



## Research Article

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# Science, Research, Education and Culture According to Eu Reports on Albania's Progress

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## Abstract

*This abstract explores a comparative analysis of the European Union's assessments of Albania's progress, focusing specifically on chapters 25 and 26 of these reports. Chapter 25 of the EU progress report examines matters concerning science and research, assessing Albania's achievements, challenges, and recommendations for improvement in these areas. Conversely, chapter 26 of the report focuses on education and culture, evaluating Albania's advancements, identifying obstacles, and suggesting strategies for further development. By examining the key areas of progress, challenges encountered, and recommendations provided by the EU in these sectors, this analysis illuminates Albania's path toward EU integration, offering valuable insights into areas that require additional attention and enhancement. This comparative analysis provides a thorough examination of Albania's progress in science, research, education, and culture, juxtaposed with the EU's evaluations and recommendations. By comparing these assessments, it illuminates both Albania's achievements and the enduring challenges in these vital sectors. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of these areas in Albania's EU integration journey, emphasizing the necessity for ongoing efforts and focused strategies to tackle the identified challenges and propel Albania closer to integration with the European Union.*

**Keyword:** EU Progress Reports, Albania, Chapters 25 and 26. Science, Research, Education, Culture, Comparative Analysis

## 1. Introduction

The European Union's (EU) progress reports are crucial in evaluating Albania's advancements and challenges on its path towards potential EU integration. Chapters 25 and 26 of these reports stand out as they focus on science and research, and education and culture, respectively. These chapters thoroughly examine Albania's progress in these pivotal sectors, offering a detailed analysis of the developments made, the obstacles faced, and the EU's recommendations to foster continued growth. Chapter 25 of the EU progress report examines Albania's accomplishments and challenges in the field of science and research. It underscores the country's endeavors to bolster its scientific capacities, invest in research endeavors, and stimulate innovation. Nevertheless, the chapter also pinpoints potential hurdles for Albania, including infrastructure constraints, financial limitations, and the

necessity for stronger collaboration among academia, industry, and governmental entities. The EU's recommendations in this chapter frequently center on improving research infrastructure, facilitating knowledge exchange, and cultivating partnerships to propel scientific and technological progress.

In contrast, Chapter 26 of the EU progress report centers on Albania's advancements in education and culture. This chapter evaluates the quality, inclusivity, and compliance of Albania's education system with EU standards, as well as its endeavors to safeguard and advance cultural heritage. While acknowledging achievements in broadening access to education and cultural resources, the chapter also highlights challenges such as curriculum modernization, teacher training, and cultural preservation strategies. The EU's recommendations in this regard commonly focus on enhancing educational standards, fostering cultural diversity, and strengthening cultural institutions to foster a dynamic and inclusive society.

## **2. Brief Overview of EU Progress Reports on Albania**

The EU progress reports on Albania offer comprehensive evaluations of the country's advancements, obstacles, and reforms across multiple sectors crucial to EU integration. As integral components of the EU's enlargement process, these reports serve to monitor candidate countries' adherence to EU standards and criteria. They encompass diverse areas, including political and economic criteria, the rule of law, fundamental rights, and specific policy domains such as environment, energy, transport, and education.

The reports offer a comprehensive analysis of Albania's legislative and institutional framework, the implementation of reforms, and the country's overall readiness to meet EU accession criteria. They recognize areas where Albania has made strides, commend achievements, and offer recommendations for areas requiring improvement. Furthermore, the reports assess Albania's compliance with EU regulations and standards, addressing critical issues such as corruption, judicial independence, media freedom, and human rights.

In summary, the EU progress reports on Albania serve as a valuable tool for monitoring the country's journey toward EU membership. They pinpoint areas of success, outline necessary reforms, and recommend actions to address challenges, ensuring sustained progress in the integration process.

### *2.1 Chapter 25: Science and research (2021 – 2022 - 2023)*

Albania's progress in the field of science and research, as detailed in Chapter 25 of the EU progress report, illustrates both accomplishments and areas in need of improvement. The report acknowledges the country's strides, including the completion of the quantitative analysis phase of the Smart Specializations Strategy, heightened participation in Horizon 2020, outreach efforts to the diaspora, and enhanced collaboration between academia and business sectors. However, it also underscores that previous recommendations have not been fully implemented, indicating areas that still require strengthening.

One of the primary challenges identified by the EU is Albania's need to increase its investment in research, aligning with its commitments and priorities within the European research area. The report highlights that the current level of investment, particularly in scientific research funds, falls significantly below the target of 1% of GDP by 2022. To bolster research and innovation capacity, Albania is urged to ramp up its investments and establish a clear methodology for funding research and science initiatives.

Another key area of focus is the development of a Smart Specialization Strategy (S3), which is crucial for fostering stronger connections between academia, industry, and government. While progress has been made in drafting the S3 roadmap and completing qualitative and quantitative analysis phases, continuous efforts are needed to enhance academia-business partnerships and increase private sector involvement in research and innovation endeavors.

Moreover, Albania's involvement in EU framework programs, particularly Horizon 2020, has seen advancements but still encounters hurdles. The low success rate of proposals involving Albanian participation underscores the necessity for heightened awareness and supportive measures to bolster engagement in Horizon Europe and other collaborative international research initiatives. Additionally, initiatives to generate accurate statistics and data on science and technology, including gross domestic expenditure on Research and Innovation, are vital for Albania's inclusion in the European Innovation Scoreboard and for enhancing its capacity for international cooperation in research and innovation.

## 2.2 Chapter 26: Education and culture (2021 – 2022 - 2023)

Albania has demonstrated moderate preparedness, with notable advancements in certain areas, but significant challenges persist. The EU underscores the importance of preventing discrimination and ensuring quality education for all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. While Albania has improved its National Agency for Employment and Skills and continued the restructuring of educational bodies, such as the National Agency for Education, Vocational Training, and Qualifications, there are areas requiring attention. These include finalizing implementing legislation for vocational education and training (VET) reform, operationalizing sector skills committees, and adopting a new education strategy that addresses the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the earthquake.

The impact of the earthquake, coupled with the adjustments necessitated by remote education during the pandemic, has strained Albania's education system. The report underscores challenges such as school disruptions, the imperative for digitalization, and disparities in access to online education, particularly affecting vulnerable groups. Albania is urged to conduct a comprehensive assessment of learning gaps, inequalities, and marginalization to ensure systemic recovery, promote digital transformation, and address the needs of vulnerable children and those with disabilities.

While efforts have been made to enhance education quality, including the development of a new National Strategy of Education and Action Plan, distribution of free textbooks, and teacher training programs in digital education, budget allocation to education remains insufficient, falling short of the anticipated share of GDP devoted to education. Persistent issues such as financial autonomy for schools, inadequate resources, and the shortage of skilled teachers, especially in rural areas, necessitate concerted efforts for improvement.

In vocational education and training, strides have been taken in modernizing qualification standards and curricula, yet challenges persist, including low participation rates, inadequate resources, and the pandemic's impact on work-based learning. Addressing these challenges requires Albania to adopt implementing legislation for VET providers, finalize preschool reform, enhance digital education, and boost enrollment in vocational schools to align with European standards.

In the cultural sector, Albania has established a national strategy and made efforts in areas such as licensing for cultural heritage projects and participation in EU programs like Creative Europe. However, further actions are necessary to fully implement youth-related policies, establish youth structures, and evaluate the effectiveness of existing youth strategies. Enhancing youth engagement, expanding student services beyond Tirana, and promoting regional cooperation in youth initiatives are also vital for Albania's advancement in education, culture, and youth development.

Albania benefits from the international dimension of the Erasmus+ program, with ring-fenced support from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance III (IPA) totaling EUR 374 million for the 2021-2027 period.

Albania continued to actively participate in EU programs, notably Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. In the culture sector, the national strategy for 2019-2025 is being implemented, focusing on cultural education for children and youth, the creative industry in music and dramaturgy, and international cooperation. In 2021, the ministry adopted implementing legislation regarding the creation and administration of a database of stolen cultural assets, as well as rules for monitoring and

evaluating entities that manage cultural assets.

In March 2022, Albania ratified the agreement to participate in the new EU Creative Europe program 2021-2027, and the Ministry of Culture has established the necessary administrative structures for its implementation. However, some bylaws are still pending approval for the implementation of the youth law, and additional efforts are needed to establish relevant youth structures. The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth must finalize and adopt the National Youth Strategy for the period 2022-2029, along with its action plan.

According to the Ministry of Education and Sport's scientific research strategy report (2023), the total cost for implementing the national strategy for scientific research, technology, and innovation for the period 2023-2030 is 27.5 billion ALL. The average annual cost of dedicated activities for this period is projected to be 0.084% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023, increasing to 0.152% of GDP in 2026, and aiming to reach 0.162% of GDP by 2030. These figures are detailed according to the following program policy goals:

- a. Increasing the efficiency and stability of the system to support scientific research, integrated at an international level, across various fields including natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical sciences, agriculture, social sciences, and humanities.
- b. Creating an environment conducive to facilitating and encouraging mechanisms for interaction and technology transfer between the research community, economy, innovation sector, and public institutions. (Report: "For the Approval of the National Research Strategy for Scientific, Technological, and Innovation 2023-2030 and Action Plan for Its Implementation"; 2023; pg. 14)

### 3. Methodology

A survey was conducted among 21 first and second - grade master's students at Durres University "Aleksandër Moisiu" enrolled in the "School Psychology and Development" program. The focus group, held on university premises, centered on their perceptions regarding progress in the education system, science, and culture. The structured questionnaire addressed various aspects, including:

1. Assessment of the progress of university education in recent years.
2. Evaluation of the quality of programs and curricula offered in today's universities.
3. Impact of university culture on personal and professional development.
4. Advancement in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity within the university environment.
5. Availability of infrastructure and resources for research and development in higher education institutions.
6. Progress in collaboration between universities and the private sector for technological innovation and development.
7. Main challenges in the field of culture and art within the university environment.
8. Commitment of higher education institutions to preserve and promote the cultural and artistic heritage of the country.
9. Opportunities for student participation in research projects and cultural activities.
10. Level of cooperation between universities and the local community.
11. Integration of technology in teaching and research.
12. Progress in preparing students for the challenges of the knowledge society and future work.
13. Influence of cultural and artistic activities on academic and personal achievements.
14. Opportunities for expanding international cooperation for students and university staff in the fields of education, culture, and research, along with relevant issues.

Acknowledging certain limitations in the research is essential. Moreover, the dynamic nature of the education, research, and science processes, coupled with the limited timeframe for the research, may affect the depth of insights gathered. Despite these constraints, the qualitative method approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted contributions and challenges faced by students in their everyday education.

**Table 1:** Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Particulars	%
Age	22-27	57.1
	28 - 33	23.8
	Over 34	19
Gender	Male	29
	Female	71

#### 4. Findings and Analyze: Insights Gained from the Focus Group

The focus group comprised 21 students, including 6 males and 15 females, enrolled in the Professional Master Program "School Psychology and Development" at the Faculty of Education, University "Aleksandër Moisiu" in Durrës, Albania.

The focus group discussion offered valuable insights into higher education, specifically the master's program in School and Developmental Psychology at UAMD. Participants shared positive and concerning trends in the educational landscape of their country. While some expressed worries about diminishing critical learning and interest among students, prioritizing grades and job prospects over genuine curiosity, others highlighted rapid technological advancements and abundant opportunities, expressing eagerness for academic engagement.

Participants evaluated the accessibility and quality of programs and curricula, acknowledging the alignment of the Master's curriculum with the field's priorities while suggesting improvements in practical application. They emphasized the importance of balancing theory and practice and encouraged exploration of additional literature to enhance learning outcomes.

University culture was recognized for its positive impact on personal and professional growth, with participants noting the acquisition of broad cultural understanding and practical skills. However, concerns were raised about the lack of practical experience in certain areas, indicating a need to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and real-world application.

Participants discussed diversity and inclusion, noting progress in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity within the university environment based on personal interactions with students from various backgrounds. However, some participants felt that more active promotion and celebration of diversity, both culturally and linguistically, were needed.

Infrastructure and resources for research and development were generally considered adequate, including physical and electronic libraries, laboratories, and teaching technology. However, challenges such as limited use of technology in teaching and research, particularly during the pandemic-induced shift to online learning, were also mentioned.

Participants discussed the role of universities in preparing students for societal and economic contributions, emphasizing the need for stronger collaborations between universities and the private sector for innovation and job placement. Additionally, there was a call for universities to play a more active role in preserving cultural heritage and promoting artistic activities, which are seen as integral to personal and academic development.

Looking towards the future, participants expressed optimism tempered with a desire for continued improvement. They hoped for more developed curricula, expanded literature, increased international cooperation, and enhanced opportunities for personal and professional growth. Overall, the discussion reflected a nuanced understanding of the challenges and potentials within higher education and cultural development in their country.

#### 5. Conclusions

Albania has made commendable strides in science and research, evident in the rise of research institutions, scientific publications, and collaborations with international partners. Data from the

Albanian Ministry of Education, Sports, and Youth indicates a consistent increase in research output, vital for nurturing innovation and knowledge creation.

However, significant challenges persist. Limited research funding is a primary concern, hindering large-scale projects and talent retention. Disparities in funding, highlighted by the Albanian Academy of Sciences, underscore the need for increased investment. Brain drain exacerbates this issue, with skilled researchers seeking better opportunities abroad, depriving Albania of valuable expertise and innovation potential.

The EU progress report and insights from focus group discussions with university students underscore the imperative of addressing these challenges through targeted strategies. Recommendations include ramping up R&D investment to meet EU standards, enhancing funding access via competitive grant programs, fostering robust collaboration frameworks among academia, industry, and government bodies, and implementing measures to curb brain drain. Backed by data-driven policies and strategic investments, these recommendations can bolster Albania's advancement in science and research, spur innovation, and enhance its standing in the global research landscape.

The European Union (EU) has pinpointed several challenges in Albania's science and research sector through its progress reports and assessments. These challenges, delineated in Chapters 25 and 26 of the EU progress report on Albania, shed light on areas necessitating attention and enhancement for the country to better align with EU standards and attain sustainable progress in science and research. Some of the key challenges identified by the EU include:

1. **Limited Research Funding:** Albania faces constraints in research funding, with allocations often insufficient to support large-scale research projects, attract top talent, and invest in cutting-edge technologies and equipment. This limited funding hampers the country's ability to compete internationally and conduct impactful research that addresses societal and economic challenges.
2. **Inadequate Research Facilities:** The EU progress report highlights the inadequacy of research facilities and infrastructure in Albania. This includes a lack of state-of-the-art laboratories, equipment, and resources necessary for conducting advanced research across various scientific disciplines. The absence of modern research facilities limits the country's capacity to undertake high-quality research and innovation initiatives.
3. **Brain Drain:** Albania experiences brain drain, where skilled researchers and professionals migrate to other countries in search of better opportunities, higher salaries, and more conducive research environments. This brain drain phenomenon leads to a loss of expertise, talent, and innovative potential within Albania's scientific community, hindering the country's ability to retain and utilize its human capital effectively.
4. **Limited Collaboration Frameworks:** The EU progress report emphasizes the need for enhanced collaboration frameworks between academia, industry, and government bodies in Albania. The lack of robust partnerships and collaboration networks impedes knowledge transfer, technology commercialization, and the development of innovative solutions that address societal needs and contribute to economic growth.
5. **Quality of Research Output:** While Albania has made progress in increasing research output, the EU highlights the importance of ensuring the quality and impact of research publications and projects. Improving the quality of research output requires investments in research excellence, capacity building, and fostering a culture of rigorous scientific inquiry and innovation.

These challenges identified by the EU in Albania's science and research sector underscore the importance of targeted interventions, policy reforms, and strategic investments to overcome obstacles and promote sustainable growth, competitiveness, and excellence in scientific endeavors. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for Albania's integration into the European research landscape and enhancing its contribution to global scientific knowledge and innovation.

## 6. Recommendations and Areas for Improvement

The European Union (EU) has provided recommendations and identified areas for improvement in Albania's science and research sector to facilitate the country's alignment with EU standards and promote sustainable progress. These recommendations aim to address challenges and enhance the country's scientific capabilities, research infrastructure, collaboration frameworks, and research quality. Some of the key recommendations and areas for improvement suggested by the EU include:

1. **Increased R&D Investment:** The EU emphasizes the need for Albania to boost investment in research and development (R&D) to support scientific initiatives, fund research projects, attract top talent, and foster innovation. Allocating adequate resources and funding to R&D activities is crucial for driving scientific progress and competitiveness.
2. **Improved Funding Access:** Enhancing access to research funding through competitive grant programs, scholarships, and incentives for private sector investment in research is recommended. This includes streamlining funding application processes, establishing transparent criteria for funding allocation, and diversifying funding sources to support a wide range of research disciplines and projects.
3. **Enhanced Research Infrastructure:** It's crucial for Albania to invest in modern research facilities, laboratories, equipment, and technology infrastructure. Upgrading research infrastructure will support high-quality research and innovation, enabling advanced scientific studies, experiments, and technology development across various sectors.
4. **Strengthened Collaboration Frameworks:** Fostering collaboration and partnerships between academia, industry, government bodies, and international institutions is essential. Strengthening collaboration frameworks will facilitate knowledge transfer, technology commercialization, interdisciplinary research, and the development of innovative solutions to address societal challenges.
5. **Capacity Building and Skills Development:** It's crucial for Albania to invest in capacity building programs, training initiatives, and skills development for researchers, scientists, and students. This includes promoting continuous learning, professional development, and international exchanges to build a skilled workforce capable of conducting high-impact research and innovation.
6. **Quality Assurance and Research Excellence:** Ensuring the quality, integrity, and impact of research output through robust quality assurance mechanisms, peer review processes, and adherence to international research standards is crucial. Promoting research excellence, ethical conduct, and adherence to best practices will enhance the credibility and impact of Albania's scientific contributions.
7. **Mitigating Brain Drain:** Implementing strategies to mitigate brain drain and retain skilled researchers and professionals within Albania is essential. This includes creating attractive career opportunities, competitive salaries, research incentives, and conducive research environments to encourage talent retention and utilization.
8. **Promoting Open Science and Collaboration:** Encouraging open science practices, data sharing, collaboration platforms, and access to research findings will foster transparency, collaboration, and knowledge exchange within the scientific community. Promoting open access publications and research outputs will enhance the visibility and impact of Albania's research contributions.

These recommendations and areas for improvement suggested by the EU provide a roadmap for Albania to strengthen its science and research ecosystem, promote innovation-driven growth, and contribute meaningfully to scientific knowledge, technological advancements, and societal development. Implementing these recommendations will be crucial for Albania's integration into the European research landscape and enhancing its competitiveness on the global stage.

## 7. Annex: Focus Group Question

1. How do you see the progress of the level of university education in your country during the last years?
2. What do you think about the approach and quality of programs and curricula offered in today's universities?
3. How does university culture affect your personal and professional development?
4. Do you think there has been any progress in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity in the university environment?
5. How do you rate the infrastructure and resources available for research and development of science in higher education institutions?
6. Do you think there has been progress in collaboration between universities and the private sector for technological innovation and development?
7. What are the main challenges you face in the field of culture and art in the university environment?
8. How do you see the commitment of higher education institutions in preserving and promoting the cultural and artistic heritage of your country?
9. What are the opportunities for students to participate in research projects and cultural activities at your university?
10. How do you think cooperation between universities and the local community can be improved to influence the development of culture and research at the local and regional level?
11. How do you rate the use of technology in teaching and research at your university?
12. Do you think there has been progress in enabling students to adapt to the challenges of the knowledge society and the work of the future?
13. How do you see the impact of cultural and artistic activities on your academic and personal achievements?
14. Do you think that your university offers enough opportunities for personal and professional development for students?
15. What are the main challenges you face in the inclusion and support of students with special abilities in the university environment?
16. How can the exchange of ideas and cooperation between students, professors and the business sector be accelerated to promote innovation and research development?
17. How do you see the role of the university in preparing students to contribute to society and the economy of a developed country?
18. What are the opportunities to expand international cooperation for students and university staff in the field of education, culture and research?
19. Do you think there is a need for increased investment in infrastructure and human resources at your university to accelerate progress in these areas?
20. What are your hopes and expectations for the future of higher education and culture in your country?

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