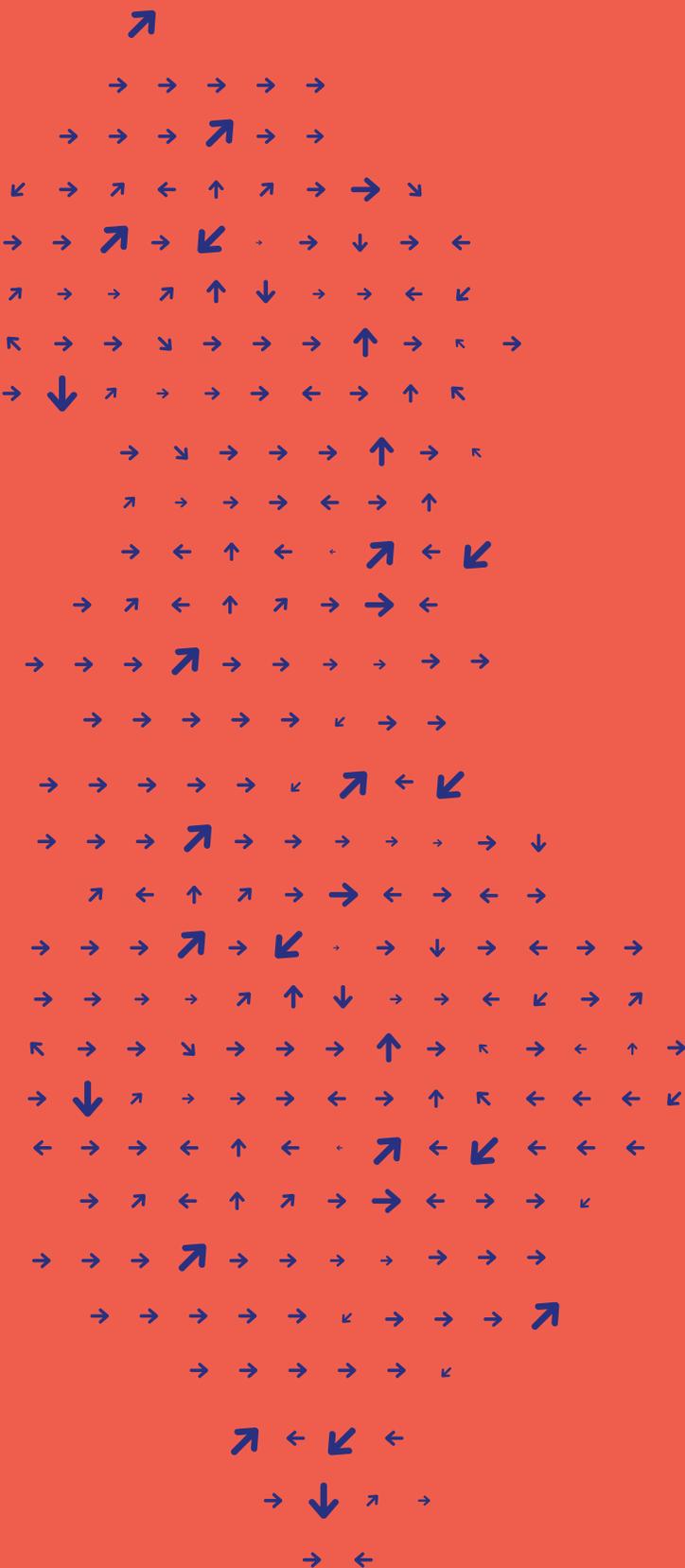


LOCAL GOVERNANCE MAPPING IN ALBANIA 2020



Funded by
the European Union





Governance Perception in a Reforming Albania

Nationwide Local Governance Mapping in Albania 2020

AUTHORS

IDRA Research & Consulting and Human Development Promotion Center (HDPC)



Disclaimer

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

A	Accountability
CD	Community Dialogues
CRC	Citizen Report Card
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DLP	Detailed Local Plan
DR	Desk Research
E&E	Effectiveness and Efficiency
GIS	Geographic Information System
GLP	General Local Plans
GRB	Gender Responsive Budget
LG	Local Government
LGB	Local Government Barometer
LGM	Local Government Mapping
LGUs	Local Government Units
MFG	Municipal Focus Group
MoFE	Ministry of Finance and Economy
Mol	Ministry of Interior
NCSDL	National Cross-Cutting Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance 2015-2020
MTBP	Medium Term Budget Programme
NTPA	National Territorial Planning Agency
P&CE	Participation and Citizens Engagement
TAR	Territorial Administrative Reform
T&RoL	Transparency and Rule of Law
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	12
General findings	14
Introduction	17
1. Background: Albania’s governance context and local governance mapping	21
1.1 Local governance reforms and challenges in Albania.....	23
1.2 STAR2 project context.....	27
1.3 Objectives of the Governance Mapping Exercise.....	28
1.4 General Description of Albanian Municipalities.....	29
2. Mapping Methodology	33
2.1 Analytical Framework for Local Governance Mapping.....	34
2.1.1 Effectiveness and Efficiency.....	35
2.1.2 Transparency and Rule of Law.....	36
2.1.3 Accountability.....	36
2.1.4 Participation and Citizen Engagement.....	37
2.2 Research Methods.....	37
2.2.1 Secondary Data.....	38
2.2.2 Primary Data.....	38
2.2.3 Citizen Report Card Survey.....	39
2.3 Scoring approach.....	40
2.4 Profile of Respondents.....	41
3. Local Governance mapping: Findings	45
3.1 An Overview of Local Governance.....	47
3.2 Effectiveness and Efficiency.....	52
3.2.1 Vision and Planning of local administration.....	58
3.2.2 Financial Management.....	61

3.2.3	Informed Decision Making.....	65
3.2.4	Coordination and Cooperation.....	68
3.2.5	Level of Satisfaction with Services	72
3.3	Transparency and Rule of Law.....	85
3.3.1	Transparency.....	90
3.3.2	Rule of law.....	97
3.3.3	Incidence of corruption.....	101
3.4	Accountability	108
3.4.1	Checks and balances.....	112
3.4.2	Local Government Recourse Mechanisms.....	117
3.4.3	Government Responsiveness	120
3.5	Participation and Citizen Engagement	123
3.5.1	Institutional Framework for Citizen Participation.....	127
3.5.2	Stakeholder Involvement in Decision-Making.....	133
3.5.3	Citizen engagement	138
3.5.4	Civic engagement	141
4.	CONCLUSIONS	145
5.	RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD.....	151
6.	ANNEX: MUNICIPALITY SCORES	159

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Sampling criteria and total number of conducted interviews

Table 2. Top 5 and bottom 5 overall ratings from the public and the local government

Table 3. Effectiveness and efficiency criteria top positive and top negative determinants

Table 4. Municipal coordination and cooperation bottom 5 – highlighting the most problematic indicators of the criterion

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of municipalities based on LGM overall score

Figure 2. Frequency distribution of municipalities based on Effectiveness and Efficiency

Figure 3. Frequency distribution of municipalities based on Transparency and Rule of Law

Figure 4. Frequency distribution of municipalities based on Accountability score

Figure 5. Frequency distribution of municipalities based on citizen participation and engagement

Figure 6. Classification of municipalities by their population

Figure 7. The Map of Local Governance Mapping Implementation

Figure 8. Share of respondents to the Citizen Report Card by gender and age

Figure 9. Share of respondents to the Citizen Report Card by education level

Figure 10. Share of respondents to the Citizen Report Card by status of employment and income

Figure 11. Overall local governance score

Figure 12. Overall comparative local governance score, 2016-2020

Figure 13. Overall local governance score by municipality size

Figure 14. Overall score of Local Governance: top 10 and bottom 10 municipalities

Figure 15. Local Government Mapping

Figure 16. Effectiveness and efficiency criteria

Figure 17. Effectiveness and efficiency: comparative overview, 2016-2020

Figure 18. Effectiveness and efficiency by municipality size

Figure 19. Map of effectiveness and efficiency

Figure 20. Vision and planning of local administration: performance of indicators

Figure 21. Vision and planning of local administration: comparison between 2016 and 2020

Figure 22. Map of clear vision and participatory and inclusive plans

Figure 23. Financial management: performance of indicators

Figure 24. Financial management: comparing 2016 and 2020

Figure 25. Financial management map

Figure 26. Informed decision making - indicators

Figure 27. Informed decision making – comparing 2016 and 2020

Figure 28. Informed decision making Map

Figure 29. Coordination and cooperation: indicators

Figure 30. Coordination and Cooperation: comparison 2016-2020

Figure 31. Level of cooperation with central government

Figure 32. Map of Cooperation and Coordination

Figure 33. Satisfaction with services: indicators

Figure 34. Satisfaction with services: top 10 and bottom 10

Figure 35. Access to municipal service delivery: top 10 and bottom 10

Figure 36. Men and women access to local government services

Figure 37. Quality of service delivery– indicator

Figure 38. Easiness of obtaining municipal administrative services: top 10 and bottom 10

Figure 39. Satisfaction with public services: comparing 2016 and 2020

Figure 40. Public services availability and access - comparing 2020 and 2016

Figure 41. Public services availability and access

Figure 42. Satisfaction with the quality of public services – comparing 2020 and 2016

Figure 43. Citizen satisfaction level with public services

Figure 44. Easiness of obtaining administrative services

Figure 45. Public service considered as main priorities for intervention according to citizens’ perception

Figure 46. Municipality assessments for services provided

Figure 47. Map of satisfaction with Public Services

Figure 48. Transparency and rule of law

Figure 49. Transparency and rule of law criteria

Figure 50. Transparency and rule of law map

Figure 51. Transparent and accessible information 2020

Figure 52. Transparent and accessible information – comparing criteria

Figure 53. Local administration transparency from citizens’ perspective

Figure 54. Municipal information flow around projects, activities and public services according to citizens’ perspective

Figure 55. Transparency and rule of law criteria by municipality size

Figure 56. Citizen access to information on performance of local services and resources

Figure 57. Transparent administrative procedures (Top 10 – Bottom 10)

Figure 58. Main information sources used by citizens concerning city matters and various activities of their municipality

Figure 59. Local administration transparency map

Figure 60. Rule of law: indicators

Figure 61. Rule of law – comparing criteria

Figure 62. Local government awareness raising on laws and local regulations from citizens’ perspective

Figure 63. Impartiality in enforcing laws and local regulations

Figure 64. Rule of law map

Figure 65. Incidence of corruption 2020

Figure 66. Incidence of corruption – comparing criteria

Figure 67. Corruption Perception (Top 10 – Bottom 10)

Figure 68. Corruption Experience (Top 10 – Bottom 10)

Figure 69. Perception on corruption (Top 10 – Bottom 10)

Figure 70. Corruption perception level for the municipal government

Figure 71. Reasons for citizen-perceived corruption

Figure 72. Corruption incidence in municipal offices contacted in the last 12 months

Figure 73. Incidence of corruption map

Figure 74. Accountability

Figure 75. Accountability Criteria

Figure 76. Accountability criteria by municipality size

Figure 77. Accountability map

Figure 78. Control mechanisms 2020

Figure 79. Control mechanisms (checks and balances) – comparing criteria

Figure 80. Control mechanisms (Top 10 – Bottom 10)

Figure 81. Map of checks and balances

Figure 82. Local government recourse mechanisms 2020

Figure 83. Control mechanisms (checks and balances) - comparing criteria

Figure 84. Local government recourse map

Figure 85. Government responsiveness 2020

Figure 86. Comparison of government responsiveness criteria

Figure 87. Submission of the complaint by the citizens who had reason to complain

Figure 88. Municipal responsiveness to citizens' complaints

Figure 89. Government responsiveness map

Figure 90. Participation and citizen engagement

Figure 91. Participation and citizen engagement: comparative overview, 2016-2020

Figure 92. Participation and citizen engagement by municipality size

Figure 93. Participation and citizen engagement map

Figure 94. Institutional framework for citizen participation 2020

Figure 95. Citizen participation platforms (Top 10 – Bottom 10)

Figure 96. Evaluation of citizen participation platforms by the municipality and the community

Figure 97. Effective platforms for citizen participation

Figure 98. Efficiency of public consultation

Figure 99. Right on information Coordinators - indicators

Figure 100. Public consultation efficiency: Municipality vs community

Figure 101. Map of the institutional framework for citizen participation management

Figure 102. Stakeholder involvement in decision-making 2020

Figure 103. Stakeholder involvement in decision making - criteria comparison

Figure 104. CSOs influence in decision making (Top 10 – Bottom 10)

Figure 105. CSOs influence in decision-making - comparing the municipal vs community score

Figure 106. Engagement of women in decision making (Bottom 10 – Top 10)

Figure 107. Map of stakeholder involvement in decision making

Figure 108. Citizen engagement 2020

Figure 109. Comparison of citizen engagement criteria

Figure 110. Participation of citizens in municipal meetings (Bottom 10 – Top 10)

Figure 111. Citizen engagement Map

Figure 112. Civic engagement in 2020

Figure 113. The level of civic engagement – comparing criteria

Figure 114. Ability of the media to raise awareness (Bottom 10 – Top 10)

Figure 115. Interaction with local administration and public expression of citizen opinion on local, political, social or environmental issues

Figure 116. Civic engagement map

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The territorial and administrative reform, a precursor to a series of local government reforms, created a new and favourable framework for strengthening local government institutions and boosting service delivery efficiency, but, on the other hand, it also brought in a new dimension of the challenges to the advancement of local democracy and citizen engagement in public affairs. Over the last 3 years, along with the ongoing implementation of the decentralization agenda, the institutional, legal and regulatory framework supporting the local government reform has advanced further. Local good governance remains a key challenge on the path of EU integration.

In 2016, the Government of Albania, in partnership with the United Nations Development Program - UNDP in Tirana, started the implementation of the project “Consolidation of the Administrative and Territorial Reform - STAR2”. The project benefits all 61 municipalities and aims to improve institutional capacities of local administrations, the service delivery sector and the environment for active civic engagement, which together aim at achieving better local governance. The project has been made possible through the support of and cooperation with the European Union and the governments of Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, USAID, UNDP as well as the Government of Albania.

Local Governance Mapping was the first activity of UNDP’s STAR2 project starting its first phase in fall 2016, while the current second phase took place as planned at the very end of the project life span. Both phases attempt to assess the level and practices of good local governance as seen from citizens’ and municipal officials’ points of view across Albanian municipalities. The underlying belief of this assessment is that findings at municipal and national level will benefit local decision-makers, but also central institutions, international partners and civil society organizations that assist institutionally and/ or programmatically local governance in Albania.

The 2nd Local Governance Mapping implemented at the beginning of 2020 is based in the same methodology and assessment tools. Besides diagnosing the current situation it aims at measuring progress achieved in three years by comparisons with LGM 2016 results.

As in the case of the 1st Local Governance Mapping, the current assessment, applied to all 61 municipalities, takes into consideration the dimensions of Effectiveness and Efficiency, Transparency and Rule of Law, Accountability and Participation and Citizen Engagement, which are all important principles of good governance. Along these selected dimensions, the assessment has attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are the views of citizens about different aspects of local government operations?
- What aspects of local governance are more / less problematic from the perspective of both citizens and municipalities?
- How familiar, informed and engaged are citizens with their local administrations?
- How do citizens perceive the capacity of local governments and its responsiveness?

- What is the situation of local governance at an aggregate national level and the common challenges that deserve attention?

The mapping methodology, adopted in similar studies conducted by UNDP and other international development organizations in other countries, combines desk research with qualitative and quantitative research, using the techniques of the Local Government Barometer and the Citizen Report Card.

Data used in this report was obtained from the following sources:

- 11,934 questionnaires with community representatives in 61 municipalities through the Citizen Reporting Card;
- 61 focus groups with municipal high-level officials;
- 61 community dialogues;
- collection of secondary data from the 61 municipalities and other sources for the demographic, economic, social, public and administrative framework.

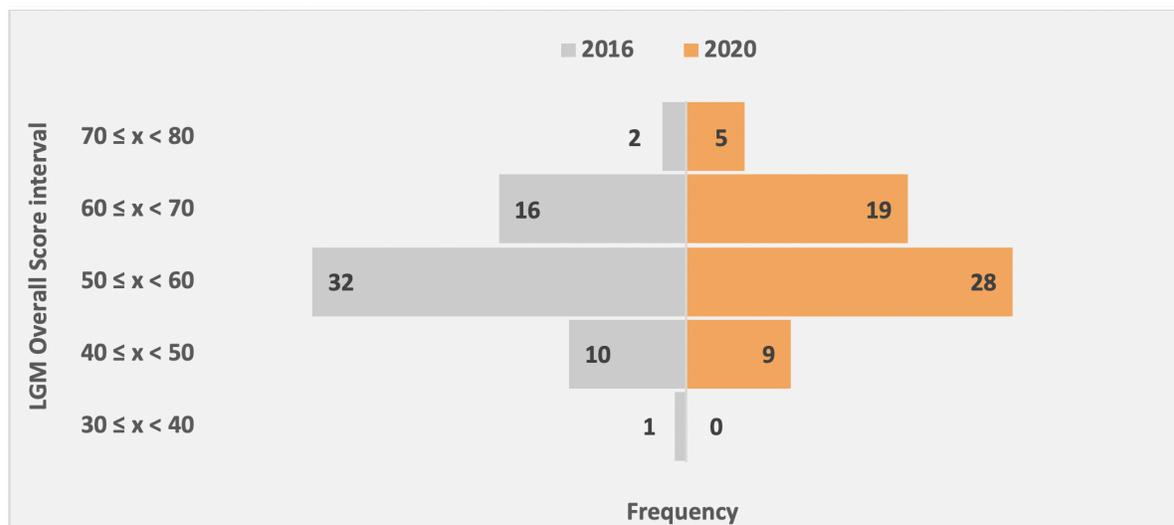
Respondents were selected randomly within each municipality, based on data from 2011 Population and Housing Census. The margin of error is estimated to be approximately 0.89%, with a confidence level of 95%.

General findings

- In 2020, the overall situation of Local Government Mapping score (LGM) has marked a slight improvement. While in 2016 only two municipalities scored over 70 points by the LGM parameters, that number went up to five in 2020. Another positive finding worth noting is that the assessment found no municipalities scoring under 40 points, unlike 2016.

The improvement is a result of the performance of the small and medium-sized municipalities. The seven largest municipalities (municipalities operating in areas with over 100,000 inhabitants) have seen a declining performance in 2020 compared to 2016.

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of municipalities based on LGM overall score

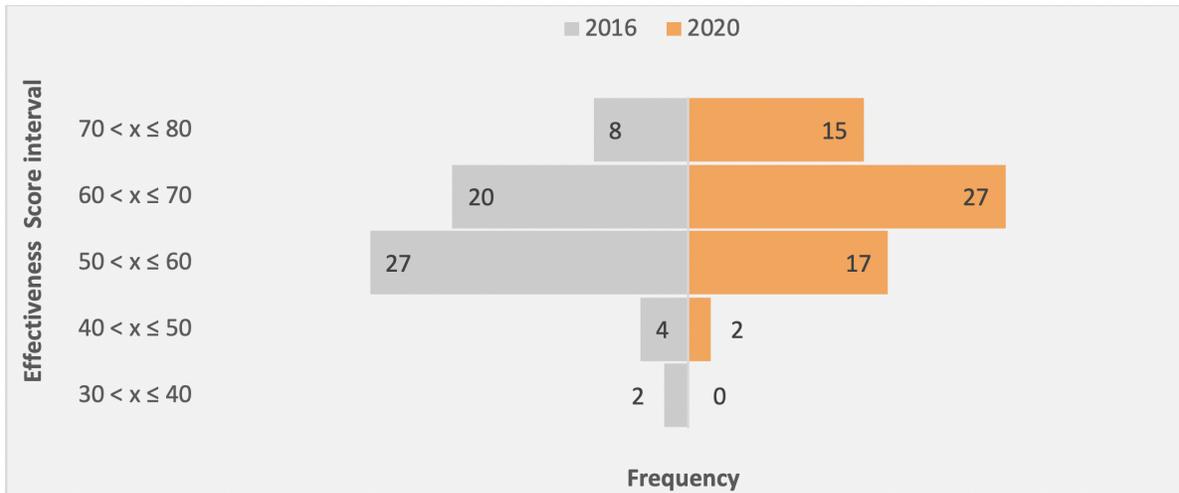


Effectiveness and Efficiency

- Effectiveness and efficiency had the highest improvement compared to other criteria. In 2016 there were 8 municipalities that scored over 70 points, while in 2020 there are 15 such municipalities. In 2016, two municipalities were found to have “poor” effectiveness and efficiency as reflected by their score range, while in 2020 there were no municipalities scoring under 40.

The frequency of the over-60 score range has increased, whereas the under-60 has gone down.

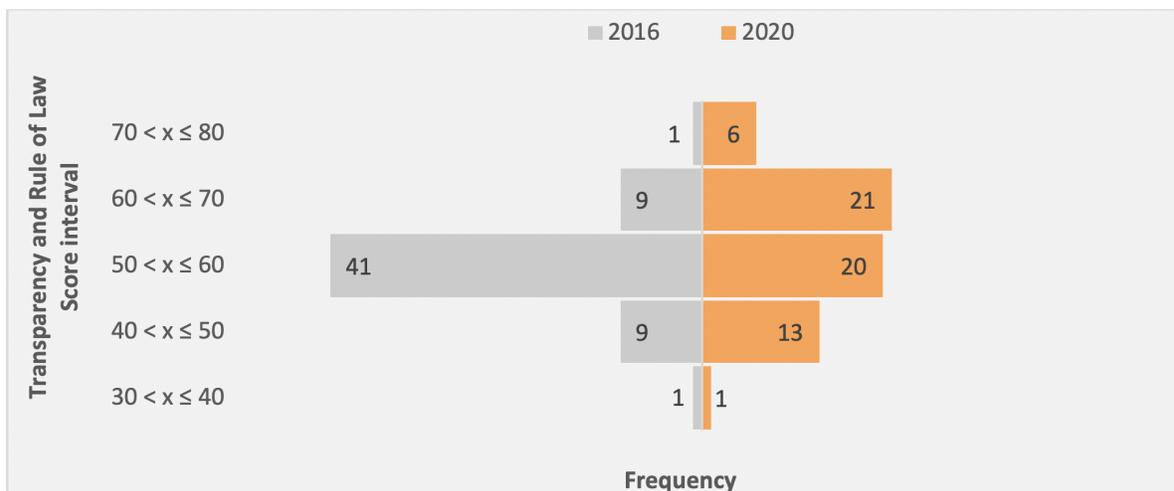
Figure 2. Frequency distribution of municipalities based on Effectiveness and Efficiency



Transparency and Rule of Law

- The transparency and rule of law criterion has improved, too. In 2016, there was only one municipality with over 70 points, while in 2020 there are 6 municipalities, with 26% of them (17 municipality) having upgraded their performance from “average” to “good”. There is only one municipality whose performance is ranked as “poor” under this criterion.

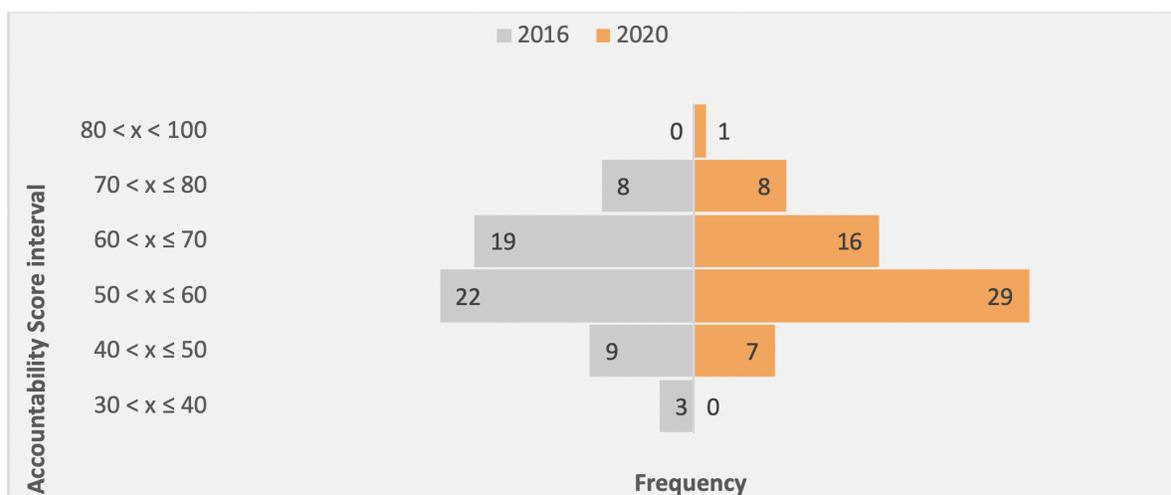
Figure 3. Frequency distribution of municipalities based on Transparency and Rule of Law



Accountability

- Based on frequency distribution, accountability has seen an improvement in 2020 compared to 2016. In a positive development, none of the municipalities has scored “poor” under accountability in 2020, compared to three of them in 2016. In 2020 there is just one municipality scoring “very good” in terms of accountability.

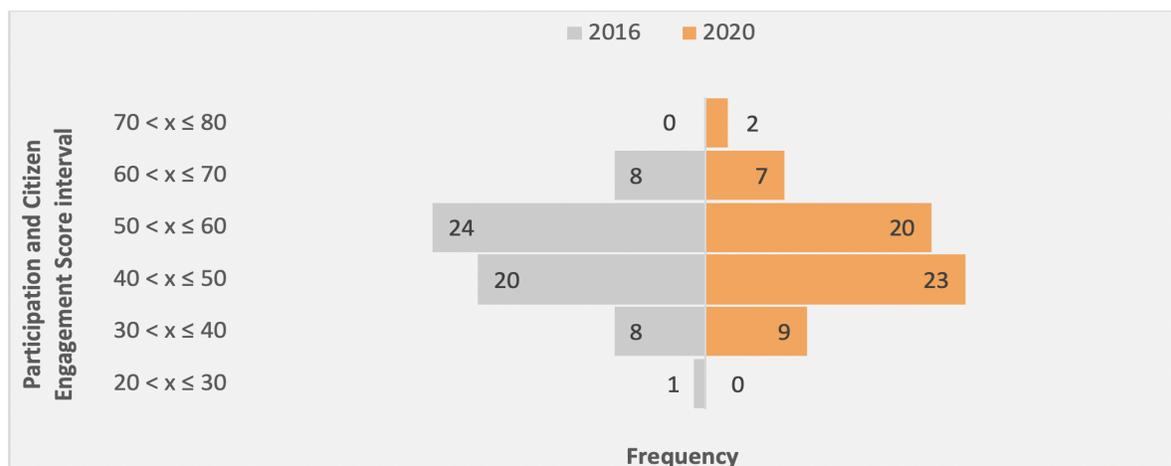
Figure 4. Frequency distribution of municipalities based on the Accountability Score



Participation and citizen engagement

- Based on frequency distribution, the situation in 2020 improved slightly compared to 2016 in participation and citizen engagement dimension. No municipality scored “poor level” in this dimension in 2020, whereas two of them scored “very good” for their performance.

Figure 5. Frequency distribution of municipalities based on Citizen Participation and Engagement



INTRODUCTION

Good local governance is the backbone of democracy as it directly impacts citizens' everyday lives in the way it interacts with and serves them. From this angle, effective local governance requires a two-way communication between government and citizens.

It should be noted that while used widely, good governance is still a developing notion, since there is not yet a single commonly agreed definition. However, it is concerned with different processes of governance and how decisions are made, who takes these decisions, who gets involved in the decision-making process and how, as well as with the application of control and accountability mechanisms.

One of the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) definitions of governance, combining capacity, accountability and responsiveness, describes it as "the processes by which public policy decisions are made and implemented ... the result of interactions, relationships and networks between the different sectors (government, public sector, private sector and civil society) and involves decisions, negotiation, and different power relations between stakeholders to determine who gets what, when and how. Governance is therefore much more than government or 'good government' and shapes the way a service or set of services are planned, managed and regulated within a set of political social and economic systems".

That is to say that local government response cannot be sufficiently comprehensive and effective if it resorts only to symptomatic and top-down solutions and measures, like the increased organizational capacities, internal control, etc. without addressing additional core matters of interrelationship between State and the citizens and taking into account local know-how, expectations and perspectives. On the other hand, if local government is not accountable to its citizens or not responsive to their needs, people will lose trust in the processes that govern interaction and in their local government. There are also many approaches and parameters attempting to measure the quality of governance. Among those, UNDP identifies nine main dimensions, namely participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability and strategic vision, as adequate proxies for measuring good governance. However, such measurement is far from straightforward. The interactions and interrelations of these dimensions with each other are quite complex. For example, improved access to information fosters transparency and accountability, also boosting citizen engagement. Public engagement increases consensus and the decision-making legitimacy. Accountability reinforces the rule of law and, consequently, equality in governance.

The present LGM attempts to provide a broad assessment of citizens' perceptions of the capacity, accountability and responsiveness of their respective local governments to the needs and expectations of the public at large, the relations and interactions between citizens and their local administrations, beyond mere municipal outputs or services provided. The exercise that was conducted across all 61 municipalities takes into consideration the following dimensions: effectiveness and efficiency, transparency and rule of law, accountability and participation.

1. UNDP, A Users' Guide to Measuring Local Governance, UNDP 2009 http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/local_governance/a-users-guide-to-measuring-local-governance-.html

While looking into these dimensions, the assessment attempts to answer the following questions:

- What are the views of citizens about different aspects of local government operations?
- What aspects of local governance are more / less problematic from both citizens' and municipalities' perspectives?
- How familiar, informed and engaged are citizens with their local administrations?
- How do citizens perceive the capacity of local governments and their responsiveness?
- What is the situation of local governance at an aggregate national level and the common challenges that deserve attention?

The assessment was carried out between January and February 2020. The results were obtained from the data collected through secondary, qualitative and quantitative research techniques, combining the Local Government Barometer and Citizen Report Card techniques, applying a methodology that was developed specifically for this purpose. The Local Governance Mapping is deemed an important starting and ending point for the implementation of STAR2, to initially inform subsequent project activities, and then provide a measurement of change in the local governance environment, as well as identify any attributable STAR2 project effects on local governance. The report is structured in five chapters:

The first chapter provides a general overview of Albania's governance context and Local Governance Mapping. It starts with a brief introduction of the main legal and institutional developments relevant to local governance, a background of the STAR 2 project and the objectives of the Local Governance Mapping exercise.

The second chapter describes the mapping methodology. It presents the selected local governance methodological approaches, analytical framework of local governance mapping with the good governance criteria, local governance scoring approach and the qualitative and quantitative methods used to collect the information from the municipalities.

The third chapter presents the findings of the mapping and provides an overview of the local governance state of play across the country, describing the degree of effectiveness and efficiency, transparency and rule of law, accountability, participation and civic engagement. Further, the chapter also highlights the current service delivery status in municipalities, emerging key policy areas and local reforms, and other key issues to be addressed.

The fourth chapter presents the main findings and conclusions of the mapping exercise.

The fifth chapter offers some overarching recommendations and potential strategies for emerging governance gaps at the municipal level as a way forward for interested development stakeholders and actors.



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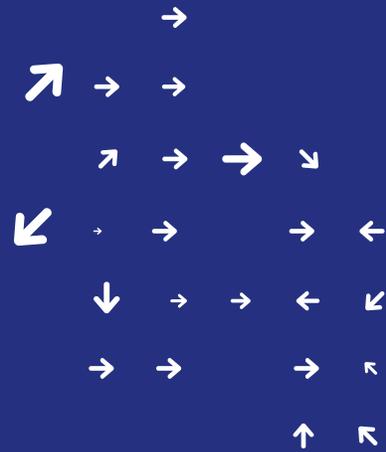
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01. BACKGROUND

Albania governance context and local governance mapping



Albania is a small country on the Southeast Europe with a population of 2.862 million inhabitants that share land borders with Montenegro to the northwest, Kosovo to the northeast, North Macedonia to the east, Greece to the southeast and south. To the west and southwest Albania is bordered by the Adriatic and Ionian seas.

The country is experiencing an important transformation phase following a long and difficult transition from full communist isolation to the democracy and market economy. The Albanian economic growth rate in the last years has increased reaching to 4.1% in 2018³. It is an upper-middle-income country and ranked 69th among 189 countries in terms of human development⁴.

Albania has been going through a huge economic transformation since the 1990s that saw resources shift from industry and agriculture to services and construction. The structural transformation towards most productive sectors was accompanied with a drastic shrinking of the role of the state in economy. Currently, services contribute with 47.7% of the GDP, industry and construction with 21.3%, agriculture and fishery 18.4% of the GDP⁵. Services and agriculture are the major employers, with 42.9% and 37.4% of the total employment. In 2018, 44.5% of the employees are in paid employment, 34% are self-employed and 21.6% are unpaid employees involved with the family business. Unemployment has decreased over the last years, reaching 11.2% in the last quarter of 2019. The share of youth who are not in employment, education or training is still high, with 28.6% in 2018⁶.

When it comes to the people at risk of poverty in Albania, they consisted of 23.4% in 2018, compared to the EU average rate of 16.9%. The severe material deprivation indicator is 38.3%, and the share of those at risk of poverty or social exclusion is 49%⁷. Albania has 12 regions and 61 municipalities. The largest populated municipalities are Tirana (31.8% of the total population), Durres (10.2%) and Fieri (10.2%) followed by Elbasan (9.5%), Korca (7.2%), Shkodra (7%) and Vlora (6.6%). Durrës and Tirana municipalities continue to have a positive growth of the population. On the other hand, emigration has increased recently. There were around 44 thousand emigrants in 2019 compared to 21 thousand immigrants⁸. Membership to the European Union is a long-standing aspiration of the Albanian people. In June 2014, following the decision of the European Council, Albania became an EU candidate, while in March 2020 the European Union decided to open negotiations with the country. This decision was the result of important reforms and positive developments the country has gone through to progress in terms of the political and economic criteria getting closer to EU standards.

2. INSTAT: Population in Albania, 1 January 2019

3. INSTAT, Gross Domestic Product, 2019.

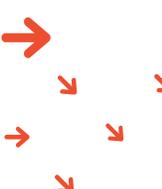
4. UNDP, Human Development Report 2019, Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century, 2019.

5. INSTAT, Annual Sector Accounts, 2019.

6. INSTAT, Labour Market 2018, May 2019.

7. INSTAT, Income and Living Conditions in Albania, 2018.

8. INSTAT, Demography and Social Indicators, January 1st 2020.



→ 1.1 Local governance reforms and challenges in Albania

Since 2014, local governance in Albania has been subject to a series of structural, institutional and public policy transformational challenges. In 2014, the new Law on Territorial Administrative Reform (TAR) was adopted consolidating 369 LGU in 61 municipalities while reconfirming the 12 districts as the 2nd level of Local Government (LG). The implementation of the new TAR was supported by the Law on Local Self-Government⁹ that devolved to the municipalities a series of functions and competences and regulating important aspects of LGU activity, such as consultation and communication with the central government, transparency, information, consultation and civic engagement etc., as well as on the Law on Local Self-Government Finances¹⁰ that specified the financing instruments to support the local service delivery for the communities. TAR associated with key complementary developments created larger municipalities in terms of their covered territory and population with increased functional competencies involving thus LGUs in larger and more complex policymaking processes and more challenging context for inclusive, participatory public service delivery.

In parallel, National Cross-Cutting Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance 2015-2020 (NCS-DLG)¹¹ approved in 2015 is driven by the ambition of empowering new municipalities through establishment of efficient systems at local level enabling the latest to improve quality of public services, local democracy and sustainable development of new territories.

A series of legal and sub legal acts were approved aiming at regulating and supporting the organizational and functional aspects of the LGU and their interaction with the central government institutions. Some institutional rearrangements took place in this context as the reorganization of Agency for Administrative Territorial Reform into Agency for Support to Local Self-Government while the institutional responsibility for Decentralization Local Government Issues was delegated to the Ministry of Interior. Other key initiatives that have influenced local governance performance are:

1. the *Thematic Group for Decentralization*, as an effective and strategic mechanism that coordinates decentralization processes and local governance policy priorities, adopting a cross-cutting and sector-based approach, through an inclusive and constructive dialogue that involves both public institutions and international partners, and guides cross-ministerial policies by priority areas and sectors for the achievement of the identified objectives in line with the NCS-DLG;
2. the *Special Group on Reform in Public Administration*, which requires the Ministry of Interior (Moi) to report in the framework of the Association Stabilization Agreement (ASA) regarding the public administration reform and management of the local finances at the local level, as part of the country's EU accession;

9. Law No. 139/2015 "On Local Self Governance".

10. Law No. 68/2017 "On Local Self-Government Finances".

11. Council of Ministers Decree (CMD) No. 691, date 29.07.2015 "On approval of the Cross-cutting Strategy on Decentralization and Local Governance 2015-2020".

The integration and consultation between Local and Central Government recognized an increasing frequency through the Consultative Council, an instrument of communication and consultation between two levels aiming at ensuring the voice of LGs is heard and the interests of LG are taken into consideration in the CG policymaking affecting LG and implementation of decentralized functions.

A Matrix of Competencies of Local Self-Government has been compiled with the EU assistance making clear specific evidence of the gaps, overlapping and conflicting of existing law and sub-laws, thus identifying the steps that need to be taken to ensure in the sectorial legislation relevant to local self-governance the extent of local autonomy set out in the Cross-Cutting Strategy of Decentralization and Local Governance.

Recently, the MoI has finalized the revision of the NCSDLG 2015-2020 and its Action Plan based also in the Mid Term Review and the Matrix of Local Self-Government of competences. The revised Action Plan with implementation timeline 20-22 was consulted nation-wide with different stakeholders and consists in 4 specific objectives:

- a. consolidation of strategic and operational capacities of the LGUs (application One Stop Shop Information System for administrative services delivery in 61 municipalities and their administrative units, consolidation of the administration structures and strengthening the dialogue of central and local governance based on the reciprocal accountability principle); strengthening of local finances and fiscal autonomy (strengthening financial management, raise capacities to use loans for local projects financing, consolidation of the local revenue system and local fiscal administration etc.);
- b. promotion of the local sustainable development (effective implementation of own functions, sustainable local development, drafting the national minimal standards for local services);
- c. strengthening good governance at the local level (ensuring an open local governance, increase transparency, accountability and extend e-governance at the local level, strengthening of the community structures etc.).

A series of developments concerning public service delivery, territorial planning, anti-corruption policies, right to information and others, and a set of cross-cutting and sectoral strategies and government reforms have impacted the local public service and the quality of community life.

Among important initiatives of central government with significant impact at local level are:

- *The Urban Renaissance Program.* The programme counts 696 completed projects, with a total financing of USD 45 million, intended to ensure an upgrade of the infrastructure at the national and local level. All municipalities have benefited from different projects under the programme, covering 64 different infrastructure categories.
- *Waste management.* CG marked important steps in the implementation of its share of responsibilities related to the complex issue of waste management. The identification of 199 waste repository sites in all 61 municipalities in 2018 is completed.
- *Culture and Culture Heritage.* Since 2013, the government has financed more than 100 projects on the restoration of cultural objects and revival of historical centres, for a total value of more than

USD 55 million with 22 benefiting municipalities.

- *Employment and VET reforms.* The modernization of the Regional and Local Employment Offices based on a new service model and the initiation of accreditation for VET providers as well as the optimization of teaching process in the VET centers improved the quality of such service increasing the number of employed people by the local employment offices.
- *The Social Assistance Reform.* In 2018 an automated point system was introduced to evaluate and qualify the beneficiaries of Social Aid Scheme in all territory of the country. The municipalities were allocated a 6% fund to support the families that were excluded from the scheme by the automated pointing system.
- *Integrated Services Delivery.* In 2016, the Agency for Delivery of Integrated Services (ADISA) was established in response to the needs of citizens for efficient, quality and transparent services. ADISA Front Offices serve as integrated public services delivery centers (One Stop Shops) for services delivered by central government agencies. ADISA offers services in 15 municipalities out of which 8 are collocated with LGs One Stop Shops, respectively in the municipalities Belsh, Divjakë, Kukës, Librazhd, Malësi e Madhe, Maliq, Patos. There is also a mobile pilot ADISA unit. In 2019, a total number of 861,245 citizens received services in ADISA one stop shops, 57% of whom have applied for services and the rest for information.
- *Online public services through e-Albania platform.* Is another initiative of the government aiming at improving access in administrative service delivery. Through a personal account each citizen can apply for administrative services. E-Albania platform delivered a total number of 19.5 million from its establishment. Through this portal citizens can apply for getting local public services also. Currently, e-Albania offers 9 online services for the municipality of Berat, Kamëz, Kuçova, Lushnja, Patos, Saranda, Vlora and Vora as well as 2 services for the Municipality of Durrës and 3 services for the Municipality of Tirana. The Albanian Government has decided to digitalize every public service and provide online offering by 2020.
- *Co-governance platform.* Is a consultation and complaint platform of Central Government with citizens. During 2019 there was a total number of 4,230 complains linked with LGs out of which 2,063 complains were addressed through the assistance of this platform. The larger number of complains concerned to the Municipality of Tirana followed by Vlora and Fier.

The local government and decentralization reform was assisted by different donors. During 2016-2020, a series of projects are implemented in support to decentralization agenda and LGs as:

1. *“STAR 2, Consolidation of the Territorial and Administrative Reform”* – aiming at ensuring functionality of newly established Local Governments, so that local administrative and service delivery outcomes are effective, qualitative, participatory, and inclusive, and correspond to evolving decentralized competencies and responsibilities. The project focused its efforts in three main dimensions: (i) Strengthening Institutional and administrative capacities of LGs; (ii) Increasing local service delivery efficiency, quality, coverage and accessibility and inclusiveness; as well as (iii) enhancing Local democracy and fostering citizens-oriented governance.

USD 55 million with 22 benefiting municipalities.

2. "Municipalities for the Europe" – a project aimed at strengthening local capacities on EU policies and programmes, establishing structures, providing trainings, establishing online system for information exchange and cooperation;
3. "Strong municipalities" – a project aimed at improving local services related to waste management and pre-school education through a transparent public administration and functional councils;
4. "EU for the rule of law" – a project aimed at improving good governance both nationally and locally;
5. "SECO" – a project aimed at assisting the preparation of Medium-Term Budget Programme, increasing staff capacities in line with the international standards;
6. "DLDP" – the Decentralization and Local Development Programme aimed at strengthening local capacities for improved local services; improving local governance in terms of transparency and citizens' participation;
7. "ReLOad" – a programme aimed at strengthening cooperation between LGUs and CSOs in the Western Balkans. It is funded by the municipality budget and is intended to establish a transparent model of civic participation for improved local services;
8. "USAID PLGP" – Planning and Local Governance Programme aimed at strengthening LGUs within the decentralization process for improved local services and boosting local economic development;
9. "LevizAlbania" – aimed at reinforcing local democracy through civic engagement in terms of good governance indicators.

Dissemination of good practices and their sustainability in the LGs activity remains a crucial challenge for the future.

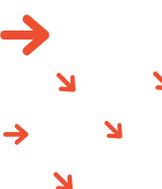
Following TAR, LGs have been encountering many challenges related to the new context with increasing local competencies and administration of larger territories and population. Local administration and policy-makers lacked knowledge and previous working practices to address citizens' needs and improve local services in such large territories. Local revenues experienced low changes over the past years, remaining historically low/insufficient, unsupported by in-depth budgetary/fiscal analysis, and continuously with a high degree of dependence on central transfers. As such, this low financial autonomy of the LGUs has hindered the overall policymaking process and performance.

The new municipalities must be more proactive in addressing two key challenges: responding to the increased public expectations for services and good governance from local government and, in a broader sense, reducing the historically wide gap between the urban and rural areas, while the risk to drift them further apart and deepen the inequalities remains high.

In its progress report, the EU Commission has constantly emphasized as crucial priority strengthening of regional and local government units so that they are able to fulfil their role. As mentioned in the EU Commission Enlargement Perspective¹², “...public administration reform is paramount in strengthening governance at all levels, including improving the quality and accountability of administration, increasing professionalism, de-politicization and transparency, also in recruitment and dismissals, more transparent management of public finances, and better services for citizens. An appropriate balance between central, regional and local government also needs to be found”.

In its 2019 Communication¹³ on the Enlargement Process, the EU Commission highlighted the role of the regional and local authorities in the EU alignment process and eventual application of EU rules. Additionally, it is worth noting that the European Union relies upon its Member States to implement the EU legislation and in that regard, the local government has a crucial role to play in the process of legislation approximation that is to happen during the accession process and further once Albania becomes a member country. Local authorities play a significant role in the day-to-day implementation of EU law related to their functions stipulated in the EU *acquis*.

Considering the above, particular emphasis and focus should continue to be placed on the local government in Albania, in order to ensure its preparedness for the accession negotiation process. This means having efficient and effective structures, and a local government that operates fully on the basis of good governance principles, such as accountability and rule of law.



→ 1.2 STAR2 project context

The above reform context and the predecessor STAR project¹⁴ sets the backdrop within which the STAR2 project was developed as a collaborative effort of international partners, under national leadership, to support the implementation of the reforms at the local level and thus assist in further consolidating the local governance system. The STAR2 project launched in July 2016, covers all newly formed 61 municipalities with the aim of improving capacities of local administration, efficiency of service delivery system and citizen participation in the local decision-making process.

STAR2 built on the national commitment to reform and strengthen local governance and public administration in general, enhance the efficiency and transparency of public institutions for an effective response to public expectations and fight against corruption, make citizens central to service delivery transformation and modernization, and create climate of trust, cooperation and democratic decision-making for a healthy and sustainable development.

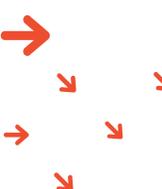
As part of this, UNDP STAR2 supports the leadership of MoI and capacity development of local self-governments to strengthen institutional, organizational capacities of mayors and civil servants to deliver quality

12. A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans.

13. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of the Regions 2019 Communication On EU Enlargement Policy.

14. The STAR (2016) project provided technical, operational and logistic support to the MoI in the development and implementation of the territorial and administrative reform.

services; improve administrative and financial management and performance monitoring of service delivery. It seeks to enhance inclusive and transparent governance through strong citizen participation.



→ 1.3 Objectives of the Governance Mapping Exercise

The year 2019 marks the end of the 1st mandate of the 61 municipalities resulting from TAR. Since its conception TAR was intended as a foundation to further boost the process of administrative and fiscal decentralization in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency of local service delivery. This mandate has been marked by dynamic developments, opportunities and challenges for LGs. During past four years municipalities had the opportunity to get acquainted with its larger and differently configured territory, increased number of functions and constraints related to its finances.

Local governance mapping was planned to be undertaken, as part of STAR 2. For that purpose, UNDP, in close cooperation with the Government of Albania and the MSLI, agreed to conduct a full-fledged mapping exercise across Albania in all the 61 municipalities, to have a better grasp of the perspectives of the citizens, governmental and non-governmental stakeholders on service delivery, as well as to identify the existing governance capacities to effectively implement and meet reform requirements. The exercise was also envisaged to offer insights into the diverging perspectives of government authorities and citizens. Subsequently, a Local Governance Mapping exercise was conducted in all municipalities.

The initial mapping served to inform subsequent project activities, while the final mapping aims at providing a measurement of change in the local governance environment, as well as identifying the project impact on local governance directly attributable to STAR2. These findings will ultimately benefit the Government and other decision-makers, including development partners for their capacity development interventions.

To sum it up, the aims of local governance mapping are the following:

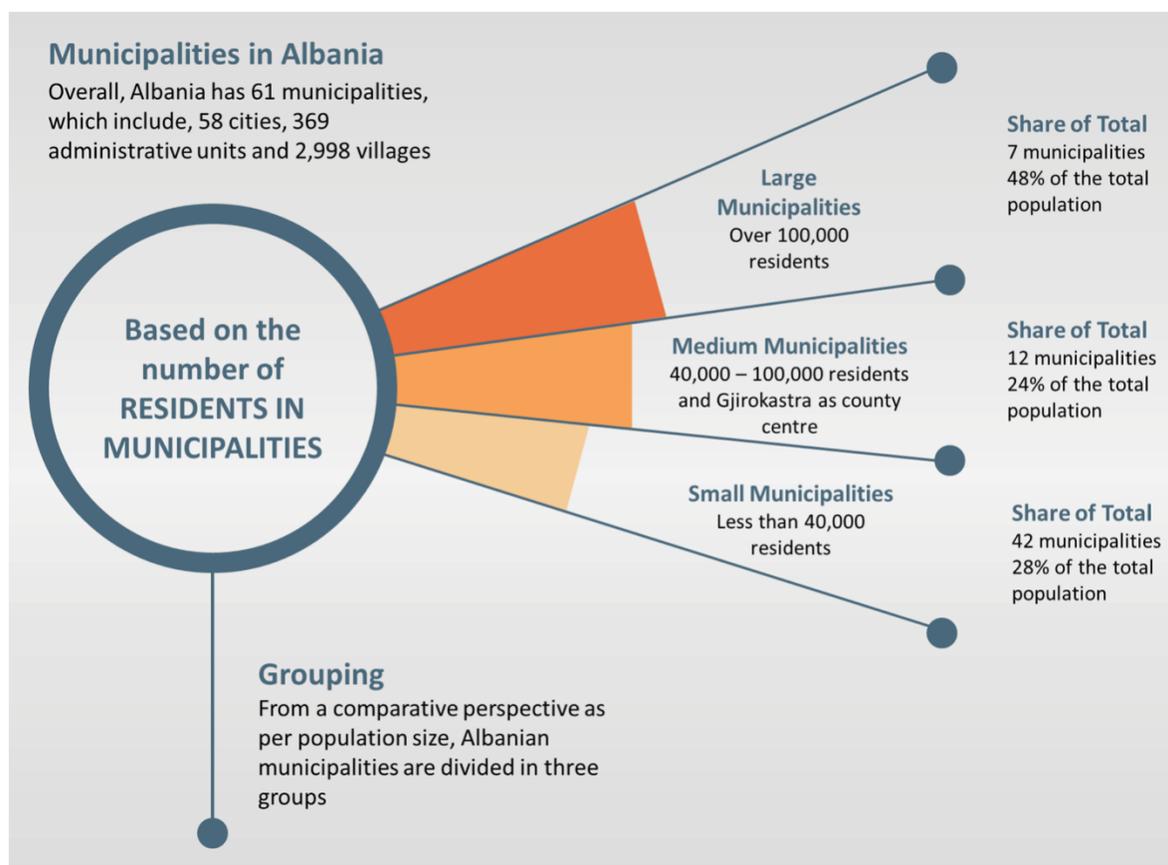
- Assist in making governance measurable and debatable at the local level;
- Identify potential gaps and constraints in local policy-making and implementation;
- Capture capacity building needs amongst all stakeholders which, if addressed properly, could strengthen local governance;
- Emphasize the need to prioritize, plan, budget and monitor related capacity development activities;
- Provide evidence-based policy advice to local and central government;
- Identify improvements and persisting challenges in engaging civil society in local governance;
- Provide an objective account of achievements and thus further build accountability.

→ 1.4 General Description of Albanian Municipalities

As all Albanian municipalities were covered under the local governance mapping, some key demographic indicators for each municipality are presented here while the details can be found in the Annex in Table 5.

Briefly, in terms of population distribution across the territory, Albania is divided into 61 municipalities that include 369 administrative units, 58 towns or cities and 2,998 villages. Tirana stands out as the municipality with the largest surface area (1,089 km²), followed by Tropoja (1,042 km²) and Malesia e Madhe (961 km²). The municipalities with the largest number of towns are Mirdita (4), Kurbin (3) and Durres (3), whereas the top three municipalities with the largest number of villages are Dibra (141), Tirana (135) and Elbasan (116).

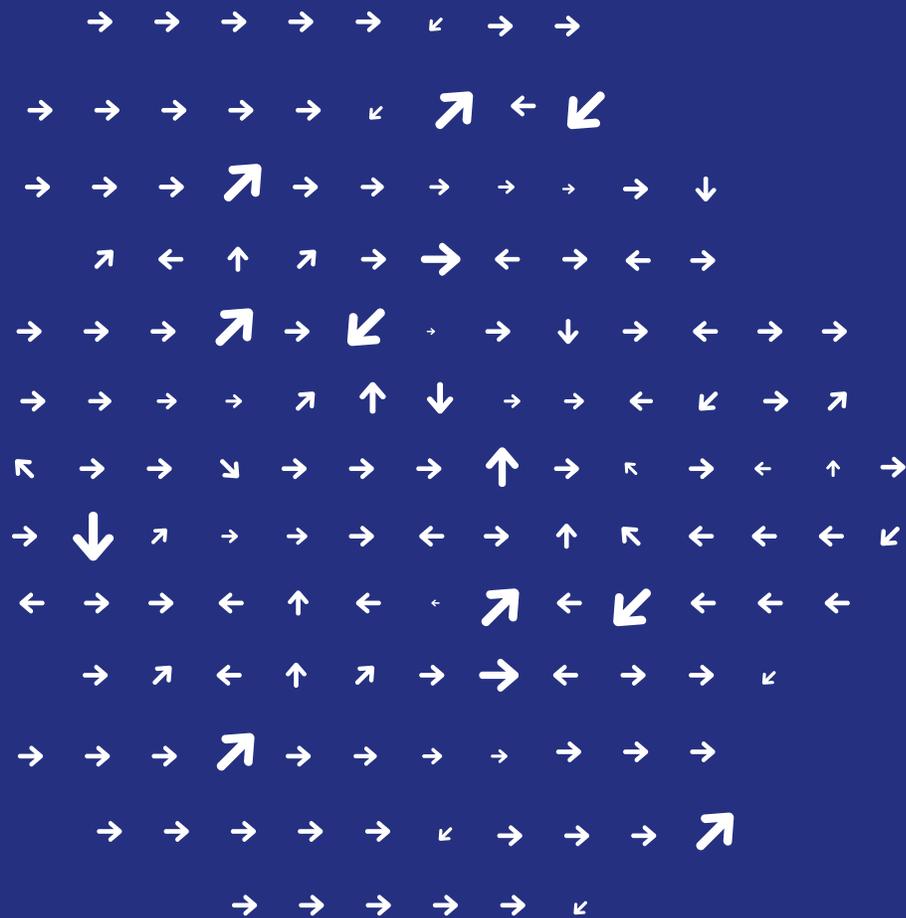
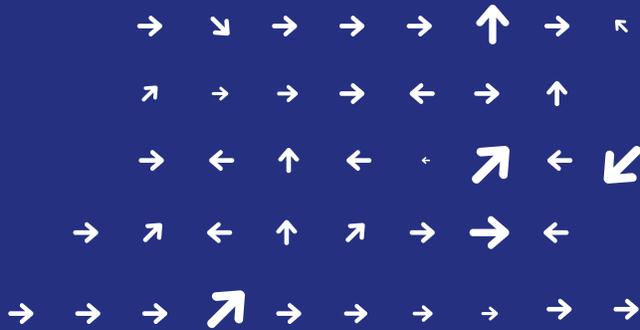
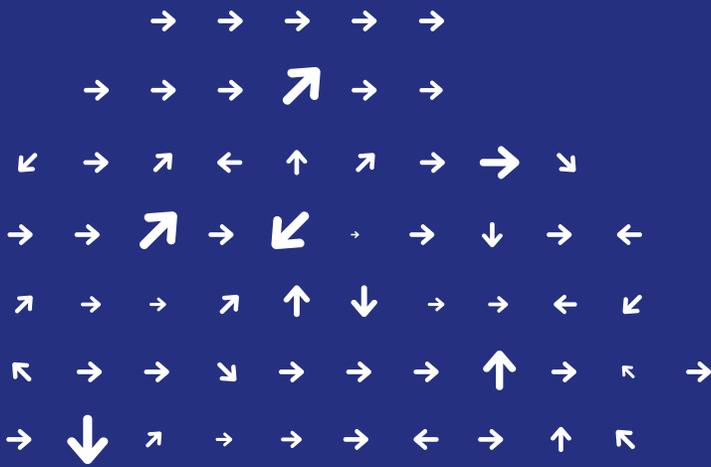
Figure 6. Classification of municipalities by their population



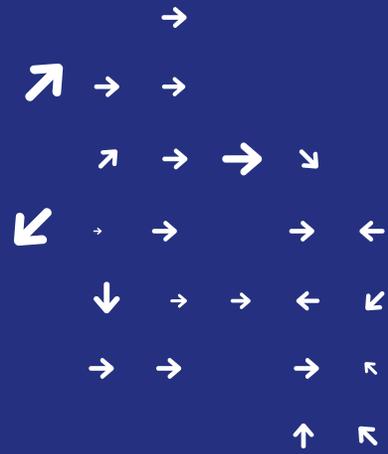
According to the 2011 Census, Albania has a population of 2,800,138 inhabitants. The municipalities recording the largest population are, in a descending order, Tirana, Durres, Elbasan, Shkodra and Fier, together accounting for 40% of the total country population. However, differences are more pronounced if one compares the population of the top 30 municipalities (the upper half), which comprises 85% of the total country population, while the remaining 30 municipalities account for just 15%. The sampling and the survey have mirrored this distribution.

From a comparative perspective, as per population size, Albanian municipalities can be divided into three groups: 1) large municipalities (over 100,000 inhabitants), 2) medium-sized municipalities (between 40,000 - 100,00 inhabitants) and 3) small municipalities (less than 40,000 inhabitants). Gjirokastra municipality moved up from the “small” to the “medium-sized” group because of its administrative status as the centre of the region. As shown in Figure 6, large municipalities account for 48% of the total population of Albania, while 12 medium municipalities cover 24% of the population, and 42 small municipalities 28% of the population. The following table shows municipalities under each group.

Large	Medium	Small
Tirana	Lushnja	Divjaka, Librazhd, Kuçova, Bulqiza
Durrës	Korça	Malësia e Madhe, Vau Dejës, Shijak
Elbasan	Lezha	Mat, Cërrik, Ura Vajgurore, Mallakastër,
Shkodër	Dibër	Devoll, Peqin, Vora, Prrenjas,
Fier	Pogradec	Gramsh, Patos, Rogozhina, Mirdita
Vlora	Berat	Roskovec, Tropoja, Saranda,
Kamëz	Kruja	Belsh, Has, Klos, Selenica,
	Kukës	Skrapar, Kolonja, Puka, Poliçan,
	Kurbin	Memaliaj, Përmet, Finiq, Tepelena,
	Maliq	Konispol, Himara, Delvina, Fushë Arrëz,
	Kavaja, Gjirokastra	Këlcyra, Libohova, Dropull, Pustec



02. MAPPING METHODOLOGY



The selected methodology for the Local Governance Mapping exercise has been adapted from methodologies successfully applied in various other countries and it is especially suited to countries at the initial stages of local government reform which have limited statistical data available on services, or are developing a government performance management system on the quality of governance and service delivery.

These methodologies are also well suited for countries that seek to encourage active citizen participation and bottom-up accountability. Further, they help with ascertaining both institutional and citizens' perspectives¹⁵. For Albania, the selected methodologies included the already-tested Local Governance Barometer (LGB) and Citizen Report Card (CRC).

- ✓ LGB is mostly applied in countries which are characterized by a limited availability of reliable administrative and statistical data on the service delivery processes and the quality of governance. LGB uses a set of localized governance indicators that are presented to various stakeholder groups to “score” performance on governance measures at the local level. It emphasizes awareness raising and constructive dialogue around governance and presents an overview of governance strengths and weaknesses. While the LGB uses a global model of good local governance, it is tailored to specific country contexts to develop a specific model as the case in Albania. Given the time and cost constraints, it was tailored to look at limited perspectives of few groups of stakeholders and not at all levels of service providers. Thus, the LGB was used with a group of citizens and civil society and another group of service providers at the municipal level.
- ✓ CRC technique is a tool that helps identify citizens' opinions/perceptions about how local governance processes work, their opinion on public service delivery quality, as well as main problems and issues as viewed from the beneficiaries' perspective. A number of questions were developed to seek people's perspective on the above issues. CRC helped to determine citizen (single stakeholder) perspectives, identify gaps and inequalities in local governance processes and service delivery.

→ 2.1 Analytical Framework for Local Governance Mapping

- Field assessments have been carried out in conformity with an Analytical Framework, an LGB-based methodology and structure that was developed and adopted to the Albanian local government context. The Analytical Framework ensures representation by both government actors (key local government staff) and non-government ones, including citizens and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and focuses mostly on the 'interactive' dimensions of governance. The Framework includes a set of localized governance indicators that are used by various groups of stakeholders to score specific governance dimensions at the local level.

15. The LGM methodology was initially used in the framework of the LGM 2016 in Albania, carried out under the UNDP STAR 2 project, implemented by IDRA in cooperation with GADC and URI.

- The four main good governance dimensions selected for this assessment are:

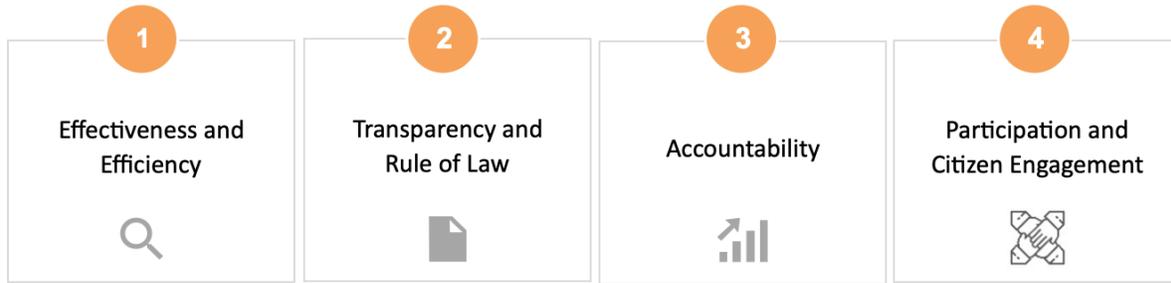


Figure 7. The map of local governance mapping implementation

Community Level Mapping

- 369 administrative units
- Citizens Report Card: conduct of 11,934 interviews
- 61 Municipalities
- Community Dialogue: conduction of 61 community meetings



Municipality Level Mapping

- 61 Municipalities
- Municipality Focus Group (FG): conduction of 61 FGs with municipality staff

2.1.1 EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

Effectiveness refers to measuring the extent to which interventions or specific services achieve the desired goals and effects. Effectiveness in local government has to do with planning, coordination and implementation capacities of the administration in response to citizens' priorities in service delivery and economic development.

Efficiency means achieving the best possible result by using existing limited human and financial resources and avoiding or minimizing losses, delays or misuse.

This dimension includes the following criteria:

- **vision and planning of local administration** (if the latter have gone through a participatory and inclusive process),
- **financial management** (planning and management of local financial resources),
- **informed decision making** (based on reliable and updated information),

- **coordination and cooperation** (municipality interactions with central government, donors, and other municipalities),
- **level of satisfaction toward services** (quality and accessibility of public service)

2.1.2 TRANSPARENCY AND RULE OF LAW

Transparency in the present study implies an environment where actions, decisions, decision-making processes of local administration are made public and satisfactory information is accessible to citizens and actors directly affected by these decisions. Transparency is linked to access to reliable information and real-time data on the decisions and performance of the local administration.

The **Rule of Law** is a broad notion that in some literal definitions includes transparency, integrity, equal access and opportunities, necessary institutional capacities, respect and equality before the law, protection of human rights, etc. However, for the purpose of this study, the Rule of Law has been defined with a focus on the existence of an effective legal and institutional framework to ensure equal rights, awareness of the rights and duties of each individual, impartial law enforcement and institutional effectiveness in the fight against corruption.

For the needs of this framework, this dimension is represented by the following criteria:

- **transparency** (if public service delivery performance and resources planning and utilization are available and accessible to citizens),
- **rule of law regarding the Institutional Legal Framework at local level** (whether a relevant legal framework exists and is effective),
- **incidence of corruption** (existence of anti-corruption policies, corruption perception level, corruption experience level).

2.1.3 ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is defined as the ability, will and obligation of the municipality to report its actions to the citizens, explain the purpose and reasons for decision-making actions, justify the approach and the procedures to realize them so as to enable the assessment of compliance and performance by interested parties. Thus, it is about local government ability to show, explain and be held accountable for its decisions based on agreed targets and objectives to the public at large.

The accountability dimension is composed by the following criteria:

- **checks and balances** (whether there are institutions, which have control, supervision, and sanction power on the local administration),
- **recourse** (whether there are in place mechanisms for filing complaints and/or collecting citizens' inputs and whether they are effective), and
- **government responsiveness** (level of municipal responsiveness to filed inquiries and complaints)

2.1.4 PARTICIPATION AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

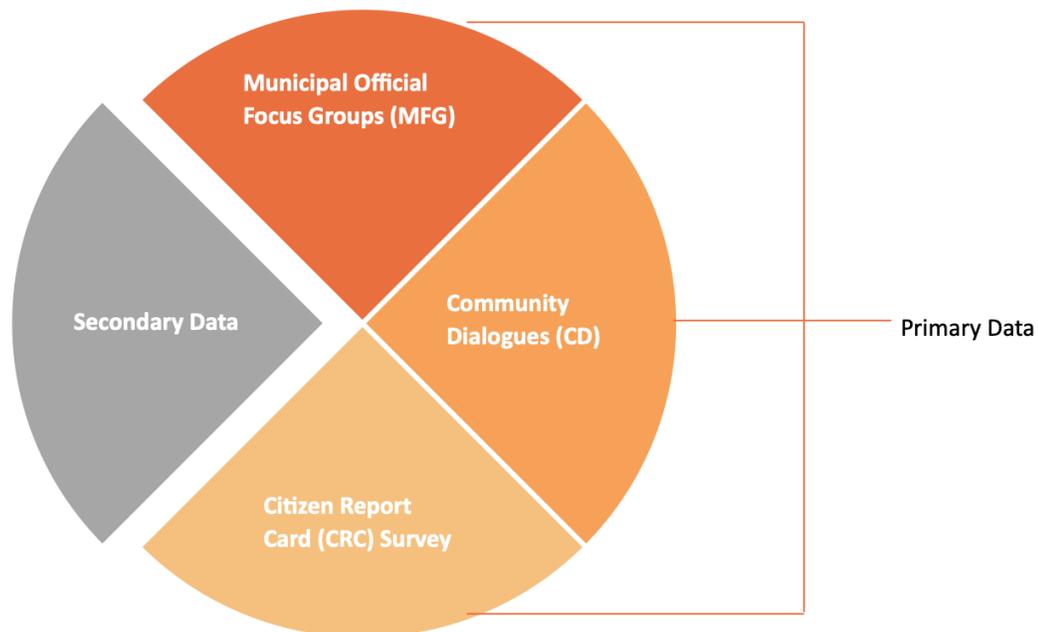
Participation and Citizens' Engagement refers to the active participation of all citizens (involvement of different interest groups) and civil society in local matters and development with a view to influence decision-making and allocating resources appropriately. This includes active, inclusive, free and meaningful participation of men, women and other groups from the community in the decision-making processes.

The Participation and Citizen Engagement dimension is represented by the following criteria:

- **institutional framework** (whether there is an institutional framework which ensures and manages citizen participation)
- **decision making** (involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process),
- **citizen engagement** (the level of interaction with local government),
- **civic engagement** (the level of citizens, CSOs, and media activism on local matters and development).

→ 2.2 Research Methods

This exercise follows a qualitative and quantitative approach and employs both secondary and primary data collection methods. Different instruments were used to conduct data collection:



2.2.1 SECONDARY DATA

In this phase existing data was collected and analysed, particularly from the records and reports of the municipalities included in the assessment. The analysis of secondary data was important to create the general overview and gain specific knowledge on local government, building a municipal profile and assessing some of the governance criteria. Further, secondary data is also used for the analytical framework, serving as auxiliary information when evaluating governance components. Data and documents collected from each municipality include:

1. **Demographic data**, including the number of villages, households, population per each administrative unit, and the total number of municipal employees, professionals in management positions and members of municipal council aggregated by gender (organizational chart of the municipality).
2. **Social data**, containing the number of households and individuals on social assistance and the number of facilities, such as schools, health centres etc.
3. **Economic data**, including records on the latest budget of each municipality, with the respective revenues and expenses, and information on the number of business entities and farms under the administrative unit.
4. **Data on delivered public services**, like the surface area of asphalted roads, sidewalks, surface of green areas etc.
5. **Information from relevant institutional plans**, namely, the General Local Plans (GLP), Strategic Plans and any Sectoral Plan

2.2.2 PRIMARY DATA

Primary data collection includes both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was collected through the organization of municipality focus groups and community dialogues. Quantitative data was collected through the citizen report card survey.

2.2.2.1 Qualitative Research

Municipality Focus Groups

The MFGs helped with collecting qualitative information on specific local governance issues as well as in scoring the governance criteria in the mapping analytical framework. Focus groups were organized in every municipality with the management staff, for a total of 61 meetings. On average, each MFG was attended by 10-14 people, including representatives / managers / directors from the main city departments and heads of administrative units.

Community Dialogues

Community dialogues were key in obtaining qualitative data from citizens and other stakeholders on local governance and service delivery issues, and in scoring municipal performance against the four governance criteria in the analytical framework. A total of 61 CDs were held, with each having 10-15 participants representative of the following groups: citizens, CSOs (formal or non-formal) of the area, local media and business representatives.

2.2.3 Citizen Report Card Survey

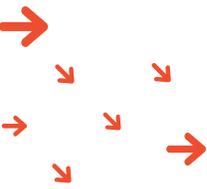
Quantitative data is collected through the CRC survey. The CRC questionnaire was used to ask feedback from the citizens on the quality of local government and their level of satisfaction with main public services.

The survey is representative of the population of Albanian municipalities. A total of 12,000 interviews were conducted across the country, with an average of about N=200 interviews per municipality. The margin of error is $\pm 0.89\%$ with a 95% confidence interval. Technically, a margin of error of $\pm 0.89\%$ means that if the study is repeated with the same sampling, results will be fluctuating within 0.89 percentage points in 95% of the time. The distribution of questionnaires for each municipality and administrative unit was done based on the number of residents according to 2011 Census.

Table 1. Sampling criteria and total number of conducted interviews

Population	Sample Size	Municipalities	Total
Up to 25,000	150	28	4,200
25,001-60,000	200	20	4,000
60,001 -110,000	250	8	2,000
over 110,000	300	4	1,200
Tirana	600	1	600
Overall Total		61	12,000

To ensure a timely conduct of the quantitative research, a total of 11,934 interviews took place, tolerating an interval of maximum 10 interviews per municipality. It is important to note that this does not by any means affect the results of the CRC.



2.3 Scoring approach

Each of the analytical framework criteria contains several sub-criteria, with the latter including questions to be answered. In answering those questions, various stakeholders (representatives / municipal officials, community citizens, civil society representatives and entrepreneurs) assessed different aspects of local administration activity based on personal knowledge and perceptions. Different techniques were used to collect answers, such as MFGs, CRCs, CDs and secondary data.

Many questions were addressed to different stakeholders, i.e., municipal officials and community, in order to capture all the different perspectives and ensure a comprehensive data set. Thus, the final score was the average value of all the results obtained from all sources for each criterion and the score for each criterion was the average of the respective sub-criteria. In the case of focus groups (with municipality or community), the same indicators/questions applied, to ensure comparability and elicit their respective perspectives. Wherever more than one source of information was involved, for instance, focus group discussions and citizen report card, the average score collected from all the sources was considered as the final rating for that variable.

Evaluation of Local Governance - Score (Average of Criteria)

Effectiveness and Efficiency (Average of Sub criteria)

1. **Vision and planning of local administration (5 indicators / questions)**
2. **Financial management (4 indicators / questions)**
3. **Informed decision making (4 indicators / questions)**
4. **Coordination and cooperation (5 indicators / questions)**
5. **Level of satisfaction toward services (6 indicators / questions)**

Transparency and Rule of Law (Average of Sub criteria)

1. **Transparency (5 indicators / questions)**
2. **Rule of law (4 indicators / questions)**
3. **Incidence of corruption (4 indicators / questions)**

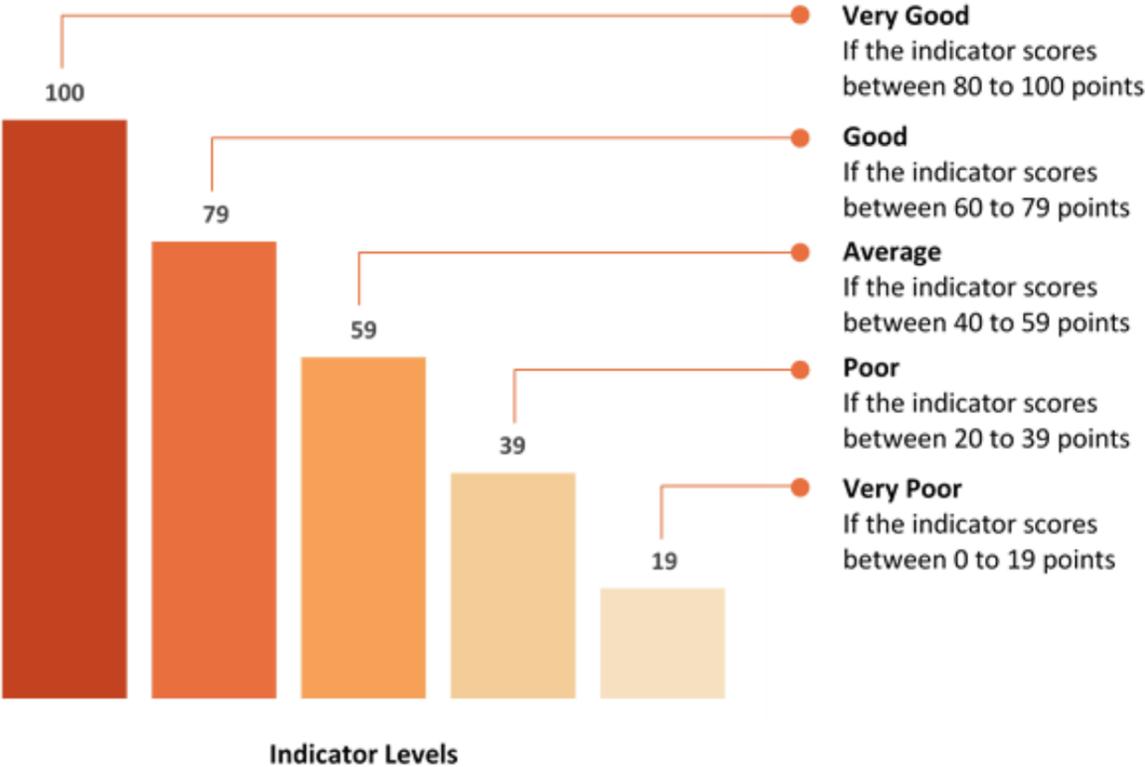
Accountability (Average of Sub criteria)

1. **Checks and balances (5 indicators / questions)**
2. **Local government resources (3 indicators / questions)**
3. **Government responsiveness (3 indicators / questions)**

Participation and Citizen Engagement (Average of Sub criteria)

1. **Institutional framework for citizen participation (5 indicators / questions)**
2. **Involvement of all stakeholders in decision – making (5 indicators / questions)**
3. **Citizen engagement (4 indicators / questions)**
4. **Civic engagement (5 indicators / questions)**

The scoring is constructed in a scale **from 0 to 100 points**, where 0 indicates "Very Poor Governance" and 100 "Full / Perfect Governance". The score range is divided into 5 categories: 0-19 (very poor), 20-39 (poor), 40-59 (average), 60-79 (good), 80-100 (very good). The scale allowed for indicator scores to be easily rolled up into overall scores for each sub-criterion, then rolled up into each criterion, and finally rolled up into an overall LGB score.

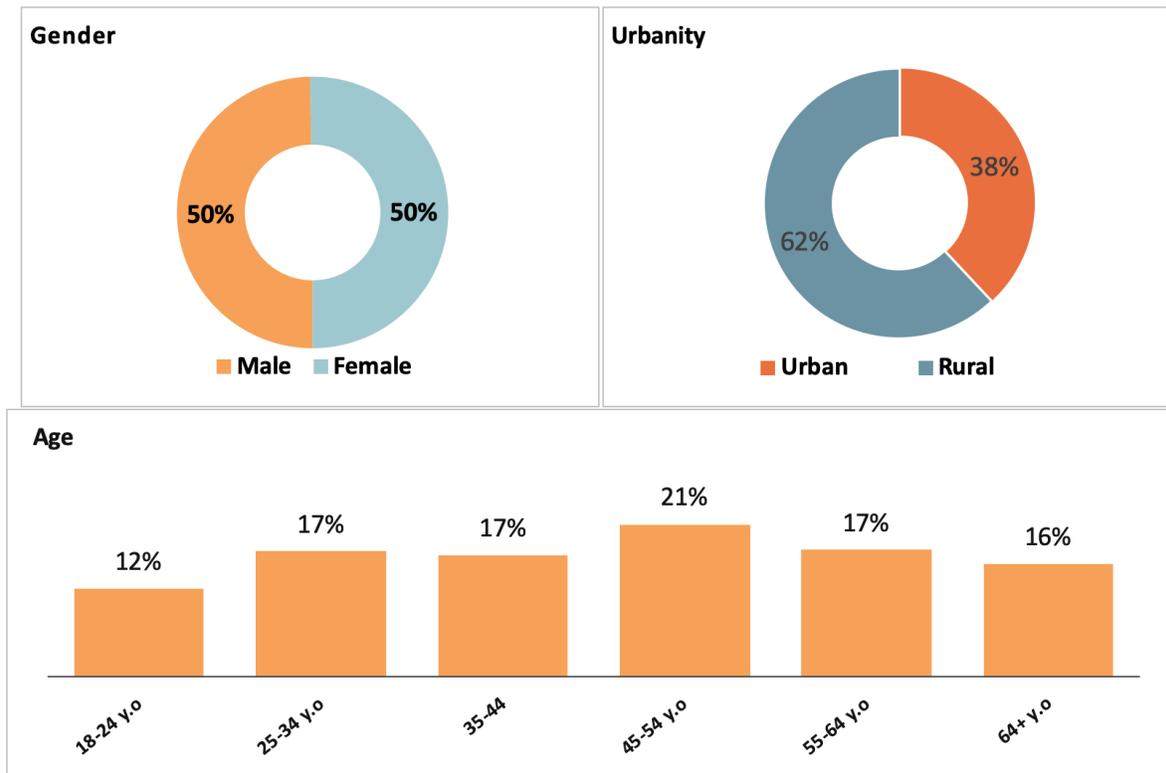


→ 2.4 Profile of Respondents

CRC respondents at the national level had a ration of 50 percent males and 50 percent females. Further, in line with the population structure, 38 percent of questionnaires refer to the urban community and 62 percent to the rural one.

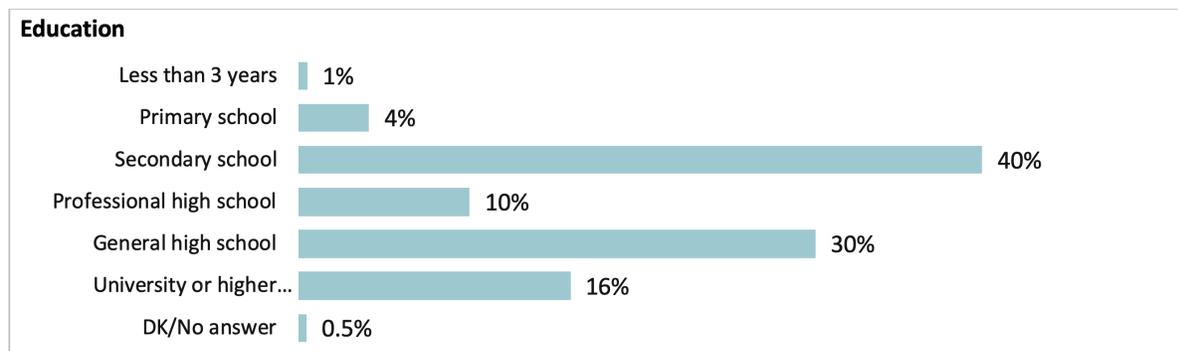
More than half of the surveyed respondents were young to mature adults aged between 18 – 45 years old, almost 84% of the respondents were at a working age, although a total of about 36% of the respondents stated they were unemployed.

Figure 8. Share of respondents to the Citizen Report Card by gender and age



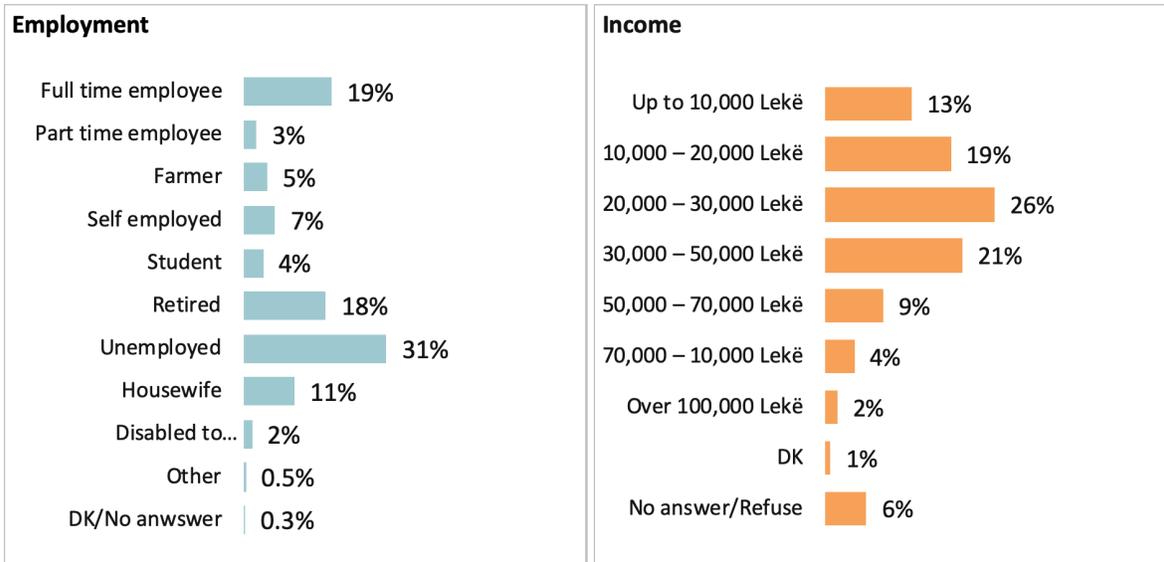
The top three respondent groups in terms of education were those who had completed the secondary education (45%), high school (40%) and university and above (16%).

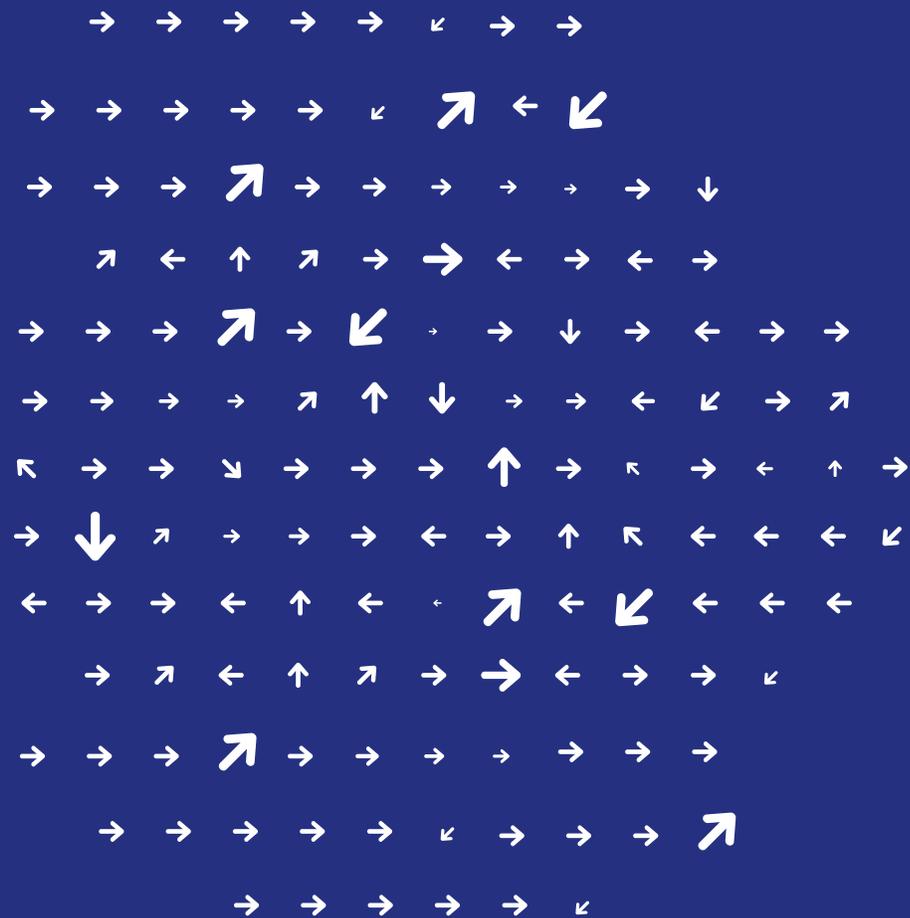
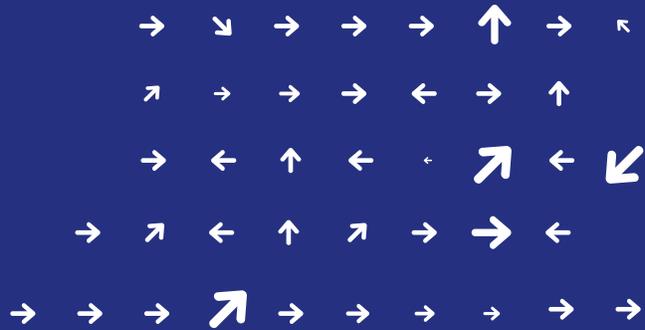
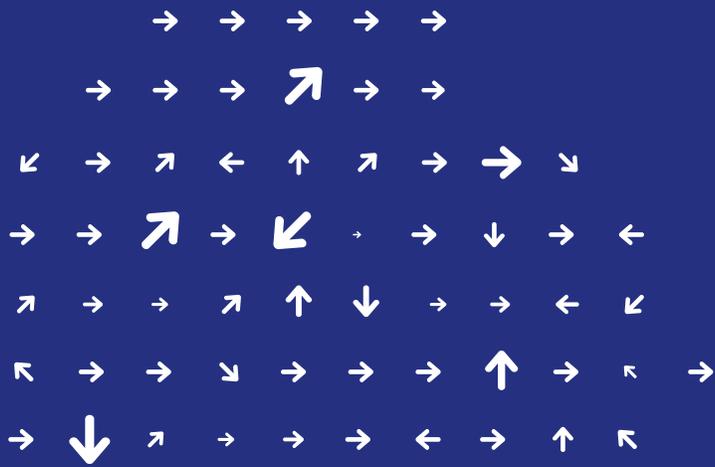
Figure 9. Share of respondents to the Citizen Report Card by education level



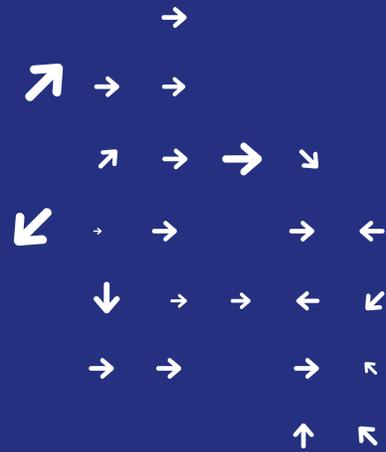
As per the employment status, the top three surveyed groups are the unemployed (31%), full-time employed (19%), and retired (18%), which constitute an aggregate of 68% of the entire sample size. Finally, in terms of income, most of the respondents are at the lower end, since over 58% belong to the lowest income ranges (below 30,000 ALL monthly incomes), while another 7% of respondents have refused to disclose this information (Don't know / no answer / refuse).

Figure 10. Share of respondents to the Citizen Report Card by by status of employment and income





03. LOCAL GOVERNANCE MAPPING: FINDINGS



LOCAL GOVERNMENT MAPPING		●	↑
Effectiveness and Efficiency		●	↑
Clear vision and inclusive planning		●	↑
General Local Plan	●	↑	
Annual Sectorial Plans	●	↑	
Implementation of plans	●	↑	
Financial Management		●	→
Medium Term Budget Programme	●	↑	
Administration and Department staffing	●	↑	
Financial management mechanisms	●	→	
Collection of Local Revenues	○	↓	
Informed Decision-Making		●	↑
Reliable statistics and up to date information	●	→	
Reliability of data on the Land Registry	●	→	
Usage of GIS Platform	●	↑	
Comprehensive Reporting System	●	↓	
Cooperation with third parties		●	↑
Consultation with central government	●	↑	
Coordination among departments	●	↑	
Cooperation with donors and international community	●	↑	
Cooperation with other municipalities	●	↑	
Internal cooperation within the municipal council	●	↑	
Satisfaction towards services		●	↑
Access to municipal service delivery	●	↑	
Quality of service delivery	●	→	
Municipality Assessments for Services Provided	●	→	
Equal access to local government services	●	→	
Obtaining municipal administrative services	●	↑	
Gender equality in access to services	●	→	
Accountability		●	→
Control mechanisms		●	↑
Open forums for CSOs to engage with local authorities	●	↑	
Well equipped and skilled local NGOs	●	↑	
The supervisory role of Municipal Council	●	→	
Following of recommendations of state audit	●	→	
Involvement of community councils in monitoring	●	→	
Communication and Reaction		●	→
Mechanisms for lodging complaints	●	→	
Mechanisms to share inputs	●	↑	
Effectivity on treating complaints	●	→	
Responsiveness		●	↓
Responsiveness to requests from the community	●	→	
Responding to complaints	●	↓	
Transparency and Rule of Law		●	↑
Transparent and accessible information		●	↑
Transparency	●	↓	
Information around projects, activities etc.	●	→	
Transparent administrative procedures	●	→	
Access to information about services performance	●	→	
Updated Website with all the relevant information	●	↑	
Rule of Law		●	↑
Effectiveness of Institutional Legal Framework	●	↑	
Educative measures on citizens legal rights and obligations	●	↑	
Awareness raising on laws and local regulation	●	↑	
Impartially enforcement of local laws and regulations	●	↓	
Corruption		●	↑
Anti-corruption policy, strategy, or action plan	●	→	
Perception on corruption	●	↑	
Corruption Experience	●	↑	
Mechanisms to prevent corruption	●	→	
Participation and Citizen Engagement		●	→
Institutional Framework		●	↑
Platforms for citizen participation	●	↑	
Community structures arising from civil initiative	●	↑	
Coordinator of Public consultation & Notification	●	↓	
Coordinator of the Right on Information	●	→	
Participatory budget system	●	↑	
Involvement of all stakeholders		●	↓
Influence of CSO-s in decision-making	●	↑	
Engagement of youth in decision-making	●	↓	
Engagement of vulnerable groups in decision- making	●	→	
Engagement of women in decision-making	●	↑	
Gender and Domestic Violence Officer	●	↑	
Citizen Engagement		●	↓
Participation of citizens in municipal meetings	●	↑	
Engagement with local government or CSOs	○	↓	
Participation of citizens on local government projects	●	→	
Involvement in monitoring and evaluation	●	→	
Civil engagement		●	↓
Membership in political parties, trade unions and NGOs	○	↓	
Awareness of legal rights and responsibilities	●	↑	
Active Citizens in Interaction on Local Issues	●	↓	
CSOs active in educating citizens	●	→	
The capability of media to raise awareness	●	→	

(80 - 100 points) very good ●
(60 - 79 points) good ●
(40 - 59 points) average ●
(20 - 39 points) poor ●
(0 - 19 points) very poor ○

Legend

1 point or more increase from 2016 ↑
More than 0.5 and less than 1 point increase from 2016 →
Less than 0.5 increase and less than 0.5 decrease from 2016 →
More than 0.5 and less than 1 point decrease from 2016 ↓
1 point or more decrease from 2016 ↓

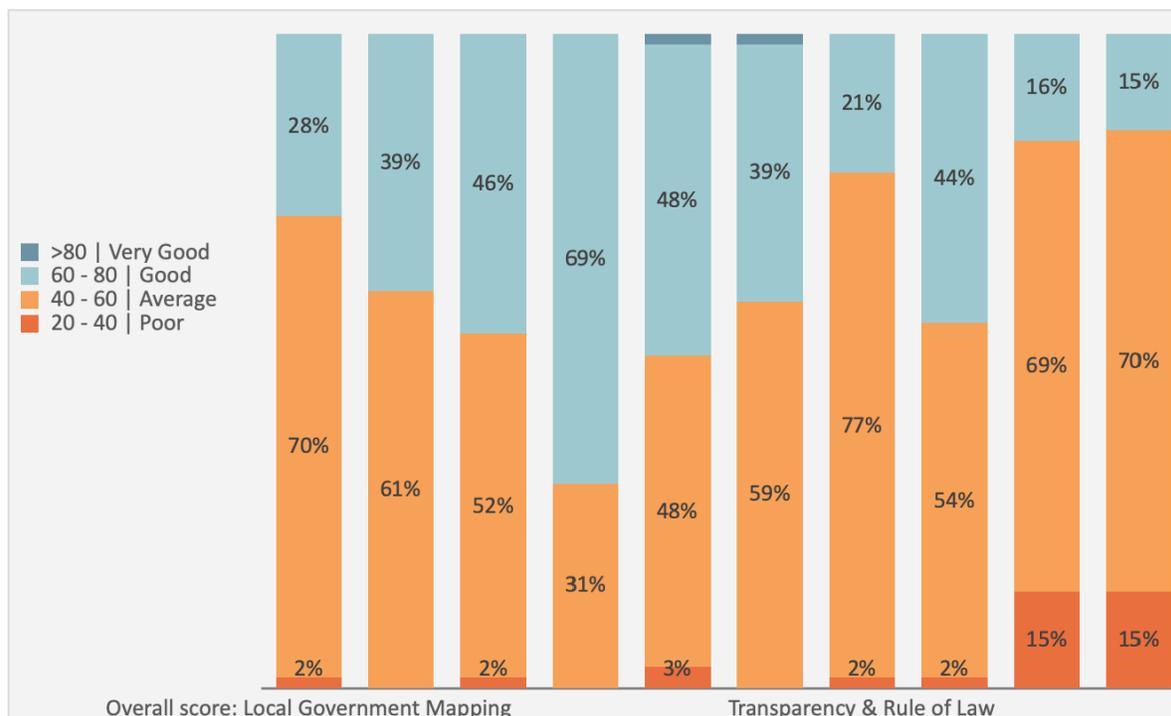
→ 3.1 Overall overview on Local Governance

The 2020 assessment of local governance is based on 4 criteria, namely effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, transparency & rule of law, participation and citizen engagement, and it extends to all 61 Albanian municipalities. The overall score indicates that there is no municipality with an aggregate average score over 80. Thus, it can be concluded that of the 61 municipalities, none of them may be considered a role model for the others. However, the good news from the 2020 LG assessment is that no municipality in Albania has scored “poor” in terms of their performance. The overall score also indicates that 11% more municipalities have improved their performance, moving up from “average” to “good”.

The LG Mapping is based on 68 questions under 15 sub-criteria, part of the four criteria presented in the Local Government Dashboard Matrix. Each question is scored from 0 to 100. Some of the questions are scored by the municipality staff, others by CDs, and some by both. In addition, there are 17 questions that are scored using the CRC, while there are 3 questions scored using desk review information. As such, the aggregate assessment for each criterion is a result of different perspectives and opinions of a vast spectrum of actors, stakeholders and beneficiaries. Their views and opinions on the issues under assessment have shown significant differences. Thus, the assessment from the CDs is different and, quite often, considerably different from that of the municipal officials, whereas the assessment from CRC is always the lowest, clearly showing the lack of a common/approximate opinion of the actors, stakeholders and beneficiaries on each other’s activity, role and contribution.

Referring to the scored criteria, we find that, compared to 2016, in 2020 there are 23% more municipalities performing at “good” level in terms of effectiveness and efficiency and transparency and rule of law. By contrast, the situation is quite the reverse when it comes to accountability, meaning that 9% of the municipalities that scored “good” in 2016 have moved down to the “average” category in 2020. On the other hand, participation and citizen engagement is seemingly faring worse than any other criteria, with the same persisting situation of 9 municipalities scoring “poor” level of performance , 9 scoring “good” level and the majority scoring an “average” performance.

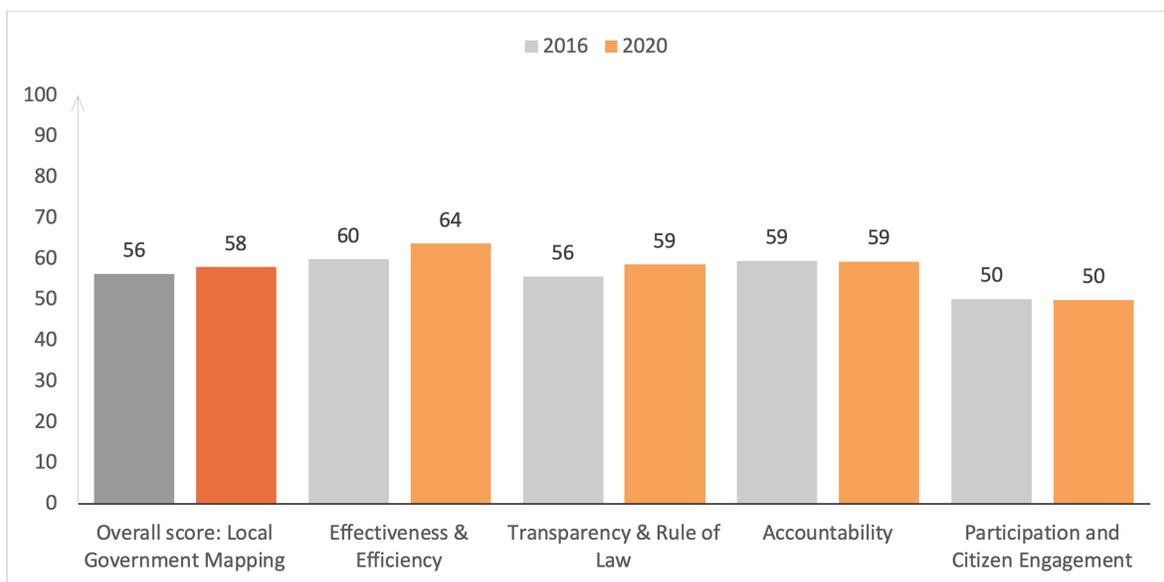
Figure 11. Overall local governance score



Comparing assessment results in 2016 and 2020, it is evident that the total average score and the average score for each criterion range from 50 to 64 points. A slight improvement has been observed in the 2020 LG assessment (2 points). Effectiveness and efficiency have scored 4 points higher, transparency and the rule of law has scored up three points, whereas there is no change in accountability and participation & citizen engagement.

The slight 2-point increase in the overall score of 2020 Local Government Mapping compared to 2016 is a result of the improved performance of small and medium-sized municipalities, whereas large municipalities have seen a decline in their assessment.

Figure 12. Overall comparative local governance score, 2016-2020

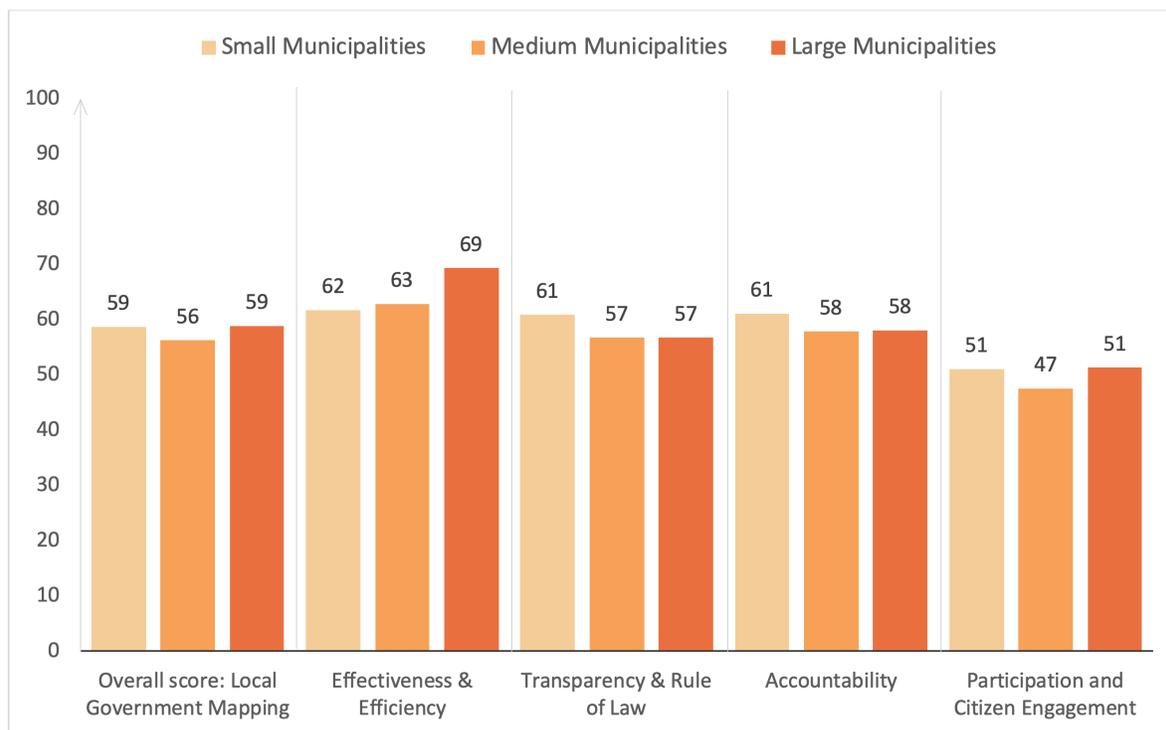


In the case of 3 out of 4 assessed criteria, namely effectiveness and efficiency, transparency and rule of law and accountability, a correlation has been found between the performance and size of the municipalities. Such correlation between size and performance is positive when it applies to effectiveness and efficiency (the larger the municipality, the better its performance) and negative in the case of the two other criteria. Consequently, the total score remains unaffected by the size of municipalities.

The most positively influenced criterion by the size of the municipality is effectiveness and efficiency, with the large-sized group of municipalities scoring an average of 69 points, whereas the group of small-sized municipalities scored an average of 7 points less, which is a significant difference.

Small municipalities have performed better in terms of transparency and rule of law and accountability (61 points for both criteria).

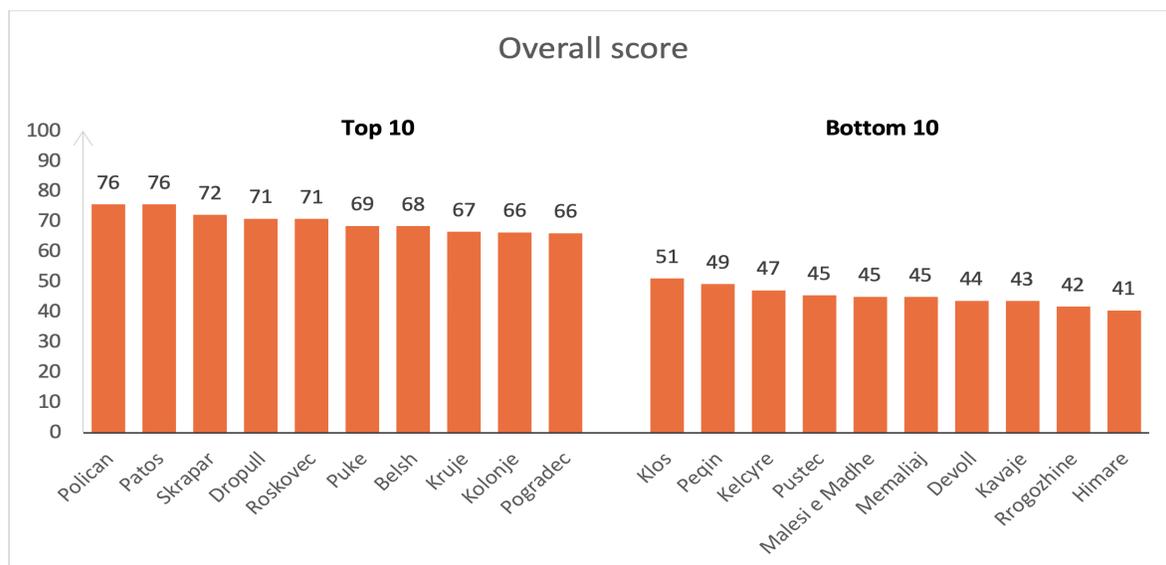
Figure 13. Overall local governance score by municipality size



The best overall performers are the municipalities of Poliçan (76 points), Patos (76), Skrapar (72), Dropull (71) and Roskovec (71), which have scored “good”. The municipalities whose performance has improved the most compared to 2016 include Dropull (+26 points), Belsh (+20 points), Miredita (+19 points) and Dibra (+19 points).

The argument why all “the best” and “the worst” performers result to be small-sized municipalities can be related to the fact that even small steps in the right or wrong directions made by these municipalities have an immediate impact and are tangible to their small communities.

Figure 14. Overall score of Local Governance: top 10 and bottom 10 municipalities



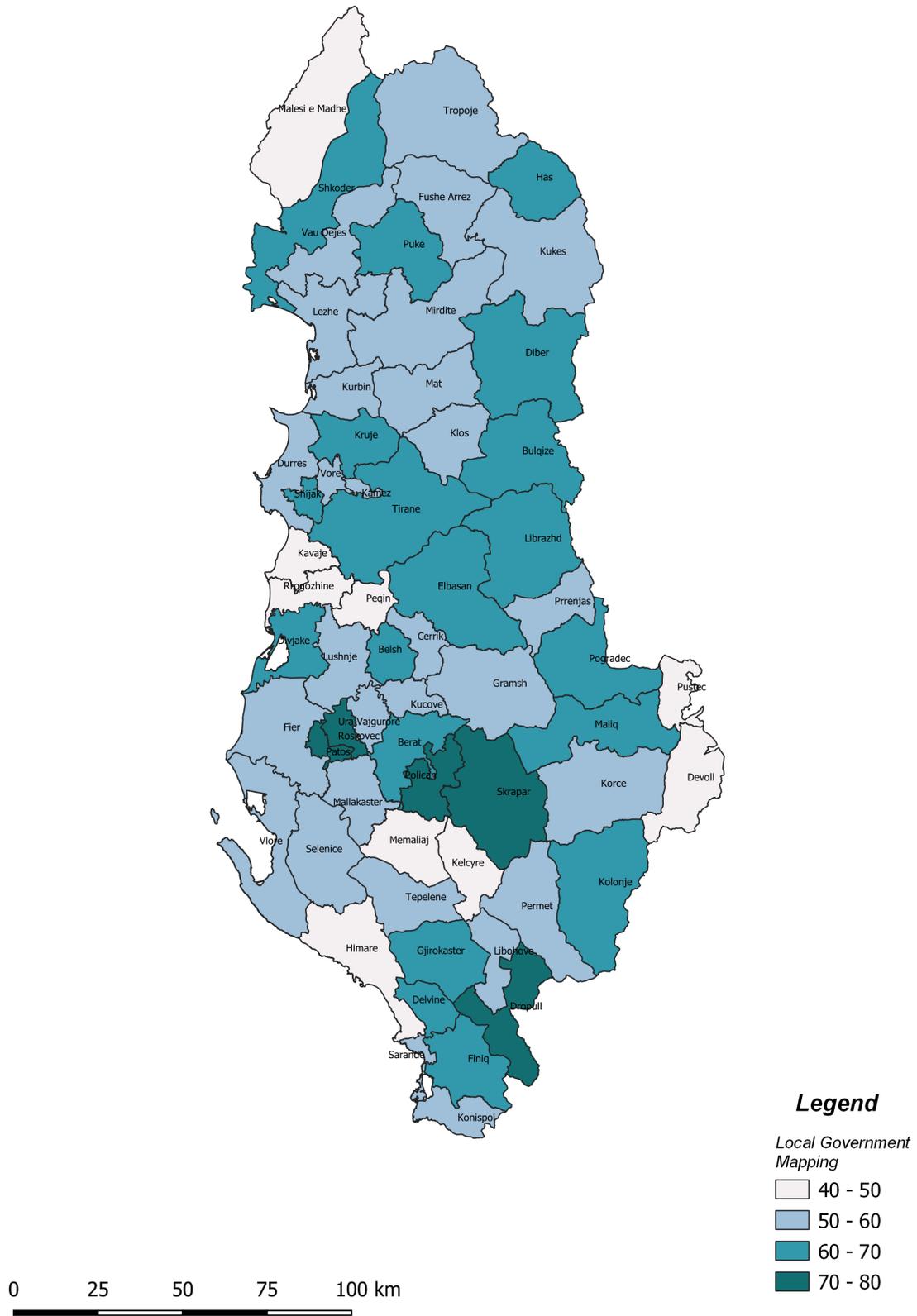
A good compliance level is seen between the top 5 overall public ratings and the top 5 overall local government ratings. “Updated website with relevant information” and “Effectiveness of the legal framework” are rated in the top five by both public and local government. Further, most of the top-five ratings by both the public and the local government are the same with top ratings in the 2016 assessment.

The bottom 5 overall public and local government ratings include lack of activism, engagement and influence of the civil society and communities in the local governance issues. These concerns are stronger in 2020 compared to 2016. Given the current situation where all municipalities are led by the Socialist Party, due to opposition’s refusal run in the last June 2019 local elections, the lack of activism and low citizen engagement can have an even greater negative impact on the local government performance across the board.

Table 2. Top 5 and bottom 5 overall ratings by the public and local government

	Public	Local Government
Top 5	1 Gender equality in access to services	1 Following of recommendations of state audit
	2 Low levels of corruption experience	2 Responsiveness to requests from the community
	3 High access to municipal service delivery	3 Effectiveness of Institutional Legal Framework
	4 Updated Website with all the relevant information	4 Updated Website with all the relevant information
	5 Effectiveness of Institutional Legal Framework	5 Mechanisms for lodging complaints
Bottom 5	1 Lack of engagement with local government or CSOs	1 Lack of influence of CSO-s in decision-making
	2 Low levels of membership in political parties, trade unions and NGOs	2 Lack of community structures arising from civil initiative
	3 Lack of active citizens in interaction on Local Issues	3 Lack of well-equipped and skilled local NGOs
	4 Lack of involvement in monitoring and evaluation	4 Lack of open forums for CSOs to engage with local authorities
	5 Non – satisfactory General Local Plan	5 Low usage of GIS Platform

Figure 15. Local Government Mapping





→ 3.2 Effectiveness and Efficiency

“Effectiveness and efficiency” looks into the existence and degree of implementation of Development Plans, the existence of a Financial Management and Fiscal Performance Plan, the extent to which decision-making is informed, coordination and cooperation with third parties, as well as satisfaction with public services. It has scored 64 points on a national average, rating as “good”, making it the highest scoring of the four assessed criteria.

The average score for effectiveness and efficiency criterion has improved in 2020 compared to 2016 (64 vs. 60 points). The sub-criteria of financial management and satisfaction with services received the same score in 2020 as in 2016 (58 and 67 points, respectively), whereas clear vision, informed decision-making and cooperation with third parties have improved and are rated as “good”. The assessment shows that the most problematic indicators under the effectiveness and efficiency criterion remain the collection of local revenues that qualify as “poor” (-17 points), General Local Plans where some improvements are noted, but still qualify as “average” (47 points) and the service delivery quality that is ranked as “average”, too (45 points).

There is good legislation in place regarding the Municipal Planning. The Law on Territory Planning and Development defines that municipal planning documents include the GLP and the Detailed Local Plans (DLP)¹⁶. The GLPs are implemented through the sectoral plans (that define the strategic development of different sectors within the administrative territory of the municipality), detailed local plans and development permits¹⁷. The development of the municipal territory is the responsibility of the Municipal Council and the Mayor, who should guarantee the preparation, approval, implementation and monitoring of the territorial planning documents¹⁸ are prepared and implemented. Operational plans, on the other hand, are not a legally obligation, but in many cases, due to the lack of DLP, municipalities assisted by donors have developed operational plans to support local development, including plans on urban waste management, decentralization of pre-school education etc. Generally speaking, municipalities lack adequate budgeting and capacities to independently meet legal requirements for territorial planning and development, but in the process they are being assisted by the central government through the National Territory Planning Agency (NTPA), and by foreign technical assistance.

Referring to the financial management sub criterion, there are a number of Laws and Government Instructions that make it incumbent on the municipalities to design the Medium-Term Budget Plan (MTBP)¹⁹. For that reason, the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE) has developed several manuals, guidelines intended to assist municipalities in preparing MTBPs and building their capacities. Currently, most of the municipalities do have an MTBP in place and they seem to have scored well in the administration and department Staffing (77 points) and financial management mechanism (72 points). However, the collection of local revenues, estimated as a ratio of the municipality’s local revenues to the total revenues (unconditional grants, conditional grants, donors and other sources of revenues), has a very low score (17 points). This is the lowest-scored indicator that manifests a continued inability by LGs to generate local revenues and guarantee the financial autonomy that is indispensable for a sustainable local development.

The best performing under the effectiveness and efficiency criterion are the municipalities of Patos (79 points), Tirana (78 points), Skrapar (75 points) and Kruja (75 points), ranking up within the “good” score range. The poorest performs are the municipalities of Rrogozhina (41 points) and Pustec (43 points), ranked at the bottom of the “average” score range.

16. Law No. 107/2014, “On Territory Planning and Development,” Article 15.

17. Law No. 107/2014, “On Territory Planning and Development,” Article 20(2) and Article 21.

18. Law No. 107/2014, “On Territory Planning and Development” Article 13(1), “Responsibilities of the Mayor.

19. Law No.139/2015, “On Local Governance”, Law No.9936 of 26.06.2008, “On Management of Budgetary System in the Republic of Albania, ” amended, Law No.10296 of 8.7.2010, “On Financial Management and Control,” Law No. 68 of 27.4.2017, “On Local Finances”, MoFE Instructions, “ On standard procedures for the preparation of the medium term budget plan of the local government units,” instruction and annexes “On the preparation of the local budget”.

With respect to informed decision-making, it is the responsibility of the Mayor to guarantee collection and processing of local information, data and statistics, grouped by gender, and ensure their publication²⁰. The mayor is also responsible for submitting an annual written report to the city council on the financial activity and the implementation of the budget of the local self government and the subordinate institutions thereof²¹. According to the Law²², the decisions of the municipal council shall be public, along with any other information on the activity of the municipality, except for what is prohibited by law²³.

Generally, Albanian Municipalities appear to be somehow keeping track of municipal data, however, a large number lack a performance and/or statistical office or an integrated reporting system. There is a lack of integrated management information systems at this level of government. Municipalities (with some exceptions among large ones) have issues with a functioning MIS at all levels: i) Problems with raw data and their input, with many shortcomings as to what of data is collected and generated and how it is organized, ii) on processing the right data and iii) using the information derived of the data processing for decision-making purposes. Data collection, at this point, is either ad-hoc (not aligned) or disconnected (different departments function as “islands” of data collection and processing).

Third-party cooperation is a known practice for the LGUs, clearly provided in the Constitution, the Law on Local Self-Government and in the European Charter of Local Self-government. Thus, according to the Law²⁴, municipalities enjoy the right to cooperate with each other, to jointly exercise their functions based on joint agreements and contracts. The Law allows them to cooperate with municipalities of other countries, at the decision of the municipal council. Additionally, the law²⁵ stipulates that two or more municipalities, together with the central government institutions, may establish legal entities for the purpose of exercising certain competences, based on joint agreements whereby the contribution of each party is clearly defined. Further, municipalities may cooperate with CSOs on projects related to local government functions. However, as we speak, such practices are only sporadic or inexistent in LGs, while there is a need for the law to be completed with sub-legal acts and regulatory frameworks to ensure clear guide for municipalities in developing and implementing such practices.

The Territorial - Administrative Reform has increased the number of functions and services that municipalities the larger municipalities, in terms of territory and population, have to provide. The Law on Local Self-Government, assigns to 41 functions in 7 key areas of responsibility: (i) Infrastructure and public services; (ii) social services; (iii) culture sport and entertainment; (iv) environment protection agriculture, rural development, forestry, nature and biodiversity, (vi) local economic development, (vii) public safety. Most of these functions have gradually transferred to municipalities throughout the continued decentralization process, whereas 7 new ones were transferred after 2015 (out of a total of 41), including management of forestry, maintenance of rural roads, management of the irrigation systems, fire protection and safety, management of some centres for social service delivery, as well as administration of the pre-university education and preschool education. The satisfaction with Services scored 67 points and was rated as “good”. Gender equality in Access to Services and access to municipal service delivery are the highest-scored indicators (98 and 75 points, respectively), whereas the quality of services remains the key issue according to citizens (45 points).

21. Article 44, Law No. 139/2015, “On Local Self-Government”.

22. Law No. 119/2014, “On the Right to Information”

23. Law No. 119/2014, Article 17.

24. Article 8, Law No. 139/2015, “On Local Self-Government”.

25. Article 14, Law No. 139/2015, “On Local Self-Government”.

Figure 16. Effectiveness and efficiency criteria

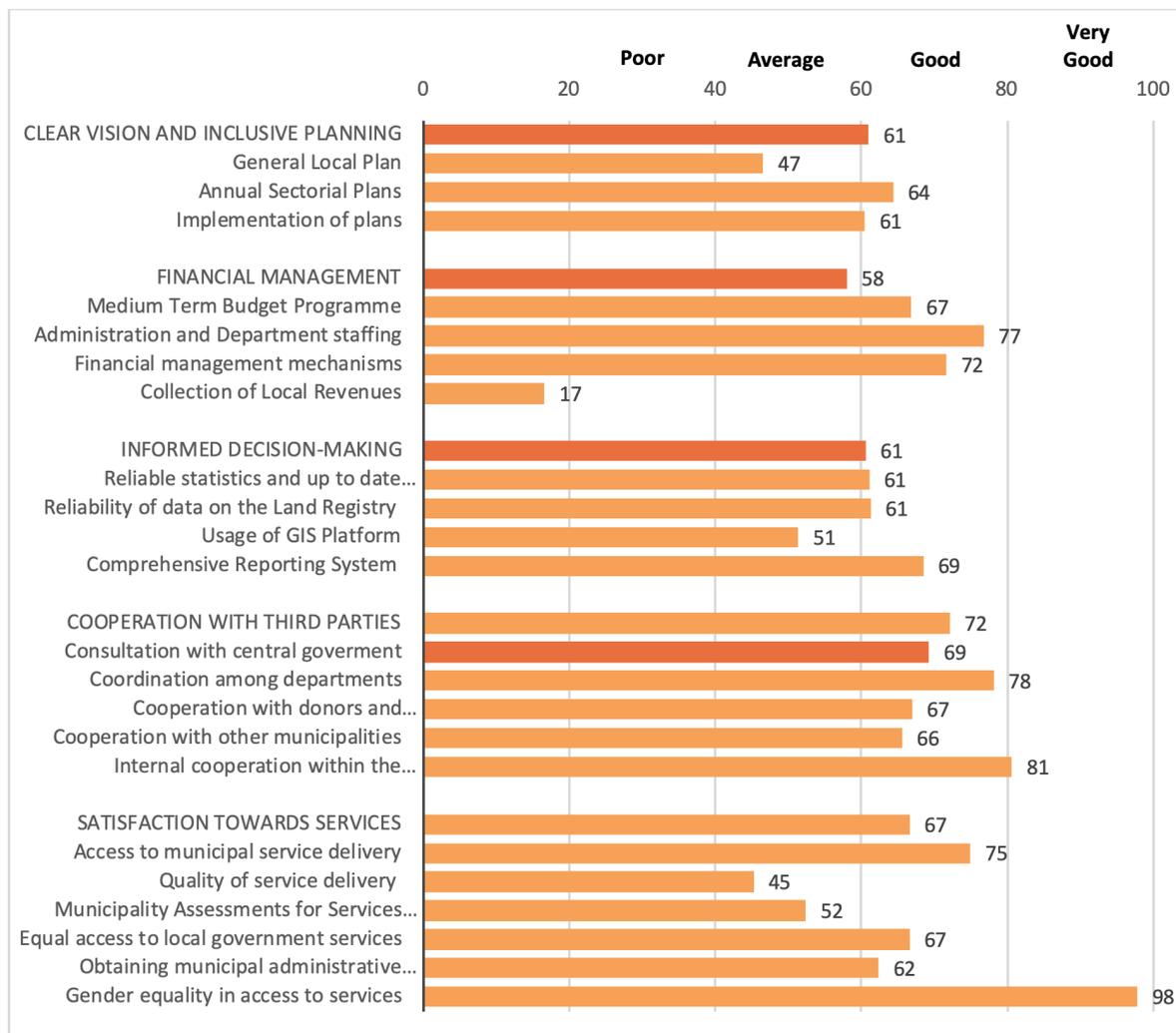
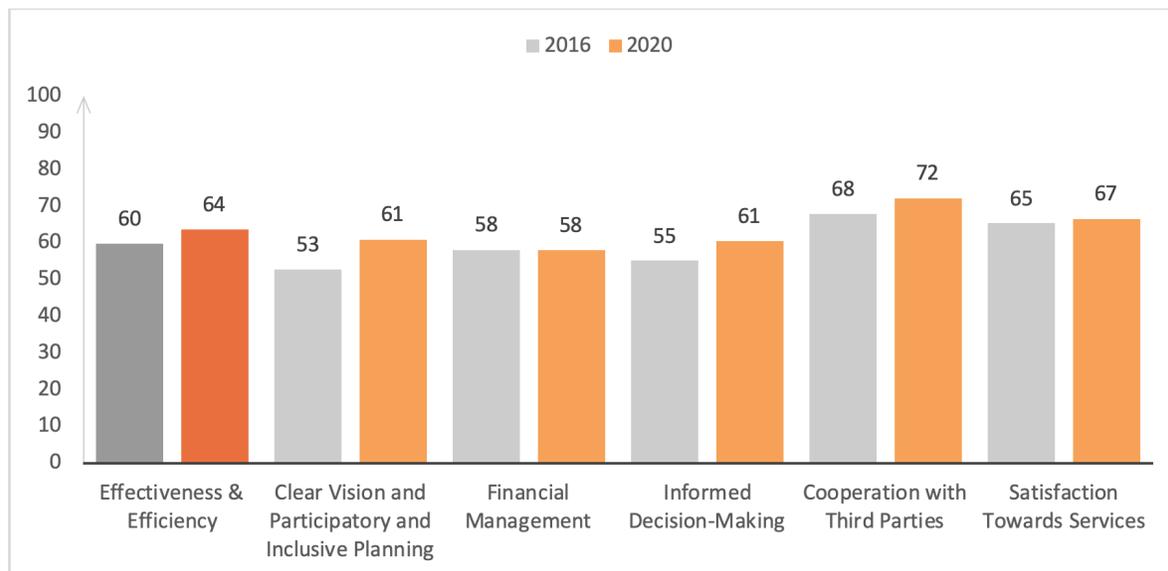


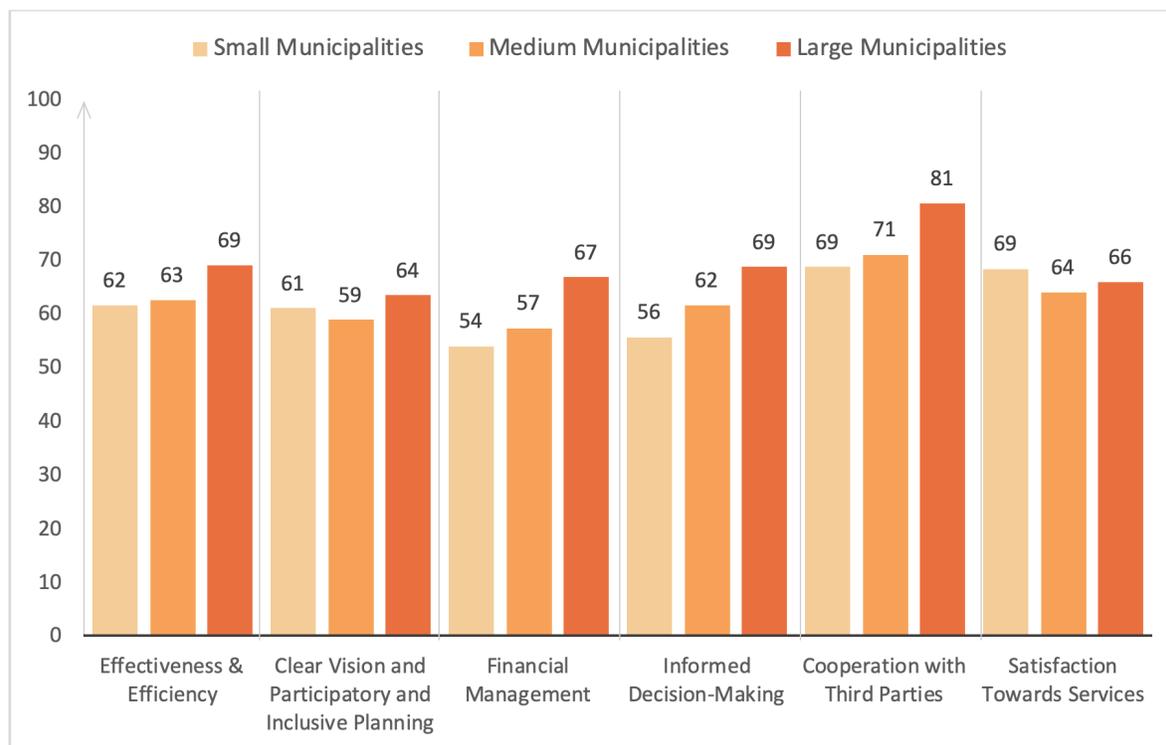
Figure 17. Effectiveness and efficiency: comparative overview, 2016-2020



There is a strong correlation between the size of the municipality and its performance in terms of financial management, informed decision-making and third-party cooperation, where the difference in score between large and small LGUs ranges from 12 to 13 points, with the medium-sized group standing somewhere in between, but always closer to the small-sized group.

Subsequently, the effectiveness and efficiency criterion has scored 69 points for the large municipalities and 62 to 63 points for the small and medium ones. The overall difference between size groups regarding effectiveness and efficiency would have been bigger if the indicator of the satisfaction with services did not favour the group of small municipalities (69 points vs. 66 points). The paradox lies in the fact that the community living in small municipalities show higher satisfaction with services compared to the other group sizes, while they have recorded lower scores for every other assessed indicator. This may be explained with different expectations by the citizens that are lower in small municipalities and higher in the large ones.

Figure 18. Effectiveness and efficiency by municipality size



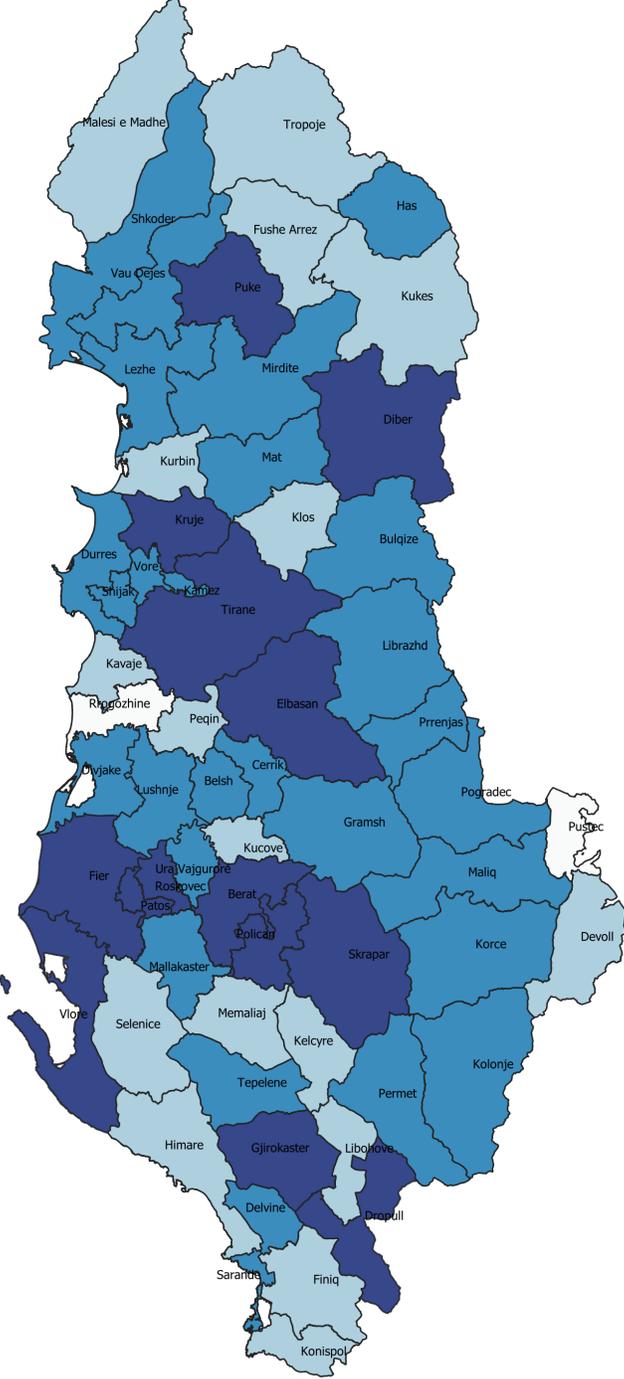
Referring to the top positive and negative determinants of effectiveness and efficiency, the assessment found that the former have changed compared to 2016, focusing more on internal organization and cooperation, including cooperation with the municipal council, coordination among departments, and administration and department Staffing. Access to services and gender equality in access to services are also rated among the top positives.

The top negative determinants in 2020 are almost the same with those in 2016. Top negative determinants seem to be more related to substantial aspects of local governance that are interrelated, such as the use of the Geographic Information System (GIS) with the GLP and the revenue collection rate, obtaining municipal administrative services with quality for service delivery. The top negative determinants indicate that citizens expect the local administration to enhance its performance and improve the quality of life in the communities.

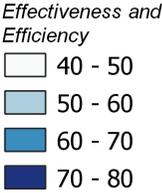
Table 3. Effectiveness and efficiency criteria top positive and top negative determinants

Top Positive		Top Negative	
1	Gender equality in access to services	1	Actual levels of local revenues collected (assessed through secondary data)
2	Internal cooperation within the municipal council	2	Quality of service delivery
3	Coordination among municipality departments	3	General Local Plan
4	Administration and department staffing	4	Obtaining municipal administrative services
5	Access to municipal service delivery	5	Usage of GIS Platform

Figure 19. Map of effectiveness and efficiency



Legend

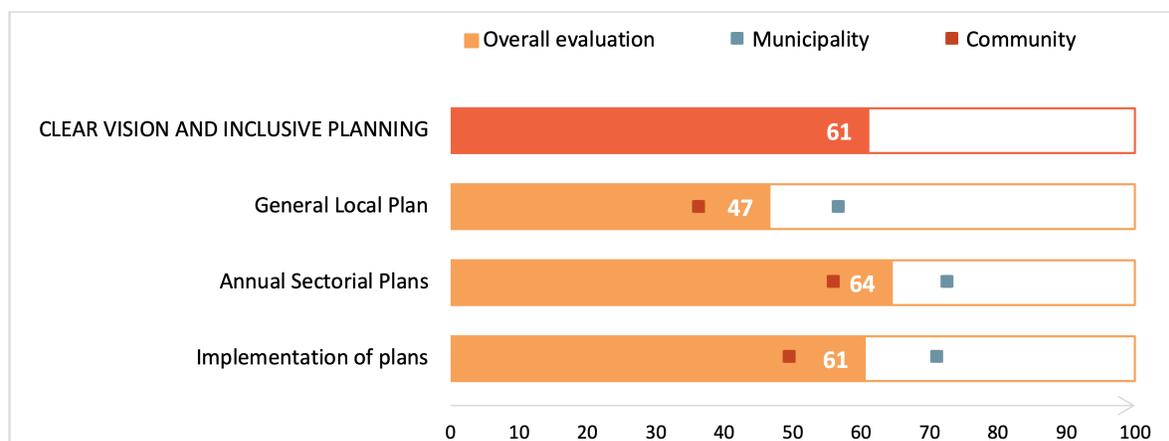


3.2.1 VISION AND PLANNING OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

This sub-criterion assesses whether the municipality has a vision and participatory and inclusive plans and how this vision affects and guides the municipality decision making. The clear vision and inclusive planning are rated as “good” in the 2020 assessment. Currently, the GLPs have been prepared and approved in 2/3rd of the municipalities. There is still one third of the municipalities without the GLP. The latter are small municipalities size-wise, except for Durres that has a GLP that approved before TAR. Having a strategic local plan in place seems a rather ambitious requirement for most municipalities. The assessment results indicate that the Annual Sectorial Plans scored best, qualifying as “good”. Both the municipal staff and the public have stated that there are sectors such as civil emergency that have detailed annual plans that are well-implemented, whereas the most problematic sectors in terms of planning and investment funds are the water and sewerage system, forest management and collection and recycling of urban wastes, as well as the improvement of healthcare centres. According to them, generally, the municipalities have plans, but these remain in paper due to a lack of funds or other reasons.

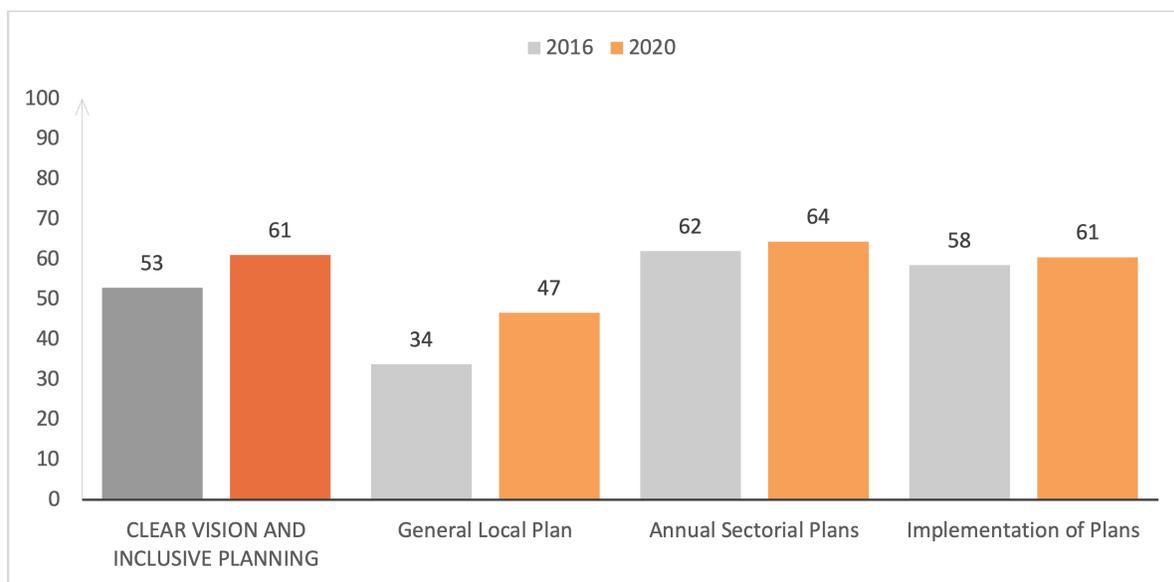
The indicators are better scored by the municipalities than by the citizens. The same was true in the 2016 assessment. The lower scoring by the community might be result of insufficient information provided to them. Most of the plans are internal documents of the municipalities and communities only get to know about them from the information provided and/or in case they are part of the drafting and implementation process. When it comes to discussions held by the municipal staff, most of the plans are seemingly approved without a significant involvement of the communities or, on the other hand, their suggestions are not sufficiently considered.

Figure 20. Vision and planning of local administration: performance of indicators



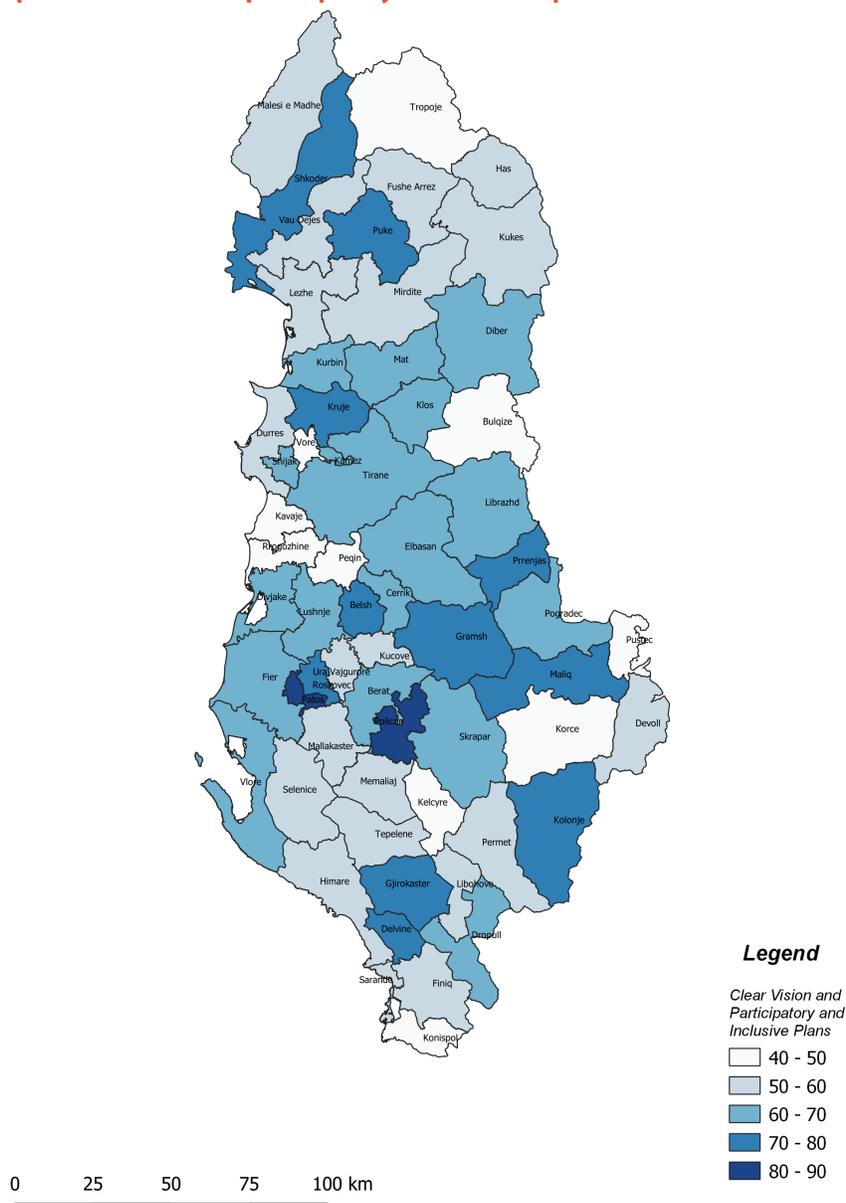
The overall score of the vision and planning sub- criterion in the 2020 LG assessment has improved compared to 2016 (61 vs. 53 points). The main progress has been made in the GLP indicator (47 points vs. 34 points). However, this is the only indicator that is ranked as “average”. The rest of indicators have slightly improved and are all rated as “good”, showing a better picture than in 2016 when all indicators were rated as either “poor” or “average”.

Figure 21. Vision and planning of local administration: comparison between 2016 and 2020



The best performers in terms of vision and planning are the municipalities of Poliçan and Patos that scored “very good” (83 points), followed by 10 other municipalities that fall in the upper level of the “good” score range. The largest municipality in the top performers’ list is Shkodra. A total of 19 municipalities are at the bottom of the “good” score range, while the rest were rated as “average”.

Figure 22. Map of clear vision and participatory and inclusive plans



Summing up, having a Strategic Local Plan in place seems to be an ambitious requirement for most LGUs. There is major progress made in terms of GLP. However, the identified major planning issue across local government units is that, while in 2016 there were 17 municipalities out of 61 which had not start the drafting process of GLP, four years later, in 2020, most of them have kicked off the process, but to no end so far. The LGUs that still miss the GLP are small sized, apart from Durres Municipality that has an outdated plan.

Most municipalities do have annual sectoral plans, but, still, there are still important sectors lagging behind with such plans. The community claims to be uninformed and that plans remain incomplete, while implementation is a challenge for various reasons, including lack of adequate funding.

3.2.2 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

This sub-criterion aims to provide an overview of the effective planning and management of local financial resources. It assesses the existence of a MTBP, the adequacy and capacity of the municipality (administration and department staffing) to manage its budget efficiently, the presence of good and effective financial management and control mechanisms and the efficiency of local government in collecting local revenues. From the scores (Figure 23), it appears that municipalities have adequate administration and staffing and the required capacity to ensure efficient budget management and effective control mechanisms for financial management. They have scored “good” across each of these indicators, except for the revenue collection performance has been rated as “very poor”, negatively impacting the average scores of the financial management sub-criterion.

There is a comprehensive legal package supported by instructions and training manuals regarding the complete financial management cycle of the municipalities. This package includes laws and instructions on local finances, decentralization, the tax system in Albania, budget management, financial management and auditing, procedures on how municipalities will prepare the MTBP, preparation of the local budget etc. As such, development of the MTBP has become a legal obligation for the local government units since 2018 and the staff has received training and assistance to increase their capacities. One important aspect of the MTBP is gender mainstreaming, as an important tool for advancing gender equality. Gender Responsive Budget (GRB) has been also included as a legal requirement in the local government financial management cycle. The approval of the Law No. 68/2017, "On Local Government Finances" paved the way to the effective inclusion of GRB throughout all the stages of the local financial management cycle (medium-term and annual budget planning, monitoring & reporting, evaluation and auditing) by local government units. Inclusion in the MTBP of the Gender Responsive Budgeting, as well as the legal changes in the area of public financial management at the local level, bring greater responsibilities and challenges for public entities in effectively managing gender-based policies, by allocating the budget resources to pursuing them. There are few municipalities, such as Durres, Korça, Tirana and Elbasan that have signed the European Charter of Equality of Women and Man in Local Life, with the intention of applying gender-responsive planning and budgeting of MTBP. The ultimate aim is that the targeted municipalities plan and implement budgets and programmes that take into account the needs of men and women, girls and boys. Currently, the majority of municipalities affirm the existence of an MTBP. That has been confirmed by the assessment of the municipal staff (80 points). The community scores for this indicator are lower, due to the limited information they have that was discussed also during the CDs. As such, there is a long way and process ahead in this regard.

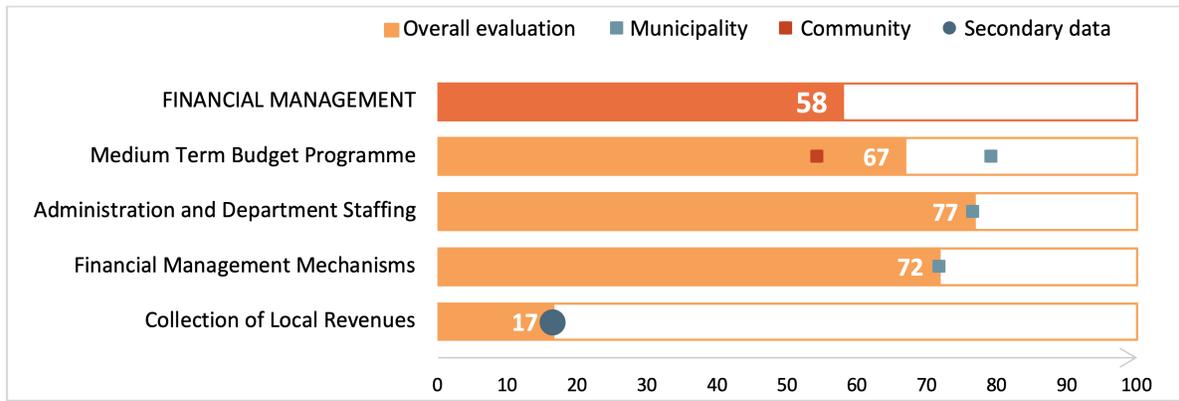
Administration and department staffing indicator has been assessed as “good”. Around half of the municipalities have claimed they have human resource capacities, while the rest declare they have difficulties in finding skilled staff. A strong correlation has been noticed between the size of the municipalities and the human resource capacities they have. Small-sized municipalities are faced with more difficulties in this direction.

The most problematic issue under the financial management sub-criterion is the local revenues collection, also being the lowest scoring one. Information is obtained from secondary data and assessed based on the ratio of municipal own revenues from local taxes against the total revenues of the municipality (unconditional transfers, conditional transfers, grants from international donors, etc.). This has been noted also in the EC Progress Report 2019 for Albania. It emphasizes that “most notably, while municipalities have been attributed larger powers, the adequacy of financial resources available to local government units (LGUs) are at risk. LGUs’ fiscal autonomy is also at risk. 73% of the LGUs’ budget comes from national transfers. The central budget allocates about 1% of GDP to LGUs, the lowest in the Western Balkans. In most municipalities, LGUs are not effective at collecting revenues. As a result, the overall ability of local institutions to deliver quality public services remains limited”²⁶.

26. European Commission, Albania 2019 Report, May 2019.

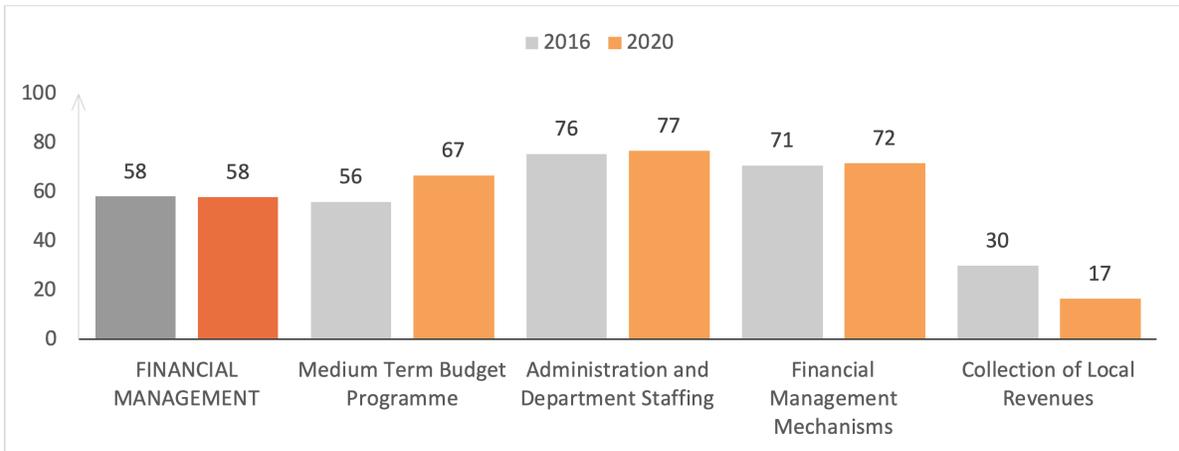
Local revenues of the municipalities are composed by (i) local taxes; (ii) tariffs; (iii) assets and economic activities and (iv) donations. There is a long list of local taxes and tariffs the Municipalities should collect. The most important are the local tax on the activity of small businesses, real estate tax, agricultural land tax, buildings tax, land tax, the tax on hotelier services, infrastructure and new construction tax, tax on transactions with the real estate, tax on occupation of public spaces and facades, local tariffs, shared taxes etc. The dialogues with the municipalities' officials mentioned that the collection of taxes from the business is better administered (the number of small businesses in the small-sized municipalities is very low) compared to the collection of taxes from the citizens. Two main problems exist regarding the taxes to be paid by citizens: (i) payment capacity in small municipalities with a high level of poor population; (ii) the mechanism for tax collection. The municipalities that have established the tax collection as part of the water consuming bills have a higher level of tax collection compared with other municipalities.

Figure 23. Financial management: performance of indicators



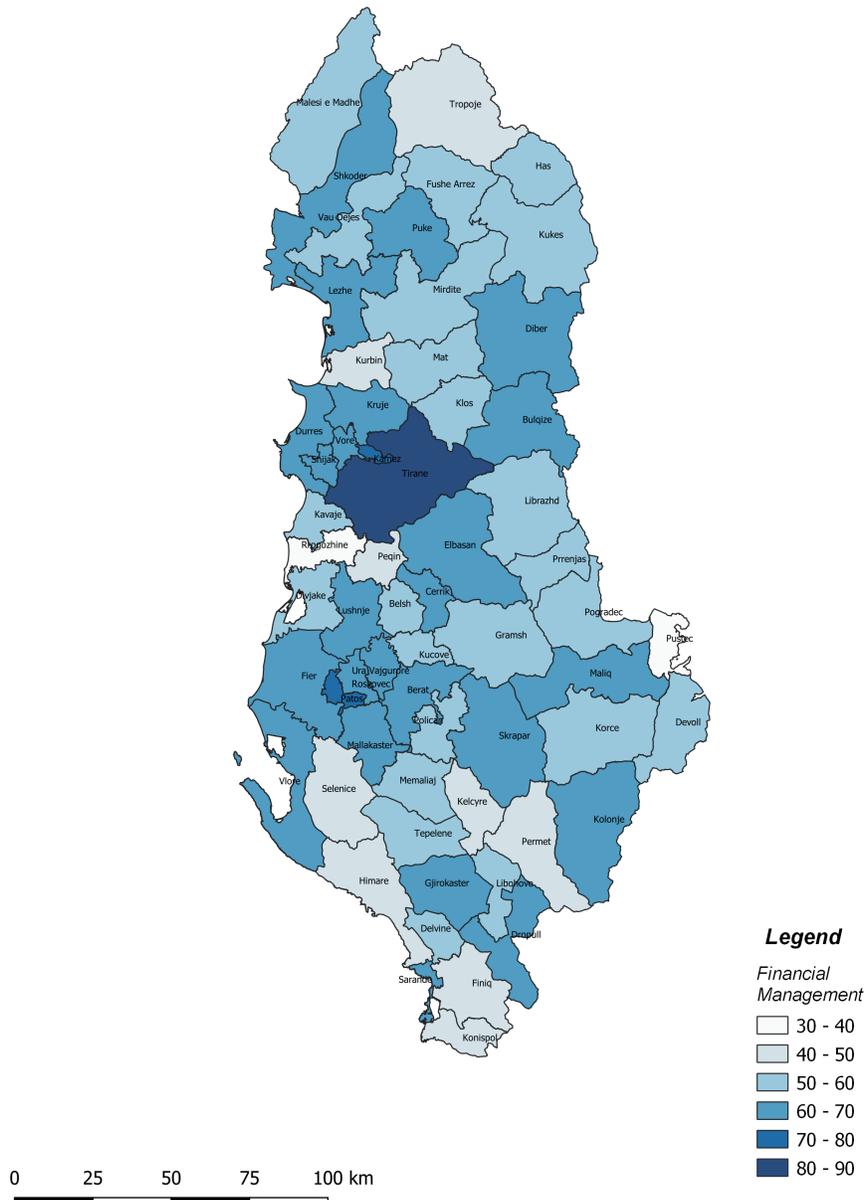
Comparing 2020 to 2016 in terms of the financial management, we find that the situation is exactly the same, rated with 58 points. Although, there has been an increase in rating for questions related to the MTBP, administration and staffing and financial management mechanisms in place, this was not sufficient to compensate the very low scores for local revenue collection, rates as “very poor”.

Figure 24. Financial management: comparing 2016 and 2020



The comparison between the average scores of the effective Financial Management and Control Mechanisms and the scores for local revenue collection identifies a considerable gap that is present in the large majority of the municipalities in Albania. There are few municipalities (large ones) that perform better than the rest in terms of local revenues collection, measured as the share of own source revenues in total collected revenues 2018. In this respect Tirana Municipality performs exceptionally good. This is result mainly of the high businesses' concentration in Tirana and large number of inhabitants, increase of their taxes and tariffs, while the delegation of additional competencies from the central government to the LGUs is accompanied with additional financial transfers that have reduced the share of the local revenues to the overall local finances, particularly in the small and medium sized municipalities.

Figure 25. Financial management map



In conclusion, almost every municipality has a MTBP and a good effective Financial Management and Control GBR Mechanisms in place. GBR has started to be included in all the phases of local financial management cycle and it is ongoing. This would create more opportunities for an effective management of gender-based policies. Municipal officials in about half of the municipalities, small and medium-sized ones in particular, claim they are short of skilled staff and face significant challenges to recruit and train new staff. Good financial mechanisms are not translated into increased local revenues collection. For the vast majority of municipalities, local revenue collection was rated as “poor”, resulting in low fiscal autonomy. In this context, insufficiency of funds for bank loans access is another concern for many municipalities.

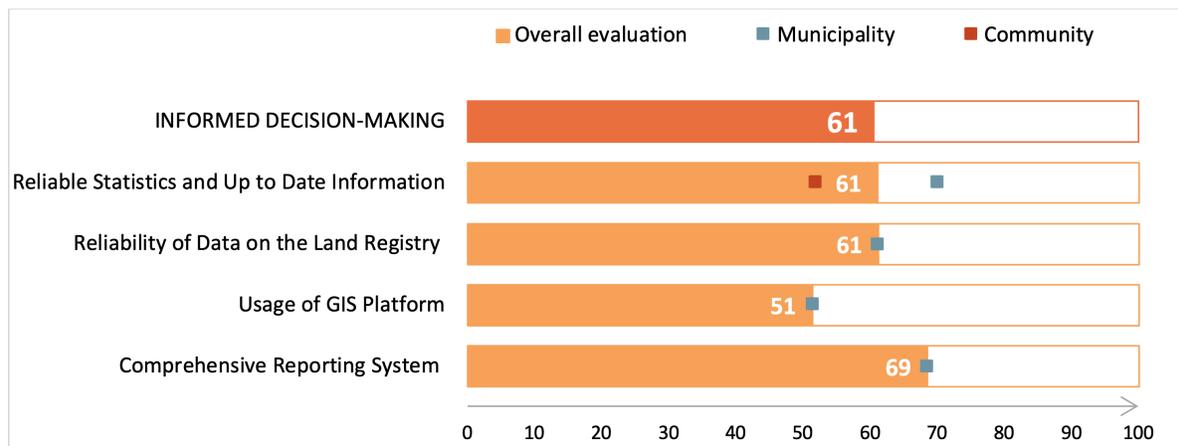
3.2.3 INFORMED DECISION MAKING

Informed decision making represents an important aspect of functioning good local governance. It looks at how much is decision making based on reliable statistics/data and up-to-date information, how reliable is the Land Registry data, the extent to which municipalities use a GIS system/platform and the existence of a comprehensive reporting system within the municipality. The best rated indicator is the comprehensive reporting system and the lowest rated is the usage of the GIS platform. CDs and discussions with municipal officials suggest that around half of the municipalities use the GIS system, while the rest do not have a GIS and instead, they use the ASIG system - the government geoportal with 2019 images. There are also large-sized municipalities that do not have yet a GIS system, such as Durres.

The reliability of Land Registry data has been rated as “good”. However, in focus group discussions there were claims property registers were filled with shortcomings. They include overlapping property titles, conflicting cases between ownership claimants. The municipalities of Kukës and Roskovec have declared that more than 70% of the properties lack ownership certificates. Property registers are filled to the brim with issues of overlapping. Property registration is an expensive process and municipalities lack resources to finalize it. The only municipality that has a property register of quality without any overlapping or dispute is Divjaka.

Feedback from focus group discussions indicates that many municipalities claim they do not have Statistical Offices or reliable systems for data collection. There are some other municipalities that declare they are not sure regarding the reliability of their data. They rely mostly on data generated from the civil registry, tax departments, INSTAT, which are fragmented and difficult to be managed. This is a problem for large municipalities, too. Thus, the municipalities of Fier, Elbasan and Shkodra do not have a dedicated statistical office, whereas Tirana and Durrës do have such offices, but the CDs complain they data is not updated, it is incomplete and is not used during decision making.

Figure 26. Informed decision making - indicators



The comparison of the assessment results in 2020 and 2016 suggests an improvement of the sub-criterion with 6 points. The average scores for each of its indicators are either the similar or close to similar, except for the usage of the GIS platform, which has significantly improved, from 27 to 52 points. Recently, legal changes have occurred in the territorial planning and development. The National Territory Planning Registry has been based on two components: (i) The Platform for Institutional Interaction and (ii) the GIS Platform. The platform for institutional interaction aims to align planning processes, starting with the initiation of plans until their final adoption. This platform is dedicated to local and central administration users. The public has access to the electronic map. The map provides information on the state of play of the territory and its planning, infrastructure, buildings, engineering infrastructure, strategic projects etc.

Figure 27. Informed decision making – comparing 2016 and 2020

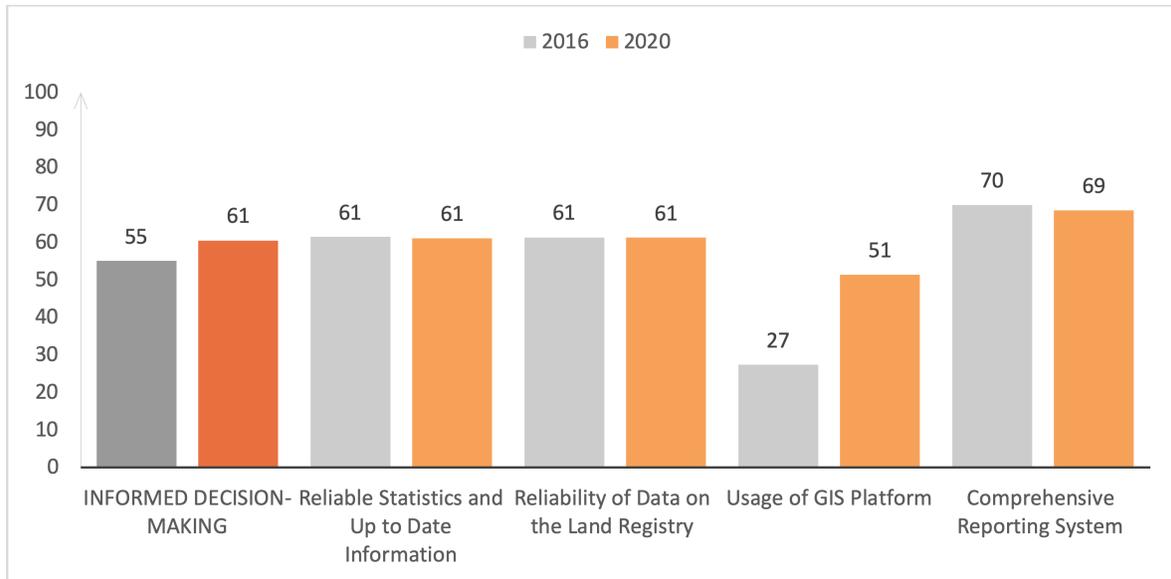
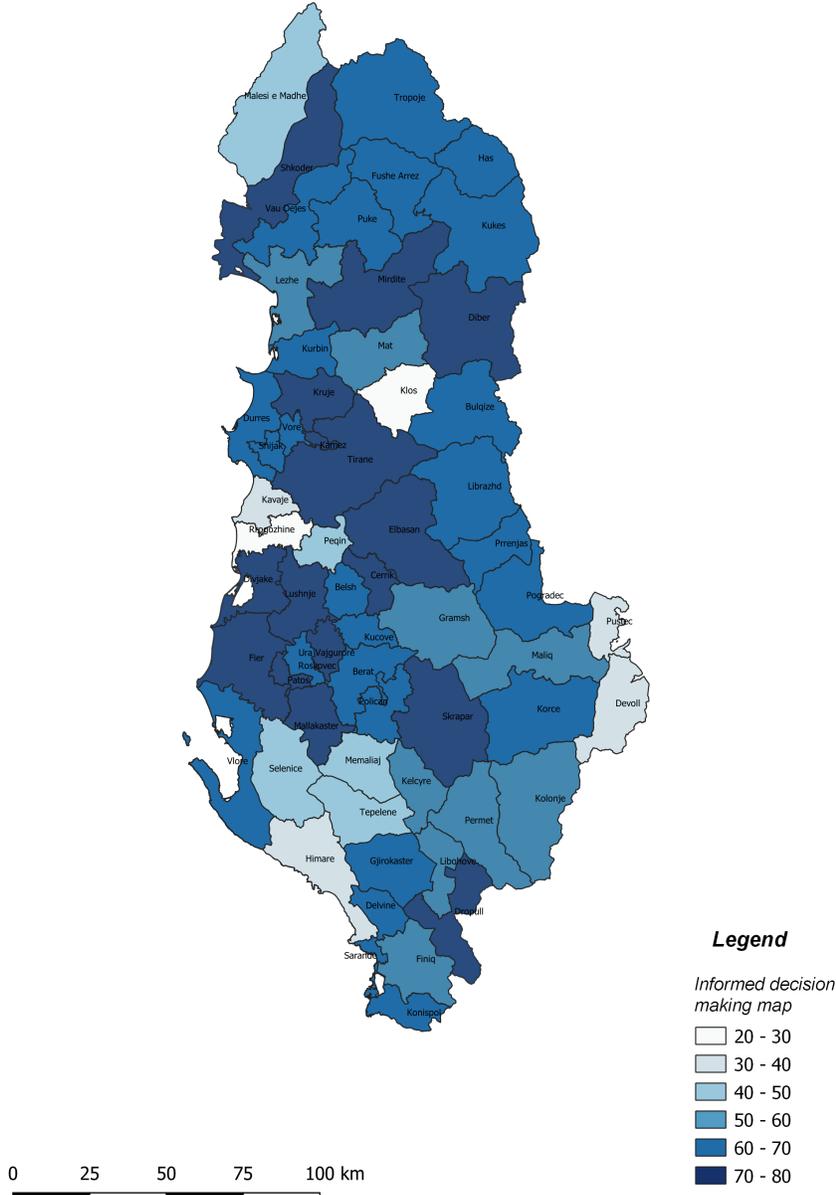


Figure 28. Informed decision making Map

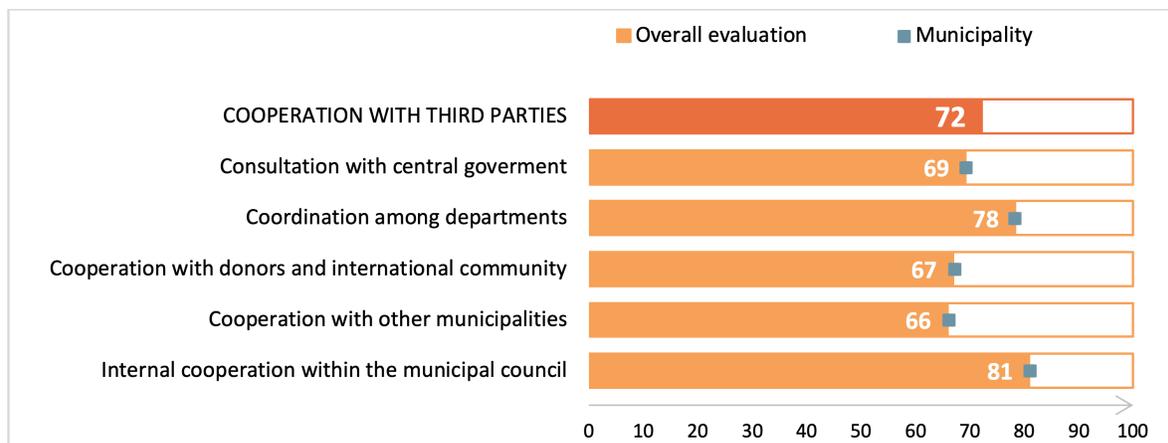


In conclusion, informed decision making has significantly improved in 2020 compared to 2016, particularly the usage of GIS system. The GIS platforms have improved in quality and quantity and they have been widely used recently. There are municipalities with problematic property registers, with many overlapping properties and other inaccuracies. The decision-making process is based on partially reliable data or systems. The governmental statistics/data of civil registry, tax departments, INSTAT, Ministry of Finance etc. are deemed to be mostly reliable, whereas secondary data collected specifically to assist the decision making from the municipalities are missing or not reliable across the majority of municipalities. There are LGUs that declare a lack of statistical office and lack of reliable data collection system, causing uncertainty on data quality. Overall, the periodical reporting system is considered good.

3.2.4 COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

Cooperation is an important mandate of the local governments and is well articulated in the local self-government law²⁷. Effective coordination and cooperation look at the level of internal coordination among municipal departments, the cooperation with the municipal council, the level of consultation with the central government, the inter-municipality cooperation, and cooperation with other national and international stakeholders. As these are mainly matters of internal functioning of the municipality for which the public is not actually well-informed, the respective indicator scores are fully obtained from the self-assessment/perceptions of municipal officials. All indicators under this sub-criterion are scored as satisfactory (“good”), without significant variations. Meanwhile, the internal cooperation with the municipal council is ranked as “very good”.

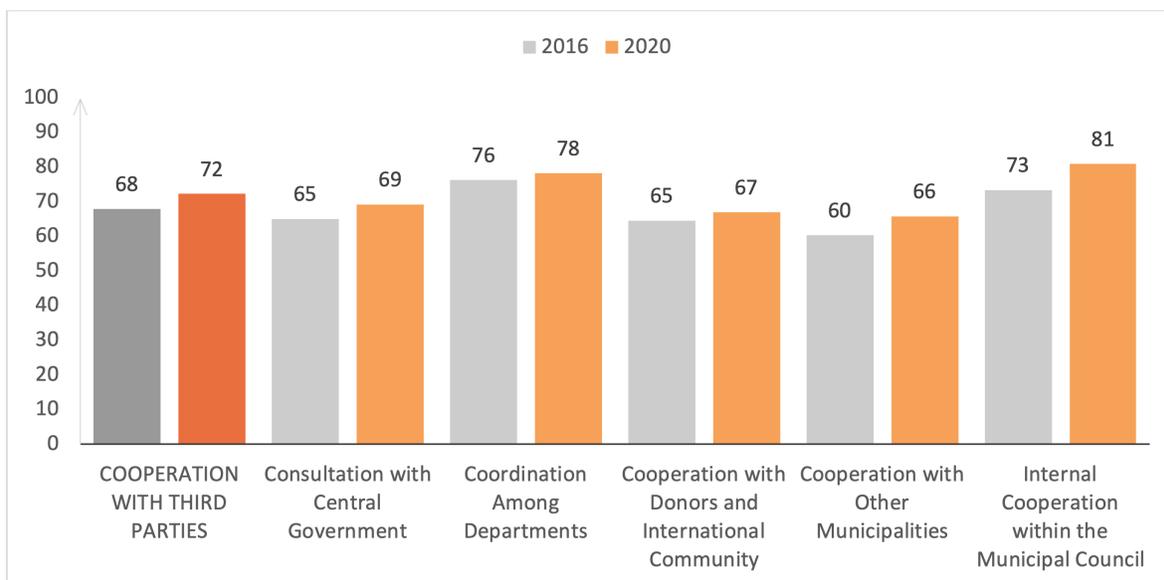
Figure 29. Coordination and cooperation: indicators



All the indicators under third-party cooperation are higher scored in 2020 compared to 2016. The biggest improvement was observed in the cooperation with other municipalities and internal cooperation with the municipal council.

27. Law No. 139/2015, “On Local Self-Government,” Article 14:
http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

Figure 30. Coordination and Cooperation: comparison 2016-2020



Small size municipalities are among those with the lowest scores regarding Coordination and Cooperation sub criterion. Almost all of them do not perform in terms of Cooperation with Donors and International Community.

Table 4. Municipal coordination and cooperation bottom 5 – highlighting the most problematic indicators of the criteria

	COORDINATION AND COOPERATION	Consultation with central government	Coordination among departments	Cooperation with donors and international community	Cooperation with other municipalities	Internal cooperation within the municipal council
Pustec	52	45	59	45	45	68
Rrogozhinë	53	57	52	43	42	72
Selenicë	54	53	69	39	50	61
Kukës	56	58	60	48	52	63
Himarë	58	46	63	54	54	75

The top 10 Municipalities in terms of cooperation with the central government are rated as “very good”, ranging from 97 to 87 points. On the top of such cooperation is the municipality of Tirana, followed by the Fier, Kameza, Vlora, Dibra, Berat etc. The assessment of the cooperation with the central government by the municipalities that are in the bottom 10 ranges from “average” to “very poor”, which is Shkodra municipality. Korça is also among the bottom 10 municipalities regarding such cooperation. Consultation with central government has improved, however in the MDs, one of the most mentioned issued considered detrimental to such cooperation was the low level of allocated funds, confirming that LGUs see the role of the central government just from a financial perspective.

Figure 31. Level of cooperation with central government

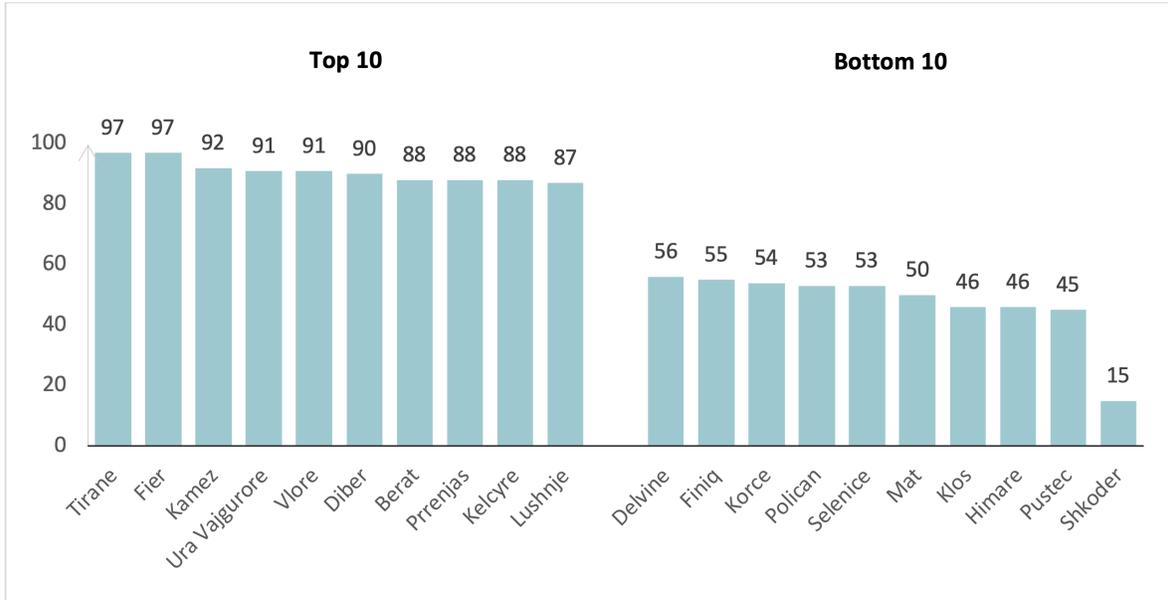
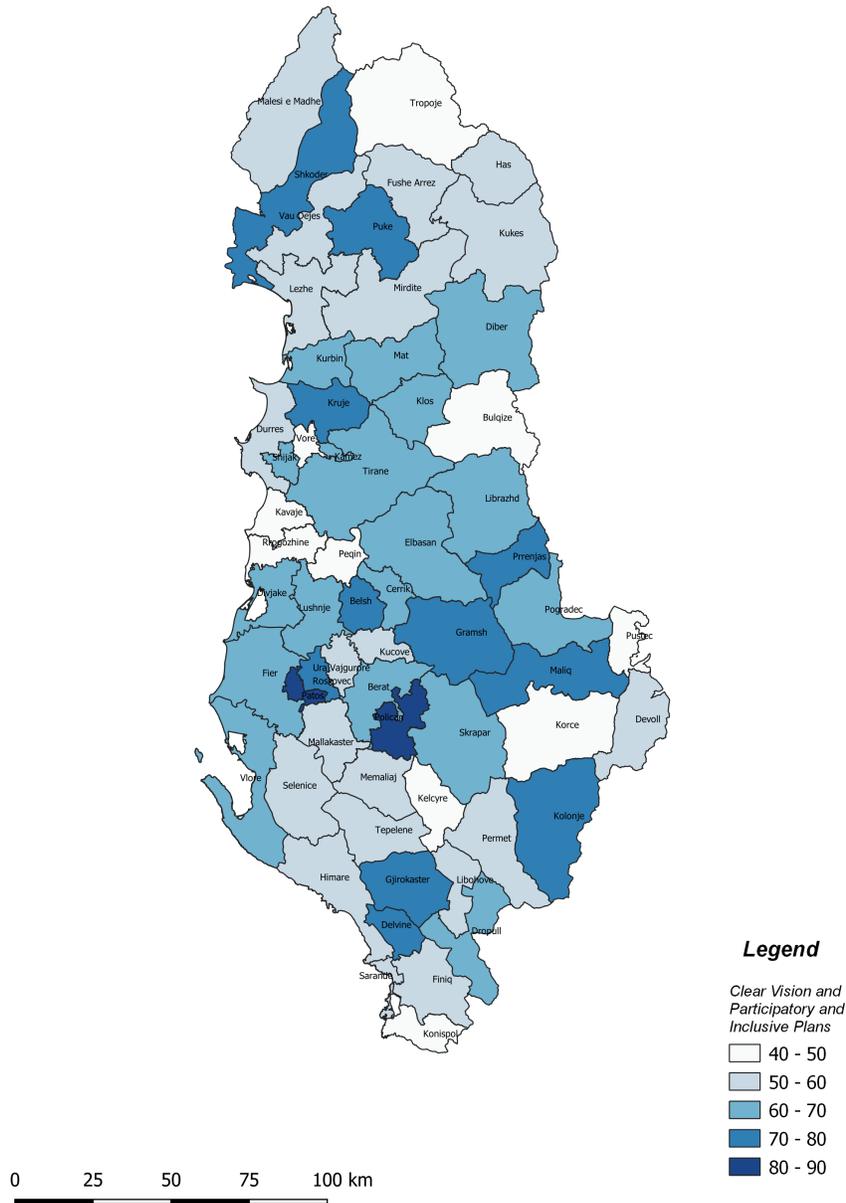


Figure 32. Map of Cooperation and Coordination



In conclusion, the coordination and cooperation are rated as ‘good’ both vertically and horizontally, and even “very good” when it comes to municipal councils. However, there is concern for a group of small-sized municipalities having the lowest scores under the coordination and cooperation sub-criterion. Almost all of them are non-performing in terms of cooperation with donors and international community. Also, consultation with central government has improved, but the municipal officials limits the scope of the consultation mainly to the allocation of funds.

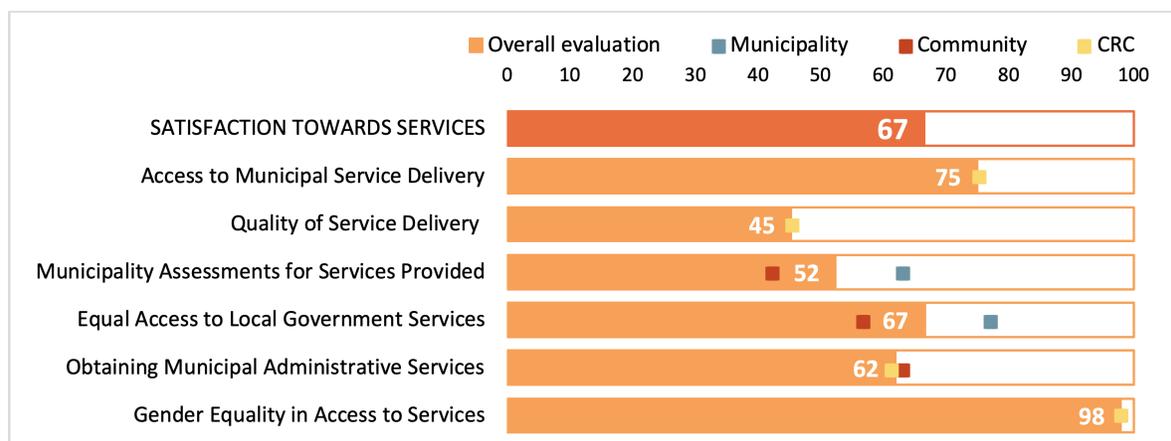
3.2.5 LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES

Local service delivery is the core function of local government. Citizens expect to receive equitable, efficient and qualitative services that meet their needs and increasing demands. An idea of how much these expectations are met is given by assessing combined perceptions of the level of satisfaction with local services. Within this sub-criterion, various characteristics of local service provision are considered: citizens' satisfaction with the quality of service delivery, service availability and access, easiness of obtaining municipal administrative services, the existence and the quality/impact of assessments conducted by local governments to determine the citizen satisfaction levels with the delivery of public services, priority services according to the citizens' perspectives etc.

LGUs are responsible for 41 functions grouped under 7 areas, including infrastructure and public services, social services, culture, sports and recreation, environment protection, agriculture & rural development & forestry, local economic development, and public safety²⁸. In offering public services, LGUs use their own organizational units, public utilities operating service delivery or they use outsourcing mechanisms to the third parties or public – private partnerships. The assessment of the access to municipal service delivery, quality of public services, gender equality in municipal services is based on CRCs. Obtaining municipal administrative services is assessed by both communities and citizens, whereas equal access to local government services take into account the assessment of the municipal staff, community groups and citizens.

At an aggregate level, satisfaction with public services is assessed as “good”. Gender equality in access to services is the highest scoring indicator, with 98 points, followed by the access to municipal services, with 75 points. So, there is a good level of access to public services both for males and females equally, but the assessment scores are lower when it comes to the equal access to local government services. The lowest scoring indicator is that assessed through the CRCs on the quality of service delivery, with 45 points, ranking at the lower threshold of the “average” score range. There is a substantial difference in the opinions of the municipal officials and citizens regarding the indicator of municipality assessments for services provided. The municipal officials judge that they are “good” in using citizens' satisfactions assessment tools for the services provided, while citizens deem them as “average” in this respect. Obtaining municipal administrative services is rated as “good” and both citizens and community groups have very similar opinions about that.

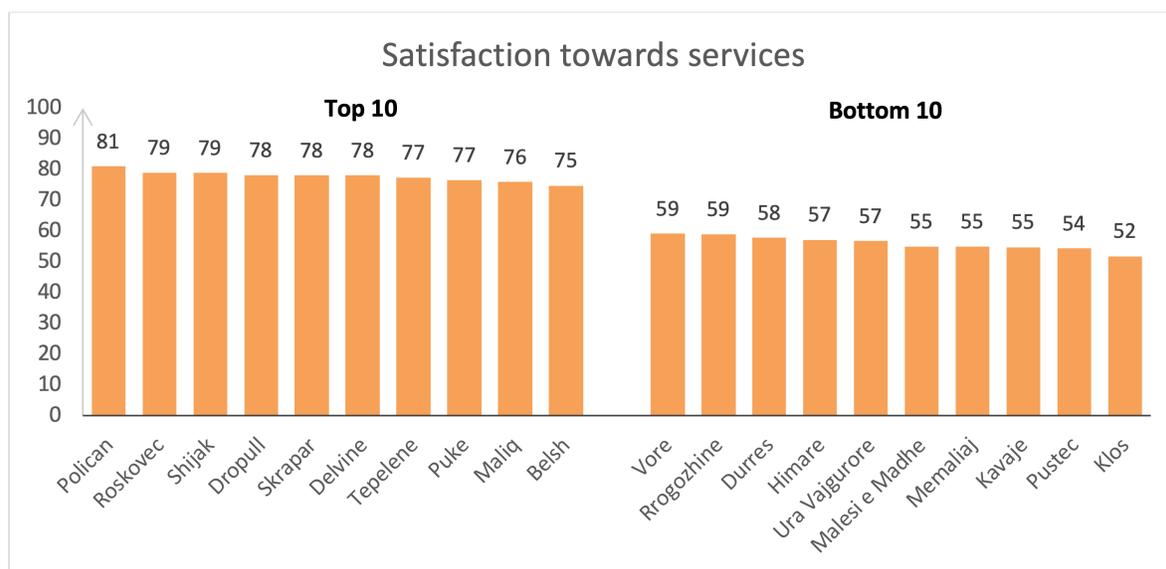
Figure 33. Satisfaction with services: indicators



28. Law No. 139/2015, Articles 23-29.

Figure 35 indicates that the assessment of municipalities regarding the satisfaction with services ranges from “average” for the bottom 10 municipalities, to “good” for the top 10 municipalities. The difference in score between the best and the worst rated municipality is 29 points, which suggests that there is little discrepancy between municipalities. No large size municipality is among the top 10 performers, while Durres is among the bottom 10 municipalities. The list of top 10 and bottom 10 municipalities indicates that there is no correlation between the level of satisfaction with services and local revenue collection rate. For instance, Vora, Durres and Himara are among the best performers in terms of revenue collection, but they are ranked in the bottom group regarding satisfaction with services. In the meantime, Tirana which records an excellent performance in revenue collection, is far from being the best performing municipalities in terms of the satisfaction with services.

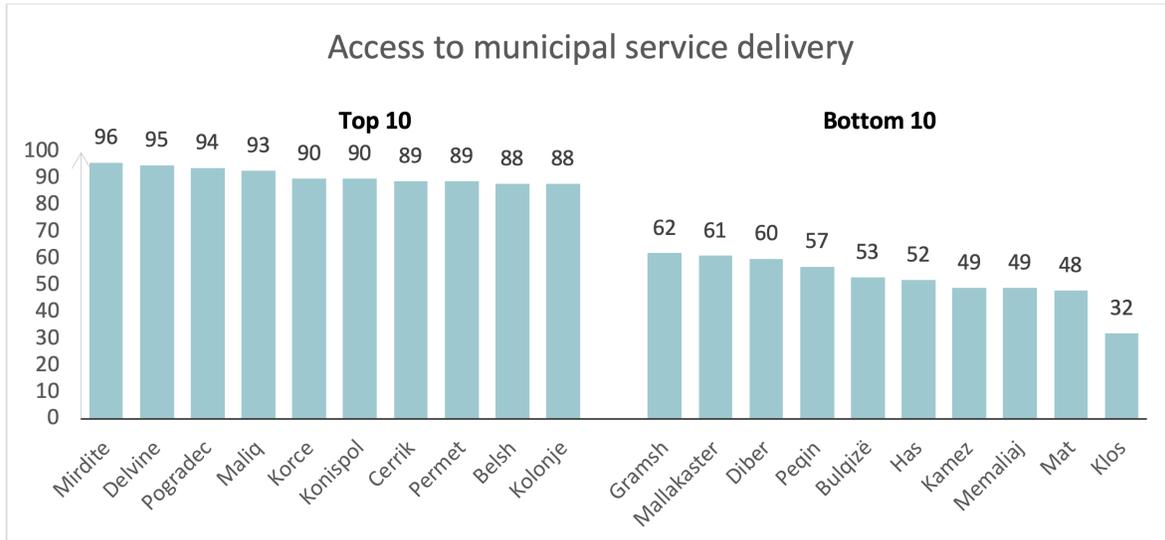
Figure 34. Satisfaction with services: top 10 and bottom 10



ACCESS TO MUNICIPAL SERVICE DELIVERY

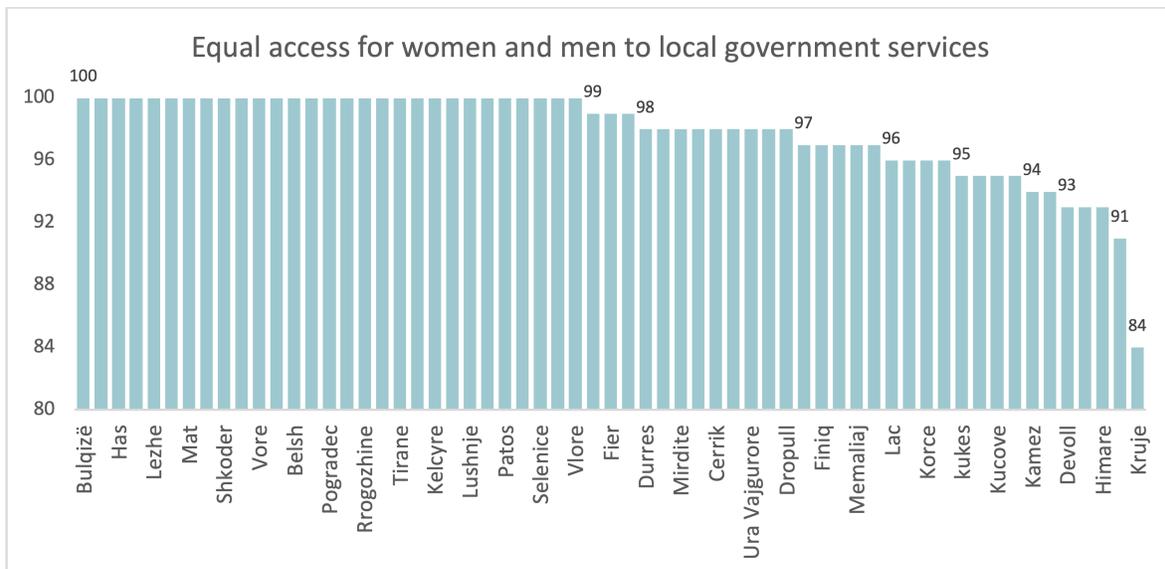
There is a significant gap between the best and worst performing municipalities, by 64 points, in terms of access to municipal service delivery (Mirdita 96 points vs. Klos 32 points). However, that the vast majority (87%) of the municipalities were rated as “good” or “very good”, with the latter being the highest number. The main issues raised during the focus group discussions include: the large territory covered by the municipality has caused difficulties for peripheral communities to access public service, lack of access to public transportation in many areas, difficulties in accessing healthcare centres, lack of skilled social workers.

Figure 35. Access to municipal service delivery: top 10 and bottom 10



Men and women have equal access to local services almost in all municipalities across Albania. Kruja municipality is the lowest scoring in this respect; yet, it is rated as very good in terms of the equal access for men and women to local government services.

Figure 36. Men and women access to local government services



QUALITY OF SERVICE- INDICATOR

The highest scoring municipality in terms of service delivery quality is Tepelena, with 85 points out of 100, followed by Shijak and Korca municipality, with 66 and 65 points, respectively. The lowest scoring of municipalities are Klos, Kukes and Lezha, with 25, 27 and 28 points, respectively. There are 55 municipalities that qualify as “poor” or “average” in the service delivery quality. The biggest issues with the quality of service delivery raised during the focus group discussions were related to the water and sewerage systems, public transportation, street lighting, waste collection system and social services.

The CDs have commented negatively the quality of services provided by the municipalities. Except for Shkodra and Fier municipalities for which there were no comments, the rest of municipalities indicate a lack of trust by citizens in the quality of municipal services and a failure by the municipalities to always respond to the complaints, suggesting that the reality is different from what is claimed.

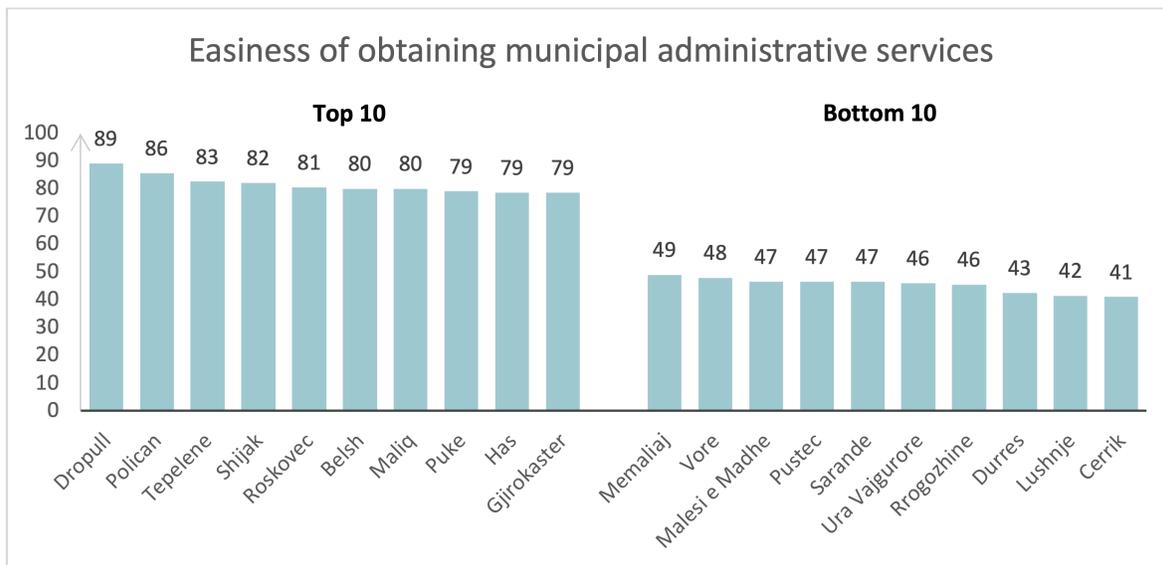
The most positive aspects of service delivery quality mentioned during focus group discussions came from the small municipalities, where there is an overall appreciation for the good work done to plant trees, the online services, the rehabilitation of city centres and improvements in accelerating the procedures for administrative services. However, it seems that there is a significant lack of trust in the quality of municipal services, given the poor response to the needs of citizens for administrative services.

Figure 37. Quality of service delivery- indicator



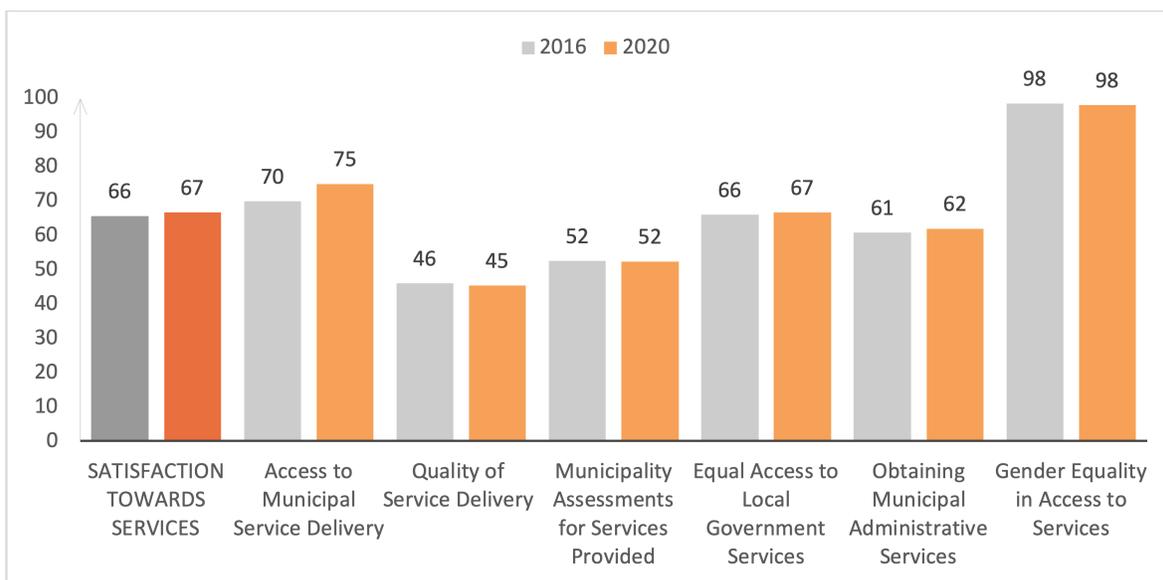
Easiness of Obtaining Administrative Services measures as averagely “good”, when CDs and CRC rank as “good” and “very good” (56%) of municipalities. The highest scored municipalities are Dropull and Poliçan with 89 and 86 points respectively, while the least scored municipalities are Cërrik, Lushnja and Durrës. The three largest municipalities Tirana, Durrës and Elbasan were assessed at the lower limit of “average” score range regarding the Easiness to Obtain Municipal Administrative Services.

Figure 38. Easiness of obtaining municipal administrative services: top 10 and bottom 10



Comparing the findings of 2020 and 2016 LG mappings, we find that that perceived satisfaction with services has remained almost on the same levels for all the indicators, with only one exception that is the improved access to municipal services (5 points), The community and citizens remain quite critical of the quality of service delivery and obtaining municipal administrative services.

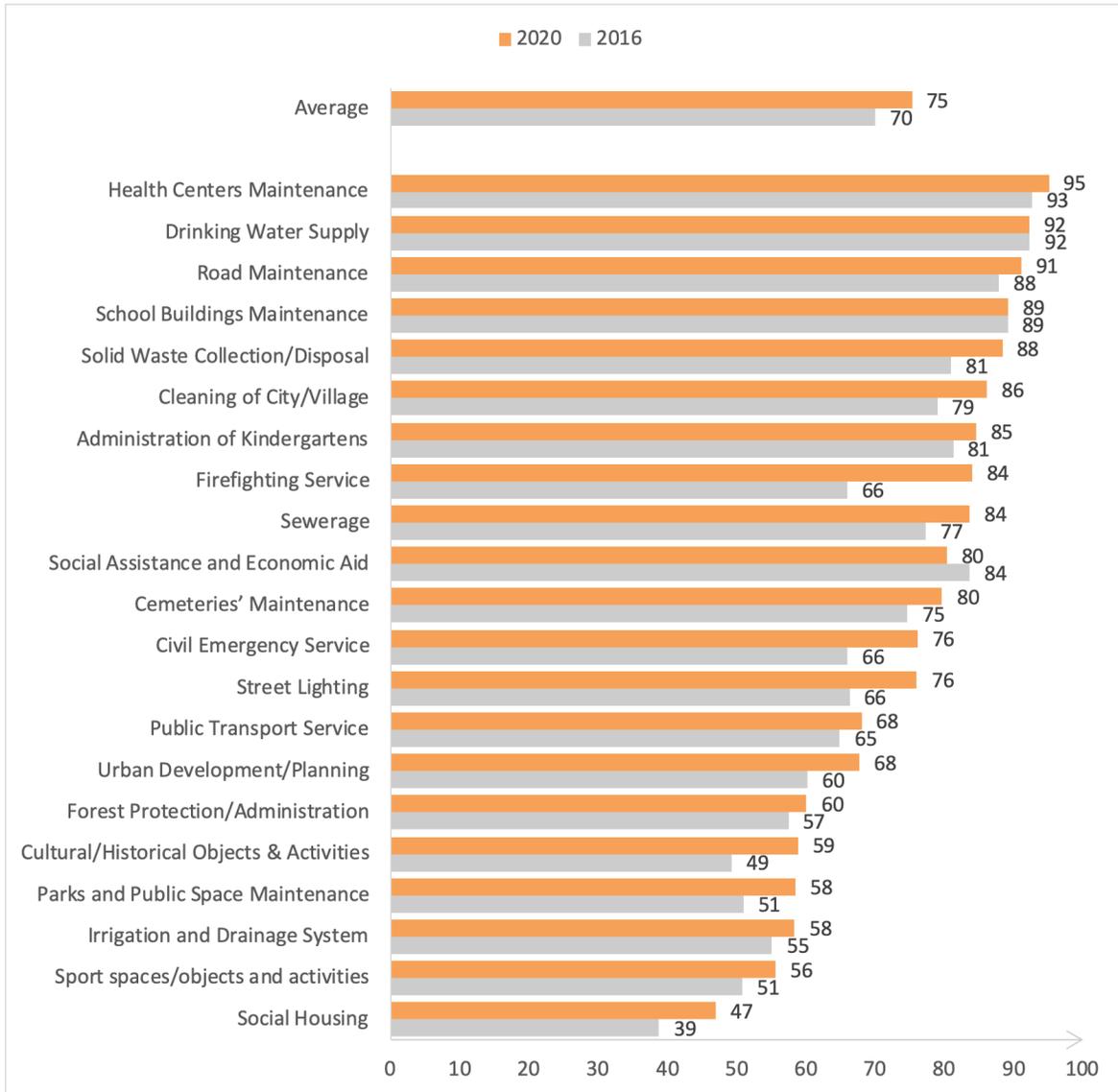
Figure 39. Satisfaction with public services: comparing 2016 and 2020



The comparison between the assessment in 2020 and in 2016 indicates that all listed public services, except for the Social Assistance and Economic Aid, are improved. The largest improvement is noticed in Firefighting Service, Parks and Parks Public Space Maintenance. The services assessed with the highest scores are Health Centers Maintenance, Drinking Water Supply, Road Maintenance, Schools Building maintenance, Solid Waste collection/disposal and cleaning of city/village, which are qualified as “very good”. The public

services assessed within the “average” score range are Cultural/Historical Heritage Maintenance, Parks and Public Space Maintenance, Irrigation and Drainage System, Sport Facilities and Activities, and Social Housing.

Figure 40. Public services availability and access - comparing 2020 and 2016



The chart provides disaggregated assessment according to urban/rural and gender criteria. It results that the availability and access of public services is almost the same for women and men, while there are differences in terms of availability and access of public services in the urban vs. rural areas. Thus, in the urban areas there are only 3 public services assessed as “average” namely Forest Protection, Irrigation and Drainage System and Social Housing. The rest of public services are scored as “good” and “very good”. In the rural areas, the public services assessed as “poor” are Cultural/historical Heritage, Natural objects, Parks and Public Space Maintenance, Sport Facilities and Activities and Social Housing.

Certain public services such as Forest’ Protection, and Irrigation and Drainage are typically rural services and

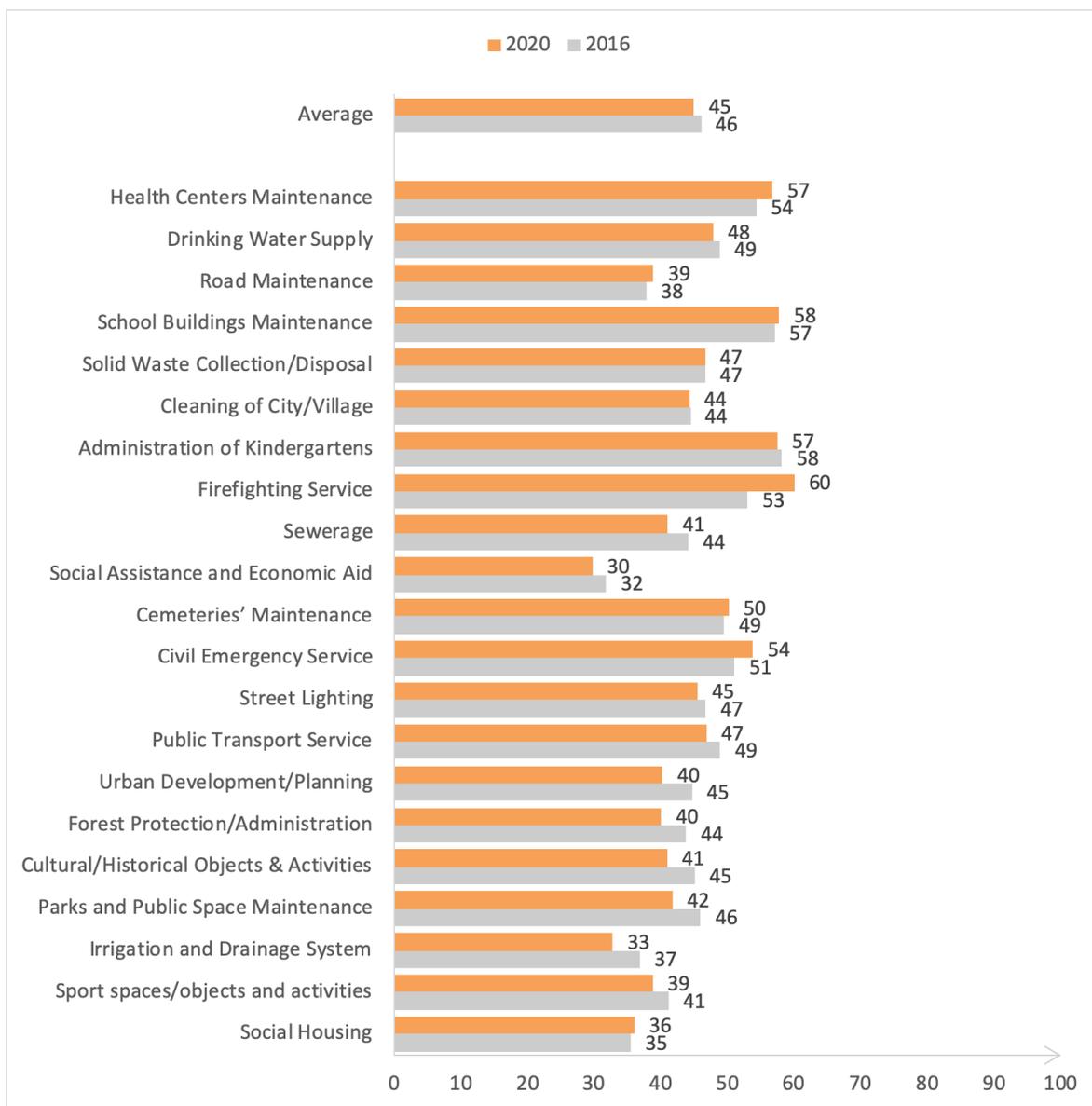
as such score higher in rural areas than in the urban areas. However, obvious urban and rural differences are noticed with respect to some public services that are still considered as an urban right by the municipalities such as Parks and Public Space Maintenance (33 points gap), Cultural/Historical/ Natural Heritage (31), Sport Spaces/Objects and Activities (31), Street Lighting (31), Public Transport Service (19).

Figure 41. Public services availability and access

	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	Overall
Average	82	71	75	76	75
Health Centers Maintenance	97	94	95	96	95
Drinking Water Supply	99	88	92	93	92
Road Maintenance	97	87	90	92	91
School Buildings Maintenance	90	88	89	89	89
Solid Waste Collection/Disposal	99	82	86	91	88
Cleaning of City/Village	98	79	84	88	86
Administration of Kindergartens	83	86	84	85	85
Firefighting Service	87	82	85	83	84
Sewerage	97	76	82	86	84
Social Assistance and Economic Aid	80	80	81	80	80
Cemeteries' Maintenance	80	79	80	79	80
Civil Emergency Service	79	75	77	76	76
Street Lighting	95	64	73	79	76
Public Transport Service	80	61	66	70	68
Urban Development/Planning	78	62	68	67	68
Forest Protection/Administration	51	66	64	57	60
Cultural/Historical/Natural Objects...	78	47	59	59	59
Parks and Public Space Maintenance	79	46	58	59	58
Irrigation and Drainage System	45	67	60	57	58
Sport spaces/objects and activities	75	44	55	56	56
Social Housing	56	42	48	46	47

Comparing citizens' satisfaction with the quality public services in 2020 with those in 2016 it results that there is not noticed any significant change in any of them. In 2020, none of the services is assessed higher than average (60 points is the maximum scores for the Firefighting Services). As such, the figures identify two main concerns: the low citizens' satisfaction with the municipal public services as well as the unchanged situation during this period. The lowest satisfaction level exists for Social Assistance and Economic Aid, Road Maintenance, Irrigation and Drainage System, Sport Spaces and activities as well as Social Housing, all of which are scored within the "poor" score range. The citizens seem to be better satisfied with health centres maintenance, school building maintenance and administration of kindergarten, but still qualify them within the "average" score range. Considering the assessment, the concern remains not only the low level of citizens' satisfaction with the services, but mainly the stagnation during last four years.

Figure 42. Satisfaction with the quality of public services – comparing 2020 and 2016



The low level of citizens' satisfaction with the quality of public services applies to both urban and rural areas and equally for men and women. However, from the citizens' perspective the level of satisfaction with the quality of public services in urban areas is slightly higher than in the rural areas, and slightly higher for females than for males. Comparing the level of citizens' satisfaction urban/rural in 2020 with that in 2016 it is noticed generally an insignificant improvement in the urban areas, but no improvement is noticed in the satisfaction level in rural areas. It is with interest to mention that social economic aid is the lowest scored public services in all categories. The reason might be that after the reform, many families were not qualified to benefit Social Assistance Aid, but they are still unclear on the reasons why they were excluded.

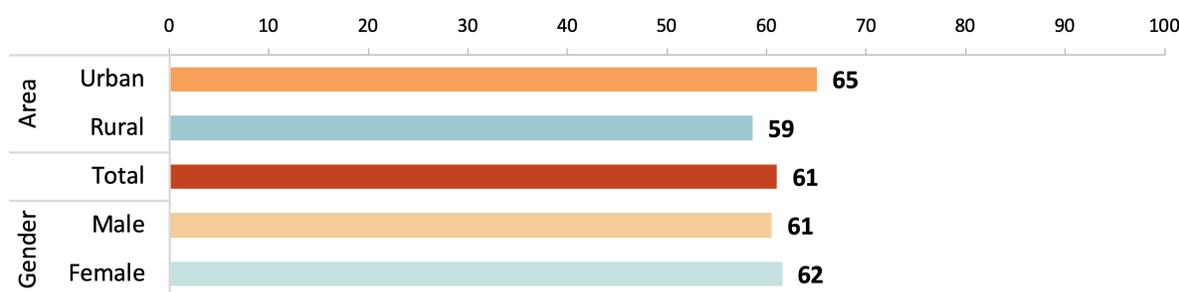
Also, every single public service is less scored in rural areas compared with the urban areas, the sharpest difference is for the Sewerage (38% less) showing that municipalities are still more focused in the urban areas.

Figure 43. Citizen satisfaction level with public services

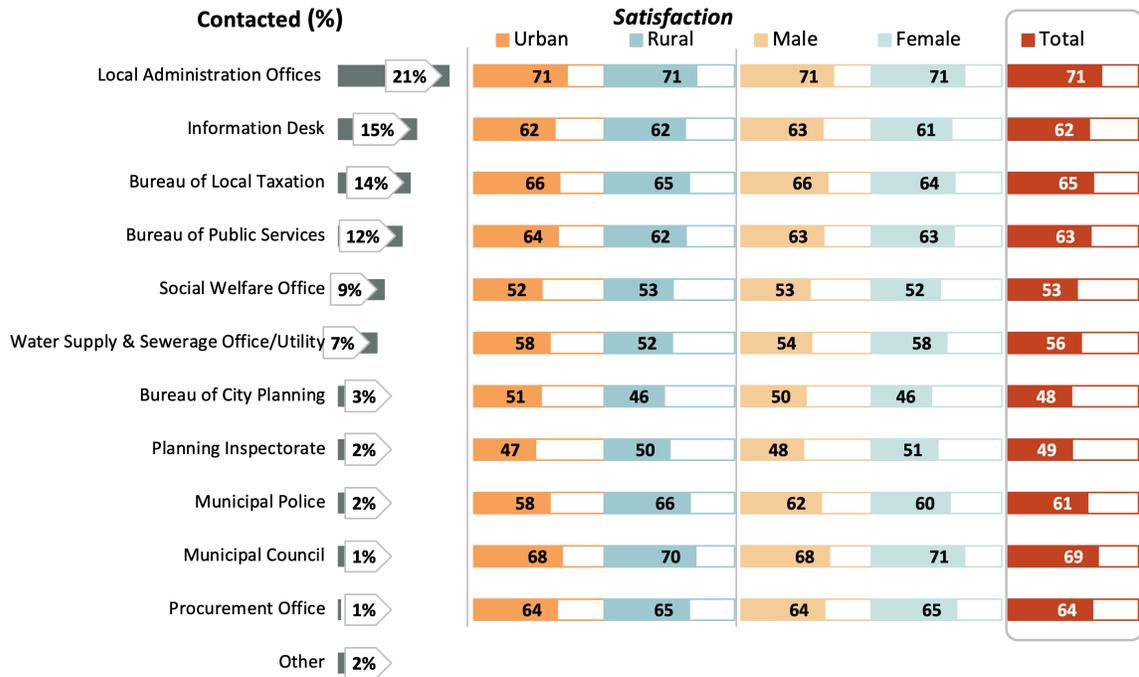
	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	Overall
Average	54	39	43	47	45
Firefighting Service	69	54	58	62	60
School Buildings Maintenance	65	53	56	59	58
Administration of Kindergartens	66	52	56	59	57
Health Centers Maintenance	64	52	55	59	57
Civil Emergency Service	61	49	52	55	54
Cemeteries' Maintenance	58	45	49	52	50
Drinking Water Supply	57	42	44	51	48
Public Transport Service	54	41	45	49	47
Solid Waste Collection/Disposal	56	40	45	48	47
Street Lighting	58	34	44	47	45
Cleaning of City/Village	54	37	43	45	44
Parks and Public Space Maintenance	49	34	40	43	42
Sewerage	55	30	38	44	41
Cultural/Historical/Natural Objects and Activities	52	30	38	44	41
Urban Development/Planning	48	35	38	42	40
Forest Protection/Administration	48	36	38	42	40
Road Maintenance	49	32	37	41	39
Sport spaces/objects and activities	47	30	36	41	39
Social Housing	43	30	35	37	36
Irrigation and Drainage System	44	28	31	35	33
Social Assistance and Economic Aid	34	27	30	30	30

Easiness of obtaining administrative services, measured as an average of the scores gathered from Community Dialogues (CDs) and Citizens Report Cards (CRC), is slightly higher in urban areas, but exactly the same for men and women.

Figure 44. Easiness of obtaining administrative services

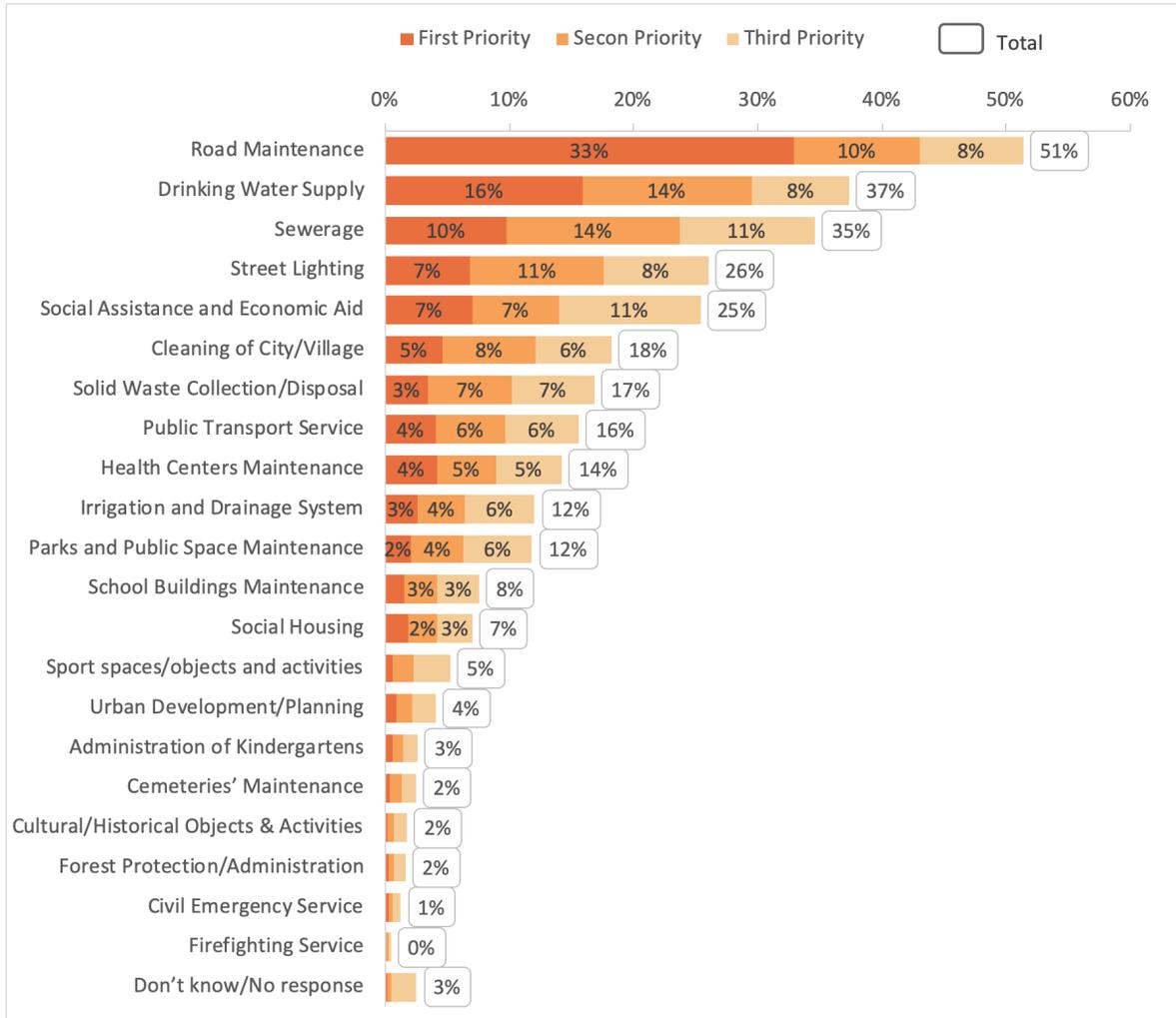


The offices citizens and community groups contact the most are the local administration office, information desk, bureau of local taxation and bureau of public services. The satisfaction rate for the easiness of obtaining administrative services is "good" both in urban and rural area, regardless of the gender. The least contacted offices are the procurement office, municipal council, municipal police, planning inspectorate and bureau of city planning.



The priority interventions listed by citizens indicate that needs in the municipalities are enormous for basic public services such as road maintenance (51%), drinking water supply (37%), sewerage (35%), street lighting (26%) and social assistance (25%). Sports, environment, cultural and recreational activities are at the end of the list of investment priorities. Among the public services considered as less of a priority is listed also the administration of kindergartens. The reason might be that most children in kindergarten age stay at home with their mothers or grandparents.

Figure 45. Public service considered as main priorities for intervention according to citizens' perception



Municipality assessments for the services provided is measured as the average result of the community dialogues (CDs). There is a significant discrepancy – 72 points - between the best and the worst performing municipalities when it comes to evaluate the efforts municipalities make to assess the quality of services provided to the citizens. The highest scoring municipalities are Poliçan (89), Skrapar (79) and Patos (79), whereas the lowest scoring are Malesia e Madhe (17), Mallakstra (22), Kavaja (24).

Focus group discussions identified that in the majority of the municipalities there is no good system in place to measure public satisfaction with municipal services they received (only sporadically, with the support of donors), and their planning, decision making and correction measures are mainly based on feedbacks from informal discussion and public hearings.

Figure 46. Municipality assessments for services provided

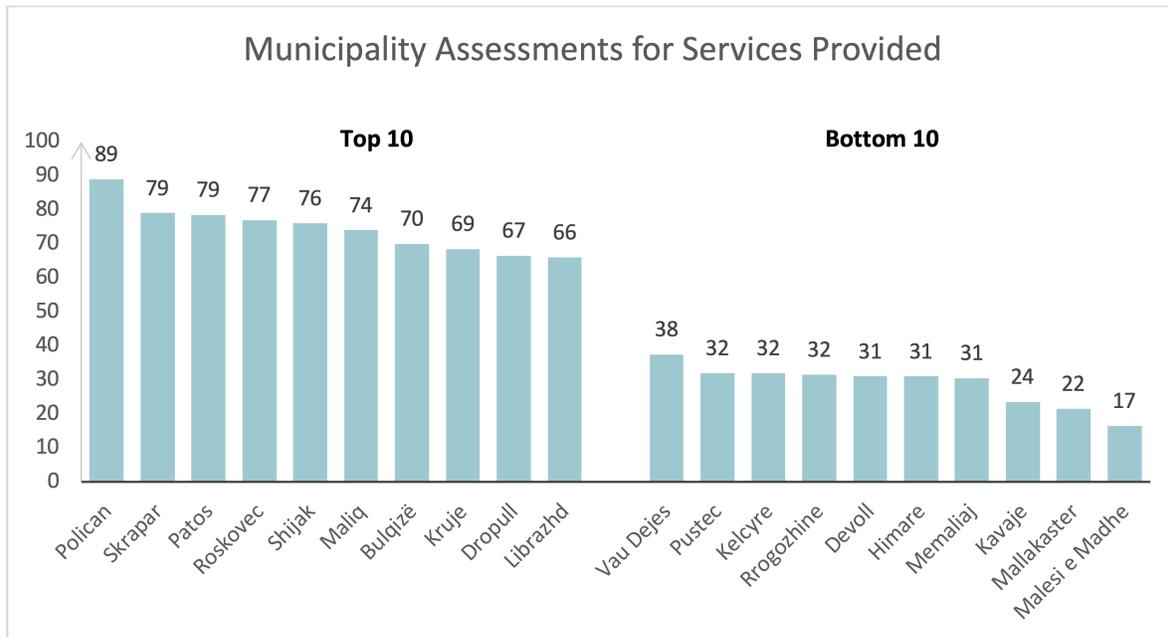
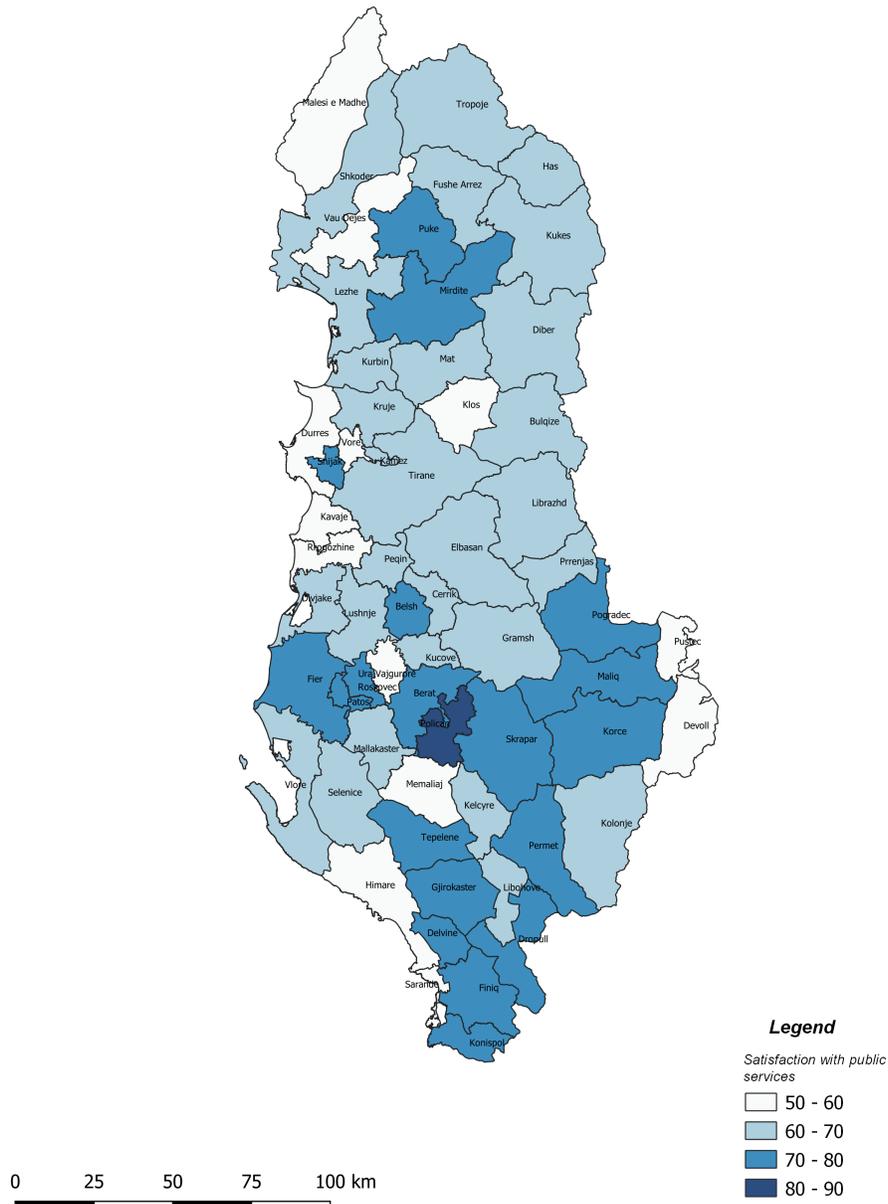


Figure 47. Map of satisfaction with Public Services



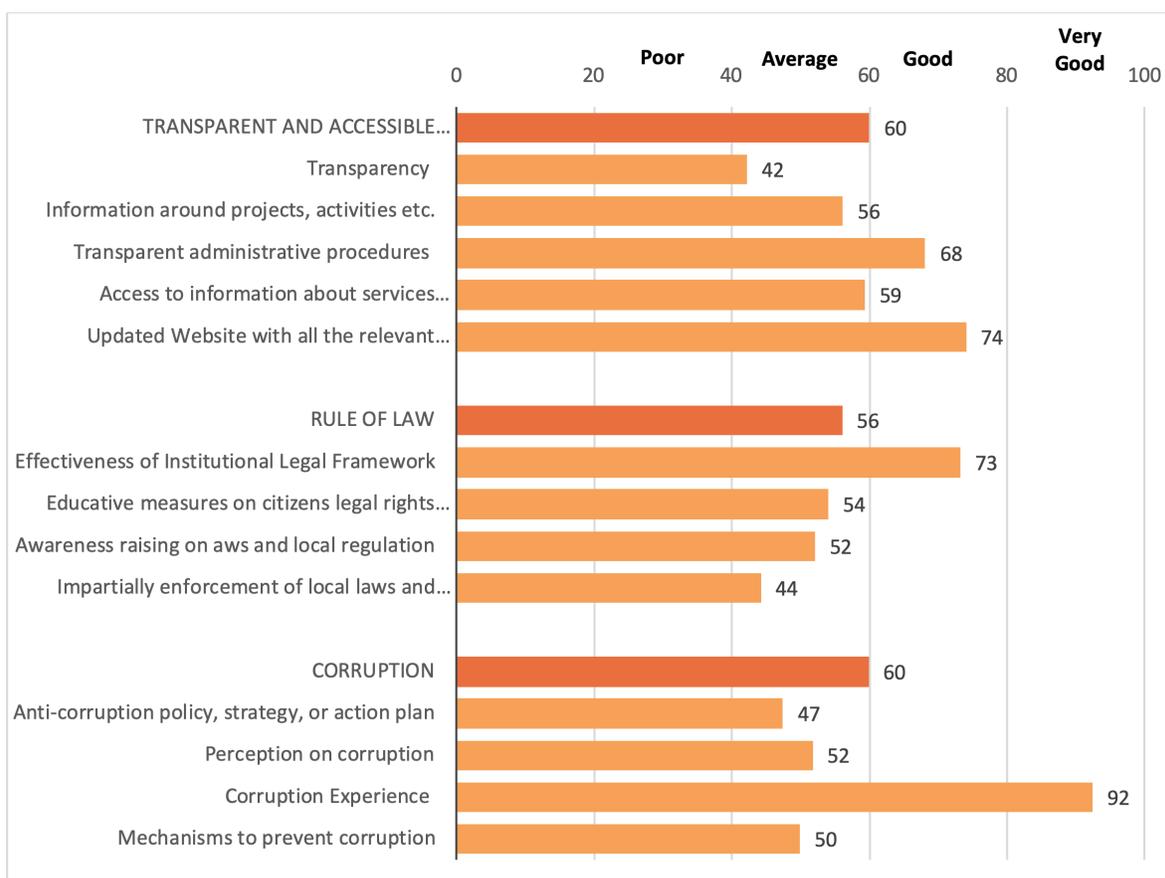
In conclusion, despite being very satisfied in terms of access to municipal service delivery, citizens perceived poor municipal response to the needs of citizens for administrative services. Further, there is a mismatch between the access to services and quality of delivered services. Lower trust in the quality of municipal services is found in the rural population, highlighting a rural-urban disparity. Communities mentioned as their top priorities for local government interventions road maintenance, water supply and sewerage, social assistance and economic aid, and street lighting. Municipalities lack the skills and instruments to improve the public service assessment, which makes it necessary to build reliable and periodical systems to measure public satisfaction and use them to influence their decision-making process.

→ 3.3 Transparency and Rule of Law

Transparency and the rule of law considers transparent access to information by citizens on public service delivery performance and resource planning and utilization, the effectiveness of institutional legal framework on legal rights and obligations, and the degree/incidence of corruption and measures to fight it at the local level. The criterion scored 59 points, ranking within the “average” score range. The evaluation of the three sub-criteria shows remarkably close results. The rule of law scored 56 points, ranking within the “average” score range, whereas transparent and accessible information and corruption were rated each with 60 points, which places them in the threshold of the “good” score range.

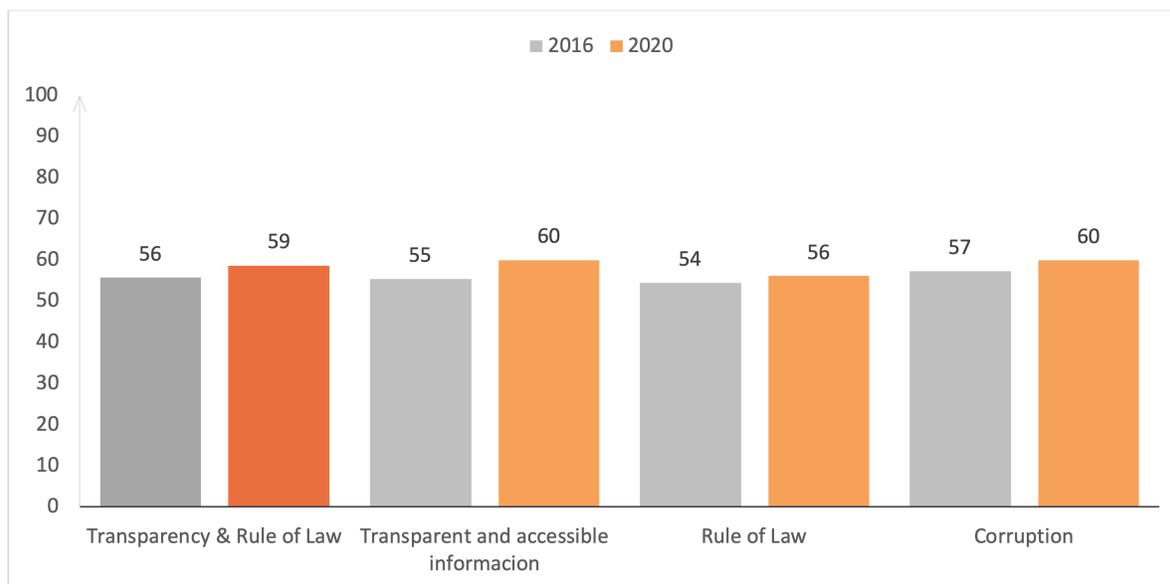
Among 13 assessed indicators under this criterion, the highest ranked is the corruption experience. Those who have had at least one contact with the municipality declared they had not faced corruption (92 points). On the contrary, citizens are quite sceptical on transparency (42 points), impartial enforcement of the laws (44 points), and corruption perception (52 points). Also, the anti-corruption policy, strategy or action plan is another important indicator that scored rather poorly (47 points).

Figure 48. Transparency and rule of law



The comparison between the 2020 and 2016 assessment results indicate a very slight improvement of the overall aggregate score and a slight improvement of its 3 indicators.

Figure 49. Transparency and rule of law criteria



The Law on Local Self-Government specially mandates local government bodies to guarantee transparency of their activities through various transparency initiatives. They have to publish all acts of local self-government bodies on their official website and display them in particular places for public announcements²⁹. Each LGU shall be obligated to appoint a *Transparency Coordinator* and adopt a *Transparency Programme*, ensuring access to public information (laws, bylaws, policies, procurement procedures, spending plans, quality of service standards, etc.) to all, especially for the poorest communities, in accordance with the provisions of the applicable RTI Law²⁹. This law requires from the LGUs to guarantee the right to information enshrined in the Constitution to ensure transparency. Thus, the public authority is obliged to inform the person who have presented a request for information whether they dispose that information or not (Article 3(2)). Taking into considerations the challenges and difficulties encountered by LGs in the implementation of RTI Law, in September 2018, the Commissioner approved a Standard Models of Transparency Programme for Local Self-Government drafted with assistance from STAR2 Project. The model takes into account the general requirements of RTI Law, of Local Self Governance Law, Local Self Finances and other legal acts regulating the activity of LGs, reflecting the standard information to be disclosed to the public by municipalities without request.

The RTI Law obliges also the authority to keep the Register for Requests and Answers (article 8, point 1), update it quarterly and publish in the official website as well as at their premises. The identity of the person requesting information is confidential. The Commissioner for the Right to Information oversees the preparation, approval and distribution of the template programs of transparency, template of the register and its content. As such, the capacities of the Commissioner are very important for the Law enforcement and for a good monitoring of the implementation.

The Law No. 146/2014 “On announcements and public consultations” regulates the process related to announcements and public consultations, it defines the procedures to be followed for guaranteeing the *public participation and transparency* in the policy making and decision making in Albania.

29. Article 15, Law No. 139/2015, on ‘Local Self-Government’,

http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

30. Law No119/2014, on “The Right to Information”, <http://www.eurailus.eu/index.php/en/library/albanian-legislation/send/55-the-right-to-information/111-law-on-the-right-to-information-en-domain.gov.al>.

According to the transparency program, the LGs should do the transparency in their official website by providing information about financial responsibility, organizational aspects and administration of the public services delivery in their communities. All the municipalities have their *official websites*, most of them under the domain.gov.al.

All the municipalities have appointed the Coordinator for the Right to Information and their contact details are included in the official portal www.pyetshtetin.al. All the decisions of the Municipality Councils are presented in the official websites of the municipalities, while a considerable number of municipalities publish these decisions also in the platform vendime.al. Not all the municipalities have adopted the Transparency Program and as such not all of them have it published in their websites. There are cases when instead of a full Transparency Program they have published just some elements of it. Also, not all the municipalities have published the Requests and Answer Registry in their websites.

With reference to the *Rule of Law and Incidence of Corruption*, there are two national laws, which address the fight against corruption at local level, namely, Law on “Public Cooperation in Combating Corruption” and Law on “Whistleblowing and Whistle-Blowers”. The purpose of the Law on “Public Cooperation in Combating Corruption”, is to encourage public participation in the denunciation of corruption, protecting and encouraging people who report corrupt practices of abuse of public authority. Under this law there are established rules, procedures and responsibilities applicable in state institutions for reporting and recording corrupt practices as well as compensation and protection of persons who report such cases³¹.

To further foster the fight against corruption, the Law on ‘Whistleblowing and Whistle-Blowers’ sets out rules for whistleblowing a suspected corruption-related action or practice in public and private sector, establishes a mechanism for whistle-blowers’ protection and states the obligation of public authorities and private entities regarding whistleblowing³². The main purpose of this law is to prevent and address the issue of corruption in the public and private sector. It also seeks to provide the protection to individuals who signal suspected acts of corruption at their place of work thus encouraging whistleblowing of suspected corrupt practices. Under the provision of this law, each municipality is expected to assign this responsibility to a specific unit, which records, administratively investigates and reviews the alleged cases.

Further, the Municipalities following the instructions of the Ministry of Interior and based on the validated methodology with the Ministry of Justice (the Minister of Justice is the National Coordinator against Corruption), are in charge of preparation and implementation of the personalized integrity plans. The integrity plan defines the conceptualize framework for the policies and the measures to prevent the integrity violations by the public employees and to monitor the effect of the implemented measures in the institution. Each municipality, based in a methodology, prepares its own integrity plan in which it identifies all the processes and practices that have the risk for corruption and the level of risk they represent (financial management, human resource management, control and audit, instruments against corruption, social services, administration and management of property, planning administration and territorial development, etc.). These plans should be associated with anti-corruption policy and instruments. The mayor is responsible for the implementation of the integrity plan. The Ministry of Interior is in charge of supervising the implementation of the integrity plans and anti-corruption policies in the local government units. It cooperates and reports at the Ministry of Justice and the National Anticorruption Coordinator on the implementation of the measures envisaged under the National Inter Sectoral Strategy for Anti-corruption. There are 6 municipalities that have prepared and approved the integrity plans with the aim to prevent corruption in their institutions. 10 more municipalities are expected to formulate and approve such plans in the near future.

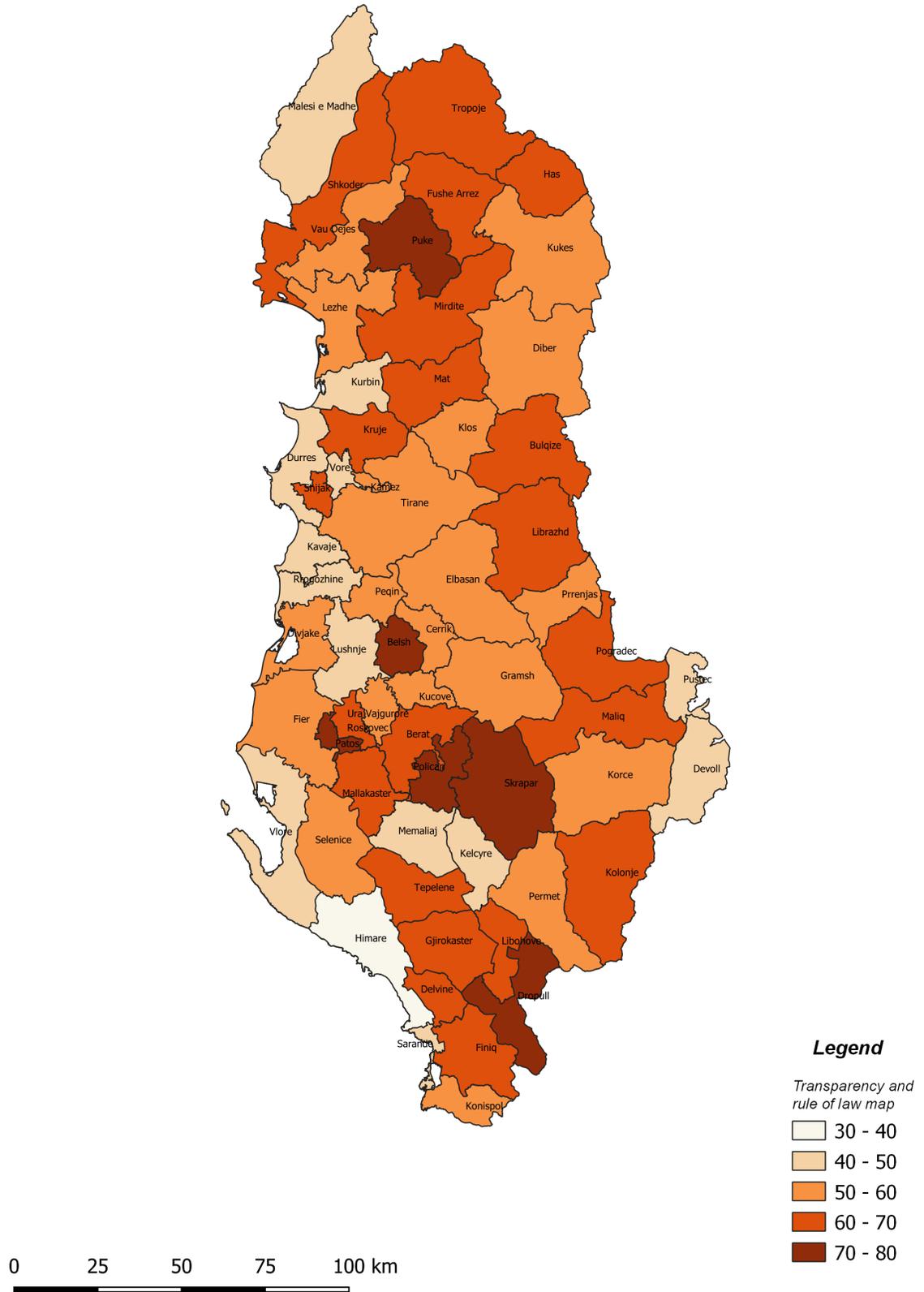
31. Law No. 9508 of 03.04.2006, “On Public Cooperation in Combating Corruption,” <http://www.eurallius.eu/index.php/en/library/albanian-legislation/send/74-combatting-corruption/145-public-cooperation-in-combatting-corruption-en>

32. Law No. 60/2016, “On Whistle-blowing and Whistle-blowers Protection,” <https://www.parliament.al/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ligj-nr.-60-dt.-2.6.2016.pdf>

The National Aggregate Indicator on Transparency and Rule of Law indicates that while an enabling framework with several legislations exists, their implementation is yet slow. Other major challenges expressed across all municipalities under this criterion include lack of sufficient systems and mechanisms within the municipality to inform citizens about the municipal budget, activities, projects, etc., on a regular basis.

The lack of consistent engagement between the citizens and the local governments has led to increasing distance between them and reducing trust in the government and consequently increased lack of credibility about the local government's commitment to transparency. With limited CSOs across the municipalities and inadequate mechanisms of LGUs to promote legal education, legal awareness of citizens has suffered. While there are clearly anti-corruption laws and policies, clear action plans and integrity mechanisms are not set in place with the result that people's mindset and the general culture of corruption still has not changed significantly.

Figure 50. Transparency and rule of law map



3.3.1 TRANSPARENCY

This sub criterion aims to at providing an overview of the municipal and citizen's assessment on local government transparency, the extent of information flow from the municipality towards the community (on local projects, activities, municipal budget or service delivery, the level of transparency of administrative procedures), the extent to each citizens' have access to information on local level performance and the existence of official municipal websites updated with all the relevant information and the level of use of other information tools (media, radio, social media, newspapers etc.). The overall assessment for this sub criterion is 60 points. The citizens have evaluated with 42 points the Transparency in their municipality, which remains at the lower limit of "average" range score.

The indicator on information availability by the municipalities is assessed with 56 points, qualifying within "average" range score. This assessment is the average of the scores given by the municipal staff, community and citizens that varies from "very good" to "average" and "poor". The variation is sharper in the group of 7 largest municipalities, where average citizens score is 40 points, while average municipal staff score is 90 points. The focus group discussions have identified that more than half of the municipalities provide insufficient information to the citizens about local projects, activities and municipality budget. This evaluation result proves that no major developments have happened following the approved Decision by the Albanian Government in February 2015 regarding Open Data Policy and the Establishment of the Open Data Portal³³. The Action Plan for the implementation of this policy envisaged four major actions and 17 commitments to promote transparency and open data, two among which namely Increasing the Access to Information and the Modernization of the Public Service relate to local authorities. The ultimate outcome of this policy would be an improved public access to information and increased levels of citizen participation. The indicator on Information Availability in 2020 was assessed with the same points as in 2016, meaning that the Open Data Policy has not influenced yet the performance of the LGUs.

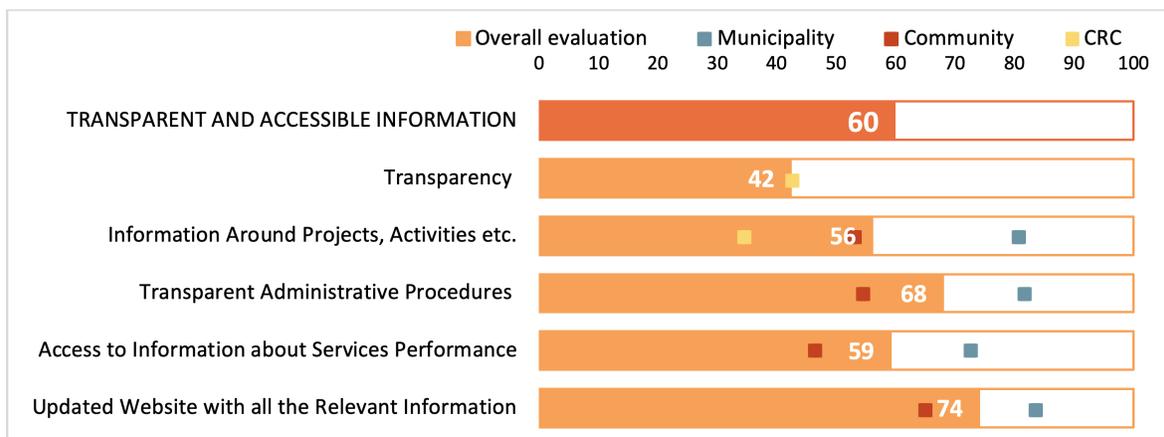
Transparent administrative procedures scored 68 points qualifying within the "good" score range. The focus group discussions evidenced the positive role that e-Albania has played in this direction as a platform that aims to improve service delivery, reduce service delivery time, avoid bureaucracies and reduce corruption of public institutions, including local government bodies. All of the 500 e-services offered on the portal are dedicated to a wide range of users, from unemployed citizens, business, property owners, businesses, students, elderly, Albanians living abroad, civic employees, etc. These services are classified by categories and institutions. According to the information available on the portal, the certificate services, which are administrated by local self-government bodies, are among the most used electronic services on the e-Albania portal.

Access to Information scored 59 points qualifying within the "average" score range. There is a big discrepancy in the evaluation of the community groups and municipal staff for this indicator.

The indicator with the highest assessment is Updated Municipal Website with relevant information that received 74 points ("good"). The variation of the municipal staff assessment with the assessment from the community is lower than for the other indicators under this dimension.

33. CoM Decree No.147, dated 18.02.2015 "Approval of the Policy Document for the implementation of Open Data and Establishment of the Open Data Portal".

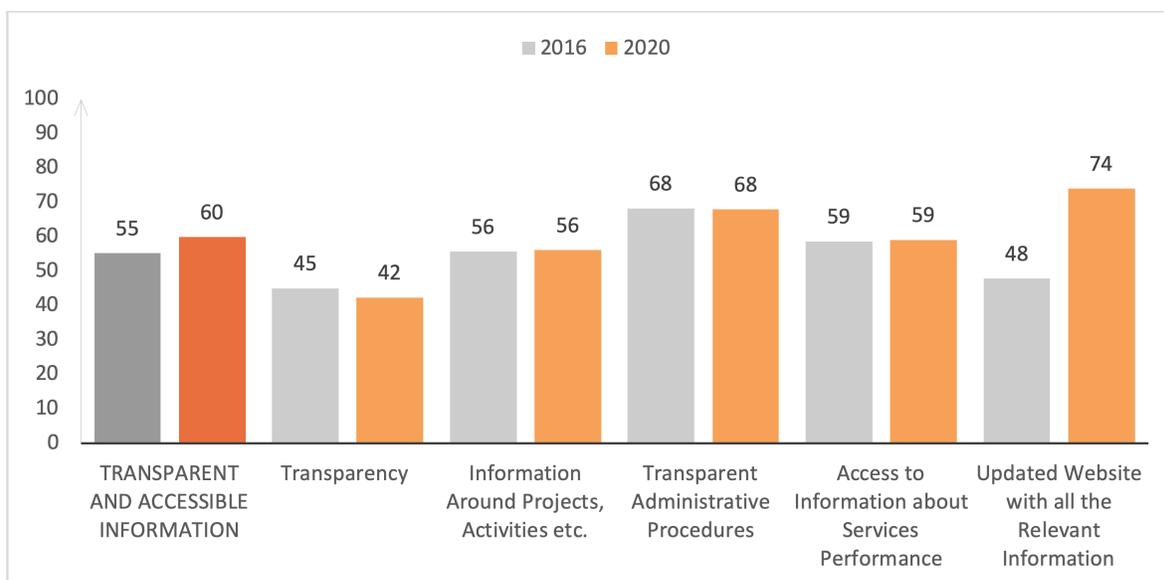
Figure 51. Transparent and accessible information 2020



The comparison between the assessment in 2020 and in 2016 indicates that the entire improvement by 5 points of the sub-criterion Transparent and Accessible Information, is due to the very significant improvement on the “Updated Municipal Website with relevant information” indicator, going up from 48 points in 2016 to 74 points in 2020. Transparency has worsened by three points, while the rest of indicators have not changed.

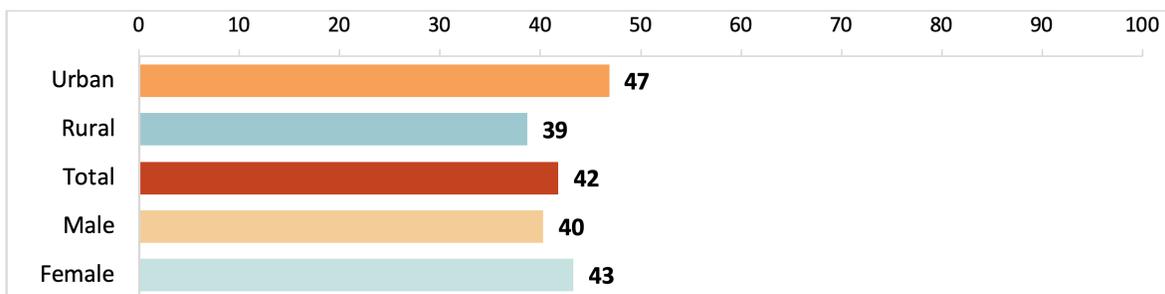
Apparently, it is a lack of finding the proper and effective way to inform the public on their municipality services, plans and projects and further involve the citizen in local government’s decision making. That will explain why the average scoring of 4 indicators for the transparency of local government, is 64 points, while the scoring from the broad public is 42 points. That would also explain the contradiction that all indicators measured with the participation of focus groups was the same or better compared to 2016, while to the broad public the average perception of the transparency level of local government has decreased.

Figure 52. Transparent and accessible information – comparing criteria



Common citizens (CRC) view local administration transparency as “average” in urban areas and “poor” in rural areas, although the score difference is not significant (47 points urban vs. 39 points rural). The assessment is almost the same gender-wise. Comparing this year’s assessment results with those derived in 2016 it is noticed that there is a slightly worsened situation in each of the presented dimensions.

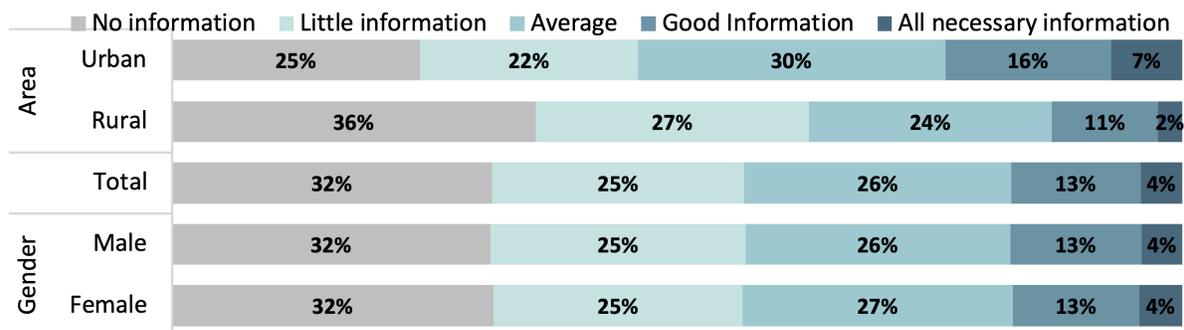
Figure 53. Local administration transparency from citizens’ perspective



The assessment of the Municipal Information flow indicates that there is still a high share of citizens who have little information about projects, activities and public services. There is a low percentage of people that declare to have good or all necessary information (in total 17%).

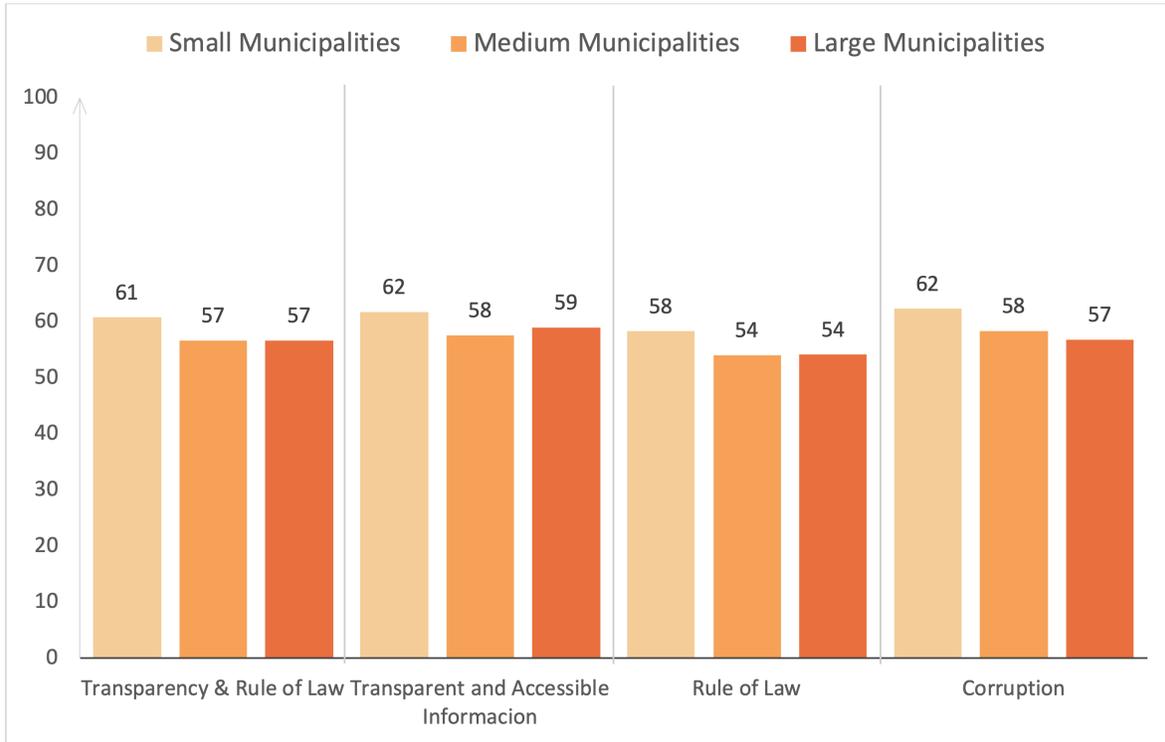
While the pattern of level of access to information about project, activities and public services is identical for females and males, it is uneven for the urban and rural population. Thus, 63% of rural population have no or little information, while for the urban population that figure is 47%.

Figure 54. Municipal information flow around projects, activities and public services according to citizens’ perspective



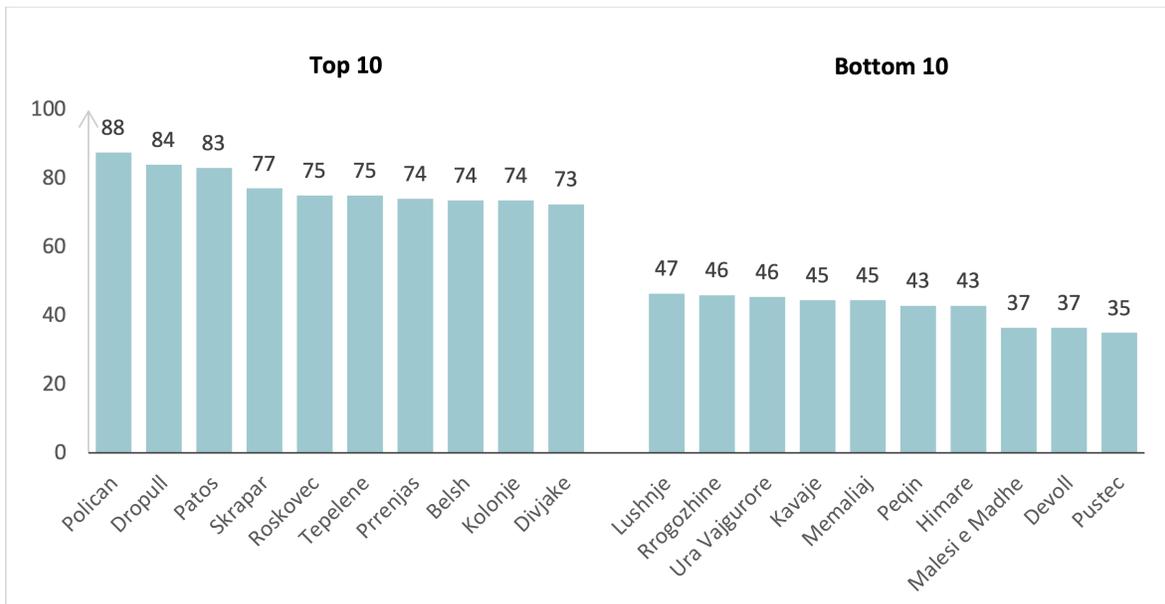
Transparency and rule of law scored equally or almost equally for the groups of medium-sized and large municipalities. The small-sized group of municipalities is performing on average better than the two other groups regarding the three indicators under the transparency and rule of law criteria (the overall score for the criterion is 61 for small-sized municipalities and 57 points for medium-sized and large municipalities). The biggest difference size-wise has been noticed in the corruption indicator, where the groups of small-sized municipalities scored 62 points compared to 57 points, or 5 points less, for the large size group.

Figure 55. Transparency and rule of law criteria by municipality size



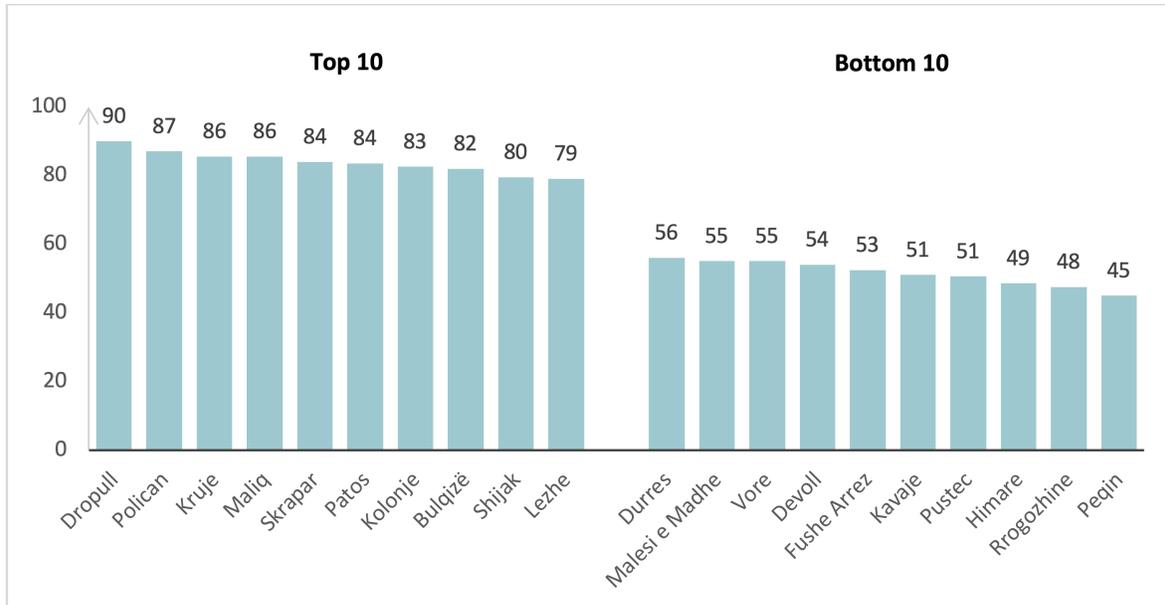
Poliçan is the highest scoring municipality (88 points) in terms of the citizen access to information on performance of local service, resources available and utilization of resources, whereas Pustec is the lowest scoring (35 points). The top 10 and bottom 10 list includes only small-sized municipalities in this case.

Figure 56. Citizen access to information on performance of local services and resources



The highest scoring municipalities for transparent administrative procedures are Dropull and Polican, whereas Peqin and Rrogozhina are the worst. Most of the top-10 ranked municipalities for transparent administrative procedures are also listed in the top 10 when it comes to citizen access to information on performance of local public services, and the same seems true also for the bottom 10. Durres and Vora are ranked in the bottom 10 municipalities regarding transparent administrative procedures, with 56 and 55 points, respectively.

Figure 57. Transparent administrative procedures (Top 10 – Bottom 10)



In terms of the frequency of receiving information, the main source for the citizens to get informed on city matters is local TV (40%, as the first choice and 83% mentioned in total), which more than in 2016 assessment (33% as the first choice and only 47% mentioned in total). National TV stations come second, with 27% mentioning it as the first choice, which is less than 4 years ago (32%), although mentioned 73%, much more than in 2016. National newspapers improved its ranking as an information source significantly, from the 6th place in 2016, to the third in 2020.

Social media, municipality websites and announcement walls are the least used information sources for the citizens, whereas in-person visits to municipalities seem to be a rare option. However, that is true only for generic information on city matters. From the interviews with the focus groups, it turned out that when it comes to searching for specific information on any services or issues affecting directly the citizen's family, he or she goes straight on the municipality's website/portals and in the social media and, if necessary, visits municipality offices in person.

Figure 58. Main information sources used by citizens concerning city matters and various activities of their municipality

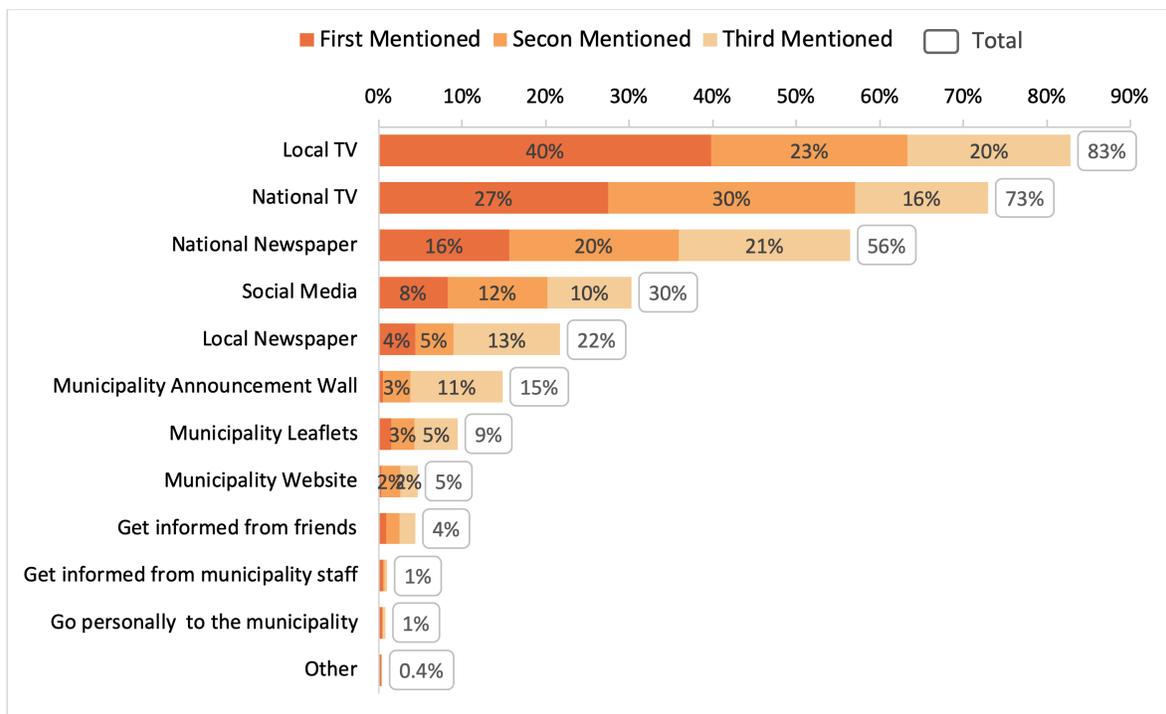
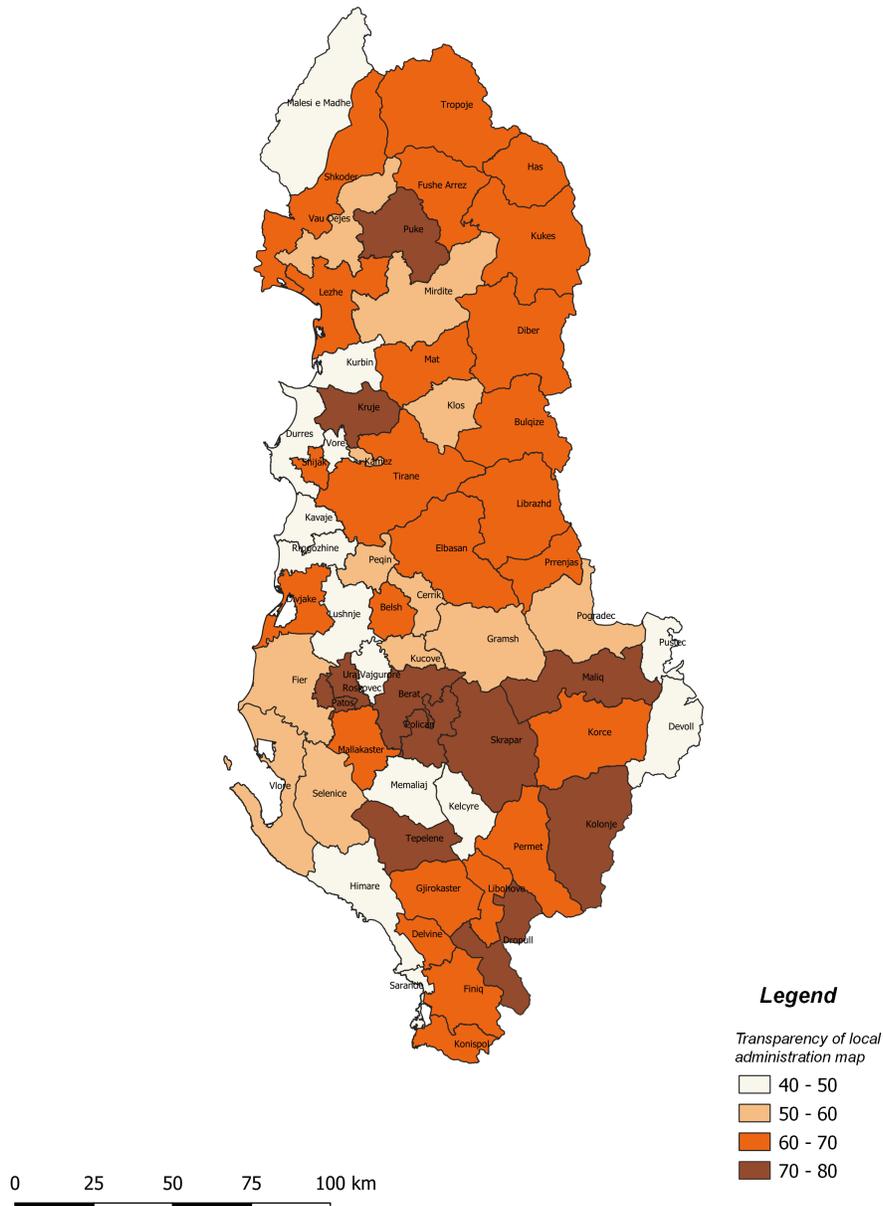


Figure 59. Local administration transparency map



In conclusion, people perception in relation to their local government unit transparency has not changed. They are sceptical and mostly have scarce information about projects, services, and activities. Significant differences exist in the perceptions of municipalities and citizens meaning that either the municipalities are too optimistic, or the citizens are not well-informed on municipality services, plans and projects. Communities have average access to information on the performance of local services, resources available and utilization of these resources. The transparency of administrative procedures for issuing building permits, business licenses etc. scored the same as in 2016. Digital service delivery platforms have started to reduce the red tape and corruption. All municipalities have an official website and the quality of information there is 'good' and regularly up to date in most of the municipalities. The citizens' perception of transparency is lower in rural areas and so is information on projects, activities, and services.

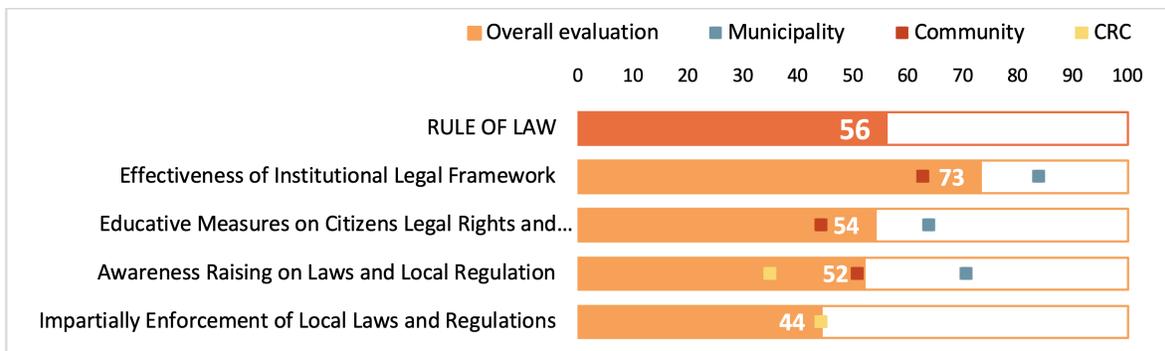
3.3.2 RULE OF LAW

The *Rule of Law* sub-criterion has received an average total score of 56 points for all municipalities. It aims at measuring the level of Rule of Law at local level and is composed of four indicators, namely the Effectiveness of the Institutional Legal Framework, Ensuring Equal Rights for all citizens (women, man, youth, and vulnerable groups); the existence of municipal measures in place to inform citizens about their legal rights and obligations; the extent to which local government raise Awareness through its own website or public media (radio, newspapers, and social media) about Laws and Local Regulations; and the extent to which the municipality Enforces Laws and Regulations Impartially.

The Effectiveness of Institutional Legal Framework indicator is rated with the highest score (73 points) qualifying within “good” score range. The main valid concern here is about land property legal framework (obtaining property titles and regulation to correct records of overlapping in registers), which leave room for subjectivism by municipal officers.

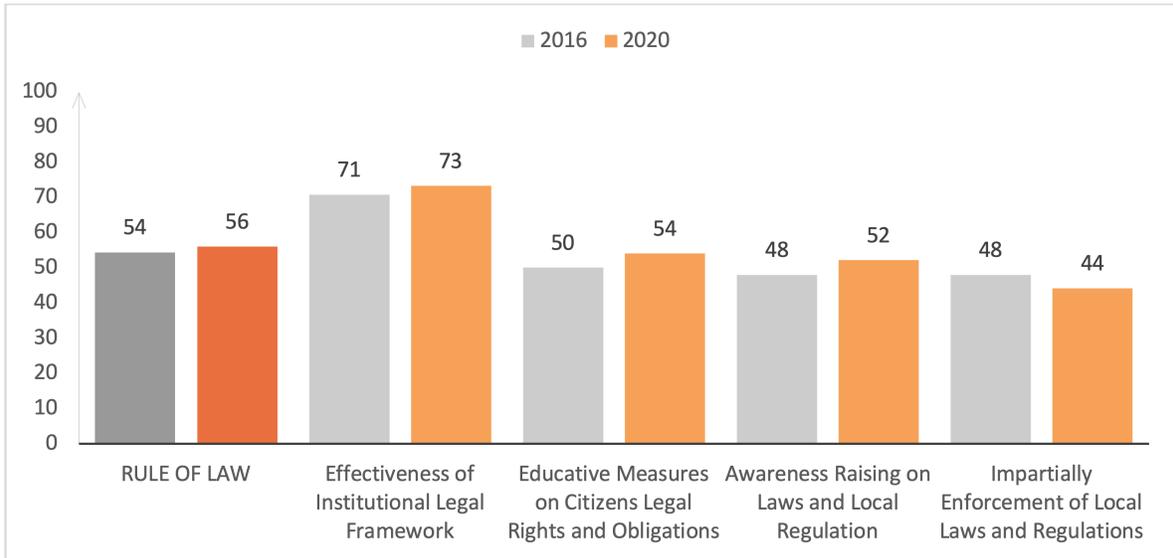
The law enforcement indicator was the lowest-rated (44 points), falling within the “average” score range. A large discrepancy exists in the perception of citizens, community and municipal staff regarding the assessed indicators under this dimension.

Figure 60. Rule of law: indicators



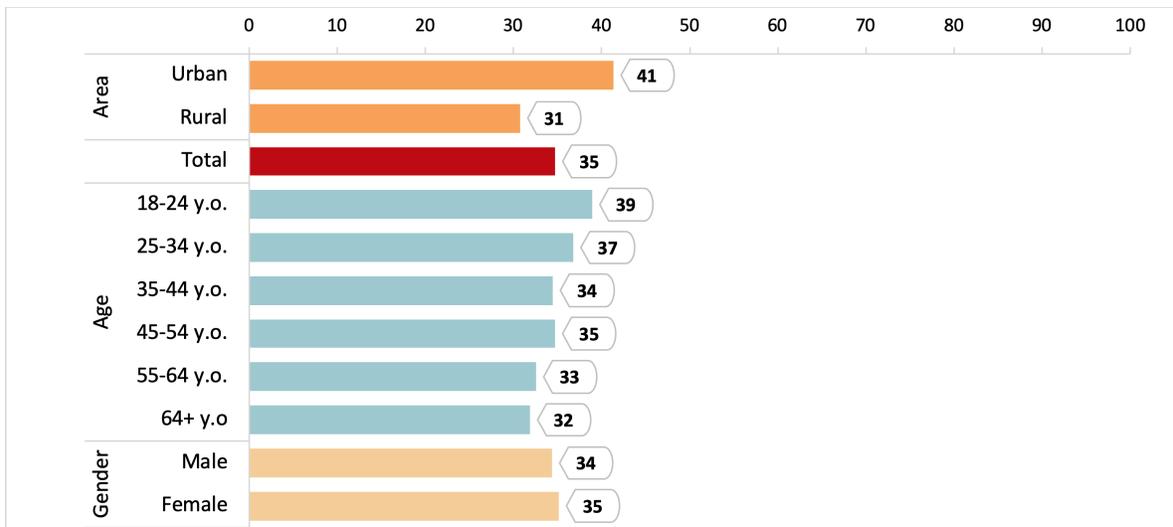
The comparison between the assessment of Rule of Law in 2020 with the one in 2016 indicates a slight increase in the overall aggregate scores as well as for each indicator, with the exception of the impartial enforcement of local laws and regulations that has gone down by 4 points.

Figure 61. Rule of law – comparing criteria



Local government awareness raising on laws and local regulations seems to perform better in urban areas compared to the rural ones (41 vs. 31 points), and for the age group between 18 and 34 years old. No real gender difference is noticed.

Figure 62. Local government awareness raising on laws and local regulations from citizens' perspective



An important dimension of the rule of law is *impartial enforcement of laws and local regulations* for which the citizens (CRC) consider local governments to be operating at average levels (44 points). While there are minor gender-based differences in perception in favour of females, urban inhabitants perceive municipal authorities to be slightly better in this indicator compared to the rural community (Figure 63). Overall, with a moderate advancement of the justice reform, Albania has mostly experienced a negative trend in the judicial system and the enforcement of laws and regulations. As a result, deficiencies in the rule of law have continued to be an obstacle.

Enforcement of the laws and regulations is viewed as more impartial in rural areas than in urban areas, with 4 points of difference and slightly better for females than for males.

Figure 63. Impartiality in enforcing laws and local regulations

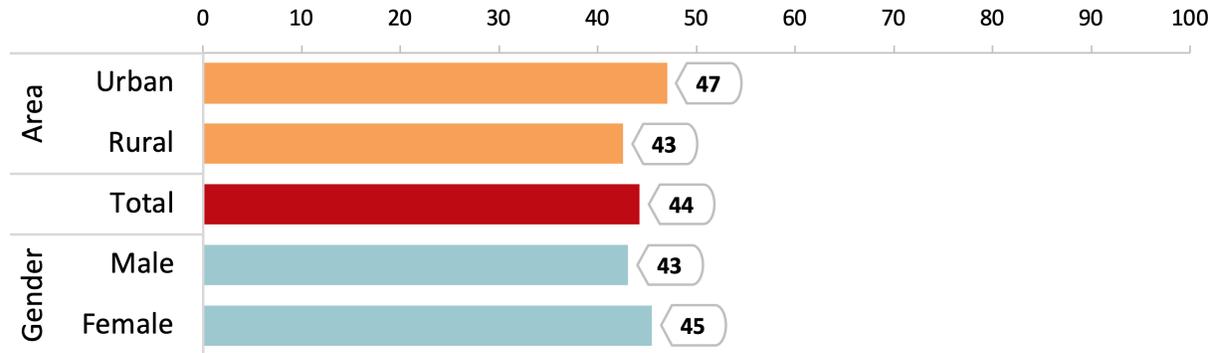
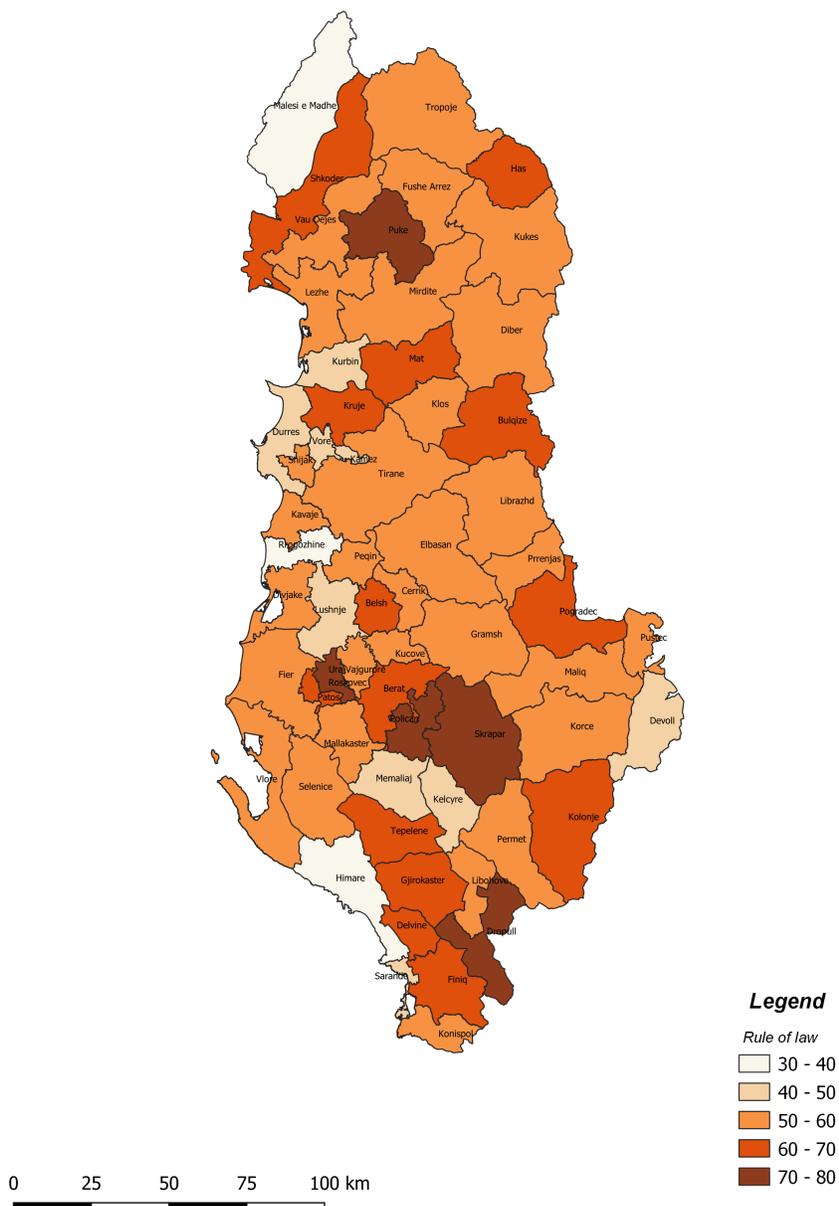


Figure 64. Rule of law map



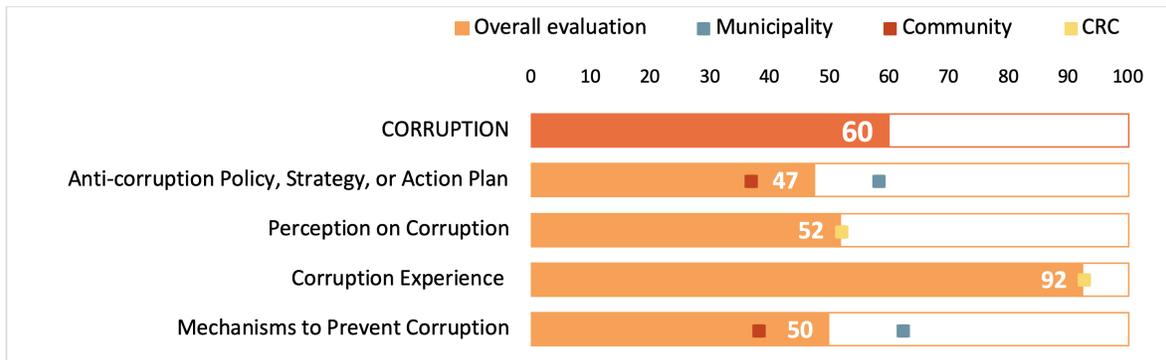
In conclusion, while there is a good legal framework in place, citizens perceive that the impartial enforcement of laws and regulations is not yet a common practice and it has deteriorated over the last three years. LGUs have achieved a higher awareness of the population in the urban areas compared to rural areas.

3.3.3 INCIDENCE OF CORRUPTION

At an aggregate level, the *incidence of corruption* received *60 points*, qualifying within the “good” score range. It looks at the existence of anti-corruption policies, strategies, action plans and mechanisms to prevent corruption in municipalities, the citizen perceived level of corruption at local level and the experience of citizens with corruption in the local administration.

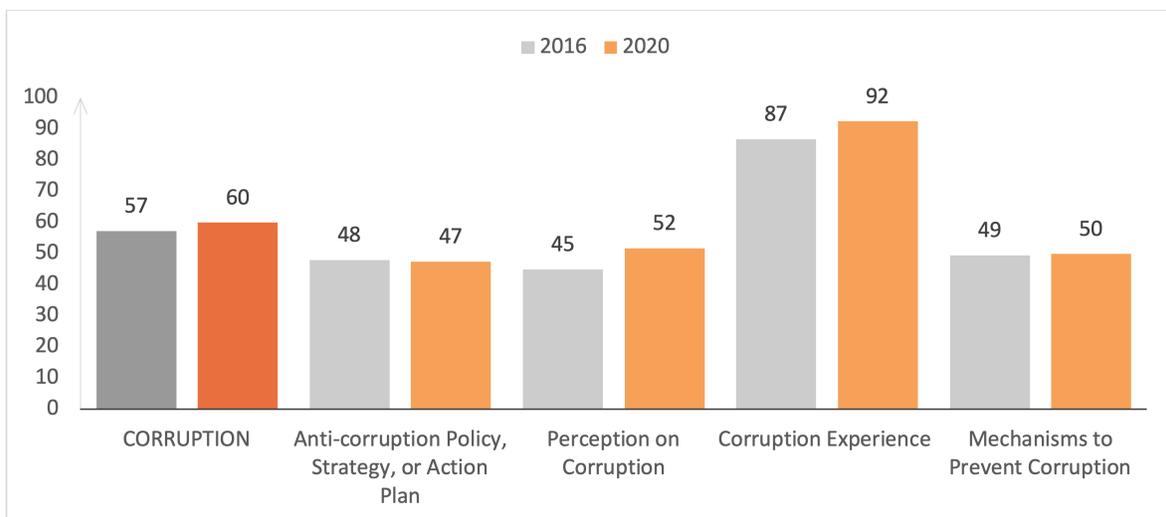
Experience with corruption of the citizens who have contacted at least once the municipalities is almost 0, whereas the indicator of perceived corruption assessed within the “average” score range. Regarding two other indicators assessed based on the community dialogues and municipal staff focus groups, they stand within the “average” score range (47 and 50 points, respectively). There is a strong correlation between scores in those two indicators. This might be linked with the need to back up implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy with local policies, action plans and mechanisms to prevent the corruption. Municipalities of Poliçan, Patos and Belsh have scored well both in anti-corruption strategies and mechanisms to prevent corruption. On the opposite end, Devoll, Pustec, Kelcyra, Himara have poor scores on both criteria. Among large municipalities, Tirana is performing close to “poor” in terms of both indicators.

Figure 65. Incidence of corruption 2020



If comparing the 2020 assessment to 2016, we find that there is an improvement in the overall assessment of the sub-criterion mainly due to the improvement of the perception on corruption and less corruption experience.

Figure 66. Incidence of corruption – comparing criteria



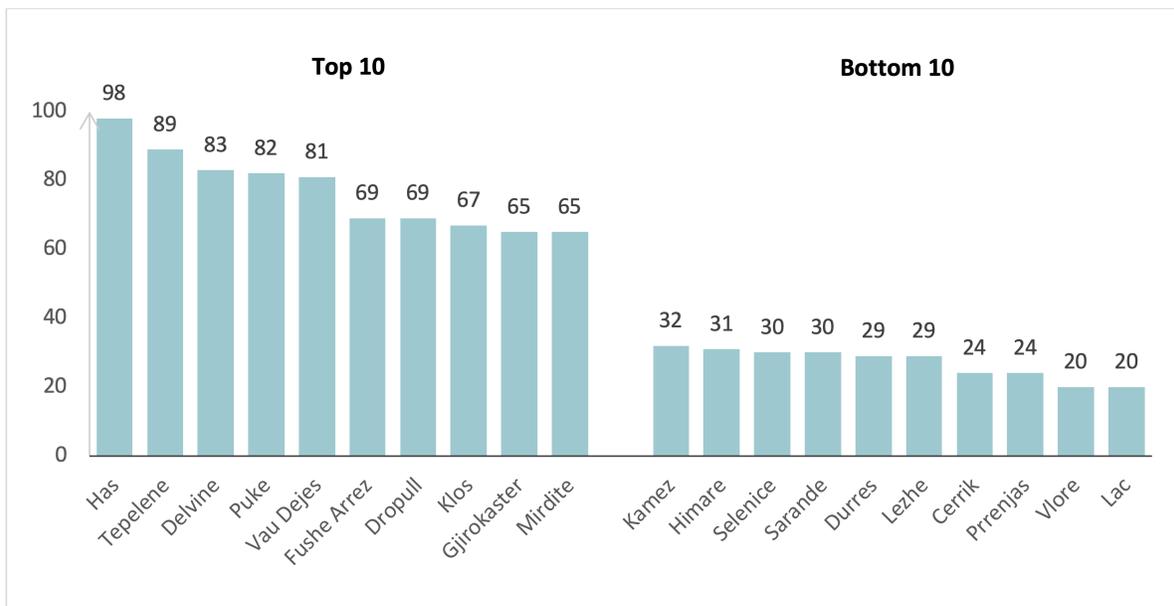
Although, there are in place *anti-corruption policies, strategies and action plans dealing with corruption, or systems/mechanisms to prevent corruption not only at the national and local level*, yet as data reveals, at an average level this two dimensions are evaluated with an aggregate score of 47 and 50 points respectively. The CDs and municipal officials have evidenced that around 72% of the municipalities have not yet an anticorruption strategy, policy or action plan, but they rely only in the mechanisms defined by the law such as whistle-blowers, citizens' complaints in the portals as well as the internal/High State Audit findings and recommendations. In some of the municipalities there exists local anticorruption plans and, in many cases, they call it the integrity plan, which also envisages mechanisms to prevent corruption. The staff of the municipality of Tirana declare that they currently lack a dedicated anti-corruption plan, but it is in the drafting process, while the CD found that the municipality provides the opportunity to report corruption cases. However, there are not follow-up results in that regard. From the dialogues, we learn that internal audit is viewed as the main mechanism to prevent corruption.

Thus, Municipalities of Poliçan, Patos and Belsh are scoring well in both anti-corruption strategies and mechanisms to prevent the corruption. While on the opposite side Devoll, Pustec, Këlcyrë, Himarë have scored poor on both criteria.

There are five municipalities with a very low citizens' perception about corruption. These are the Municipalities of Has, Tepelena, Delvina, Puka and Vau i Dejës. The most corrupted Municipalities from the citizens' perception are the municipalities of Lac, Vlora, Prrenjas and Cërrik. Municipalities that are not in the charts below are score between the range of 65-32 points, suggesting that in general citizens perceive municipalities as problematic in terms of corruption.

Large municipalities are scored "poor" for this indicator, with the average scoring of them at 37 points. Shkodra Municipality (53 points) is the best performer among the large municipalities sub-group. Differently from the rest of indicators, in the case of citizens' perception on corruption there are 3 large municipalities (Vlora, Durrës and Kamëz) listed in the Bottom 10.

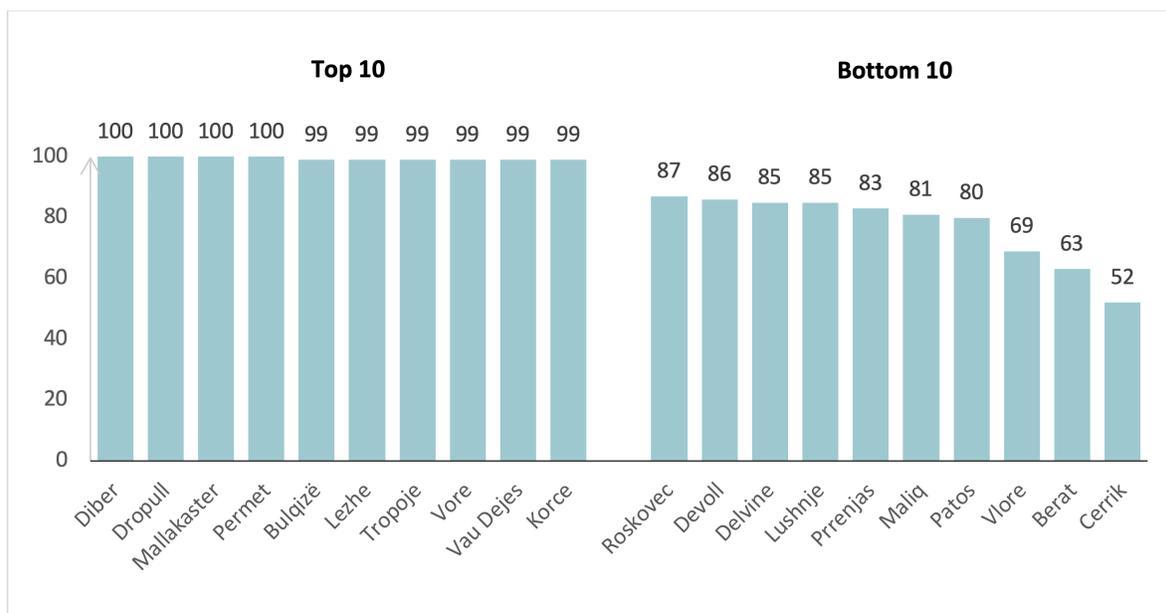
Figure 67. Corruption Perception (Top 10 – Bottom 10)



In the vast majority of the municipalities, the situation with the corruption faced by citizens themselves during their personal experience with municipalities it is very good. In four of them, the municipalities of Dibër, Devoll, Mallakastër, Përmet respectively, there was no surveyed citizen with any reported corruption experience. The worse scores municipalities regarding the corruption experience are the municipalities of Cërrik, Berat and Vlora where 31% to 48% of the citizens have experienced cases of bribes or corruption during the last 12 months.

Referring to the Top 10 and Bottom 10 municipalities in terms of corruption experiences by the citizens who have contacted at least once the municipality, it results that Top 10 municipalities have 0 corruption experienced by the citizens.

Figure 68. Corruption Experience (Top 10 – Bottom 10)

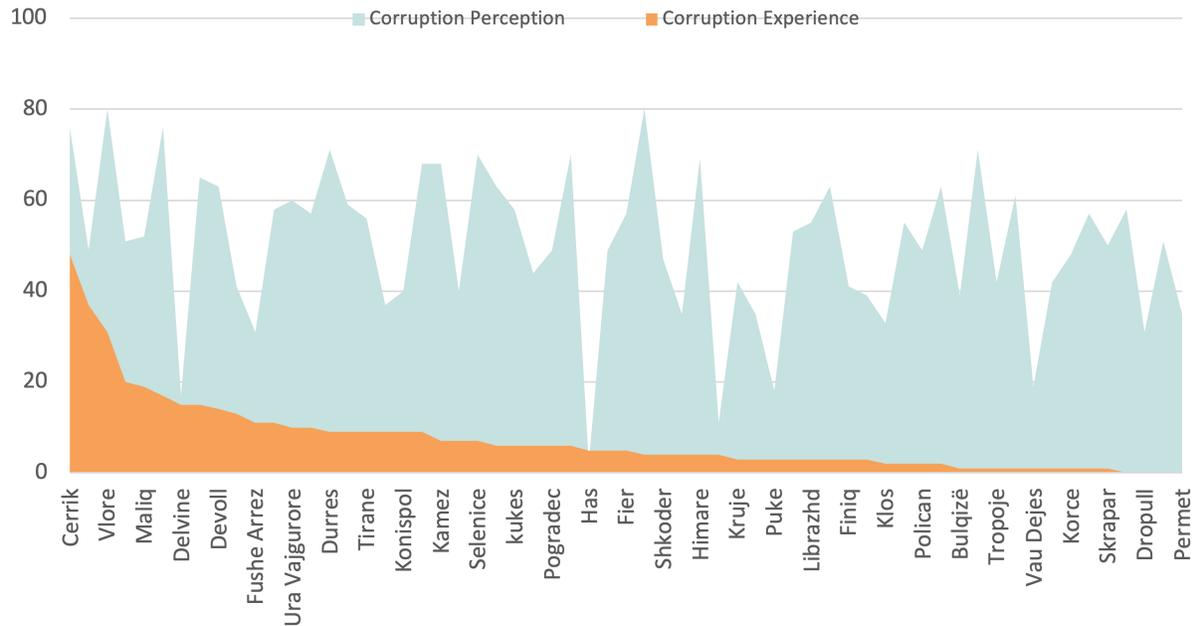


- **“CORRUPTION EXPERIENCE”** INDICATOR REPRESENTS THE % OF CITIZENS THAT HAVE HAD AT LEAST ONE CONTACT WITH THE MUNICIPALITY DURING LAST 12 MONTHS AND DECLARE THAT NO BRIBE IS ASKED AND PAID.

In almost all municipalities there is discordance between the perception of corruption and the corruption experience. This significant difference, which we have seen as somehow moderate in the case of transparency indicators, might be caused by two main factors: the level of information and psychological factors. The majority of the citizens may lack information on the transparency systems and anti-corruption measures in municipalities and, as a result, their judgement is based on the negative cases rumoured within the community. Consequently, the perception is more negative than the reality.

Around 50% of the citizens did not have any direct experience with the municipality for over 1 year and their assessment is completely based on others’ opinions and the media. In almost all municipalities, citizens who did not have any personal experience with the municipality gave lower ratings compared to those who had such personal experiences.

Figure 69. Perception on corruption (Top 10 – Bottom 10)



- **“CORRUPTION EXPERIENCE”** INDICATOR IN THIS CASE IS CALCULATED AS THE SHARE OF SURVEYED CITIZENS THAT HAVE HAD AT LEAST ONE CONTACT WITH THE MUNICIPALITY TO RECEIVE A CERTAIN SERVICE AND BRIBE IS IMPLIED FOR RECEIVING THE SERVICE.

No gender-based or rural/urban difference exists in the perception of corruption. Citizens have the same perception on corruption regardless the community they live in or their gender.

Findings reveal that the above citizen perception mostly stems from discussions with friends/family (61 per cent) and less from personal experience (26 per cent) and the media (9 per cent). Compared to 2016 assessment, the perception of corruption stemming from discussions with friends/ family has increased, while the one based on personal experiences and media information has decreased. Under these conditions, citizen platforms to report corruption practices, an increased media role in following, investigating and informing corruption cases, and the implementation of the findings and recommendation of the internal and Supreme State Audit become crucially important.

Figure 70. Corruption perception level for the municipal government

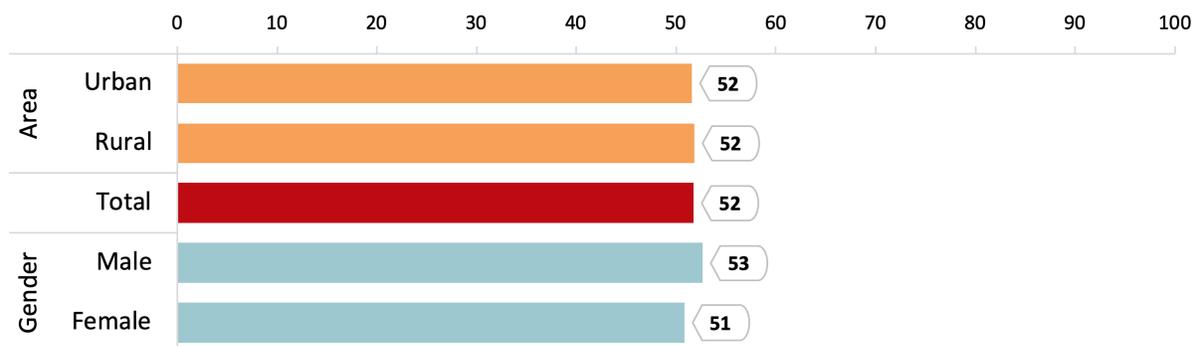
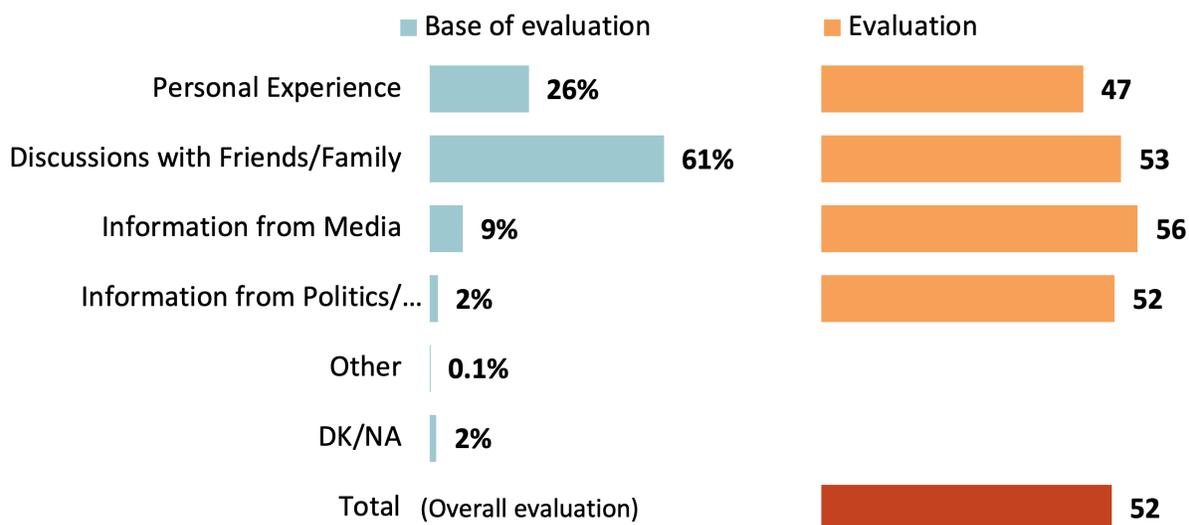
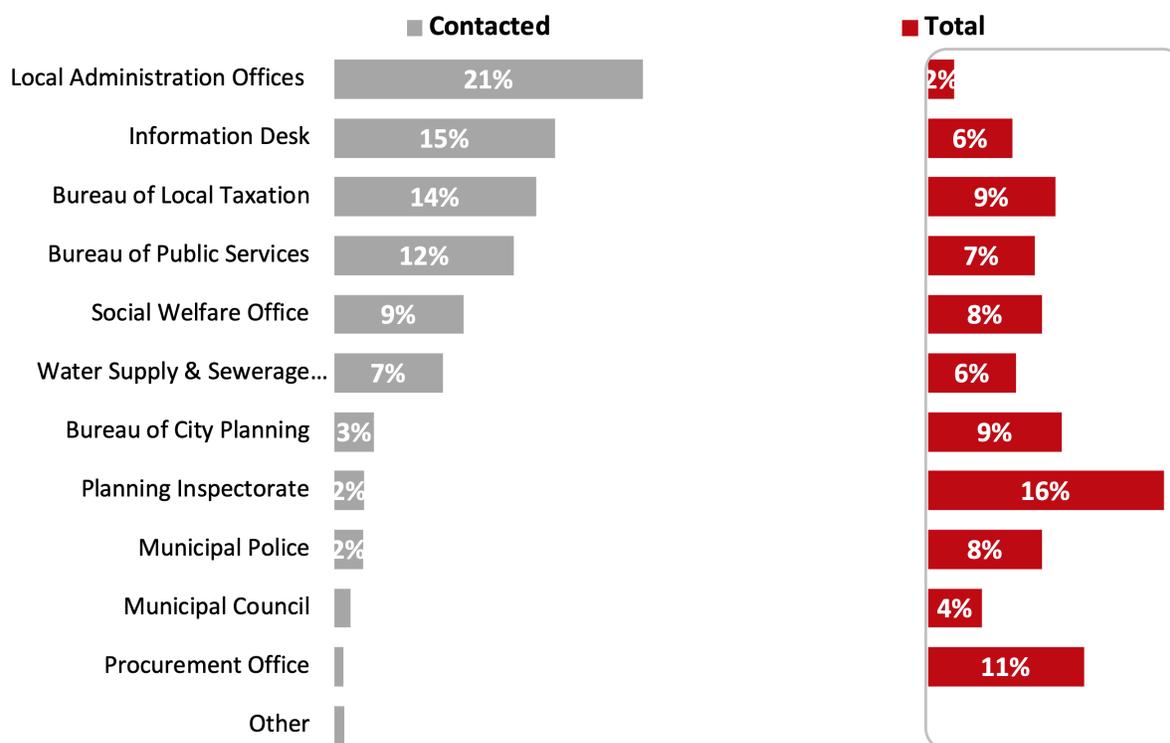


Figure 71. Reasons for citizen-perceived corruption



Citizens (having had personal contact with the local administration over the last 12 months) report that the most problematic structures regarding corruption practices are the Planning Inspectorate, Procurement Office, Bureau of City Planning and Bureau of Local Taxation. **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.** presents the share of citizens who state they visited municipal offices over the last year and the share of those admitting that at some point bribe was implied to receive the requested service.

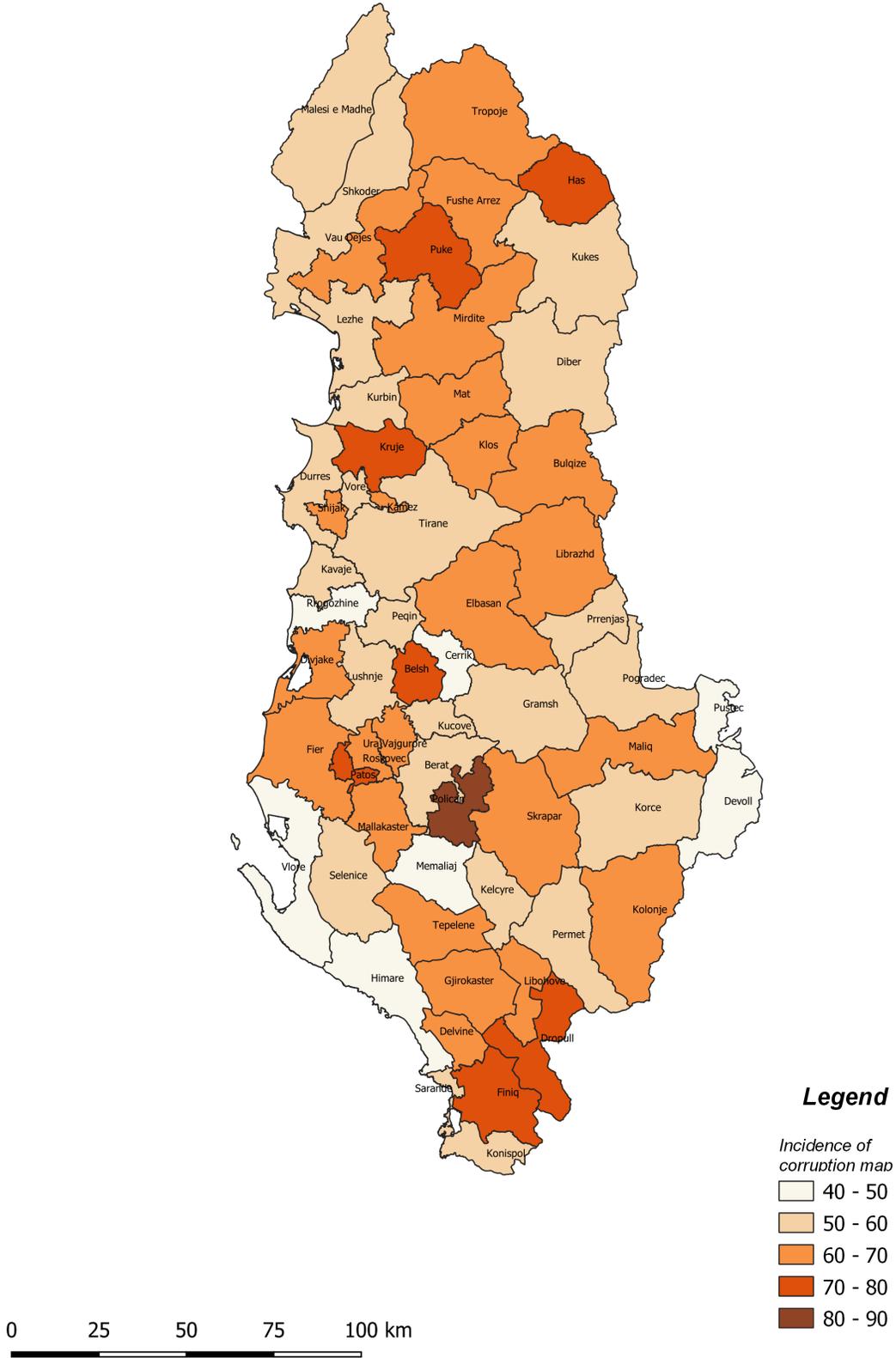
Figure 72. Corruption incidence in municipal offices contacted in the last 12 months



In conclusion, there has been no evident change in the incidence of corruption in 2020, compared with 2016, while a slight improvement has been marked in the citizens' perception of corruption. Citizens' perception regarding corruption in their local government stands at high levels across large municipalities, and at average levels across the rest of municipalities. This is a perception mainly stems from discussions with friends, rather than being result of a direct personal experience. 72% of the municipalities do not yet have an anti-corruption strategy, policy or action plan and they rely on daily practices of addressing complaints and following the audit findings. Follow-up on complaints is poor, whereas the internal audit is considered the main mechanism to prevent corruption. There is discordance between the perception of corruption and corruption experience at that.

No gender-based and rural/urban difference was identified in the corruption perception. The role of transparency programmes, the whistle-blower officials, the existence of online portals where citizens can report corrupt practices and internal/external audits are not sufficient.

Figure 73. Incidence of corruption map



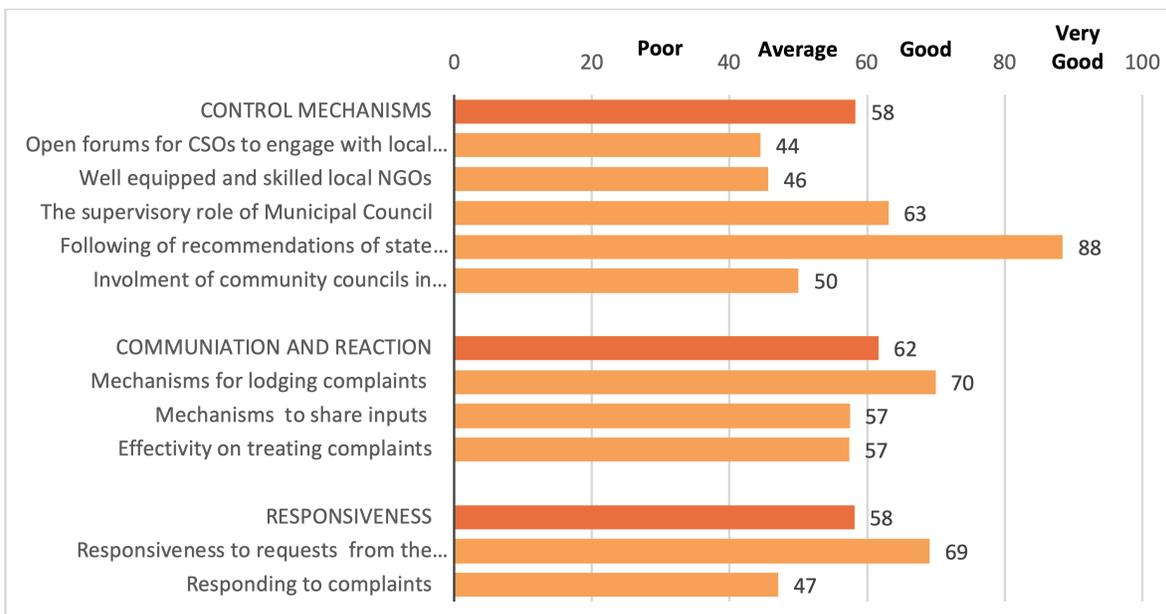
→ 3.4 Accountability

The “accountability” criterion that aims to map the municipality’s ability “to be accountable” to the citizens through institutional and control mechanisms, effectiveness of complaint recourse mechanisms for different groups, and the level of local government’s responsiveness to citizens and businesses, is given a score of 59 points indicating an average performance.

The difference between the overall score across the three sub-criteria is small. Communication and reaction is the highest scoring sub-criterion, falling within the “good” score range, whereas control mechanisms and responsiveness has not yet moved past the “average” threshold.

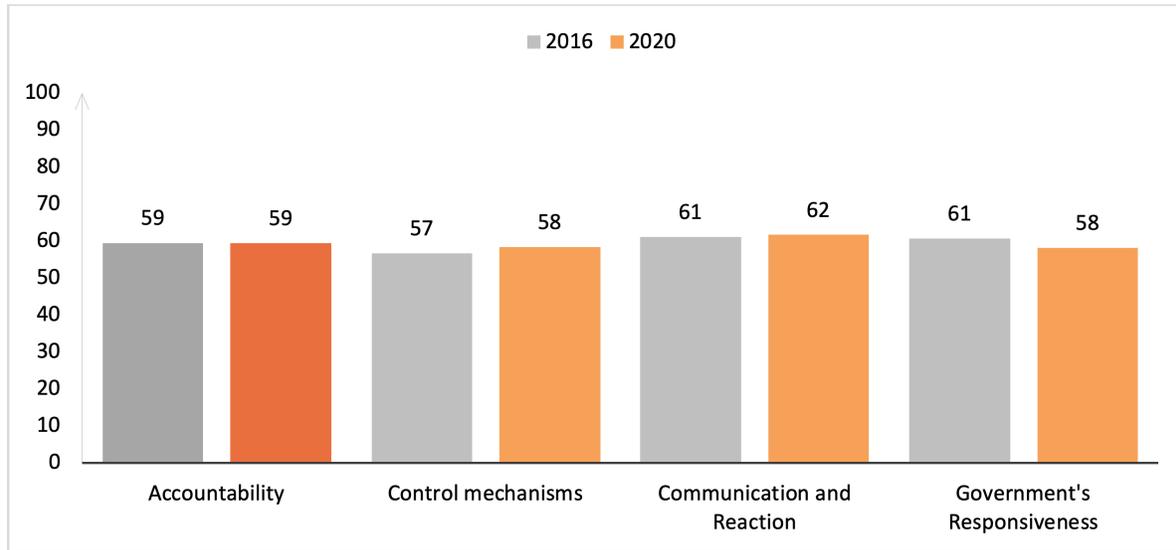
Among the indicators, *following the recommendations of state audit* is well above other indicators and the only one receiving a “very good” rating.

Figure 74. Accountability



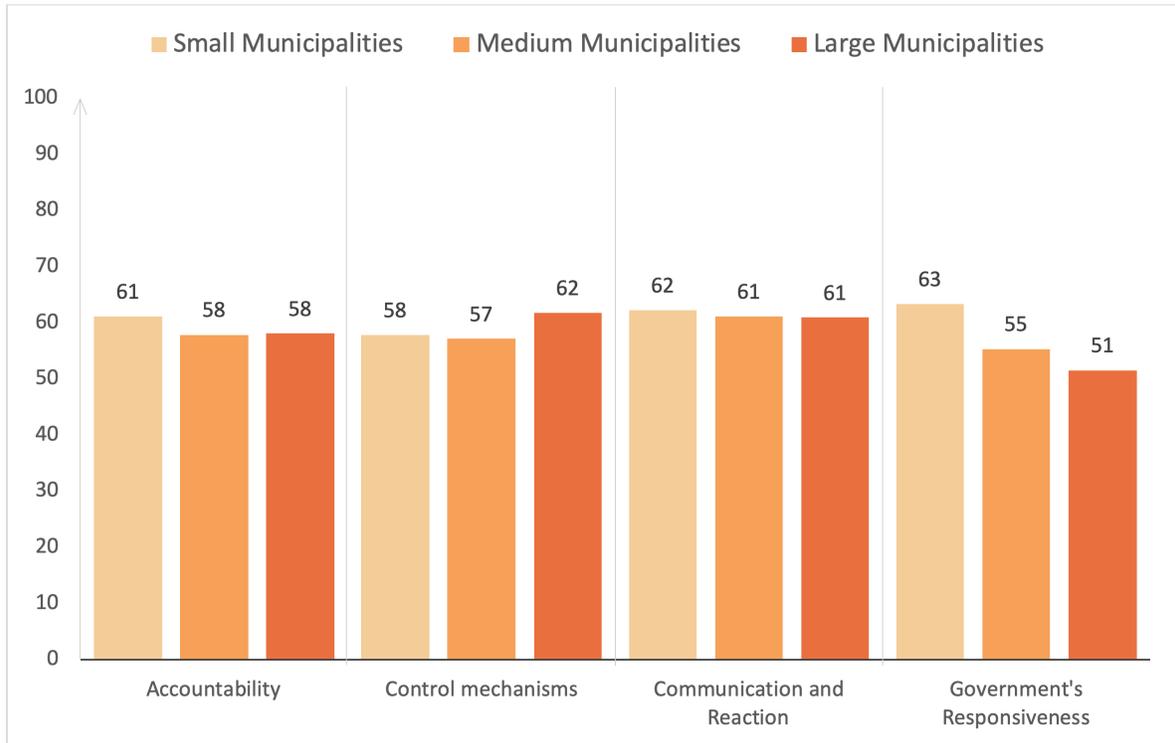
When comparing findings of the 2020 and 2016 assessments, we find that accountability has not changed, but the situation has deteriorated for government responsiveness that has moved down from “good” to “average” rating. The two other sub-criteria have shown a very slight improvement.

Figure 75. Accountability Criteria



Small-sized municipalities have a higher score under the accountability criteria than the medium-sized and large municipality groups, 61 vs. 58 points. The reason for that difference is the indicator of government responsiveness that has a higher rating among small municipalities, compared to the large ones (63 points vs. 51 points). The situation is reversed, although with a narrower difference, when it comes to the indicator of control mechanisms. The group of large municipalities has scored an average of 62 points against 58 of the group of small-sized municipalities.

Figure 76. Accountability criteria by municipality size



3.4.1 CHECKS AND BALANCES

The establishment of a checks-and-balance system is important for the sustainability of an effective governance. The sub-criterion of checks and balances (control mechanisms) looks into whether institutions have effective control, supervision and sanctioning power over the local administration.

The sub-criterion of the control mechanism intends to assess the extent of citizen and CSO participation in local planning and budgeting, the CSOs degree of preparedness to fulfil their role vis-à-vis local governance, the supervisory role of the municipal council in relation to the local administration, the state of implementation of the findings of the Supreme State Audit and the community and citizens' councils involved in monitoring of the local administration performance. The assessment has been made both by the community focus groups and municipal staff and covers all indicators, except for the last one that also involves the citizen reporting card.

Open forums for CSOs to engage with local authorities has received the lowest score, 44 points, therefore ranking at the lower end of the "average" score range. There are several laws whereby citizen participation in local decision making is defined, including the NCSDLG 2015- 2020. Thus, the Strategy provides that all decisions at the local level should be taken with the participation of citizens and follow the principles of equality, inclusiveness and transparency. In addition, Law No. 146/2014, "On Notification and Public Consultation," specifies that local authorities shall take all necessary measures to facilitate public consultation, including: publication of the notification of consultation and all related information regarding the document under consultation, publication of the annual plan related to policy making in the transparency program, provision of information in all consultation stages following the publication of the draft act, such as the review of the comments and recommendations for its improvement, the organization of public debates and the adoption of the act. The same law makes it an obligation upon public institutions to publish all laws and policy documents, at the drafting stage and upon approval, and receive feedback and recommendations. If recommendations are turned down, a summary of arguments on the relevant refusal should be made public. The law provides options for complaints where provisions on consultations are not observed, based on the claims by interest groups. However, the law does not foresee any administrative sanctions against public institutions or the responsible person for notification and public consultation; neither does it foresee any appealing procedure against the decision of the public authority.

Another opportunity for citizens' participation in the decision making is the legal right foreseen in Article 20 of the Law No. 139/2015 "On Local Self-Government" by which each community, through its authorized representatives, or not less than 1% of the inhabitants of the municipality, has the right to propose citizens' initiatives to the municipal council on issues under the jurisdiction of the local self-government unit. In cases where proposals presented to the municipal council as citizens' initiatives have a financial impact on the municipal budget, they shall be considered by the council according to the agenda and shall not be approved without taking the opinion of the mayor. In order to improve policymaking, local authorities should design and implement local action plans in order to bring new insights, perspectives, and expertise from local actors (citizens, civil society organizations, businesses, etc.). This will allow local governments to better link policymaking with the current needs and concerns of the population, and thus to better implement the local action plans and policies. Participatory budgeting is another important process that brings local communities closer to decision making on the allocation of the municipal budget.

However, referring to the community and municipal staff dialogues the situation is mixed. Around one quarter of them declare that there are not yet sustainable formats of open forums for CSOs engagement with local authority. There are gatherings organized as open forums, but they happen to be mostly part of the election campaign strategy. Around 40% of the dialogues confirm that there are good open forums platforms with citizens and CSOs and that the engagement level is good, while small-sized municipalities declare there are no CSOs operating in their area, which makes it impossible to organize open forums.

Well-equipped and skilled NGOs has scored 46 points, hence falling within “average” score range. There is strong criticism concerning the skills and capacities of the CSOs, which are often considered incapable of contributing to increase local government accountability. It is interesting to see that community focus groups have been more critical than the municipal staff regarding the capacity of the local NGOs to contribute to the local issues. The municipal staff is also demanding in terms of CSOs capacities, involvement in open forums and the involvement of community councils in monitoring.

The Supervisory Role of Municipal Council scored 63 points and was rated as “good”. The dialogues evidenced that around half of the municipal councils are active in overseeing the work of the local administration and the implementation of the decisions they take. The rest either claim that there is limited supervision by the municipal councils only looking into the execution of the funds allocated by municipal decisions, or there is no any supervision at all, because the municipal council considers itself as being one with the Mayor, due to the same political affiliation.

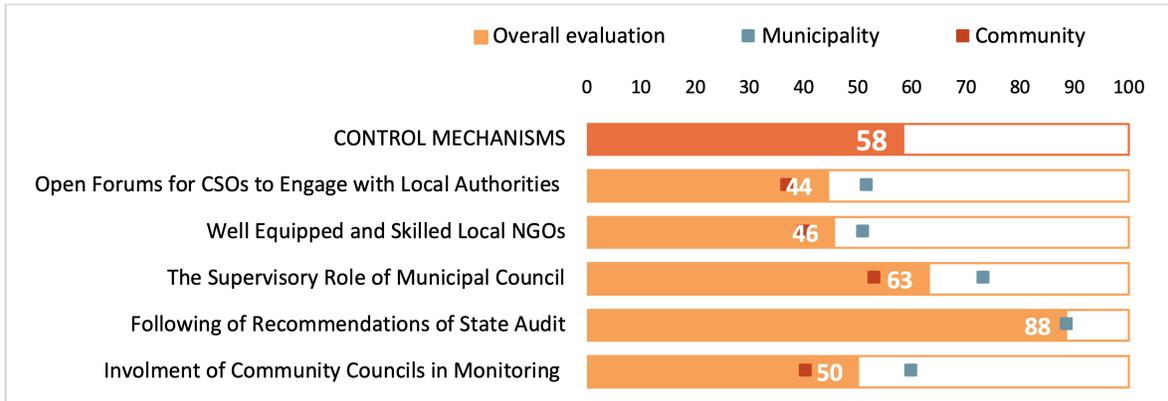
The duties and competences of the municipal council stipulated in the law³⁴, provide that the municipal council decides for the rules, procedures and the implementation of the devolved functions. Also, the municipal council, prior to the approval of documents, shall hold hearing sessions with the community, which are obligatory.

Following the recommendations of the Supreme State Audit is the highest rated indicator, with 88 points, qualifying as “very good”. The State Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) is the highest external audit institution in Albania. According to the law³⁵, the local self-government units shall be subject to external auditing by central government bodies concerning the use of conditional and/or delegated funds provided by the State budget and/or funds of foreign aid, allocated to them according to the agreements signed by the central government. Moreover, as per Article 43 of the same law, each local self-government unit is subject to external auditing by the Supreme State Audit, and any audit report should be made available to the public. In exceptional circumstances, local executive bodies may be subject to audits conducted by specialized auditing companies. In accordance with its powers, rights and duties, the SAI can address the highest state bodies in case of non-compliance with its recommendations, as set forth in Article 15 of the Law No. 154/2014, “On the Organization and Functioning of the State Supreme Audit Institution”. In addition, to increase the transparency of accounting standards and financial statements, public authorities should establish a sound internal budgetary control regime, produce publicly released annual reports and perform an external audit of those annual reports. Local authorities are advised to disclose and publish the external audit reports, and to adopt the Audit Reporting Guidelines published by the State Supreme Audit. Referring to the municipal officials focus group discussions it was highlighted that most of the municipalities have followed implemented the recommendations of the State Audit. There is a small number of municipalities that are of the opinion that the audits performed by the Supreme State Audit are subjective and, often, in contradiction with the Law on Local Self-government.

34. Law 139/2015, “On Local Self-government,” A 54/n, “On the Duties and Competences of Municipality Council”.

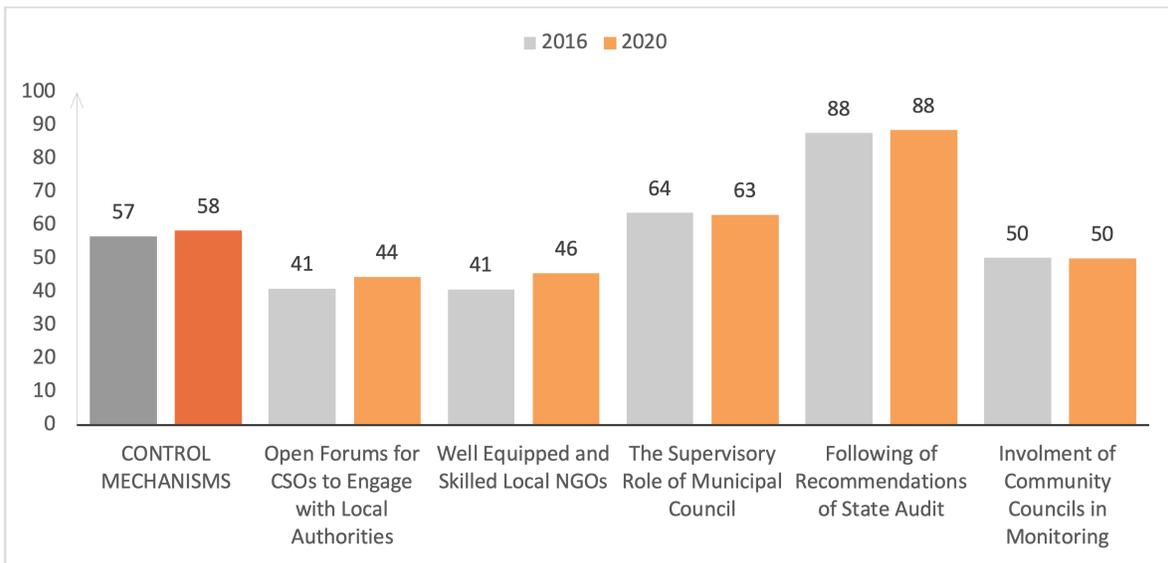
35. Law No. 139/2015, “On Local Self-Government,” Article 13.

Figure 78. Control mechanisms 2020



The situation in 2020 shows a slight improvement of the control mechanisms sub-criterion compared to 2016. The indicator of the Supreme State Audit recommendations and the community involvement in monitoring have stayed at the same level. A minor improvement has been observed also in two indicators, the open forums for CSOs engagement with local authorities (44 vs. 41), and well-equipped and skilled NGOs (46 vs. 41), respectively.

Figure 79. Control mechanisms (checks and balances) – comparing criteria



The best performers in terms of control mechanisms are the municipalities of Polican and Patos. The least performing municipalities are Memaliaj, Rrogozhine and Himara. The top 10 performers are small-sized municipalities, except for Shkodra, with a score of 71 points, falling under the “good” score range. The bottom 10 municipalities are also all small-sized.

Figure 80. Control mechanisms (Top 10 – Bottom 10)

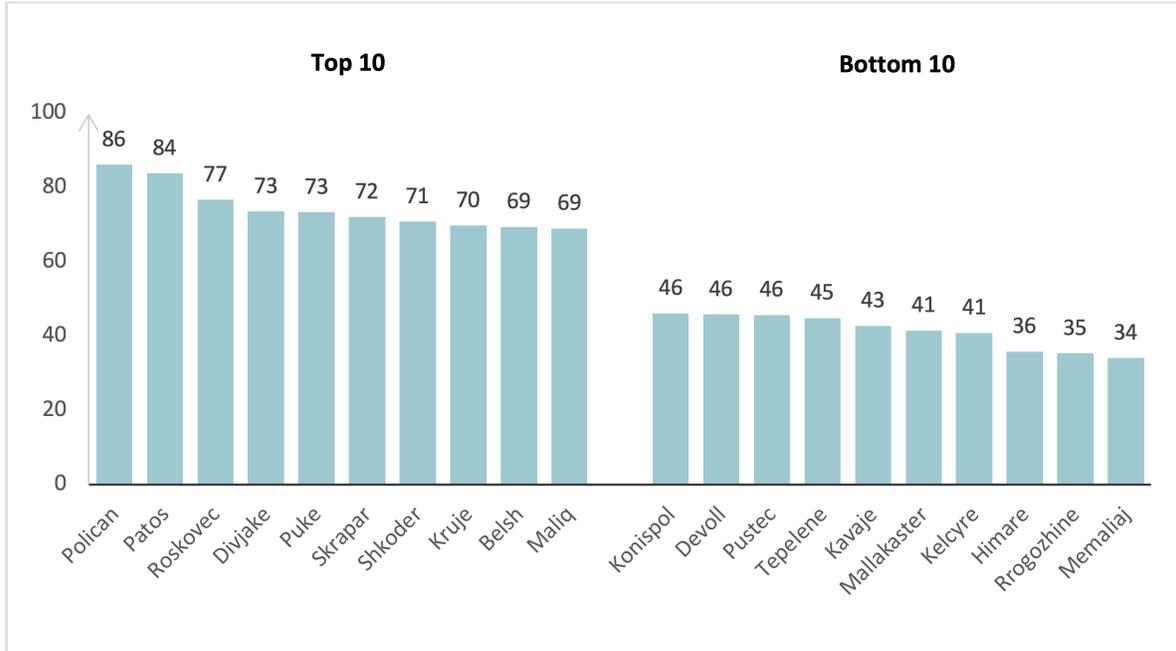
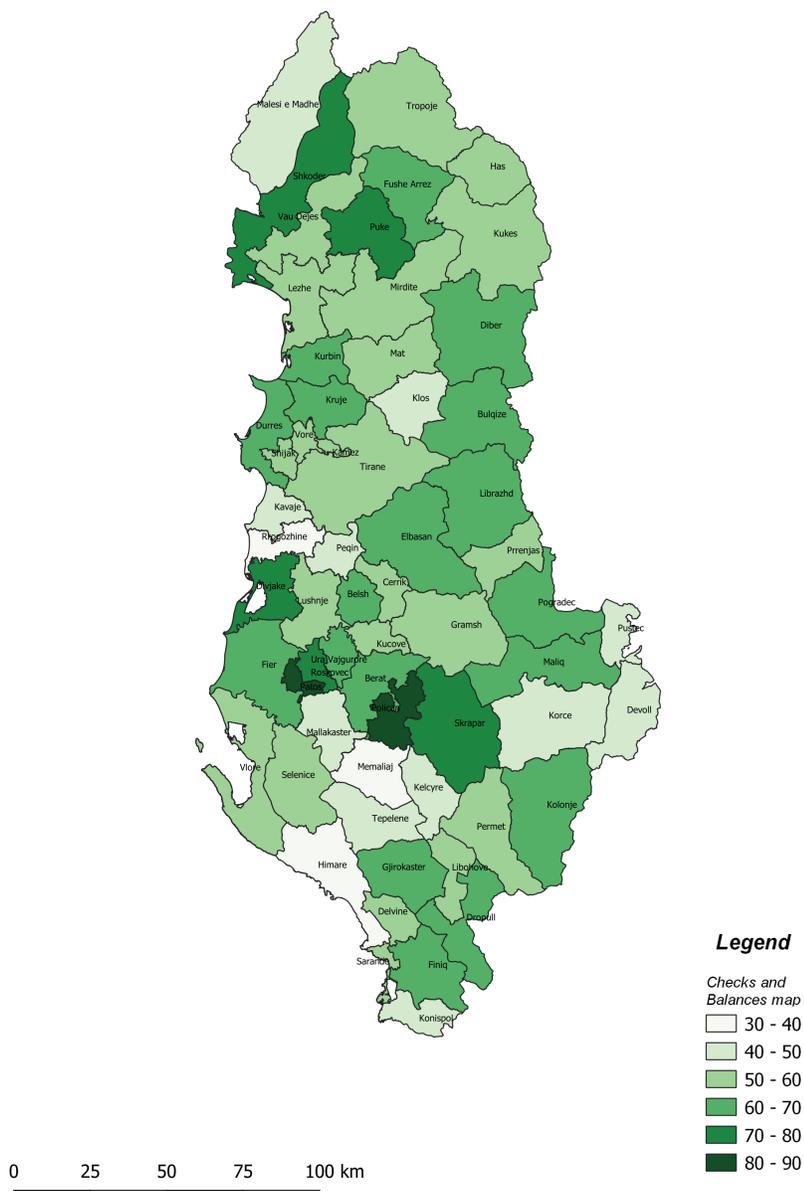


Figure 81. Map of checks and balances



In conclusion, while several laws stipulate citizen participation in local decision making, practically speaking, about 25% of the CDs in LGUs claim that sustainable open forum formats for CSOs engagement with local authorities are lacking. 40% stated that there are good platforms for dialogue, whereas in small LGUs they are missing, since there is no active CSO.

There is strong criticism on the CSOs capacities to contribute. Around half of LGUs have municipal councils that play an active monitoring role; the rest have either a limited or no role at all. The State Audit recommendations seem to be a widely used control mechanism followed by the majority of LGUs.

3.4.2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECOURSE MECHANISMS

The local government recourse sub-criterion stands at an aggregate level of 62 points. It appraises the existence of municipal mechanisms to address citizens' complaints and provide feedback, as well as the effectiveness of the municipality in addressing citizens or businesses complaints.

The highest rated indicator is the existence of mechanisms for lodging complaints, with 70 points. The right of citizens or groups of citizens to lodge requests, complaints or objections with local government bodies on matters concerning the operation and competences that fall within the LGU jurisdiction is properly addressed by the law³⁶. Where complaints are not considered, procedures for administrative appeal may be initiated, as stipulated in the law³⁷. Another option is also to file a complaint to the Office of the Commissioner for the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data, who reviews complaints within the scope of application of the mechanism for the right to information. Different mechanisms might exist in the local government units to address citizens' concerns and problems. These are one-stop shops at local government units where complaints may be filed, but also dedicated telephone numbers for this purpose. The communities and municipal staff dialogues confirm that there are two models municipalities follow when it comes to lodging complaints. One quarter of the municipalities lack a dedicated complaints office. Instead, each department receives complaints through different communication channels and manages to address them. On the other hand, two third of the municipalities have a dedicated office/officer to receiving and addressing complaints lodged with by citizens and the business. The majority of municipalities claim that people prefer the direct contact with departments and deputy mayors over submitting their complaint to a dedicated office.

The indicator concerning the input-sharing mechanism scored 57 points. It is incumbent upon each LGU to have internal regulations in place that determine the applicable procedures for handling and addressing complaints, to determine templates that facilitate feedback for citizens and properly record the complaints. Recently, online tools have been developed to receive complaints, such as the national platform, shqiperiaqeduam.al, Stop Corruption (www.stopkorrupsionit.al), Ask the State (www.pyetshtetin.al) and Improve Your City (www.permiresoqytetin.al), opendata.tirana.al etc.

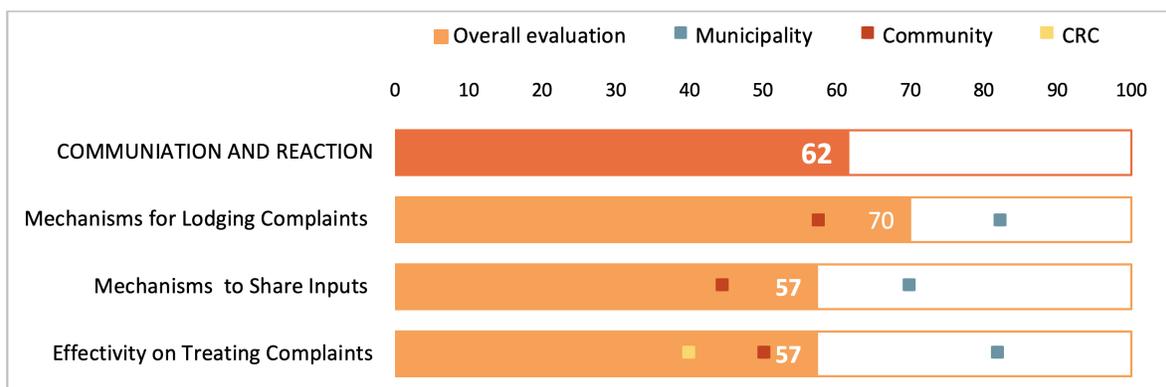
Effective handling of complaints scored 57 points. Findings suggest that, although local government units have established mechanisms for lodging complaints, their performance is average when it comes to setting up mechanisms that enable citizens to share opinions/concerns with the local staff, and the local administration to deal with complaints efficiently.

It is important to mention that the municipal staff, community groups and the citizens differ significantly in their view of each indicator, with scores raging from "poor" for the citizens, to "average" for community groups, and "good" and "very good" for the municipal staff.

36. Law No. 139/2015, "On Local Self-Government," Article 19

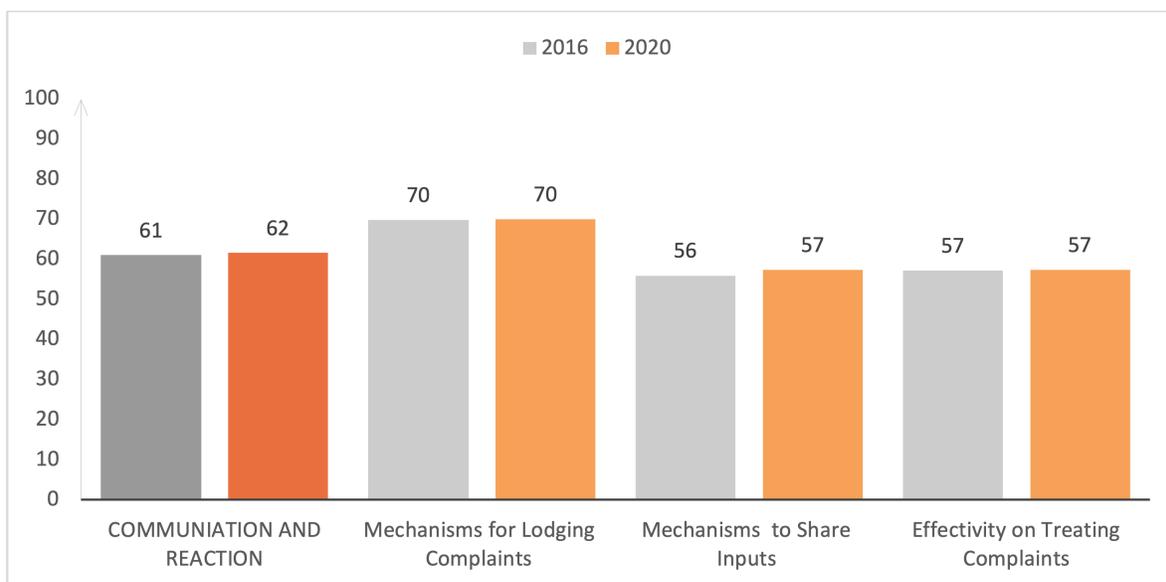
37. Law No. 44/2015, "Code of Administrative Procedures"

Figure 82. Local government recourse mechanisms 2020



The state of the *local government recourse mechanisms* and respective indicators is almost identical as in 2016. The only indicator marking a slight improvement is the input-sharing mechanism (57 vs. 56).

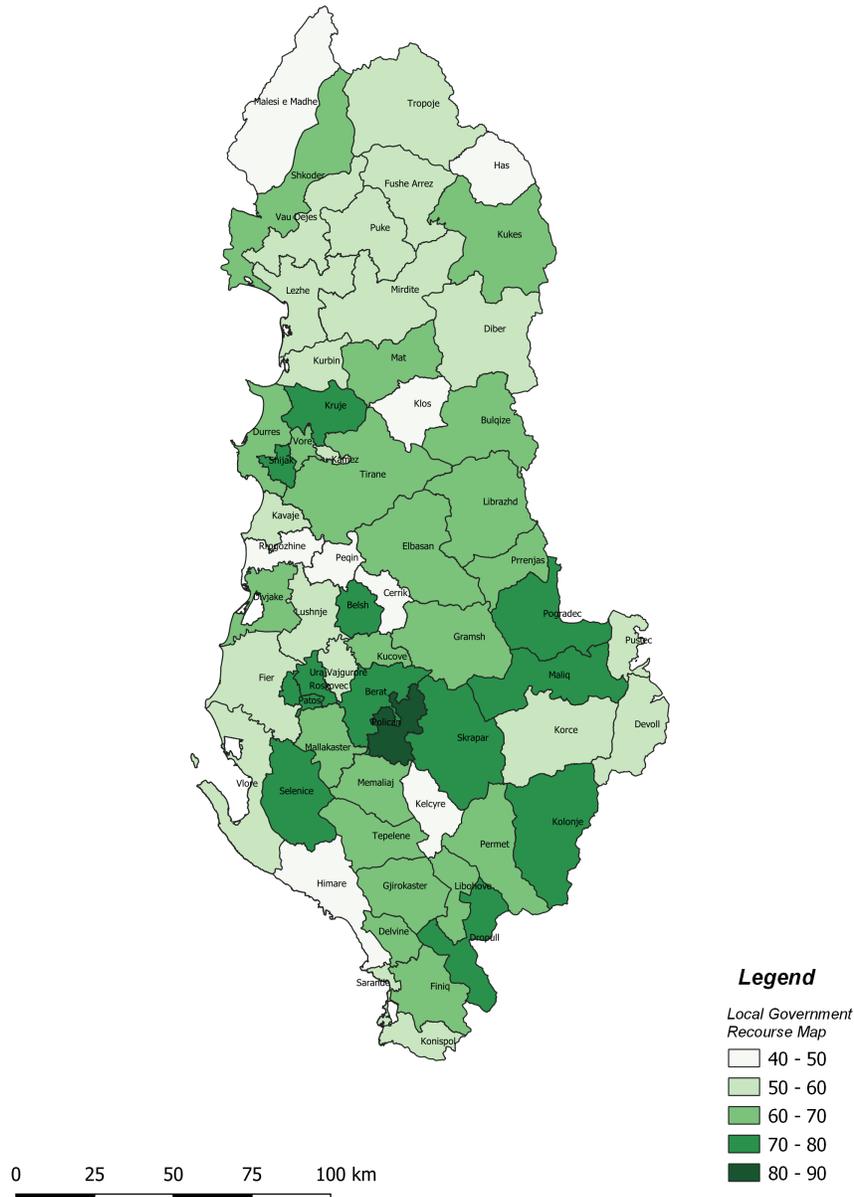
Figure 83. Control mechanisms (checks and balances) - comparing criteria



36. Law No. 139/2015, "On Local Self-Government," Article 19

37. Law No. 44/2015, "Code of Administrative Procedures"

Figure 84. Local government recourse map

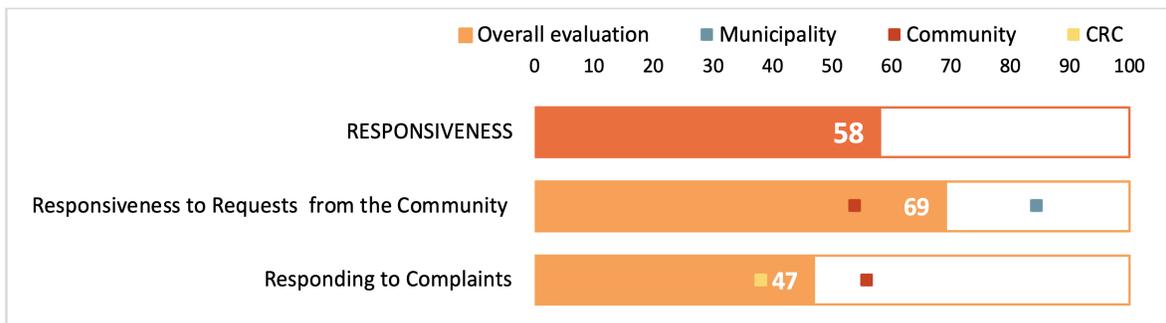


In conclusion, a relatively effective mechanism for lodging complaints exists across all municipalities, but it does not make for a good feedback mechanism for citizens' inputs on service provision and for addressing complaints lodged by both citizens and companies. Citizens and municipal officials have downright different perceptions of the effective handling of complaints. Several innovative practices have been added to the citizen feedback mechanisms, such as a dedicated space on the official websites like www.shqiperiaqeduam.al, www.stopkorrupsion-it.al, www.pyetshtetin.al, www.permiresoqytetin.al, opendata.tirana.al, or applications like 'My Tirana' where citizens can share input and seek improvement with local government.

3.4.3 GOVERNMENT RESPONSIVENESS

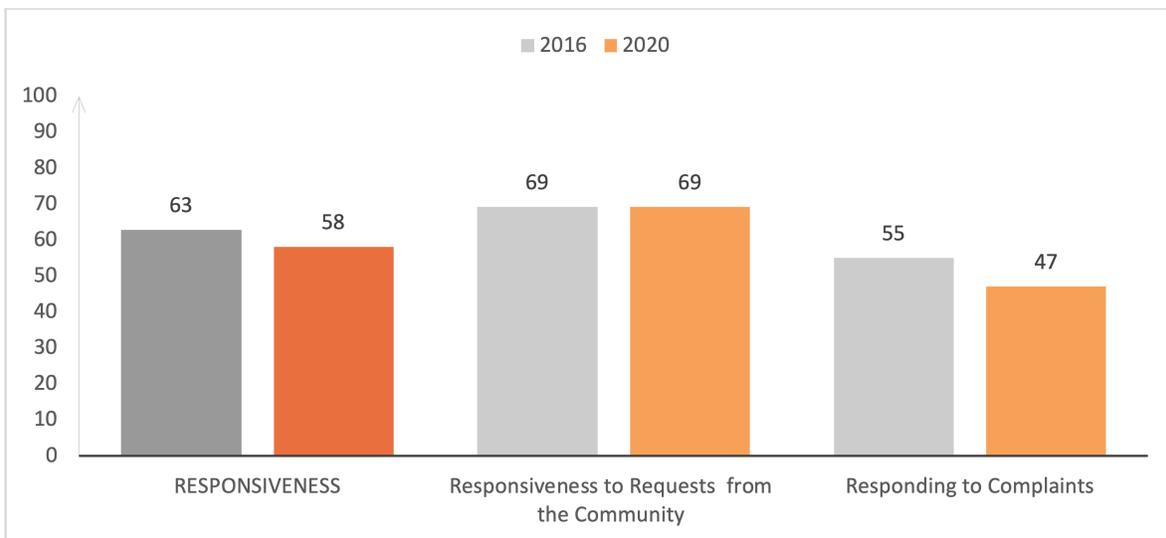
The *government responsiveness* sub-criterion stands at an aggregate level of *58 points*. It measures the rate of government responsiveness to the community requests regarding projects, developmental issues etc., and to the complaints lodged by citizens. The scores under this sub-criterion suggest that the perceived local government responsiveness to requests from the community regarding projects, developmental issues etc. has been rated as 'good', but the ranking is 'average' when it comes to replying to the citizen's complaints. The assessment of the community is lower for each of the indicators than the assessment from the municipal staff, whereas citizens assess the local administration response to complaints as "poor". During community dialogues, claims were that the main issue in this respect remains the quality of the response to the requests/complaints and the follow-up of the raised problems.

Figure 85. Government responsiveness 2020



When comparing assessments of 2020 and 2016, we find a deterioration of the overall sub-criterion, shrinking from "good" to "average" and that is due to a lower rate of responsiveness to the citizens' requests and complaints in 2020 compared to 2016.

Figure 86. Comparison of government responsiveness criteria



Males stand at a slightly higher frequency of complaints lodged with municipal offices than females (59% vs 55%), while citizens from both rural and urban areas have the same interaction degree with the municipality. Unanswered complaints exceed by 18% those answered by the local government. Females and citizens from urban areas mark a higher response rate than males and those from rural areas.

Figure 87. Submission of the complaint by the citizens who had reason to complain

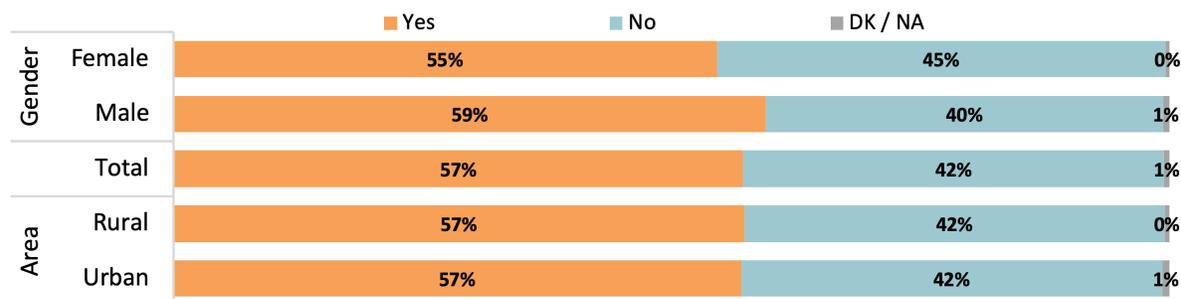


Figure 88. Municipal responsiveness to citizens' complaints

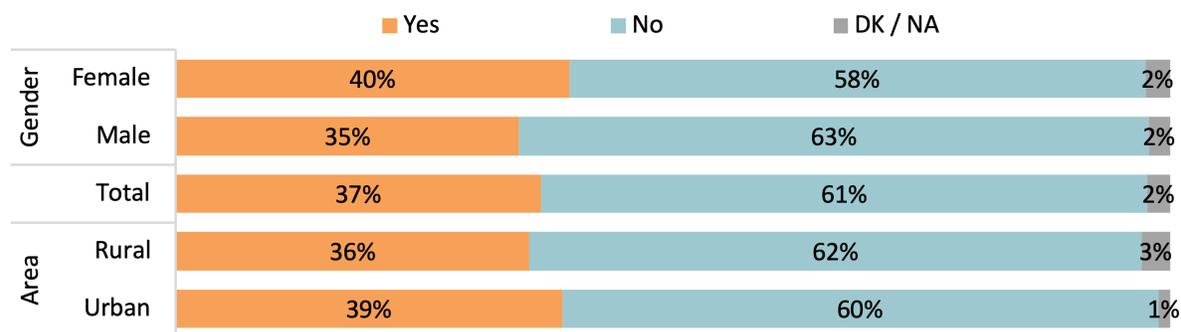
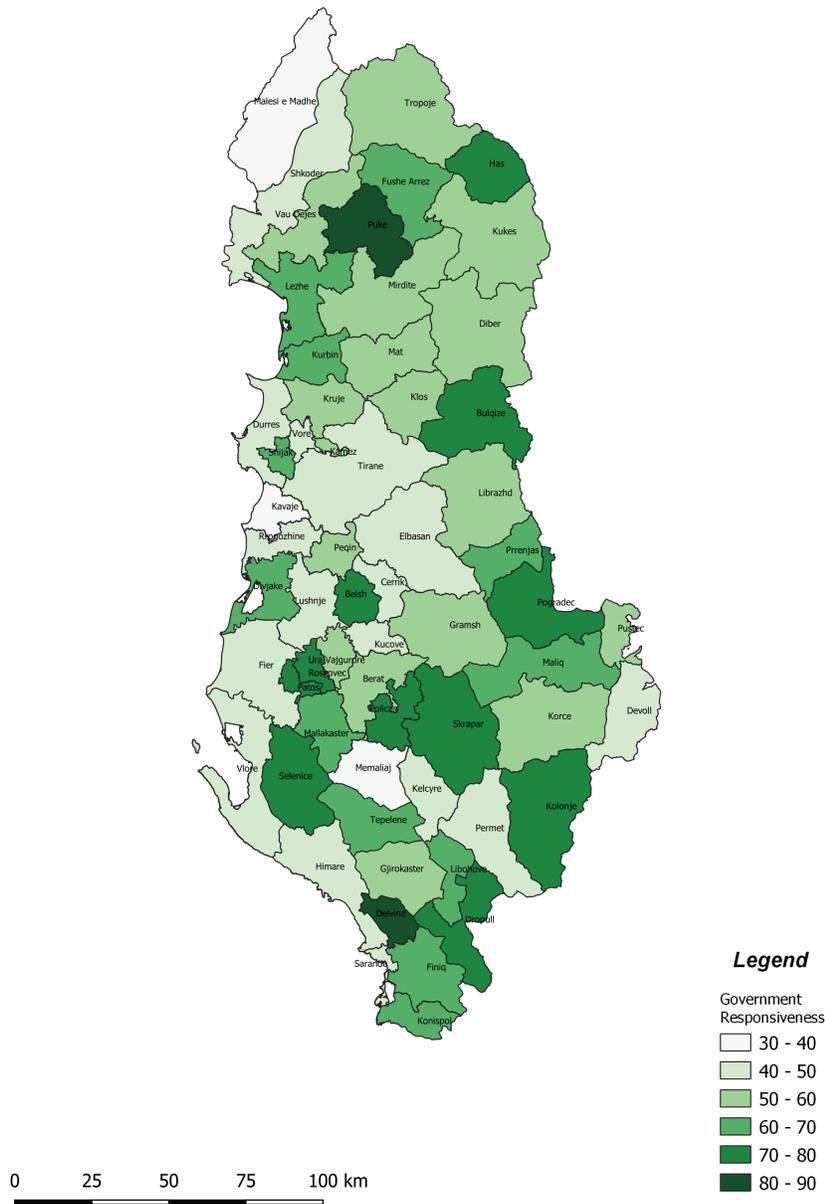


Figure 89. Government responsiveness map



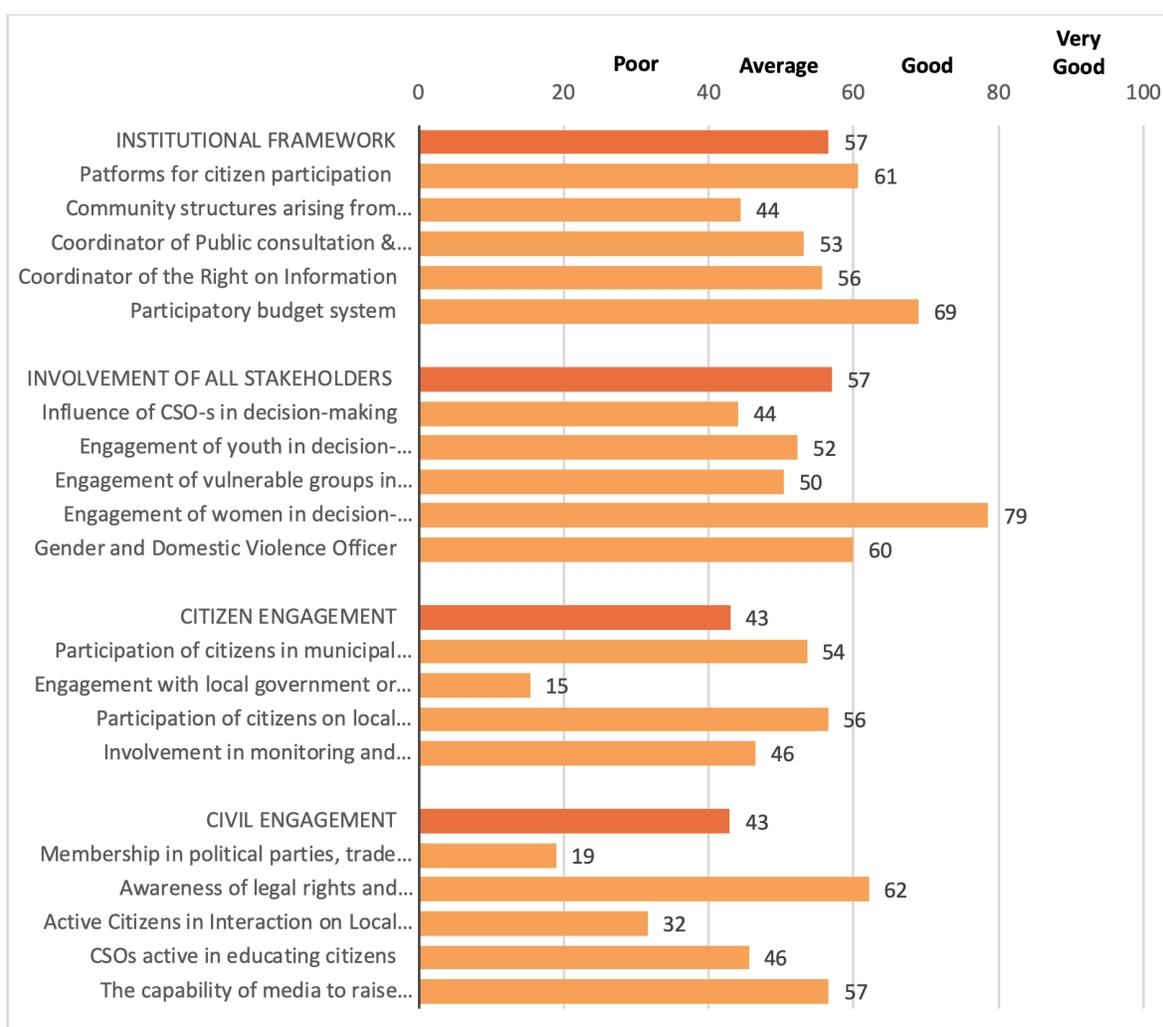
In conclusion, LGUs are generally more responsive to requests rather than to complaints. The community claims that LGUs have the same degree of responsiveness to both requests and complaints. Citizens, on the other hand, perceive responsiveness to complaints as “poor”. Big gaps exist in how the municipality, community and citizens perceive responsiveness to requests and complaints. The CD claim that the main issue remains the quality of the response to the request/complaints and the follow-up of the raised issues. Females and rural areas mark a higher response rate rather than males and urban ones. The biggest concern faced by the community is not just the responsiveness of the local governments, but the quality of the response to the requests/complaints and the follow-up of the raised problems. In this regard, the biggest challenge faced by the local government units continues to be building an integrated and effective complaint management system.

→ 3.5 Participation and Citizen Engagement

Participation and citizen engagement are the fourth and last measured governance dimension in this study. At a national aggregate level, it scored 50 points. The dimension covers 19 indicators relevant to the citizen engagement in local governance and the environment that enables the relation between them and institutions. The assessment included four sub-criteria, including the institutional framework composed by indicators that are derivative of the legal and regulatory framework (“average”); stakeholder involvement (“average”), participation in the municipal meetings (“average”) and civil engagement (“average”). Findings clearly indicate that, while the local government is going through an especially important reforming process, citizens seem to be largely uninterested in being a part of it.

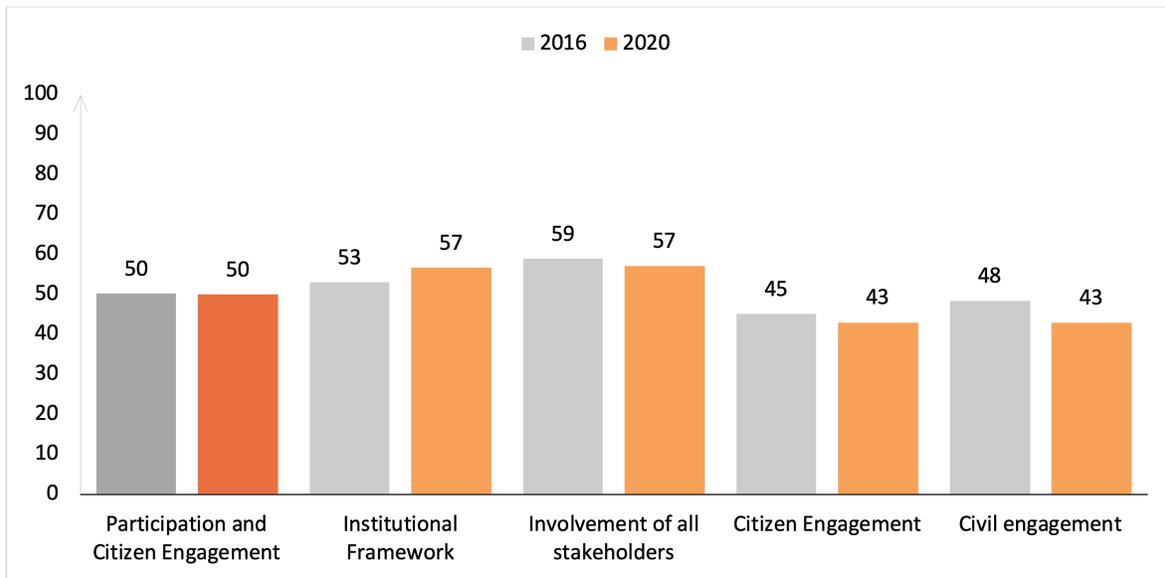
The highest scoring sub-criteria include the institutional framework (57 points) and involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process (57), the latter being positively influenced by the indicator of women engagement in decision making. The lowest scoring indicators are the engagement with local government or CSOs (15) and membership of political parties, trade unions and NGOs (19).

Figure 90. Participation and citizen engagement



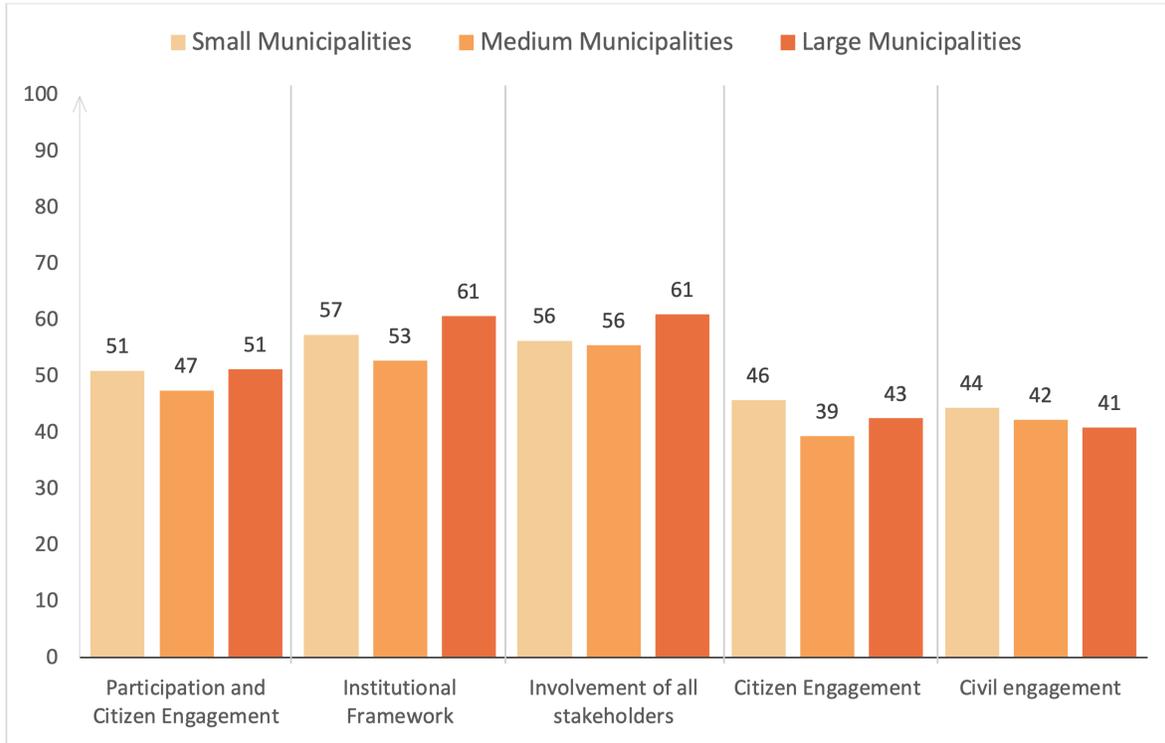
Comparing the assessment of 2020 to 2016, it is evident that, while there is no change at the national aggregate level, there is an improvement regarding the institutional framework, but there is a decrease in the involvement of all stakeholders in the decision making. The two other sub-criteria related to the citizen and civic engagement scored lower than in 2016, ranking very close to the lower end of the “average” score range.

Figure 91. Participation and citizen engagement: comparative overview, 2016-2020



In general, the size of the municipality has almost no impact on their performance under the participation and citizen engagement criterion.

Figure 92. Participation and citizen engagement by municipality size



According to the Law on the Right to Information, each local government unit shall appoint one civil servant as *Coordinator for the Right to Information*³⁸. His/her responsibilities include providing access to public information for citizens and coordinate efforts to answer to the requests for information within the time frame prescribed in this law. Similarly, pursuant to the Law on Notification and Public Consultation, municipalities shall also appoint one civil servant as the Coordinator for Notifications and Public Consultation, who shall be responsible for the overall coordination and administration of the work guaranteeing the right of notification and public consultation as stipulated in this law³⁹. The law governs the process of public notification and public consultation of draft laws, draft documents, national and local strategic plans, as well as policies of high public interest. Further, it sets out the procedures applicable to ensure transparency and public participation in policy-making and decision-making processes by public bodies.

Referring to the Law on Local Self-Government, before the review and approval of acts, municipal or regional councils shall hold consultative hearings with the community. Public consultation shall take place for any event as specified in the municipal council statute, using one of the forms required, such as open meetings with residents and stakeholders, meetings with experts, interested institutions and non-for profit organizations, or by taking the initiative to organize local referenda⁴⁰. Furthermore, each community, through its authorized representatives, or not less than one percent from the municipal population, has the right to present citizen initiatives to the municipal council on matters within the jurisdiction of the local government unit⁴¹.

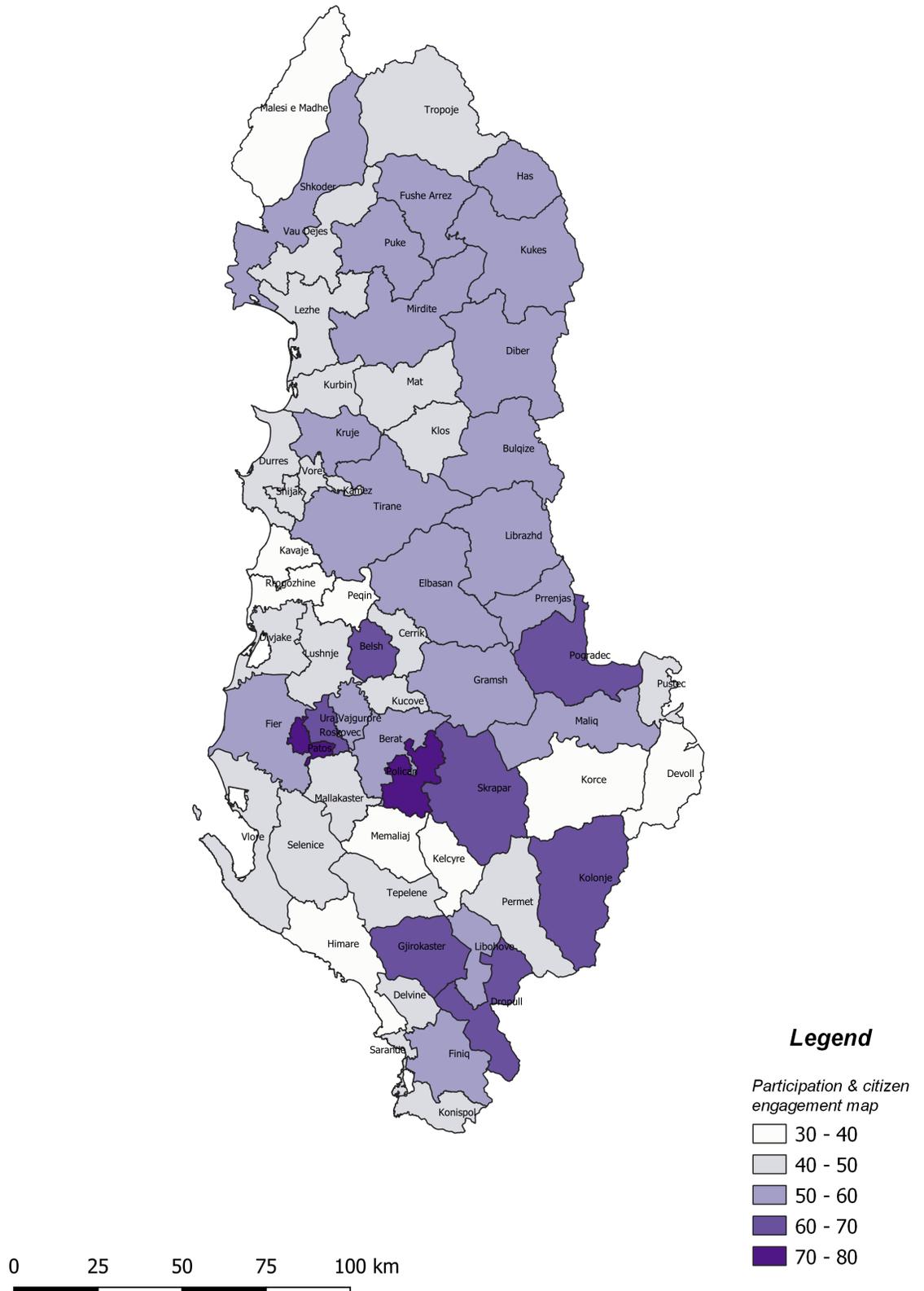
38. Law No 199/2014, "On the Right to Information," Article 10: <http://www.eurallius.eu/index.php/en/library/albanian-legislation/send/55-the-right-to-information/111-law-on-the-right-to-information-en>

39. Law 146/2014, "On Notification and Public Consultation," Article 10: http://www.hidaa.gov.al/ligje/Ligji_146-2014,_per_njoftimin_dhe_konsultimin_publik.pdf

40. Law No. 139/2015, "On Local Self-Government," Article 18: http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

41. Law No. 139/2015, on "Local Self-Government," Article 20: http://www.plgp.al/images/ligjet/Albanian%20Law%20139_2015%20On%20local%20self-government.pdf

Figure 93. Participation and citizen engagement map

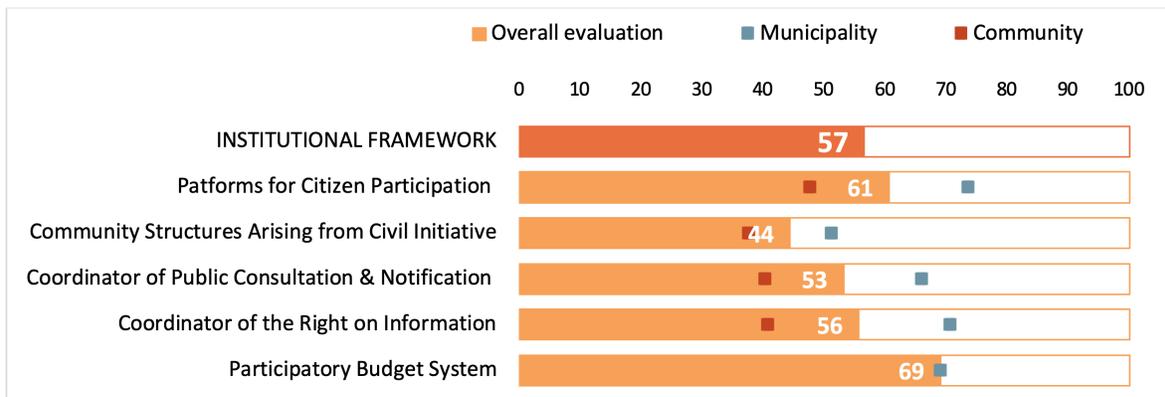


3.5.1 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPIATION

The sub-criterion offers a general overview of the present opportunities/platforms for citizen participation in development, planning and decision-making processes, of the existing community structures interacting with, making suggestions or proposing initiatives to the local government, of the level of application of a participatory budget system, and of the effectiveness of the Coordinator for Public Consultation and Notification and the Coordinator for the Right to Information. Municipal officials and citizens have differing views on most indicators, but they both concur on the poor level of community structures that reflects weak social networks.

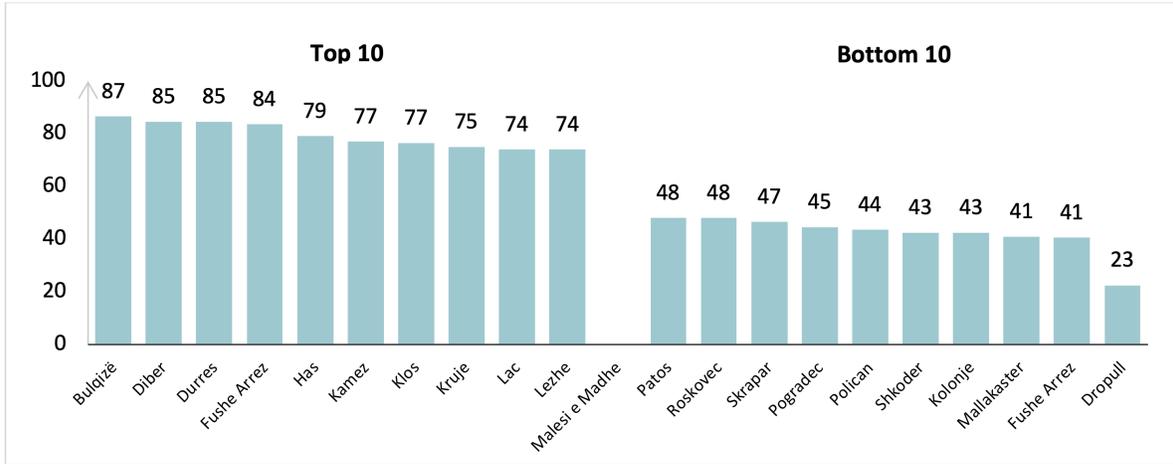
The institutional framework has been rated as “average”, but there are two indicators that scored higher than the rest, namely the platform for citizen participation, with 61 points, and participatory budget, with 69 points, both rated as “good”. Further, it has been noted that the rest of indicators scored almost the same as or higher than in 2016. The increased scores mainly come from the municipal staff rather than from the community, which shows that either the communities lack information on institutional actions to enable participation of citizens in the local governance, or the municipal staff is more overly optimistic vis-à-vis the reality.

Figure 94. Institutional framework for citizen participation 2020



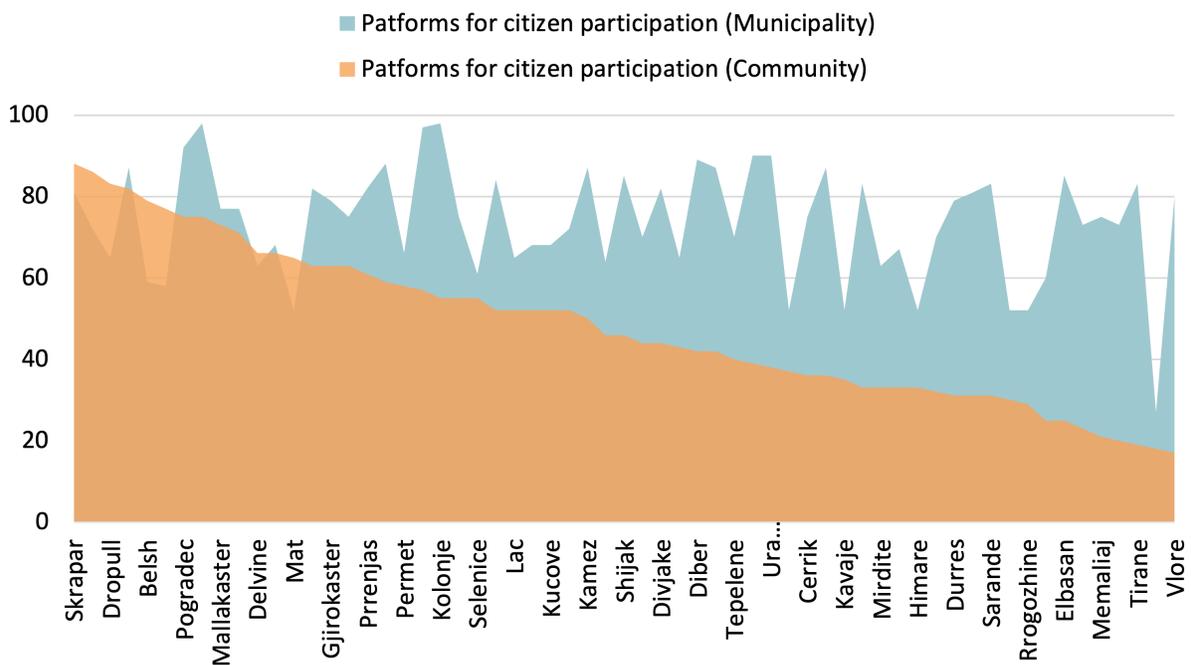
The municipalities of Bulqiza, Dibra, Durres, Fushe Arrez are rated as “very good” for having platforms for citizen participation in place. Dropull is the municipality with the lowest score and the only rated as “poor”. Shkodra municipality is also in the bottom 10, with 43 points, being very close to the lower threshold of the “average” score range.

Figure 95. Citizen participation platforms (Top 10 – Bottom 10)



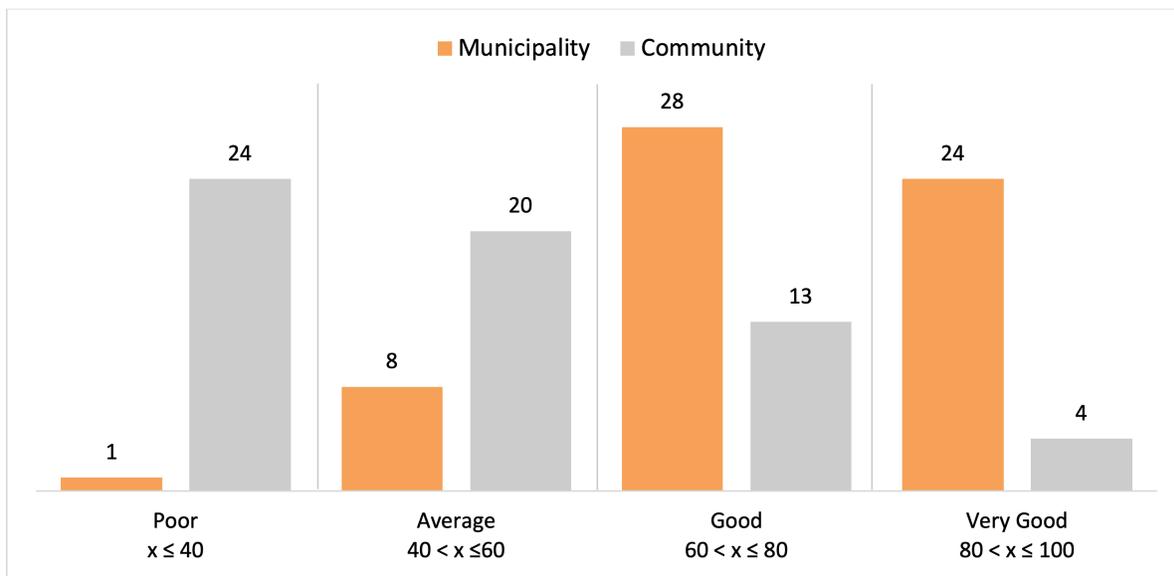
It is noticed a considerable variation between the perception of the municipality staff regarding the platforms for citizens' participation and the perception of the community itself for most of the municipalities presented in the graph. Municipal officials declare the existence of effective platforms for citizens participation while the communities declare that there are no such platforms in place. Another important obstacle mentioned during the dialogue is that about one third of the municipalities do not have active interest groups of CSOs. There are also few municipalities where the communities have been more positive than the municipality staff in their assessment like in the case of the Municipality of Skrapar, Dropull and Belsh. In a number of large municipalities such as Tirana, Vlora, Elbasani, Durrës etc the platforms resulted untrusted from the communities. There is a considerable discrepancy between community perception assessing these municipalities at the lower levels of "average" score range and the perception provided by their staff.

Figure 96. Evaluation of citizen participation platforms by the municipality and the community



The figure below presents clearly the considerable discrepancy between municipal staff and community assessment on effective platforms in place. The communities of 44 municipalities assess a “poor” and “average” score level, while the municipal officials classify as such only 9 municipalities. This becomes even more obvious while comparing the two extreme score range, respectively “poor” and “very good”, for which the perceptions are completely upside down between the community and the municipal staff.

Figure 97. Effective platforms for citizen participation



COORDINATORS FOR NOTIFICATION & PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND RIGHT TO INFORMATION

The Coordinators for Notification & Public Consultation and the Coordinator for the Right to Information are relatively new positions within the local administration structure. Both these indicators are assessed within the “average” score range. The municipality of Patos, Skrapar and Polican are rated as the best performers regarding public consultation & notification coordinator. The top 10 municipalities are assessed within “good” and “very good” score ranges, whereas all the municipalities listed in the bottom 10 are assessed as “poor” or “very poor”, in case of Divjaka municipality. Among those least performing is also Korca municipality with 34 points, rated as “poor”. The top 10 and the bottom 10 ranking municipalities with regard to coordinator for the right to information is almost the same as that of public consultation & notification coordinator. Communities and municipal officials mentioned during discussions that the majority of the municipalities have these functions in place, whereas in some small-sized LGUs both functions are merged in one. The opinion is that these functions are more effective when merged. The main issue regarding the public consultation & notification coordinator and the coordinator for the right to information is that, most often, citizens are not aware of their existence.

Figure 98. Efficiency of public consultation

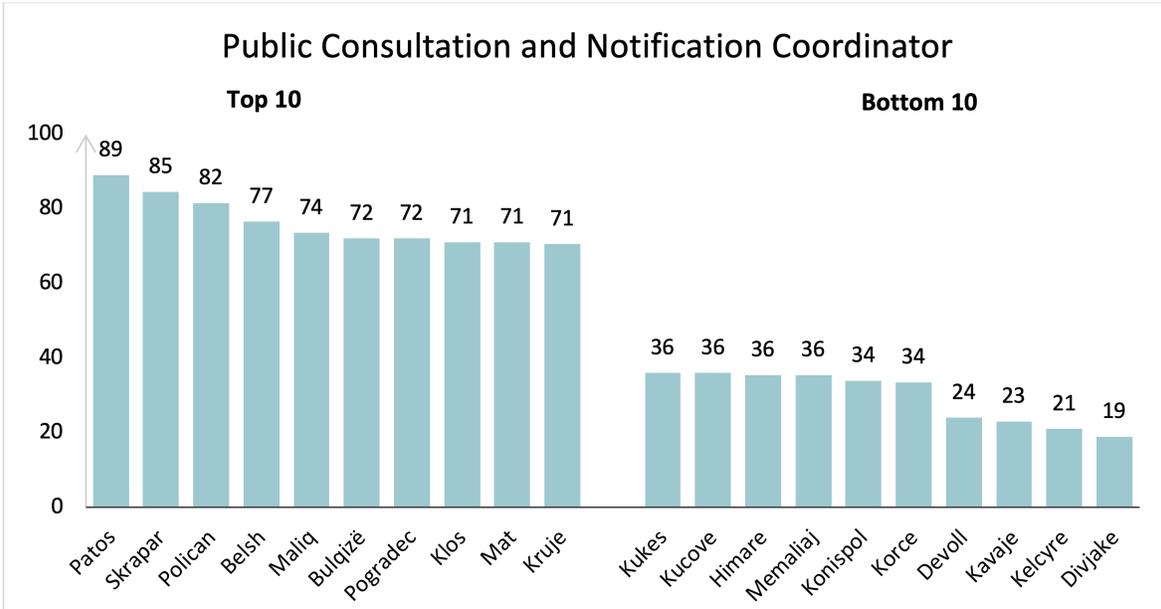
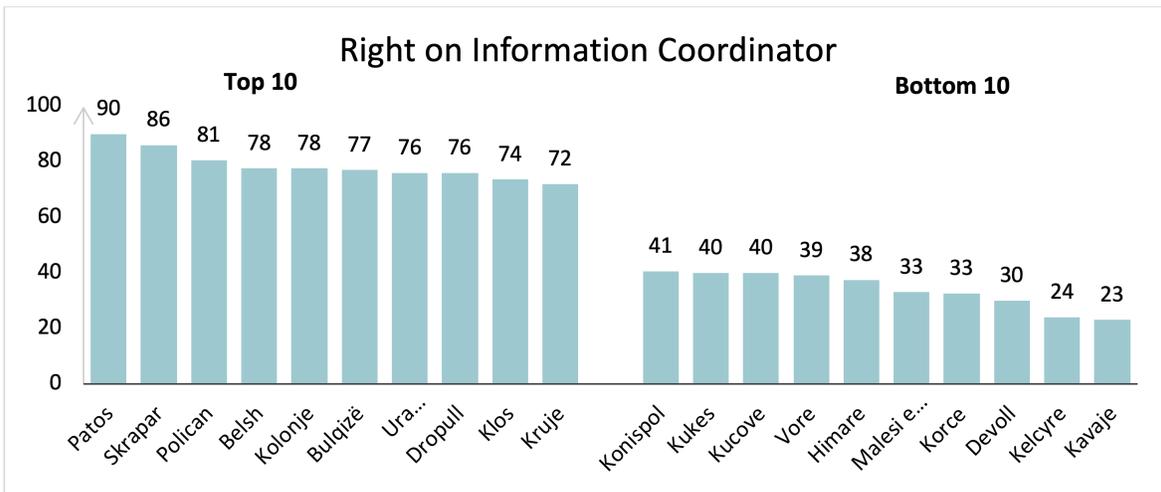


Figure 99. Right on information Coordinators - indicators



A huge discrepancy between the community and municipal assessment exists regarding the indicator on the efficiency of public consultation. While according to the community there are 34 municipalities performing “poor” and “very poor”, municipal staff categorizes only 6 municipalities under the scoring range. In fact municipal FG discussions assess 42 municipalities under “good” and “very good” score range, while communities rank only 12 municipalities at this score range.

Figure 100. Public consultation efficiency: Municipality vs Community

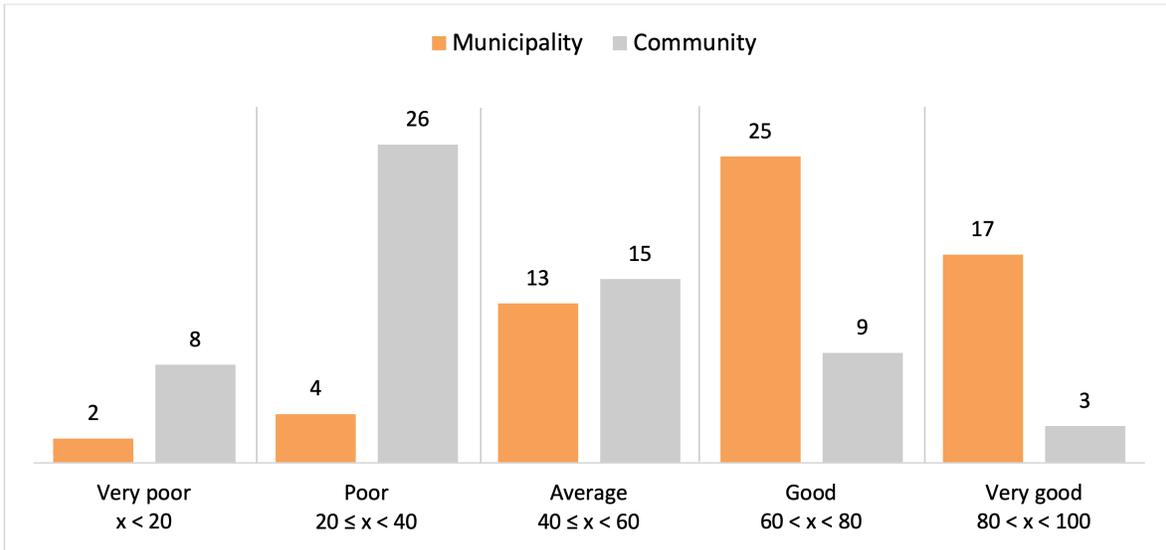
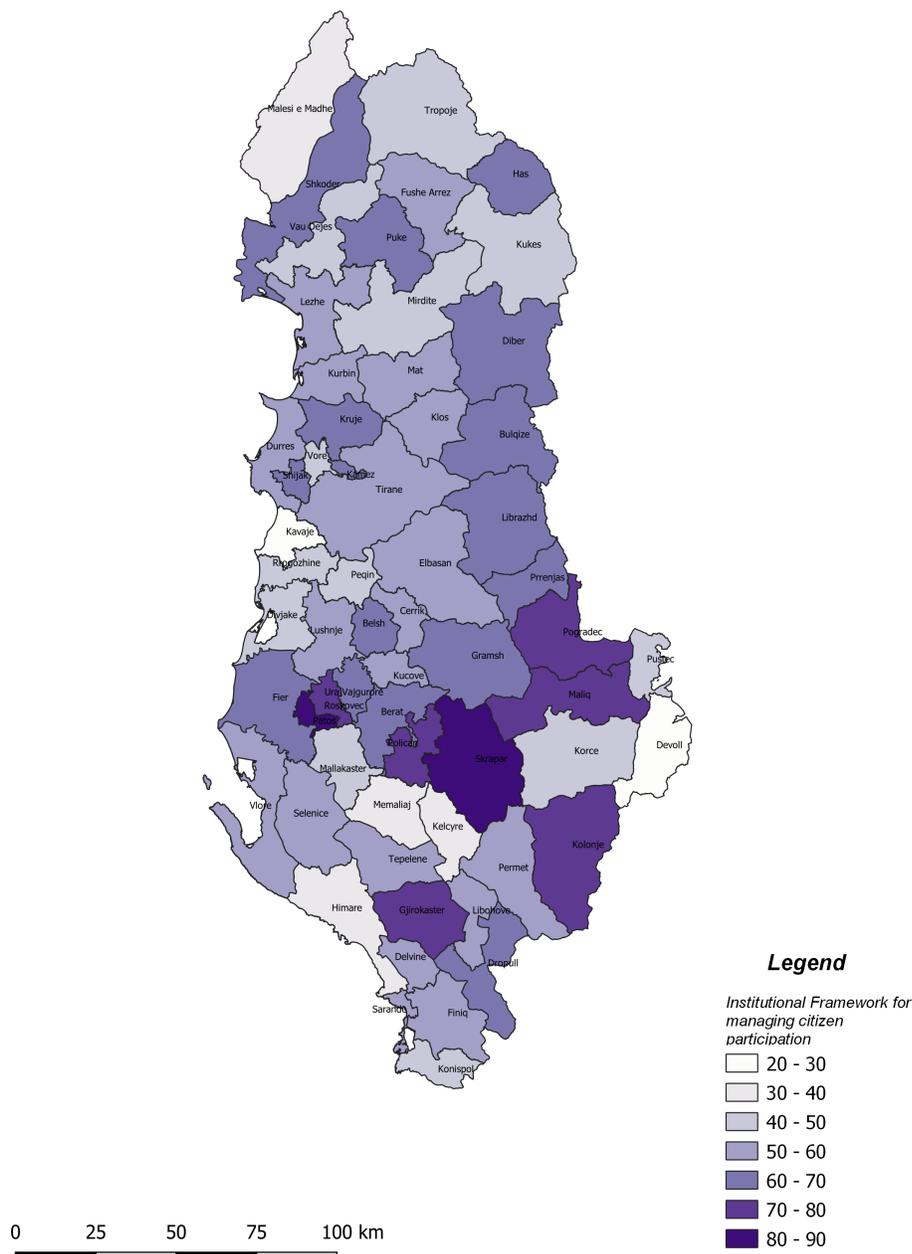


Figure 101. Map of the institutional framework for citizen participation management

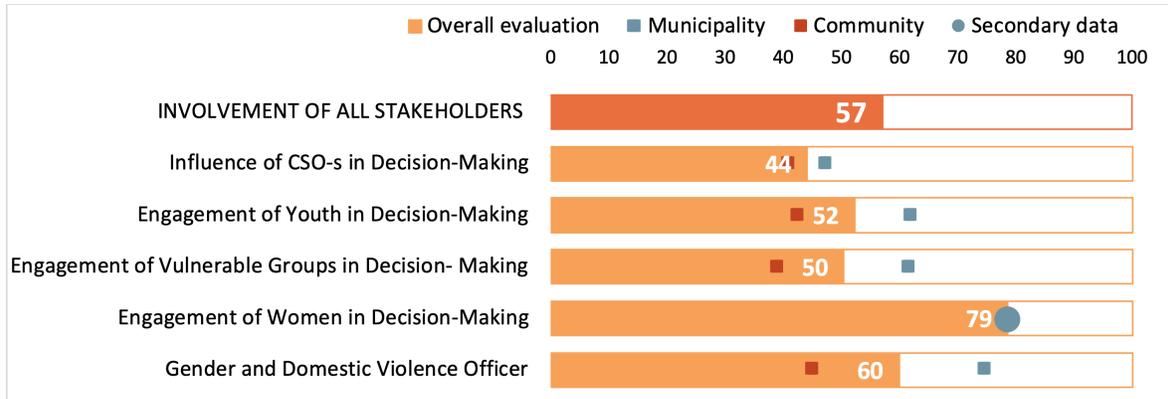


In conclusion, there is an improvement of the institutional framework for citizens participation and that relates more to the participative budget system and community structures from civil initiatives. Communities are hesitant to be positive, either due to limited information or inability of LGUs to enable their participation. One third of the municipalities lack interest groups or CSOs, whereas in large municipalities there are discrepancies in the assessment of their capacities by the communities and municipal officials. The public consultation and notification coordinator are a reality in many municipalities, but citizens are not aware of their role. The institutional framework and arrangements for public participation are not yet fully established and operational in LGUs. The community councils are inadequate and lack information on the institutional measures to enable participation of citizens in the local governance.

3.5.2 STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

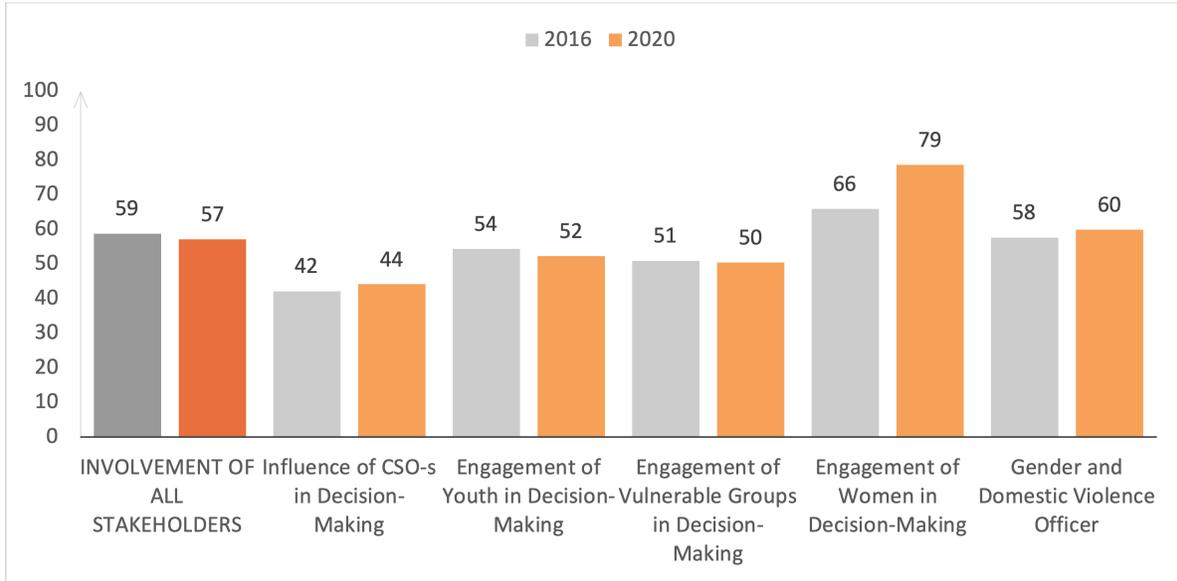
The *sub-criterion of stakeholder involvement in local government decision-making* concerns the ability of CSOs to lobby and advocate effectively to influence local government planning and decision-making, and ensure the engagement of women, youth, and vulnerable groups in decision-making and the gender mainstreaming effectiveness within the municipality. This dimension scored with 57 points, ranking in “average” score range.

Figure 102. Stakeholder involvement in decision-making 2020



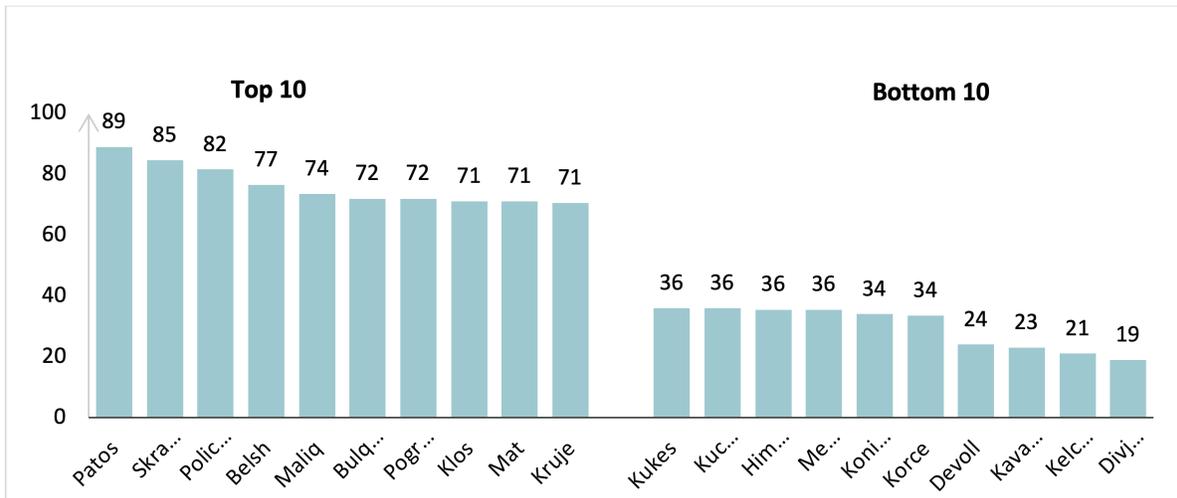
Compared findings between 2020 and 2016 assessments indicate an increase in the average scores for the sub-criterion (54 to 57), influenced by the significant improvement of indicator of women engagement in decision making that has been rated “good”, but is very close to the “very good” threshold. On the contrary, the indicators of youth and vulnerable groups’ involvement in decision making have marked a slight decrease and are mid-ranked in the “average” score range. The CSOs influence in decision making has increased by two points, but it is still the lowest ranking compared to all other indicators. In the meantime, perception of the effectiveness of the domestic violence officer in municipalities has improved, placing the indicator up to the threshold of the “good” score range. Generally, it can be affirmed that more women are involved in decision making and that the domestic violence referral mechanism continues to be effective, but local government decision making is still not open to youth, elders, vulnerable groups and people with special needs.

Figure 103. Stakeholder involvement in decision making - criteria comparison



The indicator of CSOs influence in decision making was assessed both by the staff of municipality and in community focus groups. The indicator scored 44 points. The top 10 municipalities include those with a “very good” and “good” degree of involvement, such as the municipality of Patos, Skrapar and Poliçan. The score range for the bottom 10 municipalities is from 36-19 points, meaning “poor” and “very poor”. The three worst performing municipalities are Divjaka, Këlcyra and Kavaja. Korça is also in the list of the bottom 10 and falls within the “poor” score range. A lack of CSOs in the small municipalities and poor CSO capacities in some others were highlighted during the dialogues with the community and municipal officials.

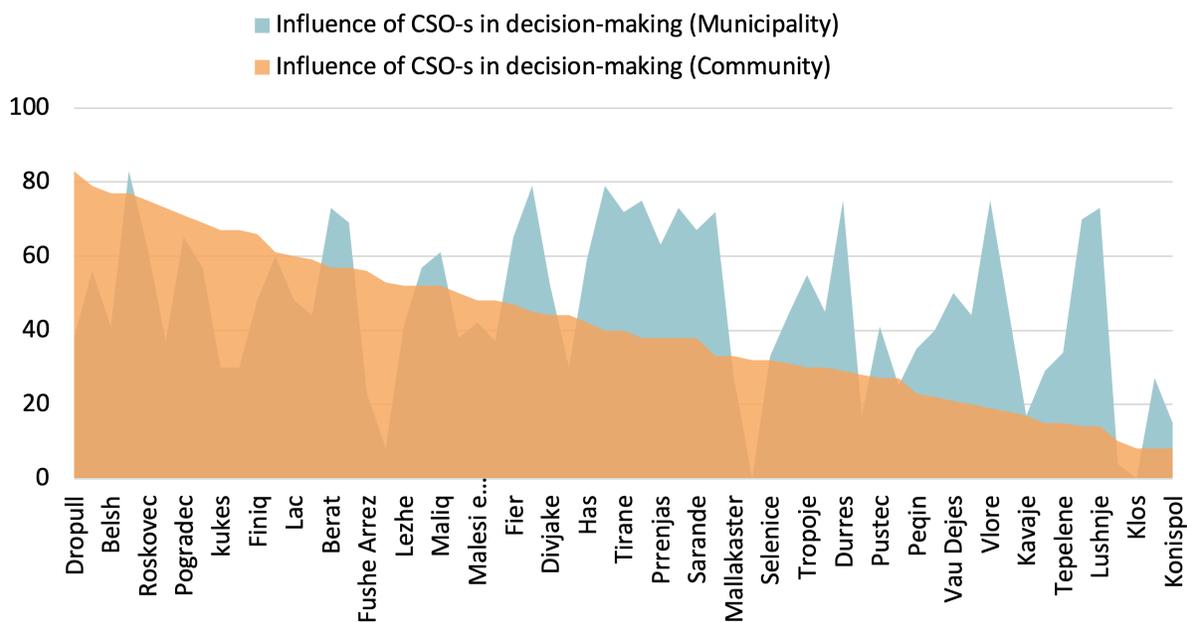
Figure 104. CSOs influence in decision making (Top 10 – Bottom 10)



Throughout the study, there have been many cases showing an obvious difference between the scores assigned by the municipal staff and those by the community. In the case of CSO involvement in local decision making, the situation is mixed. There are many municipalities with no difference (Roskovec, Finiq, Lac), others where communities have been more positive in relation to the influence of CSOs in decision

making than municipal officials (Belsh, Kukes, Pogradec), and there is another group of municipalities where the assessment of the municipal officials is much higher than that of the communities; this scenario applies to large municipalities (Fier, Vlora, Lushnja, Durres).

Figure 105: CSOs influence in decision-making - comparing the municipal vs community score



Local government units *engage youth and vulnerable groups in decision making*, but this is not the case with all of them. The dialogues with the community and municipal officials highlight that in around half of the municipalities there is youth participation in decision making mainly through Youth Councils or Youth Parliament. In some municipalities, youth organizations are politically based, while in some others, particularly in south Albania, youth organizations are weak due to emigration. This indicator scored 52 points, which is within “average” score range.

Involvement of vulnerable groups in the local decision making has been assessed as “average”. Communities and local officials agree that in more than half of the municipalities, vulnerable groups are involved through their associations, but in the rest of the LGUs, such involvement is rather scarce or inexistent.

Engagement of women in decision making is the highest-scored indicator, with 79 points, which is rather close to the “very good” score range. Pursuant to the Law on Gender Equality, all municipalities have involved women in the decision-making process. At the political level this is also a result of the applicable women representation quota. There are several large municipalities such as Tirana, Vlora, Elbasan that rank among the top 10 for women engagement in decision making. However, the scores of municipalities in terms of women engagement in decision making suggest that there a lot remains to be done in this regard, particularly in small locations.

Figure 106. Engagement of women in decision making (Bottom 10 – Top 10)

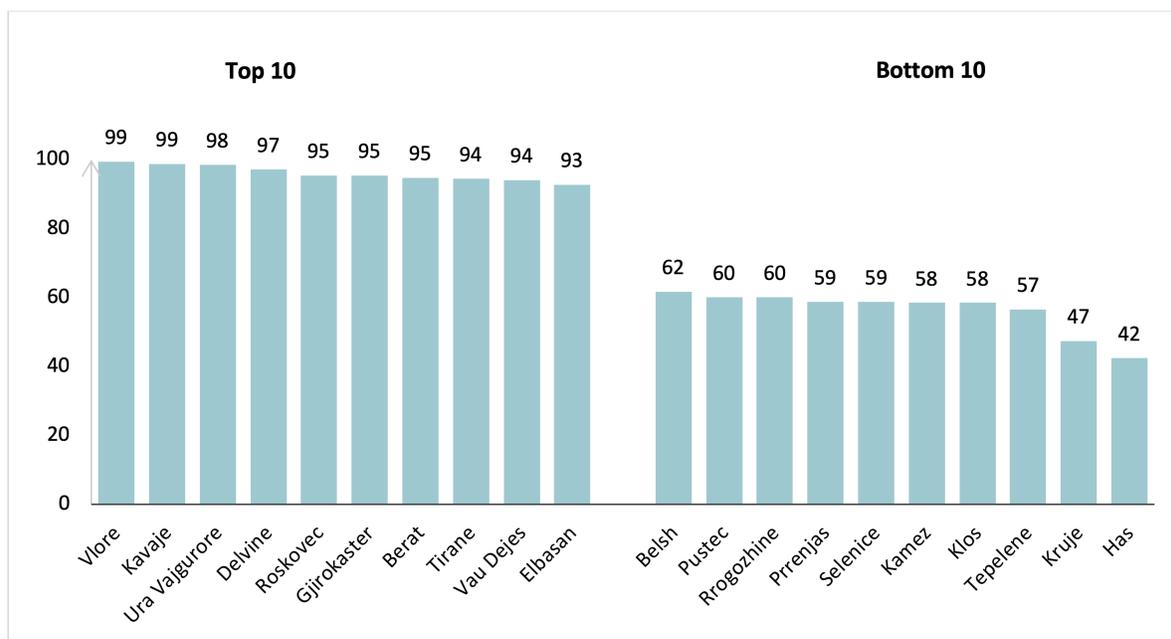
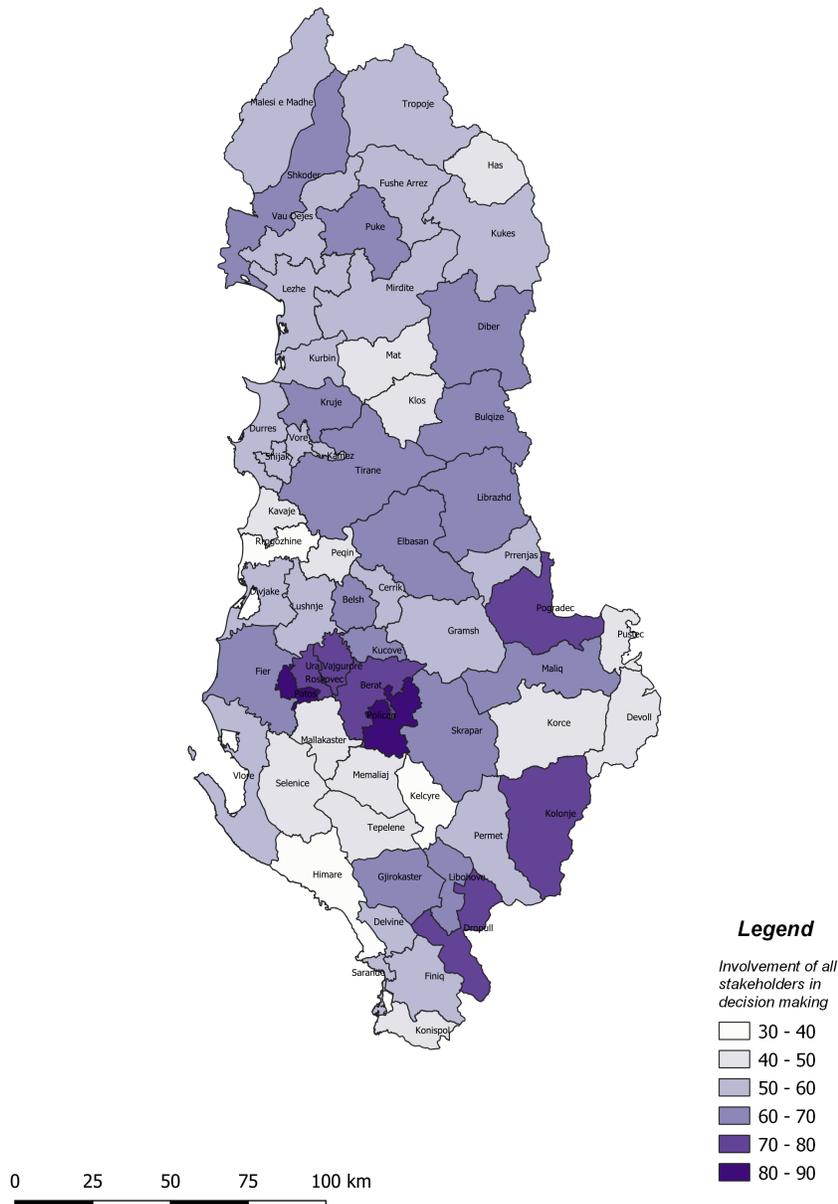


Figure 107. Map of stakeholder involvement in decision making

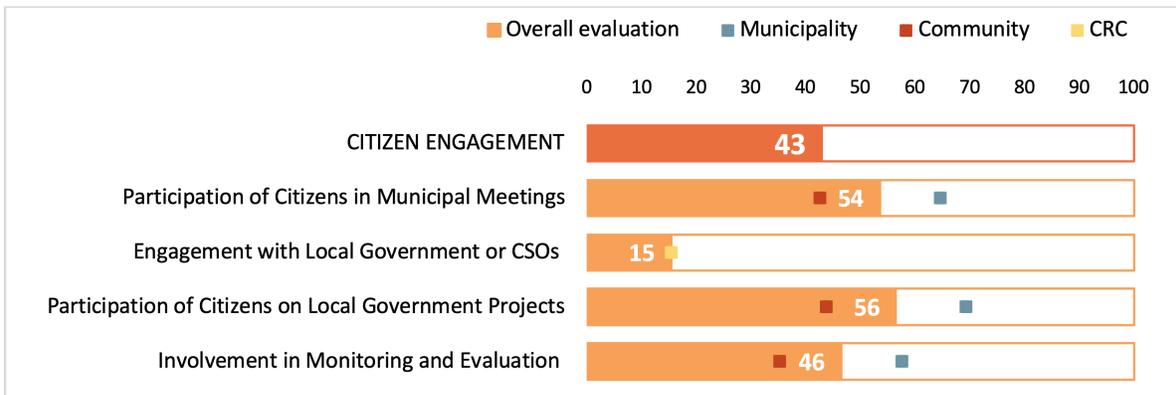


In conclusion, more women are engaged in decision making, but this is not the case for youth, vulnerable groups and CSOs. The gender and domestic violence officer have improved, but there is a gap between the assessment of CDs and municipal officials in this respect. LGUs engage youth and vulnerable groups, but this is not the case for all of them. Half of the municipalities ensure youth participation through Youth Council and Youth Parliament. In some cases, youth organizations are politically based, while in the south Albania and in small municipalities there is a lack of youth forums. The same is true for vulnerable groups. Progress has been very positive in terms of women participation, but a lot remains to be done in small locations.

3.5.3 CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

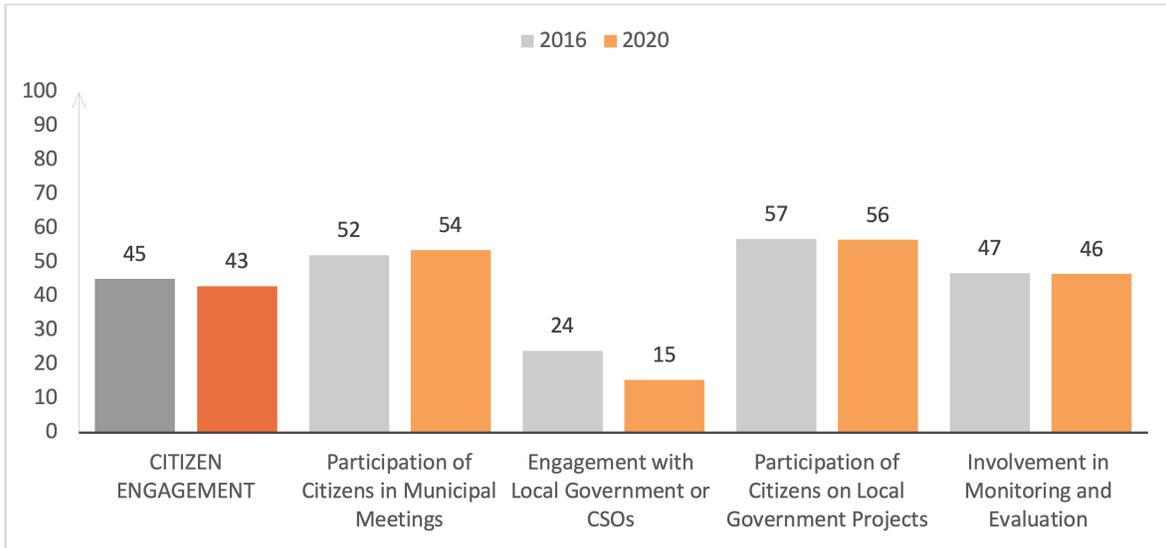
The sub-criterion of *citizen engagement* is measured by the extent of citizens' participation in municipal meetings, citizen activism to contribute to the improvement of situation in their localities, the extent to which local government projects are implemented with the participation of local actors/citizens and the degree of citizen involvement in the monitoring and evaluation of the local administration performance. The sub-criterion has scored 43 points, which is in the lower limit of the "average" score range and this is among the poorest rated of all sub-criteria in this mapping. Indicators show that citizens or community groups are better engaged in project implementation (56 points) and in attending municipal meetings (54 points), but they are less involved with the monitoring and evaluation of the local administration performance and even less with local government to improve the situation (15 points). The assessment of the municipal staff is more optimistic than the one by the community focus groups, whereas ratings are even lower from citizens through the CRCs.

Figure 108. Citizen engagement 2020



Compared to 2016, findings in 2020 show a slight deterioration in all indicators, except for the indicator of engagement with local government that has shrunk from 24-15 points. As it is, the situation suggests that citizens are largely indifferent to the decision-making process and the work of their local government administration and that local governance is a sole effort of the local administration. Under these conditions, the issues of effectiveness, transparency, accountability are in question.

Figure 109. Comparison of citizen engagement criteria



The municipalities of Polican, Kolonja and Roskovec have been rated as “very good” in terms of citizen participation in municipal meetings. Those listed at the bottom-10 received “poor” in the score range. Korca is also one of the municipalities ranked in the bottom 10 LGUs, scoring 40 points.

Figure 110. Participation of citizens in municipal meetings (Bottom 10 – Top 10)

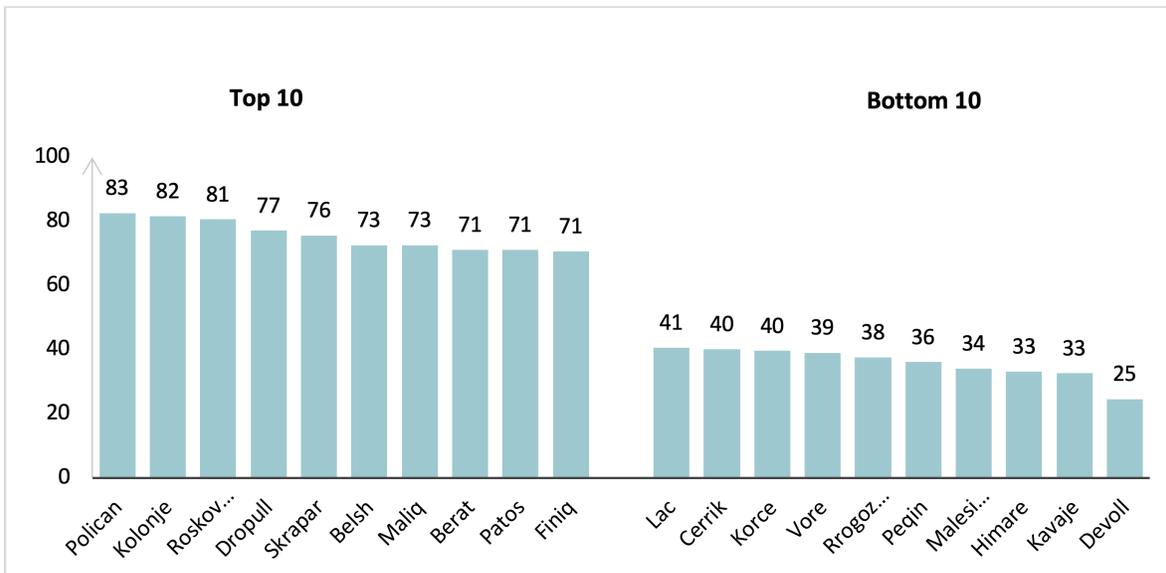
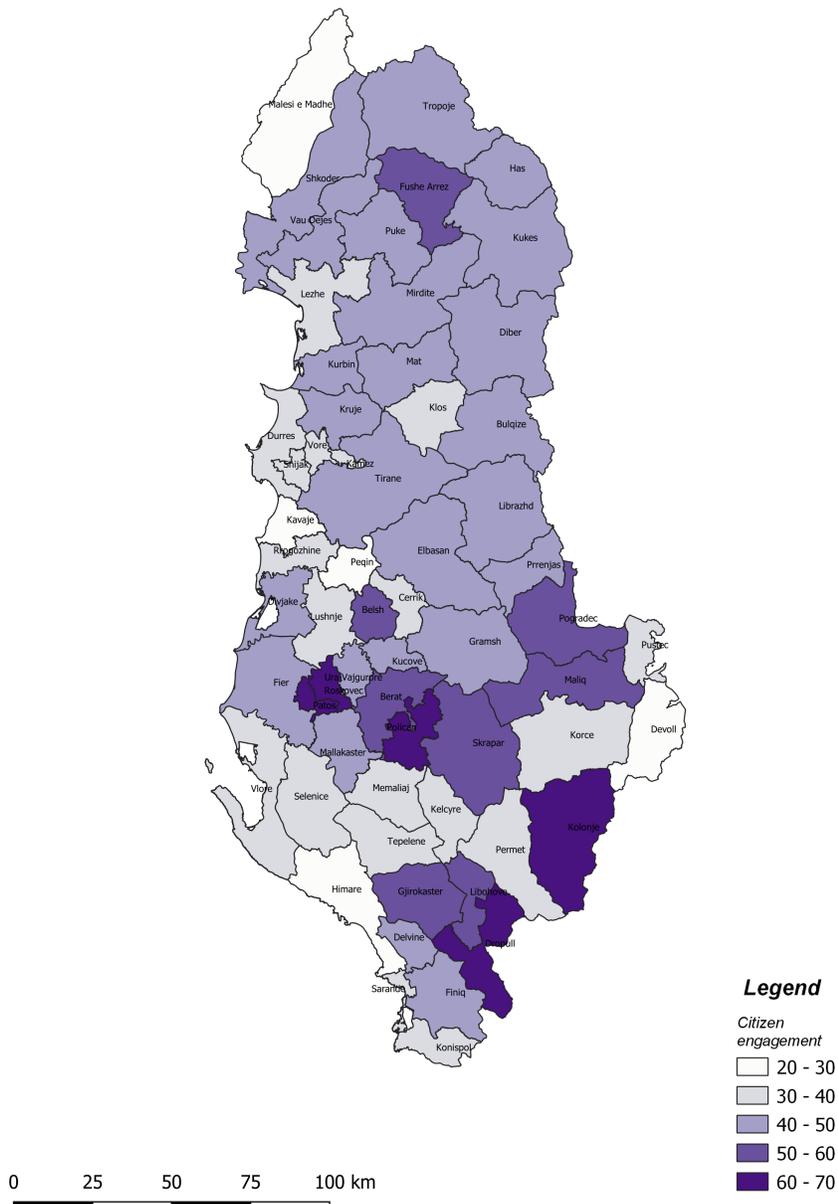


Figure 111. Citizen engagement Map

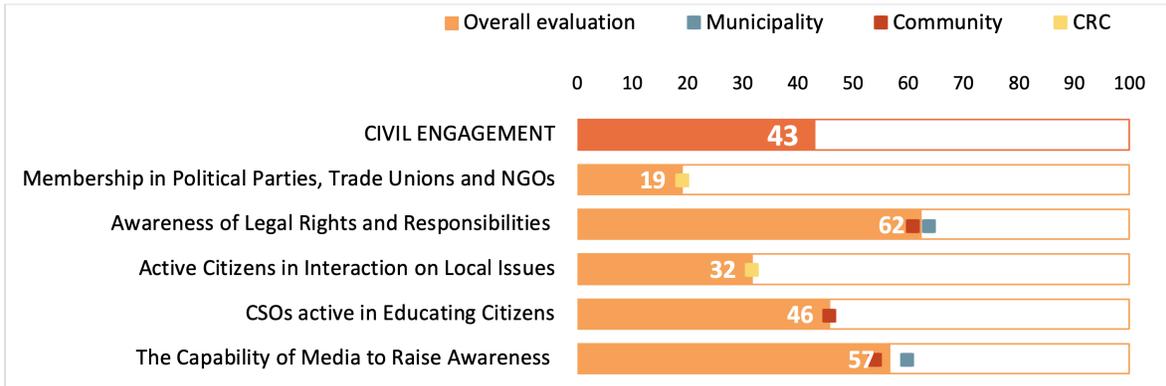


In conclusion, a low level of citizen engagement and a slight deterioration has been noticed compared to 2016 and engagement with CSOs is assessed as “very poor”. Citizen participation in planning, local project implementation and monitoring of public sector performance are all rated as “average” and do not show signs of improvement. The overall situation of citizen engagement has dropped to “nearly poor” when it comes to communities’ interaction with the local government or CSOs. The latter’s engagement is very low, reflecting a continued lack of engagement of the community with local governance. This situation is risky when it comes to the issues of effectiveness, transparency, and accountability.

3.5.4 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

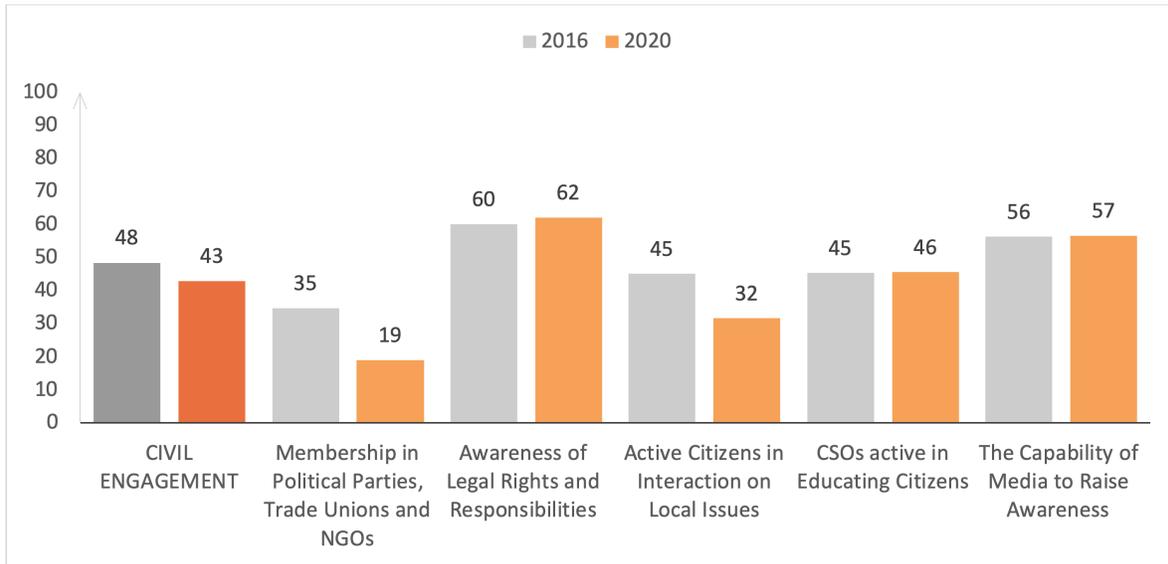
Civic engagement supports improvement in the interaction between the state and society, hence engagement of citizens and civil society with local administration is perceived as valuable. Similar to citizen engagement, the *civic engagement* sub-criterion measures the level of citizen participation in political and civic activism, how much cognizant they are of the rights and obligations as citizens and community members, the extent of their interaction with the local government, the effectiveness of CSOs in the education of citizens, and the media ability to raise citizens' awareness on their rights and obligations, and their role in local development issues. Civic engagement scored 43 points, falling within the "average" score range. Assessed indicators show that citizens are largely indifferent towards political parties, trade unions and civil social activism, (19 points). Further, their level of interaction with the local administration is also "poor", but they have "good" knowledge of their legal rights and responsibilities. CSOs seem to be sluggish concerning citizen education, whereas media ability to raise citizen awareness on their rights and duties and on their role has been assessed as "average". This is one of the very rare cases where community assessment is very close to the municipal staff assessment.

Figure 112. Civic engagement in 2020



When comparing the assessments of 2020 and 2016, we find that civic engagement has seemingly gone down with 5 points. Both indicators have scored considerably lower, with membership in the political parties, trade unions and NGOs dropping from 35 to 19 points and active citizens' interaction on local issues shrinking from 45 to 32 points.

Figure 113. The level of civic engagement – comparing criteria



The indicator of media awareness-raising ability results from an aggregate assessment of the municipal staff, community groups and citizens. Findings suggest that all municipalities listed in the top 10 score from 70 to 81 points, falling within the “good” score range, whereas those included in the bottom 10 range from 26 to 44 points, mostly falling within the “poor” score range. Discussions with the community and municipal officials have emphasized that the media in general is not fulfilling its awareness-raising role, whereas local media lacks adequate human and financial resources to play this role. Almost all small-sized municipalities have no local media.

Figure 114. Ability of the media to raise awareness (Bottom 10 – Top 10)

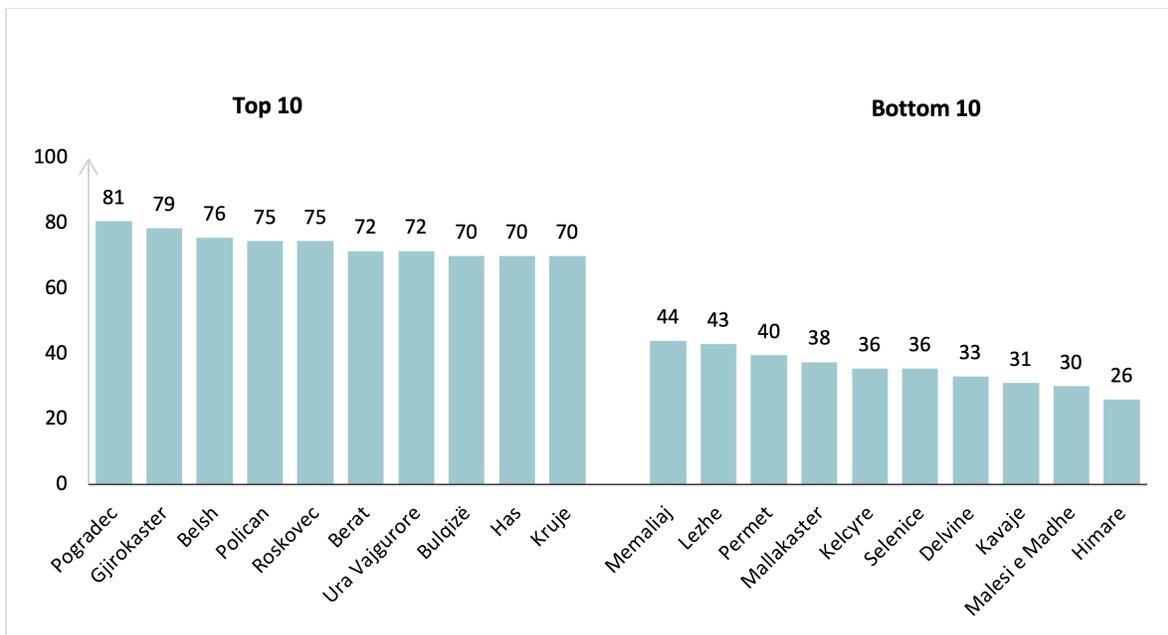


Figure 115 indicates a very poor level of public expression of opinions about local, political, social. The most common forms of communication are contacting or visiting a local public official to express an opinion on local issues (26 per cent), contacting or visiting a central government official to express an opinion on a local issue (14 per cent), expressing opinions on local issues on social media, like Facebook or Twitter (3 per cent), taking part in a protest, march or rally (4 per cent) etc. Comparing these figures to 2016, we may conclude that the level of interaction is significantly lower now. The same is true for the share of citizens who stated they would never go public with their views or personal opinions on any issue, which is very large (34-71%) and much larger than in 2016 (24-61%).

Figure 115. Interaction with local administration and public expression of citizen opinion on local, political, social or environmental issues

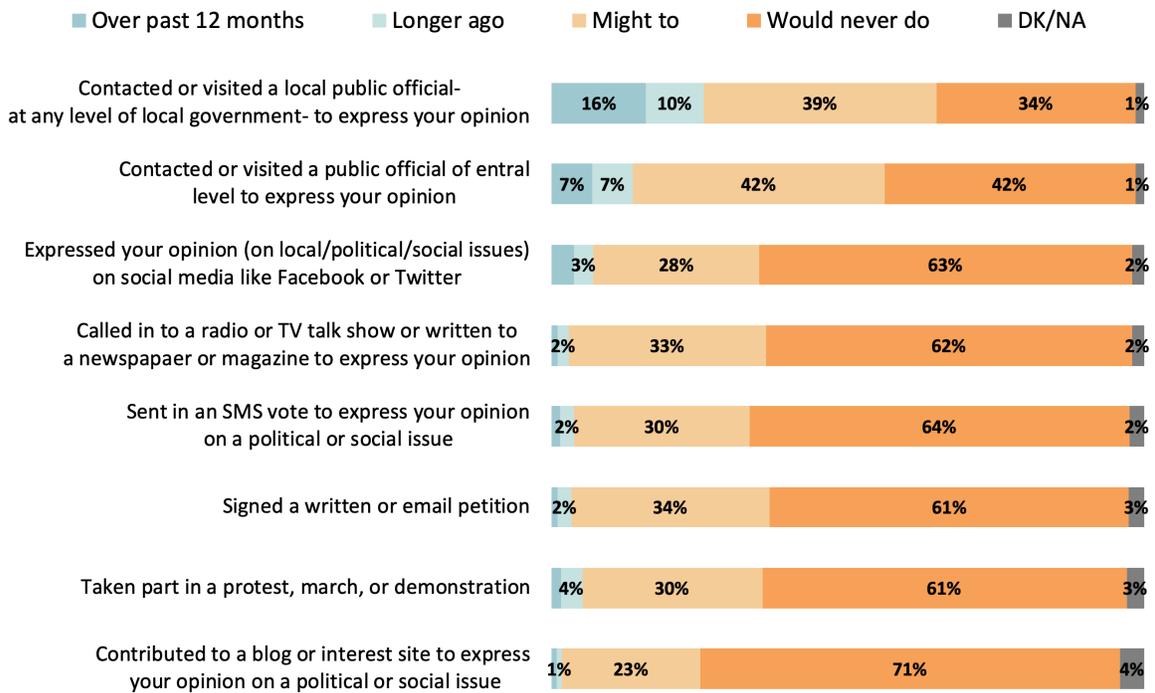
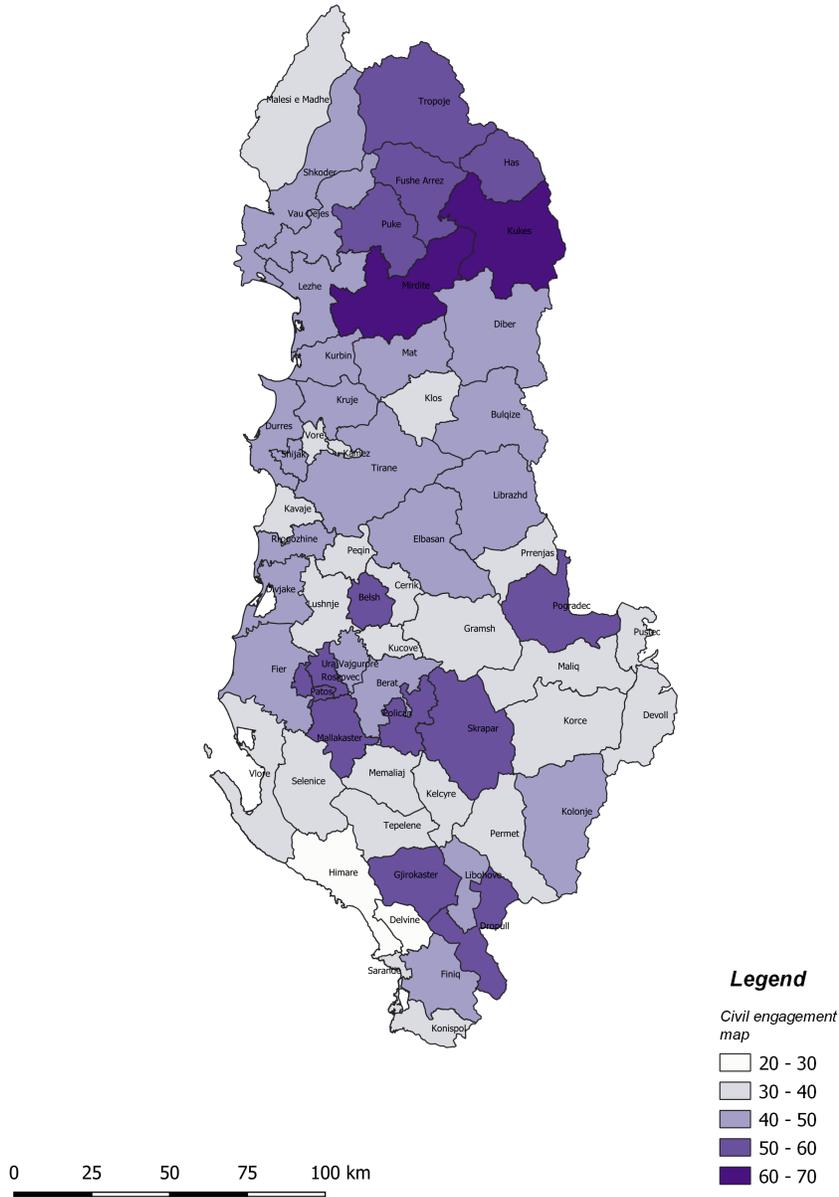
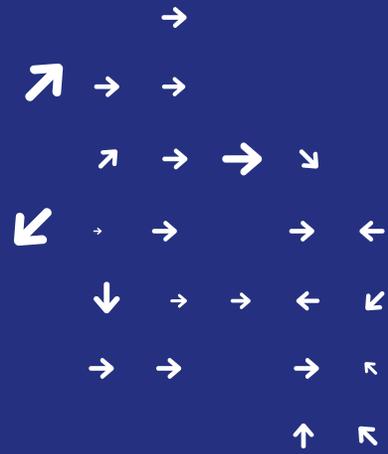


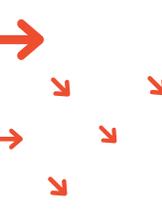
Figure 116. Civic engagement map



To conclude, civic engagement has deteriorated particularly regarding citizens' membership in political parties, trade unions and NGOs (very poor), and poor citizen interaction on local issues. CSOs show apathy in educating citizen, whereas the media is insufficiently able to raise awareness due to lack of human resources and budget, or inexistence in small municipalities. One third of citizens admit that they have interacted with local government or have publicly expressed their opinion about a local, political, social issue. Media in general has not been adequate in its awareness-raising role about citizens' rights and responsibilities, while the local media lacks human and financial resources to play this role. Almost all small-sized municipality lack local media.

04. CONCLUSIONS





→ In LGM 2020, no municipality had a “very good” performance rating at an aggregate level, but on the other hand, none of them was assessed with “poor” performance. There are 11% more municipalities, which upgraded their overall assessment from “average” to “good”. Compared to 2016, the situation in 2020 has seen improvements in terms of the effectiveness and efficiency, and transparency and rule of law, whereas while it has remained unchanged regarding accountability and Citizens’ Engagement. The latter is the least performing criterion. The improvement of the overall indicator is a result of the improved performance of small and medium size municipalities. Large size municipalities have deteriorated in their scoring.

The bigger the municipality size, the better its performance in terms of effectiveness and efficiency and lower in terms of Transparency and rule of Law and accountability. Most of the Top 5 ratings from both the public and local government are the same with those in 2016, while there is stronger concern on the lack of activism, engagement and influence of civil society and communities in LG issues.

Services – quality, access and citizen satisfaction levels: There is a one-point improvement in the aggregate assessment of satisfaction with services in 2020 compared to 2016, while the assessment of all listed public services, except for social assistance and economic aid, has shown a slight enhancement. The results indicate a big gap in the perception of access to and quality of municipal service delivery that has deteriorated over the last three years. Satisfaction with the service quality is higher in small-sized municipalities rather than in the medium-sized and large ones. No gender differences were observed when it comes to service delivery, but there are, however, significant rural-urban differences when it comes to the availability and access to certain services, such as parks and public space maintenance, cultural/historical/natural objects, sports areas/objects and activities, street lighting, and public transport. Every single public service has scored less in rural areas than in urban areas, with the sharpest difference noticed in the sewerage system (38% less). Easiness in obtaining administrative services has been rated as good, but large municipalities fall within the lower end of the “average” score range. Priority interventions listed by citizens are road maintenance (51%), drinking water supply (37%), sewerage (35%), street lighting (26%) and social assistance (25%). In the majority of the municipalities there is no good system in place to measure public satisfaction with the received municipal services, despite some existing tools funded by donors. Planning of public services, decision making, and correction measures are mainly based on the feedback from informal discussions and public hearings. No correlation has been identified between the quality of services and the local revenue collection performance. LGUs seem to yet unable to serve the large territories under their administration with the same access to public services.

Perception gaps between the community and municipal authorities: Significant discrepancies have been found between the ratings of municipal officials and the community for each indicator. Thus, all indicators under local administration vision and planning (GLP, Annual Sectoral Plans, Plan Implementation) scored better when assessed by the municipal staff as compared to the community. Communities assigned much lower scores than the municipal staff to MTBP and reliable statistics, and information updating. The same applies to the dissemination of information around projects/activities, administrative procedures and service performance. The discrepancy is rather significant between when comparing the perceptions of citizens, community and municipal staff regarding the assessed indicators under the rule of law (effectiveness of institutional and legal framework, effective measures on the legal rights and obligations of citizens, awareness raising on laws and local regulations). Different assessments were given by the community and municipal officials regarding the anti-corruption strategy and mechanisms to prevent corruption, and the discordance is also present when looking into the perceived corruption and real-life experience. Respond-

ents claimed they had little experience with corruption vis-à-vis its high perception, with half of the citizens stating they had not contacted the municipality since more than one year. This proves that perceptions may be drawn to a large extent on the opinions of others or the information published in the media and social media. The community assessment shows clearly that there is poor involvement in open forums, a small presence of skilled NGOs and insignificant community engagement in monitoring. Enormous gaps exist also regarding the recourse in the local government (mechanism for lodging complaints, mechanism to share inputs and effective handling of complaints). The same is true for the citizens' participation platforms, the public consultation and coordination, and the coordinator for the right to information. Engagement of youth and vulnerable groups scored much lower by the community, along with all the indicators under civic engagement. Whenever an indicator was assessed by the citizens, community and municipal staff, the lower scores were given by citizens, followed by the community, with huge variations at times ("poor" by citizens and "very good" by the municipal officials). Additionally, indicators assessed only by citizens are the lowest scoring throughout LGM, including transparency, impartial enforcement of laws and regulations, quality of delivered services, engagement with local government or CSOs, membership in political parties and NGOs, citizens' interaction on local issues etc. Such differences in assessment indicate that information is not flowing from the local administration towards communities and citizens, the citizens and communities are insufficiently engaged in local governance issues, municipalities have proceeded with planning and implementation without proper participatory processes and local civic activism is very scarce, if at all in the case of small municipalities, since there are no CSOs there.

Gender gap: Gender-wise LGM 2020 did not seem to identify any differences in the four assessed dimensions. The citizen perception is that the level of satisfaction with the quality of public services is slightly higher among females compared to males. In the meantime, the pattern of access to information on projects, activities and public services is identical for both males and females. Slight gender differences were noted in the perception of the impartial enforcement of laws and local regulations in favour of females. Males have a slightly higher frequency of complaints lodged with municipal offices compared to females (59% vs 55%), whereas the latter have a higher response rate than males. The Law on Local Government Finances after 2017 paved the way to the effective incorporation of GRB in all the phases of local financial management cycle, which confers greater responsibilities upon public entities to effectively pursue gender-based policies. However, there is a long process ahead towards implementations.

Plan implementation: LGM 2020 shows that major progress has been made in terms of planning compared to 2016, but the situation is still far from good. Requiring LGUs to have a strategic local plan in place seems rather ambitious. The number of municipalities with approved GLPs has increased and the situation is much better than what it used to be in 2016. However, one third still lacks GLPs or have outdated versions. Most of the municipalities do have Annual Sectoral Plans, but the dialogues confirmed there are still important sectors within LGUs without such a plan, as water and sewerage system, urban waste collection and recycling, forests management etc. Clear vision and inclusive planning are rated as "good", in a significant improvement compared to 2016 (61 vs. 54 points). Community participation in the drafting process and the reflection of their suggestions is assessed as poor. Plans are ambitious considering the available funds and the implementing capacities. Progress has been made recently in increasing community access to sectoral plans, but it is still sluggish and the community claims to be uninformed. Plans, on the other hand are often shelved due to various reasons, but mostly for lack of funding.

Inter- and intra-municipal coordination and cooperation: Coordination and cooperation in 2020 has improved compared to 2016. Internal vertical and horizontal coordination and cooperation, including among departments and cooperation with the municipal council, perform much better than the external cooperation, such as consultation with the central government, cooperation with donors and with other municipalities. Small-sized municipalities have the lowest ratings in terms of cooperation with donors and international community. Consultation with central government and the related satisfaction level are limited to fund allocation.

Staff capacity and relevant competences: Staff capacity for certain functions, particularly the highly specialized ones, is one of the major issues coming out of the dialogue with municipal officials. That includes scarce local human resources as GIS operators, urban developers, social workers, engineers to guarantee planning and delivery of public services such as irrigation and drainage systems, waste management, forests management etc. Inability to find qualitative staff remains a challenge for half of the municipalities regarding financial planning, financial mechanisms, and tax collection. There is a strong correlation between the size of municipality and staff skills. However, central government institutions covering LGUs, such as the MoFE, and donors have put a lot of efforts in the capacity building of the local administration staff and in increasing public involvement in local governance.

Revenue generation: Collection of local revenues in 2020 went down with 13 points compared to 2016. Taxes collected from the business are better managed compared to taxes from citizens, due to their low payment capacity, particularly for small-sized municipalities, and tax collection mechanisms. The municipalities which use water bills for tax collection record a higher collection rate. There is a significant gap between financial mechanisms and generation of local revenues. Poor local revenues lead to insufficient funding that, in turn, prevents access to bank loans.

Insufficient data and statistics: As far as the informed decision making is concerned, it draws on partially reliable data or systems. Governmental statistics/data from civil registry, tax departments, INSTAT, Ministry of Finance etc. are deemed to be mostly reliable and easy to access, while secondary data that is specifically collected to assist the decision making for municipalities is missing or unreliable in most of them. A growing number of GIS platforms with increasing quality are being used widely. Property registry data is considered rather problematic by municipal officials and citizens, with many overlapping property boundaries and other types of inaccuracies. Generally, the periodical reporting system is considered good, barring the fact that reports are accessible by the public.

Transparency and information flow: Transparency and accessible information marked an improvement in 2020 compared to 2016, but citizens' perception on transparency and information available on projects and activities is the lowest (around 40 points out of 100). There are several legal obligations for the LGUs and mayors to guarantee transparency and information dissemination for their citizens. Positive steps have been taken regarding the appointment of coordinators for the right to information and publishing of local decisions. However, not all municipalities have designed transparency programmes or have published the register of requests and replies. E-Albania has been highlighted as a useful tool to avoid red tape and reduce consumption. Apparently, a proper and effective way to inform citizens about services, projects, and activities, and further involve them in decision making has not been identified yet. There is a difference in how transparency is perceived between rural and urban areas and there is still a high share of citizens with little information about project, activities and public services. That is much more pronounced among rural population. While there is an enabling framework and several laws in place, their implementation is slow. Systems and mechanisms to inform citizens regularly on municipal budget, activities and projects are still inadequate within municipalities. The distance between the LGUs and citizens has reduced trust and credibility in the LG commitment to transparency.

Accountability system: The slight improvement in control and complaint mechanisms has not resulted in better LGU responsiveness, with the latter deteriorating in 2020 compared to 2016. The smaller the municipality, the higher the responsiveness and the lower the application of control mechanisms. Checks and balances are still difficult to be achieved in most of the LGUs, due to unsustainable CSO forums/platforms or lack of active CSOs that are generally perceived to be inadequately skilled to raise LGUs accountability. The Supreme State Audit results to exert stronger control compared to the supervisory role of municipal council or community councils. There are mechanisms in place to lodge complaints, but they perform poorly in terms of sharing input. Handling of complaints appears to be ineffective, with different degrees of perception between citizens and municipalities. Citizens and the community are sceptical in relation to the responsiveness to requests and complaints.

Participation and citizen Engagement: The assessment of the participation and citizen engagement in 2020 shows the same results as in 2016. Among 19 assessed indicators under this criterion, engagement with local government or CSOs and membership in political parties, trade unions and NGOs have been rated as “very poor”, being the lowest scorings ones. That suggests that citizens are largely indifferent to decision making and that local governance is an effort made solely by the local administration. There is a significant variation between the perception of the municipal staff and the community in relation to the platforms for citizen participation. Thus, there are cases where officials claim there are effective platforms in place, but that is not what the communities affirm. Several large municipalities seem to be rather optimistic regarding citizen participation platforms, but the attitude is not shared by communities. Significant improvement has been noted regarding participatory budget system. Communities appear to be hesitant when it comes to the changes made to the institutional framework on citizen participation, which might be a result of either limited information or LGU inability to enable their participation.

Civil society organizations and local governance: Compared to 2016, 2020 marks a 2-point improvement in the CSOs influence in decision making. However, CSOs are less engaged in decision making compared to youth, vulnerable groups and women, which score better. Typically, local government decision making is still not open enough to the above groups. Around one third of the municipalities lack active CSOs or groups of interest and in some others CSOs find themselves to have insufficient capacities. Dialogues with the community and municipal officials highlighted that in about half of the municipalities youth participates in decision making mainly through the Youth Council or Youth Parliament. In some municipalities, youth organizations are politically based, whereas in some others, particularly in south Albania, youth organizations are weak due to emigration.

Emergency plans, planned emergency budgets and staff recruitment: Following suggestions from UNDP, additional questions regarding emergency plans, planned emergency budgets and staff recruitment were added to the discussion guide for the Municipality Group Discussion.

Findings suggest that, although the majority of municipalities claim to have emergency plans in place to respond to natural disasters, these are not necessarily focused on disasters like the most recent earthquake, but rather on usual concerns which constitute emergencies for a given municipality within its territorial reach, such as floods, fires etc. It appears that most of the municipalities have set up an official structure to deal with emergencies, with a designated team within the municipality engaged in such cases. In some municipalities like Kruja and Durres, an emergency unit has been established following the events of the November earthquake. Actually, all municipalities have made attempts to strengthen their approach in this respect after the earthquake. They are all aware of the increased budget allocated to natural disasters (1.7%) and they are in the process of integrating this budget accordingly.

Regarding staff recruitment, the majority of the municipalities have claimed that they encounter difficulties in recruiting new staff due to factors such as: a) lack of specialized workers, particularly in areas like engineering, topography, GIS, or even law/economy; b) lack of young people living in their territory, which is the case specifically in the municipalities of Himara, Ura Vajgurore, Kucova, Selenice, Pogradec etc.

Citizens’ approach to emergency management: Following UNDP suggestions, additional questions regarding citizen’s approach to emergencies and their relationship to the municipality were asked in the Community Discussion Groups. Qualitative findings in this respect suggest that the participants have a shared perception that their municipalities would assist them in case of natural disaster and that they would try to contact their municipality in such cases. However, their trust in municipal structures to offer solutions to their issues remains low. Participants in the focus groups in the municipalities of Korca and Tirana displayed higher levels of satisfaction in this regard.

Moreover, the citizens were also asked to offer their opinion on the new administrative and territory reform. Almost all community group participants agreed that the new administrative reform has brought many benefits to their area, as well as more shared responsibilities.



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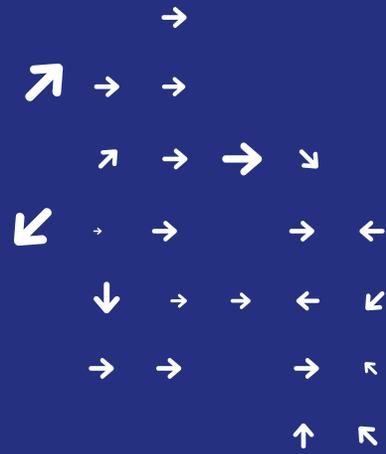
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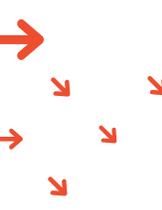
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05. RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD





→ Enhancement of local governance and the decentralization process by increasing the efficiency of LGU structures, strengthening local finances and fiscal autonomy, ensuring good governance at the local level and promoting sustainable development are reconfirmed priorities of the National Crosscutting Strategy for Decentralization and Local Governance.

The second local governance mapping report touches upon four main good-governance dimensions selected for this assessment⁴². The four dimensions are also essential standards for local public administration in the context of EU integration process. Thus it is strongly recommended that the findings of these report are considered as guidance in terms of understanding where further support is needed and where should our resources be focused in the future, to make sure that the local government gets able to serve to the citizens in compliance with EU standards.

The conclusions of the Local Governance Mapping 2020 and the noted progress of the LGUs in terms of the Effectiveness and Efficiency, Transparency and Rule of Law, Accountability and Citizen and Civic Engagement emphasize the importance to follow the recommendation structure used in under LGM 2016, namely:

1. Policy and regulatory reform related interventions
2. Local government capacities for improved service delivery
3. Bottom-up transparency and accountability mechanisms
4. Sustainable and effective mechanism for citizen engagement

I. Policy and regulatory reform related interventions

There is evident discordance between the functions transferred to the municipalities and the allocated financial resources they have available to ensure implementation. The fiscal decentralization reform needs to advance. Special emphasis should be placed on the poor performance of local government units in terms of local revenue collection and of finding the financial instruments to enable them to fulfil the additional responsibilities and access municipal loans, as part of the national public debt policy. The fiscal behaviour of large municipalities and its compatibility with the national fiscal policies need to be observed, in order to guarantee the best service for citizens and an equitable treatment of LGUs by the central government, and to address disparities across municipalities.

Large municipalities need to start working on the Strategic Plan for their cities and proceed further with the GLP approval/update. LGUs should make all efforts to finalize the land registration reform, in order to remove obstacles in the way of a better GIS use. The National Agency for Territory Planning is a pivotal institution that provides municipalities with the necessary tools for a good and sustainable governance of their territory, assists with the GLP preparation process and provides municipalities across the country with GLPs.

Efforts to establish clear linkages with MTBP and other local financial planning instruments should be stepped up. The municipal fiscal space needs to be enhanced to create equitable and predictable financial

42. Effectiveness and efficiency, transparency and rule of law, accountability participation and citizen engagement

resources sustaining the implementation of municipal plans and projects. The adoption of the new Law on Local Finances is a major contribution in this direction, although its implementation and effect should be closely monitored.

In addition to the efforts to fully apply the law on civil servants, there is a need to ensure optimal utilization of human resources in the administration of the restructured municipalities. Staff training plans should be in place in each municipality, while other instruments should be identified to fill the gap of missing human resources in small local units and to promote staff recruitment mechanisms in these locations. Inter-municipal cooperation could be of particular interest in this respect.

Implementation mechanisms of the two critical Laws on Public Consultation and Right to Information must be reinforced through allocation of adequate financial resources, human resources, skill development and awareness raising about their implications at municipal and administrative unit levels. Monitoring Mechanisms should become effective to ensure enforcement of these legal provisions.

II. Capacity strengthening strategies for local administration, councillors and Mayors in improving service delivery organization and performance management of key services.

(i) Leadership development: The LGM 2020 dashboard indicates that at an aggregate level, despite the progress made in the four measured dimensions, municipalities are still lagging significantly behind concerning accountability, transparency and rule of law and civic and civil engagement, and to a lesser degree, in effectiveness and efficiency. Most of the low-scoring municipal performance results from the big perception gaps existing between citizens and the municipal staff. That indicates a closing of municipalities toward its citizens and a rather indifferent attitude of the latter on local governance issues. As such, the elected political leaders in municipalities need to develop their vision for the entire territory under their administration and find ways to open up towards participatory governance approaches. They should see their role as integral to the national development vision of planning and executing with the objective of ensuring quality public services and wellbeing for their citizens.

As such, any capacity development effort for local governments and administration should call for engagement of national and international partners to have a coordinated approach based on new local government law, decentralization and public administration strategies as well as territorial and administrative reform.

Mayors need to intensify their communication and exchange between them as well as with the central government institutions and to enhance collaboration. The Chairs of Municipal Councils should enhance their monitoring and supervisory role for the local administration in order to guarantee effective implementation of their decisions. Councils should exercise better their role by strengthening communication and consultation with citizens.

A new partnership culture should be established. LGUs- Central Government, between LGUs (peer-to-peer support, winning arrangements etc.) and most importantly with citizens, which are at the core of the implementation of territorial administrative reform and decentralization. A new mindset and attitude of local authorities will narrow the gaps they have particularly with citizens. Any capacity development, therefore, must aim at changing the attitudes and mind set of the local authorities. It should focus on the development of new competencies within which municipalities and municipal councils must operate, the new roles to be played, and accountability and networking mechanisms.

LGM 2020 re-emphasizes the need to create peer networks of cross-party mayors and departmental heads across the municipalities to exchange notes and learn from each other about their different leadership styles or other innovations. Inviting influential and impactful municipal leaders from the neighbouring and other countries for motivational dialogue with the Albanian municipal leaders is worthwhile, particularly in the framework

of the municipalities' role under the EU negotiation process.

Large municipalities should expand transfer of the knowledge and experience to a broader group of local governments and should assist other municipalities with their accumulated knowledge and skills as well as with their developed systems to improve public services.

(ii) Participatory planning and budgeting skills and systems: Participatory planning and participatory implementation of the projects, activities and services seem to be a weakness for the local administration. There are still one third of municipalities without an approved GLP. They need to involve citizens and interest groups throughout the preparation process, provide more information to them, extend invitations for their contribution and take into consideration the suggestions they made or explain their final decisions. The National Agency for Territorial planning in cooperation with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy should assist the LGs with the necessary guidelines.

The good progress made for preparation of the participatory MTBP and other financial planning documents such as annual financial plan should continue, and emphasis should be placed on participative monitoring and evaluation. Trainings should continue also for making the financial planning process gender responsive. Skills development on participatory planning processes and on engagement with CSOs, private sector and citizens (women, other vulnerable groups) as well as in participatory budgeting processes should be high in the assistance agenda. This could also involve undertaking mock or real-life trainings in participatory budgeting approaches and enable discussion and voting on spending priorities, making spending proposals, as well as showing ways to give local people a role in the scrutiny and monitoring of the process and results to inform subsequent decisions on an annual or recurrent basis. Capacity development support is also essential for good quality project preparation for accessing funding channels.

Additionally, for better planning, data gaps must be addressed. Linking data with the territory has become a must in decision making for all governments today. Even though there is an increase in the usage of GIS from the last wave, still their usage is limited and not integrated with all the required data. municipalities need to invest in creating a GIS platform integrated with the statistics they produce and own. Creating dedicated structure for data collection and processing should be a priority for municipalities. Such structure should be well organized and with a clear mandate to use other municipal resources to collect, verify and validate the required data. Each administrative unit should be responsible and required to "fuel" data from their units to the municipal sector of statistics. The need for a harmonized and integrated management information system that would serve for better and more informed decisions as well as for a comprehensive and evidence-based performance evaluation of municipalities, should be a priority for any development interventions at local level.

(iii). Service delivery systems: Based on the competences of the local governments, the local administration in municipalities and administrative units should be supported to develop service delivery standards and systems around key service priorities. A few illustrative elements are outlined below.

a. A result oriented service delivery system should be developed in all municipalities. A result-oriented approach would require orienting all aspects of planning and management including the performance based financial transfers. The territorial administrative reform should continue with the improvement of financial management and financial discipline and the efficient use of the local taxes collection so that they are trusted by the potential creditors as well as their citizens. This is a serious challenge particularly for small and medium size municipalities, because they are less trusted by the potential creditors or investment partners compared to the large municipalities.

b. There is a need for strategic assessment and planning of appropriate and effective forms of public and administrative service delivery mechanisms specific to each particular municipal territory. Municipal administrations must choose those delivery options that would ensure maximum benefit and efficiency within their unique

context. They might need technical assistance for developing appropriate organizational models or appropriate delivery options such as PPP, corporatization, partnership with CBOs and NGOs, IMC or use of public enterprises as per their needs and resource availability with the restructured municipalities. Cooperation between local government units and a third party is provided for and encouraged under the law on local government for improving service delivery. The IMC has been an important instrument to drive reforms and service delivery in EU countries. It is critical for addressing issues of scale, learnings and supporting service delivery across differently sized municipalities. It can become a channel for accessing EU funds. More IMC initiatives could be supported based on similar municipal plan priorities of adjoining municipalities and could focus on mutual benefits in service delivery, local economic development or environment protection. Local innovations in service provisioning in the municipalities may translate or feed into nationwide reforms.

As part of this, e-services through one-stop-shop (OSS) have noted good progress, but they need to be expanded in all local government units. There is sufficient evidence that proves the advantage of these services as time-efficient, non-corruptive and easy to be received.

c. Owing to lack of effective public service assessment systems, that is an important area needing support. The local self-governance law underlines the need for service standards. The law on the right to information also mandates public authorities to inform the public about the quality of service standards. To measure service delivery effectiveness, development of a performance standard system (with standards/indicators) is necessary, covering for instance the outreach and accessibility of the particular service, affordability and quality, equity (especially gender equity), overall satisfaction of citizens, financial and administrative cost effectiveness and sustainability including environmental sustainability. These measures are also in line with the Law on Local Self-government and the Strategy on Decentralization and Local Governance. For each of the indicators, a benchmark will need to be set and various parameters may need to be factored in.

Benchmarking is an important instrument for comparing and evaluating performance in a more objective way. It can also help in determining challenges between processes and performance of delivering services. The importance of good and reliable information systems cannot be emphasized for the operational effectiveness of benchmarking. It may be worthwhile for local governments to explore participation of civil society and business stakeholders in setting benchmarks. The local governments can repeat the assessment at suitable intervals to monitor performance as well as to determine if information gathered through benchmarking has been used to improve performance (monitoring of the implementation of improvements plans). The data can be used to conduct inter-municipal comparisons.

d. While gender equity is achieved in terms of access to services, urban-rural present disparities in service availability, provision and quality. Also, the level of trust of the rural communities is lower regarding municipal services. The municipalities should act and treat equally the whole territory under their administration. The local administrative units should serve as municipal agents in their locations for bringing community concerns to the municipal authorities. Ensuring equity in provision of quality public goods and services can help equalize opportunities, allow individuals to increase human capital such as education, health and skills; and financial capital. Thus, the rural inhabitants, minority groups or other vulnerable should be provided with equitable share of resources. Similarly, the social protection systems including safety nets need to be better targeted as they act as mechanism of equity, redistributing resources to the most vulnerable to avoid extreme deprivation in outcomes as in the case of Roma and Egyptians, or the poor, disabled. The rural population is less informed regarding the laws and regulations in place and they express that there is an impartial enforcement of these laws. A targeted information and awareness policy for rural communities is very important in order to achieve the social cohesion of the population.

III. Transparency and integrity mechanisms within local administration and citizen accountability mechanisms.

To make the top-down and horizontal accountability more effective, bottom-up accountability is equally critical. Hence, improving citizen engagement and participation at the municipal and administrative unit levels need to be taken very seriously in the overall local government reforming agenda. This is true for municipalities of all sizes.

There is a strong need to establish a culture of accountability and learning through the formal institutionalization of an inbuilt tracking and monitoring system to ensure regular progress review and assessment for projects and plans during implementation, followed by the application of the lessons learned through this mechanism. Additionally, training, coaching and mentoring of dedicated municipal staff need to be undertaken to promote monitoring of results. Further, for the accountability system to be effective, it is crucially important to have a very good statistical system in place.

It is good that the Supreme State Audit and internal audit recommendations are used as a control mechanism for almost all LGUs, but more emphasis should be placed in increasing the role of municipal councillors, who need to be periodically informed about the progress made and the problems encountered during the implementation of their decisions. There is also a need to open up municipal council meetings to the public, while finding ways to make citizens interested in participating and contributing.

Another component that improves the accountability of municipal departments is citizen complaints management and redress mechanisms. A unified complaint management system needs to be designed following a database that allows not only to track complaints, but also to arrange them in categories and analyse their typology for future policy development. Municipalities declare they have mechanisms for lodging complaints, but the response mechanisms for citizens are not effective. Also, a big challenge remains building an effective complaint management system. Good practices existing in some municipalities, such as feedback platforms, need to be replicated.

Citizen engagement in supporting the local government to monitor service delivery and plan implementation is critically important for the future, since people living in municipalities are much better acquainted with the field realities. Local authorities should give voice the citizens through their representation in forums like CSOs, citizen advisory commissions, women's groups, youth councils etc., so that the fatigue existing currently in this respect is reduced. In the meantime, there should be serious consideration on how to deal with small-sized municipalities where the CSOs, youth groups and women associations do not exist or are totally inactive.

Making information available through transparency initiatives is an important first step towards increasing accountability. Without the necessary information on government decisions or responsibilities, development plans and budgets citizens have no basis on which to hold the government accountable. Increasing the availability of reliable information, evidence generation on the performance of public services and increasing the access to that information is fundamental for the promotion of greater government accountability and responsiveness. In this regard, the capacity and authority of the Coordinator for the Right to Information needs to be reinforced, so that citizens have adequate access to the relevant information.

New digital technologies and social media platforms have amplified the possibilities for information dissemination. In rural areas, a targeted information strategy should be devised. Digitalization of the municipal plans and budgets would also help to enhance local government transparency.

The existence of official websites in municipalities is a very important achievement, but they need to be updated regularly with useful information be user friendly. Information on local government laws, municipal plans, projects, activities, budgets, expenditures etc. should be published through several information dissemination

mechanisms, but the website should be a focal point for such dissemination.

Local government units should use new and innovative local systems and mechanisms based on the national anti-corruption framework to further support their effectiveness in preventing any potential corrupt practice within the municipal structures. Besides, there are other equally effective mechanisms in place that can be emulated by other municipalities, for instance, a published telephone line where citizens can report corrupt practices, while preserving anonymity.

IV. Creation of sustainable and effective mechanisms for citizen and CSO engagement with local authorities.

The *Legal Framework on the Notification and Public Consultation* has legislated the development of participatory structures. The local government law also provides for community structures at local level. The Local Governance Mapping results show that citizen participation and civic engagement is the weakest of the governance dimensions across Albanian municipalities.

Citizen engagement through direct participation and deliberation or through social organizations can improve collective action. First, given that the presence of CSOs/NGOs is limited outside the capital, it is important for local authorities to recognize that there are alternative ways, such as citizen forums, community advisory councils, etc. that can be promoted. Community councils and other citizen engagement mechanisms should be treated as an important tool to mobilize citizens around specific issues. The mobilization can bring in new demands and interests into the bargaining space, reshaping the preference of actors and expanding the boundaries of neglected issues. Unless these existing forums are properly empowered, improvements in service quality may as well remain wishful thinking. Mechanisms such as dedicated space in some municipality official websites ('Improve my city') or innovative smart phone applications ('My Tirana') could also be replicated across all 61 municipalities to seek citizen inputs.

Effective and inclusive participation should precede legal awareness of citizens on their rights and obligations and various new regulatory reforms encouraging participation. Information and awareness-raising campaigns should be organized regularly with this aim. Open public meetings with the municipality should also plan for special sections/segments with the legal department, where new legislation and regulatory changes are discussed with the public.

The existing CSOs' capacities should be strengthened to engage in a meaningful way with local governments, especially in smaller municipalities. There should be some mechanism to motivate and promote the CSOs in these areas. One such mechanism is the Agency for Support of Civil Society (AMSHC), which should prioritize funding for CSO capacity building and to support specific projects by CSOs in these areas. Further, local government units must have an exhaustive list of CSOs, and groups operating within their territory and notify them about municipal public hearings or events. That practice can augment CSOs ability to lobby and advocate with local government to influence its planning and decision making.

Participatory budgeting, referred to earlier in this report, should be pursued building on best practices (for instance, Elbasan municipality). This process will help CSOs and citizens participate in the allocation of at least part of the local government's available financial resources or in the scoring schemes of the local government, to decide on the most relevant priorities. Use of internet may also be tested in some municipalities where it is feasible. However, offline participation is also important to ensure that rural inhabitants, women, other vulnerable groups are able to effectively participate in influencing the local budgeting process. These processes would help local administrators support inclusive planning and consultative processes and determine the priorities of citizens/people priorities and reflect the same in the local plans and budget allocations.



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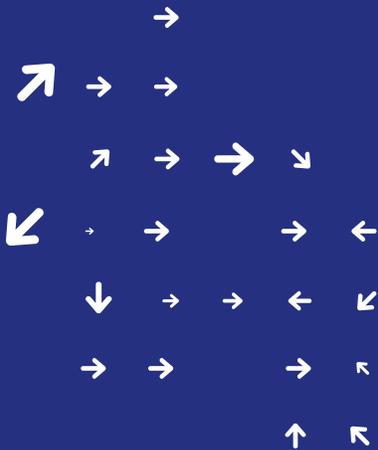
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Annex: MUNICIPALITY SCORES



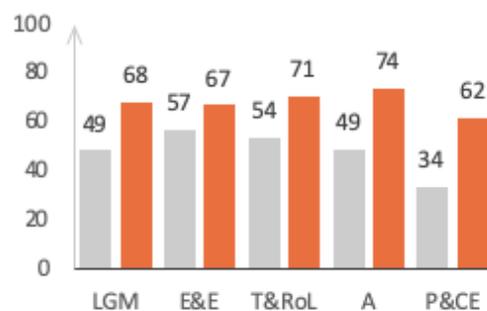
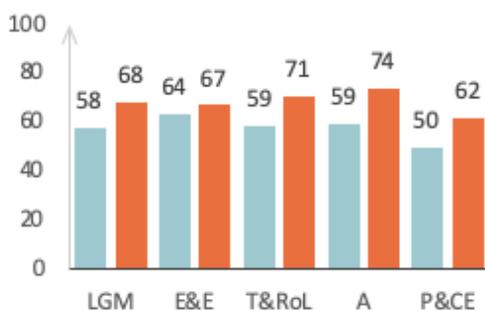
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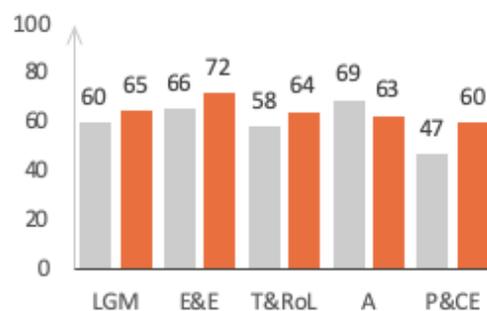
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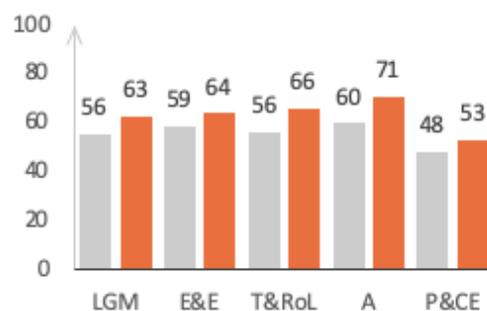
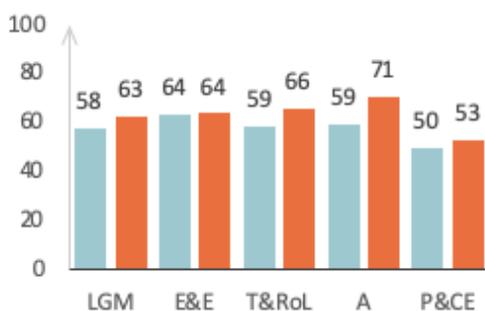
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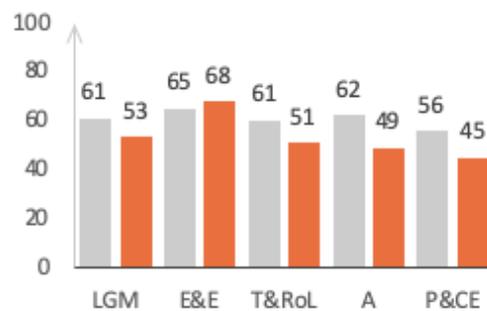
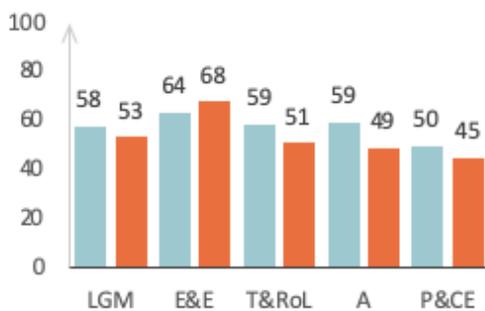
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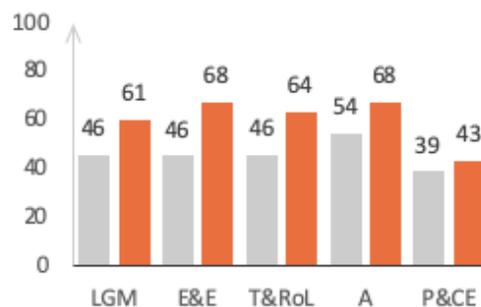
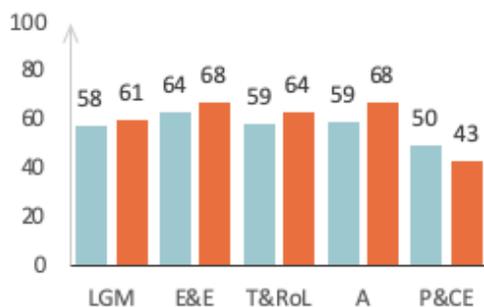
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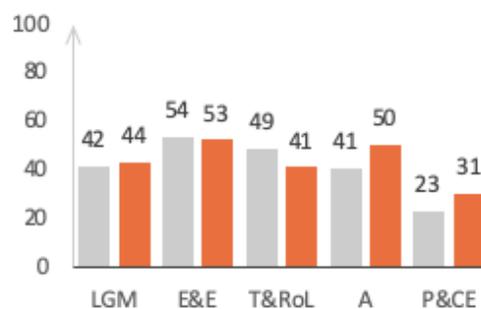
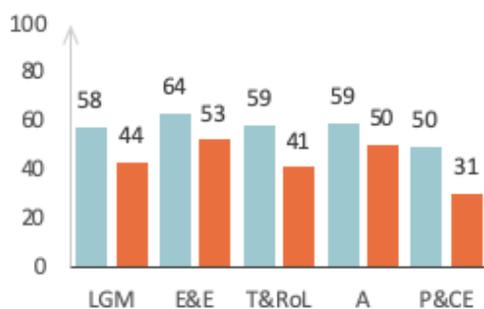
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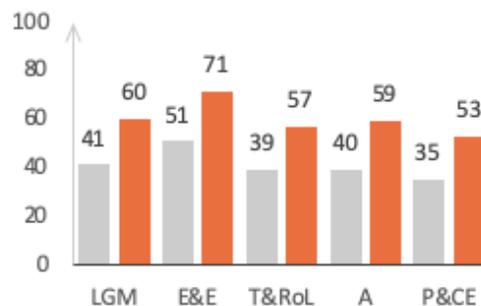
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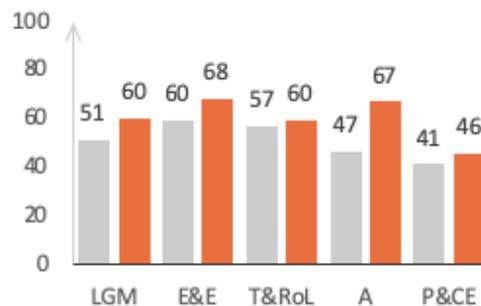
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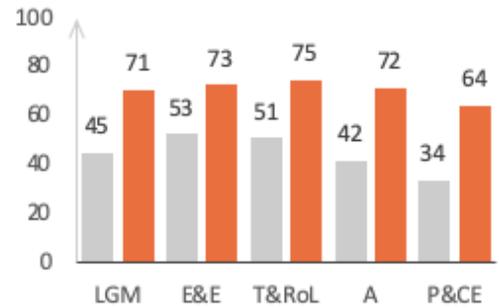
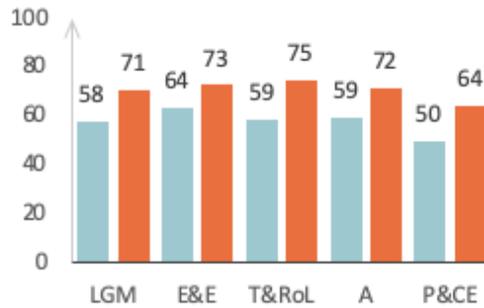
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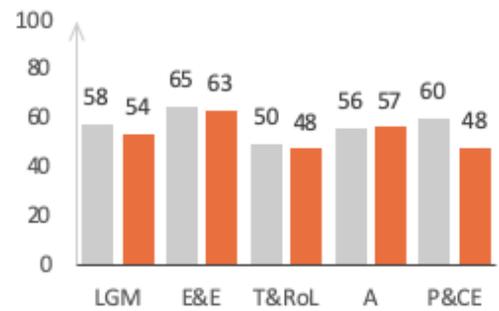
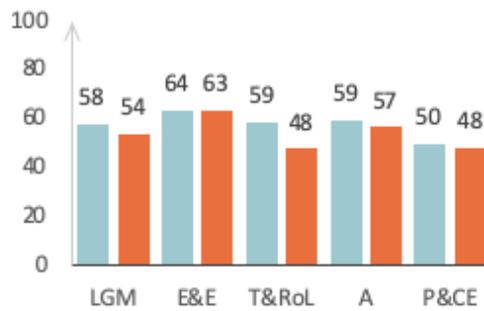
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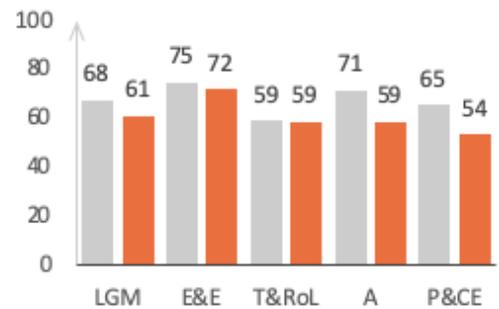
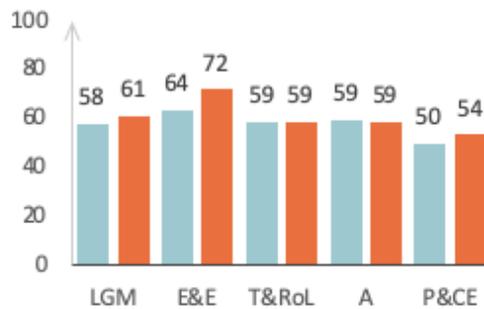
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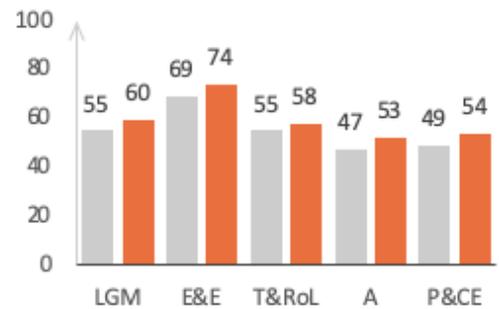
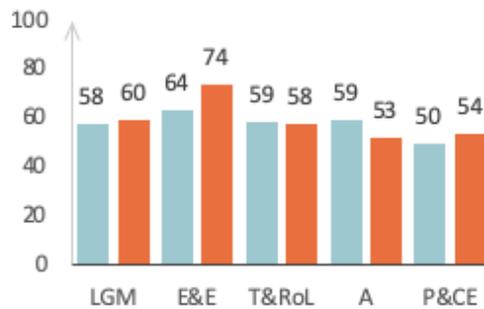
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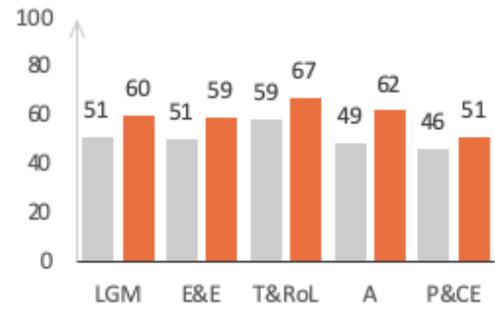
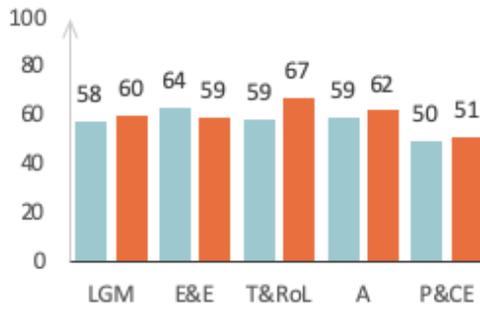
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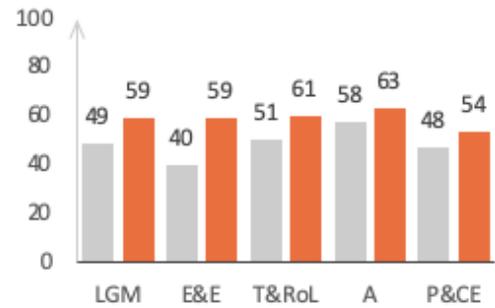
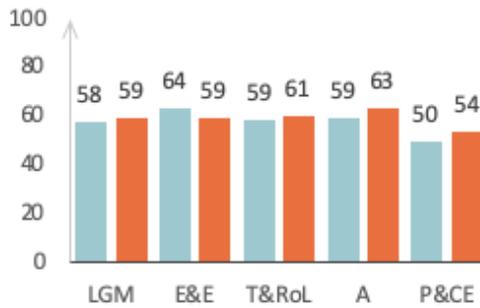
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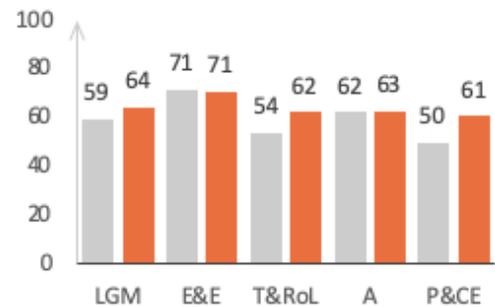
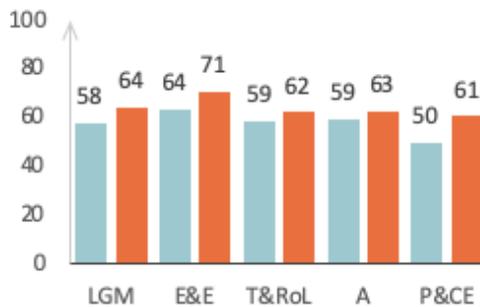
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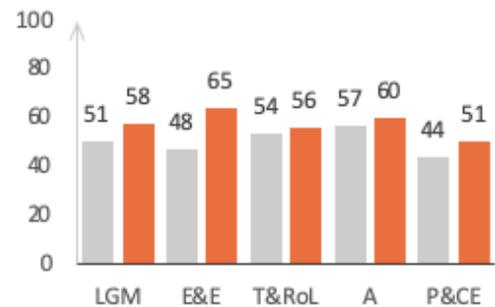
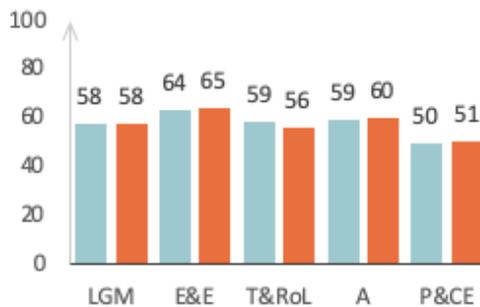
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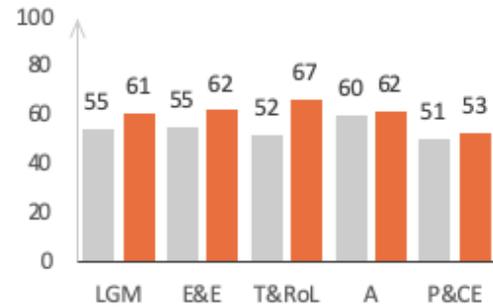
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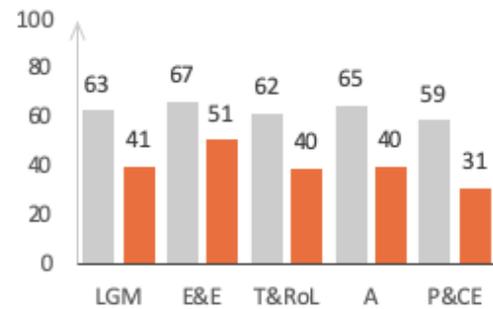
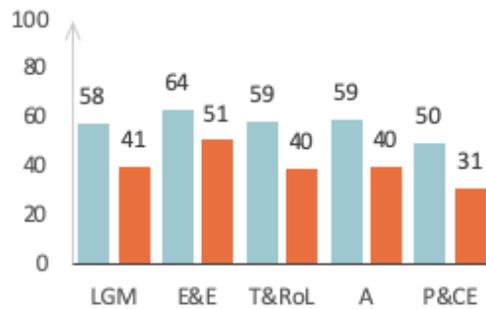
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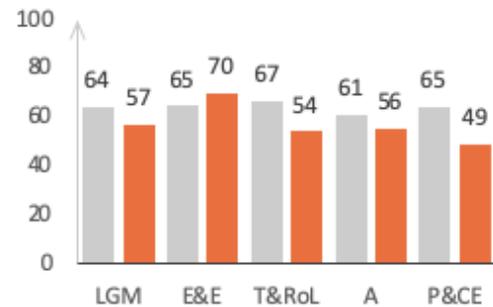
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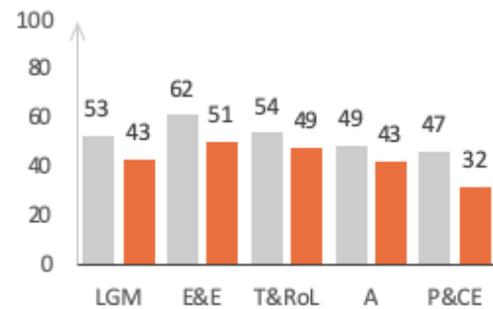
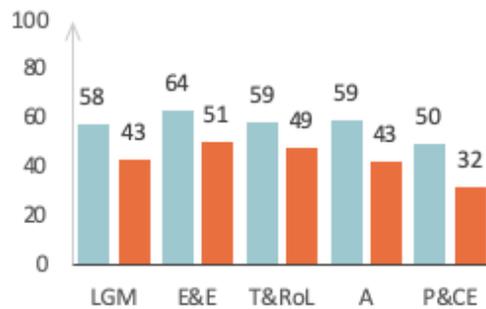
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Kamez



Kavaje



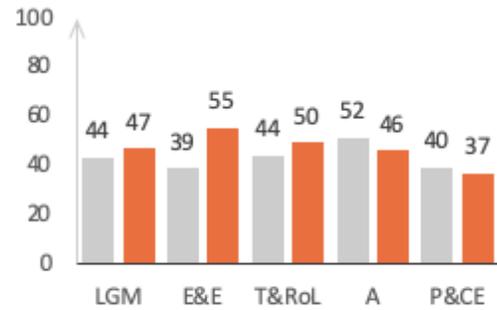
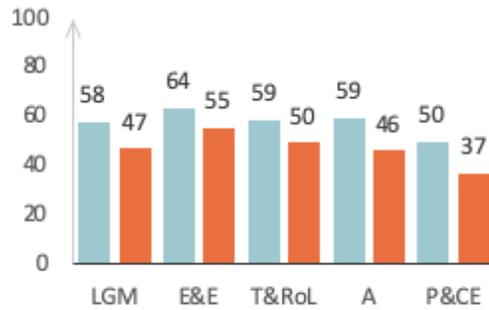
Comparison with Country Average

Average Municipality

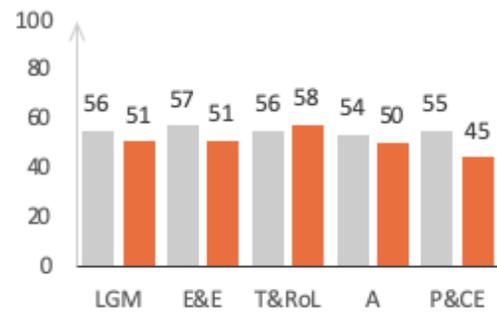
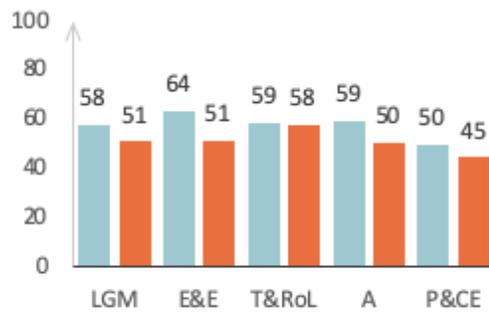
Comparison with 2016

2016 2020

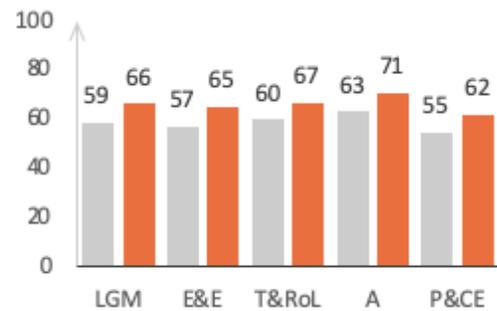
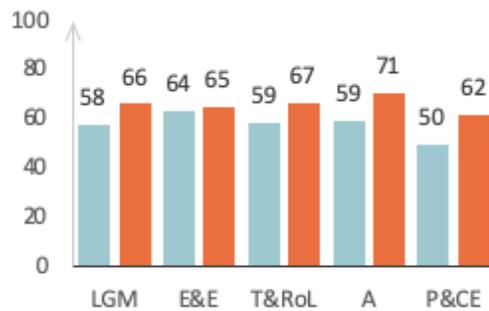
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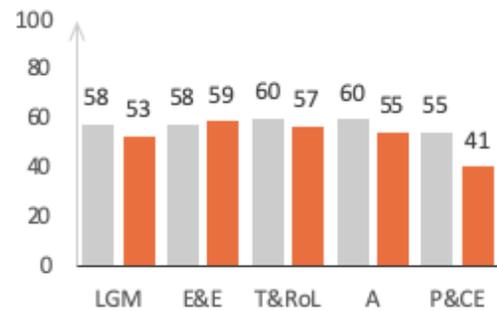
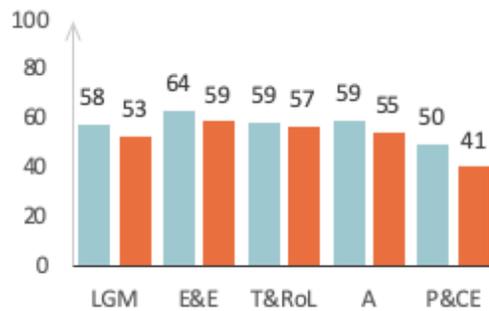
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Kolonje



Konispol



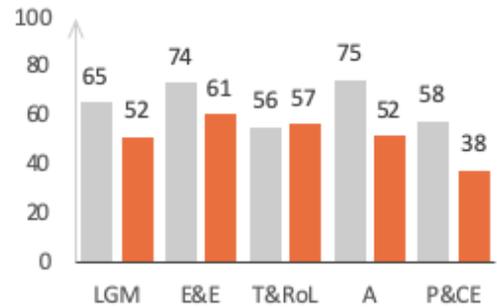
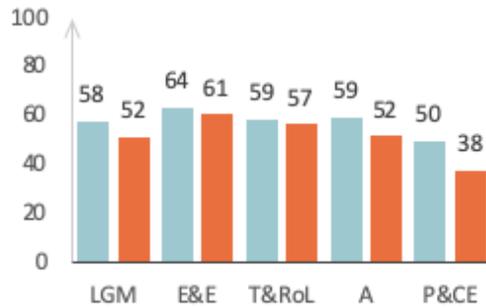
Comparison with Country Average

Average Municipality

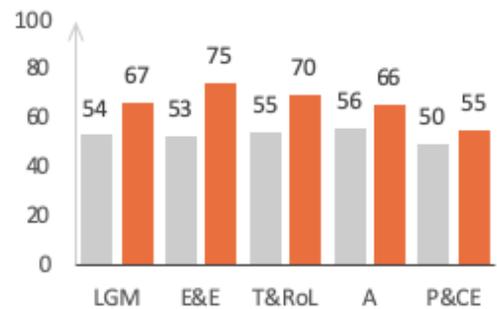
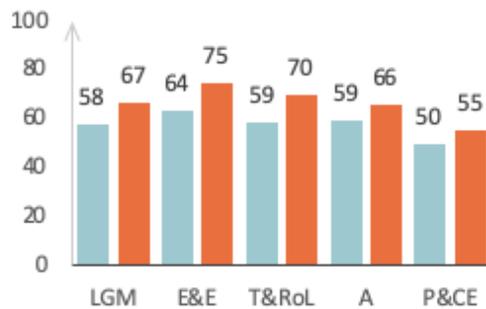
Comparison with 2016

2016 2020

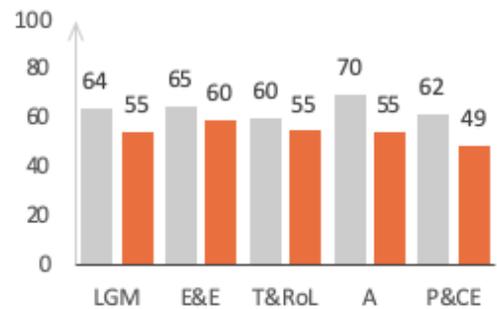
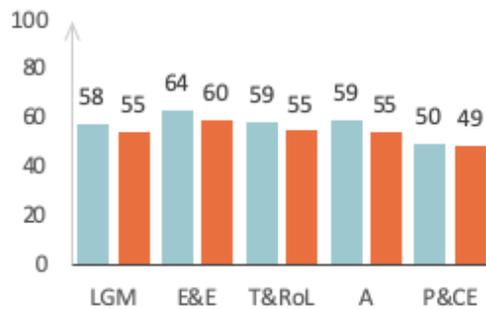
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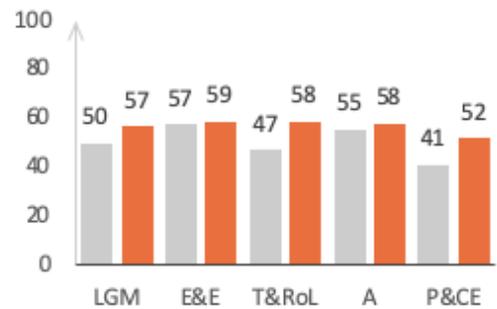
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Kucove



Kukes



Comparison with Country Average

Average Municipality

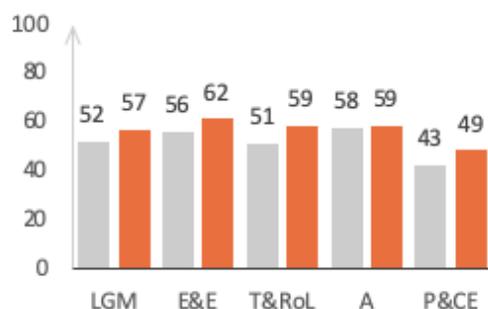
Comparison with 2016

2016 2020

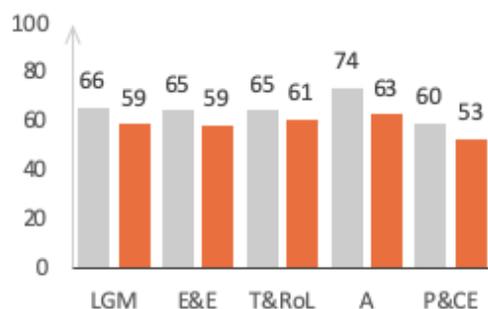
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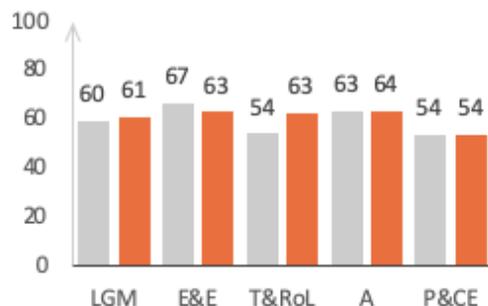
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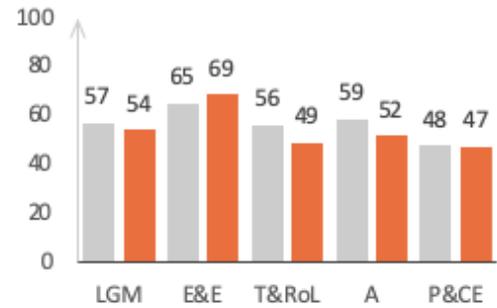
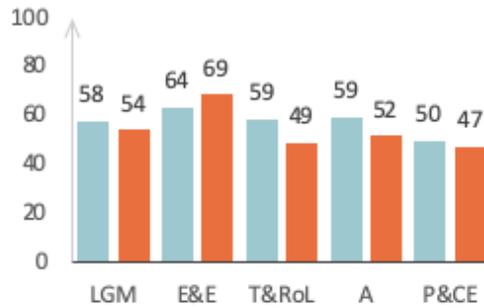
Comparison with Country Average

Average Municipality

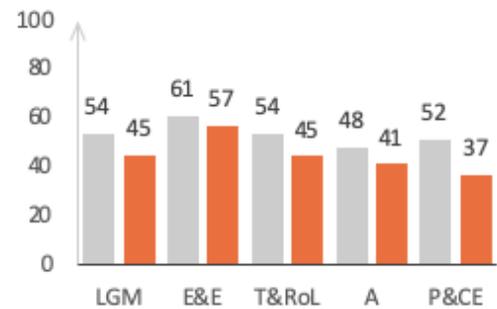
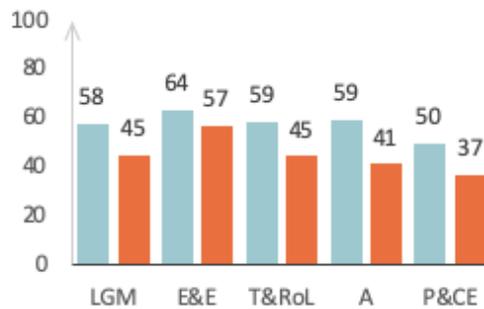
Comparison with 2016

2016 2020

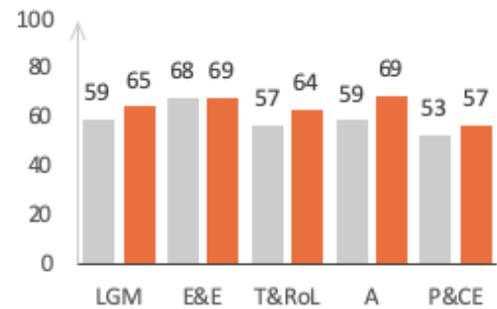
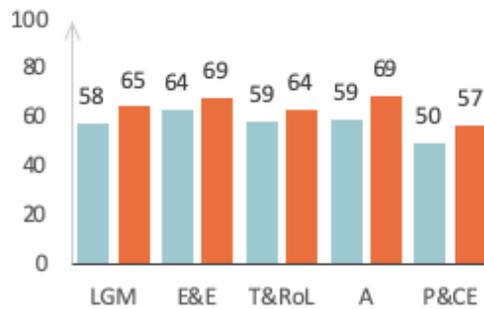
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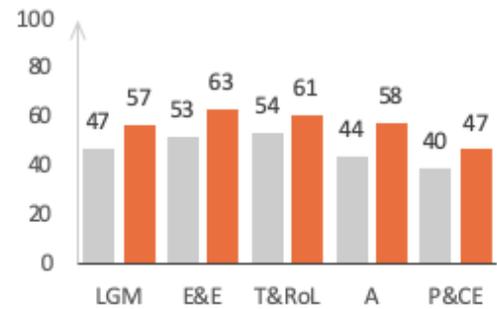
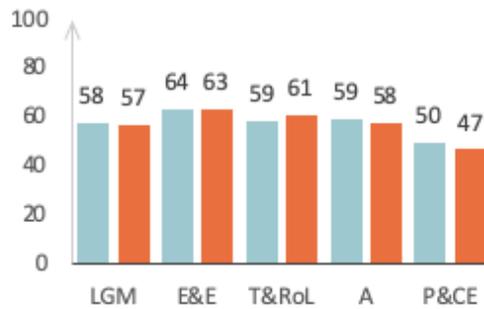
Malesi e Madhe



Maliq



Mallakaster



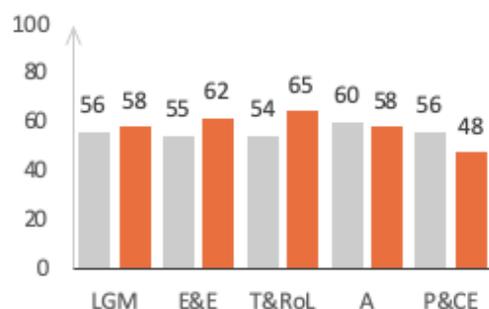
Comparison with Country Average

Average Municipality

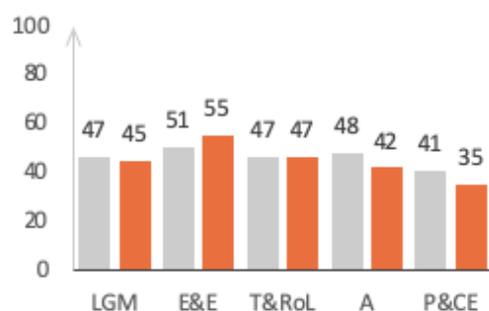
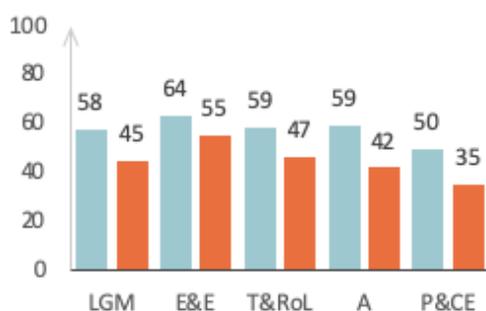
Comparison with 2016

2016 2020

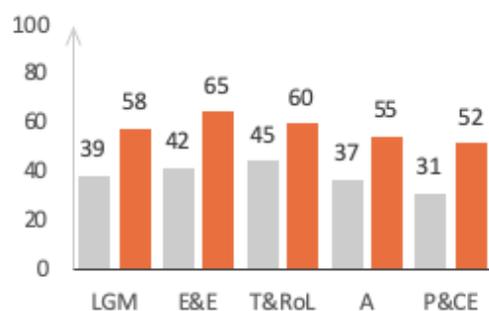
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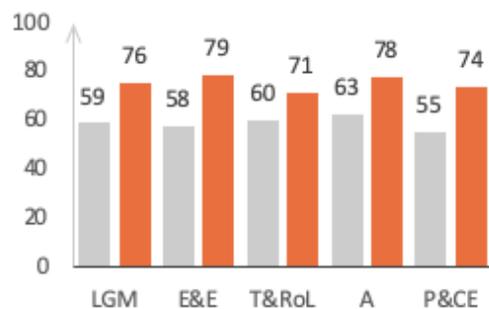
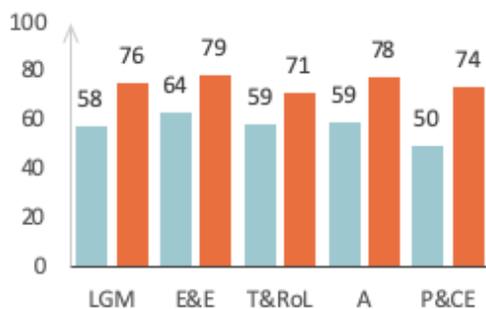
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Patos



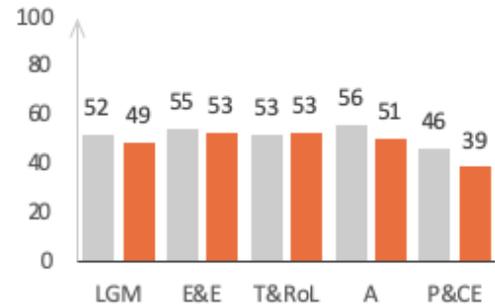
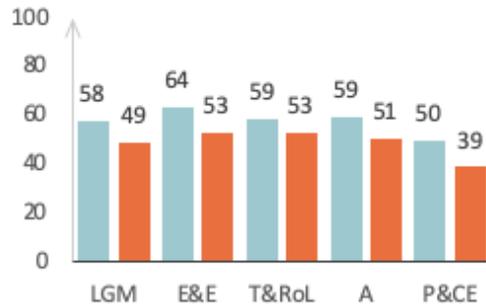
Comparison with Country Average

Average Municipality

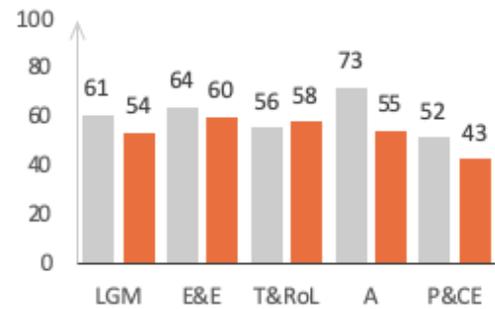
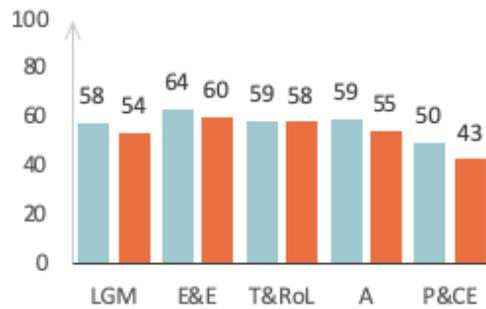
Comparison with 2016

2016 2020

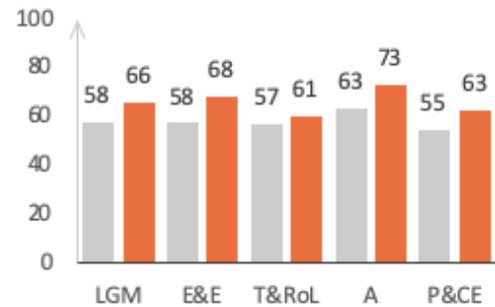
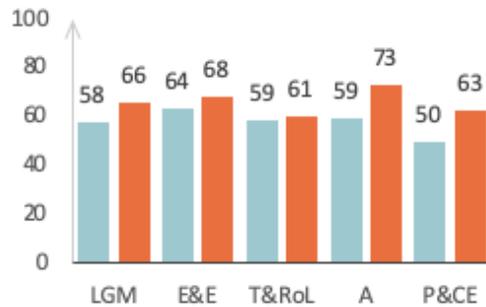
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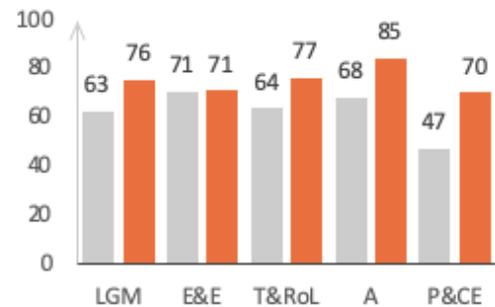
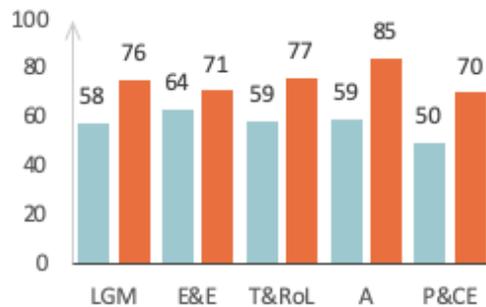
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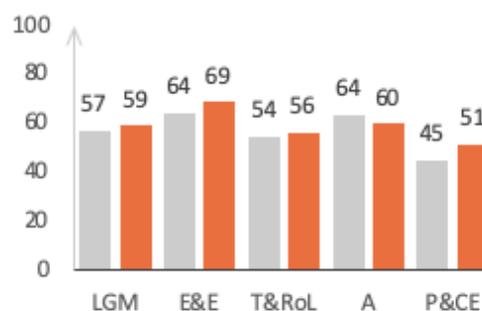
Comparison with Country Average

Average Municipality

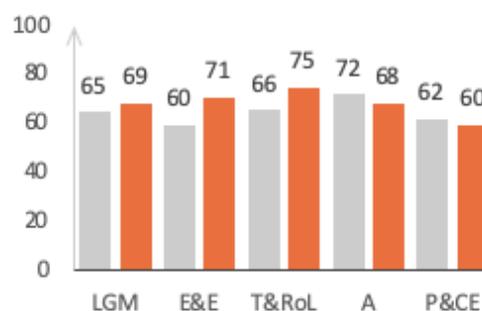
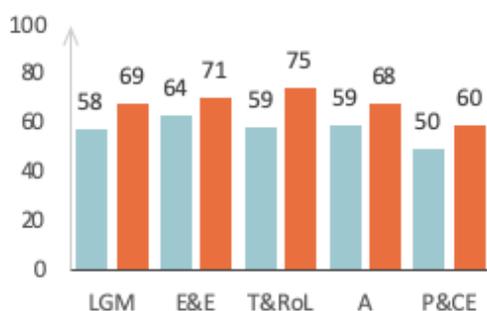
Comparison with 2016

2016 2020

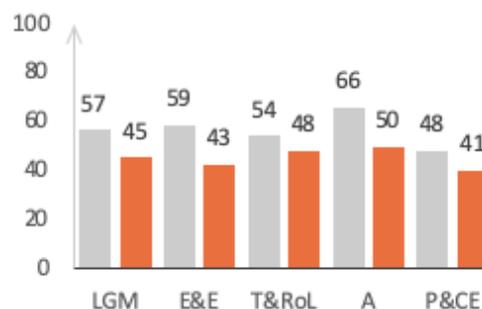
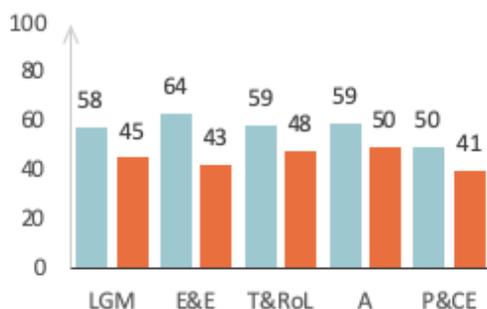
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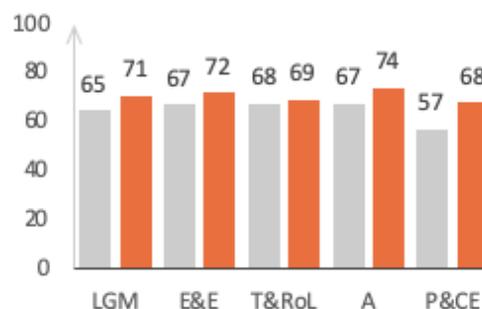
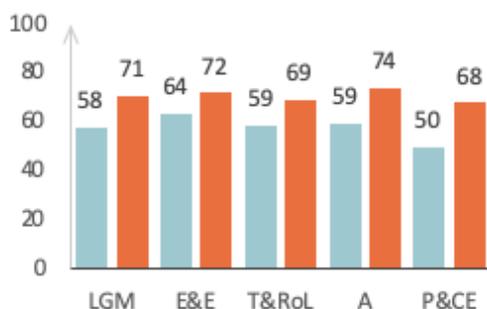
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Pustec



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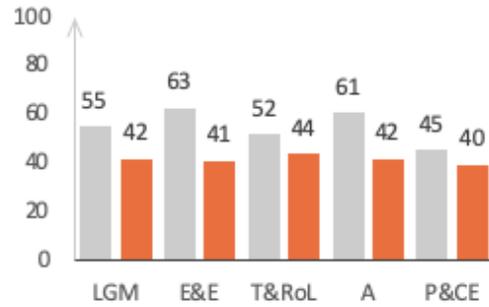
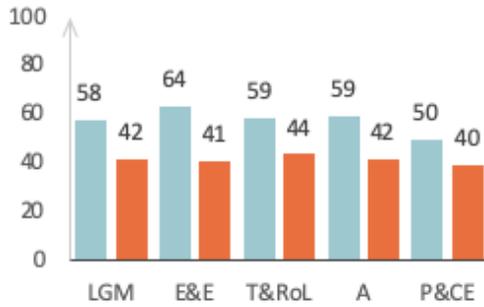
Comparison with Country Average

Comparison with 2016

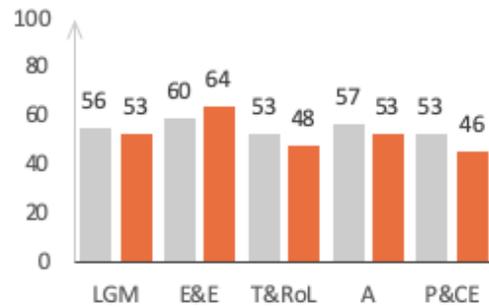
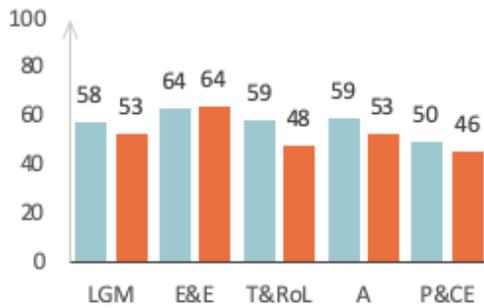
Average Municipality

2016 2020

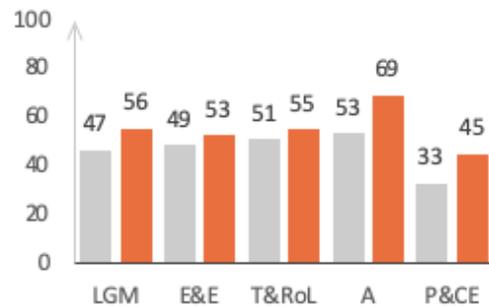
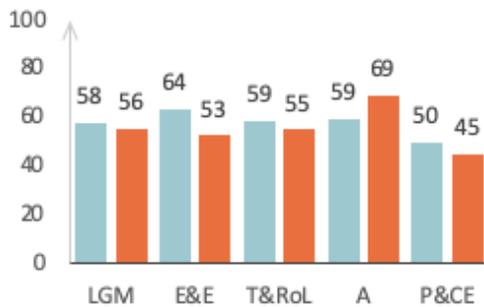
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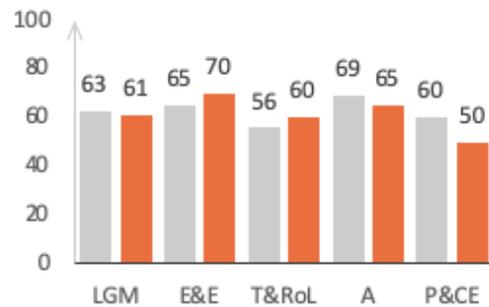
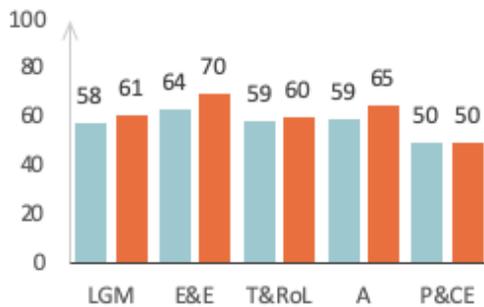
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Selenice



Shijak



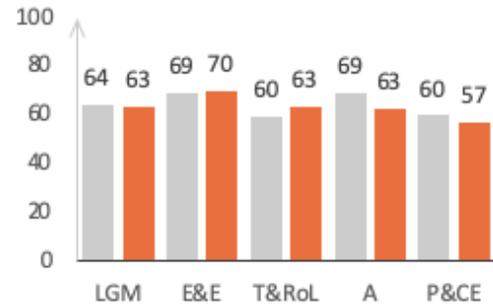
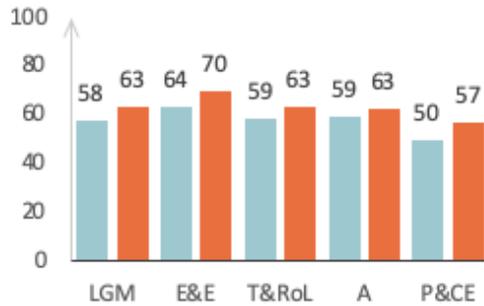
Comparison with Country Average

Average Municipality

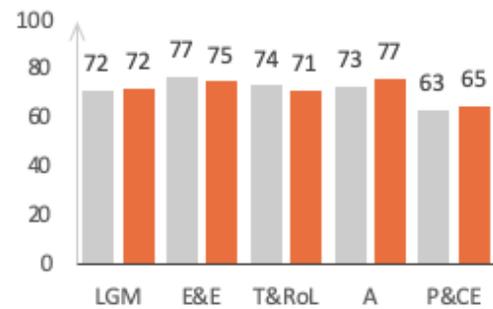
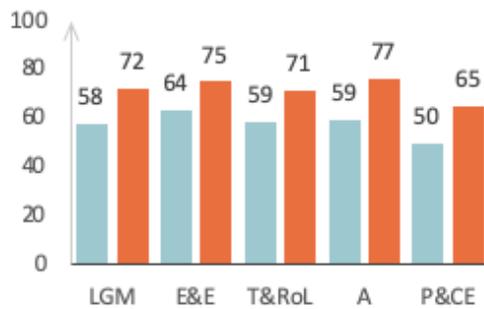
Comparison with 2016

2016 2020

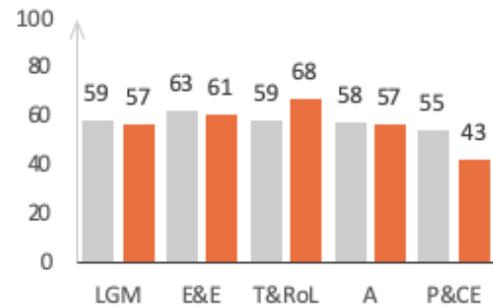
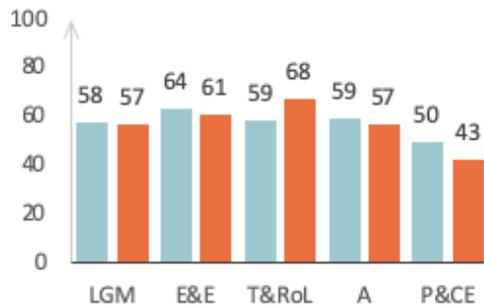
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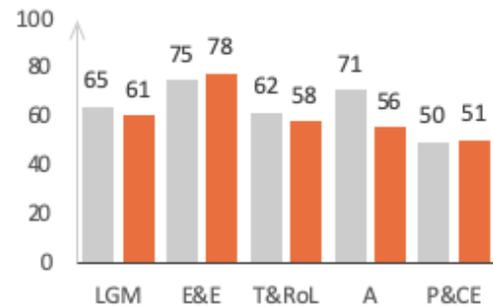
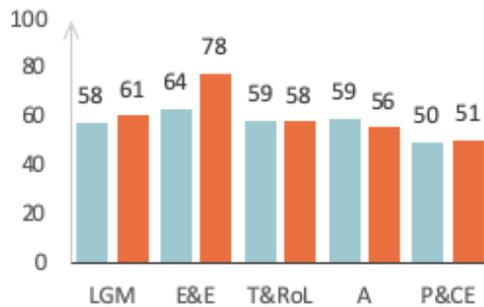
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Tirane



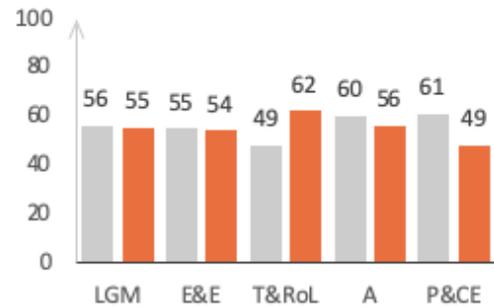
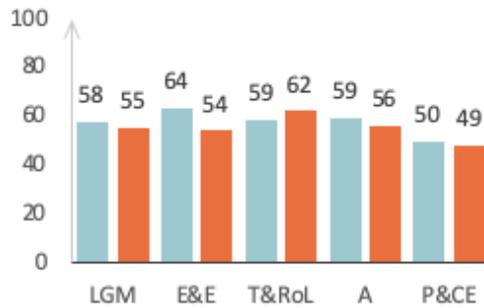
Comparison with Country Average

Average Municipality

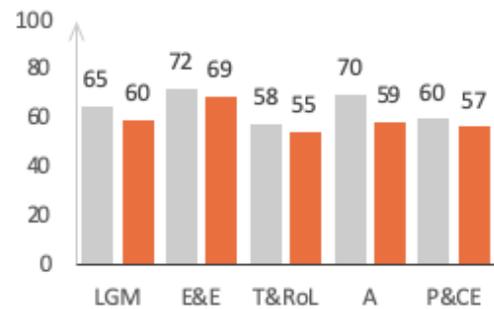
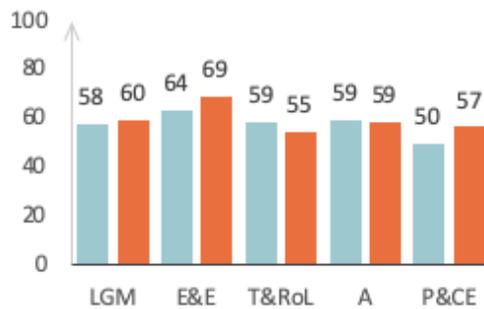
Comparison with 2016

2016 2020

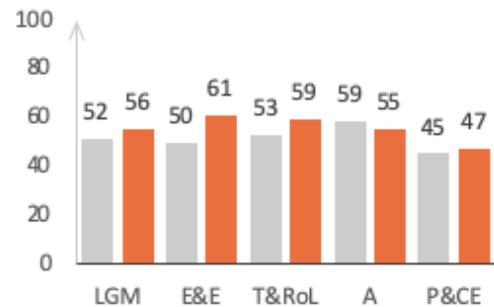
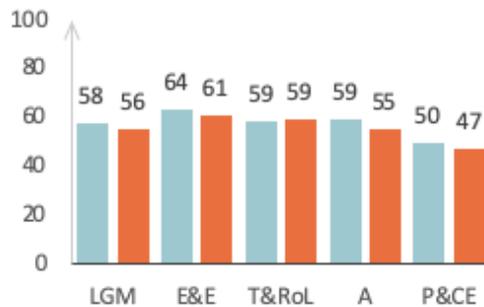
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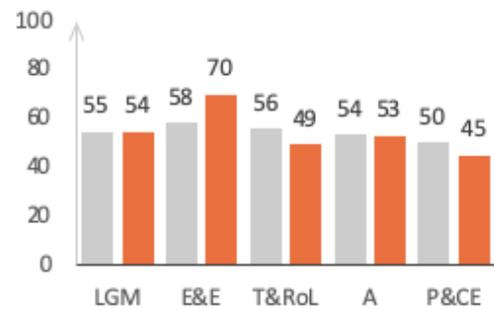
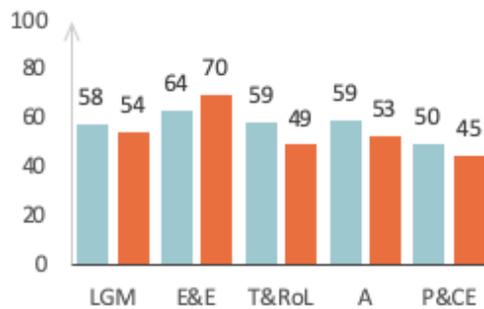
Ura Vajgurore



Vau Dejes



Vlore



Comparison with Country Average

Average Municipality

Comparison with 2016

2016 2020

Vore

