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CEJ Convergence Public Participation Needs Assessment of the Municipality of Elbasan Assessment Report

Albania

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1. SUMMARY

This Public Participation Needs Assessment for the Municipality of Elbasan was conducted in 2025 under the *Climate and Environmental Justice (CEJ) Convergence in the Western Balkans* project, financed by AFD and Expertise France. The assessment aims to strengthen Elbasan’s institutional and civic capacities for inclusive environmental decision-making and align local governance practices with European Union standards under Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change).

The assessment identifies barriers, opportunities, and practical steps to enhance citizen participation in environmental governance. It provides a baseline for the design of a *Public Participation Toolkit* that will be tested in two pilot processes: participatory budgeting and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) consultations. The study combined qualitative and participatory methods, including desktop research, 22 stakeholder interviews, and a SWOT workshop (July–August 2025). A validation session in November 2025 ensures better stakeholder ownership and alignment with local priorities.

Public participation in Elbasan is rated **medium**—there are established mechanisms and good practices, yet inclusiveness and depth remain limited. Citizens engage most actively when issues touch their immediate interests (roads, waste, water, taxation). While formal consultation structures function, they often lack transparency, timely communication, and proper feedback to participants.

- **Strengths:**
 - Institutional commitment to openness through the *Transparency Program* and membership in the *Open Government Partnership (OGP)*.
 - Established participatory mechanisms such as participatory budgeting and the Youth City Council.
 - Functional community structures (administrators, village heads, liaison officers) that act as key communication channels.
- **Weaknesses:**
 - Low environmental awareness and a weak culture of collective action.
 - Inconsistent or late notifications of public consultations, technical language barriers, and insufficient feedback.
 - Limited role of civil society and local media in fostering accountability.
 - Apathy and distrust among citizens due to past unresponsive governance experiences.

Stakeholders emphasized that meaningful participation depends on **clear information, follow-up on decisions, and visible institutional responsiveness**. Personal interest and community pride (“love for Elbasan”) are strong motivators, while lack of trust, fear of judgment, and perceptions of political bias discourage engagement.

Elbasan’s **participatory budgeting** process is widely recognized as the city’s flagship example of democratic inclusion. When well-organized and transparent, it builds trust and provides citizens with tangible influence over municipal investments. Other successful examples include the *Fiscal Package consultations*, *Participatory Budgeting for Youth*, and climate-related initiatives such as *GreenElb* under the NetZeroCity framework. By contrast, several processes, such as changes in environmental permits for industrial operators or park revitalization projects, illustrate poor participation, where consultations were symbolic, politicized, or poorly communicated. These cases underline the importance of early engagement, clear procedures, and media transparency.

Comparative EU case studies (France, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland) confirm that inclusive design, accessible language, early involvement, and visible feedback loops are the critical factors that differentiate successful participatory processes from failed ones.

Barriers to participation operate at three levels:

- **Systemic:** fragmented competencies between the Municipality and Regional Environmental Agency, limited budget for environmental awareness, and weak enforcement of participation laws.

- **Organizational:** inadequate communication channels, poorly timed or centralized hearings, and insufficient inter-departmental coordination.
- **Individual:** low awareness, socio-economic constraints, gender and minority underrepresentation, and psychological barriers such as self-censorship and apathy.

At the same time, opportunities abound. Elbasan has shown political will, an active mayoral leadership model promoting inclusion, and a growing network of partners—civil society, media, academia, and youth structures—that can drive behavioral change.

The *Public Participation Toolkit* will help translate existing legal frameworks into practical, inclusive, and low-cost tools for municipalities. It proposes:

- **Accessibility measures** (annual consultation plan templates, clear non-technical summaries, hybrid participation formats);
- **Inclusivity tools** (CSO-moderated hearings, targeted outreach to women, youth, and minorities);
- **Practical templates** (standard operating procedures, inter-directorate coordination checklists);
- **Monitoring and feedback instruments** (KPI indicators, citizen satisfaction surveys).

Two pilot applications are recommended:

1. **Participatory Budgeting:** to enhance outreach, inclusiveness, and feedback mechanisms.
2. **EIA Public Consultations:** to bridge municipal structures with the Regional Environmental Agency and ensure transparent, citizen-centered environmental decision-making.

Elbasan demonstrates strong institutional readiness and community interest to progress toward more inclusive environmental governance. To build on this momentum, the municipality should:

- Strengthen coordination with REA and civil society;
- Integrate environmental topics across participatory budgeting and OGP platforms;
- Institutionalize feedback loops to restore trust; and
- Expand educational and awareness initiatives targeting youth and vulnerable groups.

By operationalizing the proposed toolkit, Elbasan can become a **national model for participatory environmental governance**, contributing both to Albania’s Chapter 27 benchmarks and to a broader culture of transparency, accountability, and civic empowerment.

2. INTRODUCTION

Elbasan Municipality in Albania is a beneficiary of the Climate Environmental Justice Convergence in the Western Balkans (CEJ) project, which provides support to strengthen local capacities to encourage effective public participation practices in environmental matters.

The CEJ project, financed by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and Expertise France (EF) seeks to improve access to justice and effectiveness of public participation in the field of environmental justice, thereby contributing to convergence towards European standards in Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro. More particularly, it will support the countries for EU accession through the alignment of their national frameworks to the Aarhus Convention standards on access to environmental justice through three main components:

- 1) Improvement of access to justice on climate and environmental matters.
- 2) Improvement of citizen participation on climate and environmental matters.
- 3) Implementation of grants for civil society organizations.

This report, developed in close cooperation with Elbasan Municipality, directly contributes to the second component of the CEJ project and most importantly it directly supports Elbasan Municipality to advance and improve its local governance within the EU accession pathway. It provides a realistic and comprehensive baseline that will help the Municipality to build a clear overview of its participatory governance in environmental decision-making, to better understand and amplify its strengths, and to identify, prioritize, and mitigate its weaknesses.

EU perspective on public participation and Chapter 27

Strengthening public participation in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and local planning directly reinforces a candidate country's progress under Chapter 27 of the EU accession process. The EU's environmental *acquis*, especially horizontal law, is fundamentally grounded in *the Aarhus Convention*¹, which establishes that greater public awareness and involvement in environmental matters improves environmental protection through Access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters.

Consequently, access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters demonstrating robust public participation mechanisms in EIAs and SEAs² become a concrete indicator of alignment with EU standards. By establishing transparent, accessible, and effective public consultation procedures for EIAs SEAs and industrial projects, candidate countries, such as Albania, not only transpose the technical requirements of EU environmental directives but also stress their will to properly implement them. This is an indicator of institutional maturity, democratic governance, and rule-of-law principles that underpin the entire accession process.

The component II of the CEJ projects fully participates to the implementation of the EU *acquis* and to improve the late benchmarks of Chapter 27 in Albania, the Commission's 2024 report highlighting “*In the coming year, Albania should, in particular: achieve fully alignment, implementation and enforcement of the Directives on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and ensure that all infrastructure investments comply with the EU environmental and*

¹https://environment.ec.europa.eu/law-and-governance/aarhus_en , <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention/text> : adopted the 27 of June 2001 for Albania

² https://www.era-comm.eu/EU_Legislation_on_Environmental_Assessments/part_2/part_2_12.html

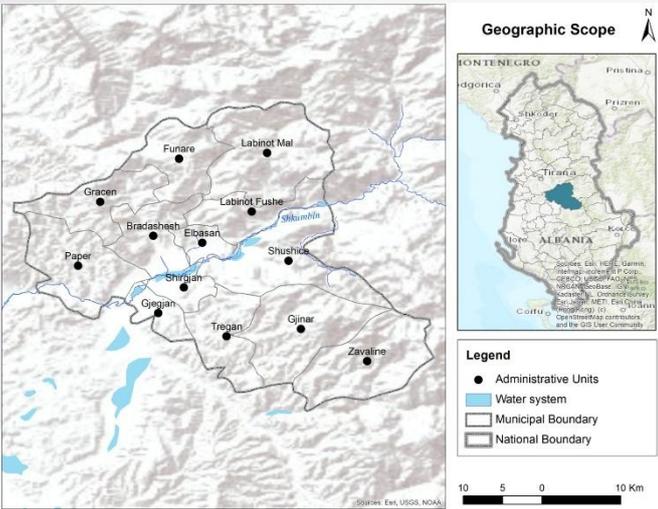
climate acquis, national and international nature and water obligations, and ensure public participation;(…)“⁴³ .

Purpose and Scope

Public participation needs assessment in Elbasan Municipality aimed to address specific challenges and opportunities for public involvement in environmental decision-making. By identifying barriers, showcasing best practices, and proposing actionable strategies, the findings will shape the development of a standardized toolkit to enhance public participation, which will be tested within ongoing local initiatives of the Municipality.

This process and the findings will also support Albania’s obligations under the EU accession negotiations, particularly Chapter 27 – Environment and Climate Change, which emphasizes strengthening local-level environmental governance and citizen engagement in decision-making through implementation of its horizontal legislation package.

The scope of the needs assessment includes *two complementary dimensions*, geographic distribution and targets. 1) The geographic scope encompasses the Municipality of Elbasan and its entire administrative territory, while also considering its operational linkages at regional and national levels. 2) The target scope reflects the diversity of stakeholders with a role in local decision-making, with particular focus on environmental matters. Together, these dimensions provide a clear framework for understanding the context of public participation in Elbasan, and are further detailed in the table below.

Scope	Definition for the public participation needs assessment
Geographic scope	<p>The entire administrative territory of Elbasan Municipality, including both the urban and its surrounding rural administrative units. This scope also takes into account the Municipality operational linkages with regional and national institutions that influence environmental governance.</p>  <p>Fig. 1: Map of the geographic scope</p>
Target scope	The diversity of stakeholders engaged in or affected by environmental decision-making in Elbasan, as identified in the stakeholder mapping and through direct engagement:

³ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a8eec3f9-b2ec-4cb1-8748-9058854dbc68_en?filename=Albania%20Report%202024.pdf

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National and Regional institutions: National Environmental Agency and its regional offices covering Elbasan, National Agency of Protected Areas, and its regional administration in Elbasan, National Forestry Agency, Shkumbin River Basin Council et. • Municipal administration and technical staff: Elbasan Municipality departments and units, including Directorate related to Environmental, Emergencies and Civil Protection (with agriculture, forestry and pastures), Directorate related to European Integration, Projects and Donors, Climate Change Working Group, youth/education specialists etc. • Municipal Council members: representatives engaged in commissions on environment, agriculture, forestry, water management, transparency, and political representatives • Local communities: via administrative unit administrators, women’s working groups, youth networks, Roma and Egyptian community representatives, community liaison officers etc. • Civil society organizations and community-based groups: formal civil society organizations and grassroots initiatives. • Private sector actors: local businesses and service operators as well as entrepreneurs and industry stakeholders with environmental impact. • Media and watchdogs: including journalists, journalists associations, online media platforms etc. • International and development actors: including Bashki te Forta, The Climate project, Save the Children Elbasan offices etc.
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Methodology Overview

To ensure a comprehensive exploration of public participation dynamics, the needs assessment methodology combines qualitative and participatory techniques to capture stakeholder perspectives, synthesize insights, and produce practical recommendations. Each methodological component builds on the previous one to ensure depth and coherence.

Data Collection

The data was collected through targeted stakeholder interviews (22) and a SWOT workshop, ensuring that input came directly from those most involved in or affected by public participation efforts. This was preceded by desktop research on local environmental frameworks and documents, providing an understanding of the key actors and the broader context of participation. The interviews, guided by a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions, encouraged dialogue and information sharing. In total, 22 interviews were conducted during July–August 2025, and a SWOT workshop was held on 17 July 2025. Throughout those processes in Elbasan, gender balance and inclusion remained central, ensuring that women, young people, and rural representatives were fully included

Data Analysis

Collected data from interviews and SWOT workshops were synthesized into insights that drive actions in order to help uncover the root causes of low participation and identify the key enablers that will guide the design and development of the toolkit. The synthesis and analysis were carried out on expert experience, under the purpose that findings are tailored to the purpose of the needs assessment and provide a realistic and insightful basis for the report. Data analysis was conducted on end August – beginning of September 2025.

Reporting

Findings from data analysis were consolidated into a structured needs assessment report, offering a clear roadmap for strengthening public participation in Elbasan Municipality, to inform toolkit design and

serve as a valuable resource for municipalities seeking to improve citizen engagement. The report included also a strategic thinking into next steps to develop and implement tools and methodologies promoting public participation and its consideration. Importantly, the analysis was framed within the context of Albania's EU accession process, drawing on EU examples and insights from the Chapter 27 negotiations on Environment and Climate Change, which serve as a driving force for aligning local governance practices with EU standards on transparency, accountability, and citizen involvement in environmental decision-making. Reporting was finalized on September 2025.

Political validation

Political validation was carried out by presenting the draft Needs Assessment Report to municipalities and stakeholders before finalization, to ensure ownership, check relevance, and integrate their feedback, an essential step when promoting public participation. A validation workshop was held on 12 November 2025 with the participation of a diverse group of stakeholders, including both those previously interviewed and others who could not be engaged earlier. This created an open space for discussion, ownership, and collective acceptance of the report's findings. In that context, an additional round of consultations for written comments was organized with the support of the Elbasan Municipality, after which we finalized the report.

3. STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

The main actors involved in environmental governance in Elbasan are mapped, outlining their roles in public participation and decision-making. Insights from interviews and workshops highlight their strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improving participatory practices.

Profiles and Roles in the Public Participation Ecosystem

Stakeholders have different roles in environmental governance depending on their political, social, and economic position. Each carries specific responsibilities, influence, and connections when applying the right to public participation. Understanding and recognising these roles helps the needs assessment to identify current capacities and where cooperation and engagement can be improved. From state institutions and their regional offices, local decision-makers, private sector actors, community-based groups and civil society organisations, to academia, local expertise, media, youth, watchdog groups and international donors, they all contribute to strengthen a participatory ecosystem in Elbasan. Those categories of stakeholders, presented in the target scope table above, together with their most representative actors and their specific role and contributions, are detailed in the table in Annex I of this report.

Among these wide range and variety of stakeholders, the main local bodies responsible for organizing and undertaking public consultations are the 1) *Municipal Council* and 2) *Mayor of the Municipality*.

The Municipal Council acts as a decision-making, representative, and supervisory body. It has the legal obligation to organize public consultations for a number of decisions legally defined by the internal regulation of the council. *Responsible persons to organise the public consultations* are: The Secretary/Secretariat of the Council, The Head of the Council, The Heads of the Permanent Committees of the Council and The Members of the Council. Their respective roles are detailed in the table in Annex I.

The Mayor of the Municipality, as the executive authority of local self-government, is legally required to conduct public consultations during the preparation of the medium-term municipal budget and detailed local plans, and may also organize consultations for other draft acts whenever considered appropriate. *Responsible persons to organise the public consultations* are: The Mayor of the Municipality and Heads of Departments/Directorates/Sectors. Their respective roles are detailed in the table in Annex I.

The entire public consultation process is supported by the Coordinator for Public Notification and Consultation, as well as municipal staff.

Elbasan Municipality, as a local a local governance unit, plays a key role in the EIA process. 1) It is a consulted stakeholder, entitled to be involved throughout the process by reviewing project documentation and providing its official opinion through remarks, suggestions, or objections. These inputs must be taken into account by the competent authority when making the final decision. 2) The municipality is responsible for ensuring that the public is properly informed about proposed projects subject to EIA. This includes facilitating access to relevant documents, such as draft EIA reports, and helping to notify the community about upcoming public hearings and consultations. 3) While the Regional Environmental Agency (REA) formally initiates and manages the EIA process, the Municipality of Elbasan is actively involved in organizing or facilitating local public hearings (venue, local notifications etc.). Beyond the consultation phase, the municipality is expected to play a role in monitoring the implementation of approved projects, helping to ensure that developers comply with the environmental conditions and mitigation measures set out in the EIA decision.

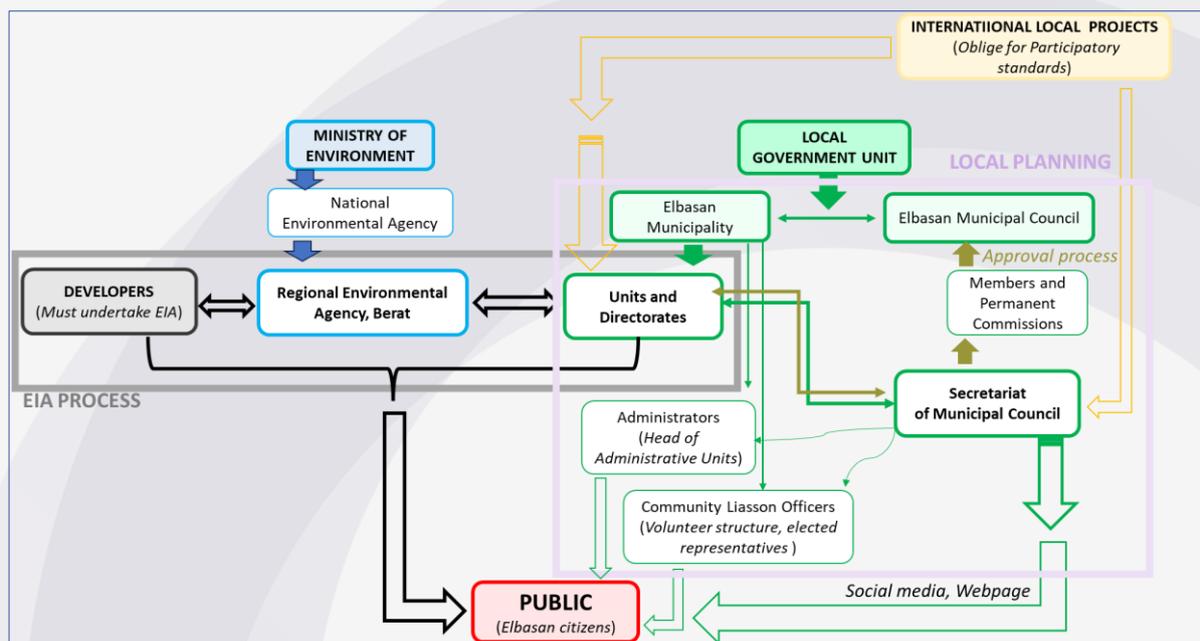


Fig. 2: Simple diagram reflecting environmental participative decision-making processes in Elbasan Municipality

Additionally, the public participation ecosystem in Elbasan is supported by two key achievements: the 1) *Transparency Program*, which guarantees open access to information for citizens, and 2) the municipality's membership in the *Open Government Partnership (OGP)* since September 2024, reinforcing Elbasan commitment to inclusive policy design and participatory decision-making. Within this framework, the Permanent Citizens' Forum for Local Policy-Making has been established, engaging experts and NGOs to ensure the active involvement of citizens and civil society in local governance.

Together, these two horizontal initiatives strengthen open and participatory governance, and during interviews were referenced frequently to be applied in the environmental sector.

Key insights from interviews

- All stakeholders recognize improvements in how Elbasan Municipality implements participatory processes.
- Elbasan Municipality is mastering Participatory Budgeting, showing growing experience and ownership of the process.
- There is a clear gap in properly and timely notifying the public and ensuring community inclusion in decision making. Also, there is little to no follow-up to explain how decisions were made or why certain choices were taken. This lack of transparency and accountability weakens trust and discourages future public engagement.
- Environmental issues are not a priority, not among citizens daily life concerns and not articulated in the municipality agenda.
- There is a clear need for environmental education and awareness-raising among Elbasan's residents to build interest and engagement.
- Partnerships of the municipality with civil society, media, academia, private sector are seen crucial to achieve meaningful participation and build trust.
- While formal processes and structures function to coordinate participation, they are not yet ensuring a meaningful participation in environmental matters.

- EIA consultation processes and their decision making are perceived as distant from both local governance and citizens of Elbasan. This is mainly due to the regional structures of Regional Environmental Agency and the passive role that Elbasan municipality plays in those processes.
- There is an “apathy” among citizens to engage and react for environmental matters. This comes from a mix of cultural barriers, distrust in institutions, and self-restriction to share their opinion.
- Personal interest is the main driver to citizens active participation in decision-making
- Every actor (citizens, media, CSOs, institutions, experts, women, youth etc.) express a desire for more and active participation in environmental decision-making.
- Environmental CSOs are very important but are currently weak, and there is low reaction to local environmental issues.
- Stakeholders believe that with stronger municipal capacity, inclusive forums, and environmental and public participation awareness-raising activities, public participation could improve significantly.

4. ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT PRACTICES

Status of citizen participation in Elbasan

Majority of interviewed stakeholders perceive environmental citizen participation in Elbasan as **medium** meaning that it demonstrates a progressive trend but with significant room for improvement. The rationale behind this perception can be clustered as below. There are many positive traits, however, as the ‘medium logic’ suggests, they also come with ‘buts’ that need to be addressed.

Environmental awareness: Environmental issues represent a raising topic of interest among citizens in Elbasan, but are not perceived as urgent or priority matters even-though Elbasan is recognised for high local problems like historic pollution from industry, waste incineration, water deviations from hydro power plants etc. Public attitude towards the environment remains indifferent, unfriendly and as a result their level of engagement is low. Citizens lack information and awareness on environmental matters and need to be better exposed to environmental discussions. At the moment, public consultations are the main source of information in which citizens attend never fewer than 20 participants but awareness of the topics and meaningful participation remain limited. Environmental organisations and academia should play a stronger role to coordinate and support public environmental education and awareness.

Engagement drivers: Personal interest is the main driver of citizens participation in public consultations and environmental discussions. They are interested in their local issues and want their voices to be heard. Also, they enjoy interacting with each-other and public consultations offer this opportunity. They value the chance to express their concerns and displeasures but there is a cultural gap in getting involved for public goods like environment. So, citizens involvement remains strict to prioritise personal needs like small infrastructure repairs, family compensations, opportunity to lobby and get compensations or favours etc.

Youth engagement: Youth City Council (YCC) represents an important mechanism and tool which is active and is increasing youth participation and engagement in Elbasan. It counts around 200 members, but their engagement is typically limited to one academic cycle and lacks long-term sustainability, especially because many young people emigrate after finishing secondary school. Members of the YCC need training and stronger links with academia to become active in public services and decision-making.

Direct public communication and coordination structures: In recent years, structured municipal channels for citizen engagement in decision making are in place. Administrators (Heads of Municipal Units) are seen as trusted figures and serve as a direct link between the municipal secretariat and the community, enabling exchange of official notifications and mobilising participation. Community structures (Heads of villages, Community liaison officers) are considered the added value of Elbasan citizens involvement. Yet, these elected representatives need continuous capacity-building on municipal functions and initiatives. On the other side, Civil Society Organisations should engage more actively beyond project-based and ensure inclusiveness of their target groups (gender, vulnerable groups, minorities). Academia could play a stronger role in supporting and encouraging active participation in environmental decision-making processes.

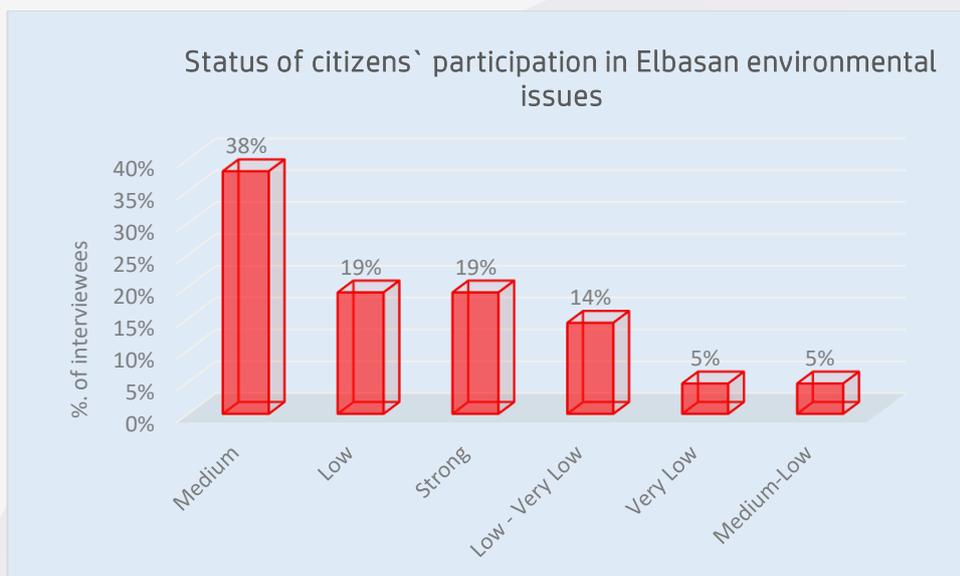


Fig. 3: Perception on level of participation in environmental issues during interviews

These stakeholders, identified several challenges and opportunities to increase public involvement in environmental issues. The table below shows participants' reflections in a structured format, connecting how their identified opportunities can be positioned to address their identified challenges:

Challenges (halt participation)	Opportunities (provides room for improvement)
Low awareness of environmental issues	There is growing recognition of the importance of environmental issues
Weak culture of collective environmental engagement	Citizens respond when directly invited
Consultations often lack debate, limiting the impact they should have in decision-making	Structures for consultation are in place and are beginning to function, but they require more proactive facilitation
Mistrust towards decision-makers and the perception of political influence	
Participation is often motivated by direct personal interests rather than environmental or community-wide concerns	Participatory budgeting is a model with more localized, up to neighborhood level consultations (not only citywide), that could improve inclusiveness and trust.

A small portion of stakeholders perceive the involvement in environmental matters already **as strong**. This view is linked to the historical context of environmental pollution in Elbasan, which has made citizens more sensitive to environmental issues. However, this perception relates more to quantitative indicators, such as the number of participants and the existence of participatory processes, rather than to the quality of public consultations. As such, stakeholders express that participation is **high but not fully inclusive**, being characterized by 1) *genuine community concern* and activism, still remaining stuck by 2) *inclusiveness gaps* and external influences.

Genuine community concern: Citizens care for their environment due to the legacy of the metallurgical industry and waste incineration which have initiated many community actions. Several examples of

their engagement include clean-up actions, engaging in tree planting, environmental campaigns etc. Environmental awareness is increasing with youth playing an active role through the establishment of Environmental Board in the Youth City Council which organizes diverse environmental actions and regularly participate in public hearings and environmental activities.

Inclusiveness gap: Public hearings are sometimes designed to 1) invite only compliant participants who remain passive and limit the open debate, 2) information is not always shared early enough to allow preparation, 3) powerful polluters, such as large industries, have been known/rumored to sponsor events or influence experts to soften criticism, and 4) logistical arrangements do not always enable participation of women, elders and marginalized communities.

Stakeholders who perceive citizen involvement in environmental issues **as low** refer to a wider status quo which include: the existing persistent pollution, weak community responsibility, and limited public reaction to environmental problems. They highlight also weak consultation practices, fragile civil society and media voices, and institutional gaps in local governance.

The rationale behind this thinking is clustered below:

Low public interest	Weak consultation practices	Weak environmental CSOs and media representation	Institutional gaps in local governance
<p>Citizens generally do not engage in environmental processes due to lack of green culture, community spirit and high personal interest.</p> <p>Even in critical cases (example of landfill fire in July 2025), only 2–3 NGOs and the organizers protested and no citizens.</p> <p>Many citizens feel hopeless that environmental issues can be solved, which leads to their apathy and non-engagement</p>	<p>Citizens are sometimes invited under promising premises without proper information or recognition as stakeholders.</p> <p>Consultation meetings are often poorly organized (invitations sent one day before, or the same morning), and it affects effective participation.</p> <p>Many citizens don't even know that participatory processes exist.</p>	<p>Civil society activism is weak, fragmented, and dominated by a few elders.</p> <p>NGOs sometimes misuse consultations, failing to raise issues effectively or inclusively (citation: "<i>one activist, one NGO, 3 people</i>").</p> <p>Media contributes to this weakness by amplifying the same small group of green voices, giving the impression of no fresh or strong leadership.</p> <p>The lack of a strong environmental civil society voice discourages broader community engagement.</p>	<p>The municipality carries out many environmental initiatives but should not replace CSOs, it must empower their role through partnership.</p> <p>Local government shows little will to reach out directly to citizens and their direct participation in environmental decision-making</p> <p>Participatory processes are symbolic rather than meaningful, which contributes to further lack of trust and participation.</p>

Gender and inclusion spotlight – Participation of women in environmental decision-making in Elbasan

Applying a gender lens to the assessment highlights that women's participation in environmental decision-making in Elbasan, while formally encouraged, remains uneven in practice. Women are present across participatory processes, including interviews, workshops, validation sessions, and participatory budgeting, yet their effective engagement is often constrained by structural, logistical, and socio-cultural barriers.

Consultations held at centralized venues, during working hours, or without transport support disproportionately limit the participation of women, particularly those in rural areas, older women, and

women from marginalized communities. Household and care responsibilities, combined with traditional gender roles, further restrict availability and confidence. Even when women attend, male-dominated meeting dynamics often reduce speaking time and discourage open expression.

At the same time, the assessment identifies clear enablers. Women engagement improves significantly when participatory processes are adapted through decentralized and evening meetings, targeted outreach via trusted community structures, and facilitation that actively invites women contributions. Elbasan participatory budgeting process provides a positive local example, demonstrating how inclusive logistics and proactive moderation can increase women’s visibility and influence.

These findings underline the need to move beyond formal inclusion toward gender-responsive participation design. Strengthening environmental governance in Elbasan requires consultation processes that enable women not only to attend, but to shape priorities, decisions, and outcomes in a meaningful and visible way.

Trends and motivations

This assessment found that the trend of citizen involvement in environmental issues shows signs of improvement, although perceptions remain divided. In recent years, 33% of stakeholders observed significant progress, 42% saw no meaningful change, while 25% described a mixed reality of significant improvements with existing obstacles that together halt positive advancement. Figure 4 illustrates this overview.

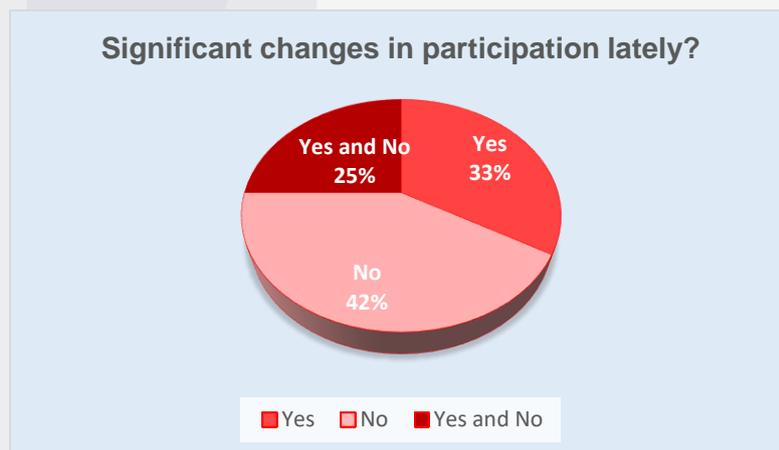


Fig. 4: Have there been any significant changes in participation levels over recent years

A key driver of increased public engagement in environmental matters and governance is citizens motivation.

- *What motivates citizens in Elbasan to participate in decision-making?*

Citizens in Elbasan participate mainly when issues affect their personal interests, when they trust that their voices will matter and will be considered, and when institutions provide clear information and positive practices. In more detail, their motivations can be clustered as follows:

1. PERSONAL INTERESTS

Direct personal interest is the strongest driver for citizens in Elbasan to engage in decision making. Concerns such as water supply, waste management, roads, noise, or taxes stimulate participation, especially when those problems are at their own doorstep. Also, citizens who have invested or depend on livelihoods (especially near the former metallurgical zone) urge to be pro-active when those are affected by decision-making.

2. COMMUNITY NEEDS AND THE LOVE FOR THEIR CITY

"Elbasanllinjtë love their city and want to see it flourish day after day reflecting European standards"

- remains a strong source of motivation among citizens who reflect and represent the well-known civility of Elbasan. Many see consultations as a chance to present requests on behalf of the community, their village or neighbourhood problems (drinking water, public spaces, local services etc.) with the hope that those will be solved. Rural residents have more connection to land and nature, thus they engage in topics like agriculture, water, land use issues etc., while urban residents react more to big-picture topics like pollution, noise, green areas, traffic etc.

3. RIGHT TO BE REPRESENTED, RESPECTED AND THEIR VOICE TO BE HEARD

Citizens feel motivated when they see that consultations are a platform to express opinions, dissatisfaction, or needs, and that their voices are heard by institutions. They see participation as a form of dialogue with the municipality and an opportunity for their concerns to be recognized and considered in decision-making. A strong driver for them is the hope that their problems will be solved, not only discussed in a repetitive way.

4. GET INFORMATION AND WANT TO SEE TRANSPARENCY

People see consultation meetings and processes as opportunities to get information about new investments, employment opportunities, and municipal plans. It is seen as a chance to learn about ongoing projects and decisions that affect their lives. Effective communication by municipal administrators and members of the city council, like notification on time, active engagement, feedback on decisions and updates on their implementation etc. helps to build trust and to increase participation.

5. POSITIVE PRACTICES AND TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Citizens in Elbasan tend to engage, cooperate and participate more when they see positive processes and responsiveness from institutions. A great example is participatory budgeting in which citizens have the opportunity to communicate directly with local authorities, receive timely information, and build ongoing communication channels with their local institutions' representatives. Active administrators, an active environment commission within the municipal council and engaged councilors have done a great job during participatory budgeting which has helped in building trust and motivation among citizens to engage in that process.

6. SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS

Social dynamics shape public engagement. Some citizens attend simply *"to be present in city life,"* reflecting a sense of community belonging and love for Elbasan, often referred to as the city's cultural face. Others participate *"to make a favor"* (*qokë*), usually linked to employment ties, such as municipal staff or their relatives feeling obliged to be present. Some attend for political reasons like out of party loyalty, to show support or criticism toward political actors/affiliations.

7. ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

Convenient timing (example, meetings held in the afternoon) is important and provides an opportunity for higher participation especially for women and working people. Closer communication with local administrative units encourages participation, as residents feel more directly connected and informed.

- *What reasons de-motivate citizens in Elbasan to participate in decision-making?*

Citizens in Elbasan often do not participate in environmental decision making due to late or missing information, irrelevance of the topics to their daily life, logistical and social barriers, and a weak culture of togetherness, strengthened by lack of trust in institutions, disappointments from past experiences, and fear of expressing different opinions,

1. LACK OF TIMELY INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

- Citizens often do not receive information in time, or at all. Announcements that are made at the lastminute leave little chance for attendance.

- Communication channels are too technological for elderly or marginalized groups and traditional tools (flyers, direct outreach) are missing or are very sporadic.
- Public consultations are posted online, but people rarely check municipal websites.
- Technical language is used in environmental processes, which many cannot understand.

2. RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC

- Consultations and discussions about local plans and strategies on environment feel too abstract and far from people's daily concerns.
- Environmental issues often do not generate public interest unless they are linked to personal issues.

3. LOGISTICAL CONSTRAINTS

- Distance, transport problems, and inconvenient meeting times affect presence especially of women and rural communities in public consultations.
- Joint consultations (one consultation is City Hall for example) make citizens feel that their neighborhood is not represented.

4. WEAK CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION

- There is a widespread individualistic culture through which people tend to solve their issues privately, in direct communication with leaders instead of reacting collectively as a community or getting together to protect their common resources.
- Many citizens feel apathetic, indifferent, or resigned. They are just not interested in being active.

5. LACK OF TRUST AND DISAPPOINTMENT

- Strong skepticism that citizen voices are valued or can change decisions.
- Previous experiences of not being heard (protests ignored, promises unkept) have erased citizens' trust.
- Perception of lack of accountability and transparency from government and municipality.
- Disappointment with central government on environmental issues (industries left untouched and those are central government issues).
- Beliefs that consultations are formalities, not sincere dialogues.

6. INSTITUTIONAL AND CAPACITY GAPS

- Municipal staff capacity needs improvement in organizing and coordination of environmental public participation. Especially the new employees who are not trained in organizing participatory processes.
- The regional division of Regional Environmental Agencies (REAs) instead of local division, has negatively impacted the communication and addressing of environmental issues.

7. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BARRIERS

- Some businesses attract citizens not to speak up, thus silencing critical voices.
- Participation is often politicized. People engage when political attacks are possible, not for constructive dialogue.
- Many women (especially housewives and vulnerable groups) are underrepresented because outreach is not always adapted to them.
- Citizens fear being judged, labeled, or punished for speaking openly:
 - o Fear of being seen as "spies."
 - o Fear of losing jobs if they oppose municipal decisions.
 - o Fear of being targeted for expressing an opposite opinion

8. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL BARRIERS

- Experience of self-censorship and feel of powerlessness ("*my opinion does not matter*") which discourage sharing of opinions and speaking up.

- "Migration mode on" - some people don't care about engagement because they plan to leave.

Trends and motivations - AN EU PERSPECTIVE

At EU level, sensibility toward environmental issues, more than three-quarters of Europeans (78%) agree that environmental issues have a direct effect on their daily life and their health. 84% find that EU environmental legislation is necessary for protecting the environment in their country. This data collected in 2024⁴ shows insignificant variation from the precedent barometer (2019), already revealing a strong adhesion to environmental regulation and impacts.

At the EU level, there's no systemic poll integrating those questions. The data thus come from several polls and public consultations, some at EU level, such as youth processes, or more local processes, where information is very extended. However, you'll find below an aggregation of data dealing with motivations and obstacles with European and French insights.

- *EU citizens' principal motivations to participate in public consultations and participatory processes linked to law making*

Motivation	Description	Data and sources
Influence, Impact and accountability	Citizens seek to influence decisions and policies that affect their lives, believing that their participation can lead to tangible change.	58% of respondents to the European Court of Auditors (ECA) "Have your say!" survey (2019) said they took part to "influence the legislative outcome". France (CNDP feedback): participants frequently express the desire that " <i>leurs avis soient pris en compte</i> " (their views be taken into account), often requesting visible feedback loops (" <i>trace de leur parole</i> ").
Personal or civic interest in the issue	A curiosity, balance of benefits/disadvantages about local issues, projects, policies that motivate citizens to participate in civic activities.	56% of EU respondents said they participated because they were "interested in the topic" In France , thematic relevance is a key driver: people mobilize more easily on visible, local environmental projects (wind farms, water quality, biodiversity, etc.) or ethical causes.
Civic duty and collective responsibility	Citizens feel a strong sense of responsibility to engage in community activities that contribute to societal welfare.	49% in the ECA study cited a sense of "civic responsibility". In France , this motive overlaps with " <i>défense du bien commun</i> " and " <i>volonté d'exercer une citoyenneté active</i> ", especially among educated publics.

- *EU citizens' principal barriers for participating in public consultations and participatory processes linked to law making*

Motivation	Description	Data and sources
Lack of knowledge of consultations (people don't know they happen)	Many citizens are unaware of how to participate or that opportunities exist, leading to disengagement.	Citizens often do not know a consultation exists or don't understand its purpose. Cited as the main barrier in the ECAS study "Participation of European Citizens in the EU Legislative Procedure" (2021). For instance, 60% of citizens report not knowing how to get involved. (European Court of Auditors 2019).

⁴ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3173?etrans=fr>

		In France , CNDP notes “ <i>faible visibilité des dispositifs</i> ” (insufficient visibility/ communication of processes)
Low trust / lack of feedback, Ineffectiveness	A lack of trust in institutions and their processes can discourage citizens from engaging, as they may feel their contributions won't matter.	Citizens feel their voice won't matter or see no follow-up (“consultation fatigue”). ECA (2019) warns that participants “rarely receive feedback on how their views are used.” Surveys indicate that 45% feel their contributions are ignored by decision-makers. (ECAS 2021) French CNDP evaluations emphasize the need to “ <i>donner à voir ce que devient la parole citoyenne</i> ” (follow-up). In France, due to recent public consultation processes lead by governments, this feeling seems to have grown.
Complexity / inaccessibility/ Bureaucratic and physical obstacles	Barriers such as location, transportation, and scheduling conflicts can prevent citizens from actively participating in civic activities.	Procedures are perceived as too technical, long, or expert-oriented. ECAS (2021) and ECA (2019), both highlight excessive length and jargon. French enquêtes publiques reports mention “ <i>documents trop volumineux</i> ” (excessive lengths of document) and “ <i>langage administratif et technique difficile</i> ” (technical and administrative language difficult to apprehend).

Future perspective of public participation

Data from stakeholders’ interviews and SWOT workshop indicate that **Optimistic** stakeholders believe that citizen participation in environmental governance in Elbasan will grow if commitment for improvement in some aspects is serious. They highlight collaboration, better communication, and stronger institutional practices. The **Neutral** perspective includes stakeholders who are more careful, reflecting uncertainty and the need for improvements, but without clear confidence. They hope for improvement but describe the present as stagnant and dependent on stronger institutional practices. **Pessimistic** stakeholders doubt that there will be a meaningful improvement of public participation in the future. They highlight deep-rooted problems like public apathy, distrust, and weak governance.

Optimistic	Neutral	Pessimistic
Participation is promising and requires sustainable engagement and cooperation among institutions, citizens, and civil society actors. It requires only small investment in timely communication, better consultation structures, environmental education and quality services to increase trust and participation Existing positive practices are seen as strong proof of institutional commitment to citizen involvement. With EU integration by 2030, citizens will adopt a European culture of participation.	Stakeholders hold a realistic view about current limits. Demographic shifts (migration in rural areas) reduce participation potential. While mechanisms exist, weak enforcement, poor communication, and lack of local ownership halts participation. Environmental issues are often communicated too abstractly, using “climate change” clichés and not connected with daily life realities, which weakens engagement.	The panorama is “not positive”, highlighting that in the past four years debates have lacked quality. Citizen apathy is alarming, and they do not feel ownership of the environment and often fail to act collectively. There is distrust in institutions, with many consultations seen as formalities rather than genuine opportunities. Citizens expect institutions to solve everything for them, without a sense of shared responsibility. Environmental issues are long-term and invisible (example health impacts of pollution) and it reduces citizen urgency to act and address them.

<p>Citizens are growing awareness of environmental issues which will increase engagement levels</p> <p>There is still hope for a “greener” and more participatory future, with environmental issues placed at the center of local government priorities.</p>	<p>Participation could increase if manuals, clear procedures, and proper enforcement of environmental laws were implemented.</p> <p>Citizens focus on individual demands and lack collective spirit which limits participation.</p>	<p>The situation may even worsen if migration, weak CSOs, and political manipulation continue to affect civic engagement.</p> <p>Hopeless: if citizens no longer talk about issues like the landfill or the former metallurgical plant, “participation is done!”</p>
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Accession process as a driving force on improving Public Participation in Elbasan

The EU accession process, particularly through the requirements of Chapter 27: Environment and Climate Change within the Horizontal Legislation package has become a key driver for improving public participation in Elbasan. “*With EU integration by 2030, citizens will adopt a European culture of participation.*” responded some of the optimistic stakeholders during the interviews, indicating that EU accession drives not only improvement in participatory governance in Elbasan, but also optimism and motivation.

Within this framework, Elbasan Municipality as a local government unit, is a key actor responsible for translating national transposed legislation into practice, being the first level of implementation. It is required from municipalities to inform and consult citizens on issues such as local environmental and other sectorial plans, EIA procedures etc., ensuring that local voices contribute to sustainable environmental governance.

While the legal transposition is largely in place, the accession process pushes Elbasan to strengthen institutional capacities, improve documentation and transparency in decision-making, expand cooperation with civil society organizations and guide the local units in fulfilling the closing benchmarks for Chapter 27. This ongoing alignment with EU standards is gradually pushing for a more participatory culture at the local level, where citizen engagement becomes an integral part of environmental governance and local development planning.

Case studies of successful and unsuccessful participation in Elbasan

- *Case studies of successful citizens participation in decision-making in Elbasan*

<p style="text-align: center;">Participatory Budgeting</p> <p>Participatory budgeting in Elbasan is widely recognized and accepted as the most successful participatory practice in local governance. It has created a transparent, democratic, and inclusive framework for local decision-making. This model demonstrates how structured, inclusive, and transparent participatory processes can empower citizens, build trust, and deliver concrete improvements. It is widely recognized as a model for Albania, proving that when citizens are well-informed, properly invited, and given real decision-making power, participation is effective.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Fiscal Package</p> <p>It uses the same methodology and coordination as participatory budgeting and is identified as a successful practice for participative decision-making in Elbasan Municipality.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Participatory Budgeting for Youth</p> <p>Participatory budgeting in Elbasan has also been extended to youth-focused processes, coordinated by the specialists of the Youth Directorate together with the Mayor and the Municipal Council Secretariat. Young people are informed well in advance, 30 days before the meeting, and are supported by specialists who provide guidance on how to raise issues of interest effectively.</p>
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It gathers around 100 young participants who voice their priorities, including the demand for a Youth Center. This proposal was prioritized in the decision-making and was implemented serving both as a youth center and a career counseling hub. The Municipal Council also invited the media to cover the session, ensuring visibility and public recognition of youth engagement. This case shows how participatory budgeting can give young citizens a real voice, turn their proposals into concrete projects, and strengthen inclusive governance.

Contract of commitments for Climate Neutrality 2030 (within NetZeroCity initiative)

In January 2025, Elbasan Municipality launched the public consultation on its Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP), inviting citizens, institutions, and local stakeholders to comment on draft measures and propose investment priorities. This step opened the way for inclusive climate planning at the city level. In March 2025, Elbasan formally signed the Contract of Commitments for Climate Neutrality 2030 with national and local partners, joining the initiative of EU 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030. The municipality is now implementing the GreenElb Pilot Activity, which combines technical building retrofits with participatory methods such as youth volunteers acting as “energy ambassadors,” participatory budgeting principles, and a community leadership model.

This integrated approach demonstrates how ambitious climate neutrality goals can be advanced through citizen engagement, shared ownership, and transparent governance, making Elbasan a positive pilot example of inclusive climate action in Albania.

Photovoltaic Investment in Fushë Buall, Shushicë

The public consultation in Fushë Buall, Shushicë (2024) on the allocation of public forest land for photovoltaic panels stands as a positive example of participatory decision-making at the local level. The Municipal Council coordinated the process through structured consultations with residents, village leaders, and interest groups, ensuring that community concerns about drinking water, pastures, and agricultural land were fully addressed.

This practice shows that when citizens are properly informed, given space to raise their concerns, and engaged in transparent dialogue, potential conflicts can be prevented, and collective agreement can be reached. It illustrates how participatory approaches can balance local development with environmental safeguards, strengthening community trust.

Elbasan Local Integrated Waste Management Plan

The development Local Integrated Waste Management Plan was coordinated by the Directorate of Territorial and Urban Planning, with active involvement of the Municipal Council, local administrators, heads of administrative units, and companies such as Kurum, AlbKrom, and healthcare waste recyclers. Consultations typically gathered 30–40 participants per meeting in the municipal hall, and more than 90 representatives from 12 rural administrative units were engaged.

The process led to the improvement of the plan and its regulations, incorporating both legal obligations and local needs. Local media covered the meetings, providing visibility and raising awareness. This case demonstrates how inclusive consultation with institutions and community representatives can strengthen coordination, improve planning, and support better environmental governance.

Open Government Partnership (OGP)

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) forum in Elbasan provides a well-structured and consolidated platform for information exchange, consultation, and dialogue. Through this forum, stakeholders receive drafts, participate in hearings, provide comments, and engage in discussions. This consistent process has strengthened transparency and made participatory decision-making more effective.

A noticed limitation is that not all actors can participate but it has a limited number of seats. When fewer actors are present, the debate becomes narrower, less inclusive, and less multi-dimensional. This highlights the need to encourage wider and more diverse participation to maximize the value of the OGP forum as an inclusive governance tool.

- *Case studies of unsuccessful citizens participation in decision-making in Elbasan*

Environmental Permit Changes for Kurum Company

The process to change and consolidate six separate environmental permits into one for the company Kurum was not effective as a participatory exercise. The consultation lacked meaningful public involvement, as the participants were almost exclusively company employees rather than independent residents or community representatives. The key obstacles were the 1) absence of broader citizen participation, 2) a superficial environmental impact analysis, and the 3) failure to properly notify the public according to participatory standards. This undermined transparency and limited the credibility of the decision-making process. No local media were notified, and NGOs were not proactive in following up. The lack of media engagement further reduced visibility and accountability of the process.

Allocation of Forest Land for Photovoltaic Panels in Labinot-Fushë (2023–2024)

The consultation on allocating forest land for photovoltaic panels in Labinot-Fushë gathered around 30 participants, but the process was weakened by conflicting views and a lack of follow-up. While some residents argued the land should remain for grazing and raised concerns about radiation, the majority supported the project. The municipality recorded all comments and the Council approved the land allocation. However, residents never received official responses to their concerns, undermining trust. The process was disrupted when opposition party media attended and politicized the consultation, creating heated debates that produced more noise than constructive dialogue. Additionally, consultations were seen as limited to “stakeholders” (institutions and NGOs) rather than ordinary citizens, reducing inclusiveness. Media coverage from opposition outlets framed the process politically and contributed to misinterpretation rather than enhancing transparency.

Waste Disposal Site and Incinerator close to Shkumbin River (2017)

In 2017, a waste disposal site and incinerator were constructed close to Shkumbin River, near a residential area of about 25,000 inhabitants. Despite strong opposition from community members and alternative locations being available, the project went ahead after an environmental emergency was declared in Elbasan. Community voices and comments were heard but ignored, and the project is today widely considered a failure. The main barrier was political will. Decision-making was top-down, with little regard for participatory processes or environmental concerns. The media has covered this project but the depth and independence of coverage depended on editorial freedom and political context.

Revitalization of the Main City Park

The revitalization of Elbasan’s main city park was undertaken as an “urban requalification” project, and therefore no public consultation was carried out. Civil society and interest groups were not included, while proposals from citizens (such as adding benches instead of concrete blocks) were ignored until they organized a roundtable in the park themselves to address the issues. Authorities argued that citizen input had been considered when the original park was designed, but in reality, the new interventions changed the park fundamentally. Large areas were concreted, a canal was opened through the park that remains non-functional and filled with waste, and numerous trees were cut. As a result, parts of the park have become unusable, undermining its role as the most important public space of the city.

Interviews with citizens revealed frustration: they see the park as belonging to the community, and they felt excluded and discriminated. Media coverage was limited and polarized. The coverage mostly promoted the project from an institutional perspective and critical reporting was largely absent. The main barriers were the failure to apply consultation requirements and the selective involvement of stakeholders.

Public hearings with Industrial Operators

Public hearings with industrial operators are regularly organized and procedurally well-coordinated. However, they have not led to improvements in environmental performance. Companies often continue operating without upgrading technology or addressing pollution issues. Comments and concerns raised during hearings are largely ignored, leaving citizens and stakeholders feeling excluded and powerless. The main barriers are the lack of responsiveness from industry and the selective inclusion of participants. Authorities often exclude key stakeholders with a genuine interest in environmental impacts. In the past, there was some media coverage, but in recent years these hearings have received little or none which makes the process seem to be intentionally kept out of public discussion

Challenges in Participatory Budgeting

Participatory Budgeting is designed to give citizens a voice in setting community priorities. However, in practice, often participants represent institutional interests rather than community concerns. As a result, the process does not always reflect the voices of ordinary citizens or their everyday challenges.

The main barriers were late notifications, overlapping meetings (2–3 in the same day, preventing people from attending more than one), and inconvenient scheduling. Citizens also reported not receiving timely or consistent information. No specific media coverage was noted for these challenges.

The Bypass Infrastructure Project (State project)

The state Bypass project is considered a negative example because it has been developed without any public consultations. Despite the fact that the project directly affects numerous community interests, local voices have not been included in planning or decision-making.

Case studies of successful and unsuccessful participation in EU's countries

- *Case studies of successful citizen's participation in environmental decision-making in EU*

Toulouse-Mirail incinerator — a CNDP-guaranteed concertation that steered project redesign

The municipality and the operator ran a CNDP-guaranteed public concertation, under the scrutiny of independent guarantors, on the evolution and modernisation of the Mirail incinerator. This concertation took seriously timelines, quality of information and diversified ways of participation: platform of meetings, citizen panels, published follow-up etc. The process produced concrete recommendations and a negotiated, phased approach to upgrades regarding compliance works (short-term) and re-structuring scenarios (2030). It is often cited as a case where structured CNDP procedures improved project design and stakeholder buy-in⁵.

Why it worked: early, structured engagement (in design phases before technical solutions are fixed); inclusion of citizen panels and transparent follow-up reports; explicit attention to accessibility of information.

Lesson: for waste facilities, a CNDP-style process that offers iterative dialogue and public reporting can produce measurable design changes and reduce local conflict.

Roşia Montană (Romania) — 2013 -2021: citizens blocking a large polluting mine (a success for civic influence)

The proposed Roşia Montană open-pit gold mine met mass public protests (2013 onward), strong NGO mobilisation, heritage/archaeological arguments and national/international pressure; parliamentary and regulatory steps eventually halted the project (2021) and the area gained UNESCO protections restricting future mining.

Why it's a success (from the citizen perspective): broad cross-society mobilisation, clear messaging (culture, environment, water, cyanide risk), alliances with NGOs and international actors, and use of legal/political levers to block permits.

Lessons: effective campaigns combine local voices with technical evidence (health/heritage/environmental impact), rapid coalition building, and legal strategies (permit appeals, UNESCO or EU law references where relevant).

Waste management in Paris region — Plan régional de prévention et de gestion des déchets en Île-de-France (2016-2019)

Between 2016 and 2019, the Île-de-France Regional Council led the development of its waste prevention and management plan (PRPGD). Public participation was embedded from the start with stakeholders, NGOs, professionals, citizens (+4500) through multi-channel participation (online, workshops etc.). It led to groups co-drafting the plan's objective. The participatory phase gathered data on citizens' priorities — notably reducing household waste, promoting local composting, and reducing plastic packaging. **These inputs were explicitly reflected in the final plan.**

The process **succeeded** because citizens were consulted early through a mix of online tools, workshops, and surveys that ensured broad participation. Transparent feedback tables showed how each proposal was addressed, building trust. Technical actors shared expertise while citizens grounded decisions in daily practice, leading to clear outcomes: recycling, reuse, and composting became measurable priorities in the final waste plan.

Inclusion, an example of best practice: Phoenix inclusion group in the Public debate La mer en débat

National public debate on France's maritime strategy and 45 GW of offshore wind, led by the CNDP and four local commissions (CPDP). Over **21,000 participants, 375 events, and 20,000+ written contributions** were collected in 4.5 months. Within this reglementary process (legal participation) an **"Inclusion Group"**, supported by the EU *H2020 Phoenix Project*, was created in **Normandy and Hauts-de-France** to involve people usually distant from public decision-making. Its goals:

1. Gather views of vulnerable or underrepresented communities,
2. Extend the debate locally,
3. Strengthen citizen empowerment.

⁵ <https://www.debatpublic.fr/evolution-de-lincinerateur-de-toulouse-mirail-2278>

Through tailor-made workshops and local events — such as the “*Funny Party on the Sea*” in Dunkirk, citizens’ breakfasts, and local assemblies — over 150 residents from working-class or vulnerable backgrounds became local ambassadors for the debate.

Why does it work ?

- Adapted methods: informal, creative, and inclusive formats.
- Partnership with social centres and associations already trusted by locals.
- Recognition of contributions: inputs from the group were included in the final CNDP report.

Best practices

- Partner with trusted local intermediaries to reach excluded groups.
- Use informal and creative events to make participation accessible.
- Recognize and report back on community input to strengthen legitimacy.
- Inclusion requires time, local anchoring, and empowerment tools, not only consultation sessions

- *Case studies of unsuccessful citizen’s participation in environmental decision-making in EU*

Turów lignite mine (Poland/Czech cross-border dispute)

Cross-border impacts from the Turów open-pit mine triggered local complaints and a Czech suit before EU courts. Citizens and local communities suffered water and environmental impacts; the legal process produced injunctions and complex political negotiations⁶, showing how slow and uncertain remedies can be when national energy/security arguments clash with local rights and EU law⁷. At the end an amical agreement was found in 2025⁸.

Why participation / protection was difficult: transnational impacts complicate local influence; state energy policy and national sovereignty arguments slowed prompt local remedies; legal processes⁹ were effective finally but took time.

Lesson for cross-border or regional environmental issues: ensure early transboundary notification/consultation (where relevant), use science-based baseline monitoring, and engage regional institutions early to avoid protracted legal battles and delayed relief.

Sofia (Bulgaria) waste incinerator project :

neglecting transparent participation and rigorous environmental review lead to the rejection of major infrastructure projects.

The Sofia waste incinerator project was launched in the mid-2010s as part of the city’s strategy to reduce landfill use and produce energy from waste. Funded in part by the European Investment Bank, the facility was planned to burn municipal waste to generate district heating. However, from the start, the process faced strong opposition from environmental NGOs, residents, and independent experts, who denounced the absence of genuine public consultation and insufficient health and air-quality assessments. The Environmental Impact Assessment was repeatedly challenged in court, with critics arguing that key data were unreliable and that authorities had ignored public concerns. After years of delays and litigation, Bulgaria’s Supreme Administrative Court annulled the project’s EIA approval, effectively halting its development. The case illustrates how neglecting transparent participation and rigorous environmental review can erode public trust and lead to the rejection of major infrastructure projects.

What went wrong:

- The EIA and public consultation were flawed; authorities ignored health risk concerns; also, data was unreliable; no proper participation, despite long delays / litigation.
- The project was ultimately overturned.
- This is a case where citizen participation (or legal requirement of it) was ignored (or done badly), causing delays and rejection of the project.

Fos-sur-Mer incinerator (early 2000s, not CNDP but EIA consultation)

In the early 2000s, the project to build a waste incinerator in Fos-sur-Mer, in southern France, was submitted to public consultation as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment rather than through a CNDP-led process. The consultation involved waste operators, local municipalities, NGOs, and residents, but only a few hundred people attended the hearings. Because participation took place late—after the site had already been

⁶ <https://www.miningsee.eu/poland-in-court-over-environment-impact-assessment-of-drilling>

⁷ https://www.climatecasechart.com/document/czech-republic-v-poland-mine-de-turow_1bd9

⁸ <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2025-07/cp250092en.pdf>

⁹ https://www.climatecasechart.com/document/czech-republic-v-poland-mine-de-turow_1bd9

chosen—citizens felt their input could not influence the outcome. The project proceeded with minimal changes, leaving a legacy of mistrust and frustration that later fuelled local opposition to other industrial facilities. Limited participation, hearings drew a few hundred locals

Why it didn't work:

- Limited participation
- **Timing:** consultations came late, after siting decision
- Citizens felt powerless
- Project went ahead with little modification.

Analysis of processes with potential to pilot the use of the public participation toolkit

The list of both successful and unsuccessful examples provides a great overview of the progress Elbasan Municipality has made towards public inclusion and participation in local governance and environmental decision making. While positive examples show that clear and functional structures are in place, that there is good political will and engagement to strengthen the process and make citizens active partners in decision making, the unsuccessful examples show that bad practices refer mostly to the past but that gaps in meaningful participation are inherited in the present. All these examples indicate the need for better public disclosure, closer partnership with media to change perceptions and attitude, and at the same time, they reflect the critical ambition of stakeholders who recognize the progress made so far but remain clear in their call for improvement: *we are good, but we want to be better—and ultimately the best.*

In this context, the processes with potential to pilot the use of the public participation toolkit should represent the full range of environmental decision making at local level: 1) Municipal environmental processes led and coordinated by Municipality and Municipal Council and, 2) Environmental Impact Assessment processes led by REA and private developers, with municipal oversight and support. By covering both areas, the toolkit can address the specific features of participatory environmental governance in Elbasan.

Two processes have strong potential for improvement: 1) Participatory Budgeting and 2) EIA public consultations. These are highly visible processes, widely regarded as reference by citizens when discussing public participation in Elbasan. Strengthening them will not only improve their quality but also inspire citizens to engage more actively in other participatory initiatives.

1) Participatory budgeting

- Recognized as the best participatory process in Elbasan and among the most advanced in Albania, though stakeholders believe it still requires improvement.
- Strengths rely on: established structures, strong organizational and coordination capacities, long-standing experience, and demonstrated political will to make the process citizen-centred.
- Weaknesses rely on: limited use of effective communication tools and partnerships to ensure meaningful participation.

2) EIA public consultation

- Following the regional restructuring of REA, EIA processes have become more distant from citizens and regionalization is often perceived as having undermined environmental participation. Strengthened cooperation between REA and Elbasan Municipality is needed to ensure quality consultations. The Municipality should act as the local bridge between EIA procedures and its citizens, ensuring not only participation but also active coordination and influence in decision-making.
- Strengths rely on: there is high public interest in EIA processes, especially because majority of them are linked to the historical and actual industrial pollution of Elbasan. Municipal participatory structures already exist and could be mobilized for these consultations as well.

- Weaknesses relay on: there is limited understanding of how closer cooperation between REA Berat and Elbasan Municipality could improve EIA processes. Municipal structures are more advanced than the coordination approaches typically used by REA and private developers.

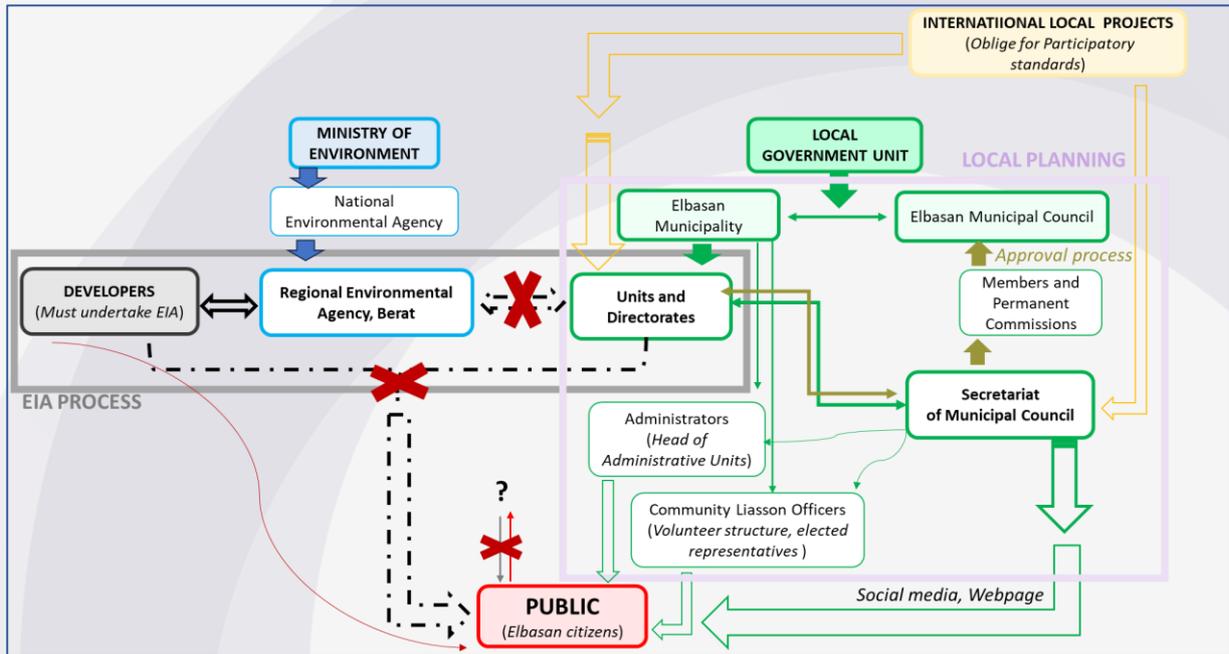


Fig. 5: Visualisation of gaps in the EIA consultation process

5. BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Systemic, organizational, and individual-level challenges

Assessment in Elbasan indicates that policies exist (systemic level) but are under-implemented (organizational level), which feeds the existing mistrust, apathy, and disengagement at the citizen level (individual).

Systemic (structural/policy-level) challenges

At the systemic level, Elbasan has a relatively well-developed policy framework which guarantees citizen participation in environmental decision-making. The most recognized instruments among stakeholders are the law on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and its regulations, law on public notification and consultation, sectorial laws (law on integrated waste management), law on the right to information, law on local self-governance, Aarhus convention, law on Environmental Protection etc. which guides for transparency and integrity programs, youth action plans, and sectoral strategic plans. However, there are few challenges:

- Policy framework works very well “on paper” but its proper implementation is inconsistent and performs both good practices and poor ones.
- The coordination of competences for consultation processes between Elbasan Municipality and Regional Environment Agency in Berat for the EIA processes is not clearly regulated. The same stands for the competences between local institutions and central institutions for big infrastructure projects.
- Municipal budgets allocate limited resources to the environment (around 8% in some cases) reducing the capacity to implement participatory measures and affecting the focus on environmental education and public awareness campaigns which serve to empower citizens to use existing participatory mechanisms on environmental decision-making.

Organizational (institutional / administrative) challenges

Institutionally, Elbasan municipality faces several organizational obstacles for effective public participation:

- There are still ineffective communication practices for public consultation processes. The information about consultations does not systematically reach everyone across different communities and does not always respect the required timeline. Notifications are mainly distributed via publications on the municipal webpage and through direct outreach via municipal community structures. Additionally, environment processes and consultation documents still use technical language that is difficult for the public to understand and engage. Mechanisms and alternatives to channel the voices of citizens who cannot participate in public hearing into municipal decision-making are missing.
- Logistics and planning are often inadequate to ensure inclusive participation. Public hearings, especially those for EIA processes, are often held in distant areas with limited or no transport options, which restricts participation of wider interested and affected communities. Public hearings for local plans, strategies and key documents are centralized in one or two consultations within the municipality and do not extend to other administrative areas. Additionally, many hearings which are organized in unsuitable times (around 10:00) exclude women and working groups participation. Recently the municipality was practicing afternoon and evening time slots which proved effective and well received among citizens.

- Lack of alternative approaches to public engagement in environmental decision-making. Written channels for collecting public opinions and comments on environmental decision-making are rarely used and not actively promoted, and there is little innovation in offering alternative ways for citizens to participate. Targeted outreach is also not systematic, though it has proven effective in participatory budgeting processes where municipalities organize meetings and consultations with focus groups.
- Coordination within the municipality and among stakeholders remains weak. There is still limited understanding of the benefits of a unified consultation mechanism. Elbasan municipality relies too heavily on their own structures and has vaguely invested in collaboration with other actors. Tools such as stakeholder mapping, documented networking, and regular environmental roundtables are not systematically practiced, which limits an inclusive dialogue.
- Limited institutional responsiveness: Citizens receive follow-up information mainly through minutes of public hearings posted on the municipal website. These do not provide clear justifications for decisions, leaving citizens with the impression that their input is ignored, which in turn reduces trust and discourages participation.

Individual (citizen-level) challenges

At the level of individuals and communities, barriers are shaped by awareness, socio-economic conditions, and cultural norms:

- Many citizens lack general knowledge on the environment and of their rights, the role of consultations, or how their input can influence outcomes and decision-making.
- Poverty, long distances, and work schedules reduce the ability of vulnerable groups to participate.
- Women, especially in rural areas, participate less in consultations due to household duties, cultural norms, and patriarchal contexts. Even when attending they do not speak. Roma and Egyptian communities are underrepresented. Public consultations are often perceived as irrelevant "tick the box" rather than meaningful processes.
- There are cases where citizens fear negative consequences if they complain (especially when family members are employed in state institutions). Past disappointments from local governance have helped to reduce trust.
- There is a culture of individualism. Indifference and apathy are described as "alarming and frightening," and it reflects social fatigue and disengagement from public life.
- Psychological barriers like shyness in public speaking, self-censorship, and feelings of being powerless contribute to weak participation.

Despite these barriers, youth and educated citizens show potential as more active groups, while pensioners are often regular participants in consultations. However, migration and low trust in institutions have reduced consistent engagement among younger populations.

6. OPPORTUNITIES AND BEST PRACTICES

Elbasan Municipality is investing in and increasing its capacity to deliver meaningful participatory governance. It has strengthened its institutional structures, enriched local policies, and demonstrated strong political will to pilot and implement good and inclusive practices.

Identified Strategies and Tools for Enhancing Participation

The 8 identified strategies based on stakeholders' responses point to a multi-layered approach. They include existing structures, mechanisms, tools and approaches as well as recommended potential future actions to make participation accessible, transparent, and meaningful.

- 1. Participative mechanisms and inclusiveness:** Participatory budgeting is the role model and best practice of Elbasan Municipality. Its strengths lie in: 1) bringing public hearing close to communities by organizing them at level of neighborhoods and administrative units; 2) combining these hearings with focus groups targeting marginalized and vulnerable communities, youth and women makes the process highly inclusive; 3) providing clear instructions on the purpose of the process, methodology and what is required from citizens, helps build citizens' understanding and motivates them to actively participate.
- 2. Leadership as role model:** A leadership that supports and promotes inclusiveness is an inspiration and encouragement for citizen participation. The Mayor of Elbasan is playing this role. He personally attends many public consultations and takes concrete actions like inviting women to sit in the front rows and directly engages them in communication; or prioritising engagement measures towards Roma and Egyptian communities. These efforts have had a visible and long-term impact on citizens and support inclusiveness while helping to break cultural barriers. In this recognition, he was awarded the title of "The most Roma-friendly Mayor" in 2020.
- 3. Institutionalised community structures:** Functional and active community structures in coordination and outreach for participatory processes are the valuable assets of Elbasan Municipality. These include Head of villages, Community liaison officers (*ndërlidhësit komunitar*) and Heads of administrative units (Administrators). Head of villages and community liaison officers are volunteers elected by citizens and administrators are part of the formal municipal structure. Together, they engage based on action plans for involving all actors, distribute information and identify community needs in direct contact with citizens. However, these structures need capacity building on environmental issues and participatory processes in environmental governance.
- 4. Comprehensive participatory mechanisms (OGP):** Elbasan Municipality has signed and committed to the principles of the Open Government Partnership, being one of the pioneer municipalities in Albania to take this action. Within this framework, it has established the Permanent Citizens' Forum for Local Policymaking, engaging experts and NGOs to ensure the active involvement of citizens and civil society in local governance. A clear and dedicated approach should be considered to address environmental issues and integrate its specifics into this structure.
- 5. CSOs as moderators of public hearings to increase inclusiveness:** Civil society in Elbasan are already an active community doing extensive work on providing social services, environmental activities and representing and mobilising citizens to engage in participatory processes. To help citizens feel more comfortable and reduce perceptions of political pressure

when articulating needs and concerns, CSOs *are proposed* to serve as ideal and neutral moderators or facilitators of public hearings.

6. **Increased articulation of importance of environment by Municipality:** Elbasan Municipality *is proposed* to integrate environment as a core theme in their public initiatives, speeches, investment projects, and campaigns, to communicate to citizens the message of the importance of environmental protection and help them better understand the direct benefits of a cleaner and safer environment in their daily lives.

7. **Technology and digital platforms:** even though controversial opinions were shared on the role of technology and digital platforms (webpages, social media, on-line media etc.) in enhancing participation, they were recognised as having a strong potential to expand outreach and increase inclusiveness, if those tools are integrated systematically into consultation processes and if they are paired with traditional outreach. Details on the different perspectives are given in Annex III.

8. **Build and benefit from important partnerships:** Elbasan Municipality cooperates and communicates on required occasions with the wide ecosystem of actors in Elbasan. There are already good relations and good will from all these actors to get involved and enhance meaningful participation. The core partnerships that are proposed to be used and their respective purposes are:
 - **Local government – Citizens – CSOs** is considered the foundation partnership for ensuring that participatory processes are wide in outreach, representative of diverse groups, and recognized by citizens as valid, credible, and trustworthy.
 - **Local government – Educational institutions** important to support environmental education, long-term awareness, and youth mobilization.
 - **Local government – Businesses** for dialogue on environmental responsibilities (waste, emissions) and opportunities (investment, funding for projects, internships).
 - **Civil society – Media** to ensure transparency, widespread communication and to raise the visibility of consultations.
 - **Cross-sector alliances** engaging health centers, social services, and environmental departments to highlight the link between environment, wellbeing, and quality of life.
 - **Multi-party cooperation** to get involved all political forces to ensure inclusiveness and reduce perceptions of bias.

Identified key actions and required resources to enhance meaningful participation in environmental governance in Elbasan, highlighting practical steps for increasing transparency, inclusiveness, and citizen engagement are summarized in the table below:

Actions and resources for increasing Public Participation in decision making in Elbasan	
Proposed key actions	Required resources
Strengthen transparency, awareness and inclusiveness (clear language, follow-up after consultations, accountability).	Sustainable financial resources, dedicated budget lines, communication materials, accessible venues.
Conduct community-level activities (small impactful initiatives, neighbourhood meetings, clean-up campaigns, cultural/social events).	Logistics support (transport, venues, megaphones, posters, fuel), staff time, volunteers.
Educational and awareness campaigns (schools, youth councils, door-to-door info, environmental education, “Green School” model).	Partnerships with schools, NGOs, and academia; educational materials; trained facilitators.

Develop manuals, surveys and monitoring tools (for consultation coordinators, feedback mechanisms, citizen monitoring).	Technical expertise for design of surveys/manuals; data collection tools; external experts.
Ensure continuous citizen involvement across the service cycle (not only hearings but also monitoring and feedback).	Human resources, trained staff, incentives for participation, IT/digital tools.
Improve public services (roads, water, lighting, waste management) to build trust and encourage citizen engagement.	Municipal budget allocations, investment funds, political will.
Organise regular thematic consultations (environmental issues, waste, vulnerable groups, seasonal problems).	Financial support for repeated events, staff time, coordination among directorates.
Increase CSO and media involvement to mobilise citizens and provide neutral facilitation.	Partnerships with CSOs, independent experts, local/national media coverage.
Integrate digital tools and platforms (updated websites, online consultations, livestreamed hearings, digital feedback).	Modern technology platforms, updated municipal websites, training for staff, outreach funds.
Promote successful models (participatory budgeting, integrated waste plan, examples of solved citizen concerns).	Communication budget for promotion, documentation capacity, political commitment.

Gender and inclusion – Strategic takeaways

Design for influence, not only attendance: Participatory processes should include facilitation and follow-up mechanisms that ensure women inputs are reflected in final decisions.

Treat logistics as a core inclusion strategy: Meeting times, venues, transport options, and decentralized formats should be planned on purpose to enable participation of women, especially those in rural areas and marginalized communities.

Reinforce and revive gender-responsive budgeting practices: Elbasan Municipality has previous experience with gender-responsive budgeting; however, this practice has weakened in recent years. Revitalizing gender budgeting is a strategic opportunity, as women—and their children—are key drivers of long-term social, environmental, and behavioral change.

Build on proven local practices: Scale up inclusive approaches already tested in Elbasan, particularly participatory budgeting, as standard practice for environmental consultations and EIA processes

7. TOOLKIT DESIGN CRITERIA

The purpose of the toolkit is to provide practical, inclusive, and adaptable tools that help Elbasan Municipality and local stakeholders (like CSOs, schools, media, and community groups) facilitate meaningful citizen participation in environmental decision-making.

It aims to:

- Make participation accessible to all citizens, including women, youth, elderly, Roma/Egyptian communities, rural communities, etc.
- Support municipalities with low cost, low-capacity friendly tools that they can realistically implement in urban and rural contexts.
- Strengthen transparency and accountability by offering tools for clear communication, feedback collection, and follow-up.
- Encourage collaborative decision making through partnership templates, guidelines, and good practice examples.
- Support consistent monitoring and evaluation, ensuring that procedures are respected and that citizen input is not only gathered but also considered and reflected in final decisions.

The toolkit is designed to close the gap between formal participation structures and real, inclusive engagement, particularly around environmental issues, which, as stated by stakeholders in Elbasan are often neglected in local governance and public awareness.

Challenge identified	Toolkit response	Tool/Template
Accessibility		
Ineffective, late, or narrow public notification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Timely, repeated, and easy-to-understand information about upcoming consultation meetings using social media, official website and community structures - Partnership with media, educational establishments and civil society to enhance distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Template for annual public consultation plan (<i>integrated version of EIA processes and local policies</i>) - 3 wave communication plan ready to use templates - Partnership/MoU template
Environmental documents have a technical language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each consultation includes a non-technical summary (what is this about, why it matters, what citizens can do) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Template on how to organise non-technical summary of environmental topics which are open to consultations
Weak alternatives for those who cannot attend public hearings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation can be expanded with hybrid formats, livestreams for diaspora and home-bound/working participants, with written comments through online tools and community structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Written comments: - Explanatory note for Electronic Register for Public Notifications and Consultations, a national platform mandatory for local governments as well - Written input forms to be integrated in the municipal website (as g-forms) or printed versions for non-technology friendly
Inclusivity		
Limited public targeted outreach beyond participatory budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use participatory budgeting outreach structures for rural areas and dedicated consultations with focus groups - Partner with CSOs and youth structures to organise participation of vulnerable groups, marginalised, elders, women and youth communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnership template

Fear and inconsistency of speaking	- Providing safe space by leadership role and use CSO moderators for neutrality	- Template with moderation tips
Logistics that exclude targeted groups; centralized city-hall hearings; transport barriers	- Use the approach of participatory budgeting: evening timeslots, decentralise venues to administrative units, villages and neighbourhoods; provide transport solutions	N/A
Practicality		
Logistics and planning gaps	- Use existing resources and structures - Provide standard operating procedures for consultations: written and public hearings	- Consultations steps planner template
Weak horizontal coordination	- Establish clear inter-directorate procedures	- Ready-to-use operational guide (like a checklist) that tells municipal departments: who does what before, during, and after a public consultation; how to share information between directorates so nothing is missed; when to involve external actors (REA, CSOs, media, administrators, etc.).
Monitoring and Evaluation tools		
Limited public engagement, follow-up and trust gap	- Standardize reporting of citizen input and decisions - Monitor inclusiveness and implementation progress through KPIs - Collect citizens feedback an opinion on environment and participatory processes (public survey)	- Template for clear visual overview of comments received and comments reflected, non-reflected and why (feedback mechanism) - Main KPI indicators identified - G-template of environmental surveys

Overall, the toolkit adds value to the existing practices and experiences through:

- **Accessibility tools** (open annual planning, social media, written submissions) can complement physical hearings, especially for diaspora, women and vulnerable groups.
- **Inclusivity measures** stress the importance that youth, women, Roma/Egyptian communities, and elderly residents have adapted communication and participation channels
- **Monitoring tools** (KPIs, giving and receiving feedback) help track participation levels, progress of participatory processes.
- **Partnership templates** guide partnerships with other stakeholders like NGOs, academia, youth groups etc. to strengthen facilitation and transparency.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TESTING

Proposed processes

Case Study: Participatory Budgeting in Elbasan

Background: Elbasan Municipality has implemented participatory budgeting for almost a decade, making it one of the most established participatory governance practices in Albania. The process allows citizens to directly influence investment priorities and ensures that municipal budgeting reflects community needs.

How It Works:

- **Organization:** Coordinated by the Municipal Council Secretariat, Finance Directorate, and other municipal units (Public Services, Media, Tax Directorate), with facilitation by administrative units' administrators and community liaison officers.
- **Participants:** diverse stakeholders like NGOs, universities, youth forums, marginalized groups, and ordinary residents from both urban and rural areas.

Process:

1. Meetings are often announced 2–3 weeks in advance (via municipal website, social media, TV, phone calls, letters) but this is not always consistent.
2. Citizens gather in neighborhood assemblies or outdoor venues.
3. Community and citizens priorities are discussed and listed on flip charts.
4. Participants vote, and the selected priorities are submitted to the Finance Directorate.
5. Meeting minutes are recorded, and outcomes can be monitored in following years.

Participation: Attendance ranges from 30–50 people in rural areas to 100–150 in urban

Impact:

- Citizens see a direct link between their voices and municipal investments, strengthening trust in local government.
- The process has fostered community cohesion, bringing residents together to discuss and vote.
- It has acted as an accountability mechanism, as priorities are tracked over multiple years.
- Environmental issues (greenery, waste bins) are also raised, though they remain less prioritized.

Challenges:

- Priorities are not always funded and feedback is sometimes lacking on why selected proposals are not included.
- Timely and accessible communication remains a challenge, especially for marginalized groups and elderly residents.
- Quality and open discussions are very limited

Conclusion: Participatory budgeting in Elbasan has created a transparent, democratic, and inclusive framework for local decision-making. Improving its identified gaps and expanding this model to other thematic areas, such as environmental governance, could further strengthen citizen engagement and trust.

Case study: EIA process

These processes are formally initiated by REA, and their timeline is difficult to predict as it depends on the needs and requests of private operators for environmental permits. However, EIAs are crucial for participatory environmental governance and Elbasan needs support to proactively strengthen its role in EIA processes and to integrate those as part of its local participatory mechanisms.

Details on the rationale of these two cases are provided in the analyses of pilot cases above.

Steps for applying the toolkit in the selected initiatives.

In order to test and operationalize the public participation toolkit, the following steps are recommended for its application within the two selected initiatives: Participatory Budgeting and EIA public consultations.

Preparation and planning

- **Map the participatory processes within the CEJ project timeline:** Define which participatory process or their elements will be strengthened within Participatory Budgeting and public hearings for EIAs. Assess other emerging important opportunities.
- **Clarify what the toolkit should improve:** accessibility, inclusivity, practicality, or monitoring.
- **Assign responsibilities:** Identify municipal units, REA staff, CSOs, and other actors who will apply specific toolkit elements.
- **Develop the annual consultation plan** using the toolkit's templates to integrate both municipal and EIA processes.

Communication and Outreach

- **Apply tools and methods in the toolkit** for the identified processes to improve and strengthen communication and outreach

Conducting the Consultation

- **Follow the operating procedure in the toolkit:** clear communication, clear agenda, neutral moderation, clear minutes of meeting, ensuring participation from different groups in public hearings etc. Apply the system of collecting written contributions from citizens.

Report back to citizens

- **Provide information** of which comments were integrated in decision-making, which were not, and why.
- **Publish** meeting minutes and decisions online and via local structures.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- **Apply the KPI indicators** included in the toolkit to measure inclusiveness, outreach effectiveness, participation levels, and trust-building.
- **Conduct citizen surveys** (from the toolkit templates) after each round to gather feedback.

Scaling and Integration (long-term)

- **Expand successful approaches** from Participatory Budgeting to other thematic consultations (waste management, climate neutrality, etc.).
- **Mainstream toolkit practices** into the Permanent Citizens' Forum of the Open Government Partnership

ANNEXES:

- I. Key stakeholders and their role in environmental public participation**
- II. Challenges in Public Participation across stakeholders**
- III. Role of technology or digital platforms in enhancing participation**
- IV. Questionnaires and interviews**
- V. List of participants for the interviews**
- VI. Detailed methodology**

Following the same order, the annexes are listed [CEJ Report Elbasan](#)