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REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA  
AGENCY FOR THE SUPPORT OF CIVIL SOCIETY



**amshc**

Agency for the Support  
Of Civil Society

# **LONG-TERM STRATEGY 2015-2020**

## Executive Summary

The *Agjencia për mbështetjen e Shoqërisë Civile (AMSHC)* began preparations for a new strategic plan to guide its efforts to transform itself into

- an engine in Albania's national development and EU accession
- a donor of world-class standards, equal among other similar European agencies
- a donor of transparency and quality
- a donor able to not only disburse grants but provide high quality technical assistance, analysis, and sound decision-making

In December 2014, an international expert facilitated a two-day strategy workshop with staff of AMSHC and held meetings with the civil society representatives of the Board. With many initiatives proposed, a process of prioritizing what could be feasible and reasonable within the strategy period occurred. The results of this process are presented here.

*The new Agency strategy for 2015-2020 acknowledges the tremendous efforts and investments required to build up AMSHC's operations over the first five years.* Grants-making rules and procedures are in place; however, in its fifth year, the time has come to take stock of these accomplishments and set the path for the future to take AMSHC to the next level in technical and administrative excellence.

The new strategy sets forth five strategic aims for which the Supervisory Board will take responsibility to achieve. These are:

- *Aim 1: AMSHC's organizational success is driven by a high performance Supervisory Board*
- *Aim 2: AMSHC is recognized as a transparent, fair grant-making organization which serves the best interests of all Albanians through Albanian civil society*
- *Aim 3: AMSHC has an agile, efficient administration with technical capacity to be a leader for the civil society sector*
- *Aim 4: AMSHC measures and reports upon the impact of grants-making for the benefit of the Albanian public interest*
- *Aim 5: AMSHC is the conduit of choice by foreign donors for grants distribution*

Together, these aims are designed to consolidate gains from the first five years of operations, and lay the groundwork for the Agency's future. At the same time they are ambitious and many of them may need to continue on into the next strategic period.

The Supervisory Board will oversee the implementation of the strategic plan, and hold the Director accountable for it.

## Unique Nature and Characteristics of AMSHC

AMSHC is a unique Agency in Europe in that it is *an Albanian-funded, independent government Agency with a specific mandate by law to serve and strengthen the country's civil society sector*. Being funded by the central budget, it has a stable, sustainable level of funding and is accountable to the Albanian taxpayer.

This unique nature of the Agency allows it to develop strategies and priorities in the best interest of the country's development, and free from foreign policy agendas. Its ability and interest in supporting start-up NGOs is another key distinguishing factor of AMSHC which allows it to engage with Albanian civil society in a more agile, flexible manner.

In addition, the Agency's national character allows it to interact at a more grassroots level throughout the country and build long-term, in-depth relationships with Albanian CSOs—particularly those in rural and isolated areas. Answering to the Albanian society as a key constituent, AMSHC has the mandate to be regularly and frequently engaged with Albanian civil society. In this way, AMSHC is charged with being an active, constant participant in the country's civil society sector.

*As a new Agency operating in an environment where many CSOs are untrusting, all of AMSHC's staff are keenly eager to take measures to improve perceptions of the Agency's transparency and fairness*

## Analysis of the Operational Context

The overall analysis of the civil society sector in Albania is characterized by confronting large challenges but nevertheless optimistic. Thanks to heavy investments in the civil society sector since the early 1990s when Albania transitioned to a democratic society, a number of positive trends have taken root and are producing tangible benefits. These trends form an important opportunity in which to implement this strategy.

Recent societal trends in Albania	
1	the country has an increasingly developed civil society sector with many CSOs
2	the government is increasingly open to collaborating with CSOs in meaningful ways (one could even describe AMSHC itself as an expression of that openness to collaborate)
3	Albanian citizens—especially those of marginalized groups—are increasingly willing to participate publically, claim their rights, and engage in civil society
4	Albanian NGOs are increasingly connected to partners and networks in Europe, which strengthens their capacity
5	NGOs are generally willing and eager to innovate, adopt new methodologies, and adapt and apply new practices to Albania

However, there are still a number of challenges which this civil society sector must overcome. Three main challenges exist:

- Both within civil society as well as the population, there remains a lingering sense of distrust of government and apathy. While this sense is diminishing, it nevertheless continues among some in society.
- The civil society sector itself suffers from a series of challenges
  - The larger NGOs tend to dominate the field, crowding out the voice of and opportunities for smaller NGOs

- There are more than 3,000 registered NGOs in Albania but many are non-functioning and/or have missions that are too general to make them meaningful
- Some CSOs do not represent a constituency but instead are driven by their leadership's vision
- Capacity is mixed among NGOs. Generally speaking, it is low among NGOs in rural and isolated areas. This is true for management and technical matters. In addition, most NGOs lack capacity to document results and attract donors on the basis of achievements
- Funding for Albania's NGOs is relatively low and most NGOs struggle for sufficient financing
- Civil society still faces challenges to find, mobilize, and retain volunteers and raise funding from within Albanian society
- The legal environment is insufficient and not fully developed for civil society. This is particularly the case for the lack of VAT exemptions for NGOs as well as the lack of a law specifically for volunteers.

Technological changes have likewise been rapid in Albania. Even in rural, isolated parts of the country, there is much greater connectivity. News travels faster, social networks are more active, communications are increasing, and public opinion is shaped more easily as a result. Generally, this is a positive trend for civil society, which makes communications, awareness, and mobilizing easier, faster, and less expensive.

### Analysis of AMSHC's Current State and Achievements

Since its establishment in 2009, AMSHC has made a great deal of effort and investment in its start-up. During those initial five years, AMSHC has operationalized its grants-making in accordance with the law and government procurement regulations. The bulk of these efforts have been bureaucratic and operational. As a new Agency with a relatively small staff, this process has been laudable.

#### ***Current Strengths and Achievements***

***Start-up.*** Since its founding five years ago, AMSHC have staffed several key functional areas such as monitoring, reporting, financial oversight, and administration (see Annex B: Current Staffing Structure). The Agency has launched six calls for proposals and disbursed more than 270 individual grants to Albanian CSOs. Both grants disbursements and monitoring of grants have been conducted within the law as well as government financial procedures.

***Outreach to Albanian civil society.*** AMSHC staff traveled to cities in all regions of Albania especially to outreach to and engage with local civil society groups. These information sessions were held to gather input, record concerns of these groups, and to train them on the grants-making objectives and procedures of the Agency.

***Efforts to increase trust and transparency.*** AMSHC staff are keenly focused on the need to build trust and transparency among civil society and the Albanian taxpayers. This has mainly been addressed through outreach and strict adherence to the rules and regulations related to grants-making and monitoring. AMSHC has also publically published its grants and all related procedures.

As evidence of these achievements, AMSHC has calculated that the amount of applications have been steadily increasing with each new call for proposals. While many CSOs naturally need grant funding, it is also a sign that more CSOs are knowledgeable of AMSHC and want to partner with it.

## Strategic Objectives of AMSHC for the 2015-2020 Period

As described above in the section, *Analysis of AMSHC's Current State and Achievements*, AMSHC has achieved much in putting the mechanical elements of its operations into place. Five years after its founding, the time has come to focus on the five aims listed here.

*NOTE: It should be noted that this is a strategic plan. The Supervisory Board will govern to achieve the aims and strategic objectives listed in this plan. The Director and his staff will operationalize the plan over the strategy period.*

### **Vision Statement**

AMSHC is a key engine in Albania's development and EU integration, partnering with, motivating, and equipping civil society to achieve sustainable impact.

### **Mission Statement**

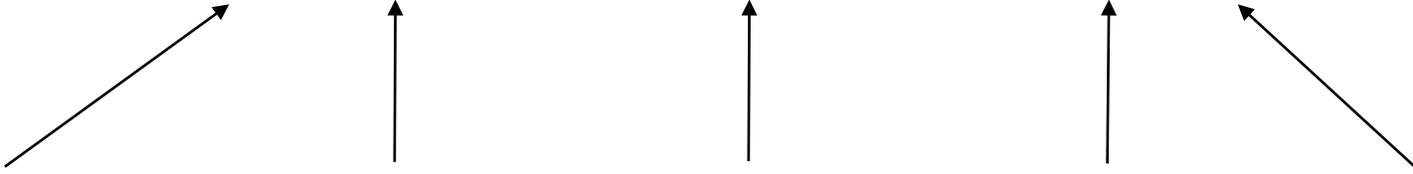
To encourage the sustainable development of civil society and the creation of favorable conditions for civic initiatives for the good of and in the interest of the public

### **AMSHC Key Values**

- Unwavering support to Albania's development and European integration
- Commitment to Albanian civil society
- Compliance with Albanian laws
- Transparency
- Fairness
- Professionalism

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**Mission Statement**  
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**Aim 1: AMSHC's organizational success is driven by a high performance Supervisory Board**

**Objectives:**

*1.1: The Supervisory Board's skills, networks, and talents are leveraged to optimize its strategic decision-making and governance of AMSHC*

*1.2: The mechanisms for establishing priorities and selecting grants are strengthened.*

**Aim 2: AMSHC is recognized as a transparent, fair grant-making organization which serves the best interests of all Albanians through Albanian civil society**

**Objectives:**

*2.1: AMSHC is widely recognized as a transparent grants-maker*

*2.2: AMSHC's contribution to Albania's development is understood and valued by the civil society and the public*

**Aim 3: AMSHC has an agile, efficient administration with technical capacity to be a leader for the civil society sector**

**Objectives:**

*3.1: AMSHC is an effective advocate for civil society concerns.*

*3.2: AMSHC is an innovating force for civil society, through technical assistance and funding*

*3.3: AMSHC's staff have technical capacity to manage the programs and transfer knowledge to civil society*

*3.4: The grants application process is more efficient for both applicants and AMSHC itself*

*3.5: Grants administration and oversight is made more efficient*

**Aim 4: AMSHC measures and reports upon the impact of grants-making for the benefit of the Albanian public interest**

**Objectives:**

*4.1: AMSHC has improved capacity and systems to effectively monitor its grants*

*4.2: AMSHC demonstrates the value, impact and contributions to national/global development goals of its grants-making*

**Aim 5: AMSHC is the conduit of choice by foreign donors for grants distribution**

**Objectives:**

*5.1: AMSHC is acknowledged as a reputable, reliable grants-maker by foreign donors*

*5.2: AMSHC distributes and manages at least 1 million euros per year of external donor funding*