



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Albania: Actors of Protection

Version 3.0

February 2025

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Executive summary

In general, Albania takes reasonable steps to prevent the persecution by operating an effective legal system for the detection, prosecution and punishment of acts constituting persecution and a person is generally able to access the protection.

As such, the state is both willing and able to offer sufficient protection to persons fearing non-state, including 'rogue' state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.

Whilst the Upper Tribunal (UT) of the Immigration and Asylum Chamber and its predecessors have not assessed the availability of protection in general, the UT has held in several reported cases that there is, in general, sufficiency of protection for specific groups, including female victims of domestic violence, victims of extortion, female victims of trafficking, and openly gay men in the capital city, Tirana. In addition, the European Court of Human Rights issued a judgment in May 2024 which found that there was, in general, sufficiency of protection in Albania, including from criminal gangs. Country information at the time of writing indicates that this caselaw continues to be applicable.

The Constitution of Albania and other legislative provisions protect fundamental human rights and penalise criminal activity. The government has implemented measures to prevent persecution by operating an accessible legal system for detecting, prosecuting and punishing criminal acts.

Both the police force and the justice system are functioning. Whilst there have been incidents of corruption and misconduct by authorities, law enforcement agencies are generally effective in maintaining security, combating crime and protecting citizens. Judicial independence is constitutionally guaranteed but can be undermined by executive influence, backlogs and limited resources. The government of Albania has demonstrated, and continues to demonstrate, a commitment to reforming the criminal justice system.

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Assessment

Section updated: 6 February 2025

About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of whether, **in general**:

- Those with a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from non-state actors can seek effective state protection.

Decision makers **must**, however, consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

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1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

1.1 Credibility

- 1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#), the [Asylum Instruction on Sexual identity issues in the asylum claim](#) and [Gender identity issues in the asylum claim](#).
- 1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 1.1.3 Decision makers must also consider making an international biometric data-sharing check (see [Biometric data-sharing process \(Migration 5 biometric data-sharing process\)](#)).
- 1.1.4 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person's claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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1.2 Exclusion

- 1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.
- 1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be

excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).

- 1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention, Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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2. Protection

- 2.1.1 In general, Albania takes reasonable steps to prevent the persecution by operating an effective legal system for the detection, prosecution and punishment of acts constituting persecution and a person is generally able to access the protection.
- 2.1.2 As such, the state is both willing and able to offer sufficient protection to persons fearing non-state, including ‘rogue’ state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 2.1.3 Whilst the Upper Tribunal (UT) of the Immigration and Asylum Chamber and its predecessors have not considered whether sufficient protection is generally available in Albania, the UT has held that the government is willing and able to provide protection in a number of reported cases for several particular groups:
- in the case of [DM](#), heard on 15 March 2004 and promulgated on 1 April 2004, the Immigration Appeal Tribunal (IAT) held that there was sufficiency of protection available to female victims of domestic violence (see paragraphs 16 and 18)
 - in the case of [XM](#), heard on 21 May 2004 and promulgated on 2 July 2004, the IAT held ‘the Government of Albania is both able and willing to provide adequate protection for the Appellant [as a victim of extortion].’ (paragraph 30)
 - in the country guidance (CG) case of [TD and AD](#), heard on 3 June 2015, promulgated on 9 February 2016, which considered risks faced by female victims of trafficking, the UT held ‘... There is in general a Horvath-standard sufficiency of protection, but it will not be effective in every case. When considering whether or not there is a sufficiency of protection for a victim of trafficking her particular circumstances must be considered.’ (paragraph 119d)
 - in the CG case of [BF](#), heard 23 October 2018 and promulgated on 29 March 2019, the UT held, ‘There exists in Tirana a generally effective system of protection should an openly gay man face a risk of harm in

that city or from elsewhere in Albania.’ (paragraph 251(iv))

2.1.4 In the judgment of [A.D. AND OTHERS v. SWEDEN - 22283/21 \(No Article 3 - Prohibition of torture : First Section\) \[2024\] ECHR 402 \(07 May 2024\)](#), the European Court of Human Rights found that there was in general a sufficiency of protection, including protection from criminal gangs:

‘... the Court ... sees no reason to depart from the [Swedish] Migration Court's finding... that it follows from available country information that Albania has a largely functioning judicial system.

‘The Court, however, recognises the challenges faced by the Albanian judicial system, which are described in the country information quoted above, and which were also noted by the Migration Agency and the Migration Court, as well as by the Government. In particular, the Court notes the reports of continuing problems relating to corruption and influence from criminal organisations. Essentially, from all the reports quoted above dating from 2021-2023..., it appears that corruption continues to be a widespread problem in Albania and that further efforts are needed to address this. The report from the Belgian Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless persons also specifically states that Albanian crime groups remain among the most powerful in all of Europe and that criminals from that ecosystem have ties to the police, judicial officials and other people in high positions.... The report from the Swedish Migration Agency further states that the police have a history of corrupt elements facilitating or even participating in criminal activities...

‘Nevertheless, the Court also recognises that Albania, a member of the Council of Europe and a Contracting State to the Convention, has made concerted efforts to address these issues. The reports quoted above describe several reforms which have been introduced and measures taken to improve the capability and integrity of the law enforcement authorities. The reports also note that, although some problems remain, progress has been made. For example, specialised bodies working against corruption and organised crime have been set up and are operational, vetting processes for judges and prosecutors are ongoing, regular police operations against criminal organisations are carried out and there are examples of investigations, arrests and convictions in cases relating to corruption and to organised crime...

‘In the light of these recent reports, which postdate the decisions in the domestic proceedings, the Court considers that the Albanian authorities' capacity to protect their people cannot be regarded as insufficient for the general public in Albania. Nor can it be regarded as generally insufficient for all persons who are targeted by criminal organisations...’ (paragraphs 68 to 71).

2.1.5 The available country information at the time of writing indicates that the caselaw above continues to be applicable (i.e. that protection is generally available) (See [Country information](#) and the following Country Policy and Information Notes: [Albania: Human trafficking](#), [Albania: Blood feuds](#), [Albania: Sexual orientation and gender identity](#) and [Albania: Domestic violence against women](#)).

- 2.1.6 Albania has a set of laws in place, including the penal code, to prevent and punish criminal acts and violations of fundamental rights (see [Legal framework](#)).
- 2.1.7 The State Police are primarily responsible for internal security. The Law on State Police sets out the duties of the police, which include the protection of persons and the prevention of crime, and indicates the principles which the police must follow, including respect for human rights and non-discrimination. There are 260 police officers per 100,000 people (by contrast, there was an average of 245 police officers per 100,000 people in England and Wales in 2024) (see [Crime and punishment statistics](#) and [Police](#)).
- 2.1.8 Whilst instances of corruption, misconduct and inefficiency have been reported, the scale and extent of these issues do not, in general, indicate a police system that is unwilling or unable to offer effective protection. The government has demonstrated, and continues to demonstrate, a commitment to reforming the police force, including by vetting senior officers; by introducing an integrity verification process in December 2023 which is designed to address criminal infiltration and corruption within the police; by encouraging the anonymous reporting of police misconduct; by introducing training in a new faculty of law and investigation; by improving police salaries; and also by establishing and cooperating with the following oversight bodies, which has led to an increase in arrest and investigation of police officers:
- the Directorate of Standards
 - the Agency for Oversight of the Police
 - the Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK)
 - the Ombudsman
- (see [Reform and accountability](#)).
- 2.1.9 In general, Albania has a functioning and accessible judicial system. In the Albania 2024 report, covering the period 15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024, the European Commission (EC) assessed that Albania was ‘moderately prepared’ (for EU membership) in the area of judiciary and fundamental rights, and that it had made ‘some progress’ in this area during the reporting period. The EC explained that it ‘...uses the following assessment scale to describe the state of play: early stage, some level of preparation, moderately prepared, good level of preparation and well advanced. To describe progress made during the reporting period, it uses the following scale: backsliding, no progress, limited progress, some progress, good progress and very good progress...’. By comparison, in the Albania 2023 report, covering the period June 2022 to June 2023, the EC had assessed the area of judiciary and fundamental rights as, ‘... in between some and moderate level of preparation in aligning with the EU acquis and European standards in the area of the judiciary and fundamental rights. Some progress was made in the reporting period.’ The government generally observed due process in connection with arrest and detention. Free legal aid is available. The EC reported that Albania’s legal and institutional framework for victims’ rights was partially aligned with the EU acquis, and noted that a Strategy for

the Protection of Crime Victims, 2024-2030, had been approved, although the budget was currently insufficient (see [Effectiveness](#), [Due process and right to a fair trial](#), [Legal aid](#) and [Victim and witness protection](#)).

- 2.1.10 The judicial system faces several challenges, including inefficiency, inadequate training for judges, corruption and an insufficient number of magistrates. However, the government is actively working to improve efficiency. In addition, the anti-corruption body, SPAK, has made good progress in fighting corruption at the highest levels of government and society; it brought the former attorney general to prosecution and conviction, as well as a powerful organised crime network which allegedly had links with the judiciary and police. Nevertheless, there are also concerns about political interference and partiality in the operation of SPAK. Reporting on the period 15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024, the EC found that Albania was continuing to implement justice reform and the vetting process, which had led to 'significant improvements' in the functioning of the judiciary. The EC also found that 'The continued implementation of vetting has had a positive impact on [the] fight against corruption in the judiciary,' with 98% of cases closed at first instance and 19 cases referred to prosecution for further investigations. Freedom House noted that international governance bodies praised the new judicial vetting system. The EC further found that the independence of higher-level courts was satisfactory, although independence needed to be improved in courts of first instance. The EC stated that the accountability of the judiciary is 'largely satisfactory' and noted that '...the continued good progress in implementing justice reforms have strengthened accountability throughout the justice system' (see [Independence and corruption](#) and [Reform and accountability](#)).
- 2.1.11 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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Country information

About the country information

This section contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment.

The structure and content follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

This document is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

The COI included was published or made publicly available on or before 20 January 2025. Any event taking place or report published after this date will not be included.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

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3. Legal framework

3.1 Basic rights and criminal law

3.1.1 The Constitution set out provisions to protect basic rights and regulate aspects of the state, including the High Courts¹.

3.1.2 Article 15 of the Constitution stated:

‘1. The fundamental human rights and freedoms are indivisible, inalienable, and inviolable and stand at the base of the entire juridical order.

2. The organs of public power, in fulfillment [sic] of their duties, shall respect the fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as contribute to their realization.’²

3.1.3 Article 18 of the Constitution stated:

‘1. All are equal before the law.

2. No one may be unjustly discriminated against for reasons such as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, language, political, religious or philosophical beliefs, economic condition, education, social status, or parentage.

3. No one may be discriminated against for the reasons mentioned in paragraph 2 without a reasonable and objective justification.’³

3.1.4 Article 21 of the Constitution stated, ‘The life of the person is protected by law.’⁴

3.1.5 Article 25 of the Constitution stated, ‘No one may be subjected to torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment.’⁵

¹ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

² Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

³ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁴ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁵ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

- 3.1.6 The Criminal Code provided details of criminal laws in force and the penalties for committing criminal offences⁶.
- 3.1.7 Article 1a of the Criminal Code stated: '**The basis of Criminal Law...**The Criminal Code is based on the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, general principles of international criminal law, and international treaties ratified by the Albanian state. The criminal legislation is composed of this Code and other laws that provide criminal offenses.'⁷
- 3.1.8 Article 1c of the Criminal Code stated: '**Principles of the Criminal Code.** The Criminal Code is based on the constitutional principles of rule of law, equality before the law, and justice in determining culpability and punishment, as well as principles of humanity...'⁸
- 3.1.9 The [Criminal Code of Albania](#) also outlines punishments for criminal acts committed by 'public officials or in public service' including but not limited to abuse of office (Article 248), committing arbitrary acts (Article 250), refusing to take measures to stop an unlawful situation (Article 251), illegal detention (Article 252), denying the equality of citizens (Article 253) and asking for and receiving bribes (Articles 259 and 260)⁹.
- 3.1.10 See relevant sections on [Police](#) and [Judiciary](#) for legislation relating specifically to the functioning of each body.

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4. Crime and punishment statistics

- 4.1.1 The Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) published a report entitled 'Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics, 2023,' which recorded a total of 33,845 criminal offenses in the year 2023, an increase of 1.1% on 2022¹⁰.
- 4.1.2 The INSTAT report further noted that the total number of registered criminal proceedings by the authorities – where a criminal investigation has been started - was 24,095 in 2023, a decrease of 6.3% when compared with 2022. Of the 23,419 completed, 26.5% were terminated (the prosecutor asked the court to dismiss the case), 31% were suspended ('the perpetrator was not recognized' or serious illness of the perpetrator prevents further investigation) and 42.5% were sent to court for trial¹¹.
- 4.1.3 The INSTAT report also stated that at the end of 2023, there were '... 5,169 prisoners, 4.6% more prisoners, compared to 2022. Most prisoners are male persons, who account for 98.5% of the total number of prisoners.'¹²

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5. Police

5.1 Relevant law

⁶ Govt of Albania, [Criminal Code of Albania](#), amended 24 January 2001

⁷ Govt of Albania, [Criminal Code of Albania](#), amended 24 January 2001

⁸ Govt of Albania, [Criminal Code of Albania](#), amended 24 January 2001

⁹ Govt of Albania, [Criminal Code of Albania](#), amended 24 January 2001

¹⁰ INSTAT, [Crime and criminal justice statistics, 2023](#) (p1), 26 April 2024

¹¹ INSTAT, [Crime and criminal justice statistics, 2023](#) (p5,8), 26 April 2024

¹² INSTAT, [Crime and criminal justice statistics, 2023](#) (p7), 26 April 2024

5.1.1 Article 3 of law number 8553 on the State Police of Albania stated:

‘The institutional duties of the Police are

- a. to protect order and public security;
- b. to protect the exercise of freedom and duties of individuals;
- c. to take measures for the prevention and investigation of crimes
- d. to check the state border of the Albanian Republic...’¹³

5.1.2 Article 27 of law number 8553 stated:

‘(The reasonable action)

1. In the course of his duty accomplishment the police employees should show the proper determination for the demanded aim achievement, but should not use the force beyond the reason.

2. In any case in the course of the duty accomplishment the police employees must not be allowed to carry out unlawful executions, physical punishments or inhuman and denigrating treatments and any kind of torture.

3. In case that the police employee is trusted the safeguarding of a person, whose health state demands the medical support, he should ask for the assistance of the medical personnel, and in case of need takes measures to protect the life and the health of the person in question.’¹⁴

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5.2 Structure and size

5.2.1 Article 11 of law number 8553 stated, ‘The Police are organized in central and peripheral level. The General Directorate of the police composes the central level of the Police, while the Regional Police Directorates compose the regional level of the Police.’¹⁵

5.2.2 Article 12 of law number 8553 stated:

‘(General Directorate of the Police)

1. The General Police Directorate is the highest administrative and technical organ within the Police.

2. The General Directorate of the Police is organized in the central directorates of:

- a. Order Police;
- b. Criminal Police,
- c. Border Police,
- d. Traffic Police,
- e. Rapid Intervention Forces and Special ones...’¹⁶

5.2.3 Article 13 of law number 8553 stated:

¹³ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Law No. 8553 of 1999 on State Police](#), 25 November 1999

¹⁴ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Law No. 8553 of 1999 on State Police](#), 25 November 1999

¹⁵ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Law No. 8553 of 1999 on State Police](#), 25 November 1999

¹⁶ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Law No. 8553 of 1999 on State Police](#), 25 November 1999

‘(The Directorates of Region Police)

1. The Directorates of the Region Police are the highest administrative organs of the Police in the local unit of the region.
2. The Directors of Regional Police Directorates have the responsibility of the management, co-operation and control of the police activity within the territorial jurisdiction and depend on General Director.
3. The commissariats, region, sites and police station function inside the Regional Directorates and they are the basic operational units of the Police on the field.
4. Special structures of the Regional Directorates may operate in a direct way within the administrative jurisdiction.¹⁷

5.2.4 In the Albania 2023 Report, covering the year June 2022 to June 2023, the European Commission (EC) stated, ‘The Albanian State Police (ASP) has a total of 11,932 officers, equivalent to 260 officers per 100,000 inhabitants, compared with an EU average of 335.3 per 100,000 inhabitants (Eurostat, 2019-2021).’¹⁸ (The [Albania 2024 Report](#) did not mention the number of police officers.) There are approximately 242 police officers in England and Wales per 100,000 people (using police officer numbers as at 31 March 2024 and the estimated population of England and Wales at mid-2023)^{19 20 21}.

5.2.5 The US Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), ‘a public-private partnership between the U.S. Department of State’s Diplomatic Security Service... and security professionals from U.S. organizations operating abroad [which] share timely security information and maintain strong bonds for the protection of U.S. interests overseas,’²² published an Albania Country Security Report on 24 April 2024 which noted, ‘The Ministry of Interior oversees the Republican Guard and the State Police, which includes the Border and Migration Police. The State Police are primarily responsible for internal security. The Republican Guard protects senior state officials, foreign dignitaries, and certain state properties. ... Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.’²³

5.2.6 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (Global Initiative), an independent civil society organisation which seeks to establish an inclusive global strategy against organized crime²⁴, published a report, based on institutional analysis and interviews with key informants, entitled ‘Integrity and Independence of Criminal Justice Institutions in the Western Balkans’ in November 2024. This report stated:

‘The Albanian state police is a well-structured law enforcement organization

¹⁷ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Law No. 8553 of 1999 on State Police](#), 25 November 1999

¹⁸ EC, [Albania Report 2023](#) (p42), 8 November 2023

¹⁹ UK Home Office, [Police workforce, England and Wales: 31 March 2024](#), updated 24 July 2024

²⁰ ONS, [Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales...](#), released 15 July 2024

²¹ On 31 March 2024, there were [147,746](#) full-time equivalent police officers in England and Wales. The estimated population for England and Wales at mid-2023 was [60,854,727](#).

²² US OSAC, [About Us](#), no date

²³ US OSAC, [Albania Country Security Report](#), 24 April 2024

²⁴ GI, [Catalyzing the Building Blocks of a Global Strategy](#), no date

that is regulated by a relatively comprehensive legal framework and system of internal regulation. There are specialized departments that deal with specific areas of law enforcement, including an anti-corruption sector, yet overall power within the organization is centralized in the hands of the general director. ...The funding of the police is channelled through the interior ministry, yet the annual budget of the state police is lower than the average for EU countries...'²⁵

5.2.7 See [Reform and accountability](#) for further information on this subject.

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5.3 Effectiveness

5.3.1 In the 'Nations in Transit 2024' report, which covered the year 2023, Freedom House stated:

'In 2023, several cases demonstrated how organized crime networks infiltrated law enforcement ..., and how those criminal outfits operated freely outside the law. In January, local news outlets reported that organized crime networks had installed illegal surveillance cameras in several cities to avoid the authorities and to facilitate loansharking operations. Law enforcement agencies only intervened to remove the cameras after the story made international news.'²⁶

5.3.2 In the Albania Country Security Report, published in April 2024, OSAC stated, 'Police now have a visible presence throughout Tirana and other larger Albanian cities, although their response is often delayed due to limited resources and manpower. Police tend to respond more rapidly to reports from members of the international community.'²⁷

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5.4 Corruption and impunity

5.4.1 In the United States State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2023 (USSD Human Rights Report 2023), covering the year 2023, the stated, 'Police corruption was a problem and was most prevalent among front-line police.'²⁸ The source did not provide further detail on the scale or extent of police corruption.

5.4.2 In the 'Nations in Transit 2024' report, covering events of 2023, Freedom House stated:

'... law enforcement agencies are still unable to function independently, and are under the influence of politicians and organized crime networks, as observed in multiple cases during 2023. For example, in July, family members of Rrahman Rraja, a powerful former Socialist MP, brutally attacked a group of citizens in the northern town of Krujë who had complained to the local police about the Rraja family's business activities, going so far as to break some of their victims' limbs. The local police at first failed to act, and only made some arrests after news of the attack went viral

²⁵ GI, [Integrity and independence of criminal justice institutions...](#) (p15), November 2024

²⁶ Freedom House, [Nations in Transit 2024 Country Report](#), 18 April 2024

²⁷ US OSAC, [Albania Country Security Report](#), 24 April 2024

²⁸ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 4), 22 April 2024

online.²⁹

- 5.4.3 Reporting on the same incident in a report published in November 2024, Global Initiative stated, ‘The incident not only resulted in the dismissals of the interior minister, the chief and deputy chief of the Kruje commissariat and significant police reassignments, but also shone a public spotlight on systemic issues within Albanian law enforcement and the legal process. News media later reported that police had been made aware of other criminal complaints regarding the MP’s family but had failed to act...’³⁰
- 5.4.4 In the same report of November 2024, Global Initiative stated, ‘The Directorate of Standards acts as an internal oversight body, while the Agency for Oversight of the Police controls the work of police officers from outside the state police... Donations to the state police are allowed by law. They are noted on a dedicated webpage but more transparency is needed.’³¹
- 5.4.5 The report continued, ‘The process for recruiting new officers and civilian personnel in the state police is regulated by law. However, there is a perception that the process is far from meritocratic and political interference in the hiring and promotion of police officers remains an issue.’³²
- 5.4.6 In the Albania Country Security Report, published in April 2024, OSAC noted, ‘Corruption and lack of resources within the police present continual challenges.’³³
- 5.4.7 In the Albania 2024 Report, covering the period 15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024³⁴, the EC stated that ‘The state police remain highly vulnerable to corruption, and accountability remains weak, despite some anti-corruption efforts.’³⁵
- 5.4.8 See [Reform and accountability](#) for measures in place to tackle corruption and impunity.

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5.5 Human rights violations

- 5.5.1 The USSD Human Rights Report 2023 referred to instances of due process violations. It noted, ‘While the law gave detainees the right to prompt access to an attorney at public expense, the ombudsman reported instances of interrogations taking place without the presence of legal counsel.’³⁶ The source did not provide information on how many instances were reported.
- 5.5.2 The report further noted, ‘In April [2023] a detained Roma man remained in custody in the Tirana Local Police Directorate for almost five days after falling seriously ill before being transferred to a hospital, where he later died.’³⁷

²⁹ Freedom House, [Nations in Transit 2024 Country Report](#), 18 April 2024

³⁰ GI, [Integrity and independence of criminal justice institutions...](#) (p17), November 2024

³¹ GI, [Integrity and independence of criminal justice institutions...](#) (p15), November 2024

³² GI, [Integrity and independence of criminal justice institutions...](#) (p15), November 2024

³³ US OSAC, [Albania Country Security Report](#), 24 April 2024

³⁴ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p3, footnote 3), 30 October 2024

³⁵ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p33), 30 October 2024

³⁶ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 1D), 22 April 2024

³⁷ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 1C), 22 April 2024

- 5.5.3 The report added, 'Police could detain without arresting a suspect for a period not exceeding 10 hours, but the ombudsman reported several procedural irregularities that led to the detention of individuals for longer than 10 hours without being arrested.'³⁸
- 5.5.4 See [Reform and accountability](#) for measures in place to tackle corruption and impunity.

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6. Judiciary

6.1 Relevant law

6.1.1 Article 1 of the Albanian Criminal Procedure Code stated:

'Role of criminal procedural legislation. The main role of criminal procedural legislation is to provide a fair, equal and due legal process, to protect the individuals' freedoms, the rights and the legal interests of the citizens, to contribute to the strengthening of the rule of law and to the application of the Constitution and laws ruling the country.'³⁹

6.1.2 Article 1/b of the Albanian Criminal Procedure Code stated

'Duties of the criminal legislation. The criminal legislation of the Republic of Albania protects the independence of the state, and all its territory, dignity of man, his rights and freedoms, constitutional order, property, environment, coexistence and understanding of Albanians with national minorities, and religious coexistence from criminal offenses and their prevention.'⁴⁰

6.1.3 Article 1/c of the Albanian Criminal Procedure Code stated:

'Principles of the Criminal Code. The Criminal Code is based on the constitutional principles of rule of law, equality before the law, and justice in determining culpability and punishment, as well as principles of humanity...'⁴¹

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6.2 Structure and size

6.2.1 Article 135 of the Constitution stated, 'The judicial power is exercised by the High Court, as well as by the courts of appeal and courts of first instance, which are established by law...'⁴²

6.2.1 Article 12 of the Albanian Criminal Procedure Code stated:

'Criminal Courts. The criminal justice is provided by:

- a) the first instance criminal courts;
- b) the courts of appeal;
- c) the High Court'⁴³

6.2.2 Article 13 of the Criminal Procedure Code stated:

³⁸ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 1D), 22 April 2024

³⁹ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Criminal Procedure Code](#), 1 August 1995

⁴⁰ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Criminal Procedure Code](#), 1 August 1995

⁴¹ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Criminal Procedure Code](#), 1 August 1995

⁴² Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁴³ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Criminal Procedure Code](#), 1 August 1995

‘First instance criminal courts and their composition.

1. Criminal offences are tried, in the first instance, by the district and military courts, in panel, in conformity to the rules provided by this code.

2. The district and the military courts try in panel consisting of three judges, when crimes are involved and, by a judge and two assistant judges when criminal contravention are involved. The trial for juveniles is held by judges who are qualified for these trials and who has been especially and additionally assigned this task.’⁴⁴

6.2.3 Article 14 of the Criminal Procedure Code stated:

‘The courts of appeal and their composition. The civil court of appeal tries, in second instance, by three judges, the cases tried by the district courts.

‘2. The military court of appeal tries, in the second instance, by three judges, the cases tried by the military courts.’⁴⁵

6.2.4 The European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), the aim of which is ‘... the improvement of the efficiency and functioning of justice in the member States, and the development of the implementation of the instruments adopted by the Council of Europe to this end,’⁴⁶ prepared a report for the attention of the EC using data collected in 2023 which noted the number of courts in Albania: ‘In Albania, a reform concerning the reorganisation of the country’s courts (New Judicial Map) was finalised in 2023. This reorganization led to the closure of 18 courts, leaving 13 courts of first instance of general jurisdiction, along with one Court of Appeal of General Jurisdiction and two administrative courts of first instance. The overall number of courts changed from 38 to 20.’⁴⁷

6.2.5 CEPEJ reported on the locations of courts, stating:

‘According to the new judicial map the number of courts – geographic locations is 14. ...The first or otherwise high category of courts is located in Tirana. This includes The High Court, Court of Appeal of General Jurisdiction, Special Court of Appeal for Corruption and Organized Crime, The Administrative Court of Appeal, Court of First Instance of the General Jurisdiction of Tirana, Special Court of First Instance for Corruption and Organized Crime, Administrative Court of First Instance of Tirana.

‘The second or otherwise middle category, includes courts of first instance of the general jurisdiction of the districts Durrës, Elbasan, Fier, Korçë, Shkodër, Vlorë, Berat, Lezhë; as well as the Administrative Court of First Instance of Lushnje.

‘The third or lower category of courts, includes courts of first instance of the general jurisdiction of the districts Dibër, Gjirokastër, Kukës, Sarandë.’⁴⁸

6.2.6 CEPEJ also reported on the budget involved:

⁴⁴ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Criminal Procedure Code](#), 1 August 1995

⁴⁵ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Criminal Procedure Code](#), 1 August 1995

⁴⁶ CEPEJ, [About the European Commission for the efficiency of justice](#), no date

⁴⁷ CEPEJ, [... Beneficiary Profile - Albania](#) (Exec summary), generated on 9 July 2024

⁴⁸ CEPEJ, [... Beneficiary Profile - Albania](#) (Exec summary), generated on 9 July 2024

'In 2023, Albania spent 730 703 726 € [£618,151,867.45⁴⁹] as its implemented Judicial System budget, reflecting a 69,3% increase from 2022. Thus, it spent 26,7 € [£22.58⁵⁰] per inhabitant, which is still less than the Western Balkans (WB) average of 45,2 € [£38.23⁵¹]. Albania continues to have the lowest budget per inhabitant in the region and the lowest budget as a percentage of GDP.

'However, over the five-year period from 2019 to 2022, Albania significantly increased its budget allocation for courts, rising from 7,5 € [£6.34⁵²] per inhabitant in 2019 to 15,1 € [£12.78⁵³] in 2022. This rise is primarily due to the increase in salaries for court and prosecutor staff. Additionally, following the legal aid reform implemented in 2018, Albania has directed substantially more funds towards legal aid, marking a 619% increase from 2019 to 2023. Also, part of the increase is due to a change in exchange rate in 2023.⁵⁴

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6.3 Effectiveness

6.3.1 The USSD Human Rights Report 2023 noted that limited resources impacted negatively on the judiciary's effectiveness, but did provide any detail⁵⁵.

6.3.2 In the 'Nations in Transit 2024' report, covering the year 2023, Freedom House stated:

'Civic sector and political pressure on the judicial vetting process has increased as delays in the justice system have caused legal, social, economic, and political challenges in Albania. Access to justice has worsened, with experts claiming it now takes over three and a half years to commence or complete proceedings due to a lack of magistrates. Since the 2017 reform, the judicial system has failed to attract new recruits and is on the verge of collapse. While 26 new magistrates will graduate in 2023, the prospective number is insufficient to run the system at full capacity for another five years, further eroding public trust in Albania's justice system.'⁵⁶

6.3.3 In the report prepared for the attention of the EC using data collected in 2023, CEPEJ used the following indicators to measure court performance:

- 'Clearance Rate... is the ratio obtained by dividing the number of resolved cases by the number of incoming cases in a given period, expressed as a percentage. It demonstrates how the court or the judicial system is coping with the in-flow of cases and allows comparison between systems regardless of their differences and individual characteristics. Its key value is 100%. A value below 100% means that the courts were not able to solve all the cases they received and, as a consequence, the number of pending cases increases. A CR above

⁴⁹ [Xe Currency Converter](#), 1 EUR = 0.845779 GBP, 20 January 2025

⁵⁰ [Xe Currency Converter](#), 1 EUR = 0.845880 GBP, 20 January 2025

⁵¹ [Xe Currency Converter](#), 1 EUR = 0.845927 GBP, 20 January 2025

⁵² [Xe Currency Converter](#), 1 EUR = 0.845982 GBP, 20 January 2025

⁵³ [Xe Currency Converter](#), 1 EUR = 0.846137 GBP, 20 January 2025

⁵⁴ CEPEJ, [... Beneficiary Profile - Albania](#) (Exec summary), generated on 9 July 2024

⁵⁵ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 1E), 22 April 2024

⁵⁶ Freedom House, [Nations in Transit 2024 Country Report](#), 18 April 2024

100% means that the courts have resolved more cases than they received (they have resolved all the incoming cases and part of the pending cases) and, as a consequence, the number of pending cases decreases.⁵⁷

- 'Disposition Time is the indicator that calculates time necessary for a pending case to be resolved and estimates the lengths of proceedings in days. It is a ratio between the pending cases at the end of the period and the resolved cases within the same period, multiplied by 365 days. More pending than resolved cases will lead to a DT higher than 365 days (one year) and vice versa.'⁵⁸

Using the definitions above, CEPEJ reported:

'In Albania, the vetting procedure affected not only the number of professionals but also the number of resolved cases (because of the lower number of judges) and, consequently, the Clearance Rate (CR) and the Disposition Time (DT) (especially in the second and third instances where many judges were dismissed or voluntarily retired). Thus, judges were not able to cope with the influx of cases, and the CR was always below 100% every year, particularly in second instance.

'The DT was extremely high in 2020, especially for civil and commercial litigious cases (1,742 days in the second instance) and for administrative cases (4,485 days in the second instance). In 2021 the situation improved, and the DT decreased for all categories of cases in the first and second instances, except for administrative cases in the second instance. In particular, DT for civil and commercial litigious cases changed from 366 days to 279 days, while for criminal law cases, it decreased from 294 days to 67 days, lower than in 2018.

'However, in 2022 and 2023 the efficiency deteriorated again, with an increase in the disposition time for all categories of cases in the two instances. However, an exception can be seen in administrative cases. In 2023, the disposition time for these cases decreased significantly, from 8,680 days in 2022 to 5,326 days. This improvement was driven by the increased number of resolved cases, which resulted from a 49% rise in the number of judges.'⁵⁹

6.3.4 In the Albania 2024 Report, covering the period 15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024⁶⁰, the EC also reported on efficiency of the judiciary:

'The justice system's efficiency needs to be improved. Efficiency continued to be negatively affected by challenges including the increased length of proceedings and a high backlog of cases, notably at the Court of Appeal and the Administrative Appeal Court. The annual intake of magistrates by the School of Magistrates is still insufficient. The codes of procedure are hampered by formalities and do not provide adequate tools to address the high backlog. Serious delays are experienced with the legal deadlines on publishing the reasoned decisions by courts. In the reporting period, the HJC

⁵⁷ CEPEJ, [... Beneficiary Profile - Albania](#) (Exec Summary, footnote), generated on 9 July 2024

⁵⁸ CEPEJ, [... Beneficiary Profile - Albania](#) (Exec Summary, footnote), generated on 9 July 2024

⁵⁹ CEPEJ, [... Beneficiary Profile - Albania](#) (Efficiency in Albania in 2023), generated on 9 July 2024

⁶⁰ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p3, footnote 3), 30 October 2024

established a working group on efficiency, which has put forward a draft strategic document and legislative proposals. These proposals aim to improve efficiency and are also being considered by Parliament. However, the consistency of these legal initiatives with the general principles of justice reform and European standards has yet to be fully ensured.⁶¹

6.3.5 The EC further stated that Albania was ‘moderately prepared’ (for EU membership) in the area of judiciary and fundamental rights, and that it had made ‘some progress’ in this area during the reporting period (15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024). The EC explained that it ‘...uses the following assessment scale to describe the state of play: early stage, some level of preparation, moderately prepared, good level of preparation and well advanced. To describe progress made during the reporting period, it uses the following scale: backsliding, no progress, limited progress, some progress, good progress and very good progress. Where appropriate, interim steps have also been used.’⁶²

6.3.6 The report continued:

‘The quality of justice needs to be improved. Even though the comprehensive justice reform has seen some progress. Challenges persist, in particular, with: (i) the quality of initial and continuous training; (ii) the consistency of case law; (iii) the high number of judicial vacancies and insufficient amount of court staff; (iv) the lack of a modern integrated electronic case management system in courts and prosecution offices; (v) the quality of indictments and decisions; (vi) the quality of court infrastructure, including the security of court buildings; and (vii) the poor consistency and reliability of statistical data.’⁶³

6.3.7 The same report stated:

‘Further improvements to the judicial training system are still necessary. There was no specific progress in the performance of the School of Magistrates’ comprehensive revision of the annual entry exam, the review of initial and continuous training curricula, and the quality and integrity of its staff. The fact that magistrates who have been dismissed through vetting are not prohibited from taking up positions of training staff remains a concern. The 2024 annual entry exam was marred by allegations of irregularities due to reported technical problems. The initial and continuous training of judges does not ensure their further specialisation.’⁶⁴

6.3.8 The same report observed that:

‘The HJC [High Judicial Council] and the HPC [High Prosecutorial Council] are in place. Overall, the efficiency of the Councils in appointing, promoting, transferring and evaluating magistrates is very low, which affects judicial quality and efficiency at all levels... The HPC and the HJC do not have internal rules of procedure on conflicts of interest, which has led to conflicts of interest in practice. Attempts by the HPC to reinstate magistrates who

⁶¹ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p31), 30 October 2024

⁶² EC, [Albania 2024 report](#) (p3, footnote 3), 30 October 2024

⁶³ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p30), 30 October 2024

⁶⁴ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p30-31), 30 October 2024

have been vetted out with a final dismissal decision is a serious concern.⁶⁵

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6.4 Independence and corruption

6.4.1 Article 145 of the Constitution stated:

‘1. Judges are independent and subject only to the Constitution and the laws.

2. If judges believe that a law is unconstitutional, they do not apply it. In this case, they suspend the proceedings and send the question to the Constitutional Court. Decisions of the Constitutional Court are binding on all courts.

3. Interference in the activity of the courts or of the judges entails liability according to law.’⁶⁶

6.4.2 Article 3 of the Albanian Criminal Procedure Code stated:

‘Independence of the court.

‘1. The court is independent and renders decisions in conformity to the law.

‘2. The court renders decisions upon evidence examined and revealed in the hearing’⁶⁷

6.4.3 The USSD Human Rights Report 2023, which covered events of 2023, stated, ‘Although the constitution provided for an independent judiciary, political pressure, intimidation... [and] corruption... prevented the judiciary from functioning fully, independently, and efficiently. ... The ombudsman assessed the judiciary made progress toward establishing a more independent system but added more resources were needed.’⁶⁸ The report did not provide specific details on the extent to which these factors impacted the judiciary’s effectiveness.

6.4.4 In the ‘Nations in Transit 2024’ report, which covered events of 2023, Freedom House reported on the case of Rrahman Rraja, whom it described as a ‘powerful former Socialist MP’ and whose family members attacked and injured a group of people who had complained to the police about them. Freedom House stated, ‘...the prosecutor’s office only brought the lowest possible charges against the attackers, evidently due to Rraja’s strong local political influence.’⁶⁹

6.4.5 In the ‘Freedom in the World 2024’ report, covering events of 2023, Freedom House stated, ‘Corruption is pervasive, and the European Union (EU) has repeatedly called for rigorous implementation of antigraft measures, particularly for corruption within the judiciary.’⁷⁰

6.4.6 In the Albania 2024 Report, which covered the period 15 June 2023 to 1

⁶⁵ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p28), 30 October 2024

⁶⁶ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁶⁷ Govt of Albania, [Albania: Criminal Procedure Code](#), 1 August 1995

⁶⁸ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 1E), 22 April 2024

⁶⁹ Freedom House, [Nations in Transit 2024 Country Report](#), 18 April 2024

⁷⁰ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024](#), 29 February 2024

September 2024⁷¹, the EC stated, ‘Concerns remain about attempted political interference and pressure on the judicial system and shortcomings in the merit-based appointments of non-magistrate members of the High Judicial Council (HJC) and the High Prosecutorial Council (HPC) and their integrity.’⁷²

6.4.7 The report continued:

‘The independence and impartiality of the judiciary is satisfactory in the higher-level courts, including courts of appeal, and needs to be improved in the courts of first instance. Concerns remain about attempted interference and pressure on the judicial system from public officials and politicians. During the reporting period, two serious incidents were recorded against magistrates, who were promptly placed under protection. Several public political attacks, inappropriate language and threats have been directed at magistrates. The self-governing institutions have effectively reacted to such incidents.’⁷³

6.4.8 See [Reform and accountability](#) for measures in place to tackle corruption and impunity.

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6.5 Due process and right to a fair trial

6.5.1 Article 27 of the [Constitution](#) stated, ‘No one’s liberty may be taken away except in the cases and according to the procedures provided by law.’ The Article also set out circumstances when a person’s liberty may be limited⁷⁴.

6.5.2 Article 28 of the [Constitution](#) set out the rights of a person whose liberty has been taken away:

‘1. Everyone whose liberty has been taken away has the right to be notified immediately, in a language that he understands, of the reasons for this measure, as well as the accusation made against him...

‘2. The person whose liberty has been taken away ... must be brought within 48 hours before a judge, who shall decide upon his pre-sentence detention or release not later than 48 hours from the moment he receives the documents for review.

‘3. A person in pre-sentence detention has the right to appeal the judge’s decision. He has the right to be tried within a reasonable period of time or to be released on bail pursuant to law...

‘4...

‘5. Every person whose liberty was taken away pursuant to article 27 has the right to humane treatment and respect for his dignity.’⁷⁵

6.5.3 Article 30 of the [Constitution](#) stated, ‘Everyone is deemed innocent so long

⁷¹ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p3, footnote 3), 30 October 2024

⁷² EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p5), 30 October 2024

⁷³ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p28), 30 October 2024

⁷⁴ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁷⁵ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

as his guilt is not proven by final judicial decision.⁷⁶

- 6.5.4 Article 31 of the [Constitution](#) set out the rights of defendants in criminal proceedings⁷⁷.
- 6.5.5 Article 32 of the [Constitution](#) stated:
'1. No one may be compelled to testify against himself or his family or to confess his guilt...'⁷⁸
- 6.5.6 Article 33 of the [Constitution](#) stated:
'1. Everyone has the right to be heard before being sentenced...'⁷⁹
- 6.5.7 Article 34 of the [Constitution](#) concerned double jeopardy⁸⁰.
- 6.5.8 Article 42 of the [Constitution](#) stated:
'1. The liberty, property, and rights recognized in the Constitution and by law may not be infringed without due process.
'2. Everyone, to protect his constitutional and legal rights, freedoms, and interests, or in the case of charges against him, has the right to a fair and public trial, within a reasonable time, by an independent and impartial court specified by law.'⁸¹
- 6.5.9 Article 43 of the [Constitution](#) stated 'Everyone has the right to appeal a judicial decision to a higher court, except when the Constitution provides otherwise.'⁸²
- 6.5.10 The Criminal Code included the following Article:
- [Article 252- Illegal detention](#)
- 6.5.11 The Albanian Criminal Procedure Code included the following articles:
- [Article 4 - Presumption of innocence](#)
 - [Article 6 - Provision of defence](#)
 - [Article 8 - Use of the Albanian language](#)
- 6.5.12 The USSD Human Rights Report 2023, covering the year 2023, stated, 'The law and constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.'⁸³
- 6.5.13 The report further noted, 'Citizens complained of lack of transparency in investigations, significant delays in proceedings, and unfair court decisions.'⁸⁴

⁷⁶ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁷⁷ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁷⁸ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁷⁹ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁸⁰ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁸¹ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁸² Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

⁸³ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 1C), 22 April 2024

⁸⁴ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 1E), 22 April 2024

6.5.14 The ‘Nations in Transit 2024’ report by Freedom House, covering the year 2023, stated, ‘Constitutional guarantees of due process are upheld inconsistently. Trial procedures can be affected by corruption and are sometimes closed to the public.’⁸⁵

6.5.15 In the Albania 2024 Report, covering the period 15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024⁸⁶, the EC stated:

‘Albania’s legal and institutional framework for procedural rights and victims’ rights is partially aligned with the EU acquis. ... A new cross-cutting Strategy for the Protection of Crime Victims 2024-2030 was approved through a decision of the Council of Ministers.

‘However, shortcomings remain regarding sufficient budget and coordination. There was no progress in addressing remaining issues related to the procedural rights of suspects and accused persons. On the right to information in criminal proceedings, the refusal or failure to grant access to a case file should be subject to judicial review, ensuring effective remedies. are available. On access to a lawyer, adequate facilities for confidential client-lawyer consultations need to be provided by courts, prosecutors’ offices and the police. On the presumption of innocence, there should be a clear legal ban on public authorities making public references to guilt in public statements and in judicial decisions, other than those on guilt. Moreover, redress should be ensured in the event of a breach of such prohibition.’⁸⁷

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6.6 Legal aid

6.6.1 In the ‘Nations in Transit 2024’ report, which covered events of 2023, Freedom House stated, ‘Although the state is supposed to offer free legal aid, legal counsel is not always provided to those who cannot afford their own. A number of local NGOs offer free legal aid for those affected.’⁸⁸

6.6.2 In the report prepared for the attention of the EC using data collected in 2023, CEPEJ noted:

‘... after the legal aid law came into force [in 2018], the legal aid budget was increased substantially to provide legal advice and free legal representation in courts. The Law on Legal Aid entered into force on 1st June 2018. It foresees a comprehensive system of Primary Legal Aid (out of court support), Secondary Legal Aid (representation by an advocate in a court procedure), and exemption from court fees and court costs. The providers of primary legal aid are specially trained officers in primary legal aid service centres, NPOs [not-for-profit organisations], and Legal clinics. This led to a significant increase in the number of cases granted with legal aid, from 270 cases in 2019 to 7,737 cases in 2023. The number of cases per 100 inhabitants (0.31) became higher than the WB [Western Balkans] median (0.19). However, the number of cases is slightly decreasing since

⁸⁵ Freedom House, [Nations in Transit 2024 Country Report](#), 18 April 2024

⁸⁶ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p3, footnote 3), 30 October 2024

⁸⁷ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p41), 30 October 2024

⁸⁸ Freedom House, [Nations in Transit 2024 Country Report](#), 18 April 2024

2021.⁸⁹

6.6.3 In an undated article, UN Development Programme (UNDP) reported on a project called Expanding Free Legal Aid Services to Women and Men in Albania (EFLAS), with which the Ministry of Justice, the People's Advocate (Ombudsman), the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and various civil society organizations were involved. The project ran from 2019 until October 2024, but UNDP reported on the achievements made by 2023, which included the following:

- 'Strengthening the Legal and Policy Framework: Enhancing the implementation and monitoring of Free Legal Aid (FLA) services through a robust legal and policy framework...
- 'Expanding Free Legal Aid Services: Expanding Free Legal Aid to 12 regions of Albania, including Durres, Fier, Pogradec, Dibra, Shkodra, Lezha, Gjirokastra, Vlora, Elbasan, Berat, Kukës, and Korça.
- 'Assisting Free Legal Aid Centers: Supporting 12 free legal aid centers in delivering primary legal aid services to 8,307 individuals, including 4,381 women and girls. Key issues addressed include divorce, protection orders, birth registrations, alimony benefits, pension benefits, work compensation, immigration criminal law, social benefits, inheritance cases, and property/land rights, with significant support provided to women and girls...
- 'Reaching Vulnerable Citizens: Providing legal information and support to 24,612 vulnerable citizens regarding their rights, access to legal aid, and entitlements...
- 'Training Free Legal Aid Providers: Enhancing the capabilities of 478 advocates, 9 magistrates, and 41 free legal aid officials through training based on two specific modules developed with the Free Legal Aid Directorate, the Albanian School of Public Administration, and the Chamber of Advocates of Albania. Special attention has been given to addressing gender-based discrimination and the specific needs of women clients.⁹⁰

6.6.4 In the Albania 2024 Report, which covered the period 15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024⁹¹, the EC stated that 'The legal framework for legal aid is comprehensive, and primary and secondary legal aid are delivered at central and local levels.'⁹²

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6.7 Victim and witness protection

6.7.1 Based on work carried out between June 2023 and March 2024⁹³, the November 2024 Global Initiative report stated, 'Protecting the principles of presumed innocence and the right to private life, both in relation to the

⁸⁹ CEPEJ, [... Beneficiary Profile - Albania](#) (Exec summary), generated on 9 July 2024

⁹⁰ UNDP, [Expanding Free Legal Aid Services to Women and Men in Albania](#), no date

⁹¹ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p3, footnote 3), 30 October 2024

⁹² EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p41), 30 October 2024

⁹³ GI, [Integrity and independence of criminal justice institutions...](#) (p4), November 2024

person under investigation and the victim of the crime, should be fundamental for the justice system and the media in realizing the public's right to information. But, in practice, cases show quite the opposite.⁹⁴

- 6.7.2 The EC's Albania 2024 Report, which covered the period 15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024⁹⁵, stated:

'Albania's legal and institutional framework for procedural rights and victims' rights is partially aligned with the EU acquis. ... A new cross-cutting Strategy for the Protection of Crime Victims 2024-2030 was approved through a decision of the Council of Ministers. However, shortcomings remain regarding sufficient budget and coordination... Albania is not aligned with the acquis on victims' rights. The Government has approved the national Strategy for "Victim protection", which also sets clear timelines for alignment with the EU acquis. Budgetary support for victims and victim compensation are still largely insufficient and needs to be enhanced.'⁹⁶

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7. Reform and accountability

7.1 Corruption

- 7.1.1 The EC's Albania 2024 Report, covering the period 15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024, stated that an Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2024-2030 and an action plan for 2024-2026 were due to be adopted at the end of 2024⁹⁷.

- 7.1.2 The report added:

'The legal framework for the fight against corruption is largely in place, but preventive measures and law enforcement need to be improved institutional roles and coordination for prevention. The framework needs to be revised to extend the powers of the SPAK [Specialised Structure for Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime⁹⁸] courts to matters related to executing their judgments... Albania needs to promptly and effectively address the outstanding recommendations of the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).'⁹⁹

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7.2 Judicial reform: Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK)

- 7.2.1 On 19 September 2023, University College London (UCL) published an article by Dr Andi Hoxhaj, a lecturer in law at UCL¹⁰⁰, which stated:

'Albania may be struggling with high levels of corruption at all levels of society, but the country is taking a new approach to tackling this crime with the introduction of a special anti-corruption body, known as Spak.

'Spak is made up of a special prosecution office, the national bureau of investigation, and special courts dealing with corruption and organised

⁹⁴ GI, [Integrity and independence of criminal justice institutions...](#) (p46), November 2024

⁹⁵ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p3, footnote 3), 30 October 2024

⁹⁶ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p41), 30 October 2024

⁹⁷ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p34), 30 October 2024

⁹⁸ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p6), 30 October 2024

⁹⁹ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p34), 30 October 2024

¹⁰⁰ UCL, [Andi Hoxhaj](#), no date

crime. Its structure was established as part of Albania's judicial reform, and adopted by its parliament in 2016, giving it constitutional powers to fight corruption and organised crime at the highest levels of government and society...

'Head prosecutor Altin Dumani only took office in December 2022, but work had started before he arrived. Spak has already confiscated assets and cash worth more than £100 million in the three years to May 2023. Prior to the establishment of Spak, there were few cases of corruption being prosecuted, because people could avoid charges by paying a bribe.

'Spak takes on cases involving corruption of values over ALL50,000 (£424.55¹⁰¹) for cases involving public officials, and ALL800,000 (£6,786.60¹⁰²) for corruption related to public procurement contracts.

'Spak is now establishing a track record in charging influential people for abusing their public office and participating in corruption. In its latest investigation which concluded in August 2023, several ministry of health officials, including the deputy minister, were charged with alleged misuse of around £100m to buy medical equipment.

'The most high-profile cases that Spak has pursued to final conviction involve the former attorney general Adriatik Llalla, who received two years in prison for hiding his wealth, and former minister of interior Saimir Tahiri, who received three years and four months in prison for abuses of power. A number of high-profile cases, including former mayors, ministers and a deputy prime minister are all currently awaiting trial.'¹⁰³

7.2.2 In the 'Nations in Transit 2024' report, covering the year 2023, Freedom House stated:

'SPAK, in collaboration with other law enforcement agencies, was able to bring down a powerful organized crime network operating in the cities of Tirana, Shkodra, and Kukës in July 2023, arresting police officers, prosecutors, and businesspeople for involvement with the criminal group. A similar powerful organized crime network operating in the cities of Elbasan and Lushnjë, which allegedly had free reign due to its close ties with law enforcement and the judiciary, was brought down by SPAK in September 2023. SPAK prosecutors have been threatened with their lives since the crackdown on these organized crime networks, and local observers have called for increased security for the SPAK's magistrates.'¹⁰⁴

7.2.3 In the Human Rights Report 2023, the USSD noted, 'The Special Prosecution Office (SPO) of SPAK made several high-level arrests, including for corruption.'¹⁰⁵

7.2.4 In the report of November 2024, Global Initiative stated, 'The Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK) has scope to deal with the corruption of high-level officials, including those in the state police, and the ombudsman office can refer abuse of power cases to the prosecution. These control

¹⁰¹ [Xe Currency Converter](#), 1 ALL = 0.00848074 GBP, 22 November 2024

¹⁰² [Xe Currency Converter](#), 1 ALL = 0.00848697 GBP, 22 November 2024

¹⁰³ UCL, [...how one of the most corrupt countries in Europe is tackling crime](#), 19 September 2023

¹⁰⁴ Freedom House, [Nations in Transit 2024 Country Report](#), 18 April 2024

¹⁰⁵ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 4), 22 April 2024

mechanisms operate under a sound legal framework, but political interference remains a concern...'¹⁰⁶

7.2.5 In the Albania 2024 Report, the EC noted:

'The Specialised Structure for Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK) has continued to produce good results by further advancing in the prosecution and investigation of complex anti-corruption cases, including those involving high-level politicians and officials, as well as cases involving the protection of EU financial interests. SPAK's capacity in financial investigations has increased and the systematic use of financial investigations and asset confiscations has improved. Overall, corruption remains a serious concern and preventive efforts have had a limited impact. The adoption of a broad criminal amnesty law led to 40 individuals convicted by SPAK courts and being fully pardoned and 65 others having their sentence reduced, which raises concerns...'¹⁰⁷

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7.3 **Judicial reform: additional measures**

7.3.1 In the Human Rights Report 2023, covering the year 2023, the USSD noted, 'The government continued to implement an internationally monitored process to vet judges and prosecutors, and to dismiss those with unexplained wealth or ties to organized crime.'¹⁰⁸

7.3.2 The 'Freedom in the World 2024' report by Freedom House, covering the year 2023, stated:

'The Assembly adopted a number of amendments in 2021 to strengthen judicial efficiency, winning praise from international governance bodies for new judicial vetting mechanisms. Although there have been setbacks such as administrative and other delays, the vetting process has continued to win praise as contributing to the fight against corruption in the judiciary. According to Albania's Independent Qualification Commission, 245 judges and prosecutors were dismissed as a result of the vetting process between 2018 and the end of 2023.

'Score Change: The score improved from 2 to 3 because an ongoing judicial vetting process, enabled by internationally endorsed legal reforms, has resulted in the removal of scores of judges for suspected corruption in recent years.'¹⁰⁹

7.3.3 In the Albania 2024 Report, covering the period 15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024¹¹⁰, the EC stated:

'Albania continued implementing the justice reform and the vetting process, which led to significant improvements in the functioning of the judiciary that must be maintained. The end of the vetting process in first instance is imminent, which is a major milestone with 11 remaining cases out of 805 as of 3 October 2024... The new judicial map was implemented, but there are

¹⁰⁶ GI, [Integrity and independence of criminal justice institutions...](#) (p15), November 2024

¹⁰⁷ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p6), 30 October 2024

¹⁰⁸ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 1E), 22 April 2024

¹⁰⁹ Freedom House, [Albania: Freedom in the World 2024 Country Report](#), 29 February 2024

¹¹⁰ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p3, footnote 3), 30 October 2024

still challenges with the quality and efficiency of justice. Some preparatory acts were adopted on the roll-out of an integrated case management system, but the necessary budget allocations are lacking, especially for the court component.¹¹¹

7.3.4 In the same report, the EC continued:

‘The continued implementation of vetting has had a positive impact on fight against corruption in the judiciary. The end of vetting of all judges and prosecutors is imminent at first instance with 794 cases closed out of 805 (98% of the total). Another direct outcome of vetting was registered in September 2024, as the IQC [Independent Qualification Commission] referred 19 vetting cases with prima facie criminal elements to prosecution for further investigations...’¹¹²

7.3.5 The report added, ‘Implementation of the Cross-cutting Justice Strategy 2021-2025 still needs to be improved. The quality of the strategy and its monitoring are generally satisfactory. However, the implementation rate and reporting capacity of the competent judicial institutions are still low. In addition, the quality of statistical data remains poor.’¹¹³

7.3.6 The report further noted:

‘Despite strong legal safeguards, merit-based appointments and career development are weakened in practice by the HPC’s [High Prosecutorial Council’s] failure to evaluate prosecutors and the HJC’s [High Judicial Council’s] slow pace of qualitative evaluations for judges. The continued use of transfers as an alternative to promotions is a serious concern. The limited number of judges at several courts, coupled with the lack of an integrated case management system, leads to a worrying situation where the random allocation of cases is not widely applied in courts and is not applied at all in prosecutors’ offices.’¹¹⁴

7.3.7 The EC also reported, ‘The accountability of the judiciary is largely satisfactory. The legislative framework and rules on the accountability of judges are fully aligned with European standards. The advancement of the comprehensive transitional re-evaluation (vetting) of all judges and prosecutors, the satisfactory operation of the HJI and the continued good progress in implementing justice reforms have strengthened accountability throughout the justice system.’¹¹⁵

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7.4 Police reform

7.4.1 In the Human Rights Report 2023, the USSD stated:

‘The government made greater efforts to address police impunity. Compared with all of 2022, in the first 10 months of the year [2023], the Police Oversight Agency (POA) opened more criminal cases (from three to 20); referred more cases for disciplinary action to the Albanian State Police (from

¹¹¹ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p5), 30 October 2024

¹¹² EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p6), 30 October 2024

¹¹³ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p28), 30 October 2024

¹¹⁴ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p29), 30 October 2024

¹¹⁵ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p29), 30 October 2024

18 to 68); and made more arrests or detentions (42 to 166). POA conducted four investigations into complaints of violence by police, disciplining three police officers and referring another to prosecution. Citizens reported two other cases involving 15 police officers to the prosecution; investigations in both cases were underway as of September.¹¹⁶

- 7.4.2 On 25 June 2024, *Gazeta Tema*, a ‘politically unrelated daily newspaper published in Tirana,’¹¹⁷ published an article stating:

‘Albania has cracked down on misconduct within its State Police, resulting in the arrest of 48 officers over the past six months. Allegations of illegal activities, law violations, corruption, and unprofessional behavior have prompted swift action from authorities.

‘In the first 25 days of this month alone, 12 officers have been arrested, one suspended, and eight others are under investigation. This surge represents a 55% increase in arrests compared to the same period last year, reflecting heightened efforts by the Police Monitoring Agency to tackle violations within law enforcement.

‘The Ministry of Internal Affairs has emphasized the importance of purging misconduct from the State Police, supported by international partners. The campaign encourages anonymous reporting, underscoring the seriousness with which authorities are addressing these issues...’¹¹⁸

- 7.4.3 On 26 July 2024, *Gazeta Tema* reported:

‘A new draft law proposing significant reforms to the State Police was the focal point of discussion in today’s plenary session in Tirana...

‘Minister Balla highlighted that the new law addresses critical issues within the State Police, such as creating the necessary capacities and strengthening organizational structures. “We believe we have found the right methods and solutions to prevent conflicts of interest and eliminate any corrupt activities within the force,” he stated.

‘One of the law’s most ambitious initiatives is the integration of artificial intelligence across 20 cities and along the entire Albanian coastline. This project aims to equip these areas with modern, intelligent camera systems. According to Balla, these AI-driven systems will replace the “subjective eye” of police officers, ensuring comprehensive territorial control 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

‘Balla acknowledged the challenges within the police force, noting that ... the number of police officers is relatively small ... He also addressed internal issues, admitting that while the majority of officers are dedicated and respected, there are some who betray the uniform daily.

‘The draft law also proposes changes in the appointment process for police chiefs. Instead of being selected by the General Director, police chiefs will now be chosen through a council appointment process, introducing a new level of transparency and accountability.

¹¹⁶ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 1C), 22 April 2024

¹¹⁷ [Gazeta Tema](#), no date

¹¹⁸ [Gazeta Tema, Albania cracks down on police misconduct: ...](#), 25 June 2024

'Education and training are also on the agenda. The law plans to revitalize the Security Academy, aiming to enroll 100 students annually from 2024 to 2025 into a new faculty of law and investigation. This initiative hopes to produce 100 sub-commissioners within three years, essential for crime investigation and prevention.

'Minister Balla ... also mentioned the recent improvements in police salaries, a result of the government's serious efforts to enhance the police force.'¹¹⁹

7.4.4 In the report of November 2024, Global Initiative reported:

'Efforts to reform the police have been made during the last few years. In 2018, Albania passed Law no.12/2018 "On the transitional and periodic evaluation of employees of the State Police, Guard of the Republic of Albania and [the Service for Internal Affairs and Complaints], in the Ministry of Internal Affairs", colloquially known as the vetting process law. The law initially proposed to vet all police personnel, but changes were made later that reduced the scope to 300 high-ranking officials. The aim of the law is to strengthen integrity within the police but vetting has progressed rather slowly, with only 66 personnel having been processed as late as 2022. Vesting the Agency for Oversight of the Police with this responsibility has also cast doubt on the impartiality of the process and interference from politics.'¹²⁰

7.4.5 In the Albania 2024 Report, covering the period 15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024, the EC stated:

'An integrity verification process within the police, including the compulsory declaration on the use by police staff of specific encrypted tools to communicate with organised crime groups, was introduced as of December 2023, following revelations that showed a high level of criminal infiltration and corruption in police ranks. In 2023, the Police Oversight Agency continued to receive a high number of complaints (over 5,000), resulting in 95 disciplinary investigations and 342 individuals referred to prosecution.'¹²¹

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8. Avenues of redress

8.1.1 Article 60 of the Constitution stated:

'1. The People's Advocate [Ombudsman] defends the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of individuals from unlawful or

improper action or failure to act of the organs of public administration.

2. The People's Advocate is independent in the exercise of his duties...'¹²²

8.1.2 Article 63 of the Constitution stated:

'1. The People's Advocate [Ombudsman] presents an annual report before the Assembly.

2. The People's Advocate reports before the Assembly when so requested,

¹¹⁹ Gazeta Tema, [New legislation aims to modernize Albanian state police...](#), 26 July 2024

¹²⁰ GI, [Integrity and independence of criminal justice institutions...](#) (p16), November 2024

¹²¹ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p33), 30 October 2024

¹²² Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

and he may request the Assembly to hear him on matters he considers important.

3. The People's Advocate has the right to make recommendations and to propose measures when he finds violations of human rights and freedoms by the public administration.

4. Public organs and officials are obligated to provide the People's Advocate with all the documents and information requested by him.¹²³

8.1.3 In the 'Nations in Transit 2024' report, covering the year 2023, Freedom House stated, '... Albania has a poor history of enforcing European Court of Human Rights rulings, and both domestic and foreign observers have serious concerns about the country's commitment to respecting human rights, and particularly the right to a fair trial.'¹²⁴

8.1.4 The USSD Human Rights Report 2023 stated:

'The Office of the Ombudsman was the main independent constitutional institution for promoting and enforcing human rights. It was authorized by law to monitor and report on prisons and detention centers and conduct administrative investigation of complaints from citizens. The Office of the Ombudsman lacked the power to enforce decisions...

'Parliament's Committee on Legal Affairs, Public Administration, and Human Rights reviewed the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman. The committee was engaged and effective in legislative matters. Parliament failed to elect a new ombudsman, and the election process was stalled. Pending selection of a new ombudsman, the incumbent, whose mandate ended in 2022, remained in place.'¹²⁵

8.1.5 In the Albania 2024 Report, covering the period 15 June 2023 to 1 September 2024¹²⁶, the EC stated:

'Effective enforcement of human rights is challenging... The Ombudsperson (People's Advocate) continued to exercise its mandate satisfactorily; however, staff shortages persist, affecting the functioning of its regional offices. Blockages, delays and the politicisation of the parliamentary appointment of the Ombudsperson remains a concern and need to be urgently addressed. Overall, the implementation rate of the recommendations issued by the Ombudsperson remains low. To improve transparency and accountability, the Ombudsperson should publish their annual report before presenting it to Parliament.'¹²⁷

8.1.6 The same report noted that, 'The country has not signed the Optional Protocol to the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Albania needs to develop a comprehensive monitoring and data collection system to assess the level of implementation of human rights legislation, policies, and strategies.'¹²⁸

¹²³ Govt of Albania, [Amended Constitution of the Republic of Albania](#), 21 April 2008

¹²⁴ Freedom House, [Nations in Transit 2024 Country Report](#), 18 April 2024

¹²⁵ USSD, [2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) (section 1C), 22 April 2024

¹²⁶ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p3, footnote 3), 30 October 2024

¹²⁷ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p35), 30 October 2024

¹²⁸ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p34), 30 October 2024

8.1.7 The same report stated:

‘The number of whistle-blower reports remains low. During 2023, the HIDAACI [High Inspectorate of Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflicts of Interest]¹²⁹ reviewed 13 new whistle-blower reports and one request for protection against retaliation, and an administrative fine was imposed in 11 cases... Albania’s legal framework needs to be fully aligned with the EU acquis and European standards, especially in the areas of ... whistle-blower protection...’

8.1.8 The report continued:

‘Albania continues to ensure good cooperation with the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). During the reporting period, the Court found breaches of the European Convention on Human Rights relating mainly to the right to respect for private and family life, the right to a fair trial, and the right to liberty and security. Albania faces challenges in implementing ECtHR judgments. There are currently 16 cases under enhanced supervision by the Committee of Ministers, more than double the figure of 2023 (7 in 2023). Albania needs to make efforts to address systemic or structural issues raised by the Court, including as regards enforcement of ECtHR judgments in the Strazimiri v. Albania case, on the inhumane and degrading treatment of forensic psychiatric patients and prisoners with mental disorders. Albania has yet to clarify existing remedies to address unlawful expropriation and demolition of property in Sharxhi and others v. Albania case.’¹³⁰

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¹²⁹ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p33-34), 30 October 2024

¹³⁰ EC, [Albania Report 2024](#) (p34), 30 October 2024

Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2024. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Commentary may be provided on source(s) and information to help readers understand the meaning and limits of the COI.

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

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Terms of Reference

The 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) provides a broad outline of the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the [country information](#).

The following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Relevant law
- Crime and punishment statistics
- Police and any other relevant law enforcement authority
 - Relevant law
 - Structure and size
 - Effectiveness
 - Corruption, accountability and impunity
 - Human rights violations
- Judiciary
 - Relevant law
 - Structure and size
 - Effectiveness
 - Independence of the judiciary, accountability and corruption
 - Reform and Specialised Structure for Anti-Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK)
 - Fair treatment and fair trial
 - Legal aid
 - Witness protection
- Avenues of redress

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Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **13 February 2025**

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

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Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and Assessment.

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Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

1st Floor

Clive House

70 Petty France

London

SW1H 9EX

Email: chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk

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