-2026.
37. INSTAT 2023.
38. Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, Albania, 2023.

Table 28. Overview of initiatives

Category	Details	Target Locations
Thematic Itineraries	- Coastal itineraries - Natural itineraries (mountains, lakes, etc.) - Historical and cultural itineraries (castles, historical zones) - Museum tours	Coastal areas, mountains (Postribë, Pult, Shosh, Shalë, Ana e Malit, Tarabosh), historical sites (Rozafa Castle, Drishti Castle, etc.), Shkodër museums
Mountain and Ecotourism	- Development of ecotourism infrastructure - Training in local guesthouse management - Development of manuals and guidebooks for tourists	Postribë, Pult, Shosh, Shalë
Sea and Beach Tourism	- Development of Velipojë and Rrjoll beaches - Velipojë: Enhanced infrastructure and services for family-friendly tourism - Rrjoll: preserved as a "virgin" elite beach	Velipojë, Rrjoll
Tourist Guide Training	- Preparation and licensing of local youth as tourist guides	All administrative units
Public Beach Management	- Compliance with legal requirements ensuring at least 30% of beach areas remain public	Velipojë, Rrjoll

Source: Territorial Development Strategy, Shkodër Municipality.

Shkodra is a municipality that is rich in history, culture, and monuments, making it an important area for both cultural heritage and tourism. Table 29 below provides an overview of some of the key monuments and cultural landmarks found within the municipality. These sites play a significant role in the local identity, preserving the region's history and traditions, and attracting visitors interested in exploring the cultural richness of Shkodra.

Table 29. Monuments and cultural landmarks

Name	Category	Village	Administrative Unit
Kalaja e Shkodrës (Shkodra Castle)	Cultural Tourism	Shkodër	Shkodër
Kalaja e Drishtit (Drishti Castle)	Cultural Tourism	Drisht	Postribë
Kalaja e Gajtanit (Gajtan Fortress) and the ruins of a settlement on the side of the mountain to the west of Gajtan Fortress	Cultural Tourism	Gajtan	Guri i Zi
Kalaja (Castle)	Cultural Tourism	Beltojë	Bërdicë
Terraced prehistoric settlement	Cultural Tourism	Theth	Shalë
Qyteza e Dakajve (The Dakaj settlement)	Cultural Tourism	Breg-Lumë	Shalë
Qyteza e Ganjollës (The Ganjollë settlement)	Cultural Tourism	Ganjollë	Guri i Zi
Fortified prehistoric ruins on Kratuli Hill	Cultural Tourism	Boks	Postribë
Ancient house featuring a mosaic on the right side of River Drin, close to Bahçallëk Bridge	Cultural Tourism	Shkodër	Shkodër
Ura e Mesit (Mes Bridge on River Kir)	Cultural Tourism	Mes	Postribë

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The Hammam	Cultural Tourism	Shkodër	Shkodër
Kisha Trikonkëshe në Kalanë e Drishtit (Church inside Drishti Castle)	Cultural Tourism	Drisht	Postribë
Rrënojat e Kishës së Shatit (Shati Church ruins)	Cultural Tourism	Mazrek	Guri i Zi
Rrënojat e Kishës së Shirgjit (Shirgji Church ruins)	Cultural Tourism	Shirgj	Dajç
Xhamia e Plumbit (The Lead Mosque)	Cultural Tourism	Shkodër	Shkodër
Ura e Hoxhës në Lumin Gomsiqe (The Hoxha Bridge on River Gomsiqe)	Cultural Tourism	Shkodër	Shkodër
Protected area of a prehistoric terraced settlement.	Cultural Tourism	Grunas	Shalë
Ndre compound protected area	Cultural Tourism	Boks	Postribë
Kratuli fortification protected area	Cultural Tourism	Boks	Postribë
The Lead Mosque protected area	Cultural Tourism	Shkodër	Shkodër

Source: Territorial Development Strategy, Shkodër Municipality.

The sites in the table are categorized according to their significance, such as historical monuments, religious sites, and protected areas, offering insight into the rich cultural heritage of the region.

Agriculture and Livestock Farming

Shkodër Municipality is a vital hub of agricultural and livestock activities in Albania, reflecting its rich natural resources and longstanding traditions in farming. Nestled in the northern part of the country, Shkodër boasts fertile lands, a favorable climate, and a vibrant rural community that sustains its agricultural sector. The data show a steady increase in the number of farmers in Shkodër over the three-year period. This growth indicates that more individuals are engaging in farming, potentially due to the expansion of agricultural opportunities or improved support for the agricultural sector.

Table 30. Number of farmers from 2021 to 2023

Year	Number of farmers
2021	1,833
2022	2,187
2023	2,465

Source: INSTAT 2024.

The data shows a steady increase in the number of farmers in Shkodër over the three-year period. This growth indicates that more individuals are engaging in farming, potentially due to the expansion of agricultural opportunities or improved support for the agricultural sector.

Livestock Farming

Livestock farming, in particular, plays a pivotal role in the local economy, with diverse categories such as cattle, small ruminants, poultry, and beekeeping contributing to food production, income generation, and rural livelihoods. The municipality's agricultural diversity also includes the cultivation of crops and animal husbandry, creating a dynamic and interdependent farming ecosystem.

Table 31. Livestock numbers 2023

Livestock category	Number of heads
Cattle	16,516
Cows	13,871
Sheep	19,680
Goats	11,865
Swine (pigs)	5,588
Sows	768
Equines (horses, etc.)	1,756
Poultry	271,424
Hens	265,995
Turkeys	1,150
Beehives	22,045

Source: INSTAT 2024.

Shkodër Municipality shows a diverse and robust presence of livestock and poultry farming with a total of 16,516 cattle, of which 13,871 are cows. This sector contributes significantly to dairy and meat production, with 271,424 poultry, predominantly hens (265,995), and turkeys (1,150). With 22,045 hives, beekeeping is a notable activity for honey production and biodiversity support.

Table 32. Livestock products, 2023

Product	Quantity (tons or units)
Milk (total)	37,251.0
- Cow milk	33,386.0
- Sheep milk	1,905.0
- Goat milk	1,960.0
Meat (total)	4,048.0
- Beef	2,270.0
- Mutton	612.0
- Goat	295.0
- Pork	464.0
- Poultry	407.0
Eggs	39,101,000 units
Wool	47.2
Honey	247.0

Source: INSTAT 2024.

The data reflects livestock sector in Shkodër Municipality, which is characterized by diverse products, such as dairy, meat, eggs, wool, and honey. This diversity supports local livelihoods and also positions Shkodër as a critical player in Albania's agricultural and livestock economy. Shkodër Municipality is a significant producer of milk, with a total output of 37,251 tons in 2023. The majority of this is cow milk (33,386 tons), with sheep and goat milk contributing 1,905 tons and 1,960 tons respectively. Livestock farming in Shkodër produced a total of 4,048 tons of meat in 2023. Beef accounted for the largest share with 2,270 tons, followed by mutton (612 tons), goat meat (295 tons), pork (464 tons) and poultry (407 tons). Poultry farming produced 39.1 million eggs in 2023. In 2023, 47.2 tons of wool were produced, and honey production reached 247 tons.

Field Crops

Shkodër Municipality demonstrates a focus on cereal cultivation, with a total cultivated area of 2,671 hectares yielding 18,292 tons in 2023, of which **corn, with a yield of 77 tons/ha and wheat, with a yield of 34.7 tons/ha.**

Table 33. Field crops, 2023

Category	Crop	Cultivated area (ha)	Production (tons)
Cereals	Total	2,671.0	18,292.0
	Wheat	538.0	1,868.0
	Corn	2,133.0	16,424.0
Vegetables	Total	1,233.0	28,327.0
	Potatoes	221.0	5,120.0
	Onions	201.0	3927.0
	Beans	198.0	270.0
Industrial crops	Tobacco	130.0	220.0
Forage crops	Total	7,365.0	276,649.0

Source: INSTAT 2024.

Vegetable Farming

Vegetable farming is another vital aspect of Shkodër's agricultural sector, with 1,233 hectares producing 28,327 tons, of which potatoes with a yield of 231.7 tons/ha; onions, with around 200 tons/ha; beans, with a yield of 13.6 tons/ha. Tobacco is the primary industrial crop cultivated in the area, with 130 hectares and producing 220 tons and a yield of 16.9 tons/ha. Forage crops cover an extensive area of 7,365 hectares, yielding a total of 276,649 tons. There is no information on rye, barley, oats, sunflower, soy, medicinal plants, sugar beet, and strawberries.

Table 34. Fresh vegetable production, 2023

Category	Cultivated area (ha)	Area in greenhouses (ha)	Total production (tons)	Production in greenhouses (tons)	Yield (tons/ ha)
Total fresh vegetables	667.0	35.0	16,303	2,409	..
Tomatoes	156.0	18.0	5,460	1,482	350.0
Cucumbers	90.0	10.0	2,696	616	299.6
Peppers	113.0	3.0	2,980	180	263.7

Source: INSTAT 2024.

Shkodër Municipality's total fresh vegetable cultivation spans 667 hectares, of which 35 hectares in greenhouse cultivation. This combination of open-field and greenhouse farming allows for diversification and efficiency in production, yielding 16,303 tons of fresh vegetables in 2023. Tomatoes are cultivated in 156 hectares and 18 hectares of greenhouses. They produced a total of 5,460 tons, with 1,482 tons grown in greenhouses yielding 350 tons/ha. Covering 90 hectares (10 hectares in greenhouses), cucumbers produced a total of 2,696 tons, with 616 tons grown in controlled environments. The yield was of 299.6 tons/ha.

Peppers are cultivated on 113 hectares, including 3 hectares in greenhouses, yielding a total of 2,980 tons. Greenhouse production accounted for 180 tons.

Table 35. Melon and watermelon production, 2023

Category	Cultivated area (ha)	Area in greenhouses (ha)	Total production (tons)	Production in greenhouses (tons)	Yield (tons/ ha)
Total melons & watermelons	269.0	21.0	6,186	945	..
Watermelons	153.0	21.0	4,109	945	268.6
Melons	116.0	..	2,077	..	179.1

Source: INSTAT 2024

Shkodër Municipality has a total of 269 hectares dedicated to melon and watermelon cultivation, with 21 hectares utilizing greenhouse methods. Their total production in 2023 reached 6,186 tons, of which 945 tons were produced in greenhouses. Watermelons were cultivated in an area of 153 hectares.

All 21 hectares of greenhouse area were utilized for watermelon production, yielding 945 tons from controlled environments. The overall production was 4,109 tons, with yield of 268.6 tons/ha. Melon cultivation covers 116 hectares, producing a total of 2,077 tons, yielding 179.1 tons/ha.

Fruit Trees and Production

Shkodër Municipality has a total of 327 hectares dedicated to fruit tree cultivation, with 263 hectares currently in production. In 2023, these areas yielded a total of 4,910 tons of various fruits.

Table 36. Fruit trees and production, 2023

Category	Total cultivated area (ha)	Area in production (ha)	Total production (tons)
Total fruit trees	327	263	4,910
Apples	6	5	140
Plums	43	36	477
Cherries	48	39	269
Figs	55	54	1,706
Nectarines/peaches	80	77	719
Chestnuts	10	10	182
Walnuts	50	3	140

Source: INSTAT 2024.

Fig production: 1,706 tons from 54 hectares; nectarines/peaches: 719 tons from 77 hectares; plums: 477 tons from 36 hectares. Chestnuts are cultivated in 10 hectares, all of which are productive, yielding a total of 182 tons; apples and walnuts: apples 140 tons from 5 hectares; walnuts: 140 tons, but with only 3 hectares in active production.

Table 37. Citrus cultivation and production, 2023

Category	Total Cultivated Area (ha)	Area in Production (ha)	Total Production (tons)
Total Citrus Fruits	21	15	524
Mandarins	19	14	355
Oranges	2	1	131
Lemons	-	-	38

Source: INSTAT 2024.

Shkodër Municipality allocated 21 hectares to citrus cultivation in 2023, with 15 hectares in active production. The total citrus fruit yield for that year was to 524 tons. Tangerines are cultivated in an area of 19 hectares, 14 of which are in production, producing 355 tons, or nearly 68% of the total citrus yield. Oranges are only cultivated in two hectares, with only one hectare in production, yielding 131 tons.

Table 38. Olive cultivation and production, 2023

Category	Total Cultivated Area (ha)	Area in Production (ha)	Total Production (tons)
Olives	662	558	710

Source: INSTAT 2024.

In 2023, 662 hectares were dedicated to olive cultivation. Of the total cultivated area, 558 hectares (84%) produce olives, resulting in a total annual yield of 710 tons. Although the vast majority of the cultivated area is in production, there are still 104 hectares that remain unproductive.

Table 39. Vineyard cultivation and production, 2023

Category	Total cultivated area (ha)	Area in production (ha)	Total production (tons)
Vineyard	187	180	950

Source: INSTAT 2024.

In 2023, Shkodër Municipality allocated 187 hectares to vineyard cultivation, with a majority of these hectares being productive. Out of the total cultivated area, 180 hectares (96%) were actively producing grapes, contributing to a total production of 950 tons in 2023.The data showcase Shkodër Municipality's diverse agricultural activities, emphasizing its strengths in cereal, vegetable, and forage crops production. High-yield crops such as corn and potatoes highlight the efficiency and productivity of local farming practices, while the extensive cultivation of forage crops underscores the symbiotic relationship between agriculture and livestock farming in the region. This integrated approach positions Shkodër as a vital contributor to Albania's agricultural output and offers opportunities for future expansion and innovation in the sector.Given Shkodër's huge potential in agricultural and food manufacturing and its socio-economic context, the following sectors could be particularly promising as having the most potential for improving the livelihoods of women, promoting gender equality and value chain development:

Agriculture: Shkodër cultivates a diverse range of fruit and vegetable, including potatoes, onions, tomatoes, and fruit trees like olives, grapes, figs, peaches, plums and cherries – figs with a production of 1,706 tons from 54 ha; nectarines/peaches with 719 tons from 77 ha; plums with 477 tons from 36 ha; citrus with 524 from 15 ha; olives with 710 tons from 558 ha; chestnuts 182 tons from 10 ha; and grapes with 950 tons from 180 ha. Another interesting crop is tobacco, with 220 tons from a cultivated area of 130 ha.

Livestock: 13,871 cows, 19,680 sheep and 11,865 goats with a total milk production of 37,251 tons (90% cows' milk and 10% sheep and goat milk) supplying 22 dairy facilities located in the territory of the municipality.

Beekeeping: is of significant value, with 22,000 beehives and 247 tons of honey production in 2023.

Tourism and tradition: Shkodër is rich in cultural heritage, including in historical monuments, nature, and traditional crafts. Promoting women as entrepreneurs in cultural tourism, such as guiding, handicrafts, and hospitality, could boost both local income and gender equality. Eco-tourism, focusing on the natural beauty of the area (like Lake Shkodër), could be a platform for women-led small businesses, such as local eco-tourism guides, food and accommodation services. Shkodër has a rich tradition in handicrafts, including weaving, embroidery, and pottery. Promoting women artisans and their products through providing training, marketing support, and access to high value markets, could significantly empower women in the region. Women in Shkodër are traditionally skilled in textile production.

Annex 2. National Context on Gender Equality

The 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:

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.[39]
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.

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

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 women.[40] The percentage of women owners or administrators in 2022 decreased compared to 2021, both in terms of businesses engaged in producing goods and those in the service sector. The number of businesses with women owners or administrators is greater in the service sector than in manufacturing, with 33.4 % and 17.2 %, respectively.
Employment rates among the population in the 15-64 age group was 72.9 % for men and 58.9 % for women. As regards the employee structure by activity status: 45.4% of women are salary-earning employees, while 23.5% of them are unpaid workers in the family business.[41]

In Albania, the number of male-headed households is four times higher than that of female-headed households. The 55-64 age group has the highest number of families with male heads of households, while 74+ age group has the most female-headed households. Across all age groups, the number of male-headed households is higher.[42]
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 their employment is informal. In 2023, 37.3 % of employed women worked in the agricultural sector, representing 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.
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.[43] 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.[44]

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.[45]
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.[46]

40. INSTAT Business Registers, 2023. https://www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/industria-tregtia-dhe-sh%C3%ABrbimet/regjistrat-e-biznesit/#tab3
41. Women and Men in Albania, 2022, https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/demography-and-social-indicators/gender-equality/#tab3
42. Ibid.
43. Gender Mainstreaming Guidance: Agriculture and Rural Development, UN Women, 2024
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.

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.[47] It remains a pivotal sector of the country's economy and engages 33.9 per cent of its active workforce.[48] 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.[49] 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.[50] 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).[51] […] Although women bear a significant share and burden of agricultural labor, their contribution remains largely unappreciated in economic terms.[52] […][53]

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)[54]; (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.

47. INSTAT [online]. National Accounts (GDP) 2023 data. See: https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/economy-and-finance/national-accounts-gdp/

48. 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/

49. FAO (2011). The Role of Women in Agriculture. See: https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/a605b688-83e0-4e3a-ad47-874f0d6f63b1

50. INSTAT (2023). The Labour Market, 2022. Available at: https://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2023/labour-market-2022/

51. 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

52. 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

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

54. 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

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.[55] […][56]

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.[57] 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.[58] Since then, the share of women beneficiaries of extension services has further shrunken and reached just 8 per cent in 2023.[59] As a result of limited access to agricultural and market information, women's productivity levels remain low. […][60]

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.[61] Yet, data on women's (co-)ownership of land is unavailable. Currently, 10 percent of land titles are digitally registered, 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.[62] […] 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.[63] 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.

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

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

57. 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

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

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

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

61. 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.

62. INSTAT (2018). Albania Demographic and Health Survey II (2017-2018). See: https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR348/FR348.pdf

63. 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

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[…].[64]

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.[65] The bulk of women's contribution to the agricultural sector is through informal employment in family farming.[66] 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".[67] 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.[68] 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.[69] 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. […][70]

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 bank account, compared to 52 per cent among the urban population.[71] 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.[72] 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

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

65. INSTAT (2022). Business Registers, 2022. Available at: https://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2023/business-registers-2022/

66. *Ibid.*

67. 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

68. INSTAT (2022). Business Registers, 2022. Available at: https://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2023/business-registers-2022/

69. *Ibid.*

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

71. 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

72. *Ibid.*

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.[73] The lack of rural connectivity in Albania has been identified as one of the gaps hampering growth in the country.[74] 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.[75] 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.[76] […] 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 […].[77]

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.[78] 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.

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).[79]

73. *Ibid.*

74. 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

75. 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

76. *Ibid.*

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

78. 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

79. 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

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. […][80]

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[81], 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.[82] 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.[83] […] 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.[84] It refers to the respective international framework Aide-Mémoire[85] on gender mainstreaming in the UN Disaster Risk Reduction Action Plan, the obligations under the EU Gender Action Plan III[86], and activities and results foreseen under the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2021-2030), Objective 3.1 "Economic empowerment of women in rural areas".[87] 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.

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

81. 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

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

83. In 2018, 779 women applied for the national agricultural support schemes, out of whom 627 became beneficiaries. Five women 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

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

85. 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

86. 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

87. 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

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.

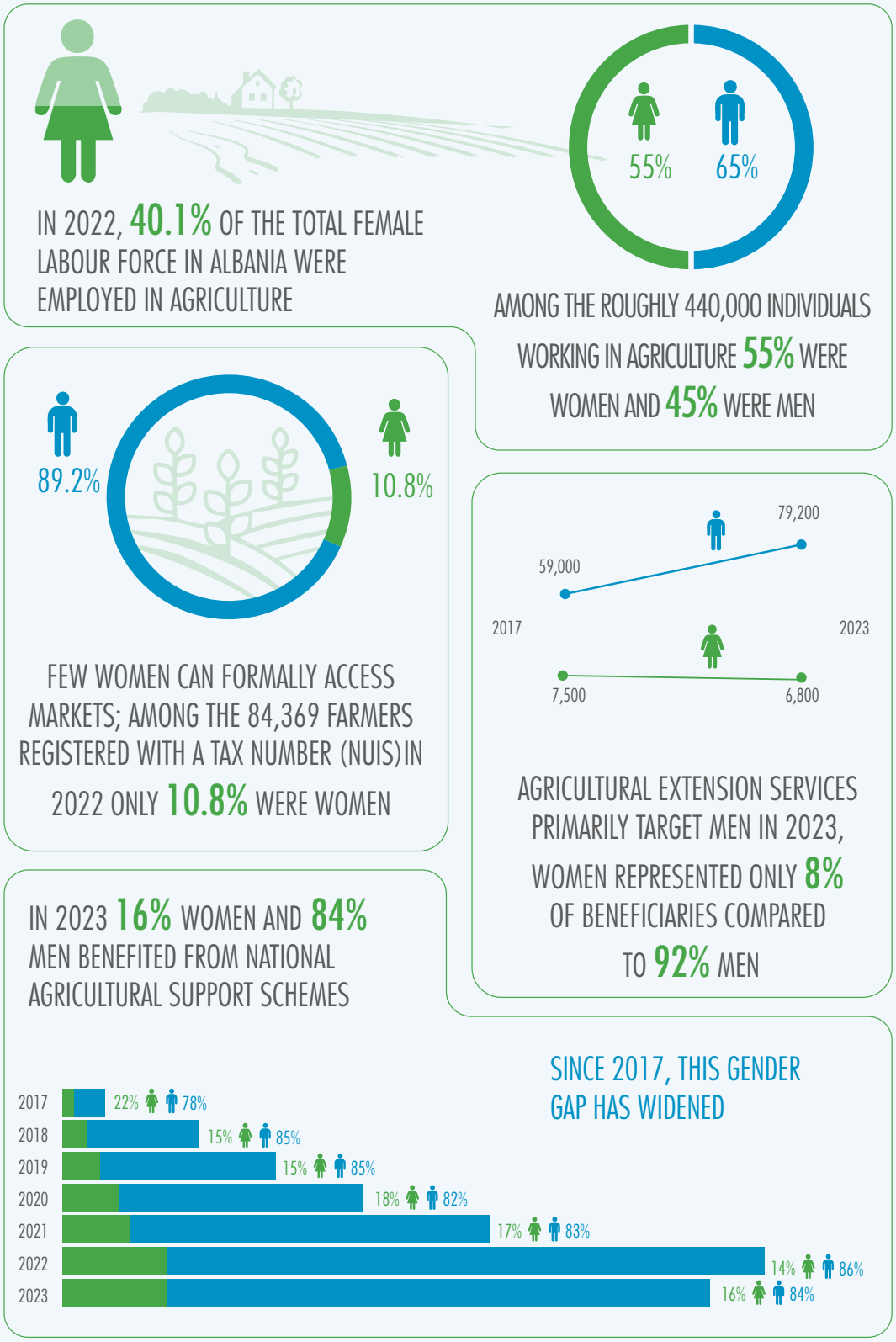
Gaps in gender statistics and data on agriculture and rural development

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.[88] […][89]

88. 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]

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

Figure 4. Women, men and agriculture in Albania



Source: Source: INSTAT (2023). The Labor 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

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE
AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

UN WOMEN