

# CIVIL SOCIETY DIALOG FORUMS

The Civil Society Dialog Forums are an on-going activity that the OSCE Presence in Albania organizes since 2018 to bring together civil society organizations (CSOs) and relevant stakeholders at the local level. The goal of the Forums is to establish and maintain contacts and exchange information on challenges, needs, capacities and difficulties encountered by CSOs.

## KORÇA FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

7 NOVEMBER 2019

42,4%

of registered CSOs  
are active in Korça

- 16 CSOs attended the Korça Forum
- 90 Registered CSOs in Korça\*
- 38 Active CSOs in Korça\*

\*Source: Agency for Civil Society Support, 2019 Report.

806,67  
KM<sup>2</sup>

204.831  
HABITANTS

Source: EUROSTAT,  
"Correspondence table LAU–NUTS  
2016, EU-28 and EFTA / available  
Candidate Countries", 2016.

Source: INSTAT, "Population by  
prefecture", 1 January 2020.

### Existing CSO Networks

- The **Citizen Advisory Board**, a civil society structure designed to function as a bridge between the citizens and the municipality.
- The Network of CSOs working in the field of **Roma and Egyptian Rights**.
- The Network of NGOs for **Children with Disabilities**.
- Group for Social Dialogue**, issued by the Social Services Department of the Korça municipality and with the support of UNICEF.
- Citizen advisory group in Prespa**, with the purpose of adding community participation to the decision-making in a local project.

### Local government and NGOs

- It was noted that municipal elections had a big effect on available funding for CSOs and on narratives of the communities' needs.
- Concern was expressed over **clientelism and meritocracy** in decision-making processes regarding grants and funding opportunities to civil society organisations.

### Funding

- Fiscal legislation requires to have one permanently employed staff member in order to keep a CSO active. Participants expressed that this resulted in CSOs having little or no financial security as this provision is highly costly, since funds are sporadic, yet running costs and tax obligations are permanent.
- Having **local CSOs as co-applicants** as a precondition for applications was considered a good way to ensure local ownership.

### Transparency

- Participants noted that local government ought to provide for more disclosure on the way public money is spent so CSOs can effectively monitor, contribute to a better representation of public interest, and avoid **project overlap**.
- It was recommended that this could be addressed by setting a website to publish all funded projects implemented at the local level.

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## SHKODRA FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

28 OCTOBER 2019



\*Source: Agency for Civil Society Support, 2019 Report.

- 13 CSOs attended the Shkodra Forum
- 70 Registered CSOs in Shkodra\*
- 30 Active CSOs in Shkodra\*

911,84  
KM<sup>2</sup>

Source: EUROSTAT,  
"Correspondence table LAU–NUTS  
2016, EU-28 and EFTA / available  
Candidate Countries", 2016.

200.007  
HABITANTS

Source: INSTAT, "Population by  
prefecture", 1 January 2020.

### CSOs Networks

- CSOs in Malësi e Madhe have established a **local Civil Society Council** with 16 NGOs for the purpose of teaming up in a structure able to absorb sub-grants.
- In June 2019 an informal network of CSOs **engaging with youth** was established by UNDP and the British Embassy.
- The Department of Social Services and the Health Department at the Shkodra Municipality has created a list of all Shkodra CSOs engaging in **social services**.
- CSOs working in the field of gender equality are also members of the Albanian Women Empowerment Network headquartered in Tirana and members of the OSCE-led Working Group on Women in Decision-Making.

### Youth Involvement

- The Arka Youth Centre has established its **Youth Council** with 50 youth activists who meet every week and develop their youth activities divided in 3 working groups.
- Participants underlined that young people are motivated and willing to engage with their host CSOs.

### Towards Financial Sustainability

- Shkodra CSOs are in the first steps of ensuring financial sustainability by running income-generating activities.
- Arka Youth Centre** is an example of this, with its hostel and coffee bar being run at no-profit by Code Partners. Despite difficulties, the income generated helps the CSO cover some part of the regular operating expenses.
- The Shkodra-based "Hapat e Lehtë" NGO has also launched an income-generating activity by employing **women victims of domestic violence**.

### Local implementation

- It was noted that **80% of the donors rely on non-local implementing partners** to carry out activities with local outreach. Participants noted that donors tend to rely on Tirana-based CSOs to implement large projects with little local outreach.
- Small CSOs don't usually have enough liquidity to cover the cost of VAT, and wait for it to be reimbursed at a later date, causing them to get indebted.

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## DURRËS FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

22 OCTOBER 2019



\*Source: Agency for Civil Society Support, 2019 Report.

- 8 CSOs attended the Durrës Forum
- 80 Registered CSOs in Durrës\*
- 16 Active CSOs in Durrës\*



Source: EUROSTAT, "Correspondence table LAU-NUTS 2016, EU-28 and EFTA / available Candidate Countries", 2016.



Source: INSTAT, "Population by prefecture", 1 January 2020.

### Revitalisation of civil society

- Since 2015, the civil society sector has witnessed a modest re-vitalisation in Durrës boosted by the traditionally good cooperation with the municipal administration.
- CSOs have been able to sign **cooperation agreements** with local government departments on health, social services and education projects.

### For youth and with youth

- Durrës CSOs provide **support for children in need and anti-trafficking efforts**. CSOs are active in the Municipality's inter-sectorial group for children in danger situation, led by the municipal child protection unit.
- The **engagement of young people** with NGOs as volunteers has increased, challenging notions against volunteerism, inherited from the Communist past.

### Project Sustainability

Participant expressed concern over the competition between Tirana and Durrës CSOs, noting that Tirana-based CSOs allegedly wrote and implemented projects centrally with no real view on **sustainability and local ownership**.

### Social services delivery network

- Durrës CSOs engaging in social services delivery and vulnerable groups have a functioning network in place, consisting on **five organisations that coordinate projects and organize joint service delivery**.
- Initially established by Save the Children, the network now works independently and ownership rests with the CSOs themselves.
- Coordination is taken over by the Department of Social Services and Health Department at the Durrës Municipality.

### Funding

Participants expressed a need to tackle the gap between donors' requirements for NGOs to have at least one year of experience to access funds and the needed expenditures to be **legally active** for one whole year without any access to funding.

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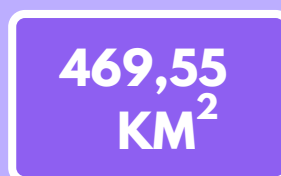
## GJIROKASTRA FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

1 NOVEMBER 2018



\*Source: Agency for Civil Society Support, 2019 Report.

- 22 CSOs attended the Gjirokastra Forum
- 30 Registered CSOs in Gjirokastra\*
- 7 Active CSOs in Gjirokastra\*



Source: EUROSTAT,  
"Correspondence table LAU-NUTS  
2016, EU-28 and EFTA / available  
Candidate Countries", 2016.



Source: INSTAT, "Population by  
prefecture", 1 January 2020.

### Cultural Heritage and Tourism

- Cultural heritage and the tourist industry have known a revival due to projects developed on these topics in the region. This was reflected by the organization of the **festival "Divani lunxhiot"**.
- Participants noted a lack of capacities and skills in **cultural management** at the local level despite the importance of cultural projects in Gjirokastra.
- Concern was expressed over the high level of **centralization** of power and decision-making in cultural projects.

### Lack of reporting

A lack of harmonised analysing and reporting methods among NGOs on the impact of implemented projects was noted. The lack of proper data was a challenge to properly **evaluate the impact of projects**.

### Forum of Civil Society

The Forum of Civil Society of Gjirokastra was created to exchange information and as a **lobbying platform** with local institutions. Good relationships between directors of local NGOs made this Forum possible.

### Lack of self-motivated civic activism

- A lack of citizen participation, volunteering and interest was noted, explained as a result of the disappointment from the **lack of impact** of previous activities.
- Participants considered that these challenges could be addressed through **regular meetings** of the Forum and through using experts and activists to address the community and engage citizens.

### Young and Old

- The need to revitalize the **Youth Parliament** and the **Youth Council** of the city of Gjirokastra was noted, as now it is only working in school institutions.
- Concerns over an **aging population** and lack of projects addressing their needs were expressed.

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## LEZHA FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

17 OCTOBER 2018



\*Source: Agency for Civil Society Support, 2019 Report.

- 15 CSOs attended the Lezha Forum
- 30 Registered CSOs in Lezha\*
- 8 Active CSOs in Lezha\*



Source: EUROSTAT, "Correspondence table LAU-NUTS 2016, EU-28 and EFTA / available Candidate Countries", 2016.



Source: INSTAT, "Population by prefecture", 1 January 2020.

### Economic challenges

- Participants expressed their concern over the effect of the economic situation on civil society in Lezha, and the fact that narrow interests, tribalism and politics might limit the scope of the work of some CSOs due to lack of **access to funds**.
- It was pointed out that as a consequence CSOs had to focus more on financial survival rather than representing citizens' interests.
- The lack of **organizational cohesion** among CSOs was also noted to hinder the success of civic causes in Lezha.

### Civil Society Coordination

- Lack of proper coordination between NGOs was seen as an obstacle to boost the level of **civic engagement** in Lezha.
- Organisations were perceived to fail to cooperate as a group with local and national media to increase the impact of the causes they wanted to represent.
- This lack of **organizational cohesion** was said to cause **segmentation of priorities** and to limit the success of civic causes in the region.

### Civic culture

- Participants noted the lack of **civic engagement** in activities due to the hostile situation towards CSOs and activists, ranging from power pressure to politicisation of civil initiatives.
- A general lack of understanding of the concept of civil society and the role CSOs play was noted in the meeting.
- Participants argued that there is a lack of civic culture in Albania which is expressed in the **fragmentation of public activism along political lines**, difficulting partnership cooperation.
- An example which was brought up was the need to have a piece of **equipment for breast cancer diagnosis** in Lezha, which despite not being a political cause, did not manage to rise above party divisions. They expressed the futility of spending funds for local awareness campaigns on breast cancer prevention from Tirana in the absence of objective opportunities to conduct diagnostics in Lezha.
- Participants argued that a good way to activate civil society would be to engage partnerships for a fair cause in the interest of the community.

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## KRUJA FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

12 OCTOBER 2018



\*Source: Agency for Civil Society Support, 2019 Report.

- 8 CSOs attended the Kruja Forum
- 25 Registered CSOs in Kruja\*
- 7 Active CSOs in Kruja\*



Source: EUROSTAT, "Correspondence table LAU-NUTS 2016, EU-28 and EFTA / available Candidate Countries", 2016.



Source: INSTAT, "Population by prefecture", 1 January 2020.

### Main issues

- **Economic concerns** and lack of social cohesion were considered some of the main problems faced in the region.
- As a consequence of the production of materials for the building industry, the city and its surroundings are exposed to heavy **environmental pollution** which can negatively impact health.
- **Protection of the Castle of Kruja**, the principal historical and touristic site of the region, was considered paramount, as poor management of the water flow brings erosion to the area.

### Children's education

- The project **"Second Chance"** by ADRA aims to lower the number of students that abandon school, helps in the integration of children returning from abroad and rebuilds schools in various villages.
- The **Roma Centre** has a project supporting education of Roma women and girls, particularly ones that have interrupted their education to work.
- The yearly summer camp organised by the **Besëlidhja Scout** in Qafë-Shtama educates children on civic inclusion and environmental awareness.

### Tirana NGOs

- It was noted that Kruja does not have capacities in creating effective monitoring, lobbying and advocacy organizations, benefitting public interest. While there are human capacities, organizational or financial ones are missing.
- The **twinning of organizations** or activists from Kruja with partner organizations in Tirana would be a welcome solution to this problem.

### Improving civil society communication

It was noted that some missing structures impeded better organisation of civil society in the region, such as the absence of a **local TV station** and the absence of an **artisans' syndicate** despite the high number of artisans in Kruja.

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