



## **Albania's Journey to Self Reliance & The U.S. Albania Transparency Academy**

### **Overview**

Since 1992, USAID has invested more than \$500 million in Albania to support political pluralism; civil society; effective local governments; independent media; the rule of law; the energy and health sectors; free-market economic systems; and sustainable economic growth, including through the development of tourism, and micro-enterprise partnerships. This assistance over the past 28 years has led to significant political and economic reforms in Albania. Today, Albania is advanced in its journey to self-reliance for a middle-income country, having demonstrated its commitment and capacity to plan, finance, and implement solutions to its own development challenges. These achievements show Albania is well-positioned to take on more ownership of its development challenges.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)'s *Journey to Self Reliance* (J2SR) is a commitment to work closely with host-country partners to address their development challenges with the goal of ending the need for development assistance. As part of this effort, USAID has developed Road Maps with metrics that identify strengths and weaknesses in a country's commitment and capacity to solve its own development challenges.

Albania's J2SR indicators show that it is one of the five most "self-reliant" countries where USAID operates globally<sup>1</sup>. Thus, USAID is forging a new development partnership between USAID and the Government of Albania (GoA). USAID has been gradually shifting from supporting a multi-sector programmatic approach to a more focused approach that addresses some of Albania's central development challenges, particularly in rule of law, economic development and energy.

A key goal of this new partnership is for USAID to support the GoA's priority development challenge -- countering corruption. Toward this end, in 2020, USAID will establish the *U.S. Albania Transparency Academy* (USATA) -- a center of excellence where experts on anti-corruption convene, public events engage business and political stakeholders, and civil society participates in dialogue and advocacy efforts.

---

<sup>1</sup> Albania's FY2021 J2SR roadmap can be found at <https://selfreliance.usaid.gov/country/albania>.

## **U.S. Albania Transparency Academy**

*The USATA will be a center of innovation and a natural touchpoint on how to improve transparency and accountability in governance as Albania moves toward EU integration. The Academy will serve as a space where government, citizens, the private sector and NGOs gather to communicate on a range of issues and seek solutions that produce a more open and accountable government. It will be a dynamic hub of events and activities engaging the GoA, including the judicial sector, business, political parties, civil society and youth. It will be a recognized center of excellence where widespread expertise on anti-corruption can gather to participate in dialogue and advocacy efforts, to include prominent public engagement of senior government, business and political stakeholders, as well as civil society and grassroots activists.*

To realize this vision, the Academy will serve as a central hub for Albanian citizens -- from students to community leaders -- to become involved in reducing corruption. Through a range of activities, citizens will play a meaningful role in increasing the transparency and integrity of public and private institutions that affect their daily lives. Activities could contribute to building oversight capacity in any branch of the government; increase transparency in public financial management, the judiciary, and private sector regulations; and develop mechanisms for government engagement and dialogue with youth, civil society and the private sector. The Academy will reinforce the Government of Albania's existing anti-corruption work through, for example, Parliament and the High Judicial Council.

Academy activities will reinforce objectives of the Integrated Country Strategy of the U.S. Embassy in Tirana: "Strengthened rule of law and governance;" "Conditions created for broad-based, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth;" and "Implement key rule of law reforms to counter corruption and organized crime as part of the EU accession process." USAID is planning to budget \$9.4 million to establish the USATA. USAID will coordinate with interagency partners to prevent duplication of efforts and to ensure the Academy reinforces and advances U.S. national interests as well as bilateral objectives, such as transparency and accountability.

The Academy It will be based in Tirana and will be active outside of the capital as well as on-line. The Academy will be established as an Albanian NGO governed by a board of directors and staffed by international and regional experts from the private sector, the public sector, academia, and civil society. The academy will be open to the public with a focus on young emerging leaders in the public and private sector.

The USATA will be built upon four programmatic "pillars" that have been the focus of past USAID programming in Albania and are areas where USAID has clear expertise in best practices. This will ensure the Academy advances U.S. foreign policy objectives from the outset

and builds upon USAID/Albania's decades-long experience, investments and achievements in Albania.

*Pillar 1: Accountability and Oversight in Public Financial Management*

The Academy will support dialogues that increase citizen-government engagement on issues of government accountability and responsiveness and it will develop tools for the public to monitor government policies and spending in key areas that affect their lives. The objective is to help ensure that public budgetary processes and decision making is transparent and responsive. For the GoA to further strengthen initiatives against corruption such as money laundering, USATA services will be in alignment with current USG (e.g. Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs [INL]) initiatives.

*Illustrative activities under Pillar 1 might include:* Establishing websites and social media campaigns for public access and input into budget formulation and expenditure processes, holding open public hearings for organizations to testify/comment on budget proposals, public forums on efforts to battle money laundering, training workshops, innovation awards, integrity awards/recognition, and government agency competitions. The Academy could bring in international experts or representatives of other governments that have introduced best practices in integrating public feedback into policy formulation and budget planning and establishing anti-money laundering procedures aligned with EU directives and international best practices. The Academy should also provide ethics training for government civil service personnel to further build a culture of accountability.

*Pillar 2: Transparency and Ethics in the Private Sector*

The Academy will implement programs to improve Albania's business-enabling environment, specifically where government and business intersect frequently, because existing challenges of corruption and the lack of accountability in the regulatory environment significantly deter foreign investment and suppress economic growth. Academy programs will focus on those areas where improvements can reduce the opportunities for corruption to take place -- e.g., programs on public procurement, customs, applications for building permits and property registration, and eGov and other eServices. The Academy will also identify innovative ways for local governments, small-medium enterprises, and NGOs to attract investment into their communities. Finally, the Academy will serve as a focal point for companies to champion anti-corruption initiatives, including bribery, money laundering and embezzlement, and to create demand for ethical business practices that deter investment and harm the country's business climate.

*Illustrative activities under Pillar 2 might include:* Online procurement platforms that increase transparency in government bids and awards, eServices that similarly allow businesses to pay taxes and fees without direct interaction, standardized online forms and procedures for trade and

customs transactions, public hearings for public permits, e.g. around construction applications, supporting business associations in developing an advocacy agenda, and establishing a business coalition on anti-corruption to independently certify companies for anti-corruption compliance.

*Pillar 3: Youth Engagement in Promoting a Culture of Transparency*

The Academy will host programs to engage youth -- from middle-school to college age -- on ethics in government and business, with a focus on civics, public budgeting, procurement, and public services that affect youth. When the younger generation understands the value of transparency and ethics in government and business, they reinforce it among peers and begin to demand change in how their government institutions operate.

*Illustrative activities under Pillar 3 might include:* Forums between youth groups and government officials on issues of interest, such as education and employment, creating opportunities for government and educational institutions to provide youth groups a better understanding of how government works, civic education initiatives, competitive challenges for schools and university students to propose and implement ways to hold government accountable, training and classes for academic credit, and an Innovation Lab where youth can develop technology tools that increase transparency in government.

*Pillar 4: Justice for All*

USATA will build on dividends gained through USG work on judicial reform to date, including USAID's Justice for All program that concludes in March 2021. The Academy will nurture an environment of zero-tolerance for corruption throughout the country's judiciary institutions, including removing corrupt individuals from those institutions. Its work will continue USAID's assistance to the High Judicial Council (HJC) and Albanian Courts in such areas as building their capacity for public relations, monitoring and evaluation of the HJC strategy and work plan, leader development training, and legislative analysis. USATA will also expand work with the School of Magistrates (SOM) in areas ranging from expanding its curricula and teaching methods to ensuring ethical norms of conduct.

*Illustrative activities under Pillar 4 might include:* Enhance transparency and credibility of the judiciary through new web portals that provide public access to court calendars, judges' selection criteria and judicial processes, courts workloads and accountability regulations. The Academy could organize study tours and bring international expertise to the HJC, courts, judges, and School of Magistrates, organize exchange programs with similar institutions/schools in other countries, and introduce best practices in organizing trust building campaigns and public hearings through the Institution of People's Advocate. By continuing the work done under USAID's Justice For All project, USATA assistance could help build a HJC and SOM Court Executive Team Leadership curricula and training.

*Across these four pillars*, USATA will house an Innovation Lab that involves citizens, especially youth, in innovative (technology driven) approaches to increase transparency of institutions and reduce corruption. In such a capacity, USATA could serve as an incubator for mobile app creation by hosting tech camps and start up competitions. It will aim to work with local and international tech companies. USAID has global experience working with companies such as Microsoft and CISCO, and the Academy should build on these existing partnerships.

Attendees and clients of the Academy will include judges and judicial institutions, other government personnel, as well as the general public. Participants in USATA events and activities will include both experienced and young emerging leaders from government, the judicial branch, political parties, civil society, private sector entities, high schools and colleges, private sector leaders, and business associations. The Academy will also sponsor events that are open to the public, such as forums between citizens and government representatives; private sector conferences on key issues; development of an advocacy agenda; and Innovation Lab and other youth activities throughout the country. Media coverage and a well-devised strategic communications plan should be included to highlight key issues and the work of the academy, particularly regarding youth.

As a Tirana-based Albanian NGO, USATA will be staffed by international and regional experts from the private sector, academia, judicial institutions, and civil society. Their expertise will cover anti-corruption initiatives, citizen-government engagement, corporate social responsibility, and institutional transparency, including transparency of the courts. It is envisioned that the Academy will also employ a team of local staff.

The Academy will be governed by a Board of Directors that will include notable members from the international community, the GoA, private sector, and civil society. The Board will be responsible for quality control oversight, recruitment of key personnel, resolving challenges, and tracking targets and benchmarks of the Academy's development over time.

Sustainability of the Academy beyond USAID funding is key. Ways that USATA will strive for financial sustainability include introducing fees for workshops, events and technical assistance; engaging with the private sector to sponsor events and co-fund advocacy and youth initiatives; seeking direct support from other donors to partner on initiatives; and advancing the concept that the GoA should plan to finance the technical assistance and events it seeks through the Academy. Opportunities to co-create and co-sponsor activities will be secured as new programs emerge and possibly expand throughout the Balkans. The goal is to move the Academy towards sustainability within a three-year window.