

Annual Narrative Report 2024

1. Programmatic Overall Progress

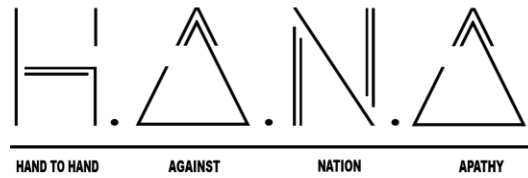
In 2024, H.A.N.A. Youth Center demonstrated growth and resilience, navigating complex challenges while delivering impactful programs that empowered youth, promoted civic engagement, and fostered community development in Lezha. Through strategic collaborations, diverse interventions, and a steadfast commitment to transparency and activism, H.A.N.A. solidified its position as a leading youth empowerment organization in the region.

This report provides an overall assessment of progress made during 2024, highlighting the implementation of eight key projects and interventions. These initiatives were supported by a diverse range of donors, including MFA of Netherlands (via the Dutch Embassy in Albania), IDM Albania (through the BAT Monitor Program), EED, LUSH Charity Pot, RYCO, FONJEP+RYCO (France), SMART Balkans, and H.A.N.A.'s own contributions.

The **THRIVE Project** was the most ambitious and impactful initiative undertaken by H.A.N.A. Youth Center in 2024, strategically designed to empower youth in the Lezha region through a holistic approach to education, civic engagement, entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and ethical leadership. Funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and facilitated through the Dutch Embassy in Albania, THRIVE was implemented across five interconnected components: Winter School on EU Integration, FILIZA Entrepreneurship Incubator, Hackathon on Anti-Corruption, ICT Courses, and the Integrity Game Toolkit. Through 86 activities, THRIVE effectively reached and engaged over 115 youth participants, fostering a generation of informed, proactive, and socially responsible citizens.

A key component of THRIVE was the Winter School on EU Integration, which educated 44 youth participants on Albania's EU integration process, governance, and democratic principles. Implemented over 20 interactive sessions, this flagship initiative combined educational workshops, European Parliament simulations, debate tournaments, and diplomatic dialogues. Participants gained firsthand experience in legislative processes and negotiation, enhancing their understanding of EU policies, human rights, rule of law, and institutional transparency. The program's impact was further amplified through high-profile discussions with EU diplomats, including the EU Ambassador to Albania and the Deputy Ambassador of the Dutch Embassy, empowering youth to actively engage in civic reforms and ethical governance.

The FILIZA Entrepreneurship Incubator played a crucial role in advancing youth entrepreneurship and employability. It engaged 30 participants aged 16 to 40 through 16 structured sessions divided into three stages: Training Cycle on Entrepreneurship, Inspirational and Mentoring Sessions, and Field Visits to Model Businesses. FILIZA cultivated an entrepreneurial mindset by equipping participants with practical skills in leadership, strategic decision-making, and innovative thinking. The program facilitated peer learning and collaboration, encouraging participants to develop sustainable business ideas that drive



socio-economic change. Notably, one participant founded the "Toka Jonë" winery during the program, demonstrating the immediate impact of the initiative.

To promote integrity and anti-corruption activism, THRIVE introduced the Hackathon on Anti-Corruption, which engaged 19 youth participants organized into 9 teams from three high schools in Lezha. Utilizing a structured problem-solving approach, the Hackathon guided participants through ideation, prototype development, and presentation of tech-based solutions to combat corruption. The event culminated in a final competition where nine innovative prototypes were showcased, addressing challenges related to public resource allocation and local governance transparency. Three winning ideas were recognized for their innovation and potential impact, highlighting the power of technology in fostering civic integrity.

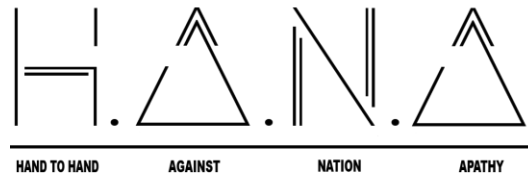
The ICT Courses component of THRIVE addressed the digital skills gap by providing high-quality, free training in Web Coding and Social Media Management. 20 youth completed 50 sessions (25 per course), gaining essential competencies in HTML, CSS, JavaScript, strategic communication, and content creation. The program was enhanced by a generous infrastructure contribution from the German Embassy, which provided laptops for hands-on learning. Additionally, the partnership with QSNNN ensured that the curriculum met national standards, enabling participants to receive officially recognized certifications from the Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation (MEKI). This initiative not only enhanced digital literacy but also increased employability, paving the way for self-employment and digital nomadism.

In alignment with its mission to promote ethical citizenship, THRIVE developed the Integrity Game Toolkit, an innovative educational resource designed to engage youth in ethical decision-making and anti-corruption awareness. Titled "Në Gjurmët e Integritetit – Dilemat Etike", the game presents real-life inspired scenarios and ethical dilemmas across key societal sectors, such as healthcare, education, justice, and government. It utilizes a dynamic and interactive approach to educate pre-university youth about integrity, accountability, and civic responsibility. The first prototype is set to undergo pilot testing at the H.A.N.A. youth center, with plans for broader implementation in schools and youth organizations.

Collectively, the THRIVE Project empowered over 115 youth participants through a dynamic blend of educational workshops, experiential learning, mentorship, and digital training. It successfully bridged gaps in education, civic engagement, and employability, fostering a culture of ethical citizenship, social responsibility, and innovation. By strategically integrating digital literacy, entrepreneurship, civic education, and integrity, THRIVE equipped youth with the tools and knowledge to actively contribute to community development and drive positive societal change.

Through strategic partnerships, high-profile engagements, and impactful learning experiences, THRIVE effectively positioned H.A.N.A. Youth Center as a pioneering force in youth empowerment within Lezha. It established a model of holistic education and ethical leadership, setting a benchmark for future initiatives aimed at fostering informed, proactive, and socially responsible youth.

The ***'Itinerary of the Public Money – Youth Reports'*** project, implemented by H.A.N.A. Youth Center and funded by the BAT Monitor Program through the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), made significant strides in enhancing transparency and accountability in local governance within the Municipality of Lezha. The project strategically empowered youth as key stakeholders in overseeing public financial management by equipping them with investigative journalism and budget monitoring



skills, positioning them as proactive participants in local decision-making processes. Through 18 concrete activities, the project actively engaged 31 youth participants, cultivating a culture of civic activism and ethical citizenship.

A core achievement of the project was the development of the "Youth Activist Club", a dedicated platform for in-depth discussions on community issues, enabling young people to voice their concerns and advocate for transparency in public spending. Through 9 sessions, participants explored critical topics impacting the quality of life in Lezha, leading to the formulation of 5 official information requests. These included demands for transparency in budget allocations for pre-university schools, the functionality of the Local Youth Council, and the depoliticization of public schools. By actively engaging in these processes, participants not only gained practical knowledge of governance mechanisms but also played a tangible role in fostering local transparency.

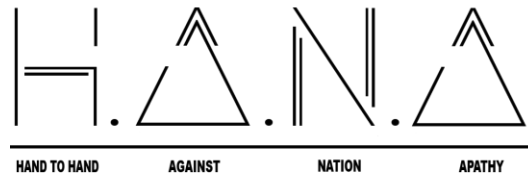
To strengthen institutional cooperation, the project initiated a high-level meeting with the Municipality of Lezha. This engagement aimed to present the project objectives and secure institutional support for information access and meeting minutes transparency. This dialogue laid the groundwork for enhanced collaboration between youth and local authorities, encouraging a reflective approach to public accountability and inclusive governance practices.

A pivotal component of the project was the creation of the "Youth Editorial Team" in partnership with "Hydajet Lezha" Public Gymnasium, involving 31 students who were trained in citizen journalism and investigative reporting. These young reporters identified 10 key investigative topics and were organized into teams to explore these issues, effectively promoting civic journalism and strengthening their research and analytical skills. This initiative not only empowered them as citizen watchdogs but also enhanced their engagement in community advocacy and public transparency.

To ensure sustainability and knowledge dissemination, the project produced the practical guide "Municipal Budget for Youth – Understanding & Influencing Change", which demystifies municipal budget structures, the public consultation process, and the importance of youth participation in local governance. This educational resource serves as a comprehensive guide for young people interested in actively participating in local decision-making and advocating for community interests.

Throughout the reporting period, the project successfully implemented 18 impactful activities, including 11 meetings with two youth groups, 5 formal information requests, and the development of the municipal budget guide. Notably, 2 preparatory training modules on budget transparency and the role of civic watchdogs were developed and delivered, enhancing participants' capacity to effectively monitor public funds. These initiatives empowered youth with the tools and knowledge needed to hold local institutions accountable and to actively participate in transparent and inclusive governance.

Despite its successes, the project faced challenges related to the political climate and institutional resistance in Lezha. The Municipality of Lezha demonstrated reluctance to incorporate youth recommendations into public policies, reflecting a broader narrative of political polarization and institutional inertia. Nevertheless, the project identified critical transparency gaps in local governance, including the non-functional Local Youth Council and political bias in public school platforms, underscoring the importance of sustained advocacy for accountable governance.



The 'Itinerary of the Public Money – Youth Reports' project has set a strong foundation for long-term youth engagement in local governance. It successfully amplified youth voices, enhanced public financial transparency, and promoted ethical civic activism. By positioning youth as key actors in public accountability, the project has contributed to the strengthening of democratic governance in Lezha and laid the groundwork for a more transparent and inclusive political culture.

In 2024, **SMART Balkans** provided core unrestricted funding to H.A.N.A. Youth Center, playing a crucial role in sustaining the organization's operational stability amidst significant financial challenges. This funding was strategically allocated to cover essential salaries, ensuring the continuity of H.A.N.A.'s impactful programs and interventions throughout the year. Despite its invaluable contribution, the core funding remained insufficient to meet the full operational demands, highlighting ongoing challenges related to underfunding and a lack of sound financial health.

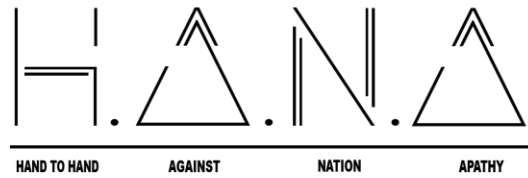
The unrestricted nature of the funding allowed H.A.N.A. the flexibility to allocate resources where they were most needed, primarily supporting the salaries of key staff members who were integral to the organization's continued impact. Specifically, the funding was allocated towards the roles of the Finance Officer, and Project Coordinator, ensuring financial accountability, and effective program implementation. This support was essential for maintaining organizational continuity during periods of high activity, including the implementation of complex projects such as THRIVE and Itinerary of the Public Money – Youth Reports.

Despite this strategic allocation, financial constraints persisted throughout the year. The funding did not fully cover the workload or the operational realities faced by a grassroots organization in Lezha. Consequently, H.A.N.A. struggled to retain skilled staff who were essential for high-quality program delivery, as salaries remained below competitive market rates. The lack of a sustainable financial health also impacted the organization's ability to invest in capacity building and organizational growth, thereby constraining its long-term sustainability.

The financial limitations underscored the urgent need for diversified funding sources to enhance financial stability and reduce dependency on a single donor. While SMART Balkans' core funding provided vital operational support, the shortfall highlighted a gap in organizational capacity and financial resilience. This underfunding challenge necessitated the reallocation of resources from other donors to supplement salaries and operational expenses, which, in turn, strained relationships with those funders who had their own programmatic expectations.

Despite these challenges, H.A.N.A. demonstrated resilience and adaptability, effectively utilizing the SMART Balkans' funding to sustain its mission-driven activities. The core funding was pivotal in retaining strategic staff, enabling the organization to navigate operational challenges and maintain programmatic impact. It also supported the strategic leadership required for advocacy efforts, community engagement, and partnership development.

In conclusion, the SMART Balkans core unrestricted funding was crucial in ensuring operational stability and leadership continuity at H.A.N.A. Youth Center in 2024. However, the persistent underfunding challenges highlighted the need for a more sustainable financial strategy to support the organization's long-term vision. Moving forward, H.A.N.A. aims to strengthen its financial health by diversifying funding



streams and advocating for realistic budget allocations that reflect the grassroots realities and workload demands of community-based organizations.

The *'Empowering Youth as Tourism Ambassadors'* project was implemented by H.A.N.A. Youth Center in collaboration with Nisma ARSIS as part of the Jeunes des 2 Rives (J2R) Program, supported by RYCO (Regional Youth Cooperation Office) and the French organization Solidarité Laïque. The project was designed to promote cultural heritage, environmental sustainability, and intercultural dialogue by engaging youth as ambassadors of tourism in the Pllanë area, Lezha Municipality. It was implemented through two international youth exchanges that successfully brought together Albanian and French participants in an immersive and transformative cultural learning experience.

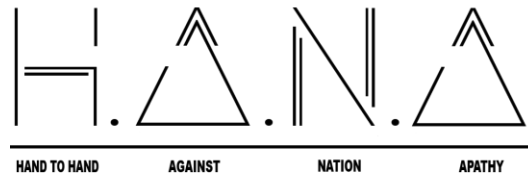
A cornerstone of the project was the international youth exchange held from October 19 to November 2, 2024, involving 6 French youth and 10 Albanian youth. The exchange program offered a rich intercultural experience through a series of workshops, guided tours, and environmental activities, strategically designed to enhance cultural awareness, leadership skills, and environmental stewardship. Participants were introduced to Albanian culture and history through a guided tour of Lezha and workshops on Albanian language and traditions, fostering a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and shared heritage.

Environmental sustainability was a key focus of the project, integrated through hands-on scientific workshops such as water analysis and species identification at the Drin River and bird watching at Kune Vain Lagoon. These activities were complemented by upcycling and recycling workshops, where participants learned to transform old clothing and create art from recycled materials, reinforcing the principles of environmental conservation and circular economy. By engaging in these activities, participants developed a strong sense of environmental responsibility and community engagement, paving the way for sustainable tourism practices.

A distinctive feature of the exchange was the media and storytelling component, where participants were trained in video production and digital storytelling. The screenwriting and filming workshops empowered youth to creatively express their intercultural experiences, resulting in the production of short films that captured personal narratives and cultural reflections. These films served as powerful tools for cross-cultural communication, enhancing participants' digital literacy and media advocacy skills.

The project also prioritized community engagement and local collaboration. The participants visited Mrizi i Zanave Agritourism in Fishte, where they actively engaged in agricultural tasks and learned about sustainable farming practices. This experiential learning opportunity provided insights into local economic development and the potential of agrotourism in promoting cultural heritage and environmental sustainability. Additionally, the project included a public restitution event at H.A.N.A.'s youth center, where participants shared their experiences, showcased their films, and engaged in discussions with community members, strengthening intercultural dialogue and community solidarity.

The project's impact was amplified through strategic partnerships and local advocacy. H.A.N.A. collaborated closely with Nisma ARSIS to coordinate activities, manage resources, and ensure effective implementation. This collaboration was formalized through a partnership agreement that defined roles, responsibilities, and financial arrangements, promoting transparency and accountability. Furthermore,



a request for collaboration was submitted to the Municipality of Lezha to install informative and directional signage along the trail of Mali i Kunorës in Pllanë, enhancing the accessibility and visibility of cultural and historical landmarks, including the Austro-Hungarian military tunnels. This initiative aimed to promote sustainable tourism and cultural preservation in the region.

The 'Empowering Youth as Tourism Ambassadors' project effectively engaged 16 youth participants through structured cultural exchanges, environmental workshops, media training, and community engagement. It empowered them as cultural advocates and environmental stewards, fostering a strong sense of intercultural solidarity and civic responsibility. By strategically combining cultural education, environmental sustainability, and digital storytelling, the project successfully promoted inclusive tourism practices and community resilience, positioning H.A.N.A. as a catalyst for cultural preservation and sustainable development in Lezha.

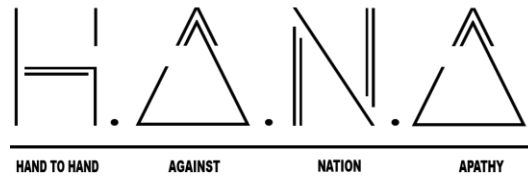
Overall, this initiative demonstrated the power of youth-led intercultural dialogue in promoting social cohesion, cultural heritage, and environmental sustainability. It established a sustainable model of cultural tourism that not only enhanced the cultural competencies and leadership skills of participants but also strengthened community identity and economic potential in the Pllanë area. The project laid the foundation for continued cross-cultural collaboration and youth empowerment, reinforcing H.A.N.A.'s commitment to civic activism, cultural preservation, and community development.

2. Summarized Projects Implemented

1. THRIVE Project (MFA Netherlands via Dutch Embassy in Albania)

THRIVE was the cornerstone project of 2024, reflecting H.A.N.A.'s vision of empowering youth for civic engagement, entrepreneurship, and digital skills. The program was financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, intermediated by the Dutch Embassy in Albania, and encompassed multiple components:

- **Winter School on EU Integration**
 - ✓ Educated youth on governance, rule of law, and Albania's EU accession.
 - ✓ Engaged 44 participants through 20 interactive sessions, two European Parliament simulations, and six debate sessions.
 - ✓ Facilitated dialogues with EU diplomats, including the EU Ambassador to Albania.
- **Hackathon on Anti-Corruption**
 - ✓ Engaged youth in developing tech-based solutions against corruption.
 - ✓ Combined technology and ethical governance, marking the first event of its kind in Lezha.
- **ICT Courses**
 - ✓ Addressed digital skills gaps with 22 sessions on HTML, CSS, and JavaScript.



- ✓ Concluded with recognized certificates from the Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation.
- ✓ Co-funded by the German Embassy in Albania for infrastructure in 2023.

- **FILIZA - Entrepreneurship Incubator**

- ✓ Empowered 30 youth participants with entrepreneurial skills and innovative thinking.
- ✓ Conducted 16 sessions using the Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC) methodology.
- ✓ Promoted sustainable societal impact through entrepreneurship education.

2. Itinerari i Parasë Publike – Youth Reports (IDM Albania - BAT Monitor Program)

Funded by the BAT Monitor Program under IDM Albania, this initiative aimed to increase transparency and accountability in local governance by:

- Educating youth on budget analysis, public finance, and civic responsibility.
- Empowering participants to monitor and report on public spending.
- Collaborating with Lezha Municipality to foster institutional transparency.
- Youth-led workshops and impactful civic education sessions contributed to a culture of accountability and democratic engagement.

3. EED (European Endowment for Democracy)

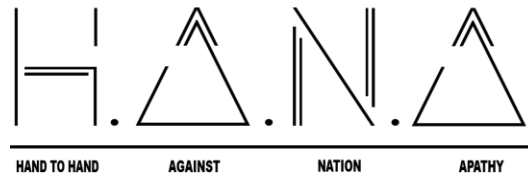
EED entrusted H.A.N.A. to administer and manage a grant awarded to a third party, Arilda Lleshi, for her activism initiative.

- H.A.N.A.'s role was limited to financial management and accountability, while Arilda Lleshi maintained direct responsibility for project implementation.
- This collaboration enhanced H.A.N.A.'s credibility and capacity in grant administration and transparent financial oversight, positioning the organization as a trusted partner for international donors.

4. LUSH Charity Pot (LUSH Cosmetics)

A modest donation from LUSH Charity Pot supported H.A.N.A.'s ongoing efforts to:

- Promote human values and civic activism in Lezha.
- Strengthen community bonds by supporting inclusive, participatory activities.



This flexible funding allowed for grassroots initiatives, reinforcing H.A.N.A.'s commitment to ethical and sustainable community development.

5. J2R (*Jeunes des 2 Rives*) Program (RYCO)

Under the J2R Program, H.A.N.A. served as the hosting organization for two international youth exchanges focusing on environmental sustainability:

- September 2024 Exchange with ARSIS (Albania):
- Facilitated cultural exchange and environmental education.
- Promoted sustainable community practices and environmental awareness among participants.
- Exchange with Youth from France (FONJEP and Nathalie Sarraut Youth Center):
- Focused on cross-cultural dialogue and joint environmental initiatives.
- Strengthened H.A.N.A.'s network with French youth organizations, enhancing international cooperation.

These exchanges contributed to the RYCO mission of regional reconciliation and cross-border youth collaboration, highlighting H.A.N.A.'s role in fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding.

6. SMART Balkans (*Core Grant - Unrestricted Funding*)

SMART Balkans provided core funding as unrestricted support for:

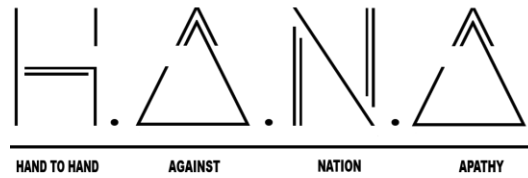
- Vital organizational needs, ensuring continuity and stability.
- Operational sustainability, allowing H.A.N.A. to respond flexibly to emerging community needs.
- Strengthening internal capacity for strategic growth and program development.

This core grant was crucial in sustaining day-to-day operations, enabling H.A.N.A. to maintain its strategic focus and organizational resilience amidst funding challenges.

7. H.A.N.A.'s Member Contributions

H.A.N.A.'s members played a significant role in sustaining the organization by:

- Contributing personal resources to cover unfulfilled organizational needs.
- Demonstrating dedication and ownership of H.A.N.A.'s mission.
- Reinforcing a culture of collective responsibility and solidarity within the team.



This internal support was pivotal in overcoming financial constraints and maintaining programmatic continuity.

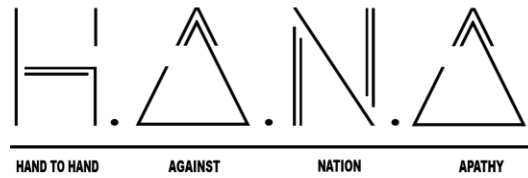
2. Learning, Challenges and Opportunities

Throughout 2024, H.A.N.A. Youth Center implemented a diverse portfolio of impactful projects, strategically designed to empower youth, promote civic engagement, enhance digital literacy, foster entrepreneurship, and advocate for environmental sustainability. These initiatives not only bridged critical gaps in education, civic participation, and employability but also contributed to community resilience and social cohesion in Lezha. A key learning outcome was the effectiveness of experiential learning methodologies across all projects, including the Winter School simulations, Hackathon problem-solving sessions, FILIZA's experiential entrepreneurship cycle, and digital storytelling in cultural exchanges. This hands-on approach significantly enhanced critical thinking, problem-solving, leadership, and public speaking skills, leading to tangible socio-economic impacts and ethical citizenship among youth.

The strategic integration of cultural education, environmental sustainability, and digital literacy emerged as a powerful tool for youth empowerment and community engagement. By connecting civic activism with entrepreneurial innovation and digital communication, H.A.N.A. successfully amplified youth voices, promoted ethical leadership, and bridged generational gaps. Additionally, the cross-cultural dialogue fostered through international youth exchanges proved instrumental in enhancing intercultural competencies and social cohesion, laying a solid foundation for regional reconciliation and inclusive governance.

Another critical learning was the importance of flexibility and adaptability in program implementation, particularly when dealing with complex socio-political dynamics. Projects such as Itinerary of the Public Money – Youth Reports and Hackathon on Anti-Corruption revealed the impact of political polarization and institutional resistance on youth participation and advocacy. Nevertheless, by employing adaptive strategies and leveraging strategic partnerships with local authorities, educational institutions, and international organizations, H.A.N.A. navigated these challenges while maintaining program integrity and impact.

Despite significant achievements, H.A.N.A. Youth Center faced multiple challenges throughout the year, largely related to underfunding, institutional resistance, and human resource constraints. A persistent issue was the limited financial resources allocated for operational expenses and salaries, particularly for grassroots initiatives outside Tirana. This financial instability led to staff burnout and difficulties in retaining skilled professionals, impacting organizational sustainability and program delivery. Although SMART Balkans' core unrestricted funding provided essential operational support, it remained insufficient to meet the full



workload demands, necessitating the reallocation of resources from other donors, thereby straining partnership dynamics and donor expectations.

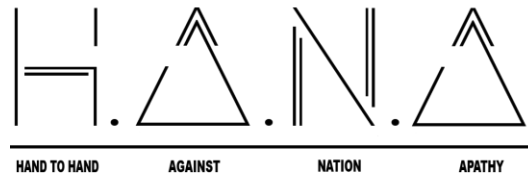
The political climate in Lezha posed another significant challenge, particularly for youth-led advocacy and public accountability initiatives. The Municipality of Lezha displayed reluctance to incorporate youth recommendations, reflecting broader issues of political polarization and institutional inertia. This resistance affected the implementation of the Itinerary of the Public Money – Youth Reports project, which sought to enhance transparency and accountability in local governance. Additionally, cultural biases and social stigmas surrounding youth activism and civic participation limited community engagement and posed challenges to inclusive governance.

Logistical constraints and infrastructural limitations also impacted the delivery of digital skills programs, particularly the ICT Courses and Hackathon on Anti-Corruption, which required reliable technological resources and adequate learning environments. Although support from the German Embassy in the form of laptops helped bridge this gap, rural and socio-economically disadvantaged participants faced barriers in digital accessibility and participation continuity. This highlighted the digital divide and the need for sustainable technological solutions in future programs.

Despite these challenges, H.A.N.A. Youth Center identified significant opportunities for growth, innovation, and strategic expansion. One of the most promising opportunities is the growing demand for digital literacy and employability skills among youth, particularly in web development, social media management, and digital storytelling. By leveraging the success of the ICT Courses and Hackathon on Anti-Corruption, H.A.N.A. can expand its digital education programs to include advanced coding, digital marketing, and data analytics, thereby positioning itself as a leader in digital empowerment in Northern Albania.

The rising interest in environmental sustainability and cultural heritage also presents opportunities for community engagement and tourism development, as demonstrated by the Empowering Youth as Tourism Ambassadors project. By collaborating with local governments, cultural institutions, and international partners, H.A.N.A. can enhance sustainable tourism initiatives and preserve cultural heritage, while simultaneously promoting economic opportunities through agrotourism and cultural entrepreneurship.

Strategic partnerships and international collaborations continue to offer significant potential for scaling impact and regional influence. The cross-cultural exchanges under the J2R Program highlighted the effectiveness of intercultural dialogue in fostering social cohesion and civic responsibility. Building on this success, H.A.N.A. plans to expand its international network by leveraging existing partnerships with RYCO, French organizations, and the Dutch Embassy, thereby enhancing its advocacy capacity and regional outreach.



Furthermore, the growing momentum for youth participation in governance and public accountability offers a strategic opportunity to strengthen democratic processes and civic engagement. By continuing to empower youth as civic watchdogs and budget monitors, H.A.N.A. can play a pivotal role in promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusive governance in Lezha. This can be achieved by expanding partnerships with institutional stakeholders such as the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) and local municipalities, advocating for policy reforms and institutional transparency.

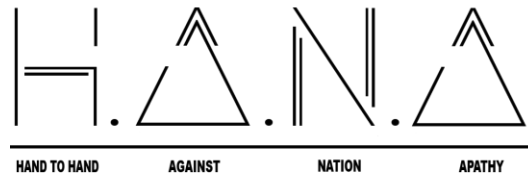
3. Gender Balances and other Crosscutting Themes

In 2024, H.A.N.A. Youth Center demonstrated a strong commitment to gender equality and inclusivity across all its programs, ensuring that gender balance and social equity were integral to the design, implementation, and evaluation of each project. The organization's strategic focus on empowering girls and young women was evident in its deliberate efforts to promote gender-responsive participation, particularly in traditionally male-dominated fields such as civic activism, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship. Through its holistic and inclusive approach, H.A.N.A. effectively challenged gender stereotypes and promoted equal opportunities for leadership and decision-making among youth in Lezha.

A key achievement in promoting gender balance was the active participation of girls and young women across all project components. In the THRIVE Project, for instance, 60% of participants in the ICT Courses and Hackathon on Anti-Corruption were girls, reflecting a strategic effort to bridge the gender gap in digital skills and technology-oriented fields. The Winter School on EU Integration and FILIZA Entrepreneurship Incubator also maintained gender parity, ensuring balanced representation in civic education, debate tournaments, and leadership workshops. These initiatives empowered girls with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to actively engage in democratic processes, drive socio-economic change, and challenge societal norms that limit female participation.

To address gender-specific challenges and barriers, H.A.N.A. employed gender-sensitive pedagogies and inclusive facilitation techniques. This included creating safe learning environments, promoting open dialogue on gender equality, and incorporating diverse role models to inspire girls and young women. In the FILIZA Incubator, successful local female entrepreneurs such as Françeska Pjetraj and Blerina Ago served as mentors, providing inspirational leadership and practical guidance. This approach not only motivated female participants but also fostered a culture of mentorship and peer support, reinforcing solidarity and empowerment among young women.

H.A.N.A. Youth Center also addressed other crosscutting themes, including social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, and environmental sustainability. Through initiatives like the



'Empowering Youth as Tourism Ambassadors' and J2R Cultural Exchanges, H.A.N.A. actively promoted social cohesion and intercultural solidarity by engaging youth from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and cross-cultural contexts. This approach enhanced social inclusion and fostered a sense of community belonging, bridging cultural and social divides. The focus on environmental sustainability was evident in activities such as upcycling workshops, recycling art projects, and sustainable tourism practices, which emphasized environmental stewardship and ethical responsibility.

In addition to gender and social inclusion, H.A.N.A. integrated human rights, ethical citizenship, and anti-corruption integrity as crosscutting themes. The Hackathon on Anti-Corruption promoted civic integrity and ethical leadership by encouraging youth-led technological solutions to combat corruption and enhance transparency. Similarly, the Integrity Game Toolkit was designed to educate youth on ethical decision-making and civic responsibility, fostering a culture of accountability and integrity.

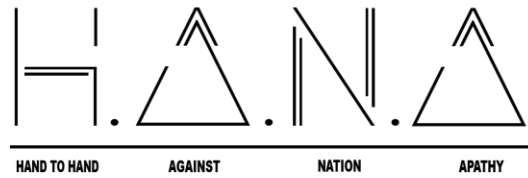
To further advance gender equality and crosscutting themes, H.A.N.A. leveraged strategic partnerships and advocacy platforms, collaborating with local governments, international organizations, and community stakeholders. This approach facilitated policy dialogues on gender-responsive budgeting, youth inclusion, and ethical governance, amplifying the voices of girls and marginalized youth in decision-making processes.

Overall, in 2024, H.A.N.A. Youth Center successfully integrated gender balances and crosscutting themes across all projects, promoting inclusive participation, social equity, environmental sustainability, and ethical citizenship. By creating safe, inclusive, and empowering spaces for girls and young women, the organization effectively challenged societal norms, bridged gender gaps, and enhanced social cohesion, laying a solid foundation for inclusive community development and sustainable social change in Lezha.

4. Communication, Outreach and Visibility

In 2024, H.A.N.A. Youth Center implemented an integrated communication and visibility strategy that significantly enhanced community engagement and stakeholder outreach across all projects. This strategy was centered on leveraging social media platforms, strategic partnerships, and community events to amplify impact, ensure transparency, and reinforce H.A.N.A.'s role as a leading youth organization in Lezha.

A strategic focus was placed on social media engagement, particularly on Facebook and Instagram, where Projects demonstrated exceptional visibility. Throughout the reporting period, Facebook metrics showed 60.9K views, 64.3K reach, 10.6K visits, and 139 new follows, reflecting a robust community interest. Posts highlighting key activities, including Hackathon



sessions, Winter School debates, and ICT course workshops, effectively showcased youth participation and project milestones. Instagram complemented this visibility by engaging a younger demographic through visual storytelling, behind-the-scenes content, and interactive stories, though data was limited to the last 90 days due to platform constraints.

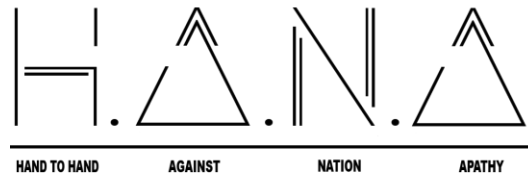
A crucial element of the strategy was real-time updates and dynamic content. H.A.N.A. maintained 100% transparency by sharing event photos, participant testimonials, short clips, and detailed reports across its social media channels. This consistent visibility approach not only enhanced community awareness but also strengthened stakeholder engagement and built trust with partners and donors. Notably, posts on debate tournaments and Hackathon prototypes received high engagement, demonstrating effective audience resonance and community relevance.

Offline visibility and community outreach were equally prioritized. Public events such as the Winter School's debate tournaments and the Hackathon's final presentations attracted community stakeholders, local authorities, and media representatives, reinforcing direct community engagement. Additionally, participants of the Empowering Youth as Tourism Ambassadors project actively shared their experiences, effectively serving as youth ambassadors and multipliers of the project's impact.

Strategic media partnerships with local TV channels and print media ensured broader visibility and public recognition. H.A.N.A. collaborated with regional news outlets to cover high-profile events, including discussions with EU diplomats, thus elevating its public profile and enhancing credibility within the community. This approach effectively bridged the gap between local community engagement and international visibility, positioning H.A.N.A. as an influential youth empowerment hub.

In addition, during this reporting period, we mobilized a youth group to systematically monitor and evaluate the social media activity of local schools and educational institutions. Through regular data collection and content analysis, they identified which posts effectively communicated relevant academic information and which deviated toward promotional or politically oriented content. By publicly sharing these findings—supported by clear statistics and examples—the group helped increase awareness among community members, amplify each school's authentic academic efforts, and foster a culture of responsible online presence. This initiative not only enhanced accountability and transparency in institutional communications but also extended the reach of positive school activities, thereby strengthening the schools' visibility in the broader community.

Throughout all communication efforts, donor visibility was meticulously maintained. Roll-up banners and branded materials consistently displayed donor and partner logos, ensuring recognition and transparency. Donors, including the Dutch Embassy, SMART Balkans, IDM,



RYCO, and others, were appropriately acknowledged in all online and offline communications, fostering trust and accountability with funding partners.

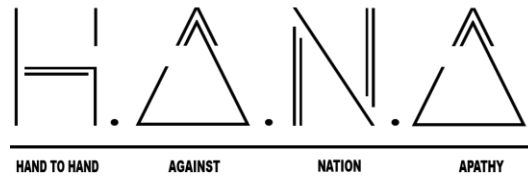
H.A.N.A.'s website played a strategic role as a centralized communication platform, providing detailed project updates, reports, and professional resources. Unlike social media, the website targeted professional stakeholders, policymakers, and partner organizations, ensuring comprehensive visibility and accessibility of project outcomes.

5. Final Remarks

2024 marked a year of significant growth, resilience, and impact for H.A.N.A. Youth Center, solidifying its role as a catalyst for youth empowerment, civic engagement, and community development in Lezha. Through eight strategic projects and interventions, H.A.N.A. effectively bridged critical gaps in education, digital literacy, civic participation, and entrepreneurship, empowering youth as ethical leaders, social innovators, and community advocates. Despite facing financial constraints, political resistance, and operational challenges, the organization demonstrated remarkable adaptability, strategic leadership, and organizational resilience, maintaining program integrity and driving positive societal change.

A key highlight of 2024 was the THRIVE Project, the most ambitious and impactful initiative in H.A.N.A.'s history. By strategically integrating civic education, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and ethical citizenship, THRIVE equipped youth with the knowledge, skills, and leadership capacities needed to actively participate in democratic processes and drive socio-economic change. The project's holistic approach and experiential learning methodologies not only enhanced critical thinking, problem-solving, and public speaking skills but also fostered a culture of ethical leadership, civic integrity, and social responsibility. The engagement of over 115 youth participants across 86 dynamic activities reflects THRIVE's far-reaching impact and sustainability, positioning it as a model for youth empowerment and community transformation.

In addition to programmatic achievements, 2024 was a year of strategic expansion and advocacy, as H.A.N.A. effectively leveraged international collaborations with RYCO, the Dutch Embassy, Solidarité Laïque, and other strategic partners. These partnerships not only enhanced cross-cultural dialogue, social cohesion, and intercultural solidarity but also strengthened H.A.N.A.'s credibility and influence within the regional and international youth development landscape. By actively participating in policy dialogues on gender equality, civic integrity, and youth participation, H.A.N.A. successfully amplified youth voices, contributing to the strengthening of democratic governance and social inclusion.



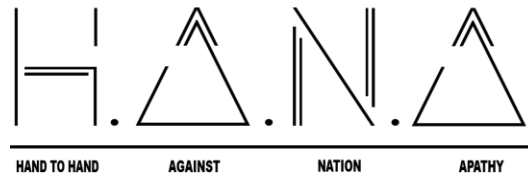
However, the year was not without challenges. Underfunding, political resistance, and human resource constraints impacted operational sustainability and program delivery. The SMART Balkans' core unrestricted funding provided essential support but remained insufficient to meet full operational demands, necessitating resource reallocation and strategic compromises. Additionally, political polarization and institutional inertia in Lezha posed barriers to youth-led advocacy and civic accountability, requiring adaptive strategies and innovative problem-solving. Despite these obstacles, H.A.N.A. exhibited resilience, strategic adaptability, and commitment to ethical leadership, ensuring programmatic impact and organizational continuity.

The year also highlighted the urgent need for sustainable financial health and diversified funding sources to ensure long-term organizational stability. Moving forward, H.A.N.A. is committed to strengthening its financial strategy by expanding funding streams, enhancing donor engagement, and advocating for realistic budget allocations that reflect the grassroots realities and operational demands of community-based organizations. By addressing financial challenges and strategic sustainability, H.A.N.A. aims to preserve its investment in skilled staff, ensuring continued high-quality program delivery and organizational growth.

In conclusion, 2024 was a transformative year for H.A.N.A. Youth Center, marked by strategic growth, impactful interventions, and community empowerment. By navigating challenges with resilience, leveraging strategic partnerships, and amplifying youth voices, H.A.N.A. has positioned itself as a pioneering force in youth development, ethical citizenship, and community transformation. As the organization moves forward, it remains deeply committed to its mission of empowering youth as proactive citizens, social innovators, and ethical leaders, laying the foundation for a more inclusive, transparent, and socially responsible future in Lezha and beyond.

6. Major Change Achieved

One of the most significant changes was achieved through the THRIVE Project, which strategically equipped youth with leadership, digital, and civic competencies. By actively engaging over 115 youth participants through 86 dynamic activities, THRIVE not only enhanced critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital skills but also fostered ethical citizenship and civic integrity. Participants of the Winter School on EU Integration gained firsthand legislative experience and actively engaged with EU diplomats, enabling them to advocate for democratic reforms and ethical governance. This shift in youth agency and civic participation marked a major change in youth leadership, empowering a new generation of proactive citizens who are actively contributing to Albania's EU integration process.



Another transformative change was observed through the Empowering Youth as Tourism Ambassadors project, which promoted intercultural dialogue, cultural preservation, and sustainable tourism in the Pllanë area. By leveraging international youth exchanges and cross-cultural interactions, the project enhanced social cohesion and intercultural solidarity, effectively bridging cultural and social divides. Participants became ambassadors of cultural heritage and environmental stewards, influencing community perceptions and tourism practices. This cultural transformation contributed to the revitalization of local heritage, fostering a sense of community belonging and identity while promoting sustainable economic opportunities through cultural entrepreneurship and agrotourism.

H.A.N.A. also achieved a significant shift in digital literacy and employability through the ICT Courses and Hackathon on Anti-Corruption. By strategically integrating digital education, technological innovation, and civic integrity, these initiatives equipped youth with essential digital skills, positioning them as digital innovators and civic watchdogs. Participants of the ICT Courses gained officially recognized certifications from the Ministry of Economy, Culture, and Innovation (MEKI), significantly enhancing their employability and paving the way for self-employment and digital nomadism. The Hackathon empowered youth to address systemic corruption through tech-based solutions, demonstrating the power of youth-led digital activism in fostering transparency and ethical leadership.

A paradigm shift in community advocacy and public accountability was achieved through the Itinerary of the Public Money – Youth Reports project, which positioned youth as civic watchdogs and budget monitors. By actively engaging in municipal budget monitoring and citizen journalism, youth participants successfully amplified community voices, demanded transparency, and influenced public decision-making. This strategic empowerment contributed to a cultural change in civic activism, promoting a community-driven accountability movement that challenges institutional opacity and political inertia in Lezha.

Besmira Lekaj, Executive Director, February 2025

Report submitted by:

(Emri i plotë, titulli, nënshkrimi dhe data)