

LABOUR MARKET (RE-)INTEGRATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – ALBANIA

Country note

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PREFACE

The Country Note presents the situation in Albania related to labour market (re-)integration and skills development for persons with disabilities with specific reference to the role of active labour market policy and measures.

The European Training Foundation (ETF) has initiated a mapping of policies and programmes for labour market (re-)integration and skills development for persons with disabilities in several Partner countries, in response to the European Union's priority of fostering the social inclusion and economic autonomy of persons with disabilities through employment, as per the priorities set out in the EU Disability Employment Package.

The main objectives were to conduct a systemic, comparative policy analysis of employment support for persons with disabilities and to identify needs for strengthening the capacity of actors in selected neighbouring EU countries.

The analysis was conducted in accordance with the framework proposed by the EU Disability Employment Package, with a particular focus on active labour market policies and skills.

In Albania, the methodology consisted in desk review and face-to-face and online interviews with the main stakeholders active in the area promotion of employment and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The list of interviewees appears in Annex 1.

1 CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

1.1 Context

Albania has been an EU candidate country since June 2014. In March 2020, the European Union decided to open accession negotiations with Albania.

Albania is an upper-middle income country with a population of 2.4 million inhabitants (1 January 2025), of which **33%** are aged 0–29; 46% are aged 30–64 and **21%** are over 65¹.

The population decline is the result of two main demographic components:

- natural increase, which for 2024 was positive with +1 208 more births than deaths;
- net migration, which remained negative with -28 836 persons².

In 2024, its gross domestic product per capita at current market prices was EUR 6 500, compared to 7 980 for North Macedonia, 11 000 for Montenegro, 12 080 for Türkiye, 12 510 for Serbia and 39 680 for the EU³. In 2024, the employment rate for the population aged 15–64 years was 68.6%. The employment rate was 62.4% for women and 74.9% for men, meaning a gender employment gap for this age group of 12.5 percentage points. Compared to the previous year, employment had increased by 1.9 percentage points. In 2024, the overall unemployment rate for people aged 15 years and over was 8.7% (7.6% for men and 9.8% for women). The unemployment rate had decreased by 1.0 percentage points compared to 2023. For the first quarter of 2025, 17.2% of inactive persons were fulfilling household duties, 12.3% were in retirement or early retirement, 15.2% had a permanent disability and 2.5% were discouraged workers.

In 2024, 22.2% of all youth aged 15–29 years old were neither in employment nor in education or training. Of this group, 44.9% were unemployed, 14.2% were fulfilling domestic and family responsibilities, 2% were discouraged workers and 38.2% cited other reasons⁴.

The at-risk-of-poverty rate in Albania dropped to 19.7% in 2023, decreasing by 0.9 percentage points from the previous year. Between 2022 and 2023 the number of individuals living below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold decreased by 5.4%⁵.

The most recent data from the enlargement countries on the proportion of the population at risk of poverty after social transfers ranged from 19.9% in Serbia in 2023 to 27.9% in Kosovo (2018 data); within this range, the figure was 20.3% for Montenegro (2022 data), 21.8% for North Macedonia (2020 data), 22.0% for Albania (2021 data) and 22.2% for Türkiye (2024 data). All of these were considerably higher than the EU average, which was 16.2% in 2024.

1.2 Situation of persons with disabilities

Comprehensive data on the situation of persons with disabilities are available through various publications issued by INSTAT, including the *Albania Population and Housing Census 2023* (Subchapter 2.1.7: *Disability and Functional Limitations*), the *Regional Statistical Yearbook 2024*, and *Labour Market in Albania, 2023–2024*. Additional data are published in annual reports, analytical studies, and statistical yearbooks prepared by the respective line ministries and implementing agencies, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and the

¹ INSTAT, Population of Albania on 1 January 2025, [\[online\]](#). Last accessed on 23 September 2025.

² INSTAT, Population of Albania on 1 January 2025, [\[online\]](#). Last accessed on 23 September 2025.

³ Eurostat, Key figures for enlargement countries, [\[online\]](#). Last accessed on 23 September 2025.

⁴ INSTAT, Labour Market 2024, [\[online\]](#). Last accessed on 23 September 2025.

⁵ INSTAT, Income and Living Conditions in Albania, 2023, [\[online\]](#). Last accessed on 23 September 2025.

National Agency for Employment and Skills. Relevant information is also included in strategic policy documents adopted by the Government of Albania, notably the *National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2025*.

It is essential to strengthen the quality, availability and comparability of data on persons with disabilities in order to support evidence-based policymaking and enhance the design, implementation and coordination of related policies and programmes. Despite progress achieved in recent years, several key challenges remain, one of which is **insufficient data on persons with disabilities**: Albania currently lacks disaggregated statistics on labour force participation, employment and unemployment specifically for persons with disabilities. These data gaps will be addressed in future Labour Force Survey (LFS) rounds. INSTAT plans to adopt Eurostat's revised LFS methodology, which includes specific indicators on the employment and unemployment status of persons with disabilities.

According to the 2023 Census, 6.5% of Albanian residents, **or 156 137 persons aged five and over, declared a form of disability (Census 2023)**⁶. The prevalence was higher among the female population (7.2%) than the male population (5.9%). Among persons with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 85.8% were literate, while for persons without disabilities the literacy rate was 98.6%. This reveals an evident disparity between persons with and without disability. Only 31.9% of the persons with disabilities aged 15 and over had completed upper secondary or tertiary education, compared to 56.6% of the population without disabilities. This difference was more pronounced in tertiary education, at 6.1% and 21.2% respectively.

There is no available data on the labour force participation rate, employment rate and unemployment rate for persons with disabilities in Albania. According to INSTAT, the issue will be addressed soon.

Administrative data on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in active labour market programmes (services and measures) is available from the National Agency for Employment and Skills database.

At the end of the first quarter of 2025, the number of persons with disabilities registered at the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), the Public Employment Service of Albania, was 3 501 or 5% of the total number of registered jobseekers⁷. This represents a clear increase in the registration of persons with disabilities as jobseekers compared to the fourth quarter of 2023 (2 656) and the fourth quarter of 2022 (437). The increase in the number of registered persons with disabilities reflects the implementation of more targeted and coordinated policy measures aimed at promoting their inclusion in the labour market. This progress can be attributed to the enhanced collaboration between key institutions, particularly the State Social Service and the National Agency for Employment and Skills, which has resulted in a more effective referral and registration system. Improved data exchange and institutional coordination have contributed to identifying a higher number of persons with disabilities who are of working age and eligible for employment support.

In 2023, in Albania the average number of disability benefit recipients by type of disability was 72 474 persons, of whom 18% were blind, 8% were paraplegic and tetraplegic and 74% had mental health problems and physical disabilities. In 2023, Elbasan County recorded the highest rate of disability benefit recipients, with 17.42% of the total, i.e. 56 persons per 1 000 inhabitants, followed by Tirana with 17.41% of the total and Fier with 11.9%.

⁶ In the Census disability is measured about the presence and the severity of any functional impairments in six core functional areas: seeing, hearing, walking or climbing stairs, cognition, daily self-care and communication, consistent with the Washington Group short set of questions and the INECE 2020 Census Recommendations.

⁷ INSTAT, Administrative data on labour market, [\[online\]](#). Last accessed on 23 September 2025.

2 STRATEGIC AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Legislative framework

Albanian national legislation contains numerous laws, by-laws and guidelines that affect persons with disabilities in all fields of life including employment and training, education, social protection, housing, accessibility and participation in public, cultural and political life.

Specific legal acts regulating the employment of persons with disabilities:

- Law No 15/2019 on Employment Promotion, regulating employment promotion instruments and the quotas system;
- Decision of the Council of Ministers No 401/2024 determining the procedures and rules for implementation of the Employment Promotion Programme through Social Reintegration;
- Law No 7889/1994 on the status of workplace disability, as amended;
- Law No 8098/1994 on the status of blind persons, as amended;
- Law No 8626/2020 on the status of paraplegic and tetraplegic persons, as amended;
- Law No 93/2014 on the inclusion and accessibility of persons with disabilities;
- Law No 108/2012 on ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

General legal acts and regulations including provisions:

- Law No 7961/1995 on the Labour Code of the Republic of Albania, as amended;
- Law No 15/2017 on vocational education in the Republic of Albania;
- Law No 69/2012 on the pre-university education system in Albania, as amended;
- Law No 79/2017 on sport, as amended;
- Law No 57/2019 on social assistance in the Republic of Albania;
- Decision of the Council of Ministers No 17/2020 determining procedures and rules for the implementation of the Employment Promotion Programme through job placements, on-the-job training and professional internships;
- Decision of the Council of Ministers No 535/2020 determining the procedures and rules for implementation of the public works programme in the community.

Definitions: Albania's legal framework adopts a broad and rights-based definition of disability. Law No 57/2019 on social assistance defines persons with disabilities as individuals with long-term impairments who may face barriers to full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. This reflects a social and inclusion-oriented understanding of disability.

Persons with disabilities are also explicitly recognised as a target group for employment support. Law No 15/2019 on the promotion of employment includes them among vulnerable groups eligible for targeted measures. At the same time, access to benefits and services depends on formal assessment procedures. The legal framework introduces a biopsychosocial assessment model but entitlement remains linked to decisions by medical and multidisciplinary commissions.

The legislation identifies different categories of beneficiaries of disability-related payments and allowances, including persons with severe physical impairments, persons declared unfit for work, persons recognised through disability assessment procedures and persons with work disability status. This shows that eligibility is determined through specific legal and administrative categories rather

than through a single disability status. The Employment Social Fund further provides a legal basis for financing employment support measures.

Overall, the framework recognises persons with disabilities as a priority group for social protection and employment support, but in practice access depends on formal assessment and categorisation procedures.

Legal framework for employment support for persons with disabilities and integration and reintegration into the labour market.

Active labour market programmes are regulated by Law No15/2019 on Employment and include employment services, measures for the promotion of employment, and vocational education and training programmes.

The Employment Social Fund, regulated by the same Law, has been created to support the employment, integration and social inclusion of persons with disabilities. It is established as a public financial fund. The main source of revenues are contributions paid by employers who fail to employ the required number of persons with disabilities in line with the quota. The contribution is equal to the minimum wage, for each month, for each person with a disability not employed. Other sources of revenue include grants and funds from donors or the state budget.

The Employment Social Fund finances programmes aimed at employment, self-employment, work rehabilitation, vocational training and retraining, employment guidance and counselling, supportive services, and the reconstruction and adaptation of workplaces for persons with disabilities and family members of persons with disabilities.

From a monitoring perspective, the inclusion of highly heterogeneous categories – ranging from individuals with disabilities and ethnic minorities to victims of violence, young people in conflict with the law, returning migrants and unemployed persons – makes it difficult to establish uniform indicators and assessment mechanisms. Each subgroup faces distinct structural barriers and requires tailored interventions. Consequently, a one-size-fits-all approach risks diluting the effectiveness of active labour market policies.

The Employment Social Fund is still not operational. The evidence suggests a significant implementation gap. The main obstacle is the lack of approval by the tax authorities to establish a separate account and independent fund, as provided for in Law No 15/2019. The absence of implementation undermines the objective of the legal framework, namely to promote the employment and social inclusion of persons with disabilities, leaving a major policy gap that needs to be addressed.

Financial support: Law No 57/2019 on social assistance provides for monthly payments for persons with disabilities and their personal assistants, with payment levels set by the Council of Ministers (Article 13). Entitlement is regulated through criteria, procedures and documentation requirements established in secondary legislation (Article 17). Payments are processed monthly by municipalities on the basis of a certified decision of the disability assessment commission and according to the beneficiary categories defined in the Law. In practice, access to financial support depends on formal assessment and administrative certification.

2.2 Strategic framework

Albania ratified the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** through Law No 108/2012 on ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, demonstrating its commitment to advancing the rights, dignity, and inclusion of persons with disabilities. Since ratification, the Government of Albania has undertaken legal and policy reforms aimed at harmonising national legislation with the provisions of the Convention. Despite this progress, gaps persist within the strategic and institutional framework, particularly in the areas of

monitoring and evaluation. During the interviews, it was confirmed that the monitoring reports are under approval and cannot be shared for the purpose of the Country Note Report.

The Albanian National Strategy for Development and European Integration 2022–2030, approved by the Council of Ministers in 2023 (Official Journal 31/2023), provides in its third pillar entitled ‘Social cohesion’ that one of the main priorities is to increase employment and employability for all citizens and that one of the political aims is to improve services in relation to the employment, education, health, social protection and social inclusion of persons with disabilities. This strategy states that the policies and the strategies of the Albanian government for the social inclusion of persons with disabilities are aligned with the objectives of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and with the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030.

Albania’s National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023–2030⁸ includes measures to integrate persons with disabilities into skills development and labour market systems. This plan will be supported by a higher awareness to engage in active living; enhancing the capacities of institutional structures to provide tailored services, prepare the private sector and employers to include persons with disabilities and to make the Social Employment Fund operational.

Albania National Strategy for Social Protection 2024–2030 and its action plan: Specific Objective A2 of the Strategy is focused on: ‘consolidation of the biopsychosocial assessment and of a sustainable and well-targeted system for persons with disabilities, through the strengthening of support services such as social, healthcare, educational, skills-building and employment services’.

National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2025⁹: one of the strategic goals of this plan is to increase labour market participation and promote equal opportunities for decent work for persons with disabilities. The plan considers the employment of persons with disabilities as a key factor for social inclusion. The public institutions responsible for implementation, in partnership with public and private institutions and other organisations, will focus on three specific objectives:

1. To improve the quality of training services to promote the participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market;
2. To increase employment and self-employment opportunities for persons with disabilities;
3. To improve the quality and efficiency of services aimed at promoting the integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market.

2.3 Institutional framework

Albania’s institutional framework for promoting the employment of persons with disabilities involves several key ministries, national agencies, local government structures and active civil society organisations. The framework aims to create coordinated inclusive policies that link employment promotion, social protection, education and vocational training. Despite notable progress in recent years, challenges remain in ensuring effective coordination, consistent implementation and the systematic monitoring of results.

The Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation is the lead institution for designing and coordinating national employment policies. Through the **General Directorate of Employment, VET and Social Insurance Policies**, specifically its **Directorate of Employment and Migration Policies** - the Ministry is responsible for labour market analysis, policy formulation and the development of active labour market measures. It designs programmes promoting employment and self-employment, supports vocational education and training providers, and oversees initiatives for the integration of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. In practice, the Ministry provides strategic direction for employment reforms and ensures that disability inclusion principles are mainstreamed

⁸ Ministry of Finance and Economy, National Employment and Skills Strategy 2030, [\[online\]](#). Last accessed on 23 September 2025.

⁹ Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Social Protection, [\[online\]](#). Last accessed on 24 September 2025.

into employment policy design. However, while disability inclusion is addressed in policy documents, it is not yet systematically embedded in programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

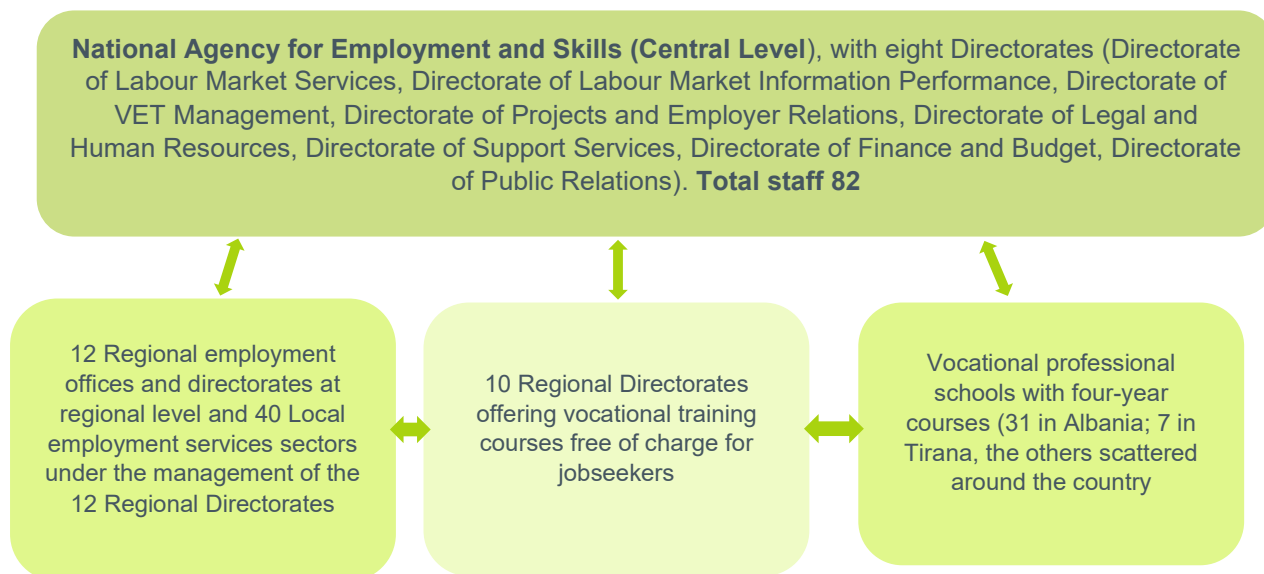
The Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP) plays a central role in promoting social protection, care policies and inclusion services for persons with disabilities. Through its **Directorate of Social Care Policies and Integrated Social Services** and the **Sector for Development Policies for Persons with Disabilities**, the Ministry coordinates disability-specific programmes, social care standards and services aimed at empowerment and community integration.

The Ministry also oversees mechanisms for linking beneficiaries of economic assistance with employment and vocational training services, in cooperation with the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES). Analysis of the institutional framework reveals that although there are mechanisms in place for coordination between social protection and employment structures, these remain largely procedural and are not yet fully operationalised at local level. It is essential to strengthen referral systems and data-sharing between MHSP and NAES in order to improve labour market inclusion outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Other ministries, including the **Ministry of Education and Sports** and the **Ministry of Justice**, contribute indirectly to employment and inclusion policies.

The **National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES)** operates under the political guidance of the **Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation** and functions as the main public employment service provider. It manages employment promotion programmes, career guidance, job placement services, and vocational training at the national, regional, and local levels. NAES is also responsible for coordinating with employers and other stakeholders to enhance labour market inclusion. Figure 1, below, illustrates the organisation of NAES at National, Regional and Local level.

Figure 1. Organisation of NAES at national, regional and local level.



The State Social Service, supervised by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, is responsible for administering social assistance programmes, managing disability benefits and coordinating with local social service structures. It oversees the use of state funds for social protection, collects and manages social data and works with NAES to support the reintegration of economically inactive individuals, including persons with disabilities, into the labour market.

Municipalities: Albania's **61 municipalities**, organised into **12 prefectures (Qarks)**, are responsible for implementing social services and local employment initiatives. Municipal structures identify beneficiaries, manage disability-related payments and cooperate with local NAES offices to promote the social and economic reintegration of working-age individuals with disabilities.

Civil society and non-governmental organisations play a crucial role in advocacy, service delivery and monitoring of disability rights in Albania. Key organisations include the **Albanian Disability Rights Foundation (ADRF)**; **ARSIS – Initiative for Social Change**; **Terre des Hommes Albania**; **Tjetër Vizion**; the **National Association of Social Workers**; the **Youth Roma and Egyptian Movement (LRER)**; the **Joscelyn Foundation**, **Save the Children Albania**; the **Centre for Competitive Skills (CCS)**; the **Institute for the Promotion of Social and Economic Development (IPSED)**; the **Albanian National Association for the Deaf (ANAD)**; the **Hap Network** and the **Jonathan Centre** (Down Syndrome Albania).

These organisations provide services such as vocational training, counselling, supported employment, and advocacy for inclusive policy development. NGOs often fill critical gaps in public service delivery and act as intermediaries between public institutions and persons with disabilities. However, cooperation frameworks between the government and CSOs remain largely project-based, and sustainable partnerships are still underdeveloped.

2.4 Coordination and cooperation mechanisms

The coordination and cooperation mechanisms at national, regional and local level connecting the central institutions, the Regional State Service Directorates and Regional Employment Directorates of NAES and the social services departments of the municipalities are regulated under by-laws.

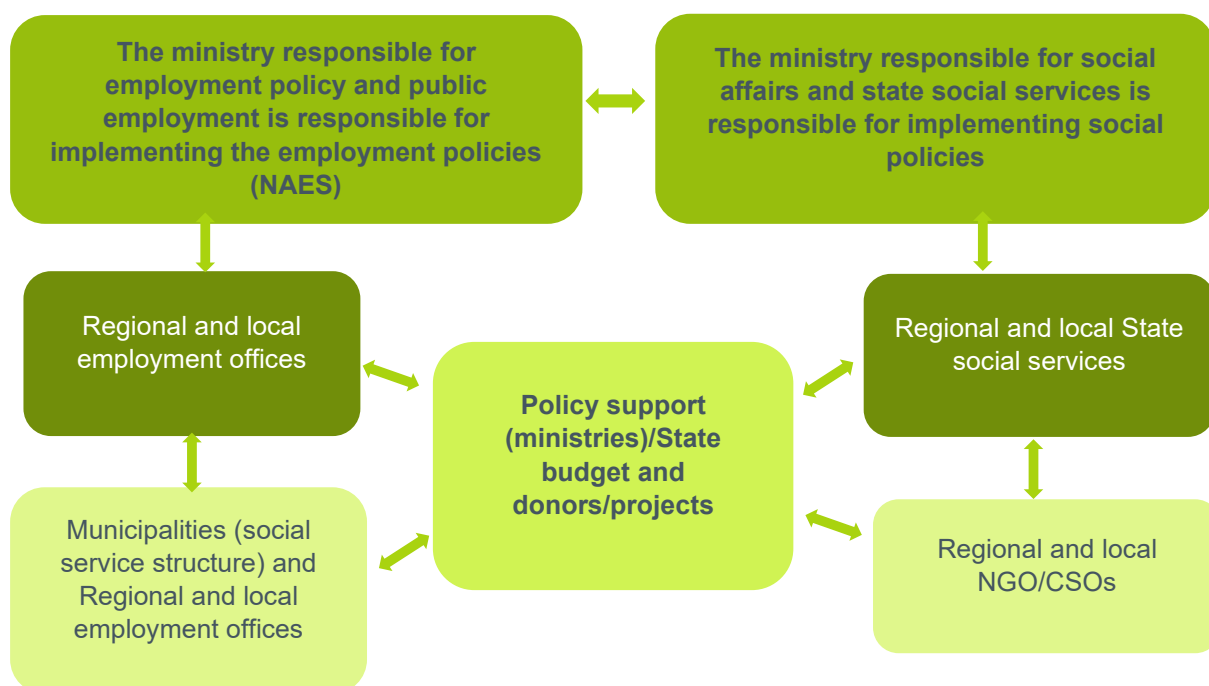
Effective interinstitutional cooperation has been demonstrated in practice among the relevant bodies operating at central level. This cooperation is evidenced by the joint elaboration and formal endorsement of the National Action Plan for the Promotion of Employment of Persons with Disabilities, concluded between the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the Ministry of Economy and Innovation. This initiative reflects a coordinated policy approach to promoting inclusive employment and ensuring the effective implementation of disability-related commitments.

At operational and service-delivery level, sustained and structured cooperation is maintained among the three key institutional actors, namely the regional agencies of the State Social Service and the regional and local agencies for employment and skills. This cooperation is regulated through systematic information exchange and the joint formulation of service delivery proposals within the framework of an established referral mechanism. Every month there is a coordination meeting and an information exchange. Furthermore, this referral mechanism is coordinated through continuous data exchange and joint planning with the Social Services Directorate of the local autonomous municipal authorities, thereby ensuring coherence, complementarity and efficiency in the provision of integrated social and employment services.

Example of linkages between social services and employment policies: since 2022, 12 regional cooperation agreements between the Regional Directorates of Social Services and NAES have strengthened the integration of employment and social protection policies. Disability assessments conducted by the Multidisciplinary Disability Assessment Commission inform tailored employment and vocational training recommendations, which are transmitted to the regional employment directorates for labour market integration. Dedicated NAES officers report monthly on services delivered, outcomes and challenges. This structured exchange ensures coordinated service delivery and enhances the employment and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The figure below illustrates the interinstitutional cooperation for the support of special groups in need and persons with disabilities to promote integration in the labour market and offer services for the special target groups.

Figure 2: Key interinstitutional cooperation mechanisms in place



In order to strengthen and enhance interinstitutional cooperation mechanisms at local level, international development partners – including the European Union and UNDP in Albania – are actively supporting collaborative initiatives in 19 municipalities.

The EU 4 Social Inclusion project, implemented by UNDP and funded by the European Union, is piloting a coordination mechanism at local level through the establishment of Communities of Practice. These multi-stakeholder platforms bring together representatives of the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) at central level and in municipalities, the State Social Service at regional and local levels and civil society organisations operating within the respective territories.

The Communities of Practice convene every four months to exchange best practices, identify challenges and coordinate joint actions, with the ultimate objective of advancing the implementation of the integrated case management approach to improve service delivery and social inclusion outcomes.

Within this framework, the UNDP project is piloting three main interventions in 19 municipalities:

- establishing and delivering intensive employment counselling in 12 municipalities targeting 800 beneficiaries drawn from the categories of vulnerable groups;
- establishing and delivering qualitative, flexible, targeted training in basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital literacy) in eight municipalities, targeting 467 beneficiaries;
- establishing and delivering supported employment and skills development programmes, incorporating job coaching and mentoring for persons with disabilities, in six municipalities, targeting 255 beneficiaries.

2.5 Sources of financing

The main sources of financing actions that support the employment of persons with disabilities in Albania are:

1. the state budget implemented by the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES);
2. the municipal budget through municipality organisations
3. donors' contributions through projects organised by the European Union, UNDP or other organisations.

In Albania, there is no dedicated state budget specifically for employment promotion measures aimed at persons with disabilities. Rather, these funds are included in the general budget for all employment promotion programmes. As a result, the use of these funds and their impact are evaluated based on the total number of beneficiaries of the programmes, which includes all participants, not only those with disabilities.

Table 1: Fund spending for measures 2018–2024 and beneficiaries

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Funds spent on measures	ALL 374.7 m	ALL 70.4 m	ALL 389.1 m	ALL 448.2 m	ALL 448.3 m	ALL 411.4 m or EUR 4.11 m
Employer beneficiaries	600	751	1 195	1 278	897	642
Total beneficiaries	5 338	4 164	4 834	4 344	2 635	2 464
Female beneficiaries	3 045 or 57%	2 778 or 67%	2 916 or 60%	2 573 or 59%	1 660 or 63%	1 563 or 63%
Beneficiaries with disabilities	53 or 1%	67 or 2%	38 or 1%	48 or 1%	40 or 2%	103 or 4%

Source: NAES annual reports

One of the key challenges relating to the financing is the non-functioning of the Social Fund for Employment and the lack of a dedicated fund for promoting the employment of persons with disabilities.

3 POLICIES SUPPORTING EMPLOYABILITY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) works to increase the employability of persons with disabilities in Albania through the network of offices of the 12 regional directorates of public employment and the 40 local sectors operating in the biggest municipalities of Albania. The Municipality of Tirana serves as an example, having established a dedicated directorate responsible for promoting employment opportunities for all vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities.

Other projects and donor-funded initiatives also support the employment of persons with disabilities, such as the *EU4Labour Market Inclusion* project, implemented by UNDP in partnership with the Public Employment Service of Sweden and the Albanian Disability Rights Foundation (ADRF).

Within the framework of this project, the following key activities have been undertaken:

- establishing and delivering intensive employment counselling in 12 municipalities, targeting 800 beneficiaries from vulnerable groups,
- providing **high-quality, flexible, targeted training** in basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital literacy) across 8 municipalities, reaching 467 beneficiaries,
- implementing **supported employment and skills development programmes**, including job coaching and mentoring for persons with disabilities, in 6 municipalities, targeting 255 beneficiaries. In this project, 20 NGOs have been contracted. These organisations play a vital role in advocacy, service delivery, social inclusion and policy development for persons with disabilities across the country.

3.1 Services supporting employability of persons with disabilities

The employment services provided by NAES are based on the three-level service model and consist of:

- providing information services for jobseekers, employers and any interested individuals;
- providing employment intermediation;
- providing career, employment and professional development counselling and guidance.

The Public Employment Service is at the service of jobseekers and employers.

Table 2: The three levels of services by service area, target group, type of access and content

Service Area	Target group	Access to service	Content
Service level 1: information area	All visitors to the employment office	Direct access	A comprehensive range of information across various platforms for jobseekers, employers, and other users, accessible independently through self-service or with minimum assistance as required.
Service level 2: core services area	Jobseekers and employers requiring individual assistance and/or services	Immediate enquiries and scheduled appointments. Minimal queuing	Individualised advisory services and administration of assistance programmes for jobseekers and

Service Area	Target group	Access to service	Content
			employers, tailored to their specific needs and provided in a timely manner.
Service level 3: specialist counselling area	Jobseekers in vulnerable positions in the labour market, persons at risk of exclusion	Access by appointment only	Comprehensive, individualised counselling services for clients requiring long-term support, to facilitate their successful reintegration into the labour market.

Table 3: Services for jobseekers

Service	Description
Information on job vacancies	Information on the labour market situation and vacancies in general.
Job mediation or matching	Matching jobseekers' profiles with available job vacancies, which is a core task of PES. It helps jobseekers find suitable employment and assists employers in finding the most appropriate workforce.
Counselling and orientation toward vocational training	Vocational training programmes equip jobseekers with skills that improve their employability.
Employment promotion measures	Employment promotion measures provide jobseekers with temporary work placements and increase their employability.

Table 4: Services for employers

Service	Description
Job mediation or matching	Matching jobseekers' profiles with the profiles of the job vacancies.
Workforce training	Providing jobseekers with vocational training and work experience and providing employers with a sustainable workforce.
Employment promotion programmes	Support for employers to help them recruit, employ and retain new employees and to employ candidates put forward by the employment offices.

Employment services are also provided by other actors, such as municipalities (e.g. the Municipality of Tirana), university career offices and various NGOs. These actors typically operate through different projects and funding sources, primarily to deliver tertiary-level services via project-based contracts or subcontracting arrangements with the Public Employment Service.

Over the past three years, the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) has enhanced the quality of services aimed at increasing the employability of persons with disabilities. Guideline No 893 – ‘*Guideline for Employment Service Delivery for Jobseekers and Unemployed Persons with Disabilities*’ has been prepared and implemented. This guideline regulates the registration and disability assessment processes, which are carried out in collaboration with the jobseekers, who have to complete a standardised form. This form is also recorded in the NAES IT system and contains information on:

- the results of the biopsychosocial assessment made by the commission of the social service system, including the degree of disability, which may be mild, moderate, severe or profound, with entitlement to personal assistance allowance;
- the personal details of the persons with disabilities, especially in the case of paraplegic and tetraplegic individuals and those with visual impairments;
- their level of education and vocational training, IT skills, mobility potential and other relevant information, such as the desired job and their strengths and challenges.

The Guideline aims to standardise the registration and assessment process for persons with disabilities, ensuring thorough profiling in line with modern standards. It fosters collaboration between social services, employment offices and jobseekers through a structured template in the NAES IT system. By promoting tailored employment support, it ensures that job placement and vocational guidance are based on individual strengths, abilities and career aspirations rather than solely on disability status.

The system established by the Guideline facilitates the matching of suitable job opportunities with individual abilities, thereby preventing job mismatches and workplace exclusion. It also supports inclusive labour market policies by integrating disability-related data with information on education, vocational training, IT skills and mobility potential. Furthermore, it improves service coordination and empowers jobseekers with disabilities by giving them the opportunity to express their career aspirations and highlight their strengths. This approach shifts the focus from limitations to possibilities, fostering empowerment and self-determination.

Its implementation has been strengthened by the availability of comprehensive data on the employability assessment of persons with disabilities. The application of a standardised assessment tool facilitates systematic follow-up and ensures that service provision is better targeted, needs-based and aligned with individual employment potential.

While NAES employment offices do not have dedicated advisors for persons with disabilities, the employment service staff are trained in applying the guidelines for providing services to this group. It would be beneficial to consider establishing a dedicated and specialised staff unit within each public employment service office to ensure the provision of personalised, tailored support for persons with disabilities.

Three key indicators were used to assess the support provided to persons with disabilities and during 2019–2024: number of persons with disabilities employed through matching/mediation of employment offices, number of persons beneficiaries of the promotion employment programmes and number of persons with disabilities trained in the vocational training centres. For more details, see Table 6 below.

Table 5: Persons with disabilities in employment, in employment promotion programmes and on vocational training courses, by NAES regional and local employment offices

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Persons with disabilities employed by mediation	82	49	32	18	290	379
Persons with disabilities in employment promotion programmes	53 (1%)	67 (2%)	38 (1%)	48 (1%)	40 (2%)	103 (4%)
Persons with disabilities in vocational Training	110	56	95	83	119	94

Source: NAES Annual Reports

During 2024 and 2025 NAES piloted a modern approach to employment services for vulnerable groups, which also focused on persons with disabilities. This was implemented by outsourcing

employment services to civil society organisations (CSOs) and represents a new approach by the NAES. Traditionally, employment services have been delivered directly by state institutions. However, the increasing complexity of labour market challenges, especially regarding the diverse needs of vulnerable groups, requires innovative approaches that combine public oversight with non-state expertise and flexibility.

Outsourcing to CSOs introduces several advantages:

1. innovation and flexibility – CSOs often possess specialised knowledge, community-level access and the ability to design tailored interventions that respond more effectively to the specific needs of disadvantaged groups;
2. client-centred services – this model shifts from standardised, one-size-fits-all programmes towards personalised support, including intensive counselling, skills development and supported employment pathways;
3. partnership model – this model creates a structured cooperation framework between public institutions, international partners (such as UNDP) and civil society, enhancing resource mobilisation, capacity-building and shared responsibility in employment promotion;
4. modernisation of public services – by engaging external providers under state supervision, the outsourcing model aligns with European and international trends in the modernisation of active labour market policies, fostering efficiency, inclusiveness and measurable impact.

During the 2025 pilot phase, EU4Labour Market Inclusion, funded by the European Union and implemented by UNDP, in cooperation with NAES, established a Grant Scheme through a Call for Proposals to support the implementation of both existing and new models of employment and skills development services at local level.

As a modern service delivery option, outsourcing complements the traditional role of public employment services and has the potential to strengthen Albania's active labour market policies.

Systematic evaluation of its results in the upcoming year will be essential to determine its sustainability, scalability and institutionalisation.

3.2 Measures supporting employability of persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities can benefit from universal ALMP measures and those targeting vulnerable groups. Those measures are implemented by the NAES and by projects funded by international donors (EU, ILO, UNPD) and bilateral cooperation from Germany, Switzerland and various EU countries. There is no specific measure only targeting persons with disabilities.

The measures described below are divided into two groups:

- measures targeting vulnerable groups¹⁰;
- universal measures targeting all jobseekers and focused on youth (two remaining measures).

Social reintegration programme

Target groups: persons with disabilities, members of the Roma and Egyptian communities, women living in areas without public employment offices, and other jobseekers from vulnerable categories

¹⁰ Vulnerable groups (special groups, as defined in Article 3(4)). Vulnerable groups (Special groups) are disadvantaged jobseekers in the labour market, including: individuals with orphan status who are in situations of economic hardship; single heads of household with dependent children; persons with disabilities; parents with disabilities; persons aged over 55; persons belonging to the Roma and Egyptian communities; persons with a history of imprisonment; persons from households benefiting from income support schemes; long-term unemployed persons; unemployed returnees from migration, within a period of no more than two years; minors and young people in conflict with the law, pursuant to the provisions of the Juvenile Criminal Justice Code; young people under the age of 29; victims and potential victims of human trafficking; victims of gender-based violence and victims of domestic violence; mothers under the age of 18.

Implementation: participation can last for six months. The programme is implemented by NAES in cooperation with public institutions and contracted NGOs. Each NGO may have up to two groups with a maximum of 20 participants per group and employ one supervisor and one employment advisor per two groups.

Activities encompass group sessions twice a week (three hours each), individual counselling: 12 one-hour meetings per beneficiary, preparation of Individual Employment Integration Plan (needs assessment, objectives, deadlines), counselling, referrals to employment, self-employment, vocational training and social services provided by NGOs.

Financial support

For beneficiaries:

- monthly allowance: 8 000 Albanian Lek (ALL 10 000 for persons with disabilities);
- transport bonus: ALL 1 800;
- childcare bonus (children under six): ALL 4 000;
- family care bonus (elderly/sick dependents): ALL 3 000.

Additionally, the measures cover NGO costs such as supervisor salary (100% minimum wage), employment advisor salary (100% of average national wage), social security contributions, administrative costs and **success bonus**: ALL 10 000 (EUR 105) per participant employed for six consecutive months after completion of the programme.

The measure has been implemented since 2025. The results and data will be available in 2026.

Community public works programme

Target groups: jobseekers, including vulnerable groups and persons with disabilities.

Implementation: the measure lasts 12 months. Persons with disabilities can be involved for up to 20 hours per week. Training for persons in long-term unemployment.

Financial support: participants receive 50% of the national minimum wage and a transport bonus for commuting more than 2 km.

This measure has a social employment orientation, providing temporary income support and community contributions rather than long-term labour market integration. While it helps unemployed persons into a work routine with a modest income, its limitation is that it does not guarantee transition into stable employment. It serves better as a social safety net than as an economic activation tool.

Vocational training programmes

Target groups: all unemployed jobseekers, including persons with disabilities.

Implementation: delivered by public and private vocational training centres.

Financial support: jobseekers receive 100% of the training fee (up to ALL 300 000). Providers receive up to ALL 200 000 (EUR 2 000) for adapting their training for persons with disabilities.

The employment promotion programme under the Youth Guarantee Scheme through work-based learning

Target group: young people aged 15–29.

Stakeholders involved: the National Employment and Skills Agency (NAES), employers, registered unemployed youth, regional employment offices and public vocational education and training (VET) institutions.

Benefits: during the training period, participants receive 80% of the minimum wage for the first half of the training period and 100% of the minimum wage thereafter until the end of the training period.

Table 6: Persons with disabilities benefiting from the employment promotion programmes 2019–2024

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Funds spent for all six measures	ALL 374.7 m	ALL 70.4 m	ALL 389.1 m	ALL 448.2 m	ALL 448.3 m	ALL 411.4 m or EUR 4.11 m
Total number of beneficiaries	5 338	4 164	4 834	4 344	2 635	2 464
Female beneficiaries	3 045 (57%)	2 778 (67%)	2 916 (60%)	2 573 (59%)	1 660 (63%)	1 563 (63%)
Total persons with disabilities beneficiaries of promotion employment programmes	53 (1%)	67 (2%)	38 (1%)	48 (1%)	40 (2%)	103 (4%)

Source: NAES annual reports

Persons with disabilities remain only marginally represented among beneficiaries of employment measures in Albania. Although these measures are formally open to all eligible groups, funding is not earmarked for persons with disabilities and is distributed across six universal measures. As a result, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the available resources effectively support their labour market inclusion.

Across the period reviewed, persons with disabilities accounted for only 1–4% of all beneficiaries. Their participation increased in 2024, reaching 103 beneficiaries, the highest level recorded, but this still represents a very small share of overall programme participation. This suggests that, despite some progress, persons with disabilities continue to face significant barriers in accessing employment support measures.

Interview evidence indicates that these barriers are multidimensional. They include long distances between home and workplace, lack of accessible infrastructure and difficulties in sustaining employment once a job has been secured. Stakeholders also pointed to weak employment retention, linked both to employer-related factors and to the limited support available to persons with disabilities after recruitment.

The increase recorded in 2024 may reflect stronger institutional attention to disability inclusion, alignment with EU inclusive policy priorities and support from EU-funded social inclusion initiatives. However, the available evidence suggests that this has not yet translated into a substantial improvement in the relative participation of persons with disabilities.

3.3 Enhancing the capacity of main stakeholders

Building the capacities of institutions and staff responsible for employment support for persons with disabilities is a complex, multisectoral process. It requires coordinated action across policy design and implementation levels, grounded in a realistic assessment of the situation of persons with disabilities—conducted jointly by national and local institutions in cooperation with experienced specialised NGOs.

Under the *EU4Labour Market Inclusion* project, UNDP, in partnership with the NAES, has implemented targeted training initiatives to strengthen institutional capacities and promote inclusive employment services for persons with disabilities. The activities are aligned with EU priorities on social inclusion, decent work and equal access to labour market opportunities. Examples of key training interventions:

- Inclusive employment counselling, with the objective of building the capacity of Public Employment Service (PES) counsellors to deliver inclusive, individualised employment services. This resulted in 120 employment counsellors from 12 regional offices being trained in accessibility standards and job-matching for persons with disabilities, and inclusive counselling practices being integrated into NAES service delivery.
- Integrated case management, with the objective of strengthening coordination between employment, social and municipal services for better case management of persons with disabilities. This resulted in 80 representatives of NAES, the State Social Services and the municipalities being trained in joint referral pathways, action plans being developed, improved institutional collaboration, and beneficiary follow-up.
- Digital skills and accessible learning to enhance the digital capacities of service providers and promote accessible learning tools for persons with disabilities. This resulted in 150 staff being trained in e-learning and assistive technologies.

The training interventions have significantly improved institutional readiness to serve persons with disabilities, embedded inclusive practices within NAES and partner institutions, and strengthened Albania's alignment with EU standards on inclusive labour market participation. The peer-learning exchanges with public employment services from Sweden, France and other EU Member States ensure sustainability and continuous knowledge transfer.

One of the challenges in the employment of persons with disabilities is the absence of a dedicated specialised unit within employment services. The establishment of a pilot structure in Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan and Fier as a first step would represent a positive initiative to improve the situation and assess the feasibility of expanding the service to all 12 Regional Employment Offices, in cooperation with civil society actors operating in this field.

3.4 Policies supporting demand for the employment of persons with disabilities

This section analyses Albania's employment promotion programmes, focusing on quotas, tax incentives for employers, and the role of CSOs/NGOs in enhancing the employment and employability of vulnerable groups across four key measures.

Article 20 of Law 15/2019 on employment promotion (13 March 2019) establishes the quota system for employing persons with disabilities: Each employer must hire one person with a disability for every 25 employees and an additional person for every subsequent 50 employees. Employers who do not meet these requirements must pay a contribution equal to 100% of the national minimum wage per month, per unfilled position. The payment procedure is determined by the minister responsible for employment and disability. The law also governs employer incentives, tax benefits, and financial support across employment promotion measures.

Job placement, on-the-job training and internships

Target groups: 11 categories of jobseekers eligible as beneficiaries, including persons with disabilities and youth under 29 years old.

Financial support: wage subsidies for **4–12 months at the value of the minimum wage**. In the case of persons with disabilities, the wage subsidy lasts **12 months** and covers **100% of the minimum wage** as well as all employer-side social security contributions.

This measure is **employment-centred**, with a strong focus on immediate labour market integration through real work experience. The measure is more **employer-driven**, ensuring that businesses have incentives to hire and train vulnerable groups. However, its sustainability depends on employers' willingness to retain workers beyond the subsidy period. The employer applies to participate in the programme online via the website e-albania. If the employer meets the criteria, it is acknowledged as a programme beneficiary. There is no obligation for further employment after the contract ends, but if the employer unilaterally terminates the contract with the beneficiary it is obliged to return 100% of the financial support received up to that moment.

The employment promotion programme through self-employment

Target group: The measure is aimed at unemployed persons who are registered as jobseekers at local employment offices. To qualify, jobseekers must have a viable business idea and submit their application in accordance with the established procedures.

Benefits: eligible applicants can receive ALL 3 000 (EUR 30) for each approved business plan and a start-up grant of ALL 500 000 (EUR 5 000) to establish their business.

The measure focuses on promoting entrepreneurship as a pathway out of unemployment. By offering both planning support and a substantial start-up grant, the programme encourages jobseekers to take initiative in creating their own employment opportunities. It directly targets self-employment and small business creation, which can stimulate local economies and diversify economic activity.

4 LINKAGES BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER POLICY AREAS

Employment policies concerning persons with disabilities are intrinsically interconnected with education, social protection, and health policies. In this regard, the systematic exchange of information and monitoring of the common actions agreed among all responsible institutions in these sectors is of paramount importance. Such interlinkages are not only reflected in the design of policies but are also evidenced in their implementation.

A notable example is the Joint Order of the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (No 211 of 4 April 2022), which endorsed an action plan aimed at enhancing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The plan sets four measurable objectives, including the annual assessment of 3 000 persons with disabilities by public employment offices, based on referrals from the State Social Service.

To monitor the implementation of activities and assess the interconnection between employment and other policy areas, such as social and education policies, the **Progress Report on the Implementation of the National Protection Strategy** is published annually. The latest report, covering 2023, shows the following progress:

- The target for the percentage of beneficiaries receiving educational, vocational training and employment services was set at 25% of individuals referred by the commission in the first year, 50% in the second year and 75% in the third year.
- In 2023, a total of **2 357 persons with disabilities (PWDs)** were referred for various services, including counselling, psychotherapy, day services, education, special education and physical therapy.
- Of the **971 PWDs** referred for employment and vocational training in 2023, or **44% of the total, 425 individuals** benefited from employment promotion and vocational training programmes. Of these, **119 received vocational training, 40 benefited from employment promotion programmes and 266 were matched through employment service provision**. Regarding the indicator measuring the **workforce integration of persons with disabilities through supportive services** – including education, vocational training, and employment promotion programmes – by 2022, **75% of individuals** referred by the assessment commissions received services from employment offices.

However, the **2023 monitoring process** revealed that only **27% of jobseekers with disabilities** who registered at employment offices benefited from employment, mediation or vocational training services¹¹.

4.1 From school to the labour market

In Albania, there has been an improvement in inclusive education. In the 2023–2024 school year, 5 025 students with special needs were enrolled in pre-university education, including preschool. Of these, 4 507 students with disabilities attended regular schools, an increase of 9% compared to 2022–2023.

However, Albania lacks a structured mechanism specifically designed to support the transition of persons with disabilities from education to employment. Existing efforts have primarily focused on transitioning beneficiaries from social assistance to employment, vocational education and training (VET), and active labour market measures. While these initiatives are valuable, the absence of an

¹¹ Ministry of Health and Social Protection - 2003 Progress Report, National Social Protection Strategy 2019–2023, available at: https://arkiva.shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ENGLISH_SP-monitoring-report_final-version.pdf.

explicit framework for school-to-work transitions leaves a critical gap in promoting long-term labour market inclusion.

Career guidance is formally provided at university level. However, in basic and upper secondary education, career orientation remains limited. Activities are primarily restricted to information sessions organised by Vocational Schools and Regional Directorates of Vocational Training Centres, which present available vocational profiles and training courses as potential entry points to the labour market. These initiatives, while beneficial, do not constitute a comprehensive system of individualised career counselling, as recommended by the **ILO Career Development Guidelines** and the **OECD Career Readiness Framework**.

4.2 Skills development opportunities

Developing skills and providing career guidance for adults, including persons with disabilities, are essential components of social inclusion and labour market integration. International frameworks, such as the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006)** and the **European Union Disability Strategy 2021–2030**, emphasise the importance of equitable access to skills development, vocational training and employment support for persons with disabilities.

In Albania, the **National Agency for Employment and Skills** plays a central role in implementing these objectives through strategic, operational and policy interventions aimed at improving labour market participation and career opportunities for vulnerable groups. Developing skills for adults, including persons with disabilities, forms part of the strategic and operational mandate of NAES. In accordance with **Strategic Guideline 2.1.4**, 'Increase the integration of persons with disabilities into the skills development system and the labour market,' as defined in the **National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2023–2030**, NAES establishes annual targets to improve skills acquisition and career orientation for persons with disabilities.

Between 2019 and 2024, a total of 557 persons with disabilities completed and were certified in vocational training courses offered free of charge by the 10 public Vocational Training Directorates. Annual participation was distributed as follows: 110 participants in 2019, 56 in 2020, 95 in 2021, 83 in 2022, 119 in 2023 and 94 in 2024.

Employment advisors in NAES public employment offices provide career guidance services for adults. **Law No 15/2019 On Employment Promotion** defines the institutional framework for career guidance, including counselling and guidance for employment and professional development. These services assist jobseekers, pupils and students in selecting professions aligned with their skills and labour market needs. Specialised counselling provides intensive, individualised support for specific groups facing employment barriers, ensuring that persons with complex needs receive tailored guidance.

Within NAES employment offices, career guidance for persons with disabilities is provided in accordance with the aforementioned legal framework and the guidelines for service delivery to jobseekers and unemployed persons with disabilities. Although this service is not a dedicated system, a designated staff member is assigned to provide support, monitor the process, and facilitate information exchange with the State Social Service **Directorate**.

To enhance the specificity and effectiveness of this service, a dedicated guideline has been approved and is currently under implementation. A detailed analysis of the aim and the importance of the guideline is provided in Subchapter 6.1 – Services supporting the employment of persons with disabilities.

4.3 How social benefits support the employment of persons with disabilities

In recent years, Albania has undertaken important reforms in the legal framework governing social benefits for persons with disabilities. A significant development occurred in 2019, when legislative changes ensured that disability-related benefits would no longer be suspended once beneficiaries entered formal employment. This reform constituted a substantial policy shift, designed to eliminate one of the key disincentives to labour market participation that had previously concerned persons with disabilities, namely the risk of losing access to essential financial support upon securing employment.

By maintaining benefits alongside employment income, the reform aims to encourage labour market integration and enhance the autonomy and participation of persons with disabilities. Such an approach aligns with international best practices in disability policy, where the emphasis has shifted from welfare dependency towards active inclusion and empowerment.

It is important to note, however, that this incentive does not apply to individuals classified as ‘workers with invalidity status.’ Their entitlements are administered under a contributory social insurance scheme that is structurally distinct from the broader social policy framework. Consequently, while the reform strengthens incentives for persons with disabilities as a social policy group, it does not extend to invalidity pensions, which remain governed by the principles of contribution-based entitlement. These changes have been confirmed during interviews conducted at the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and at the Regional Directorate of State Social Services.

4.4 Access to social services

Access to social services in Albania is governed by a comprehensive multisectoral legal framework, which includes both primary legislation and secondary regulations. The principal laws in this field are:

- Law No 15/2019 on social assistance in the Republic of Albania, which establishes the terms and conditions for benefits granted to persons with disabilities.
- Law No 139/2015 of 17 December 2015 on local self-government, as amended, specifically Article 24 thereof, which delineates the functions of municipalities in the domain of social services. In accordance with this law, municipalities are responsible for establishing and administering social services at local level for individuals in need, including persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, in the manner prescribed by law.

One of the core objectives of the **Social Protection Strategy 2023–2030** (Policy Goal B) is the expansion of **integrated, accessible and gender-responsive social services** to be implemented in partnership with local government institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

In line with this objective, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection has reported the conclusion of **73 cooperation agreements**. These agreements focus on the case management of persons with disabilities referred by the biopsychosocial assessment teams. They also extend to partnerships with institutions in the fields of education, vocational training and employment. Specifically, agreements have been formalised between the State Social Service and the **National Agency for Employment and Skills**, the **Directorates of Education**, the **Directorates for Vocational Training** and the **Municipalities**.

Social protection in Albania is composed of several key components, including pensions, economic assistance and disability payments. Social care institutions are considered a fourth component of the system. In 2023, the total number of beneficiaries of those services reached **14 929 individuals**, of whom **1 728** were in residential care services and **13 201** were in day-care services.

These services were provided through a total of **271 social care institutions** operating across the country¹². However, according to the most recent 2025 publication, *Mapping of Social Services in Albania*, produced by UNDP in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, **access to social services at municipal level is still insufficient**: 39 municipalities (64%) meet less than 10% of their social care service needs; only 6 municipalities meet more than 25% of these needs. **Adults with disabilities** are the most critical group, identified as a priority in over 80% of municipalities. However, there are also other priority groups, such as **individuals in economic hardship** (70% of municipalities), **young people in need** (60%), **women in need** and **children without parental care** (55%). This shows that the supply of social services is inadequate to meet the needs of those in the most difficult situations.

4.5 Accessibility

The accessibility of persons with disabilities in Albania is a multifaceted issue, involving numerous actors and institutions. It encompasses not only **physical accessibility** but also access to **information, public transportation, equality, employment and training, education, social care, social housing, healthcare** and participation in **political and social life**. Ensuring comprehensive accessibility requires coordinated efforts across multiple sectors and levels of governance.

Several initiatives have been implemented to enhance physical accessibility. Notable investments have been made in adapting public facilities to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. For example, the Employment Service office in Tirana (Vasil Shanto sector) has been fully adapted to provide accessible services for persons with disabilities. Plans are underway to similarly adapt five additional employment offices to ensure full accessibility.

Despite these efforts, significant barriers persist across public offices, primarily due to the **absence of lifts** and inadequate adaptation of entry and exit points. These challenges highlight the ongoing need for infrastructure improvements and targeted investments to ensure that persons with disabilities can access public services and participate fully in society.

¹² INSTAT, [Regional Statistical Yearbook 2024](#), [online]. Last accessed 24 September 2025.

5 THE GENDER DIMENSION OF POLICIES SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Currently, Albania lacks gender-disaggregated statistics on labour force participation, employment, and unemployment specifically for persons with disabilities. Besides INSTAT, other institutions such as the Ministry of Education and the National Agency for Employment and Skills also collect relevant data. The Ministry of Education systematically publishes enrolment statistics on students with disabilities.

According to the *Annual Statistical Yearbook 2022–2023*, of 416 057 students enrolled in pre-university education, 4 717 were identified as having disabilities, 31% of whom were female. Enrolment numbers have remained stable in recent years. There are no available data on graduation rates or post-school outcomes for students with disabilities in basic or upper-secondary education.

The National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) provides complementary data on persons with disabilities through its *Yearly Statistical Bulletin* and *Annual Report*. NAES data are limited to registered unemployed jobseekers but include disaggregation by gender, education level and age group. For instance, in 2023, there were 1 591 registered unemployed persons with disabilities, of whom 51% were women and 32% were heads of households.

In addition to unemployment data, NAES reports on employment outcomes, participation in employment promotion programmes, and certification initiatives for persons with disabilities. The recorded number of employed persons with disabilities has increased over recent years: in 2021, 32 individuals were employed, rising to 266 in 2023 and 379 in 2024.

These figures indicate a positive trend in the integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market. However, despite these improvements, the overall number of employed persons with disabilities remains relatively low, suggesting ongoing barriers to full labour market inclusion.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

Albania has strengthened its policy and institutional framework for the employment and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in recent years. The legal framework reflects a rights-based approach to disability; persons with disabilities are explicitly recognised as a target group in employment policy, and the strategic framework is broadly aligned with the UNCRPD and EU inclusion priorities. Progress is also visible in-service delivery, including the introduction of more tailored profiling and counselling tools within the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), stronger referral arrangements between employment and social services, and reforms allowing persons with disabilities to retain disability-related benefits when entering employment.

However, these improvements have not yet translated into strong labour market inclusion outcomes. Persons with disabilities remain only **marginally represented among beneficiaries** of employment promotion measures, accounting for just 1 to 4% of total beneficiaries between 2019 and 2024, despite representing 5% of registered jobseekers in the first quarter of 2025. At the same time, **Albania still lacks disability-disaggregated labour market data on employment, unemployment and labour force participation**, which limits the possibility of assessing outcomes systematically and monitoring progress over time.

The evidence suggests that the main constraint is not the absence of a policy framework, but weak implementation and limited targeting. Employment measures are largely universal or designed for broad vulnerable groups rather than specifically for persons with disabilities. Funding is not earmarked for this group, and the Employment Social Fund, although established by law, is still not operational. Measures targeting employers are mostly based on financial incentives, and there is a lack of counselling and guidance services for employers, to support them in the process of recruiting, employing and retaining persons with disabilities. As a result, the framework provides a basis for support, but its capacity to generate targeted and sustained employment outcomes for persons with disabilities remains limited.

The note also points to persistent structural barriers that continue to restrict effective inclusion. These include **weak accessibility, insufficient availability of social services** at municipal level, **lack of a structured transition pathway from school to work**, and **incomplete interconnection between the databases and case management systems of the social protection and employment services**. Interview and administrative evidence further suggest that many persons with disabilities face practical barriers in accessing workplaces and sustaining employment once recruited. This indicates that labour market inclusion cannot be addressed through employment measures alone **but requires stronger coordination across employment, education, social protection and local service delivery systems**.

At the same time, some recent developments point in a positive direction: the growth in the number of registered jobseekers with disabilities, the increase in the number of persons with disabilities employed through mediation and the expansion of donor-supported pilots in supported employment, counselling and local cooperation mechanisms suggest that institutions are becoming more active and that the system is beginning to identify and engage this group more effectively. Yet these initiatives remain limited in scale, often project-based, and not yet fully institutionalised.

Overall, Albania has made progress in building the legal, strategic and institutional architecture for disability-inclusive employment. The main challenge now is to move from framework development and pilot action to consistent implementation at scale. This will require more targeted measures for persons with disabilities, stronger accessibility and in-work support, better data and monitoring, an operational Employment Social Fund and more effective integration between employment, education and social protection systems. Until these gaps are addressed, the inclusion

of persons with disabilities in employment measures is likely to remain limited relative to policy ambition.

6.2 Recommendations

1. Establish specialised employment support for persons with disabilities within NAES and at local level.

Albania should complement universal employment services with a more structured disability-specific support offer. NAES should progressively establish specialised functions for disability inclusion in regional employment offices, either through dedicated staff or designated counsellors with advanced training in disability profiling, job matching, workplace adaptation and retention support. These functions should not replace mainstream services but should ensure that persons with disabilities receive more intensive and tailored support than is currently possible through the general service model. Given the evidence of low participation in employment measures and the limited scale of targeted support, the priority should be to strengthen counselling, individual employability assessment, preparation for work, vacancy matching and post-placement follow-up. Where NAES lacks internal capacity, these services could be delivered through stable formal contracting arrangements with specialised NGOs and disability organisations, rather than only through temporary project-based cooperation.

A second priority within this recommendation is the gradual introduction of supported employment as a regular instrument, not only as a pilot. This should include job coaching, workplace orientation, employer mediation and post-placement support for persons with more complex support needs. The pilot experience under EU-supported initiatives already provides a basis for testing such an approach; Albania should build on this experience and define a national service model, including eligibility criteria, service standards, provider roles and monitoring arrangements.

In parallel, NAES should develop a more systematic retention function, as current evidence suggests that barriers do not end at recruitment but continue after entry into employment. This should include follow-up during the first months of employment, counselling for both employee and employer and referral to social or rehabilitation services where necessary.

2. Operationalise the Employment Social Fund and use it to finance a targeted package of employer and employee support.

The Employment Social Fund should be made operational as a matter of priority. The Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation, together with NAES, the Ministry of Finance and the tax authorities, should resolve the pending administrative and legal obstacles that have prevented the establishment of the separate account and functioning fund foreseen in Law No 15/2019. Once operational, the Fund should not remain a general financing mechanism in name only. It should be translated into a clearly defined package of measures targeting the employment of persons with disabilities, with transparent rules on eligibility, allocation, reporting, monitoring and evaluation. Priority uses of the Fund should include supported employment services, workplace adaptation grants, vocational rehabilitation, employer subsidies linked to retention, and financing for specialised counselling and guidance services.

Employers also need practical help with selection, onboarding, adaptation of workplaces and integration of the employee into the work team. Public employment services should develop a dedicated employer support function focused on disability inclusion. This should include information on quota obligations, practical guidance on the recruitment of persons with disabilities, support in identifying reasonable accommodation needs and follow-up support after recruitment. Financial incentives alone are unlikely to be sufficient.

A specific grant instrument for reasonable accommodation should be introduced or financed through the Employment Social Fund, covering equipment, workstation adaptation, assistive devices, and minor physical adjustments needed for the employee to perform the job effectively.

This is particularly important given the note's evidence on accessibility barriers and the Fund's intended role in financing workplace adaptation.

3. Strengthen integrated case management, referral mechanisms and digital interconnection between systems.

Albania should move from procedural cooperation to genuinely integrated case management for persons with disabilities. The existing cooperation between NAES, the State Social Service and municipalities provides a basis, but it needs to be made more systematic and results-oriented. A common case management approach should be introduced for persons referred through the biopsychosocial assessment process and for other jobseekers with disabilities registered with NAES. This should include a shared methodology for assessment, a joint action plan for labour market inclusion, regular review points and clear designation of responsibilities between employment, social and local services. In practice, this would allow employment counselling, skills support, social services and municipal support to be sequenced around the person's pathway rather than delivered in parallel without sufficient coordination.

A key enabling condition is digital interconnection. NAES and the State Social Service should establish interoperable information exchange so that referrals, service take-up, employment outcomes and participation in measures can be followed more effectively. This should also support monitoring of Individual Employment Plans and Integrated Plans for Employment and Social Inclusion. At present, the lack of system interconnection limits the ability to track employment pathways and weakens both service delivery and policy learning. The immediate priority should be a practical information-sharing solution between the two systems, followed by a broader framework for data exchange with municipalities and other relevant service providers.

4. Develop a structured transition pathway from school and training to employment for young persons with disabilities.

Albania should establish a specific transition-to-work pathway for young persons with disabilities, as this remains one of the weakest links in the current system. The objective should be to connect education, vocational training, employment services and employers before young people leave school, rather than only after they become inactive or register as unemployed. This pathway should include early career guidance, skills profiling, work-readiness preparation, exposure to employers, work-based learning opportunities and supported entry into first employment. It should be designed jointly by the Ministry of Education and Sports, NAES, the Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation and the relevant social protection structures.

This recommendation should go beyond general cooperation and translate into concrete operational arrangements. Schools, vocational training providers and employment services should agree procedures for the referral of final-year students with disabilities to NAES, including the transfer of relevant information on qualifications, support needs and career interests, with appropriate safeguards. Career guidance should be strengthened before graduation, especially in upper secondary and VET pathways. Employers should be involved through internships, work-based learning and trial placements adapted to the needs of learners with disabilities. A limited number of regional transition pilots could be introduced first, before scaling up nationally, using the lessons already generated by referral and local cooperation mechanisms.

5. Strengthen disability-disaggregated labour market data, programme monitoring and evaluation.

A stronger evidence base is essential for improving policy design and measuring whether current reforms lead to better outcomes. INSTAT should prioritise the collection and publication of disability-disaggregated labour market indicators, including labour force participation, employment, unemployment and inactivity. This should be linked to the planned introduction of disability-related indicators in future Labour Force Survey rounds. At the same time, NAES should improve its own administrative data so that participation in services and measures can be analysed by disability status, gender, age, education level and, where possible, type or level of disability. This is

particularly important because current data allow only a partial view of the position of persons with disabilities in employment measures.

Monitoring should also move beyond counting participants. Albania should strengthen evaluation of active labour market measures to assess outcomes such as job entry, duration of employment, retention after six and twelve months and progression into further training or stable work. Disability should become a standard dimension of programme monitoring and evaluation rather than an occasional reporting category. This would allow policymakers to identify which measures are effective for persons with disabilities, which are not, and where adjustments are needed. In parallel, integrated employment and social inclusion plans should be monitored more rigorously so that barriers encountered during implementation are systematically recorded and used to improve programme design.

6. There is a need to move from policy framework to policy implementation and focus on improving the labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities.

There is a need to increase the participation of persons with disabilities in the active labour market services and measures. This group, as one of the vulnerable groups, should be overrepresented in the active labour market programmes. Specific measures need to be developed to address the unique needs of persons with disabilities, notably including dedicated units within the public employment services that are able to provide specialised counselling and job-matching services. Such services can also be provided by NGOs specialising in supporting persons with disabilities, subject to contractual arrangements ensuring the stable provision of such services.

Another instrument that should be developed is supported employment for persons with severe disabilities, which would help persons with such disabilities to enter the workplace and better adjust and integrate, as well as improving retention rates.

The policy package lacks instruments supporting the retention of persons with disabilities within the labour market. Employment promotion instruments are designed for those with officially certified disability, which means that persons recovering from illness or injuries may not receive the support they need to help them return quickly to employment. Also, there is a lack of instruments supporting retention in employment following the initial work placement, such as monitoring and counselling.

Finally, there is a need to develop a complex, individualised approach to the employment of persons with disabilities that combines different services and instruments, including vocational rehabilitation. In this context, there is a need to develop a case management approach. There is also a need to consolidate and formalise the referral system between the State Social Service and NAES to ensure that persons with disabilities receive coordinated support across social protection and employment services, including personalised employment counselling and skills development programmes.

6.3 Best practices

Best practices in promoting the employment of persons with disabilities in Albania

Several initiatives in Albania demonstrate effective approaches to enhancing the labour market inclusion of persons with disabilities:

1. Implementation of the 2022-2025 Action Plan.

The coordinated implementation of the 2022 Action Plan by the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection represents a significant step in promoting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. This initiative highlights the potential of interministerial collaboration in designing and executing targeted employment policies.

2. Cooperation agreements between NAES and regional State Social Services

Formal cooperation agreements between NAES regional offices and Regional State Social services have strengthened coordination and support mechanisms. These agreements facilitate the referral of persons with disabilities to appropriate employment and social services, thereby improving routes into labour market participation.

3. Piloting the Community of Practice through EU4Labour Market Inclusion

The EU4Labour Market Inclusion project has piloted a Community of Practice in 19 municipalities, engaging all key local stakeholders, including municipal authorities, NAES employment offices, State social services and civil society organisations (CSOs/NGOs) supporting vulnerable groups. This initiative fosters knowledge-sharing, collaborative problem-solving and integrated service delivery, providing a replicable model for multi-stakeholder engagement at local level.

4. Reform of financial support for employed persons with disabilities

The reform whereby persons with disabilities are permitted to retain their social benefits while engaging in employment represents a notable best practice. By eliminating the previous disincentive associated with loss of benefits upon employment, this reform provides a strong incentive for labour market participation and supports the economic independence of persons with disabilities.

Collectively, these initiatives illustrate practical strategies for improving employment outcomes, fostering interinstitutional collaboration and promoting inclusive economic participation for persons with disabilities in Albania.

ANNEX

List of institutions and organisations

The interviews were carried out with the following institutions and organisations:

- UNDP/EU4Labour Market Inclusion
- Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation (Directorate of Employment and Migration Policy)
- Regional Directorate of State Social Services, Tirana
- INSTAT, National Institute of Statistics
- Albania Foundation for Disability Rights
- National Agency for Employment and Skills (Central Level and Regional Directorate)
- Municipality of Tirana
- Ministry of Health and Social Protection

ACRONYMS

AB	Assignment beneficiary
ADRF	Albanian Disability Rights Foundation
ALMM	Active labour market measures
ALMP	Active labour market policy
ANAD	Albania National Association of the Deaf
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Disability Assessment Commission
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers
DPO	Disabled people's organisation
EAA	European Accessibility Act
EC	European Commission
ESS	Employment service system
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GAP III	Gender Action Plan 2021–2025
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics, Republic of Albania
IPSED	Institute for the Promotion of Social and Economic Development
IT	Information technology
LEO	Local employment office
LGU	Local government unit
LMI	Labour market inclusion
MECI/MEKI	Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MoHSP/MSHMS	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
Mol	Ministry of Interior
MoJ	Ministry of Justice

MSs	Member States
NAES/AKPA	National Agency for Employment and Skills
NAPPWD	National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OPD	Organisation of persons with disabilities
PCs	Partner countries
EPP	Employment promotion programme
PES	Public employment services
REO	Regional employment office
SSS/SHSSH	State social service
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VET	Vocational education and training
VTC	Vocational training centre
YAP	Youth action plan

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