

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS REPORT FOR ALBANIA – 2025¹

- **Executive Summary**

Human rights defenders (HRDs) in Albania faced a challenging climate in 2025, marked by **intimidation, legal harassment, and surveillance** amid some positive legal reforms. Across sectors, from investigative journalists and civil society activists to environmental campaigners, lawyers, and LGBTI+ advocates, HRDs encountered persistent violations of their rights. A **sharp increase in strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)** was observed, as companies and powerful figures used **defamation charges to silence critics**. At the same time, **mass surveillance initiatives and data breaches raised serious privacy concerns**, with the government rolling out thousands of “smart” CCTV cameras and other monitoring tools without robust safeguards. HRDs reported **police interference and intimidation**, especially around the May 2025 parliamentary elections when **at least 20 journalists and media outlets suffered verbal and physical attacks or obstruction by officials**. **Online smear campaigns intensified**, targeting independent media and activists with disinformation and hostile rhetoric. Fact-checkers and watchdog NGOs were maligned as “traitors” or “foreign agents” in coordinated efforts to discredit their work. Crucially, **advocates for marginalized groups, including women’s rights and LGBTI+ activists, endured hate speech and threats**, as conservative actors spread false narratives about gender and equality initiatives.

- **Methodology and Sources**

This report provides an overview of key developments affecting human rights defenders (HRDs) in Albania during 2025. The analysis is based on a review of publicly available and verified information from credible international and regional organisations, reputable media outlets, and monitoring reports produced by civil society organisations working on media freedom, civic space, and human rights protection. Attention was given to reports and alerts issued by organisations such as the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Council of Europe Platform for the Protection of Journalism, the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) mechanism, the SafeJournalists Network, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and other international monitoring initiatives. Relevant findings from European Union institutional reports, including the European Commission’s annual enlargement and rule-of-law assessments, were also considered.

The report further draws on monitoring conducted by Albanian civil society organisations such as Citizens.AI, public statements by professional associations, and verified reporting by independent national and international media outlets. Information was cross-checked across multiple sources where possible to ensure accuracy and reliability. The analysis focuses on patterns and documented incidents that illustrate broader trends affecting the safety, independence, and operating environment of human rights defenders, including journalists, activists, lawyers, and defenders working with marginalised communities.

¹ This report is based on information from verified media outlets, NGO reports, and international organizations monitoring human rights in Albania. Key sources include the SafeJournalists Network documentation, OSCE/ODIHR’s Election Observation report, statements by the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) and partner organizations, Balkan Insight and Citizens.AI reporting, as well as the European Commission’s Albania 2025 progress report. These and other cited references provide the factual evidence for the patterns of violations detailed above. **Parts of this report have been updated with events happening during January 2026.**

Given the nature of threats faced by HRDs, including intimidation and harassment, some incidents remain underreported or difficult to independently verify. For this reason, the report emphasises well-documented cases and patterns identified through credible monitoring mechanisms. The purpose of the report is not to provide an exhaustive catalogue of all incidents, but rather to highlight key developments and structural challenges affecting the ability of human rights defenders in Albania to operate freely and safely during 2025.

- **Legal Harassment and SLAPPs**

Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) emerged as a key tool to harass activists and journalists in 2025. Despite repeated international calls to reform defamation laws, Albania continues to criminalize defamation, and both civil and criminal cases were used punitively against critical voices. The OSCE/ODIHR's election observation report noted that "journalists have faced numerous civil and criminal defamation cases in recent years, including strategic litigation against public participation (SLAPP) cases", underscoring how legal actions are wielded to discourage investigative reporting and public critique. Human rights organizations like the SafeJournalists Network have long warned that **SLAPPs serve to intimidate and exhaust those who expose corruption or abuse of power.**

Environmental and community activists were particularly targeted by SLAPPs in 2025. In one high-profile case, a hydropower company sued three villagers from Mirdita after they spoke out about the environmental damage caused by small hydro plants in their area. The residents had spent years protesting and pursuing legal action against the company for diverting rivers and drying up their land in a protected national park. Instead of addressing these concerns, the company filed defamation and insult charges, claiming the activists' public statements "damaged its image". The accused, who had described the project as an "environmental massacre" and highlighted the loss of water and livelihoods, argue that the lawsuit is nothing more than open pressure intended to silence them. Legal experts have labeled this case a clear SLAPP, noting the disproportionate fines sought against rural community members and the weak factual basis of the company's claims. The goal is not to win on the merits but to drag activists into long, costly proceedings, demoralize them, and deter further dissent. By December 2025, the court had set the first hearings for these SLAPP cases, indicating the activists would have to continue fighting on two fronts: protecting their environment and defending their right to free expression in court.

In a subsequent development during January 2026, the company withdrew from the court proceedings by failing to appear at the latest hearing. While this move halted the immediate judicial pressure, activists report that the intimidation has not ceased. Instead, the company is now suspected of using alternative tactics, including coordinated smear campaigns targeting both activists and independent media. Anonymous pages and profiles have circulated defamatory narratives online, amplified through paid social media boosts, in what observers describe as a shift from courtroom litigation to digital harassment aimed at discrediting and isolating community voices.

Currently, Albania has no dedicated legal mechanism to dismiss or punish SLAPPs, though plans are underway to transpose the EU's Anti-SLAPP Directive by 2027. In the meantime, the burden falls on activists to endure protracted legal battles, which lawyers warn can cause stress, depression, and a chilling effect on civic engagement. Nevertheless, civil society groups note that such pressure can sometimes backfire, fostering greater solidarity and determination among activists to defend their rights.

Journalists have also faced legal harassment. Albania's criminal defamation provisions remain a 'sword' over media freedom, allowing powerful figures to initiate criminal proceedings against reporters. In recent years (continuing into 2025), public officials and businessmen have filed both criminal and civil defamation suits to retaliate against investigative reports. These lawsuits, often accompanied by

demands for excessive damages, serve to deter media outlets from pursuing sensitive stories about corruption or abuse.

The European Commission's 2025 progress report explicitly urged Albania to "fully decriminalize defamation and align civil defamation laws with international standards", reflecting concern that the current framework enables punitive lawsuits against journalists. While no major media outlet was convicted of defamation in 2025, the sheer threat of SLAPP litigation contributed to self-censorship and caution in Albanian newsrooms. Media rights organizations like the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) have pointed out that almost every critical journalist in Albania can recount being sued or threatened with a lawsuit at some point, underscoring how normalized this form of harassment has become. Overall, SLAPPs and other legal harassment remain one of the most pressing threats to Albania's human rights defenders, aimed at silencing both community activism and investigative journalism through courtroom pressure rather than open debate.

In late January 2026, the Albanian Parliament approved a broad package of amendments to the Criminal Code that included a partial decriminalisation of defamation. While presented as harmonisation with European standards, the changes stop short of full reform by exempting from criminal liability only those journalists who are "registered and recognised", leaving insult and other punitive provisions intact and applicable to other public-interest speakers. Media organisations and civil society have strongly criticised this status-based approach as exclusionary and legally uncertain, arguing that linking legal protection to formal registration undermines freedom of expression and risks creating indirect control over journalism rather than safeguarding it. They continue to call for full decriminalisation of defamation and insult for all individuals, grounded in the public-interest function of speech rather than professional status, to align with international standards and protect activists, citizen journalists and other watchdog voices from SLAPP-type pressures.

- **Surveillance and Privacy Violations**

Government-driven surveillance expansion in 2025 has raised alarm among human rights defenders about the erosion of privacy and potential abuse of data. The year saw the rollout of the ambitious "Smart City" project – an initiative to install thousands of high-definition security cameras across at least 20 cities, integrated with monitoring software for real-time facial and license-plate recognition. Prime Minister Edi Rama promoted the project as a leap to "the highest level of technology" for public safety, giving police a "magic eye...in real time over the entire territory" of Albania. However, civil society voices and digital rights experts have strongly questioned **the lack of transparency and safeguards** in this mass surveillance plan. Research from the Institute for Democracy and Mediation, shows that Albania now deploys drones, CCTV networks, automatic license-plate readers, and even live-streamed traffic cameras, all ostensibly for public safety, yet with little public oversight on how the data is used or stored. Albania suffered high-profile data breaches in 2021–2022 (*exposing voter data, salaries, and license plates*), highlighting vulnerabilities in its cyber defenses. **Privacy advocates fear that adding an all-seeing camera grid to this scenario, without robust legal protections, creates ripe conditions for surveillance abuse** – whether by state agencies or malicious hackers. Concerns have been raised about the lack of robust vetting and legal safeguards in the deployment of mass surveillance infrastructure, including risks of foreign-controlled data access, hidden security vulnerabilities, and the potential misuse of monitoring systems for political pressure, profiling, and the suppression of civic freedoms, with broader implications for privacy, free assembly, and freedom of expression.

Human rights defenders have expressed growing concern that their participation in demonstrations, meetings, or advocacy activities could be covertly recorded and later used for intimidation, discrediting,

or undue monitoring. Weak institutional safeguards, including the absence of a strong and independent data protection authority and gaps in cyber-security, increase the risk that collected personal data or surveillance footage may be misused, leaked, or exploited, posing serious privacy and safety risks for journalists, whistleblowers, activists, and vulnerable groups.

Digital threats have also intensified, including hacking attempts, phishing attacks, online surveillance, and doxxing targeting journalists and activists. A particularly alarming case involved a large Telegram network (a massive group called “Albkingz” with over 100,000 members) was used to share illegally obtained intimate images and **to coordinate harassment of women and journalists** who exposed the abuse, subjecting them to threats and online targeting. The incident highlighted how digital platforms can be weaponized to silence defenders, while slow or insufficient institutional response deepened the harm. Despite growing recognition that online abuse constitutes real violence and emerging efforts to strengthen legal protections against cyber harassment and data misuse, human rights defenders in Albania continue to operate in an insecure digital environment.

- **Intimidation and Violence against journalists and HRD**

Direct intimidation of HRDs by state agents – including police, security services, and public officials – remained a concern in 2025. Throughout the year, there were multiple instances of journalists, protesters, and activists facing harassment, physical force, or obstruction by authorities, which observers say has fostered a climate of fear. These patterns were especially pronounced around politically sensitive moments such as the 11 May 2025 parliamentary elections, when media and civil society scrutiny is most crucial.

On election day and its aftermath, monitoring groups documented an alarming number of incidents where journalists were verbally or physically assaulted, or had their work interfered with by officials and party supporters. According to the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) coalition, at least 20 journalists and media outlets faced interference or pressure during the election period, including several cases caught on camera. For example, in Gjirokastër a reporter, Armando R. (working for an online portal), was physically attacked by unknown individuals while reporting at a polling center. In the city of Pogradec, a local news journalist, Erisa Xh., was confronted by police officers who forced her to delete video recordings from her phone – an unlawful act aimed at erasing evidence of potential electoral misconduct. Perhaps the most high-profile incident occurred in Tirana, where a well-known Syri TV crew (journalist Ambrozia Meta and her cameraman) was covering activities outside an unofficial Socialist Party office: a ruling-party MP, Erion Braçe, aggressively accosted the team on live broadcast, grabbing equipment and shoving them, effectively stopping their coverage. These brazen acts of intimidation were condemned by domestic and international observers. ODIHR’s final report on the elections noted “many cases of intimidation and obstruction of journalists’ work” on election day, validating civil society reports.

Furthermore, media watchdogs highlighted that officials at some polling stations illegally restricted accredited journalists’ access, citing spurious reasons. In Durrës, for instance, journalists were *prevented from filming the vote count* in violation of the electoral code. In another case in Saranda, an Euronews Albania correspondent was told he could only film for 15 minutes inside a voting center before being ejected, an arbitrary limit with no legal basis. Such actions hinder transparency and suggest a coordinated effort by certain authorities to shield the process from independent scrutiny.

Intimidation continued after the polls as political tensions ran high. Following the ruling party’s victory, some opposition figures directed their anger at the press. Notably, during a protest on 16 May 2025 against alleged election fraud, several Democratic Party (DP) officials harassed reporters covering the rally. DP General Secretary Flamur Noka was filmed berating and insulting journalists from Report TV

and A2 CNN, accusing them of bias and refusing to answer their questions. At the same event, a senior DP politician snatched the press badge off a Euronews Albania reporter (Sara Demushi) and, alongside party security, pushed and shouted at her, inciting some protesters to join in the aggression. The situation became so hostile that a number of journalists felt unsafe and left the protest early. These incidents show that intimidation of media is not confined to one side of the political spectrum – journalists in Albania face threats from both government allies and opposition actors when reporting on contentious issues. The MFRR and SafeJournalists Network jointly called for prompt investigations into all cases of violence or obstruction against journalists by public officials, stressing that impunity would only embolden further attacks. However, prosecutions of such cases remained rare by year’s end, continuing a long-running problem of assaults on journalists going unpunished in Albania.

Beyond the electoral context, Albanian authorities were involved in an unprecedented action against a major media outlet in August 2025, raising concerns about abuse of power under the guise of administrative or legal disputes. In the early hours of 9 August, police forces in Tirana surrounded the building of Focus Media Group (which houses News24 TV, BalkanWeb news portal, and related outlets), cut off its electricity, and blocked all entry for journalists and staff. This de facto siege of a media headquarters was apparently linked to a government property claim: the Ministry of Culture contended that Focus Media’s lease had lapsed. However, the manner of enforcement shocked observers – no court order or prior notice was presented before armed police sealed the premises. The result was that News24, one of Albania’s largest news channels, was abruptly taken off air, and about 230 media employees were left in limbo, unable to work or even retrieve personal belongings from the office.

Media unions and rights organizations roundly criticized the operation as heavy-handed and lacking due process. They noted that while property disputes should be resolved lawfully, “the heavy-handed police action [was] carried out under unclear legal grounds and without due process,” with no transparency about the legal basis, timeline, or proportionality of the measures. The blockade lasted for days, during which journalists held protests outside – holding banners like “Democracy dies in darkness” – and demanding the government lift the cordon and respect media freedom. An international statement by RSF, MFRR, and SafeJournalists warned that this was “*not merely a contractual dispute*” but a move that “undermines pluralism and risks a chilling effect on media freedom” in Albania. By essentially shuttering critical news outlets overnight, the authorities sent a worrying signal to all Albanian media. The incident has been viewed as a form of administrative intimidation – using state power (in this case, police and regulatory leverage) to punish or pressure a media group known for scrutinizing the government. As of 12 August 2025, News24 remained off-air with no clear resolution in sight. The chilling message to HRDs was that, beyond targeted violence or lawsuits, the state can deploy its machinery to abruptly disrupt the work of watchdog institutions, a scenario that journalists compared to authoritarian practices in more repressive regimes.

It is also worth noting that law enforcement intimidation extends to street-level encounters with protesters and community activists. While 2025 did not see large-sustained protests in Albania, smaller demonstrations, for example, against environmental destruction or for women’s rights, occasionally met a ‘muscular’ police response. Activists have complained of being followed or surveyed by plainclothes officers during organizing meetings, though such claims are hard to document. In one case in late 2025, university students holding a peaceful rally against tuition hikes reported that police filmed each of them individually and demanded ID without cause, an act seen as meant to deter future protests.

Human rights NGOs have urged police forces to undergo better training on facilitating peaceful assemblies, as instances of unnecessary use of force or intimidation tactics continue to be reported. Overall, despite Albania’s formal commitments to free expression and assembly, HRDs often operate

under shadow of intimidation, whether through visible acts like election-day assaults and media blackouts, or the quieter chilling effect of knowing that raising one’s voice could invite police attention.

- **Smear Campaigns and Reputational Attacks**

Smear campaigns – the weaponization of disinformation, propaganda, and personal attacks to tarnish the reputation of human rights defenders – intensified in Albania during 2025. Both pro-government media outlets and anonymous online actors engaged in coordinated efforts to label independent journalists, civil society organizations, and other activists as enemies of the state, traitors, or agents of “foreign agendas.” These defamatory narratives, often unfounded and conspiratorial, aim to undermine public trust in HRDs and isolate them socially, making it easier to justify violations of their rights.

A striking example occurred in July 2025, when Fakteje.al, Albania’s leading fact-checking organization, became the target of a vicious online smear campaign. On July 2, an obscure nationalist portal called *Patriotik Media* published a highly inflammatory article titled “*Fakteje.al, the Voice of Censorship: Renaissance afraid of the truth.*” The piece was rife with aggressive and threatening language, accusing Fakteje of “dangerous censorship” and alleging, without a shred of evidence, that this NGO was colluding with others to “suppress patriotic voices” in Albania. The article went so far as to paint Fakteje and its staff as traitors working against national interests, falsely linking them to various respected media and NGOs, including BIRN Albania and the Albanian Media Institute, as if all were part of a shadowy conspiracy. This narrative mirrored the familiar “Soros-funded” trope seen elsewhere in the region, suggesting that independent watchdogs are puppets of foreign powers. Disturbingly, the text explicitly threatened the journalists and fact-checkers by name, declaring that “*the day will come when each of you will be publicly called to account*”. It promised to launch an “investigative series” into their personal finances and proclaimed they would face “moral punishment” from “a people who are waking up”. Such ominous language, essentially threatening exposure and retribution, amounted to a sustained campaign of public intimidation against Fakteje’s team simply for doing their job of debunking false information. Media freedom advocates noted that this was not an isolated incident: similar smear tactics had been used against independent outlets in late 2024 and earlier. Fakteje itself had weathered previous attacks, as documented by the SafeJournalists network, but the July 2025 campaign was one of the most direct and menacing to date. It illustrates how online platforms and fringe media are employed to incite hatred against HRDs, priming the public to view them with suspicion or hostility.

Independent journalists and media organizations have been frequent targets of smear campaigns, especially those that uncover corruption or criticize powerful figures. In March 2025, for instance, an anonymous Instagram account circulated doctored videos accusing BIRN Albania, Reporter.al, and Citizens Channel (Citizens.al) of being “Soros-linked” propagandists. These posts used the lexicon of far-right conspiracy, insinuating that any media critical of the government was doing the bidding of billionaire philanthropist George Soros or other “globalist” interests. While absurd, such narratives found echo in certain pro-government TV programs and online trolls, blurring the line between orchestrated smear and organic partisan commentary.

The European Commission’s 2025 report on Albania explicitly noted “*an increase in negative narratives and online smear campaigns*” against civil society actors. This points to a broader trend where civil society organizations (CSOs) that advocate for transparency, environmental protection, or minority rights are portrayed by their detractors as anti-national or corrupt. Often, smear pieces will cherry-pick facts, such as a CSO receiving a grant from an international foundation, and spin them into a story of “foreign puppetry,” thereby discrediting the CSO’s genuine domestic work. High-ranking officials have, at times, contributed to this hostile discourse. Prime Minister Edi Rama himself has a history of verbally lashing out at the media (famously calling journalists “trash bins” in 2020 and accusing them of

spreading “fake news”), which emboldens others to pile on. In 2025, some officials continued to publicly dismiss critical media reports as “fake news” or personal attacks, rather than engaging with the substance of the criticisms. This rhetoric from the top arguably legitimizes smear campaigns in the eyes of ruling party supporters.

The smear tactic has also been deployed to derail policy initiatives championed by human rights defenders. A notable case was the push for a stronger Gender Equality Law, which women’s rights groups and equality advocates had been urging. In the lead-up to Parliament’s adoption of a revised Gender Equality Law on 6 November 2025, conservative groups instigated a disinformation and smear campaign to misrepresent the law’s content. Dozens of inflammatory social media posts and articles claimed that the law would “allow gender reassignment surgery for children” or “legalize same-sex marriage by stealth” – *completely false assertions*, as the law did neither. Activists observed that online propaganda deliberately conflated the Gender Equality Law with unrelated issues like LGBTI+rights to spark public fear. For example, fake news stories alleged that the law would force use of terms like “Parent 1 and Parent 2” instead of mother/father, echoing a known trope used in anti- LGBTI+ disinformation. These smears led to heated TV debates and social media outrage, creating a toxic environment for the law’s proponents. Women HRDs like those from the Albanian Women Empowerment Network found themselves *personally attacked* as “destroyers of family values” just for supporting European-standard gender policies. Misleading headlines in mainstream media further ‘fanned the flames’, leading to hate speech and even direct threats against prominent activists. This episode demonstrated how smear campaigns can jeopardize not only individual defenders but also the reforms they champion, by shifting focus from facts to fearmongering.

Smear campaigns often spill over into targeted harassment, especially online. **Women journalists, in particular, face gendered smear and abuse.** A Balkan Insight analysis in mid-2025 highlighted that *women reporters in Albania are routinely subjected to online insults and threats, including sexualized hate speech, when they publish investigative pieces*. For instance, when a female journalist reported on a high-level corruption story, anonymous Facebook pages cropped up calling her a “paid liar” and worse, while commenters issued misogynistic slurs and even death threats. These personal attacks are intended to silence outspoken women and discourage others from following in their footsteps. Unfortunately, according to media NGOs, accountability for such smear campaigns is rare. Albania does have defamation laws (ironically used by the powerful, as noted earlier), but they are seldom used by HRDs to protect themselves from slander, due in part to weak enforcement and the desire of activists to avoid drawn-out court cases. The Council of Media Ethics of Albania has condemned smear efforts, for example, in late 2024 it spoke out after two online portals waged a coordinated smear against the Media Council itself.

In summary, smear campaigns in 2025 constituted a significant non-physical threat to Albanian HRDs, eroding their public image and paving the way for other violations. By branding independent voices as conspirators or enemies, these campaigns create a hostile atmosphere that can justify censorship, legal charges, or even violence against HRDs. Combating smears proved difficult; HRDs largely responded by doubling down on transparency (e.g., openly publishing their funding sources and methodologies) and by seeking solidarity across the sector. Nonetheless, the psychological impact of sustained defamation, ranging from stress and reputational damage to reduced public support, which is a heavy burden that Albania’s defenders had to bear throughout the year.

Several incidents in 2025 illustrated how anti-gender narratives and disinformation campaigns in Albania can translate into attacks on individuals, institutions, and public debate. Cases involving an artistic installation, a professional athlete, and educational materials on gender equality demonstrated how stigma, misinformation, and moral panic can undermine trust in equality-based initiatives. In one

instance, an artwork displayed at the National Museum by artist **Blerta Kambo** became the target of coordinated online attacks after it was falsely framed through anti-gender narratives circulating on social media. In another case, **Brazilian volleyball player Nayara Ferreira**, who played for the Albanian club Dinamo, became the subject of stigmatizing narratives and public backlash following her suspension from competition, highlighting how public discourse around gender-related issues can quickly escalate into personal attacks and reputational harm.

Similarly, educational **leaflets on gender equality distributed in schools** were misrepresented in public debate and on social media, generating fear-based narratives and moral panic about their content and purpose. These incidents reflect a broader trend in which equality-related initiatives are portrayed as threats to social values, fuelling hostility toward individuals and institutions associated with them. At the same time, civil society organisations and media monitoring have documented a rise in **online violence against women**, including harassment, threats, and coordinated digital abuse. Observers warn that the persistence of disinformation and gender-based online attacks risks undermining public trust in equality policies and discouraging participation in public debate, reinforcing the need for accurate information and stronger responses to digital harassment.

- **Threats to Marginalised Groups and Their Defenders**

HRDs advocating for marginalised communities – including LGBTI+ individuals, women, ethnic minorities, and others facing discrimination – faced particular challenges in 2025. In Albania’s conservative social landscape, those who push for equal rights and inclusion often encounter not only the general obstacles described above (like smears and legal issues) but also hate-motivated threats and bias-motivated violence. Over the past year, LGBTI+ activists and community members were subjected to harassment and intimidation, both online and offline, highlighting the persisting homo- and transphobia that defenders strive to combat.

One of the most prominent LGBTI+ activists in Albania, Xheni Karaj, has long been the face of the movement and correspondingly a frequent target for extremists. Although the specific televised incident involving Karaj (where misleading media coverage led to a flood of hate messages) occurred in 2021, the pattern continued into 2025. Whenever LGBTI+ rights made the news – be it the discussion of same-sex partnership recognition or an LGBTI+ cultural event – a surge of online hate speech reliably followed. Activists running the NGO Shelter/*Streha* (which supports homeless LGBTI+ youth) reported that after a TV report on their shelter aired in mid-2025, they received dozens of threatening emails telling them to shut down, laced with slurs and references to “cleansing” the country of LGBTI+ people. Similarly, organizers of Tirana’s annual Pride event noted that in the weeks before the march, social media threats spiked, often from anonymous accounts. According to one LGBTQ association, by the eve of the 2025 Pride march they had catalogued over 1,000 individual threats or abusive messages online, ranging from calls for violence to doxxing of known activists. The language of these attacks was often fueled by regional anti-LGBT rhetoric, accusing activists of “corrupting Albanian youth” or “violating traditions”. While the Pride parade in Tirana largely proceeded peacefully, an isolated stone-throwing incident was reported during the event. Police intervened and detained the individual responsible, preventing further escalation and allowing the march to continue without additional violence.

Women’s rights defenders also found themselves targeted, particularly when challenging patriarchal norms. As mentioned earlier, the debate over the Gender Equality Law turned ugly due to a misinformation campaign. Women activists who spoke in favor of the law or on related issues like sexual violence were vilified as “home-wreckers” or agents of a so-called “gender ideology”, echoing a growing regional anti-feminist movement. For instance, during the public controversy, one feminist leader

received a wave of Facebook comments telling her she “should be raped to understand her place,” a horrific threat clearly aimed at silencing her advocacy. Civil society groups like the Albanian Women’s Empowerment Network condemned the toxic online environment, noting that impunity for online hate has emboldened trolls to escalate their abuse. In addition to threats and hate speech, activists were also subjected to targeted harassment through the unlawful disclosure of personal data. In 2025, a representative of the anti-gender movement publicly shared on social media the personal data and salary information of staff members from women’s rights and LGBTI organizations, without their consent. The post was accompanied by inflammatory language, urging followers to “look how much these mercenaries are paid to destroy the Albanian family.” This act of doxxing not only violated privacy and data protection standards, but also exposed staff to further harassment, intimidation, and potential security risks. Aleanca LGBTI filed an official complaint with the police regarding this incident and requested an investigation into the unlawful publication of personal data and incitement to hatred.

Religious and ethnic minority rights advocates also navigated tense circumstances, though these were lower profile. Albania’s religious coexistence is often praised, but there were a few incidents where defenders of minority religious sects felt pressured. One example in 2025 involved an activist for the Bektashi community (a Sufi Muslim order) who alleged that local officials in a northern town obstructed a cultural event and intimidated the organizers, reflecting underlying prejudice. Additionally, Roma rights activists continued to report routine harassment. A Roma community organizer working in Tirana’s outskirts said that during an anti-eviction protest in mid-2025, police officers singled out Roma demonstrators, pushing them aggressively and using ethnic slurs – treatment notably harsher than that faced by non-Roma protesters at the scene. The activist filed a complaint with the Ombudsperson’s office, but as of year’s end there was no official response or disciplinary action known.

In summary, marginalised groups’ defenders in Albania faced a dual battle in 2025: pushing for essential legal and social changes on one hand, and fending off a backlash of hate, threats, and discrimination on the other. Their struggle underscores that human rights progress is not linear – even as Albania edges forward with laws (like the Gender Equality Law) and greater diversity in public life, resistance forces are attempting to claw back those gains through fear and intimidation.

- **Key Trends**

- a. **Pressure on journalists and independent media** – Monitoring organisations documented multiple cases of intimidation, obstruction of journalistic work, and administrative measures affecting media operations, particularly during politically sensitive periods such as the 2025 parliamentary elections.
- b. **Expansion of digital and surveillance-related concerns** – The increasing use of surveillance technologies and weak data protection safeguards raised concerns among civil society regarding privacy risks, potential misuse of collected data, and the monitoring of civic activity.
- c. **Growth of online harassment and disinformation** – Human rights defenders, journalists, and equality advocates were frequently targeted by coordinated online attacks, smear narratives, and disinformation campaigns, particularly in relation to gender equality, anti-discrimination initiatives, and public debates on social issues.
- d. **Hostility toward defenders working with marginalised groups** – Defenders advocating for women’s rights, LGBTI+ equality, and minority protections faced heightened levels of hate speech, intimidation, and online abuse, reflecting persistent social stigma and polarised public discourse.