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POSITION PAPER

Strengthening Trust, Accessibility, and Use of Official Statistics in Albania in the Context of EU Accession

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Introduction

The Center for Comparative and International Studies (CCIS) considers the development of a modern, reliable, transparent, and user-oriented statistical system as a strategic prerequisite for Albania's democratic governance, sustainable development, and European Union accession process. In the context of Albania's advancing negotiations with the European Union, particularly under Cluster 1 Fundamentals, statistics have become increasingly important not only as technical instruments of measurement, but also as essential tools for accountability, policy design, institutional transparency, and public trust.

According to the 2025 European Commission assessment, Albania *remains moderately prepared* in the area of statistics (Chapter 18), reflecting notable progress while simultaneously underlining the need for further structural reforms and institutional strengthening. The country has made important advances in recent years, including the implementation and publication of the 2023 Population and Housing Census, improvements in macroeconomic statistics aligned with ESA 2010 standards, and enhanced cooperation with Eurostat. These achievements represent an important institutional foundation for further approximation with the EU acquis.

At the same time, the European Commission report highlights several structural and operational challenges that continue to affect the effectiveness and impact of Albania's statistical system. Persistent limitations in human resources, institutional coordination, data accessibility, digitalization, and statistical dissemination continue to weaken the broader integration of evidence into policymaking processes. Data gaps remain in several strategic sectors, including research and innovation, foreign direct investment, environmental accounts, agriculture, transport, and local governance indicators. The report also points to concerns regarding transparency and the accessibility of certain datasets, emphasizing the importance of open and publishable statistical information in line with EU principles.

CCIS believes that Albania's challenge today is no longer solely related to the production of statistics. Increasingly, the key issue concerns the effective use, interpretation, communication, and societal trust in official data. In many cases, statistics remain underutilized by institutions, municipalities, academia, media, civil society organizations, and businesses. This creates a disconnect between data production and evidence-based decision-making.

Statistics as a Governance and EU Integration Priority

Statistics are foundational to Albania's EU integration process because they underpin the monitoring and evaluation of reforms across virtually all negotiation chapters. Chapter 18 Statistics plays a horizontal role across the accession framework, supporting evidence-based assessment of economic performance, social inclusion, regional development, public finance management, environmental sustainability, and institutional effectiveness.

Reliable and trusted statistics are also critical for Chapter 22 on Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments, where local and regional data are indispensable for planning, monitoring, and evaluating development interventions. Similarly, policy areas linked to research and innovation, employment, social policy, agriculture, and environmental governance all require high-quality statistical evidence aligned with EU methodologies.

In this regard, CCIS considers that strengthening the statistical ecosystem should not be viewed exclusively as a technical process led by statistical institutions. Rather, it should be understood as a broader governance reform requiring:

- stronger institutional coordination;
- increased interoperability of data systems;
- improved accessibility and dissemination of official statistics;
- investment in digital and statistical literacy;
- enhanced stakeholder engagement;
- and greater integration of evidence into public decision-making.

The Role of Non-State Actors in Strengthening Albania's Data Culture

CCIS underlines that universities, civil society organizations, media, and the business community have an increasingly important role in strengthening Albania's statistical culture and promoting evidence-based governance.

Academic institutions contribute through research, analysis, and professional training. Civil society organizations use data to monitor reforms, advocate for accountability, and support public participation. Media organizations play a critical role in communicating statistical information to the wider public and combating misinformation. Businesses increasingly rely on data for market analysis, forecasting, competitiveness, and strategic planning.

However, evidence collected through CCIS initiatives and stakeholder consultations demonstrates that these sectors continue to face substantial barriers in effectively accessing and using official statistics. Common challenges include limited data literacy, fragmented platforms, lack of user-friendly formats, insufficient communication from data-producing institutions, and restricted access to disaggregated or local-level information.

As a result, trust in official statistics often depends not only on the quality of the data themselves, but also on the transparency, clarity, accessibility, and responsiveness of institutions.

CCIS believes that trust in statistics should be understood as a strategic governance issue. A society that trusts and uses official statistics is better equipped to support democratic accountability, monitor reforms, and engage constructively in public debate.

Strategic Priorities Identified by CCIS

Based on the current European Commission assessment, national reform priorities, and stakeholder consultations conducted by CCIS, several strategic priorities emerge for strengthening Albania's statistical ecosystem:

1. Strengthening Institutional Capacities

Further investment is needed in the human and technical capacities of statistical institutions, particularly in relation to specialized expertise, digital infrastructure, data interoperability, and cybersecurity.

2. Improving Accessibility and Transparency of Data

Official statistics should be disseminated in more user-oriented formats, including open-data platforms, visual dashboards, machine-readable datasets, and simplified explanatory materials.

3. Enhancing Data Literacy Across Society

Statistical and digital literacy should be integrated more systematically into higher education, public administration training, civil society capacity-building, and media professional development.

4. Increasing Use of Statistics in Policymaking

Public institutions at both central and local levels should strengthen mechanisms that integrate statistical evidence into planning, budgeting, monitoring, and policy evaluation.

5. Strengthening Local-Level Statistics

Municipalities require improved access to local data, stronger analytical capacities, and better coordination with national statistical institutions to support territorial development and regional policy implementation.

6. Expanding Stakeholder Engagement

More structured dialogue is needed between statistical institutions and non-state actors to improve mutual understanding, identify user needs, and strengthen public trust.

CCIS Position

CCIS strongly supports Albania's continued efforts to align its statistical system with European standards and recognizes the important progress achieved by national institutions in recent years. Nevertheless, the organization emphasizes that the future success of statistical reform will depend not only on technical compliance with the EU acquis, but also on the capacity to build a broader culture of trust, transparency, and evidence-based governance.

A modern statistical system must be understood as a shared public infrastructure serving institutions, citizens, researchers, media, municipalities, businesses, and civil society alike. Official statistics become meaningful only when they are accessible, understandable, trusted, and actively used.

For this reason, CCIS advocates for a comprehensive approach that *bridges the gap between data production and data utilization, while strengthening the relationship between institutions and society*. Such an approach is essential not only for fulfilling EU accession obligations, but also for reinforcing democratic governance, public accountability, and sustainable development in Albania.

CCIS remains committed to contributing through research, policy dialogue, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based initiatives that strengthen Albania's data culture and support the country's European integration path.

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