

# Sustainable Development Goals in Albania: Targets and Progress

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**Abstract:** This paper is built under the principles of a mini review structure. It provides a literature review regarding the background of sustainable development and sustainable development goals in general, followed by sustainable development goals for Albania in a specific way. It is an analysis of each of the 17th SDGs in Albania, including targets, statistics and progress. Recent data regarding the targets included in each goal are provided, as well as earlier data for the past few years, based on data from the Institute of Statistics of Albania and United Nations. At the same time, a financial distribution of UN funds is provided for each of the SDGs in our country. An evaluation of the achievement of various targets is discussed; we highlight the need of improvement of various SDGs’ progress, including the 8th, 10th and 16th SDG in our country.

**Keywords:** Sustainable development, sustainable development goals, Albania.

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has been at the heart of European policy for a long time, enshrined in the European Treaties. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015 give new impetus to global efforts to achieve sustainable development (INSTAT, 2023). Albania faces multiple challenges that drive vulnerabilities, including weaknesses in rule of law, uneven institutional capacity, service gaps, limited investments in social services, degradation of natural resources and few labor opportunities. The November 2019 earthquake and coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic highlighted the need to address disaster risk management and the socioeconomic impact of these events, particularly on vulnerable groups and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. The pandemic deepened gender inequalities, disproportionately affecting women, their livelihoods and access to essential health services, and increased incidents of gender-based violence (UNDP, 2021).

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) reported on Sustainable Development (SD) in ‘Our Common Future’<sup>1</sup> as a basis for the World Confer-

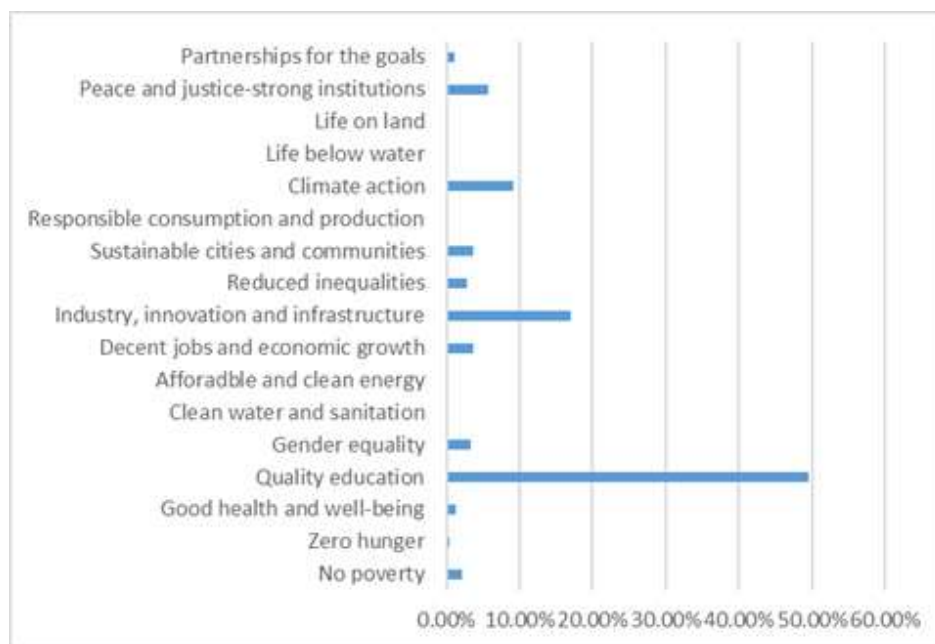
ence on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro (1992) resulting in the Agenda 21, many visions, reports and plans on different levels up to the European Union (EU), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Organizations (UNO) and from different sources, governments, science, industrial organizations, NGOs, have from different points of view given views on strategies and measures supporting the process of sustainable development (Jansen, 2003). The merit to have introduced the term ‘sustainable’ into political language, however, belongs to the Club of Rome. In March 1972, this globally operating think-tank published the epoch-making report on the ‘Limits to Growth’, written by a group of scientists, led by Dennis and Donella Meadows of the ‘Massachusetts Institute of Technology’ (MIT). Describing the desirable “state of global equilibrium”, the authors used the word ‘sustainable’: “We are searching for a model output that represents a world system that is: 1. sustainable without sudden and uncontrolled collapse; and 2. capable of satisfying the basic material requirements of all of its people.” (Grober, 2007). The most useful and known definition comes from the “Our Common Future” also known as Brundtland Report from United Nations (UN) on 1987. “SD is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the worlds poor, to which overriding priority should be given, and
- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs.” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

In its development, the concept has been adapting to the contemporary requirements of a complex global environment,

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<sup>1</sup> Our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report, was published on October 1987 by the United Nations through the Oxford University Press. This publication was in recognition of Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Norwegian Prime Minister and Chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED).



**Graph 1.** SDGs budget allocation in Albania.

Source: created in excel with data from UN Albania<sup>2</sup>

but the underlying principles and goals, as well as the problems of their implementation, remained almost unchanged. Still, some goals have been updated, and the new goals were set. These goals are united in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2015 which outline the challenges that humanity has to fight not only to achieve sustainable development but to survive on Earth as well (Tomislav, 2018). The MDGs have become a type of global report card for the fight against poverty for the 15 years from 2000 to 2015 (Sachs, 2012). While MDGs have promoted increased health and well-being in many countries by recognizing and deliberating on the possible constraints of the MDGs framework, the post-2015 agenda may have even greater impact (Fehling, Nelson, & Venkatapuram, 2013). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity (UNDP, 2023).

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN ALBANIA

Today, progress is being made in many places, but, overall, action to meet the Goals is not yet advancing at the speed or scale required. 2020 needs to usher in a decade of ambitious action to deliver the Goals by 2030 (UN, 2023). The Sustainable Development Goals are a global call to action to end poverty, protect the earth's environment and climate, and ensure that people everywhere can enjoy peace and prosperity. 19 UN Agencies work together to support Albania's achievement of the SDGs. \$70.7 million resources available are allocated as in Graph 1.

Data show that most of the budget is allocated for quality education (almost 50%), followed by industry, innovation and infrastructure (over 15%), climate action (around 10%), peace and justice strong institutions (5.7%). Almost same percentage for decent jobs and economic growth, gender equality, reduced inequalities and no poverty. There is a 0% allocation for goals like life on land, life below water, responsible consumption and production, affordable and clean energy and clean water sanitation. There is 1.2% allocation for good health and wellbeing and 0.4% of the total budget for zero hunger SDG.

According to the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2015-2020 (NSDI II), based on the application of globally accepted principles of sustainable development, particular focus is given to the following: *Human development and social cohesion*, where Albanian citizens are at the core of the development, in a free, democratic, socially inclusive, cohesive, healthy, safe, and just society, with due respect for fundamental human and civil rights, and a rejection of all forms of discrimination. *Environmental preservation*, through the promotion of sustainable production and consumption, the prevention of environmental degradation, water resource depletion, the integration of environmental issues in all sector strategies, and in the notion of corporate social responsibility, and in the application of the precautionary principle in all planned activities. *Participation and consultation*, where citizens, civil society, and the private sector participate in or are consulted on policy decision-making, and where social dialog is promoted and encouraged. *Information and knowledge* use as a factor for development and basis for evidence-based decision making (Council of Ministries, 2016). The report of the UN mainstreaming, acceleration and policy team reached consensus on three highly effective solutions for policy and programming to accelerate progress towards European Union accession and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of Al-

<sup>2</sup> Data available at: <https://albania.un.org/en/sdgs>

bania: (a) human capital development and social inclusion; (b) sustainable, resilient and green economic growth and resource management; (c) effective, people-centered govern-

ance, human rights, rule of law and gender equality (UNDP, 2021). A summary of SDGs targets and statistics in Albania is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. SDGs targets and statistics in Albania.**

SDGs	Targets and statistics
SDG 1 No poverty	“By 2030, reduce by at least half the percentage of women, men and children of all ages living in poverty in all dimensions of poverty based on the national definition”. Statistics show a 23.7% poverty in 2017 and 21.8% in 2020.
SDG 2 Zero hunger	“By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and frailty in children under 5 years of age and addressing the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant women and elderly people”. Statistics show, prevalence of shortness (height for age, %), by years, was 19% in 2008 and 11% in 2018.
SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being	“By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality rate to less than 70 deaths per 100,000 live births”. Maternal mortality rate was 5.6% in 2012 and 3.6% in 2020. Highest rate observed on 2013 with 11.2% and lowest rate on 2014 with 2.8%
SDG 4 Quality Education	“By 2030, ensuring that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes”. Early school leavers as a percentage of the population aged 18-24, by year, was 39% in 2008 and 15.6% in 2020.
SDG 5 Gender Equality	“Ensuring the full and effective participation of women and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”. Women percentage in parliament was 20.7% in 2014 and 29.5% in 2020.
SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation	“By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all”. The percentage of the population that is supplied with drinking water in the household was 76.7% in 2007 and 90.6% in 2020.
SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy	“By 2030 ensure universal access to affordable and reliable energy services”. Percentage of population with access to electricity has been almost linear from 2007-2020, 99.9%.
SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth	“Supporting economic growth per capita in accordance with national circumstances, where there is at least 7 percent annual growth of gross domestic product per year in least developed countries”. Statistics show that annual growth rate of real GDP per capita shows fluctuations up and down. The lowest rate was observed in 2015 with -13.67% and the highest value in 2018 with 16.68%. Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita in 2020 was -2.67%.
SDG 9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure	“The development of a quality, reliable, sustainable and strong infrastructure, including regional and cross-border infrastructure, in support of economic development and human well-being, focusing on fair use and affordable costs for all”. Based on INSTAT data, passenger transport is mainly supported by sea and air at constant rates, with the exception of the 2019-2020 period where a decline was observed. The transport of passengers by rail from 2012-2020 shows a declining trend, while that of goods fluctuates up and down.
SDG 10 Reduced Inequality	“By 2030, achieve progressive and sustainable income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population at a rate higher than the national average”. Gini coefficient was observed 36.8% in 2017 and 33.2% in 2020 with a light declining trend from 2017-2020.
SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities	“By 2030, ensuring access for all to adequate, safe, affordable housing, basic services and improving poor neighborhoods”. Percentage of population living in poor neighborhoods has been declining with around twice from 2007-2020. It was 43.7% in 2007 and 20.8% in 2020.
SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production	“By 2030, achieve sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources”. Internal use of environmental materials in relation to the population (tons) including biomass, minerals and metal concentrates, non-metallic minerals, fossil energy materials and other products and waste fluctuates with the highest value in 2016 with 9.9 tons and the lowest value in 2011 with 7.2 tons. In 2019 it was 7.9 tons. The lowest impact out of the total is observed by waste and other products.
SDG 13	Albania is working to support its wider development goals, which are geared to increase resilience to climate change impacts.

Climate Action	The focus is on key sectors such as energy, industrial development, agriculture, public health, and biodiversity. Albania is addressing the vulnerability of key sectors and prioritizing adaptation efforts through integrated policy, research and investment in key areas such as the protection of coastal zones and urban planning, increasing awareness of the agricultural and health communities to climate change risks. Albania remains committed to developing a long-term, low carbon development strategy as well as reducing its current greenhouse gas emissions (The World Bank Group, 2023). The government has taken several initiatives to address climate change in the mid to long-term, such as the approval of the Action Plan of the National Strategy on Climate Change (NSCC) 2020-2030, the Climate Change Law (2020), the implementation of adaptation programs etc. (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2023).
SDG 14 Life below water	“Conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”. United Nations work on SDG 14 in Albania is linked to other SDGs: SDG 12, SDG 15 and SDG 17 (UN Albania, 2023).
SDG 15 Life on land	“By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland water ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in accordance with obligations under international agreements”. Forest area as % of total land area from 2013-2020 was almost linear with 36-37%.
SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions	“Visible reduction of all forms of violence and the number of deaths”. Number of intentional homicide victims per 100,000 inhabitants, by gender and age show a slight decrease in the 2016-2017, from 2.7 to 2. The trend then is linear with around 2 victims from 2017-2020. The largest number of victims is observed in males with slight increase rate from 2017-2020. In 2020 it was 3.7 male victims per 100,000 inhabitants.
SDG 17 Partnerships for the goals	“Strengthening domestic resource mobilization, including international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for revenue and tax collection”. Total government revenue (including grants, tax revenue, from taxes and customs, income from local government, income from special funds, non-tax revenue) by source as a share of GDP has been from 24.7% in 2003 to 26.3% in 2020. Slight fluctuations are observed in between.

Source: Information and data gathered from the Institute of Statistics of Albania<sup>3</sup>. Summary made by authors.

## DISCUSSIONS

This paper presented an overview of each individual goal, pointing out basic elements, presenting the targets and indicators that were set by the United Nations in order to monitor each goal's progress, as well as recent data regarding the situation that is occurring currently in our country. In the Economic context, economic growth in Albania is too low to converge with European Union living standards and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP Albania, 2023). In the Environment context, environment protection is one of 127 programs funded by the Albania state budget and budget allocated for it is very low. In the last 4 years (2019-2022), the budget has been 0.23-0.18% of the total budget of the government, much lower value than other countries of the Balkan (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2022). After weathering the consequences of the 2019 earthquake, COVID-19 pandemic, and price crisis, the government's focus is now on full recovery with special attention on tourism, agriculture, and digitization. It is encouraging to see that there is increased attention to climate change and the environmentally-friendly interventions across economic sectors (World Bank, 2023). According to the funds allocated by the UN for SDGs fulfillment, most of them are focused on quality education (SDG 4), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), climate action (SDG 13), and peace and justice - strong institutions (SDG 16). Statistics from INSTAT show that in most of the SDGs there has been improvement over the years and in achieving the objectives stated by UN. The SDGs that require more attention accord-

ing to the figures in Table 1 are decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduced inequality (SDG 10), as well as peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). The achievement of the objectives related to SDGs should certainly not be seen as a separate process from the other challenges that our country faces, both at the national and international level. However, our country has always had the support of international partners, local and international organizations to achieve goals with global impact, including the SDGs.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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