

Annual Narrative Report 2022

1. Overall Programmatic Report

H.A.N.A had the opportunity to focus more on advancing its mission in 2022, thanks to the programmatic support from the European Endowment for Democracy (EED). This support facilitated the consolidation of H.A.N.A's offerings to the youth of Lezha and its partners. It also created a positive impetus to enhance the center's attention to financial sustainability, which remains the primary and most significant challenge for the organization. The past 12 months have served as a period of reflection on the barriers faced by a local civil society organization (CSO) in implementing its programs and retaining staff amidst a post-COVID-19 era, the war in Europe, and a concurrent social and economic crisis.

The reporting year was a time to build and refine a new approach to fundraising opportunities. While this remains a complex and challenging task, especially in the absence of dedicated expertise, organizational experience, and access to information, several key achievements can be highlighted under the framework of organizational sustainability and communication strategies with potential supportive partners:

Key Achievements in 2022

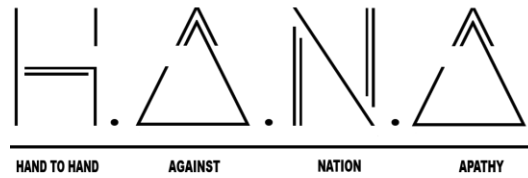
- *Strengthened Relations with the Swedish Diplomatic Presence in Albania*

Through a well-executed collaboration early in the year, H.A.N.A built a strong relationship with the Swedish Embassy. This partnership was acknowledged as highly valuable by the local community in Lezha and the Swedish Embassy itself. The center became a hub for engaging central and local decision-makers in waste management. Following persistent efforts from H.A.N.A for continuity, the Swedish Embassy and the Swedish Institute committed to further engagement with the center in early 2023.

- *Renewed Collaboration with Luxembourg's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs*

The visit of Luxembourg's Ambassador to Albania, Mr. Philippe Donckel, reinforced ties with youth under one of the four pillars of H.A.N.A's program: democracy, with a special focus on the opening of EU membership negotiations and Albania's path toward EU integration.

- *Extensive Activities and Outreach*
 - 89 events conducted
 - 31 video clips created for online audiences
 - Enhanced and enriched the center's website
 - Secured membership in the European Youth Network (Youth Express Network), focusing on youth mobility



- Submitted 67 proposals or contact attempts to potential supporters (with four positive responses: two financial supports and two memberships/future commitments)

These efforts underscore the intense and dedicated work of the center's team during the reporting year.

Despite the achievements, the center faced significant challenges, elaborated in the following sections. It is worth noting that while the unwavering goal of empowering the youth of Lezha remains central, the intended progress has not been fully realized. Financial sustainability for a grassroots organization operating in a small, heterogeneous municipality like Lezha is an inherently difficult component of the organizational vision. This challenge is compounded by the highly competitive funding landscape, where donors have numerous alternative options with more experience, expertise, and networking capabilities.

Nonetheless, H.A.N.A has solidified its position as a key CSO actor in Lezha. This status was further reinforced during the reporting period through one of the center's signature programs, the political education of youth. Focused on adopting EU value systems as a prerequisite for membership, this program, now in its third year, has demonstrated that even a specialized initiative can effectively incorporate cross-cutting themes from the center's broader program portfolio. This reflects the integrated nature of progress required for Albania's EU membership aspirations.

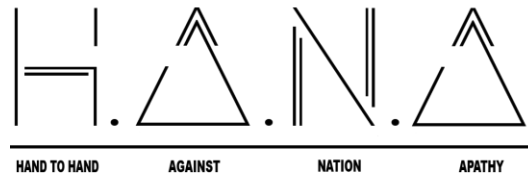
2. Projects

1) *WinterSchool, 3rd Edition – The Youth Political Education Program*

H.A.N.A successfully concluded the third edition of its Winter School for Youth Political Education, a tradition established in 2020 under the program "Introduction to Politics and the European Union." This marked the first collaboration between H.A.N.A and Luxembourg's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. The program has been an enriching experience, strengthening our expertise in this intervention and improving the efficiency and impact of our organization in the communities we represent.

- The implementation of democracy in Albania remains challenging, with barriers such as:
- High rates of youth emigration.
- Centralized services and opportunities in the capital, Tirana.
- Nepotism and political favoritism, limiting opportunities for youth outside political power structures.
- Adverse conditions stemming from the war in Ukraine (rising living costs without corresponding income increases).
- The uncooperative stance of public education structures toward NGOs like ours, which address policymaking and institutional accountability.

Despite these challenges, H.A.N.A successfully engaged youth in a six-month journey, discussing Albania's path to EU membership. Our center remains committed to fostering civic activism among young people to empower them to invest their lives in Albania instead of seeking legal or, often, illegal emigration opportunities to developed countries. This outcome is only achievable if youth meaningfully engage in the country's political life and its EU membership aspirations, as EU member states remain highly appealing destinations for our youth.



The Winter School, funded by Luxembourg's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, included:

- A month-long recruitment and methodology design phase, involving public announcements, the launch of the program's third edition, introductions to educators, and the monitoring of Google registration forms.
- 32 activities conducted over six months.

During the open call in September 2022, 59 youth applied: 33 from Lezha and 26 from other municipalities. Ultimately, 22 participants from Lezha and 15 from outside Lezha officially joined the program. To ensure commitment, participants were informed during the introductory session of a regulation stating that missing three consecutive events without reasonable justification would result in disqualification from certification or participation in key program events.

Activity Highlights

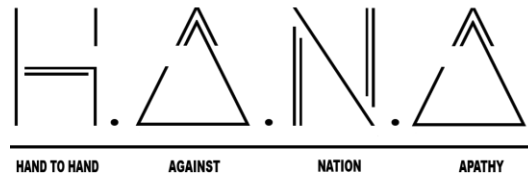
The program featured a variety of activities, including:

- October: 4 events (1 informational session, 3 lectures).
- November: 11 events (6 lectures, 2 podcasts, 1 institutional visit, 1 EU Corner/celebration of EU values, and a visit from Ambassador Philippe Donckel).
- December: 7 events (4 lectures, 1 EU Corner, 1 institutional visit, 1 podcast).
- January: 6 events (2 lectures, 1 institutional visit, 1 EU Corner, 2 podcasts).
- February: 4 events (1 lecture, 1 podcast, Ambassador Donckel's visit, and a reflection/closing event).
- Certificates and recommendation letters were distributed in March 2023 due to logistical reasons.

Impact and Feedback

The program provided a semi-academic experience with expert-led lectures and meetings with senior officials and diplomats, creating a high standard of engagement. Individual experiences varied based on participants' levels of preparedness and interaction, but the program's objectives were met: increasing understanding of Albania's EU accession negotiations, the Stabilization and Association Process, the Acquis Communautaire, and systemic issues affecting Albania's judicial, executive, and legislative systems.

"I am Lueda Jakaj, and today I had the opportunity to attend a lecture with one of Albania's greatest intellectuals, Professor Përparim Kabo. He taught us about our cultural and historical roots connecting us to Europe with great passion. This lecture is unforgettable, and I will carry it with me forever. Knowing what I do now, EU membership for Albania is just a natural course of events. We belong there and have always



been part of it. Right now, we are just tidying up a few things before we officially knock on their doors.” – Lueda Jakaj, 17 years old

“I am Endri. I have been part of the program for three months and am thrilled I applied. Valuable lessons from individuals long-established in their fields and other activities gave us a sense of being European youth, meeting policymakers and diplomats. It was a unique experience that taught me so much.” – Endri Gjoka, 20 years old

This enriching experience, comprising 16 lectures, 6 podcasts, 3 EU Corners, 3 institutional visits, 2 ambassador meetings, and 1 transitional event, continues to showcase the program’s profound impact on youth in Lezha and beyond..

2) Implementation of "Re:waste" by H.A.N.A in Collaboration with the Swedish Institute

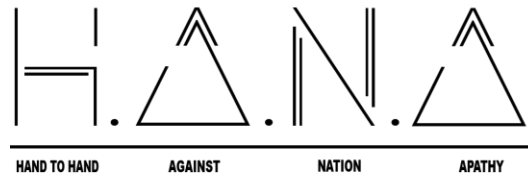
H.A.N.A successfully implemented the "Re:Waste: How is Sweden Re-thinking Resources" initiative in alignment with the methodology outlined by the Swedish Institute. The organization initiated communication with the Swedish Embassy in Albania, following a request to familiarize itself with Sweden’s presence and support for civil society in Albania. This engagement allowed H.A.N.A to learn more about the Swedish Institute’s Sharing Sweden platform.

"Re:waste" was a perfect fit for our mission to protect the environment and raise awareness on this critical issue. The project also aligned with our efforts to pilot a community-based waste segregation model in Lezha. Aimed at disseminating information and encouraging activism, H.A.N.A sought opportunities to expand or continue the dialogue on waste segregation with the community and local authorities. By exploring Sharing Sweden, we hoped to find initiatives focused on environmentally friendly efforts, and the exhibition proved to be an ideal match. After agreeing on the preparatory phase details with the embassy, H.A.N.A prepared for the project’s launch by designing and translating materials from English to Albanian, procuring facilitation tools to display videos, and organizing the main exhibition event. To reach broader youth audiences in Lezha, H.A.N.A proposed to the embassy that the exhibition tour six schools in Lezha, which was approved. The exhibition was scheduled to launch on April 13th at the H.A.N.A Youth Center. Invitations were sent out, and at 2:00 PM, the event took place, hosting key decision-makers from central and local government, including Mirela Kumbaro, Minister of Tourism and Environment, Pjerin Ndreu, Mayor of Lezha, Elsa Håstad, Swedish Ambassador to Albania.

Other notable attendees included representatives from the "Strong Municipalities" project, the two companies engaged in circular economy in Lezha (Vale Recycling and AZ Group), the Regional Education Directorate, the Local Education Office, the European Integration, Transparency, and Communication Department of Lezha Municipality, representatives of civil society organizations from Lezha and Kurbin, representatives from 10 schools in Lezha, and other distinguished guests.

School Tour and Impact

Following the launch event, the "Re:waste" exhibition toured the following schools in Lezha:



1. "Besëlidhja" High School, Lezha City
2. "Gjergj Fishta" High School, Lezha City
3. "Gjergj Kastrioti" High School, Lezha City
4. "Kosova" High School, Lezha City
5. Public High School of Zejmen, Zejmen Administrative Unit
6. Public High School of Ishull-Lezha, Shëngjin Administrative Unit

Additionally, the following schools visited the exhibition at the H.A.N.A Youth Center:

1. "Kolin Gjoka" Vocational High School, Lezha City
2. "Hydajet Lezha" Public High School, Lezha City
3. "At' Shtjefen Gjeçovi" Public High School, Kurbin
4. "Nënë Tereza" High School, Koder-Marlekaj, Lezha

Over six weeks, a total of 3,120 students and more than 200 school staff were exposed to the exhibition's materials. School staff, guided by H.A.N.A, utilized the panels' information to organize open lessons with students as part of the school curriculum. These sessions informed students about proper waste management, the environmental harm caused by a lack of reuse and recycling, and highlighted Sweden's exemplary model.

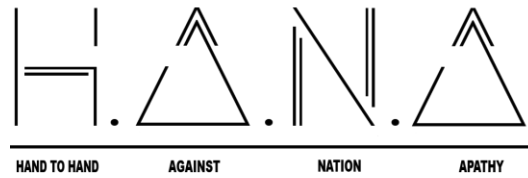
Outcomes and Reflections

H.A.N.A takes great pride in integrating this initiative into its program in Lezha. This effort amplified our voice and visibility, and more importantly, it convened the key stakeholders responsible for waste management to provide their feedback and commitments to the cause.

3) "Rini, Riciklim, Respekt – Ekosistemi i Dashurisë për Mjedisin" – Environmental Education

Due to a three-month extension of the project into 2022 (originally planned for January–December 2021), several objectives exceeded their initial targets. The additional activities undertaken in 2022 included:

- 1) *Documentation*: Compiling the experience of piloting a waste segregation model at the source in Lezha into a handbook or guide. This initiative was made possible through negotiations with the Municipality of Lezha.
- 2) *Media Production*: Producing a reportage and a documentary summarizing the implementation experience and activities of the second phase of the project.



- 3) *Environmental Activism Campaign*: Conducting a field campaign involving youth from Lezha Public High School, under an agreement with the Local Education Office in Lezha, titled “Community Service Hours.”

Enhanced Collaboration and Focus Areas

The first phase of the project established a solid network of collaborators, which enriched the participation of local authorities in the second phase. However, significant attention in the second phase was devoted to achieving the second and third objectives of the project, particularly through work with youth. Collaboration with the Local Education Office in Lezha and schools facilitated contact with young participants.

Under the second objective, two major initiatives were accomplished:

- Formation of a working group that participated in a recycled art course, culminating in a public exhibition in Lezha featuring artworks created from recyclable waste.
- Creation of 10 installations for segregating plastics and cigarette butts, which were distributed to schools in Lezha and various city locations.

Key Activities and Outcomes

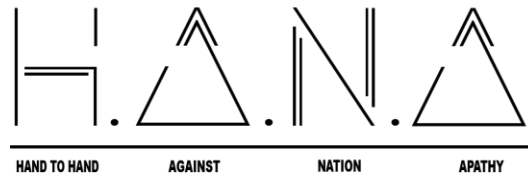
In November 2021, an agreement was finalized with Lezha’s largest public high school (“Hydajet Lezha” High School). Through this collaboration, 130 students joined H.A.N.A.’s efforts during March and April 2022 to spread awareness about environmental and nature conservation. Activities with these youth included:

- Citywide clean-up campaigns.
- Painting tree trunks throughout the city.
- Revitalizing the school’s resting area by painting benches and improvising flower pots made from painted plastic tires.
- Conducting a survey among Lezha residents and businesses to measure understanding and satisfaction levels regarding the municipality’s waste management practices.
- Establishing a system for segregating single-use plastic bottles by engaging and raising awareness among local businesses.

Youth Engagement and Artistic Achievements

H.A.N.A directly engaged 145 young participants: 130 youth from the Community Service Hours program and 15 youth from the “Art from Trash” exhibition.

The “Art from Trash” exhibition group met 2–3 times weekly under the guidance of a contracted art professor. Their efforts culminated in an exhibition showcasing over 15 creative works made primarily from various categories of plastic (bags, bottles, containers, caps, etc.) and metal. The exhibition was



inaugurated before the Lezha public, who praised the creativity and craftsmanship of the displayed works, comparing them to nationally or internationally renowned pieces.

The exhibited artworks not only enhanced the aesthetics of their display locations but also transformed their purpose, offering a striking visual presence at the youth center, city, and schools where installations and youth initiatives were implemented.

4) Core Grant Support from EED (July 2022 – December 2023)

In the second half of 2022, H.A.N.A secured critical support through a core grant provided by the European Endowment for Democracy (EED). This funding represented a significant milestone for our organization, as it was designed to address our programmatic and administrative needs without restrictions or ties to a specific project. The flexibility of this grant enabled us to sustain our operations, ensuring the functionality of our youth center and the implementation of our broader mission.

The core grant allowed H.A.N.A to focus on strengthening its internal capacities, covering essential administrative expenses, and maintaining a stable operational foundation. This stability was crucial, as financial insecurity and limited resources pose significant challenges for small organizations operating outside central hubs like Tirana. By alleviating these challenges, the EED's support provided a sense of security that empowered us to focus on delivering impactful programming and serving the community effectively.

The unrestricted nature of the grant gave us the opportunity to innovate and adapt to the evolving needs of our community. This included enhancing our ability to respond to local challenges, strengthening partnerships, and advancing initiatives that promote democracy, youth engagement, and social equity. The funding further reinforced our role as a key voice for change in the Lezha region, enabling us to advocate for youth rights and development in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

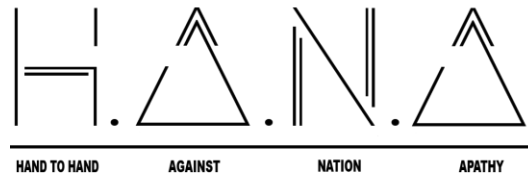
This core grant exemplifies the importance of donor support in sustaining grassroots organizations and highlights the trust placed in H.A.N.A to steward resources responsibly and effectively toward the betterment of our community.

3. Challenges and Reflections on Collaboration and Sustainability

During this reporting phase, which spanned two academic years (2021–2022 and 2022–2023), challenges emerged in collaborating with educational coordinating institutions, especially as many of the center's primary participants are high school students. Two main reasons contributed to this:

1) Transition in Leadership and Centralized Decision-Making

A leadership transition at the Regional Education Directorate introduced a centralized approach, with decision-making heavily reliant on directives from the Ministry of Education and Sports (M.A.S) in Tirana. This regional institution prohibited the center from direct communication with students and school staff without prior approval from M.A.S to collaborate with the Local Education Office (ZVAP) and its affiliated



schools. H.A.N.A prepared detailed documentation, including programmatic curricula for proposed youth interventions—a significant workload—only to face a six-week wait for a rejection based on weak and unreasonable rationale.

2) Contradictions with Partisan Interests

The center's critical approach to addressing cause-and-effect relationships in societal phenomena often conflicts with the partisan interests of local authorities and their expectations of unconditional support from "allies." H.A.N.A's explicit stance against political bias and its promotion of critical reasoning among youth have led to subtle exclusions, such as a lack of invitations to civil society events organized by local institutions in Lezha. Additionally, other civil society actors have been granted access to schools without undergoing the bureaucratic approvals required of H.A.N.A, and responses to communication or event invitations from the center have frequently gone unanswered.

Youth Demographics in Lezha

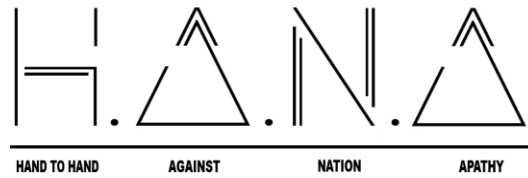
Lezha has a considerable youth population (approximately 25% of its 113,500 residents are aged 15–29). However, the region faces high internal migration rates toward Tirana, as well as emigration abroad, coupled with low interest among youth in engaging with civil society organizations (CSOs). As a result, high school and secondary school students remain the most impactful and accessible demographic for H.A.N.A's interventions.

Reflections on Organizational Sustainability

The quest for organizational sustainability remains a significant challenge in Albania, a country fraught with barriers for operating a new local organization and youth center. The stigma of being "small" and inexperienced leads most international funding agencies to overlook appeals for support. From January to December 2022, H.A.N.A submitted 67 proposals for funding to various institutions, both domestic and international. These included responses to calls, unsolicited proposals, requests for introductory meetings, and inquiries about joining closed funding opportunities. Most efforts were met with silence, lack of response, or outright rejection.

While these fundraising efforts have been discouraging, H.A.N.A acknowledges that donor agendas are often fully occupied with their priorities, and the lack of positive outcomes is not directly attributable to the center.

To improve its chances, H.A.N.A subscribed to premium versions of online platforms like Chronicle of Philanthropy and FundsforNGOs. These subscriptions have helped identify open funding opportunities for CSOs worldwide and provided filtered information and guidance on approaching specific donors. Despite the challenges, these steps represent a proactive approach to addressing sustainability and expanding funding possibilities.



4. Gender Education as a Cross-cutting Theme and Strategic Pillar

One of the strategic directions of H.A.N.A is to educate its audience, participants, and beneficiaries on gender issues. As a core component of our program, this pillar translates into a work plan with specific activities addressing misogyny and the violated rights of girls and women. These activities have been implemented with the youth who frequent the center, while ensuring that H.A.N.A's public stance on gender inequality and injustice remains unequivocally clear. This includes addressing explicit discrimination based on sex (female or LGBTQIA+ communities).

Under the initiative *"Hajde T'Flasim"* (*Come, Let's Talk*), we have tackled the (im)balance between genders, revisiting a conversation that has long been postponed, not due to haste but due to the significant barriers posed by public mindsets and attitudes. We have highlighted the absurdity of decisions about the fate and body of a girl or woman being made by the men around her. The key message delivered to young women in these sessions has been: "If others decide for you solely based on your gender, you lack control over your own life. You have only one body and one life, yet its 'instruction manual' is written by those who control your existence."

Navigating discussions about freedom, equality, and justice for women and girls in Albania, with the goal of influencing and transforming deeply rooted patriarchal mindsets, is far from easy. As we anticipated, people often cling stubbornly to their ingrained beliefs, resisting change even in the face of evidence, statistics, and testimonies. To encourage empathy, we asked participants—especially boys—to imagine others making decisions about their own bodies, prompting them to reflect on how this would feel. However, the realization that such a scenario would never occur in their lives highlighted their unacknowledged privilege, leaving little room for empathy or a shift in perspective. Instead, we often encountered the dismissive sentiment that "we already live in an era of equality, so let's not overdramatize."

Drawing inspiration from the U.S. case *Jane Roe v. Harry Wade*, some boys expressed oversimplified views on abortion, claiming it occurs for only two reasons:

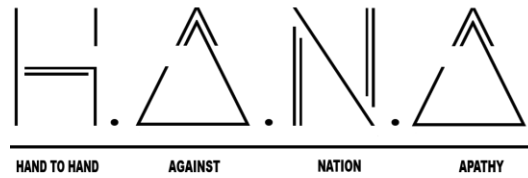
- To save the mother's life.
- Out of convenience.

To contextualize societal norms in Lezha, we discussed how a young woman facing an accidental pregnancy, without life plans or any support system, is expected to "take responsibility" because she is denied the right to be a sexual being with needs, unlike her partner.

This mindset is compounded by generationally inherited patriarchal beliefs, where decisions are made by patriarchs and silently followed. Additionally, strong religious influences, particularly Catholicism, are prevalent in Lezha and northern areas where many residents have migrated from. The Church's connection with these communities sustains traditionalism and a minimalist intellectual approach to life.

Resistance and Challenges

In some discussions, we invited feminist women from Tirana, whose articulate contributions and admirable advocacy inspired empathy and solidarity among young women. However, many young men responded with resistance, silence, or outright refusal to engage. In one instance, during a discussion on



human rights and the need for a feminist approach, a young man abruptly left, stating to staff: “I’m leaving because I can’t stand listening to her (the guest speaker).”

Such incidents are not limited to youth; they also occur among male professionals, often forcing us to pause meetings to address individual challenges rooted in cancel culture.

In December, we felt motivated to begin work on an exhibition that highlights hate speech and misogynistic undertones prevalent on social media. This exhibition aims to serve as a wake-up call against the persistent refusal to embrace certain core values of the EU community—values that Albania is striving so hard to join.

5. Communication, Outreach, and Visibility

During the reporting period, H.A.N.A utilized a combination of digital and physical communication strategies to raise awareness of its initiatives and strengthen connections with the local community and institutional partners. By leveraging social media channels and its official website, the center maintained a consistent and credible presence in the public sphere.

- Posts on Facebook and Instagram generated approximately 15,000 interactions, including likes, comments, and shares, demonstrating the effectiveness of visual content and focused messaging on key issues.
- Promotional and educational materials, including videos and short informational posts, reached an organic audience of over 50,000 followers, both within and beyond the Lezha region.
- Customized stories and videos increased daily engagement, providing a dynamic channel for announcements and real-time updates.

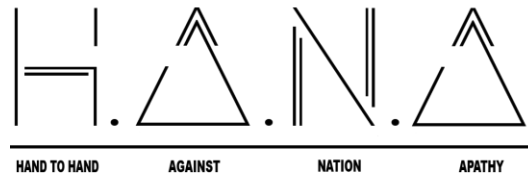
During this phase, the center strengthened collaboration with key stakeholders, such as the Swedish Embassy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg, through high-profile visits and meetings. These partnerships amplified H.A.N.A’s messaging to new audiences and enhanced its public image as a key voice on youth and environmental issues.

The organization of the “Art from the Bin” exhibition and waste segregation activities in various schools across Lezha not only attracted the attention of local institutions but also created a platform for community involvement.

Relationships with local and national media ensured that H.A.N.A’s activities and successes were widely reflected, increasing public awareness of the center’s mission.

H.A.N.A’s official website and social media channels were used to disseminate educational materials on core topics such as the environment, gender equality, and youth policy. Dedicated articles, infographics, and concise video content were shared to maximize impact on target audiences.

Key Outcomes in Outreach and Visibility



- The engagement of over 3,120 students and more than 200 school staff in the center's program activities.
- Enhanced visibility through the involvement of 11 schools in projects and the direct participation of over 145 youth in activities such as exhibitions and awareness campaigns.
- Significant improvement in the center's public image as a leading institution in youth and environmental advocacy.

H.A.N.A has built a solid communication foundation that reflects its professionalism and commitment, increasing access to target audiences and contributing to greater recognition of its mission at both the local and national levels.

6. Final Considerations

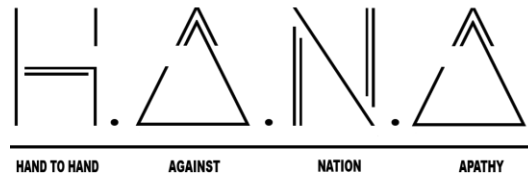
We consider the annual organizational report an important opportunity to reflect on the achievements and challenges our organization faced during 2022. Throughout this period, we have been dedicated to promoting democracy, public accountability, environmental awareness, and gender issues through our activities. With over 80 activities conducted and more than 200 youth actively engaged, we have made continuous efforts to positively impact the Lezha region, particularly in the Municipality of Lezha.

An additional important aspect, which perhaps does not receive sufficient space in this document, is our organization's preparation for the 2023 Local Elections. We view our engagement and participation in monitoring and observing the electoral process as one of the most crucial mechanisms for fulfilling our role in promoting a functional democracy in the country. During 2022, we invested time and resources in preparing our staff and volunteers, anticipating the need to carry out this responsibility with diligence and professionalism. By participating in this process, we hope to contribute to fostering transparency, integrity, and free participation in the upcoming local elections.

The annual organizational report provides a valuable platform to assess our results, identify challenges, and outline plans to strengthen and expand our impact in the future.

7. Main Change Achieved

In 2022, our greatest achievement as an organization was the successful implementation of three major projects through the youth center "H.A.N.A." We mobilized over 200 young people and organized more than 80 diverse activities focusing on democracy, public accountability, environmental awareness, and advocacy for gender equality. Through these projects, we encouraged youth engagement in public debates, raised awareness on environmental concerns, and promoted gender equality. Simultaneously, we remained steadfast in our efforts and invested significant energy to keep the only youth center in Lezha open and active.



We have built strong networks and connections with various partners and collaborators while prioritizing meaningful interaction with our online audiences. This dedication and commitment reflect our continuous efforts to serve the community and youth in a sustainable and impactful manner.

A significant milestone for our local organization was securing a core grant from the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) for the period from July 2022 to December 2023. Financial insecurity and lack of resources are major challenges for small organizations operating outside the central hubs of power and opportunity in Tirana. Support from a prestigious donor agency like EED provides us with a sense of security and financial stability, enabling us to focus on our mission and implement impactful projects within our local community.

This support empowers us to influence youth development and rights in a geographically diverse region, establishing H.A.N.A as a vital voice in promoting positive change and improving the quality of life in our community.

Besmira Lekaj, Executive Director, December 30, 2022