



# **Strategy for Inclusion of Women and Youth for Green Building Council Albania**

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## Introduction

This strategy was developed to strengthen the inclusion of women and youth in Albania's growing green building sector. It is built upon comprehensive consultations, an in-depth assessment of current practices and barriers, and alignment with national and EU strategies. The process consisted of two main activities:

- Activity 1: Assessment, consultation, and strategy drafting
- Activity 2: Finalization and presentation

The ultimate goal is to make Albania's green building sector more diverse, innovative, and sustainable by actively engaging women and youth at all levels.

The Green Building Council (GBC) of Albania, officially launched on May 31, 2024, marks a significant innovation for the country's construction sector. Established as a voluntary organization, the Council brings together a wide network of stakeholders, including construction companies committed to innovation, universities specializing in architecture and construction engineering, environmental organizations working on climate change, professional associations from the sector, and other relevant actors. The Council serves as a collaborative platform to promote sustainable building practices, support research and innovation, and align Albania's construction industry with European Union green standards.

The formation of the Green Building Council comes at a critical time, as the construction sector one of the most important drivers of Albania's economy is increasingly being called upon to adopt environmentally responsible approaches. This includes embracing digital tools, reducing energy consumption, and adhering to evolving green legal frameworks. The Council aims to accelerate the application of these changes, positioning Albania as part of a broader regional and European movement toward sustainability.

This initiative is supported by the RECONOMY program through the project "Energy Efficiency in the Construction and Renovation Sector in the Western Balkans." RECONOMY is a regional green economic development program funded by the Swedish International Development and Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and implemented by HELVETAS in partnership with CeproSARD. It operates across multiple Western Balkan countries, including Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The program focuses on increasing economic value in the construction sector, especially by promoting the use of energy-efficient products and investing in skills development for sustainable construction and renovation.

The Green Building Council of Albania represents more than just an institutional innovation it is a step toward systemic transformation. Through its connection with the RECONOMY program, it also contributes to regional cooperation by addressing shared challenges, fostering peer learning, and empowering disadvantaged groups, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises and women-led businesses, to participate in the green and digital transition.

The participation of women and youth in Albania's green building and construction sectors has traditionally been limited. While the sector is a major contributor to national GDP and employment, its workforce composition does not reflect the diversity of the wider Albanian labour market. This report explores current practices, identifies key barriers, and proposes strategic recommendations through a comprehensive, narrative-based assessment. It draws on national data, international reports, stakeholder interviews, and focus group discussions.

## **Sector Overview**

Although Albanians are among the poorest people in Europe, they have a high enthusiasm for building, particularly residential construction, much greater than that of other European countries. According to Eurostat data, in 2022 Albania's nominal construction expenditure was equivalent to 18.8% of GDP, whereas in the EU it was 11.3%, ranking Albania first in Europe (Eurostat, 2023). Neighboring countries are behind, at 13.2% in North Macedonia, 12.7% in Montenegro, 11.7% in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 10.2% in Serbia (Eurostat, 2023).

These investments fall under Gross Formation of Fixed Capital, which captures residents' investment in fixed assets like engineering, residential structures, machinery, equipment, and digital equipment. It is worth noting that residential construction accounts for most of Albania's investment in this sector, at approximately 60% of total construction investment (INSTAT, 2023). In contrast, investment in machinery and equipment sources of innovation and efficiency is minimal at only 4.1% of GDP in 2022, second lowest in Europe (Eurostat, 2023).

In this particular context of high-level construction activity but comparatively low-level technological investment, the Albanian construction sector and the growing green building industry provide employment for over 80,000 workers, or around 7% of national employment (INSTAT, 2019). Nevertheless, deep structural imbalances persist:

Women make up only 3% of the construction workforce, although they represent 52% of Albania's overall labor force participation (INSTAT, 2019).

Youth aged 15–29, who account for close to a quarter of the population, have less than 12% of the sector's jobs (INSTAT, 2019).

These figures reveal systemic barriers that limit the participation of young people and women in a sector at the center of Albania's economic development and its green and climate-resilient growth vision. Closing these deficits is not only an issue of social justice but also a strategic imperative in order to foster innovation, sustainability, and inclusive economic growth for the benefit of national and European green transition policies.

## **Regulatory Framework and Policy Context**

Albania has formally committed to promoting inclusivity and equality in the labour market through a series of national strategies and international obligations. The National Employment and Skills Strategy (2021–2027) sets broad objectives for increasing the participation of women and youth in employment, aiming to reduce gender gaps and youth unemployment through training, upskilling, and targeted activation measures (Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2021). Complementing this, the Gender Equality Strategy (2021–2030) outlines actions to combat discrimination and stereotypes, strengthen institutional capacities, and enhance women's representation in decision-making roles (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 2021). Albania's ratification of the Istanbul Convention further reinforces its legal and policy commitment to gender equality and protection from violence and discrimination, including in the workplace (Council of Europe, 2011).

Despite this comprehensive policy framework, implementation remains a critical challenge. Reports by the European Commission (2023) and GREVIO (2022) note persistent gaps between legislative commitments and practical enforcement, especially in traditionally male-dominated sectors like construction. These gaps stem from limited monitoring mechanisms, fragmented inter-institutional cooperation, and insufficient gender-sensitive budgeting. For instance, while national strategies highlight the need to reduce occupational segregation, there is little evidence of concrete, sector-specific policies to attract and retain women and young workers in construction, such as targeted apprenticeships, mentorship programmes, or incentives for inclusive hiring practices.

The context is even more pressing in the green building sector, which represents a strategic opportunity to align Albania's climate objectives with inclusive growth. As the construction industry shifts toward sustainable and energy-efficient practices, there is

potential to design policies that not only meet environmental goals but also actively dismantle structural barriers faced by women and youth. Embedding inclusivity into green building certification systems, developing specialized green skills programmes targeting underrepresented groups, and ensuring that climate finance and investment frameworks include social inclusion criteria could bridge the gap between policy intent and tangible outcomes. These targeted measures are essential to transform formal commitments into practice and to create a greener, fairer, and more resilient built environment in Albania.

## **Analysis of Barriers and Opportunities**

Drawing from literature, data, and targeted consultations with stakeholders in Albania (including representatives from academia, private sector, and NGOs), key barriers and opportunities have been identified.

### **Barriers**

- Cultural and gender norms discouraging women and young people, especially women, from pursuing technical and construction-related careers (UN Women Albania, 2021).
- Limited green building training programs in Albanian universities and VET institutions (ETF, 2021).
- Lack of practical learning opportunities and internships targeted to women and youth (World Bank, 2023).
- Rigid working conditions and limited family-friendly policies in the construction sector (ILO, 2015).
- Low visibility of role models and successful women and young professionals in the field.
- Fragmented policy support and limited incentives for companies to hire and train women and youth.

### **Opportunities**

- Alignment with EU Green Deal and Albania's EU accession process creates incentives for sustainable construction and innovation (European Commission, 2022).
- Growing donor and private investment in energy efficiency and green infrastructure.
- Young people's interest in environmental issues and digital skills that can support green construction innovation (UNDP Albania, 2020).
- Existing national strategies promoting gender equality and youth employment.

## **Vision and Objectives**

The vision is a green building sector in Albania that is inclusive, dynamic, and innovative, where women and youth contribute actively at all levels from design to construction, management, and policy.

The objectives are:

- Increase awareness and attractiveness of green building careers among women and youth.
- Enhance access to targeted education, training and practical experiences.
- Foster supportive workplace environments and industry networks.
- Strengthen institutional and policy frameworks to sustain inclusion.

## **Green Building in Albania (Key Examples)**

Albania is experiencing a notable shift towards sustainable construction and eco-friendly architecture, underscoring its growing commitment to green building practices as part of broader economic and environmental goals. This transformation reflects both local ambition and alignment with European directives, and it offers a timely opportunity to embed inclusivity into the heart of the sector's growth.



A central element of this evolution is the adoption of international certification standards, which set benchmarks for sustainability and resource efficiency. For example, the Park Avenue Tower in Tirana achieved Albania's first BREEAM Design Stage certification<sup>1</sup>, receiving an Excellent rating a milestone demonstrating that high-performance buildings are possible in the Albanian context.

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<sup>1</sup> BREEAM Design Stage certification, also known as the interim BREEAM certificate, is awarded after the design stage of a building project, based on the sustainability measures implemented in the design.





Similarly, Vlora Marina has become the first project in the country to secure EDGE certification at the design stage, signaling a serious commitment to resource-efficient design (World Green Building Council, 2020). These certifications not only raise the profile of individual projects but also inspire wider market transformation, encouraging other developers to integrate sustainability into design and construction processes.

At the same time, municipal and national initiatives are creating momentum for green urban development. Pilot projects like rooftop gardens in Tirana and Përmet contribute to urban biodiversity, reduce the urban heat island effect, and improve building energy efficiency. Other efforts such as retrofitting public lighting in cities including Shkodër and Kukës demonstrate how local governments are embracing practical measures that both reduce energy use and enhance quality of life (European Commission, 2023). These local examples, though still emerging, reflect Albania's broader ambition to align urban planning with the European Green Deal and national climate commitments.

Market dynamics also suggest a growing appetite for sustainable design. According to sector data, Albania has seen around a 20% increase in green building projects in recent years. These projects range from luxury developments blending comfort with efficiency, to smaller-scale, resource-efficient buildings targeting a broader demographic. The shift shows that sustainability is no longer a niche market; rather, it is becoming a core expectation among investors, developers, and end users.

Crucially, professional organizations and networks like Build Green Albania play a catalytic role in this transition. By fostering collaboration among architects, engineers, and designers, and by promoting knowledge sharing and professional training, such networks are laying the groundwork for a skilled workforce ready to lead the green transformation. Yet, despite this momentum, systemic challenges remain. The sector remains heavily male-dominated, and young professionals face barriers to entry, from limited practical training opportunities to unclear career pathways in green construction.

This moment of sectoral growth presents an opportunity not only to modernize Albania's built environment but also to rethink who participates in building it. Embedding targeted measures for women and youth into Albania's green building expansion is not just a



matter of fairness it is a strategic move to unlock creativity, innovation, and long-term resilience in a sector that will shape Albania's sustainable future.

### **Why Including Women and Youth in Green Building Council in Albania**

Albania is witnessing a powerful shift towards greener, more sustainable cities and this transformation is opening up exciting new opportunities, especially for women and young people. Green building is no longer just about energy savings or modern design; it's about shaping healthier communities and creating a more inclusive, forward-thinking society.

Across Albania, projects like the TID Tower, Green Coast Resort, and the Plaza Tirana show how sustainable architecture can combine innovation with local character. Features such as solar panels, rainwater harvesting, green roofs, and smart building technologies aren't just technical solutions they represent a vision of progress that everyone can be part of.

By involving women and youth directly in the design, construction, and management of these projects, we can make sure the benefits of green building reach every corner of society. Young architects and engineers can bring fresh perspectives to integrating renewable energy and eco-friendly materials. Women leaders and entrepreneurs can champion social sustainability, ensuring projects respond to community needs, enhance urban wellbeing, and remain accessible to all.

The push for sustainable architecture is also about skills and jobs of the future. Training programs and internships focused on green construction methods, digital tools like BIM (Building Information Modeling), and environmental certification standards (such as LEED or BREEAM) can equip young professionals especially young women to lead Albania's green building movement.

Moreover, involving youth and women in discussions on sustainable urban planning can spark ideas that go beyond traditional design: from vertical gardens that improve air quality in dense urban areas, to community green spaces that foster wellbeing, to smart systems that reduce energy use in public buildings. Their participation helps keep innovation grounded in real life and local context.

Reducing the carbon footprint of Albania's cities isn't only an engineering challenge; it's a shared social mission. By giving women and young people an active role in creating Albania's top green buildings, we also help build a society that values equality, creativity, and care for future generations.

Through dedicated mentoring, education, and engagement initiatives, the Green Building Council Albania can become a catalyst for inclusion ensuring that sustainability is not only a technical standard, but a collective cultural goal. In this way, Albania's green architecture won't just be admired as concrete examples of eco-friendly design, but also celebrated as symbols of shared effort, diversity, and hope.

## **Strategic Objectives and Pillars**

### **Pillar 1: Governance and Leadership**

Objective: Mainstream gender and youth inclusion in GBC Albania's internal governance and leadership structures.

#### Key Actions

- Ensure minimum 40% gender balance and youth representation (<35 years) in GBC boards, working groups, and advisory bodies.
- Adopt inclusive recruitment policies and leadership pipelines.
- Establish a Gender & Youth Inclusion Officer within the Secretariat.

### **Pillar 2: Education, Skills and Empowerment**

Objective: Expand opportunities for women and youth to access green education, training, and leadership development.

#### Key Actions:

- Develop mentorship programs connecting young professionals and women with sector experts.
- Organize green skills bootcamps, certification courses, and internships targeting female students and unemployed youth.
- Partner with universities and vocational schools to integrate sustainability and inclusion in curricula.

### **Pillar 3: Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Employment**

Objective: Support inclusive green entrepreneurship and job creation in the sustainable construction value chain.

#### Key Actions

- Launch an "Inclusive Green Start-up Fund" to support women- and youth-led ventures.

- Facilitate access to green innovation labs, co-working hubs, and EU-funded accelerator programs.
- Advocate for inclusive procurement policies and public-private partnerships promoting decent green jobs.

#### **Pillar 4: Awareness and Social Norm Change**

Objective: Transform societal perceptions and raise awareness of the contributions of women and youth to green development.

##### Key Actions

- Implement national media campaigns (“Women Build Green”, “Youth for the Future”) showcasing success stories.
- Engage male allies, teachers, and community leaders in promoting inclusion.
- Integrate gender and inclusion topics in all GBC public events and workshops.

#### **Pillar 5: Policy, Advocacy and Partnerships**

Objective: Strengthen the enabling environment through inclusive policy advocacy and stakeholder coordination.

##### Key Actions

- Contribute to national strategies on climate, energy, and construction with a gender/youth lens.
- Cooperate with Ministries (Tourism & Environment, Education, Infrastructure) and CSOs to advance inclusion goals.
- Align with the EU Gender Equality Strategy (2020–2025), Youth Strategy (2019–2027), and SDG 5, 8, 11, and 13.



## **Strategic Actions**

### **Increasing Awareness and Attractiveness**

Albania's construction industry, while traditionally perceived as physically demanding and male-dominated, is undergoing a significant transformation driven by sustainability and technological innovation. However, public perception has yet to catch up. The green building sector characterized by energy-efficient design, digital construction tools, and interdisciplinary collaboration offers creative and socially meaningful careers attractive to both women and young professionals (World Green Building Council, 2020). Yet, awareness remains limited.

National and local awareness campaigns should showcase real stories of women and young people working successfully in sustainable construction, architecture, and engineering. Partnerships with national media, online platforms, and influencers can amplify these narratives, positioning green building as a modern and aspirational career choice. Organizing annual Green Building Weeks, site visits to certified sustainable projects, and student design competitions can further connect abstract concepts to tangible local successes.

Integrating sustainability themes early in the education pipeline is critical. Primary and secondary schools can introduce modules on climate change, energy efficiency, and sustainable urban planning, laying the groundwork for future interest in green professions. At the university and vocational levels, curricula should include Albanian case studies of green retrofits, energy audits, and passive house design, ensuring relevance and practical understanding. For example, partnerships with local municipalities could develop student projects addressing real urban challenges, like improving energy efficiency in Tirana's post-communist housing blocks (INSTAT, 2023).

### **Enhancing Education and Practical Training**

The future workforce must be equipped not only with general construction skills but also specialized knowledge in green techniques, digital tools, and circular economy principles. Building Information Modeling (BIM), energy modeling software, and life-cycle assessment tools are increasingly standard in international markets and will become critical for Albania as it aligns with EU directives (European Commission, 2023).

Establishing or updating training programs in partnership with vocational education and training (VET) institutions, universities, donor agencies, and private companies will be key. These programs should actively target women and youth through scholarships, dedicated recruitment drives, and reserved spots in high-demand modules. For instance, a collaborative training initiative led by GBC Albania, in partnership with major construction firms and donor organizations like GIZ or UNDP, could certify dozens of young professionals annually in energy-efficient retrofitting.

Practical experience is equally important. Structured internships and apprenticeships linked to recognized qualifications and clear learning outcomes would help bridge the gap between education and employment. Companies should be encouraged to host interns on actual green building projects, supervised by experienced mentors. Exchange programs with EU member states, leveraging Albania's candidate country status, could further expose students to advanced sustainable construction techniques and management practices.

### **Fostering Supportive Workplaces and Networks**

Attracting women and young professionals into the sector is only part of the challenge; retaining and supporting them requires cultural change within companies and institutions. Employers should adopt gender-sensitive human resource policies, such as transparent promotion criteria, flexible work arrangements for parents, and zero-tolerance policies on harassment. Studies show that companies with inclusive practices not only improve employee satisfaction but also achieve higher productivity and innovation rates (ILO, 2022).

Recognition schemes can highlight companies leading in diversity and inclusion. Annual awards organized by GBC Albania could celebrate best practices, from balanced hiring to mentorship and leadership development initiatives. Beyond company-level change, professional networks play a vital role. GBC Albania and partner associations can facilitate mentorship programs connecting students and early-career professionals with senior figures in design, engineering, and construction. Regular meetups, workshops, and leadership training can help build confidence, share knowledge, and foster a sense of belonging.

This network approach is especially critical for women, who often lack role models in technical and leadership roles. International examples, such as the “Women in Construction” network supported by the UK’s Chartered Institute of Building, show how mentoring, networking, and advocacy can change industry culture over time (CIOB, 2021).

### **Strengthening Institutional and Policy Support**

Albania has adopted important frameworks, including the National Employment and Skills Strategy (2021–2027) and the Gender Equality Strategy (2021–2030), as well as international instruments like the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011). However, translating policy into practice remains a challenge, especially in male-dominated sectors like construction (European Commission, 2023).

GBC Albania should work closely with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, Ministry of Education and Sports, and Ministry of Health and Social Protection to develop concrete incentives: tax benefits for companies investing in diverse workforces, public procurement preferences for firms demonstrating inclusive practices, and targeted funding for training programs for underrepresented groups. Establishing annual monitoring of women's and youth participation in the green building sector, published in collaboration with INSTAT, would ensure data-driven policy adjustments.

Alignment with Albania's EU accession process and the European Green Deal could unlock donor support and technical assistance. For instance, green financing mechanisms and climate funds increasingly require social inclusion criteria. Ensuring Albania's construction and green building sector meets these criteria could attract investment while advancing equity goals.

### **Implementation Framework**

Achieving systemic change requires coordination across multiple stakeholders, each playing complementary roles.

GBC Albania will coordinate strategy implementation, monitor progress, organize awareness campaigns, and facilitate professional networks.

Private sector actors will offer internships, invest in training, adopt inclusive HR policies, and participate in recognition schemes.

Educational institutions will revise curricula, develop targeted outreach for women and youth, and collaborate on research projects.

Government institutions will create enabling policies, introduce incentives, and ensure regulatory alignment with EU standards.

Civil society and international organizations will provide technical assistance, funding, and share international best practices.

An accompanying implementation plan will detail responsibilities, timelines, required resources, and measurable indicators, such as the share of women in technical roles, number of youth internships offered annually, and percentage of projects using green certification schemes.

## **Expected Impact**

Successful implementation of this strategy will transform Albania's green building sector from a niche technical field into an inclusive driver of sustainable development. Expected outcomes include:

A significant increase in the participation of women and youth in technical, managerial, and leadership positions.

Greater diversity in project teams, leading to more socially responsive and innovative designs.

Improved employability for young graduates and women re-entering the workforce, supported by new training pathways and mentorship.

Contribution to Albania's national targets on gender equality, youth employment, and climate action, aligned with EU accession benchmarks.

Evidence from other countries shows that industries embracing diversity perform better financially and generate more creative solutions to complex challenges like climate adaptation and urban resilience (World Economic Forum, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

The transition toward a green and sustainable construction sector in Albania presents a unique opportunity to not only address pressing environmental challenges but also advance social inclusion. By placing women and youth at the center of this transformation, the Green Building Council (GBC) Albania can help reshape an industry long characterized by exclusion and underrepresentation.

This strategy offers a comprehensive roadmap for creating a more inclusive green building sector, rooted in Albania's existing policy commitments, aligned with European standards, and responsive to the needs of the labor market. From education and mentorship to inclusive governance and employment, each strategic pillar is designed to dismantle structural barriers while promoting innovation and resilience.

Women and youth represent untapped potential in the Albanian economy. Their greater involvement in green building through leadership, technical skills, and entrepreneurial contributions can drive the sector toward greater creativity, productivity, and sustainability. At the same time, inclusive practices enhance social cohesion and help



build a workforce fit for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions.

The success of this strategy depends on collaborative implementation, involving public institutions, private companies, academic actors, and civil society organizations. Measurable impact such as improved employment outcomes, increased participation in training, and visible cultural shifts will require sustained commitment, resources, and accountability.

Ultimately, this is not just a technical strategy it is a vision for a greener, fairer Albania, where the buildings we create reflect the values of equity, diversity, and collective progress. GBC Albania, through this strategic framework, has a unique role to play as both catalyst and convener of this transformation.



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