



The 17th Year Publication, No.1

June 2025

THE IMPACT OF EU FUNDS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN ALBANIA

Yzeir Selamaj, Valbona Cinaj

“Albanian University”

Abstract

In the process of Albania's European integration, agriculture represents a strategic sector of particular importance for economic development and the improvement of living conditions in rural areas. The European Union, through its pre-accession funds, in particular the IPARD (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development) program, has offered concrete opportunities for the modernization of the Albanian agricultural sector. The aim of this paper is to examine the direct and indirect impact of EU funds on increasing productivity, improving the quality and standards of production, as well as on the development of the rural economy.

The paper analyzes the progress achieved through EU-supported investments in Albanian farms, including the use of modern technologies, the development of agritourism and support for the processing of agricultural products. It also highlights the challenges related to the absorption of funds, institutional capacities and the lack of information for farmers. Through this analysis, concrete measures are suggested to improve the access and efficiency of European funds in the function of sustainable rural and agricultural development.

Keywords: *EU Funds (IPARD II), Rural Development, Modernization of Agriculture, Agrotourism, Absorption of Funds, Rural Development Policy, Training of Farmers*

1. Introduction

The agricultural sector in Albania constitutes a crucial part of the national economy, representing around 19% of the gross domestic product and employing over a third of the workforce – the highest percentage in the Western Balkans region. Over the last 15 years, the gross value added for agricultural products has more than doubled, reflecting a positive performance of this sector. This has directly impacted not only economic growth, but also food security and social stability, especially in rural areas. With over a third of the workforce engaged in the agricultural sector and a significant area of land used for agricultural purposes, the development of this sector is essential for improving the well-being of the population and reducing regional inequalities.

After the 1990s, Albanian agriculture went through a difficult period of transition, characterized by fragmentation of land ownership, weak infrastructure, lack of investment, and limited access to modern technology. In the face of these challenges, international aid and support, especially from the European Union, has played an important role in supporting reforms and modernizing the sector. The European Union, through its financial instruments such as the IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) and more specifically the IPARD component, has provided direct support to the agricultural sector and rural de-

velopment in Albania. The main purpose of this support is to prepare the agricultural sector to compete in the European single market and to achieve EU standards in production, food safety, environmental protection, and rural well-being. From 2014 until now, the European Union has provided significant support to Albanian agriculture through the IPARD II and IPARD III programs, which aim to modernize the agricultural sector and rural development in line with EU standards.

1.1 IPARD II (2014–2020)

The IPARD II program, implemented during the period 2014–2020, has included a total fund of 94 million euros, of which 71 million euros were financed by the EU and 23 million euros by the Albanian government. This program has supported investments in:

- Investments in Physical Assets of Agricultural Farms (Measure 1 of the program)
- Investments in Physical Assets for the Processing and Marketing of Agricultural and Fisheries Products (Measure 3 of the program)
- Farm Diversification and Business Development (Measure 7 of the program)

1.2 IPARD III (2021–2027)

The IPARD III program, launched in 2021, has a planned budget of EUR 146 million for Albania, with the aim of supporting:

- Investments in physical assets of farms
- Processing and marketing of agricultural and fisheries products
- Development of rural public infrastructure
- Agritourism and diversification of economic activities
- Advisory services and technical assistance

The measures included in Albania’s IPARD III program are:

- Measure 1 (M1) – Investments in physical assets of agricultural farms,
- Measure 3 (M3) – Investments in physical assets for the processing and marketing of agricultural and fisheries products,
- Measure 4 (M4) – Measure for environmental, climate and organic farming,
- Measure 5 (M5) – Implementation of local development strategies – LEADER approach,
- Measure 6 (M6) – Investments in infrastructure rural public,
- Measure 7 (M7) – Farm diversification and business development,
- Measure 9 (M9) – Technical assistance,
- Measure 10 (M10) – Advisory services,
- Measure 11 (M11) – Forest creation and protection.

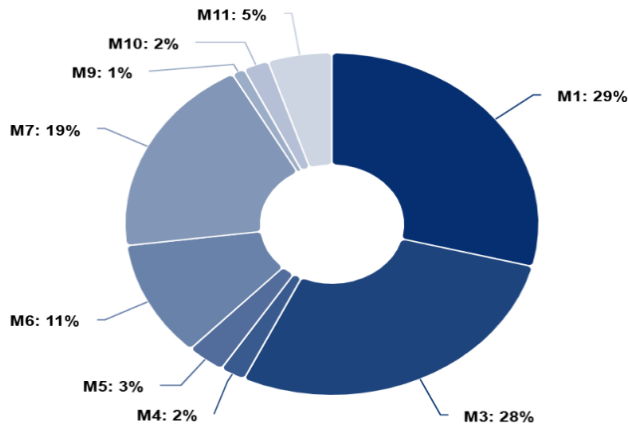


Chart 1.1: Planned public funding by measure (% of total budget) Source: European Commission

However, due to irregularities discovered in the implementation of IPARD II, the European Commission has temporarily suspended the development of the process for Albania under IPARD III.

This paper aims to comprehensively analyze the impact of these funds on the development of Albanian agriculture, presenting concrete examples, statistical data, as well as assessments of the economic and social effects. It also examines the current challenges in the absorption of funds and provide some recommendations for further improvement of this process.

2. Methodology

This paper is based on a qualitative and analytical research approach, which aims to examine the impact of European Union funds on the development of Albanian agriculture during the period 2014–2024, with particular emphasis on the implementation of the IPARD II and IPARD III programs. The methodology is built on a combination of documentary analysis and review of published statistical data, to provide the most complete and balanced overview of the effect of these funds.

1. Methodology

In the absence of a primary database built on the ground, this paper relies on the analysis of secondary data, focusing on strategic documents, implementation reports, official statistics and publications of international organizations that oversee or support rural development in Albania. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation reports from national and European institutions are included.

2. Literature Review

Policy and official documents published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), the EU Delegation to Albania, the AZHBR and the European Commission.

- Official statistics from INSTAT, especially those related to agriculture, farm structure, and fund absorption.
- Publications from international organizations such as FAO, the World Bank and OECD that analyze rural development performance and policies in Albania.
- Reports from independent media and analytical platforms, regarding issues and challenges encountered in the implementation of IPARD.

The analysis is structured at two levels:

- Thematic analysis, which addresses the impact in institutional, economic and social aspects, based on international literature and practices.
- Statistical data analysis, which examines funding trends, fund absorption, distribution by measures and their impact by agricultural sectors.

The methodology used does not include direct data collection in the field but relies on documentary analysis and processing of secondary data, published by reliable sources.

This approach aims to provide a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the impact of EU funds, highlighting achievements, challenges and recommendations for future improvement.

3. Analysis of the measures taken and the progress of the IPARD process

IPARD II Program measures implemented in Albania

The IPARD II Program (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development), implemented in Albania during the period 2014–2020, has been one of the most important financial interventions of the European Union in support of the agricultural and rural sector development. Within the framework of this program, three main measures have been implemented aimed at the modernization of agriculture, improving the competitiveness of production and processing, as well as creating new employment opportunities in rural areas through the diversification of economic activities.

Measure 1 – Investments in Physical Assets of Agricultural Farms

This measure focused on increasing the efficiency and sustainability of agricultural production at the farm level. Its objective was to modernize production technology and improve hygiene and sanitary conditions, so that Albanian farmers could bring production closer to European standards. The benefits included the construction or reconstruction of stables and agricultural facilities, the purchase of modern machinery, as well as investments in waste management and animal welfare. This measure aimed not only to improve production, but also to reduce the environmental impact of traditional practices.

Measure 3 – Investments in Physical Assets for Processing and Marketing of Agricultural and Fisheries Products

This measure aims to support entities operating in the agricultural and fisheries products processing sector. The supported investments included the construction of processing plants, the purchase of modern equipment for processing, packaging and storage of products, as well as the improvement of marketing infrastructure. This has directly contributed to increasing the added value of Albanian products and increasing the capacity to compete in European and international markets.

Measure 7 – Farm Diversification and Rural Business Development

One of the main goals of this measure has been to create new sources of income for rural families, by supporting initiatives outside traditional agricultural production. Supported activities have included the development of rural and nature tourism, artisanal food processing, community services, traditional crafts and the use of renewable energy. This measure has been assessed as an important step towards reducing poverty in rural areas and curbing internal and external migration.

Through these three measures, the IPARD II program has created an important basis for the sustainable development of agriculture and the rural economy in Albania. However, their implementation has also been accompanied by significant challenges, which are related to transparency, control and administrative capacities, as it is analyzed further in this paper.

3.1 Impact of IPARD II funds on Albanian agriculture

Modernization of farms and increased productivity

One of the most visible and immediate impacts of IPARD funds on Albanian agriculture has been the modernization of farms and their equipment with advanced technology. Through the financial support of the European Union, many farmers throughout Albania have benefited from grants to invest in new agricultural equipment, such as tractors, planting and harvesting machinery, high-efficiency irrigation systems, equipment for managing agricultural waste and equipment for treating solid and liquid waste. In addition, modern greenhouses with optimal conditions for cultivating vegetables and other plants have

been built or reconstructed, as well as new stables and facilities for livestock, which meet the hygiene and sanitary standards of the European Union.

These investments have significantly facilitated farm work processes, reduced production costs and the time required for the agricultural cycle, leading to increased yield per unit area. Advanced technology has enabled a more rational use of natural resources, such as water and fertilizers, reducing the negative impact on the environment.

According to data from the Agency for Agricultural and Rural Development (AZHBR), hundreds of farmers have benefited from the IPARD II program to purchase modern machinery or to build structures for the processing and storage of agricultural products, such as refrigerators, cleaning and packaging lines, and agri-food processing lines. These investments have also created opportunities for longer storage of products, which has contributed to reducing post-harvest losses and increasing farmers' incomes.

The modernization of farms has had a knock-on effect on the entire agricultural sector, improving the quality of production, increasing the capacity to compete in foreign markets, and stimulating the growth of employment in rural areas. This technological transformation constitutes an important step towards the professionalization of Albanian agriculture and its alignment with European practices and standards.

Improving quality and standards

One of the most important impacts of EU funds on Albanian agriculture has been the improvement of production quality and the implementation of international food safety standards. Through IPARD programs, many farmers and agro-processors have benefited from funds for the construction of facilities that meet hygiene and sanitary requirements, the installation of equipment for safe storage and processing of products, as well as for staff training.

Improving hygiene and sanitary conditions on farms and in processing units has been one of the basic requirements for beneficiaries of funds. This includes the construction of facilities that meet European food safety regulations, the installation of disinfection equipment, temperature control in the storage and transport process, as well as the training of staff in good agricultural and processing practice standards.

One of the conditions for benefiting from IPARD funds has been the application and/or preparation for certification according to standards such as:

- Global GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) – which guarantees sustainable production, food safety and environmental protection.
- HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) – which ensures strict control of risks throughout the food chain.
- ISO 22000 and ISO 9001 – for food safety and quality management systems.

The implementation of these standards has double importance: firstly, it increases the confidence of the local consumer in the products marketed on the national market and, secondly, it paves the way for export to the European Union markets, where the requirements for quality and traceability are very high. For this reason, EU funds have been an important impetus for the transformation of agricultural and agro-industrial practices from traditional production towards a certified and sustainable model.

According to data from AZHBR, a significant number of processors of wine, milk, olive oil and other agri-food products have invested in international certification thanks to IPARD funds, gaining access to new markets and ensuring increased value for their products.

The improvement of standards has not only brought economic benefits, but also positive effects on public health, consumer protection and environmental protection, contributing to a safer and more sustainable food system for Albania in its European integration process.

3.2 Encouraging processing and increasing the value of agricultural products

One of the strategic goals of the IPARD programs in Albania has been to increase the economic value of agricultural products by supporting processing and packaging. Traditionally, most of the country's agricultural production has been traded in raw form, which has limited farmers' incomes and created dependence on unstable and seasonal markets. European Union investments have aimed to replace this outdated model with a more sustainable approach focused on local processing.

Through IPARD, many small and medium-sized businesses in rural areas have benefited from support to build capacities for processing fruit, vegetables, meat, milk, olive oil and fishery products. This includes the purchase of modern equipment for washing, cutting, fermentation, packaging and storage, ensuring higher quality and longer shelf life of products. Thus, Albanian agricultural production has acquired a new identity as a processed product with export potential.

Local processing has also brought social benefits, stimulating the creation of new jobs in rural areas, especially for women and young people, and has created an economic chain that helps local communities become more economically sustainable. Furthermore, processing has helped reduce post-harvest losses – a widespread problem in Albanian agriculture – by enabling the preservation of products even out of season.

In conclusion, support for processing has helped Albanian agriculture to move from a sector oriented towards the sale of raw materials to a sector with a processed and market-ready product, making it more competitive, more efficient and better integrated with European Union standards and markets.

3.3 Diversifying the rural economy and promoting agritourism

One of the most important impacts of European Union funds on rural development in Albania has been the promotion of economic diversification in agricultural areas. Through Measure 7 of the IPARD II program, farmers have been supported to move away from dependence solely on agricultural production and to create complementary activities such as agritourism, traditional crafts, artisanal processing and rural services.

With the help of IPARD funds, many farmers have transformed their properties into hospitality structures that offer accommodation, traditional food and authentic experiences for domestic and foreign tourists. These investments have increased the income of rural families and have helped preserve the Albanian cultural and culinary heritage.

At the same time, artisanal workshops have been set up to produce jams, traditional cheeses, artisanal raki, local wine and handicrafts, adding value to local products and creating a sustainable link between agriculture, culture and tourism.

This diversification has had direct social and economic effects, especially on the employment of young people and women in rural areas, helping to curb emigration and create long-term prospects. Rural areas have begun to transform not only into production areas, but also into centers with multidimensional development potential. In summary, EU funds have not only aimed at supporting agricultural production, but also at the structural transformation of the Albanian rural economy, integrating it into a more sustainable, more diverse model closely linked to tourism, culture and local identity.

3.4 Training and education of farmers

The professional training of farmers has been an essential component of the European Union interventions in Albanian agriculture, with a direct impact on increasing the efficiency and sustainability of the sector. Through IPARD funds and the accompanying technical assistance, training has been organized on farm management, drafting business plans, rural marketing and the implementation of European food safety standards. These interventions have helped farmers to be better prepared to benefit from the funds and to manage investments in a sustainable manner.

The main topics of the training included:

- Farm management (budget planning, work organization, asset maintenance).
- Drafting business plans and preparing documentation for application to grant schemes.
- Rural marketing and promotion of local products.
- Implementation of European production and food safety standards (e.g. HACCP, Global GAP).

The training has also had a positive impact on the organizational and awareness-raising aspects, encouraging increased cooperation with institutions and civil society. The training of farmers has thus become a key factor in increasing professionalism in agriculture and in aligning with European Union practices, making the sector more integrated and prepared for market challenges.

However, implementation on the ground has been partial. The lack of continuous support and sustainable training structures has meant that many farmers, especially in remote areas, do not fully benefit from these programs. This shows the need for a sustainable and coordinated national strategy for agricultural education, to be extended equally to all rural areas of the country.

3.5 Increasing export opportunities

One of the most lasting benefits of European Union support for Albanian agriculture has been the increase in export capacities, especially towards EU markets. Through IPARD funds and investments in improving quality, packaging and traceability, Albanian farmers and processors have become more able to meet international standards and compete abroad.

Certification according to standards such as Global GAP, HACCP and ISO has become a key condition for access to European markets. Technical and financial support from the EU has helped many Albanian agro-processors obtain these certifications and increase the credibility of their products. As a result, products such as Albanian fruits, vegetables, wines and medicinal plants are increasingly being exported to countries such as Germany, Italy and Austria.

However, exports remain concentrated in a few products and few actors, while many small farmers face difficulties in meeting technical and logistical requirements. In order to expand this potential, additional support is needed for the creation of cooperatives, improving cold chain infrastructure and strengthening links with international markets. Overall, EU funds have paved the way for the internationalization of Albanian agriculture and its integration into the European economy.

3.6 Promotion of renewable energy and sustainable management of agricultural waste

An increasingly important component of support through IPARD II funds has been the promotion of renewable energy and the treatment of agricultural waste, as part of the objectives of sustainable development and protection of the rural environment. The program has encouraged investments in solar panel systems for heating and electricity on farms and processing units, as well as in equipment for the processing or composting of organic agricultural waste.

These interventions not only reduce dependence on traditional energy sources and operating costs for farmers, but also help with more efficient waste management, preventing pollution and contributing to a greener agricultural economy. Although these investments have been more limited in number compared to other measures, they represent an important step towards the transition of Albanian agriculture towards sustainable models and aligned with the environmental policies of the European Union.

4. Analysis and impact of EU investments in key agricultural sectors (2020–2024)

The agricultural sector has been one of the most important pillars of the Albanian economy, contributing around 18–19% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing over 36% of the national workforce according to INSTAT data for 2023. This sector remains particularly important for rural areas, where most of the population is involved in agricultural, livestock and processing activities.

Distribution of IPARD II funds by measures and sectors (2018–2024)

Official data from the Agency for Agricultural and Rural Development (AZHBR) for the period 2018–2024 show that IPARD II funds have been distributed through three main measures:

- Measure 1 – Investments in physical assets of agricultural farms,
- Measure 3 – Investments in processing and marketing,
- Measure 7 – Farm diversification and rural development.

Measure 1 – Investments in physical assets of agricultural farms

Sector	Call I	Call II	Call III	Call IV
Dairy Sector	1,329,180.31	260,591.16	1,111,149.29	
Fruit and Vegetable Sector	4,561,095.19	5,375,817.53	10,175,588.71	
Meat Sector	524,300.66	193,645.63	1,453,248.17	
Vineyard/Grape Sector	358,382.23	412,739.69	394,169.12	
Total	6,772,958.39	6,242,794.01	13,134,155.29	0.00

Table 1: Total investment in measure 1 (years 2018-2024) in EUR

This measure aimed to increase production capacities and improve agricultural infrastructure on farms. The funds were distributed to the milk, fruit and vegetable, meat and vineyard sectors. The most supported sector is fruit and vegetable, with over 20.1 million euros in total, followed by the milk sector with over 2.7 million euros and the meat sector with 2.1 million euros.

This distribution shows a strategic orientation of funds towards sectors with high trade and export potential, such as fruit and vegetables, while support for vineyards has been modest and stable in all three calls (~1.2 million euros in total).

Measure 3 – Investments in Physical Assets for the Processing and Marketing of Agricultural and Fisheries Products

Sector	Call I	Call II	Call III	Call IV
Dairy Sector	250,352.36	1,988,297.57		
Fruit and Vegetable Sector	4,637,219.11	3,126,177.67	5,069,124.36	
Meat Sector	2,756,550.23	2,686,662.18		
Vineyard/Grape Sector	730,430.38	1,254,272.18		
Total	8,374,552.08	9,055,409.60	5,069,124.36	0.00

Table 2: Total investment in measure 3 (years 2018-2024)

This measure has significantly supported the increase in capacities for processing and packaging of products, as well as certification for foreign markets. Also, the fruit and vegetable sector dominates, with over 12.8 million euros invested in three calls. Followed by the meat sector (~5.4 million euros) and milk (~2.2 million euros).

It is also important to highlight the support for the wine sector, with ~2 million euros, which shows an effort to support products with local identity and high tourist and export potential. This measure has had a direct impact on improving quality and increasing added value in the agri-food chain.

Measure 7 – Farm Diversification and Rural Business Development

Sector	Call I	Call II	Call III	Call IV
Nature and rural tourism sector	1,320,775.35	4,493,012.22		4,630,038.87
Medicinal plants sector	216,588.62	5,375,817.53		
Beekeeping		171,703.44		
Olive oil processing		83,606.25		
Total	1,537,363.97	6,038,596.99	0.00	4,630,038.87

Table 3: Total investment in measure 7 (2018-2024)

The funds of this measure have been mainly concentrated in the nature and rural tourism sector, with over 10.4 million euros in three active calls. This is an important indicator of the EU's orientation towards promoting agritourism and integrated economies in rural areas.

Furthermore, support has been noted for alternative sectors such as medicinal plants (~5.4 million euros), beekeeping and olive oil processing, albeit in lower amounts. This shows the EU's efforts to promote economic diversification and create new income opportunities in rural communities, especially for women and young people.

The distribution of IPARD II funds reflects a balanced approach between the development of primary production, processing and rural economic diversification. The most supported sectors have been fruit and vegetables, benefiting from both direct investment on farms and processing, while sectors such as wine, medicinal plants and rural tourism have received particular attention due to their potential for creating added value, increasing employment and local development.

This analysis of the distribution of funds confirms the EU's stance to develop sustainable, diversified and market-oriented agriculture, in line with the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

5. Sectoral performance according to INSTAT data (2022–2023)

The latest data published by INSTAT for the years 2022 and 2023 provide a clear overview of the performance of the agricultural sector in Albania and indirectly reflect the impact of EU support through IPARD programs. In general, a steady increase in the production of basic crops is observed, for which support has been provided through investments in mechanization, irrigation systems and storage and processing structures.

In the group of arable crops, the production of cereals increased by 1.5% in 2023, potatoes by 4.38%, and beans by over 7%. These figures are related to the increase in investments in agricultural machinery and the efficiency of new technologies supported by IPARD funds in regions such as Fier, Elbasan and Korçë. Similarly, for vegetables and greenhouses, production increased by 2% overall, while over 22% of them are cultivated in modern greenhouses – a direct indicator of the impact of IPARD in the modernization of production infrastructure.

On the other hand, traditional sectors such as olives and fruit trees have recorded a significant decline – -25.4% and -4.5% respectively. This highlights the need to review the priorities of rural financing, providing more support to farmers working in these sectors sensitive to climate change and geographical factors. At the same time, the slight increase in citrus fruits and medicinal plants signals the potential for expanding support for alternative crops, with a focus on export and processing – areas that the EU and IPARD II have included in their measures to promote diversification.

This analysis clearly shows that EU investments have contributed to the modernization of production and increased efficiency in some sectors, while for some important traditional crops, more focused interventions, training and incentives for application in IPARD schemes are required, in order to maintain a balanced and inclusive development in the entire Albanian agricultural sector.

Albania’s Agri-Food Trade (2020–2024)

According to INSTAT and Eurostat data, Albanian agricultural exports have increased significantly in this period. In 2023, total merchandise exports reached \$4.3 billion, while imports increased by 2.5%, reaching \$8.6 billion.

IPARD’s Impact on Increasing Agricultural Exports

IPARD programmes have played a key role in improving the production and processing capacities of the Albanian agricultural sector. Through investments in farm modernization, product processing and rural development, IPARD has helped increase the quality and quantity of exported products.

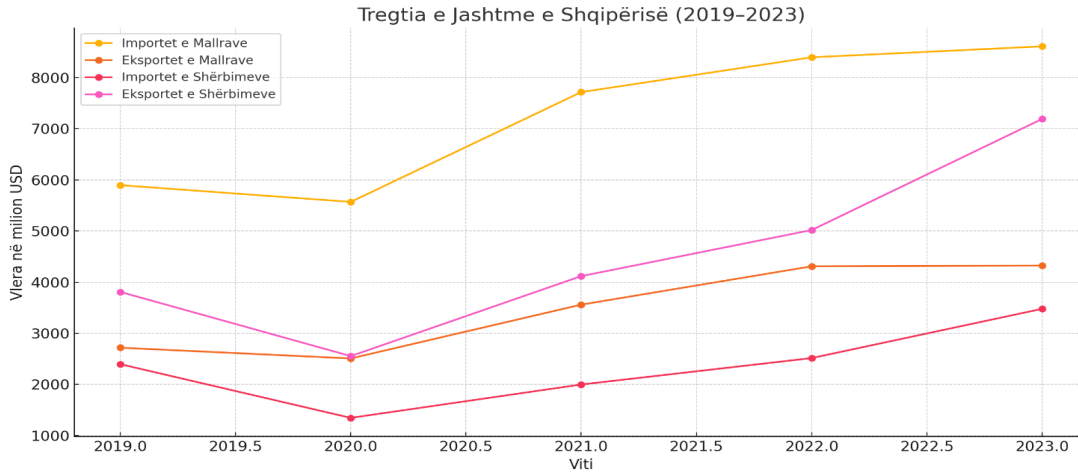


Chart 2. Albania’s foreign trade 2019-2023

Year	Imports of Goods (million USD)	Exports of Goods (million USD)	Imports of Services (million USD)
2019	5,897	2,716	2,394
2020	5,570	2,506	1,343
2021	7,718	3,559	1,996
2022	8,399	4,309	2,513
2023	8,613	4,324	3,477

Table 4: Foreign trade data 2019–2023

According to data from the World Trade Organization and INSTAT, Albania has experienced a significant increase in exports of services, as well as stability in exports of agricultural products, although the trade deficit for goods remains high. From 2019 to 2023, exports of goods increased by over 59%, reaching USD 4.3 billion in 2023, while imports for the same period increased by over 45%.

In this context, agri-food products occupy a significant part of Albania’s export structure, with around 12.6% in 2024, including fruits, fresh vegetables, wines, medicinal plants and processed agricultural products. IPARD programs have been a key driver for this growth, providing funding for:

- Certification and improvement of quality standards for export.
- Construction of cleaning, packaging and storage lines according to EU requirements.
- Investments in the value chain for products with export potential (such as tomatoes, cucumbers, wine, olive oil, citrus fruits and medicinal plants).

Although the impact of IPARD on increasing export capacities is evident, the figures still show a weak and unfocused structure of agricultural exports, concentrated in a few products and few processors. This fact, combined with the lack of diversification and price competitiveness, has the effect of maintaining

the trade balance negative.

6. Conclusions

1. The IPARD II Fund has significantly contributed to the modernization of Albanian agriculture, enabling direct investments in machinery, agricultural infrastructure, processing and marketing of products. This has led to increased productivity, reduced costs and improved production quality.
2. The program has helped in sustainable rural development, through support for economic diversification, agritourism, agro-processing and promotion of women's and youth initiatives in rural areas. These interventions have stimulated employment and provided alternatives to migration.
3. Certifications and approximation to European standards have improved significantly thanks to technical and financial support from IPARD, enabling Albanian producers to enter European markets with competitive products.
4. The implementation of renewable energy and agricultural waste management, although on a more limited scale, has paved the way towards a greener agricultural model and closer alignment with EU environmental policies.
5. INSTAT data and sectoral analyses confirm a steady increase in production for the main crops and an expansion in investments in processing and exports. However, traditional crops such as olives and fruit trees have declined, requiring specific interventions.
6. Agri-food exports have increased modestly, thanks to investments in quality and traceability, but Albanian agricultural trade remains concentrated and dependent on a small number of actors and products.
7. Important challenges include: low administrative capacities, lack of information and advice for farmers, lack of cooperation in the form of cooperatives, as well as delays in the implementation and absorption processes of funds.

7. Recommendations

1. Strengthen the administrative and institutional capacities of the AZHBR and local structures to effectively manage and implement IPARD funds, including simplifying application procedures for farmers.
2. Develop a national strategy for agricultural training and rural advisory services, decentralized and comprehensive one, to include farmers in the most remote areas and help in project design, applications and investment management.
3. Promote the formation of agricultural cooperatives and producer groups, to improve farmers' bargaining power, share infrastructure and facilitate access to markets and funds.
4. Increase support for traditional crops and the most vulnerable sectors, such as olives and fruit trees, through specific financing measures and policies to cope with climate impacts and property fragmentation.
5. Expanding investments in renewable energy and waste management, focusing on affordable technologies for small-holder farmers and integrating sustainable environmental practices into national agricultural policies.
6. Full alignment with EU standards in food processing and safety, through mandatory certification schemes, investments in laboratories and continuous training for the food chain.
7. Establishing a national digital platform for information, applications and assistance for IPARD funds, so that farmers have equal access to financing opportunities and technical information.
8. Regular monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the funds, through a transparent system of reporting and publication of data by regions, sectors and beneficiary groups (women, youth, marginalized communities).

Bibliography

1. Delegation of the European Union to Albania. (2023). *IPARD II Programme in Albania – Implementation Overview*. Marrë nga: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu>
2. Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MBZHR). (2023). *Raport Vjetor për Bujqësinë dhe Zhvillimin Rural*. Tiranë: MBZHR. Marrë nga: <http://www.bujqesia.gov.al>
3. Agjencia për Zhvillim Bujqësor dhe Rural (AZHBR). (2024). *Lista e përfituesve IPARD II dhe projektet e financuara*. Marrë nga: <https://azhbr.gov.al>
4. European Commission. (2024). *Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for Rural Development – Albania, IPARD III Programme 2021–2027*. Marrë nga: <https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu> (https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/international/international-cooperation/enlargement/pre-accession-assistance/apply-funding_en)
5. FAO – United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. (2022). *Supporting IPARD implementation and rural development in Albania*. Marrë nga: <https://www.fao.org>
6. <https://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail/fao-albania-partner-for-sustainable-and-resilient-agri-food-systems-and-rural-development/>
7. <https://azhbr.gov.al/financimet-nga-ipard/>
8. <https://azhbr.gov.al/programi-ipard/>
9. Instituti i Statistikave (INSTAT). (2025). *Statistikat e Bujqësisë dhe Zhvillimit Rural 2020–2023*. Tiranë: INSTAT. Marrë nga: <https://www.instat.gov.al>
10. Albania: Economic and Political Overview (May 2025) <https://www.lloydsbanktrade.com/en/market-potential/albania/trade-profile?utm>
11. Cinaj, Ribaj Valbona (2022) “Albania Versus Challenges of Covid-19 and European Funds” *World Journal of Business Research (WJBR)*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2022, Pp 19-27
12. Cinaj R. Valbona, Ribaj Rebeka “Macroeconomic Impact of Natural Disasters in Albania” ISSN-L 2393-3119 ISSN 2393-3127, Ovidius University of Constantza, Faculty of Economic Sciences, vol. 0(1), pages 59-66, August. 2021
13. Ribaj A., Mexhuani F. - 2021. [The impact of savings on economic growth in a developing country \(the case of Kosovo\)](#) *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*,
14. Ribaj A., Ilollari O., 2019 Albania Case Linked with SEE Countries ([Asymmetric information versus banks’ customer trust, Albania case linked with SEE countries](#))
15. Valbona Cinaj Artur Ribaj 2024 **Adaptation of SME-s in the Face of COVIDI-19, Albanian Reality** *International Paris Congress on Social Sciences & Humanities February 17-19, 2024*
16. Valbona Cinaj Ribaj, [Enkeleda Shehi](#), Artur Ribaj , July 2024 Albanian Macroeconomic Perspective Versus Covid – 19 Impact, **Financial Engineering** 2:187-200