

# Policy Paper Series

## Green Agenda & Sustainable Connectivity

*Albania Youth Perceptions Survey on EU*

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>EIP</b>	Economic and Investment Plan (for the Western Balkans)
<b>ESN</b>	Erasmus Student Network
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EU4Youth</b>	European Union initiative for youth employment and skills
<b>GAWB</b>	Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
<b>NECP</b>	National Energy and Climate Plan
<b>TEN-E</b>	Trans-European Networks for Energy
<b>TEN-T</b>	Trans-European Transport Network
<b>WBIF</b>	Western Balkans Investment Framework

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## Introduction and Methodology

### *Context of EU Integration in Albania*

Albania's accession to the European Union (EU) remains a strategic national priority, reflecting the country's enduring commitment to democratic consolidation, economic modernization, and institutional alignment with EU standards. The *European Commission's 2024 Albania Report* highlights continued progress in areas such as public administration reform, economic governance, and approximation with the EU acquis (European Commission, 2024). Nonetheless, persistent challenges remain in the domains of judicial reform, media freedom, and anti-corruption—key pillars within the Fundamentals Cluster. The report emphasizes the need for inclusive, transparent reforms and the strengthening of institutional capacities to meet accession benchmarks effectively.

In line with the EU's evolving enlargement methodology, the integration process increasingly follows a *whole-of-society* approach, recognizing that sustainable progress depends on the active participation of all societal sectors. Within this framework, youth are positioned not merely as future EU citizens but as essential drivers of democratic development, social innovation, and civic engagement. Their participation strengthens public trust in institutions, fosters civic responsibility, and ensures that reforms reflect the aspirations of the next generation.

Albanian youth benefit from a range of EU-funded programmes that promote education, employability, and civic participation. Notable among these are:

- **Erasmus+**, which supports youth mobility, civic engagement, and intercultural learning through exchange programmes, training, and participation projects (European Commission, n.d.);
- **EU4Youth**, a 36-month initiative co-implemented by UNDP and UNICEF to operationalize the Youth Guarantee scheme in Albania, improving employability among young people not in education, employment, or training (UNDP & UNICEF, 2024); and
- **Funded traineeships at the EU Delegation to Albania**, which provide young graduates with professional exposure to EU diplomacy, policy analysis, and public outreach (European External Action Service [EEAS], 2025).

Collectively, these initiatives not only empower young Albanians but also deepen social and institutional linkages between Albania and the European Union.

## *Methodology*

### *Research Design*

This policy paper series, developed by **ESN Tirana**, adopts a **mixed-methods research design** that combines quantitative and qualitative analyses to examine youth perceptions of Albania's EU integration process. The approach integrates survey data with documentary review, ensuring empirical robustness and contextual depth.

### *Data Source and Collection*

The analysis draws on data from the **ESN Albania Survey on Youth Perceptions of European Integration**, conducted by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Albania between **April and June 2025**. The survey explored how young people in Albania perceive, understand, and engage with the European Union and the country's integration trajectory.

The questionnaire was distributed online via **Google Forms** using a **snowball sampling** technique. While this method limits sample representativeness, it is appropriate for exploratory studies focused on identifying emerging patterns and attitudes within interconnected youth networks. A total of **264 valid responses** were collected from individuals aged **15 to 29**, encompassing participants from urban, suburban, and rural areas with diverse educational backgrounds, employment statuses, and living conditions. This diversity allowed for comparative analysis across demographic subgroups and provided a broad overview of youth perspectives on EU integration.

The overarching purpose of this data collection was to generate **evidence-based insights** that inform policymakers, civil society actors, and EU institutions in designing reforms that reflect the needs and aspirations of young people in Albania.

### *Data Preparation and Cleaning*

Data processing and analysis were conducted using the **R statistical environment (version 4.3.2)**. To ensure the accuracy, consistency, and reliability of the results, a systematic data preparation workflow was applied:

1. **Variable standardization** – Column names were translated from Albanian to English and harmonized for clarity (e.g., *Mosha juaj* to *Age group*; *Gjinia juaj* to *Gender*).
2. **Missing data treatment** – The dataset was screened for incomplete responses. Records with substantial missing data were removed, yielding a final cleaned sample of 264 observations.
3. **Data normalization** – Text entries were trimmed and standardized to correct typographical inconsistencies and ensure uniform categorical labeling (e.g., *Femër/Mashkull* standardized to *Female/Male*).
4. **Recoding of categorical variables** – Demographic variables were regrouped into coherent analytical categories as follows:
  - Age groups: 15–19, 20–24, 25–29 years
  - Education levels: Secondary, University, Postgraduate
  - Residence area: Urban, Suburban, Rural
  - Employment status: Student, Employed, Unemployed
  - These cleaning and recoding steps ensured that the dataset was analytically sound and suitable for both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

### *Variable Transformation and Analytical Design*

The survey comprised both **ordinal (Likert-type)** and **nominal (categorical)** variables. Data transformation followed the logic of variable measurement types:

- **Ordinal variables** (e.g., frequency of following EU news, understanding of EU politics, perceived impact of EU integration) were converted into ordered factors with descriptive labels.
- **Nominal variables** (e.g., awareness of EU programmes, participation in EU initiatives, willingness to engage in EU-related activities) were recoded into binary indicators (*Yes/No*) to facilitate cross-tabulation and association testing.

- **Open-ended responses** (e.g., perceived challenges to integration) were manually coded into thematic categories, such as *corruption*, *political instability*, *economic reforms*, and *social issues*.

This transformation enabled the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings within a unified analytical framework.

### *Analytical Approach*

A **mixed analytical strategy** was employed, combining descriptive statistics, visualization, and inferential tests to examine youth awareness, engagement, and perceptions regarding EU integration.

#### 1. **Descriptive analysis and visualization:**

Frequency and percentage distributions were computed to identify general patterns of youth awareness and engagement. Results were visualized using bar charts and comparative plots to highlight demographic differences.

#### 2. **Inferential analysis:**

Relationships between key variables were explored through statistical testing:

- **Spearman's rank correlation** measured the strength and direction of associations between ordinal variables, notably between frequency of following EU news and understanding of EU politics ( $\rho = 0.54, p < .001$ ).
- **Chi-square tests of independence** assessed relationships between categorical variables, such as awareness of EU programmes and participation in EU activities ( $\chi^2 = 27.6, p < .001$ ; Cramer's  $V = 0.325$ ).

These tests revealed statistically significant relationships between information exposure, value alignment, and youth engagement behaviour.

#### 3. **Sectoral and thematic analysis:**

Perceptions of EU integration's impact across domains such as education, employment, governance, culture, and the economy were examined using Likert-scale responses converted into ordered categories ranging from "Very negative" to "Very positive." Open-ended responses were coded and quantified to identify the most frequently cited obstacles to integration.



### *Software Environment and Reproducibility*

All analyses were conducted in **R (version 4.3.2)** using open-source packages from the **diverse** ecosystem for data management, visualization, and reproducibility. Analytical scripts and documentation were maintained to ensure transparency and replicability of findings.

## The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans

The European Union's (EU) commitment to achieving climate neutrality by 2050, formalized through the *European Green Deal*, represents not merely an environmental strategy but a comprehensive transformation of economic structures, social contracts, and development paradigms (European Commission, 2019). For candidate countries in the Western Balkans, this agenda constitutes both a benchmark for accession and a challenge to entrenched governance models, economic dependencies, and societal practices.

Albania, which formally opened negotiations under *Cluster Four: Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity* in September 2025, stands at a critical juncture in its integration process. The country must address long-standing institutional weaknesses while accelerating alignment with the EU's evolving environmental and climate acquis (European Union, 2025).

The *Green Agenda for the Western Balkans* (GAWB), launched in 2020, adapts the European Green Deal's objectives to regional conditions marked by coal dependency, limited institutional capacity, and emerging environmental governance frameworks (European Commission, 2020). Structured around five pillars: decarbonization, circular economy, depollution, sustainable food systems, and biodiversity protection, the GAWB explicitly links environmental performance with EU accession progress.

Albania, endowed with substantial hydropower potential yet facing climate-related challenges such as water scarcity, waste accumulation, and ecosystem degradation, must align national reforms with the GAWB framework. Environmental reform is thus integral to broader processes of state modernization, economic diversification, and social transformation.

## Sustainability Transitions and Youth Engagement

Recent scholarship on sustainability transitions underscores that transformative environmental change depends not only on technological innovation or institutional reform but also on social legitimacy, civic participation, and intergenerational equity (Köhler et al., 2019). Within this framework, youth are not passive recipients of policy but essential actors in shaping and sustaining green transitions.

Within the European Union, youth engagement in sustainability governance has evolved from symbolic consultation to structured participation. The *EU Youth Dialogue*, embedded in the Union's Youth Strategy, institutionalizes youth input across policy areas, including climate and

environmental governance (Council of the European Union, 2023). Complementary programmes such as *Erasmus+* and the *European Solidarity Corps* integrate sustainability competencies into education and volunteerism. The *Council Conclusions on the Social Dimension of a Sustainable Europe for Youth* further affirm that young people are “agents of change,” entitled to take part in designing, implementing, and monitoring the European Green Deal (European Council, 2023).

This institutional architecture reflects a growing normative consensus: effective sustainability governance requires the inclusion of younger generations, whose future livelihoods depend most directly on its outcomes.

By contrast, the Western Balkans present a more fragmented picture. Although regional commitments, such as the *Sofia Declaration* (2020) have emphasized youth inclusion, practical mechanisms for sustained engagement remain underdeveloped (Regional Cooperation Council, 2021). Consultation processes are often ad hoc, and civil society organizations lack the coordination and resources needed to influence national policy trajectories. As a result, youth participation in environmental decision-making remains largely symbolic.

## Albania’s Environmental and Infrastructural Landscape

Albania’s environmental profile illustrates both progress and persistent challenges. Approximately *100% of its electricity generation* derives from hydropower, making it a regional leader in renewable energy use (Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, 2024). In recent years, investment in solar and wind projects, supported by international financial institutions and private capital has expanded the country’s renewable base. The updated *National Energy and Climate Plan* (NECP) sets more ambitious emissions reduction and renewable energy deployment targets, signaling a growing governmental commitment to climate action.

However, implementation gaps remain. The European Commission (2024) rates Albania as “moderately prepared” in transport and environmental policy, with limited progress in circular economy frameworks, water management, biodiversity protection, and civil protection mechanisms. Amendments to the Law on Protected Areas in 2024 raised concerns over policy consistency. Strengthening institutional enforcement, advancing the National Adaptation Plan and Decarbonisation Roadmap, and consolidating the Energy Efficiency Agency are priorities.

The Cluster Four negotiations, initiated in 2025, thus offer a strategic window to embed sustainability at the core of Albania's EU integration agenda (European Union, 2025). The process aligns environmental reform with broader objectives of economic modernization, social inclusion, and regional cooperation.

## Youth and the Green Transition in Albania

Public support for the green transition, particularly among youth, represents a critical but underutilized resource. Survey evidence indicates that young Albanians overwhelmingly support renewable energy development, expect EU integration to raise environmental and living standards, and express a strong desire for participation in decision-making processes. Yet, awareness of specific EU programmes in transport, agriculture, and environmental policy remains limited. Bridging this information gap requires *education reform, expansion of green skills* within vocational training, and the institutionalization of participatory mechanisms such as youth councils, citizen assemblies, and participatory budgeting in EU-funded projects.

Albania's path toward climate neutrality is therefore both *technical and generational*. Policy frameworks and financial instruments exist, but implementation remains uneven and citizen engagement, especially among young people is insufficiently embedded in governance structures. As climate change accelerates, youth engagement becomes not merely desirable but indispensable for legitimacy and long-term effectiveness.

## Toward a Socially Inclusive Green Transition

To ensure that Albania's green transition advances both environmental and social objectives, policy action must combine regulatory alignment with civic empowerment. Integrating sustainability into education systems, strengthening environmental literacy, and promoting youth-led innovation can enhance both the inclusiveness and durability of reform. Drawing on EU best practices, Albania should aim to institutionalize youth participation in monitoring and evaluating green policies ensuring that the transition reflects the aspirations and creativity of the next generation.

Ultimately, the country's success will depend on its ability to transform formal compliance into substantive transformation, anchoring environmental governance in transparent institutions, informed citizenship, and intergenerational solidarity. By aligning with the *European Green Deal* while empowering young people as partners in implementation, Albania can advance an

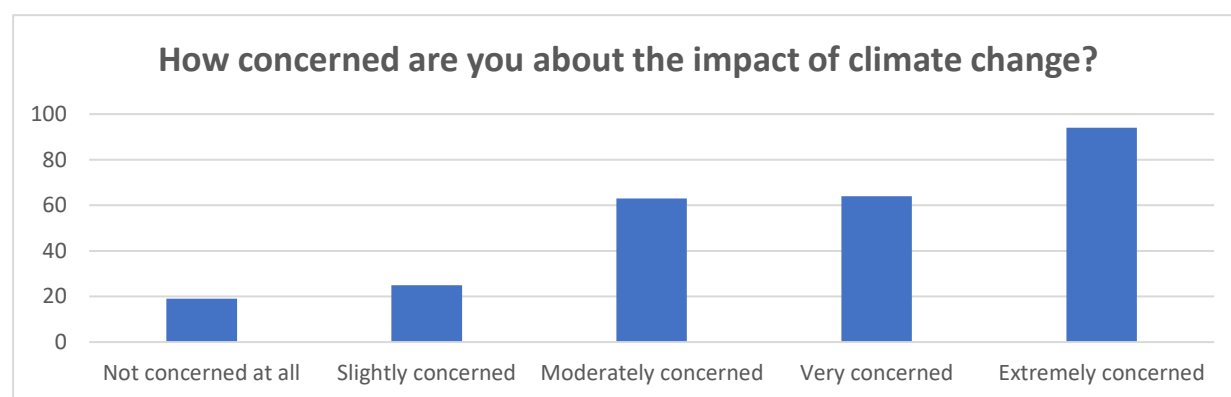
integration model that is not only compliant but also *sustainable, participatory, and future-oriented*.

## Climate Change as a Dominant Youth Concern

Survey data from 264 young Albanians reveals climate change as a paramount concern. When asked to rate the impact of climate change on Albania and Europe on a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high), responses clustered decisively at the upper end of the scale.

Nearly 60% of participants selected ratings of 4 or 5, indicating high or very high concern. This represents a strong majority consensus that climate change constitutes a serious threat requiring policy response. By contrast, only 17% of respondents rated climate impact at levels 1 or 2, suggesting that climate skepticism or dismissal is marginal within this demographic cohort.

These findings mirror broader European trends where climate change ranks among youth's top concerns (European Commission, 2022). In Albania, however, the issue has distinct local dimensions. Young people have witnessed erratic rainfall disrupting hydropower, rising temperatures reducing agricultural yields, and extreme weather damaging infrastructure and livelihoods. Media coverage of droughts, fires, and floods has reinforced this sense of vulnerability. For many, climate change is not abstract but a tangible force shaping jobs, living conditions, and migration choices.

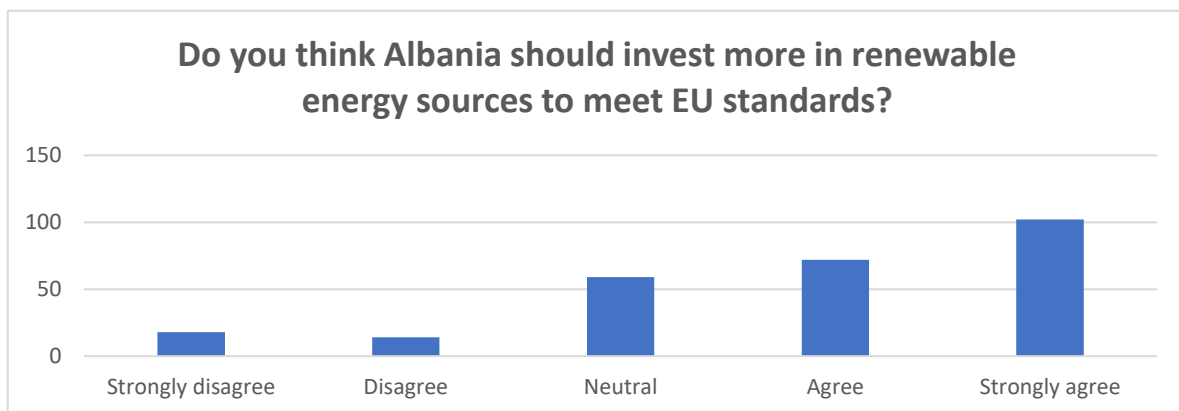


**Figure 1.** Distribution of Youth Concern Regarding Climate Change Impact on Albania and Europe

Note. Survey respondents (N = 264) rated concern on a 5-point scale where 1 = very low impact and 5 = very high impact. Data collected through the National Youth Perception Survey on EU Integration Process and Union Developments, 2025.

## Strong Support for Renewable Energy Transition

Beyond general climate concern, the survey explored specific policy preferences regarding energy transition. Respondents were asked whether Albania should increase investment in renewable energy sources to meet EU environmental standards. The results demonstrate overwhelming support: nearly three-quarters of participants expressed agreement or strong agreement with this proposition. Only 32 respondents (12%) indicated low levels of support, selecting ratings of 1 or 2 on the 5-point scale.

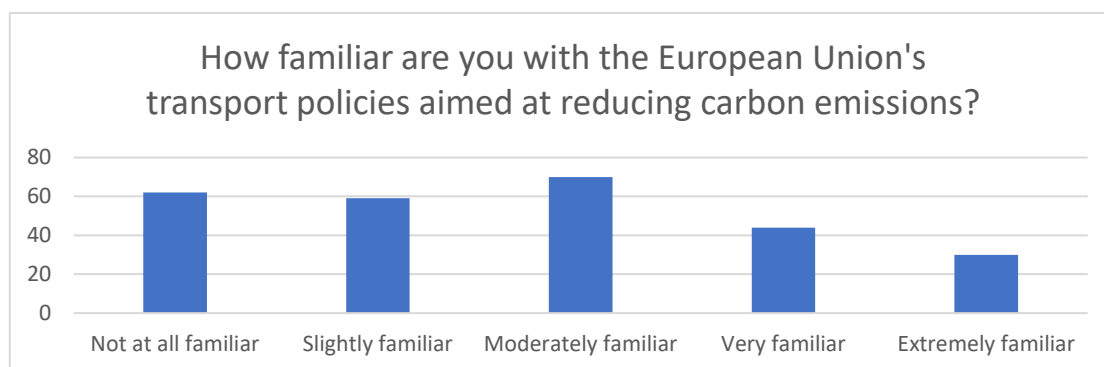


**Figure 2.** *Youth Support for Increased Renewable Energy Investment to Meet EU Standards*

Note. Respondents (N = 264) indicated agreement levels on a 5-point scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Survey conducted as part of the National Youth Perception Survey on EU Integration, 2025.

## Knowledge Gaps in EU Climate and Transport Policies

While youth demonstrate strong concern about climate change and support for renewable energy, their familiarity with specific EU policy frameworks reveals significant gaps. When asked about their knowledge of EU transport policies aimed at reducing carbon emissions, responses were distributed across the scale with notable concentration at lower levels. Nearly half of respondents, approximately 47%, reported little familiarity, selecting levels 1 or 2. Only about 28% indicated strong familiarity (levels 4 or 5), while the remainder positioned themselves at the midpoint.



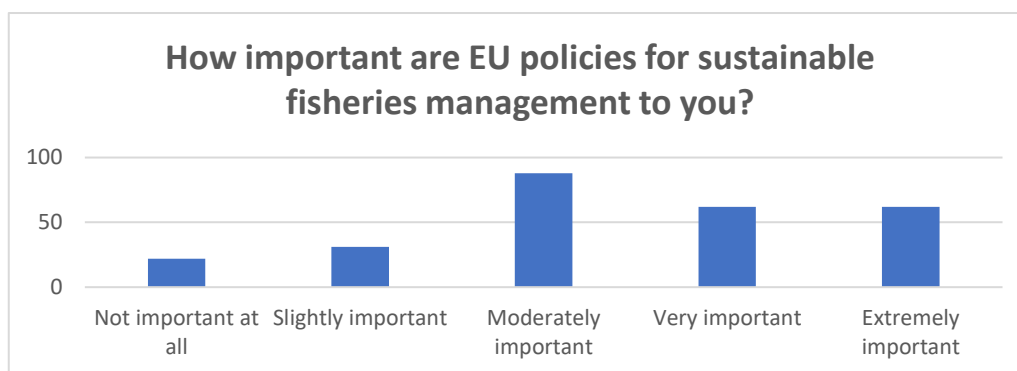
**Figure 3.** *Youth Knowledge of EU Transport Policies for Carbon Emission Reduction*

Note. Self-assessed knowledge levels (N = 264) on a 5-point scale where 1 = very low knowledge and 5 = very high knowledge. Data from National Youth Perception Survey, 2025.

This pattern highlights a persistent gap between general environmental awareness and specific policy literacy among young Albanians. European Union (EU) transport policy encompasses complex frameworks such as vehicle emissions standards, sustainable urban mobility plans, rail investment, electric mobility promotion, and integrated transport networks aimed at reducing emissions. Despite their relevance to everyday mobility and employment prospects, these domains remain opaque to non-specialists. The knowledge gap stems from several factors: EU policy communication often relies on technical language, domestic media prioritize political developments over policy content, and educational programs rarely address concrete regulatory instruments. Civil society organizations in the transport and environmental sectors also face limited outreach capacity. As a result, even climate-conscious youth often lack familiarity with the specific mechanisms driving sustainable transport and emissions reduction in the EU context.

## Moderate Recognition of Sustainable Fisheries Importance

The survey also explored youth perspectives on EU policies regarding sustainable fisheries. While fisheries may appear peripheral to Albanian youth concerns given the country's limited maritime fishing industry, responses indicated moderate to strong recognition of importance. The largest group of respondents selected the scale midpoint (level 3), while nearly as many rated fisheries policies at levels 4 or 5 combined, indicating higher importance.



**Figure 4.** *Youth Assessment of EU Sustainable Fisheries Policy Importance*

Note. Importance ratings (N = 264) on a 5-point scale where 1 = very low importance and 5 = very high importance. Survey data collected 2025.

These findings indicate that young Albanians tend to conceptualize sustainability in broad, systemic terms rather than focusing solely on visible or localized issues. Awareness of fisheries policy signals an understanding that environmental protection extends to marine ecosystems, that sustainable resource management requires integrated approaches, and that EU standards encompass diverse policy areas. This broader consciousness is encouraging for long-term sustainability transitions, as it reflects openness to comprehensive environmental governance. However, the clustering of responses near the midpoint suggests ambivalence: many respondents may recognize the importance of fisheries in principle without possessing detailed knowledge or personal engagement. This moderate stance contrasts with the stronger enthusiasm for renewable energy, implying that the salience of sustainability issues varies across policy domains. Policymakers should therefore recognize that different environmental areas mobilize youth to differing degrees and adjust communication and engagement strategies accordingly.

## Perceptions of Infrastructure and Environmental Priorities

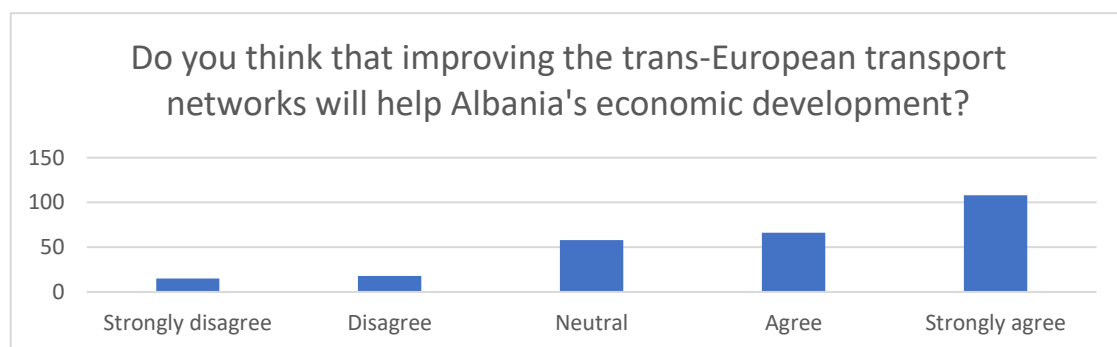
Infrastructure and environmental sustainability are two of the most visible dimensions of the European Union's (EU) enlargement process. For Albania, these areas are closely tied to the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T; European Commission, 2024) and the broader Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans (Western Balkans Investment Framework, 2024), which together provide the strategic and financial framework for modernizing mobility, strengthening connectivity, and reducing emissions. The EIP alone foresees €9 billion in grants and up to €20 billion in leveraged investments for the region, with Albania featuring prominently in several flagship projects. The country's geographic position



makes it a critical link in Corridor VIII, connecting the Adriatic to the Black Sea through Durrës, Skopje, and Sofia, and in the Adriatic–Ionian Corridor, which stretches along the coast to integrate southern Europe. These corridors are not simply transit routes; they are seen as engines of economic growth, enablers of trade, and platforms for sustainable development.

## High Expectations for Transport Network Benefits

Survey results confirm that young Albanians attach high importance to these initiatives. When asked about the potential impact of TEN-T network improvements on Albania's economic development, youth responses revealed strong optimism. Approximately 70% of respondents rated expected benefits at levels 4 or 5, indicating high or very high anticipated positive impacts. Only a small minority expressed skepticism, with fewer than 20% selecting lower ratings.



**Figure 5.** *Youth Expectations Regarding TEN-T Impact on Albania's Economic Development*

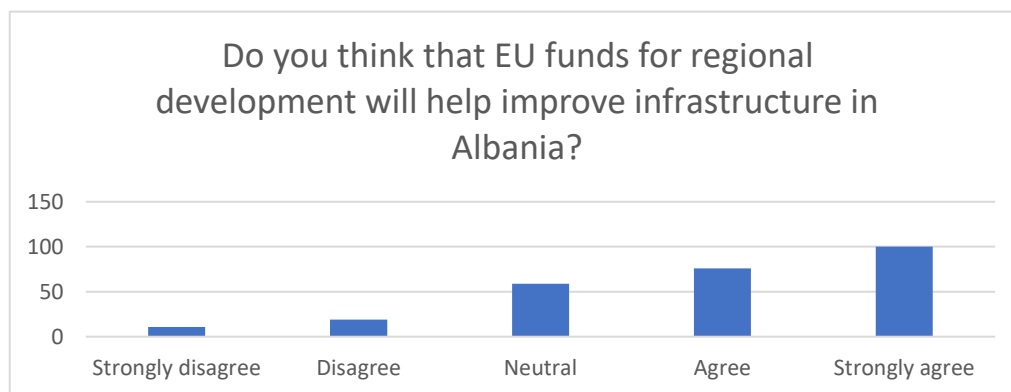
Note. Expected impact ratings (N = 264) on a 5-point scale where 1 = very low impact and 5 = very high impact. National Youth Perception Survey, 2025.

This optimism reflects several considerations. Improved transport infrastructure promises reduced travel times, lower logistics costs, enhanced regional connectivity, and greater access to markets and employment opportunities. For young people considering career options, better infrastructure expands geographic opportunity and facilitates mobility. The association between infrastructure quality and economic prosperity is widely recognized, making transport investments appear obviously beneficial.

## Confidence in EU Regional Development Funds

When asked whether EU funds for regional development will help improve Albania's infrastructure, responses clustered strongly at the higher end of the scale. Only a small minority expressed doubt, with 11 individuals rating their confidence at level 1 and 17 at level 2. The

largest group placed themselves in the mid-range at level 3 (55 respondents), while higher confidence was evident among 73 respondents at level 4. The strongest support came from 97 individuals who rated their confidence at the maximum level 5. These results indicate that a clear majority of young Albanians view EU regional funds as a reliable driver of infrastructure improvements, with approximately 64% of respondents (170 out of 264) expressing strong or very strong confidence (levels 4 and 5) in their impact.



**Figure 6.** *Youth Confidence in EU Regional Development Funds for Infrastructure Development*

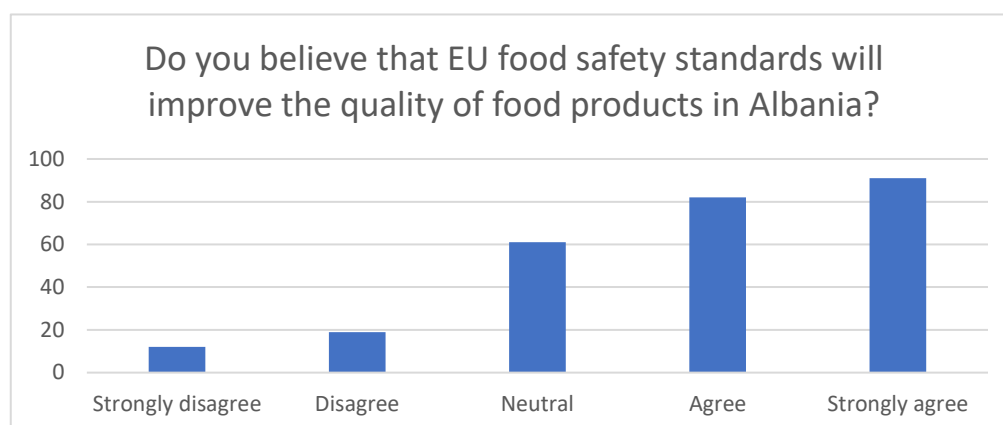
Note. Confidence levels (N = 264) on a 5-point scale where 1 = very low confidence and 5 = very high confidence. Survey data, 2025.

This pattern demonstrates that young Albanians view EU financial instruments as credible and effective mechanisms for driving infrastructure improvements. Nearly two-thirds of respondents expressed strong or very strong confidence in EU funds' capacity to deliver results. This trust likely reflects several factors: the EU's reputation for rigorous project management and accountability standards, visibility of EU-funded projects through signage and media coverage, association of EU involvement with higher quality and reduced corruption risks, and general pro-European sentiment among youth.

## Strong Belief in EU Food Safety Standard Benefits

Environmental dimensions are equally critical. When asked whether EU food safety standards will improve the quality of food products in Albania, only a small fraction of respondents expressed doubt, while about one in four gave a neutral response. By contrast, nearly 70 percent expressed strong or very strong confidence that alignment with EU rules will raise food quality. This clear majority view shows that young people see food safety standards not as abstract

regulations, but as a direct improvement in their daily lives, linked to stronger consumer protection and healthier products in the domestic market.



**Figure 7.** *Youth Expectations for Food Quality Improvements Through EU Safety Standards*

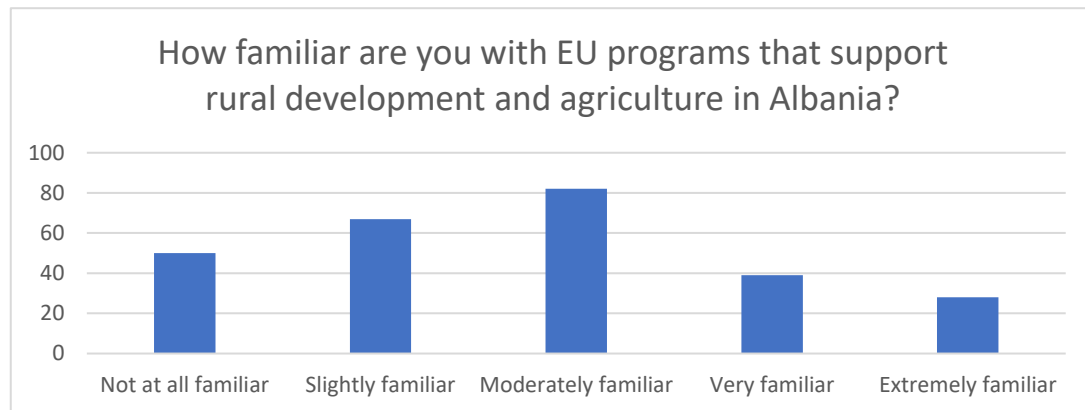
Note. Expected improvement ratings (N = 264) on a 5-point scale where 1 = very low improvement and 5 = very high improvement.  
National Youth Perception Survey, 2025.

Young people see EU standards as directly relevant to their daily lives and wellbeing. Food safety is tangible and immediate, experienced through everyday consumption, and EU alignment is understood as a way to ensure safer, healthier, and more reliable products. This connects policy to consumer interests, health, and quality of life. Albania's food safety system still faces challenges, including limited inspections, weak enforcement, insufficient laboratory capacity, and fragmented institutional responsibility (European Commission, 2024). Media coverage of food safety incidents has increased public awareness of these gaps. EU accession is seen as a driver for necessary improvements through mandatory standards, capacity building, and stronger accountability. For youth, food safety offers a clear example of how EU integration delivers visible benefits, making it a powerful narrative for building support and encouraging demand for effective implementation.

### Limited Awareness of Rural Development Programs

Awareness of EU programmes on rural development and agriculture is relatively limited. Nearly half of respondents about 44% rated their knowledge at the lowest levels (1 or 2). This points to a significant communication gap: the very areas where EU support could make the

biggest difference, such as farming communities and rural youth, are the least informed. Strengthening outreach and making these programmes more visible at the local level is therefore essential to ensure that young people can fully benefit from the opportunities provided.



**Figure 8.** *Youth Familiarity With EU Rural Development and Agricultural Support Programs*

Note. Self-assessed knowledge levels (N = 264) on a 5-point scale where 1 = very low knowledge and 5 = very high knowledge. Survey data, 2025.

Overall, these findings suggest that young Albanians view infrastructure and environmental reforms as tangible markers of progress on the country's EU path. They recognize the potential of transport corridors, regional funds, and higher food safety standards to improve daily life and future opportunities. At the same time, the knowledge gap on rural development highlights the risk of leaving some communities behind. Bridging this divide through stronger communication and inclusive outreach will be essential to ensure that the benefits of EU integration are widely shared, and that Albania's green and digital transitions are both equitable and sustainable.

## Policy Recommendations

Advancing Albania's green transition requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, civil society, and EU institutions. First, green education must be mainstreamed into national curricula and vocational training, with renewable energy, waste management, and circular economy practices treated as essential skills for future employment. Strengthening Environmental Impact Assessments and ensuring that consultations are transparent and

accessible would reinforce accountability, while expanding outreach in rural areas is crucial for helping young farmers and entrepreneurs access EU development funds. At the same time, local inspectorates and civil society organizations need adequate resources to guarantee compliance and effective enforcement.

Youth must be placed at the center of these reforms. Their active participation in municipal councils, participatory budgeting processes, and EU-funded project boards would ensure that policies reflect the priorities of the younger generation. Targeted vocational programs in eco-entrepreneurship, renewable technologies, and sustainable transport developed in partnership with youth organizations and universities; can equip young people with the skills needed for the green economy. Youth-led awareness campaigns on sustainable transport, road safety, and energy efficiency should also be supported, enabling young Albanians to become educators and advocates within their communities.

Finally, collaboration and advocacy are key to sustaining momentum. Stronger partnerships between government, civil society, and the private sector can scale up green skills training and create new career pathways. EU financial instruments such as the Economic and Investment Plan and the Western Balkans Investment Framework should be leveraged to co-finance youth-driven projects in renewable energy, recycling, and biodiversity protection. Regional cooperation among Western Balkans youth councils can further amplify advocacy efforts, allowing young people to exchange best practices and push collectively for inclusive and sustainable green transition policies.

## Conclusion

Albania's path toward the European Union is inseparable from the green transition. Progress has been made in renewable energy and infrastructure, supported by EU financial instruments, yet alignment with the *acquis* remains partial in areas such as transport, waste management, water, and biodiversity. Survey results highlight that young people recognize both the urgency of climate action and the opportunities EU standards offer, from safer food and cleaner water to more sustainable mobility, economic development, and rural livelihoods. At the same time, a gap persists between their concern for the environment and their limited awareness of EU policies and programmes.

Addressing this gap requires inclusive and participatory approaches. Priorities include mainstreaming environmental education and green skills across curricula, expanding vocational training in green economy sectors, and supporting youth-led initiatives. Structured youth engagement in policy-making, EU-funded projects, and municipal decision-making can strengthen accountability and ensure that investments reflect community and intergenerational needs. Strategic use of EU financial instruments, performance-based funding for education, robust environmental enforcement, and regional cooperation and knowledge exchange further enhance the capacity of young Albanians to contribute meaningfully to the green transition.

The green transition is at a decisive moment. By equipping young Albanians with knowledge, practical skills, and a genuine voice in shaping policy, Albania can transform EU integration commitments into tangible, inclusive, and sustainable change for present and future generations.

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