



PEOPLE-MUNICIPALITY INTERACTION IN TIMES OF CRISIS: A COVID-19 CASE STUDY

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The views expressed in this document are those of respondents of the survey and focus group participants and do not necessarily represent the views of UNDP or USAID.

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Executive Summary

Municipalities are at the forefront of the COVID-19 crisis response. They are not only the key players in implementing the government measures, but also create bottom-up policies and COVID-19 response strategies. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to understand the challenges that some of Kosovo's municipalities had experienced during the pandemic. This research was done through 500 survey interviews and nine focus group discussions. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data enabled a multifaceted insight into the satisfaction level of residents in Kosovo¹ with regard to municipal support and communication, people-engagement in municipal matters, as well as public service provision and the availability of resources in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, respondents of the five municipalities represented in this study², were **more dissatisfied with the municipal support given to them or their families** and their communities (52% and 42% respectively), than satisfied (25% and 26% respectively). On average, more men than women were generally very dissatisfied with municipal support towards themselves, their families, or their communities. Focus group discussion revealed that most participants perceived that municipalities adhered to the government-imposed measures and that some took initiatives to help those affected by COVID-19, disinfected public spaces, distributed food, or provided PPE.

Survey respondents that were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the municipal support were asked to provide ideas how they, their families and communities could be supported better. Almost two thirds of the respondents (61%) mentioned that **municipalities should provide financial assistance to those affected by COVID-19** and to the families in need, **distribute food and hygiene packages to families in need** (15%), and **provide free medical services and medicine** for all people (9%).

The municipalities seemed to have succeeded in keeping most of their residents informed. About **54% of all respondents felt that they had been kept somewhat or very well informed** about the pandemic by their municipalities. This was further confirmed through focus group discussions. Additionally, 95% of Kosovo Albanians but only 74% of Kosovo Serbs stated they received information in their native language. Focus group discussions revealed that non-majority communities were dissatisfied with this aspect of the information dissemination and felt discriminated when material was not available in their native language. Non-majority communities (Kosovo Serbs, Kosovo Bosniaks, Kosovo Turks, Kosovo Roma, Kosovo Ashkali and Kosovo Egyptian) also disapproved of municipalities' communication which mainly focused on using social media accounts to inform their residents, bypassing their official websites and other communication channels, which hindered reaching the older generations in an efficient manner.

It is noteworthy that, on average, residents were better informed about the COVID-19 pandemic than they were satisfied with their municipalities' efforts to support people with financial means, in-kind donations, or through other channels that aimed to mitigate COVID-19 impact on health and socio-economic conditions. The **average degree of being informed by their municipalities about the COVID-19 pandemic is 3.3 points** across all five municipalities (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very well informed). The **average degree of satisfaction with the municipal support received** for themselves or their families amounts to only 2.5 points in comparison.

¹ For UNDP, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

² Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Podujevë/Podujevo, Prizren, Rahovec/Orahovac, and Zvečan/Zvečan

The general **reliability of the information disseminated by municipalities on the COVID-19 pandemic was perceived as satisfactory**. Overall, 65% of respondents in the five municipalities somewhat trust the information they received from their municipalities and 15% of them trust the information even to a greater extent. In addition, 56% of respondents somewhat trust the information received from the central institutions while 20% showed trust to a greater extent. **Local or Kosovo-wide television announcements, Facebook, as well as family and friends** are the top three sources for COVID-19 related information among residents in all five municipalities.

Residents in Kosovo do not tend to participate in municipal public hearings, which are a crucial tool and legal requirement to guarantee that municipal budget planning is in line with the expectations of various stakeholders such as residents, enterprises, and other municipal entities. About **two thirds of respondents did not think their municipalities held any public hearings before or after** the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Only four out of 33 people who indicated they knew about the public hearings said they took part in one. The topics covered in those hearings, according to them, were related to concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic, water supply, street lighting, and road construction and maintenance. Few of the participants in focus group discussions also participated in public hearings. Those who took part mainly attended them to discuss issues that directly affected them or to represent non-governmental organizations. In general, respondents **said that they were not well informed enough about public hearings, while some also admitted having little interest in participating**.

To mitigate the consequences of COVID-19 on their livelihoods, **financial help for families in need** and those affected by COVID-19 was listed as the main priority by survey respondents, followed by – the need to - **tighten and observe preventive measures against COVID-19**.

More **than half of all respondents believed that their municipalities' financial and infrastructural resources** for COVID-19 response were **sufficient**. Around two-thirds of all respondents said that municipal **human resources were sufficient or more than sufficient**.

Municipalities are obliged to offer public services regardless of the situation they are confronted with, such as COVID-19 pandemic. **Generally, more than 70% and up to 84% of the respondents said the municipality was efficient or very efficient in providing most public services** such as: waste management, sewage management, local road maintenance, local transportation, water supply, lighting maintenance, and Family Medical Centers' (FMC) provision of health care throughout the pandemic. However, only half thought the same about the payment of social scheme obligations. In the focus group discussions, some participants believed that the municipalities had enough budget to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic while others felt that the financial resources were not sufficient. A number of participants also pointed out that municipalities often return a surplus to the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers which is mainly due to inadequate budget planning, suggesting that the surplus could have been reallocated towards COVID-19 response.

Based on these findings, some recommendations for the municipalities to consider are presented below:

Financial assistance and subsidies

- Financial assistance for individuals in general and especially those hardest-hit by COVID-19 and subsidies for businesses were mentioned as top priorities that municipalities should consider in supporting the people and businesses operating in them. It is evident that people

preferred to be subsidized directly with money as they could procure different products and services tailored to their specific needs.

Communication channels and language used

- Although some respondents were more satisfied than others in terms of the information they received from their municipalities, it was apparent that some groups were reached more than others due to the communication channel or language used. Thus, municipalities should make better use of official websites to inform their residents. Also, information should be shared in all official languages in Kosovo. Information should also be shared through TV channels, social media and text messages to reach out to all ethnicities and generations. Social media is an effective communication tool to reach younger generations whereas it is less effective for the elderly and the minority ethnic groups. Therefore, special attention must be placed on this matter, as a precaution for future potential crisis the municipalities may encounter.

Civic engagement in municipal decision-making and budget prioritizing

- Municipalities in Kosovo are obliged to hold public hearings³ to discuss activities that need to be accounted for in the municipal budget and find proper information channels for their residents. However, other research⁴ as well as the findings of this report suggest that civic non-engagement in public hearings, or other modes of public consultations, is due to residents not being properly reached out and not being interested. The situation did not seem to be different before and after the COVID-19 outbreak. Thus, there is a need for more tailored awareness campaigns on the purpose and importance of local public hearings, as well as better channels of information.

Municipalities should post timely information in all official languages in their municipal websites and social media, and send out mass emails or text messages. Moreover, to increase the trust of people that their voices are heard, municipalities should publish meeting minutes and information about which issues proposed by the residents were taken or not taken into account along with an explanation as to why the issues were not addressed. As a lesson learned from the crisis, to ensure higher participation, public hearings could potentially be fully or at least half digitalized by using virtual platforms. Moreover, combining different tools and approaches (both traditional and new means of engagement) to create more systematic plans for engagement of residents can – over and beyond – create a much more consistent interaction that in turn, in the medium term can also positively influence municipal level planning and prioritization.

Financial, Infrastructural, and Human Resources and Provision of Public Services

- Significant portions of the survey respondents held the opinion that the municipalities had sufficient financial resources (52%), human resources (65%), and infrastructural resources (72%); nonetheless, some believed the contrary and many focus group participants also thought that the budget their municipalities receive does not reflect the true number of residents of a certain municipality nor their needs. Municipal representatives highlighted this issue during the discussions as well. Therefore, a better and more efficient preparation in regard to budgetary planning is needed. This in turn, can also proactively be used by the Ministry of Finance to strengthen budget allocations in terms of targeting and issue-identification rather than by general allocations to the municipality. Building on and using the

³ Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo. Law no. 03/l-048 on Public Financial Management and Accountability, Article 61. <<https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=12387>>

⁴ Kosova Democratic Institute “The 2019 Municipal Budget Development Process in Kosovo” 2019. <<https://kdi-kosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Municipal-Budget-Development-Process-in-Kosovo-ENG-me-ISBN.pdf>>

Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) estimations to complement the data from the 2011 census will further strengthen data-informed decision making. In addition, municipalities should focus on investing in digitizing most services to ensure higher effectiveness when feasible, while developing plans that effectively mitigate digital divisions. In terms of providing health services, municipalities should look into increasing specialized staff and creating more family medical centers (FMCs) to cover both urban and rural areas. Transparency in disbursing social scheme payments must be ensured by publishing beneficiary lists in due time and with explanations on the criteria followed in the municipalities' official websites. Municipalities should create better inspecting mechanisms and accountability systems with the contracted companies in paving and maintaining the roads, street lighting, and other infrastructure development.

Municipalities cannot do it all by themselves. Recovery from the crisis is a common concern at all levels of government and thus local level and central level institutions must work together to ensure adequate financial resources and good governance to provide opportunities for all, expand residents' well-being and foster all-encompassing development in the future.

Introduction

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. On 13 March 2020, Kosovo identified its two first cases of COVID-19 infection. Since then, the pandemic has caused a significant number of deaths, as well as economic and social consequences.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented challenges on the provision of public services at the local level and Kosovo-wide. Kosovo institutions and the people have experienced challenges in providing and accessing health care, food, emotional and psychological support, which led to economic insecurity. Although many businesses were completely or partially closed down to deter the spread of new infections, basic public services continued to be provided.

Municipalities in Kosovo have the mandate to manage a range of public services such as waste management, water supply, sewage management, maintenance of local roads, maintenance of street lighting, provision of local transport, payment of social scheme obligations, and provision of health care through FMCs among others.

Proper sanitation such as: clean water, proper sewage and waste management provided by public service institutions can have a direct bearing on containing the spread of the virus. Regardless of the challenges that might occur to public services such as financial and health risks caused by the pandemic, these sanitations should be mandatory to reduce the risk of further spreading the virus to the public.

UNDP commissioned this research to understand the capacities of the local institutions in Kosovo to manage the crisis and provide public services. Through an opinion poll survey engaging nine focus groups with municipal residents and five focus groups with municipal representatives, the level of satisfaction was analyzed; communication and supports the municipality has provided since the outbreak of COVID-19 in Kosovo, as well as the challenges that the municipalities have faced were analyzed.

This report provides an assessment of the efforts that the municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Podujevë/Podujevo, Prizren, Rahovec/Orahovac, and Zvečan/Zvečan, have put forth to engage their residents in the activities to combat COVID-19 and to provide public services for them. The information elaborated in this report examines how the municipalities have responded to the crisis from March 2020 to March 2021.

While the survey data was collected in March 2021, the focus group data was collected from April through June 2021. The questions explored the perceptions and experiences of the respondents for the one-year mark albeit focus group participants sometimes talked about events beyond this timeframe when expressing their thoughts.

Overview of the Decisions of Kosovo Institutions until March 2021

To understand the context in which municipalities had to operate, it is important to pay attention to the overview of Kosovo institutions' decisions taken at the central level during the timeframe the survey was conducted.

Kosovo registered the first two cases with the COVID-19 on 13 March 2020 and two days later, declared a public health emergency.⁵ Later that month, the executive cabinet closed down schools and other educational institutions, closed land borders and limited the travel within Kosovo. Service-based businesses such as gastronomy, gyms and shopping centers had to cease operations. Only essential services, such as supermarkets and pharmacies, were allowed to operate. Companies instructed employees to work from home, when possible. Public urban transport from a municipality to another was halted and the executive cabinet implemented curfews from 17:00 to 06:00.

To alleviate the problems stemming from the restrictive measures, the executive cabinet approved the Emergency Fiscal Package by the end of March 2020. The package doubled pension scheme payments to beneficiaries, provided financial support for businesses by ordering interest-free loans, provided financial support to municipalities, and increased budgets for ministries.⁶ Distance learning at all levels of education was implemented through the public broadcaster.

As the number of COVID-19 cases went down during the quarantine, the executive cabinet stipulated a steady reopening of society during May 2020. A month later, almost all restrictions were removed, but physical distancing, mask wearing, and prohibition of large group gatherings remained in place. Private and public kindergartens began functioning and land borders were opened.

However, in July 2020, Kosovo experienced a spike in COVID-19 cases. The executive cabinet introduced new measures which included night-time curfews, mask wearing, etc. The following month (August 2020), the Law for Preventing the Spread of COVID-19, the Economic Recovery Plan for 2020, and the Master Plan for the Development of Learning under Pandemic Conditions 2020-2021 were approved. In September 2020, the executive cabinet opened educational institutions and returned to face-to-face learning through a rotation system combining online and in-person classes.

Unfortunately, the situation worsened with new COVID-19 infections which led to a significant number of deaths. In October 2020, the executive cabinet reinstated previous measures (such as physical distancing, mask wearing) and introduced new measures with stricter curfew for those municipalities with the highest numbers of positive cases and for people in high-risk group – such as the elderly.

By November-December 2020, municipalities were divided into three zones based on the confirmed number of new daily COVID-19 cases. The **green zone municipalities** (75 daily infections per 100,000 residents) had businesses closed by 20:00, restaurants could work for delivery and takeout later. The **yellow zone municipalities** (76-150 daily infections per 100,000 residents) had businesses closed by 18:00, restaurants could work for delivery and takeout later. The **red zone municipalities** (150 daily infections per 100,000 residents) had a 19:00-05:00 curfew for all residents, except for health and emergency issues, businesses had to close by 18:00, restaurants could work for delivery and takeout later.⁷ The list kept changing, but the municipalities in this study were in all three zones at different times.

⁵ Government Decision (March 2020) Available at: <https://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Vendimi-nr.01-11.pdf>

⁶ Government Decision (March 2020) Available at <https://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Vendimet-e-Mbledhjes-s%C3%AB-15-t%C3%AB-t%C3%AB-Qeveris%C3%AB-s%C3%AB-Republik%C3%ABs-s%C3%AB-Kosov%C3%ABs.pdf> and <https://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Vendim-i-Mbledhjes-s%C3%AB-16-t%C3%AB-t%C3%AB-Qeveris%C3%AB-s%C3%AB-Republik%C3%ABs-s%C3%AB-Kosov%C3%ABs.pdf>

⁷ Kosovo: Authorities update list of municipalities with increased COVID-19 activity as of December 4 /update 15 (December 2020) Available at: <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/407811/kosovo-authorities-update-list-of-municipalities-with-increased-covid-19-activity-as-of-december-4-update-15>

Ultimately, at the end of the year, the Assembly passed the "Economic Recovery Law" which, in addition to various measures aimed at supporting Kosovo enterprises, also stipulated an unemployment assistance fund of 30 million euros. In January 2021, the Economic Recovery Plan, including a 222.5-million-euro recovery plan which was mainly used to support the health sector, the police and families with low income was approved.⁸

In February 2021, the Kosovo executive cabinet decided⁹ to remove the curfews and educational institutions resumed face-to-face learning, businesses were allowed to operate until 22:00, employees were advised to work remotely when feasible and to follow instructions for protection against the spread of COVID-19. Businesses had longer operating-hours, certain businesses such as cinemas operated at 40% capacity, public transport at half the capacity.¹⁰ The decisions remained in force through end of March 2021, when COVID-19 positive cases ranged from 700 to 800 a day.¹¹

Towards the end of March 2021, Kosovo started vaccinating its population with the support of various donations.¹² Medical staff and the elderly at the age group of 80 and over were prioritized.¹³ Kosovo executive cabinet has introduced diverse measures to combat COVID-19 and its effect in terms of health and socio-economic wellbeing. Also, international development partners have supported Kosovo in these challenging times. The findings of this research show the level of satisfaction of the people and provide lessons learned on how to better prepare for public health emergencies and crisis.

Research Findings

This section of the report presents the findings from the survey with 500 residents from five municipalities and the 14 focus groups. Details of focus group participants' demographic characteristics are provided in the annex of this report.

Respondent Profile

The survey respondent profile corresponds to the quota sample explained in the methodology section and the weighting procedure (see Annex 1 for details), whereas demographic characteristics are close to the population composition of the entire Kosovo since the method of data collection was done through multistage cluster sampling with stratification. Accordingly, 53% of the respondents are women and 47% of the respondents are men. Approximate to the age distribution of the entire Kosovo population, and with municipal variations taken into account, 20.2% of the respondents are 18-24 years old, 21.4% of the respondents are 25-34 years old, 17.6% of the respondents are 35-44 years old, 18.5% of the respondents are 45-55 years old, 12.4% of the respondents are 55-64 years old, and 9.9% of the respondents are 65 or more years old. About 63% of the respondents represent the region of Prizren, namely the municipalities of Prizren and Rahovec/Orahovac, 33% represent the region of

⁸ Kosovo approves €222.4mn recovery package for 2021 (January 2021) Available at: <https://www.intellinews.com/index.php/kosovo-approves-222-4mn-recovery-package-for-2021-200482/?source=kosovo>

⁹ UNKT, RECAP of the government decisions (February 2021) Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mLCGV0Bvgtf91aKvxocwk5PiDmV2U6Jc/view>

¹⁰ UNKT, RECAP of the government's decision, (February 2021) Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mLCGV0Bvgtf91aKvxocwk5PiDmV2U6Jc/view>

¹¹ UNKT COVID-19 Update Sitrep. 60, (March 2021) Available at: <https://kosovoteam.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/SITREP%2060%20-%20Kosovo%20-26032021.pdf>

¹² Ministry of Health in Kosovo, (March 2021) Available at: <https://msh.rks-gov.net/sq/kosova-ka-nisur-sot-vaksinimin-kunder-covid-19/>

¹³ Reuters, (March 2021), Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-kosovo-vaccine-idUSKBN2BL2BI>

Prishtinë/Priština, namely the municipalities of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje and Podujevë/Podujevo, and 4% represent the region of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, namely the municipality of Zvečan/Zvečan.

Figure 1 Respondent profile by gender

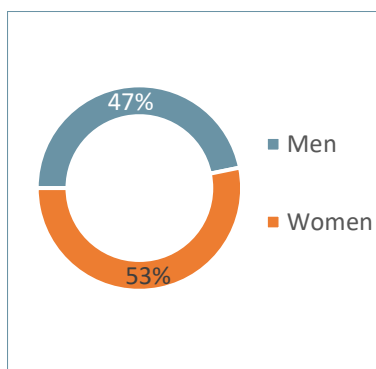


Figure 2 Respondent profile by age

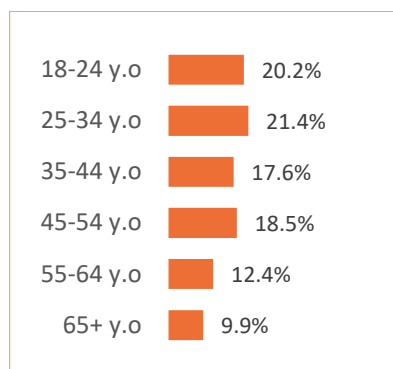
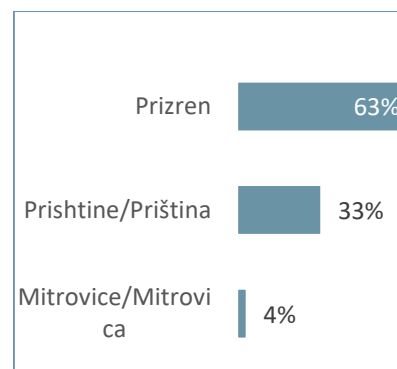


Figure 3 Respondent profile by region



Moreover, 60% of the respondents reside in rural areas and 40% in urban areas. Regarding the level of education completed, 4.7% of the respondents have not completed any level of education, 33.4% have completed primary education, 45.3% have completed secondary education, 14.1% have completed a bachelor degree or equivalent, and 2.5% have completed a Master or PhD degree.

Figure 4 Respondent profile by type of settlement

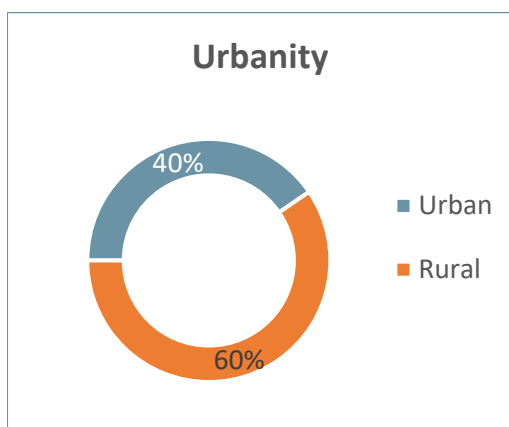
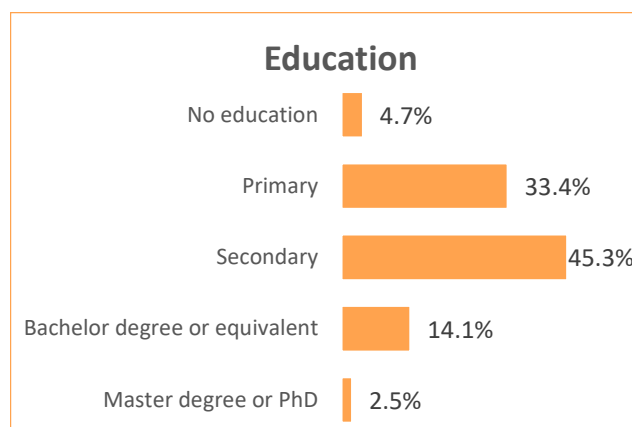


Figure 5 Respondent profile by education



In terms of ethnic background, 90% of the respondents are Kosovo Albanians, 6% are Kosovo Serbs, and 4% are of other ethnicities. Regarding employment status, 23.2% of the respondents work full time, 2.8% work part time, 3.9% are self-employed, and 1.3% are farmers. About 24.8% of the respondents are unemployed, 26.1% of the respondents are homemakers, 9.1% are retired, 8.2% are students, and 0.5% are disabled. On marital status, two thirds of the respondents (66%) are married, 27.7% of them are single, 4.7% are widowed, 1% are living with a partner, and 0.6% are divorced.

Figure 6 Respondent profile by ethnicity

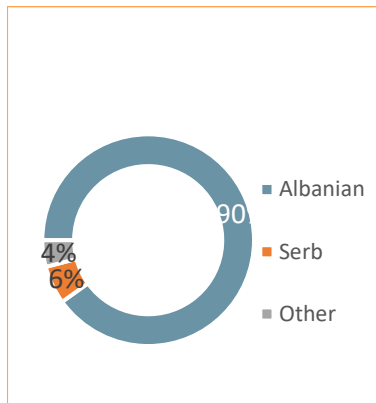


Figure 7 Respondent profile by employment

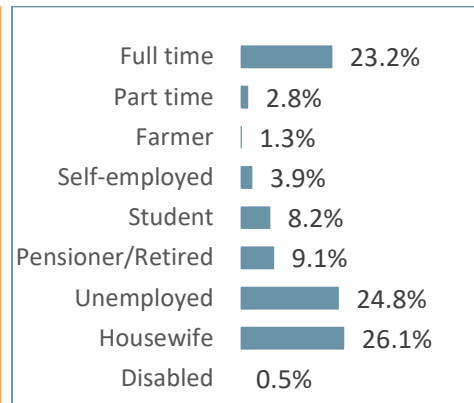
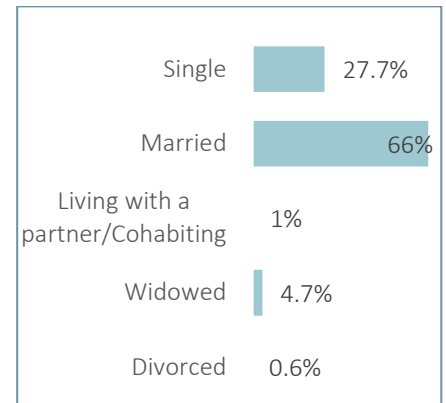


Figure 8 Respondent profile by marital status



People’s Satisfaction with Municipal Support and Communication

The first module of the survey scrutinized respondents’ satisfaction with their municipalities’ support and communication during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, survey data findings show that residents were often dissatisfied with the ways¹⁴ their municipality supported them and their families. This is visible across all surveyed municipalities, but especially from Rahovec/Orahovac where nearly two thirds were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Perception towards how well communities as a whole were supported by their respective municipalities were slightly more positive, while focus group discussion revealed varying perception on whether municipalities had succeeded in making their residents and communities feel supported.

Many survey respondents pointed out the lack of financial aid to families affected by the pandemic. The residents of the municipality of Prizren stood out in this regard, with more residents feeling food and hygiene package distributions for families in need were also missing.

The level of awareness about municipal initiatives aimed at tackling COVID-19 was low among survey respondents. However, some of the focus groups findings from discussions conducted with municipal representatives stand in direct opposition to these survey results; representatives felt that their municipalities have implemented a number of successful initiatives. In addition, some participants from focus groups with residents also highlighted that their municipality has managed the pandemic well through different types of initiatives.

This discrepancy could be explained through other findings from the focus group discussions; several residents highlighted the lack of information material in languages of minority groups and the (perceived) unorganized distribution of information regarding the initiatives as major obstacles in informing the people.

General information distribution about the COVID-19 pandemic on the other hand appears to have been handled well, or in acceptable manners (neutral), by the municipalities. The majority of survey respondents felt very well or well informed, and perceived the information as reliable and easy to

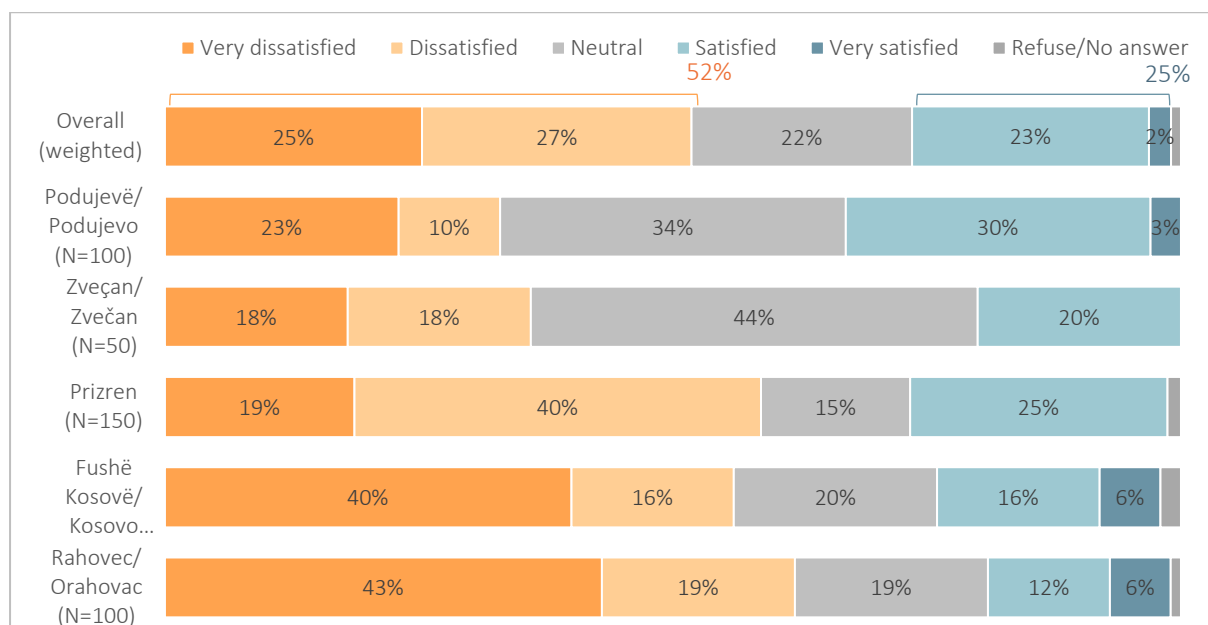
¹⁴ Financial means, in-kind donations, in any other way

understand. Overall, it can be observed that the level of satisfaction with the information distribution stands higher than the satisfaction with initiatives taken by the municipalities.

Survey respondents most commonly receive said information via TV announcement or social media, as well as from their communities (family and friends). It should be noted that relying on community knowledge was especially common among residents of Podujevë/Podujevo and older respondents in general, the latter also rarely made use of social media to obtain information. A considerable portion of Kosovo Serbs survey respondents (19%) stated that general information material about COVID-19 was not provided in their native language.

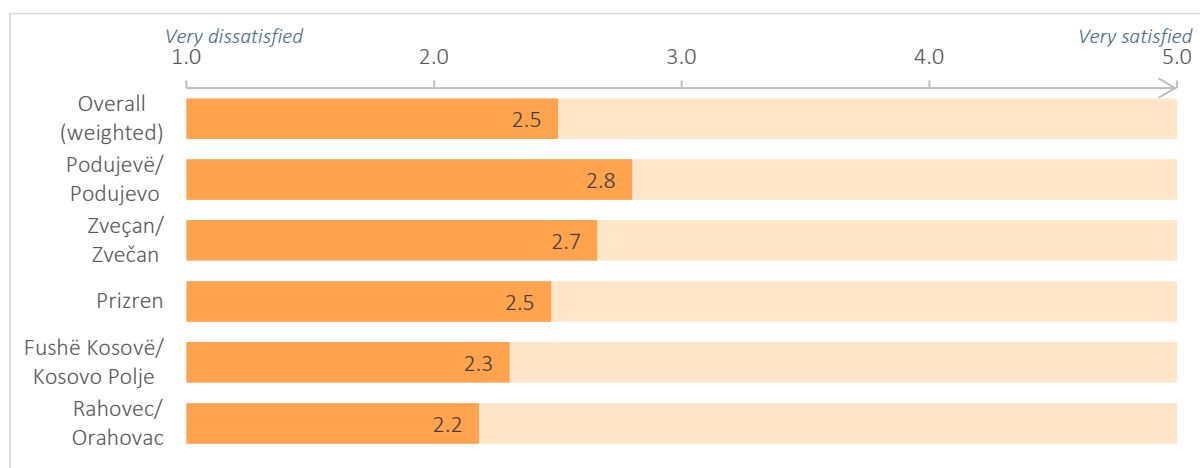
When asked whether the respondents were satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the municipality has supported **them or their families** financially or with in-kind donations during the COVID-19 pandemic, 52% of the respondents reported that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, whereas about 25% of them were satisfied or very satisfied. Broken down into municipality, 33% of the respondents of Podujevë/Podujevo, 36% of respondents of Zvečan/Zvečan, 56% of respondents of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, 59% of respondents of Prizren, and 62% of respondents of Rahovec/Orahovac were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Figure 9 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your municipality is supporting (with financial means, in-kind donations, or any other way) **you or your family** during COVID-19 pandemic? – by municipality



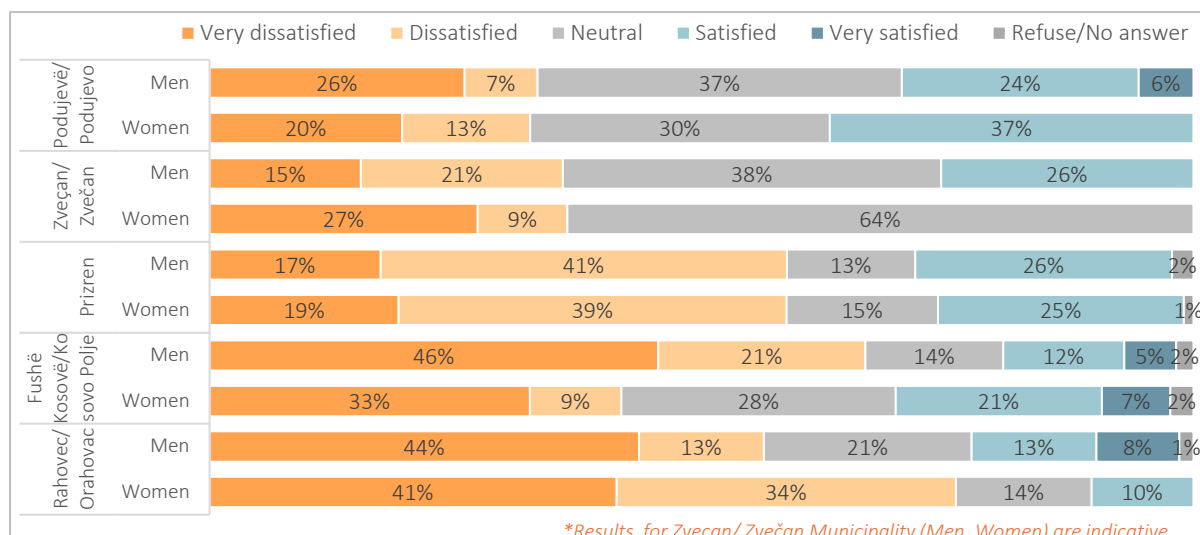
Reporting these results from a scale-perspective where 1 equals 'very dissatisfied' and 5 equals 'very satisfied', the satisfaction with the municipal support received for themselves or their families is on average 2.5 points including all five municipalities. The average for Podujevë/Podujevo is 2.8 points, for Zvečan/Zvečan 2.7 points, for Prizren 2.5 points, for Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje 2.3 points, and for Rahovec/Orahovac 2.2 points.

Figure 10 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your municipality is supporting (with financial means, in-kind donations, or any other way) **you or your family** during COVID-19 pandemic? – by municipality, on a 5-point scale



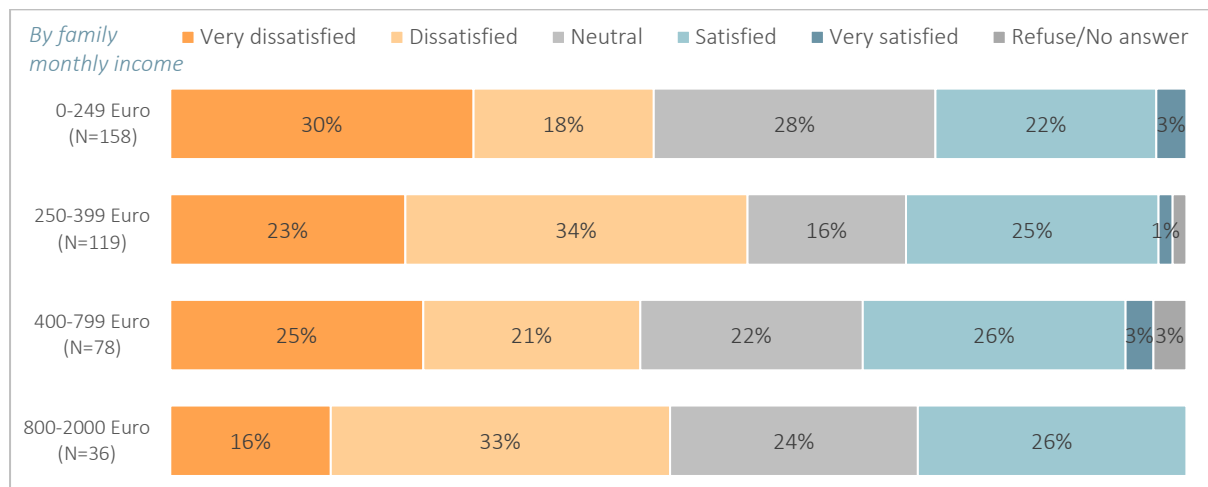
The report additionally explores whether there are any differences in the satisfaction of respondents with their municipalities based on gender. More men from Podujevë/Podujevo (26%), Rahovec/Orahovac (44%), and Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje (46%) were very dissatisfied with municipal support than women from those municipalities (20%, 41%, 33% respectively) whilst more women from Prizren (19%) and Zvečan/Zvečan (27%) were very dissatisfied with municipal support than men (17% and 15%, respectively).

Figure 11 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your municipality is supporting (with financial means, in-kind donations, or any other way) **you or your family** during COVID-19 pandemic? - by gender



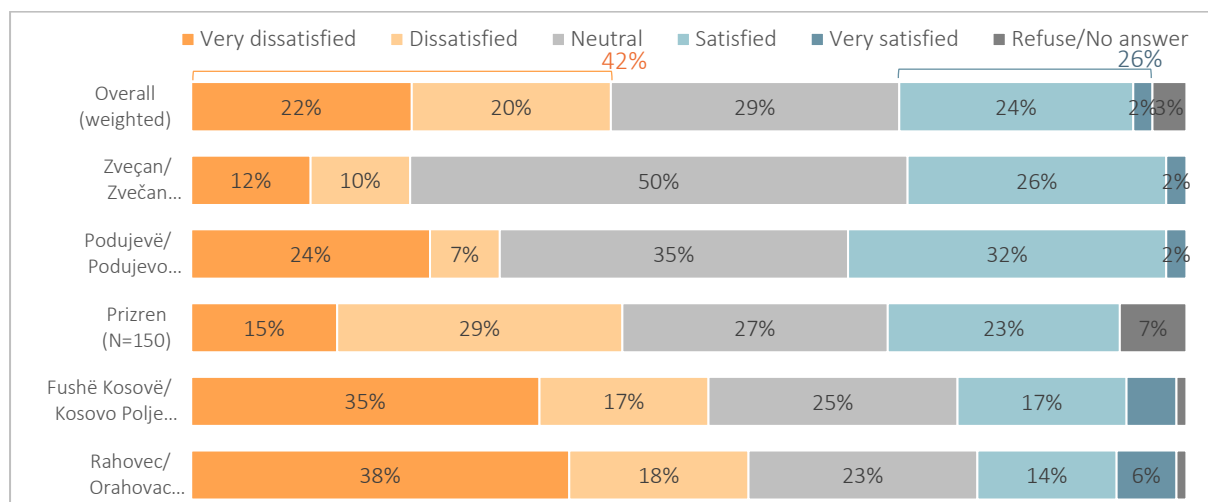
When compared by monthly family income, the majority of people from all municipalities that were very dissatisfied were those earning 0-249 euros per month, followed by those earning 250-299 euros per month, then by those earning 400-799 euros per month, and lastly by those who earn 800-2000 euros per month as a family. These results indicate up to a certain extent that the lesser the entire family income, the more likely the respondents were to be very dissatisfied with the municipalities’ financial or in-kind support. However, it should be noted that there were slightly more very dissatisfied respondents in the third family income bracket rather than the second.

Figure 12 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your municipality is supporting (with financial means, in-kind donations, or any other way) you or your family during COVID-19 pandemic? - by monthly family income



The respondents were then asked to assess their level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with municipal support during the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to **their community**. Respondents of all municipalities felt that their municipalities had been more helpful with financial or in-kind support towards their communities in general rather than with themselves or their families. In this respect, 42% of respondents of all five municipalities were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their municipality’s support towards their communities (10% lower than when compared to the support received themselves) and 26% of them were satisfied or very satisfied. More respondents were neutral (29%) when compared to the municipal support given to themselves and their families (22%). Disaggregated by municipality, 22% of the respondents of Zvečan/Zvečan, 31% of the respondents of Podujevë/Podujevo, 34% of the respondents of Prizren, 52% of respondents of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, and 56% of respondents of Rahovec/Orahovac were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

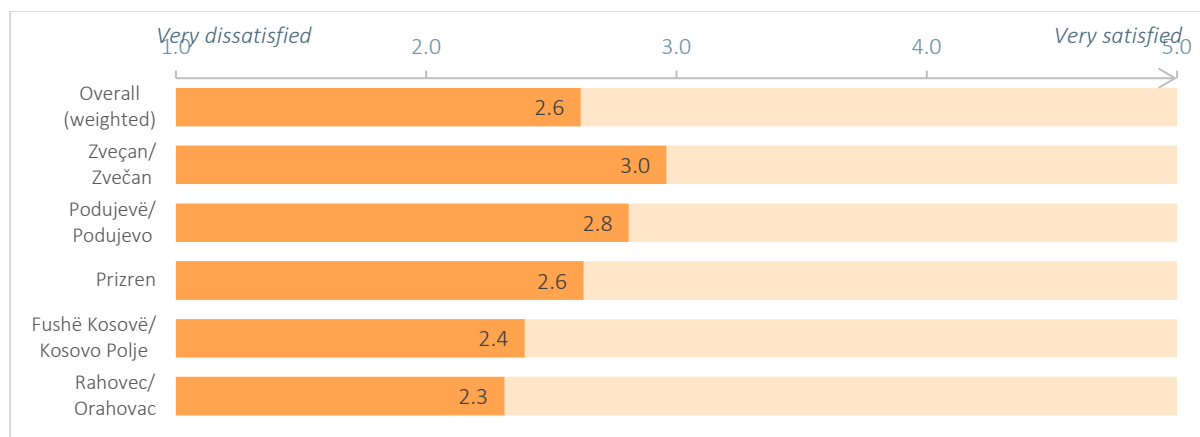
Figure 13 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your municipality is supporting (with financial means, in-kind donations, or any other way) **your community** during COVID-19 pandemic? – by municipality



On a scale from 1-5, where 1 equals ‘very dissatisfied’ and 5 equals ‘very satisfied’, the satisfaction with the municipal support received for their communities is on average 2.6 points including all five municipalities (slightly more than for themselves or their families). The average for Zvečan/Zvečan is

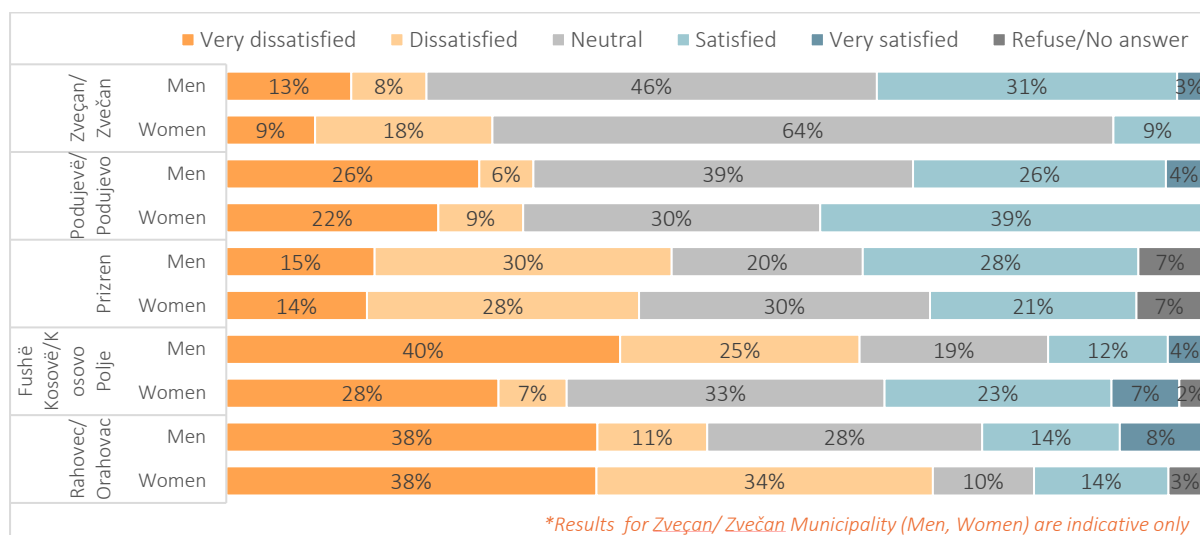
3.0 points, Podujevë/Podujevo 2.8 points, for Prizren 2.6 points, for Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje 2.4 points, and for Rahovec/Orahovac 2.3 points.

Figure 14 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your municipality is supporting (with financial means, in-kind donations, or any other way) **your community** during COVID-19 pandemic? – by municipality, on a 5-point scale



There were some differences depending on gender, when asked about their satisfaction level of municipal support provided to their communities. More men from almost all municipalities, namely Zveçan/Zvečan (13%), Prizren (15%), Podujevë/Podujevo (26%), and Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje (40%) were **very dissatisfied** with municipal support, compared to women from those municipalities (9%, 22%, 14%, and 28% respectively). On the other hand, men and women were equally dissatisfied with municipal support towards their communities (38% each) in Rahovec/Orahovac.

Figure 15 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way your municipality is supporting (with financial means, in-kind donations, or any other way) **your community** during COVID-19 pandemic? – by gender



To further elaborate these results, focus group discussions with the residents of each municipality and municipal officials as well as assembly members provided invaluable information on the intricacies of dealing with the pandemic at the local level.

During the discussions, participants in the focus group of Podujevë/Podujevo expressed themselves partially satisfied with the way their municipality has managed the pandemic situation. A few of them mentioned the fact that during the pandemic, the municipality was run without a mayor and had to

prepare for municipal elections, which affected the municipal administration efficiency. While most stated that they are satisfied with the response to the pandemic, taking into account the municipal capacities, they also acknowledged that there is always room for improvement.

Almost all participants of the Albanian speaking focus group of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje shared the opinion that their municipality has not taken any special action in preventing or mitigating the impacts caused by COVID-19. While some participants felt that their municipalities reacted appropriately to the pandemic, others mentioned that their municipality has not fulfilled its duties regarding the management of the pandemic with the necessary means and gravity. Dissatisfaction was also observed among participants in the Serb speaking focus group who thought that the municipality did not take enough initiative to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

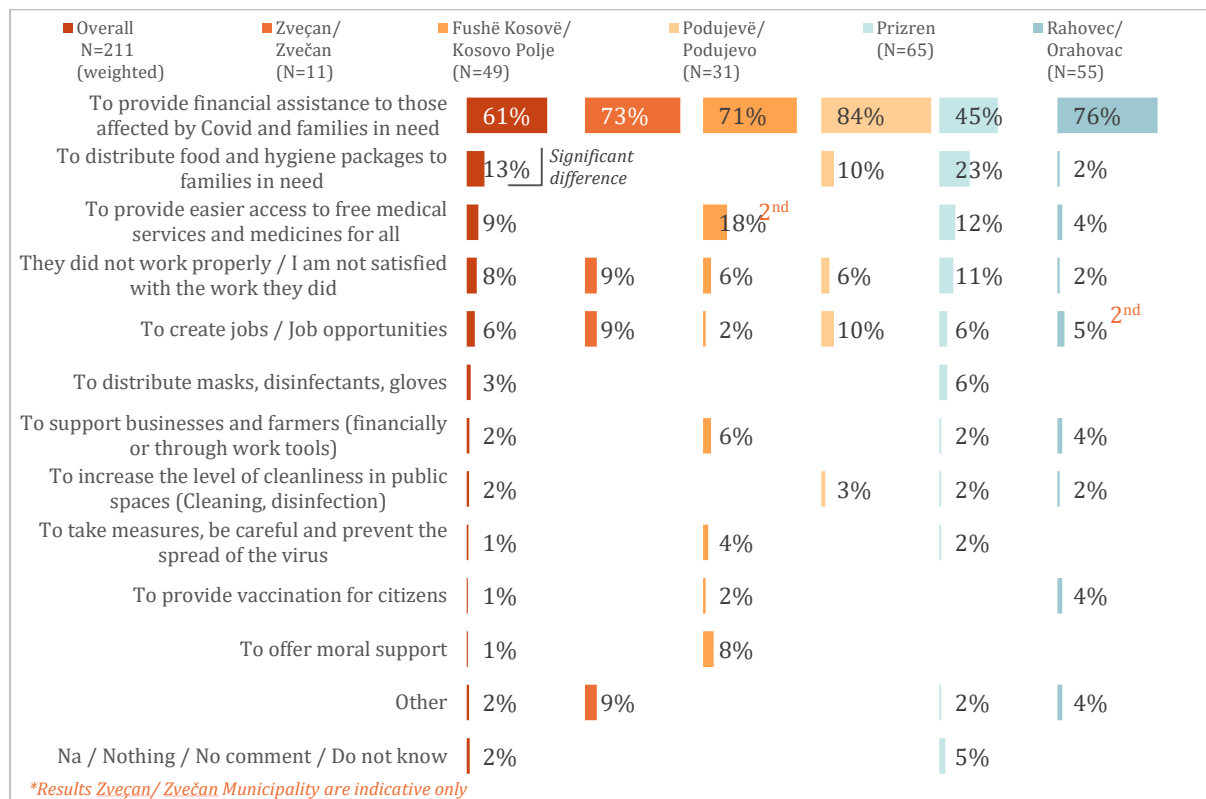
In the Serb speaking groups, the Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Gorani stood out with mostly not being satisfied with municipal initiatives, while the Kosovo Bosniaks were satisfied to some extent. The greatest issue was non-use of the Serb and other minority languages, depriving many minority community members of necessary support.

Most of the participants in the Albanian speaking focus group in Rahovec/Orahovac believed that their municipality has succeeded in adequately responding to needs occurring within the context of the pandemic. Participants in the Serb speaking group commonly felt that there was a lack of information regarding any initiatives taken by their municipalities. There is no media in the Serb language in Rahovec/Orahovac, therefore all the information was distributed either through social media or verbally from one person to another according to the participants. According to some of the Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian participants, there was no organized medical support for those who suffered from COVID-19 and all the expenses for treatment needed to be covered by the patient in advance.

Overall, both focus groups with Albanian speaking participants and Serb speaking participants were satisfied with the work of the Municipality of Zvečan/Zvečan. Both mentioned that the municipality undertook initiatives to help the residents. The Albanian speaking participants highlighted that they did not feel discriminated as a non-majority community in this municipality.

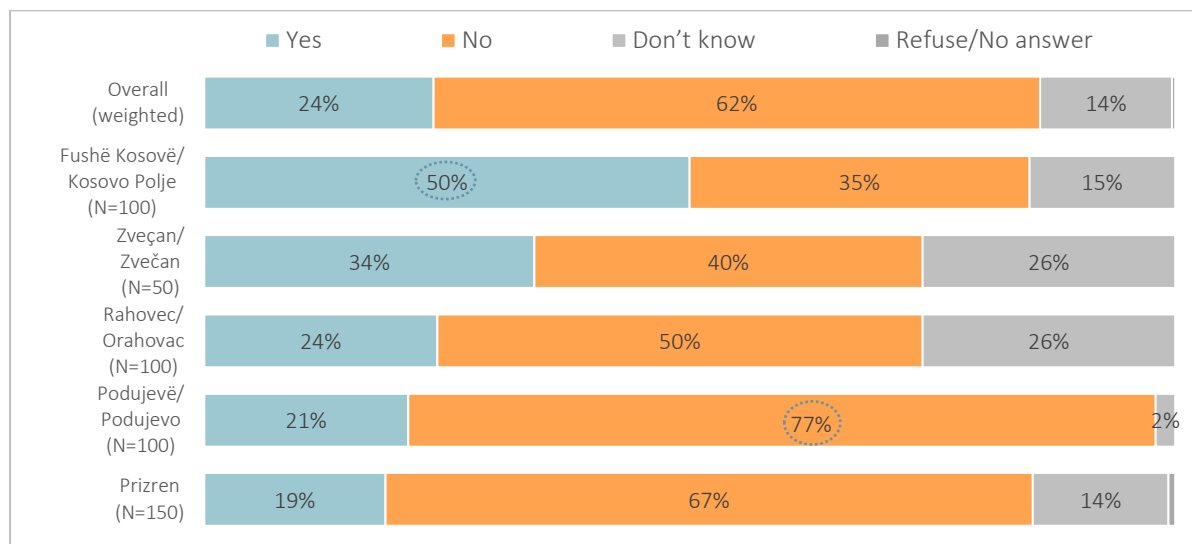
The survey participants that were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the municipal support were further asked what kind of initiative were lacking and which would be most helpful for them and their communities. Almost two thirds of the respondents (61%) mentioned that municipalities should provide financial assistance to those affected by COVID-19 and to the families in need. A minority of respondents mentioned the distribution of food and hygiene packages to families in need (13%), provision of easier access to free medical services and medicine for all people (9%), creation of job opportunities (6%), distribution of masks, disinfectants, and gloves (3%), support for businesses and farmers (2%), increasing level of public space cleanliness (2%), taking measures to prevent spread of the virus (1%), provision of vaccines to people (1%), and offer moral support (1%).

Figure 16 What kind of support is missing? What more can the municipality do? (open ended question – coded) – by municipality



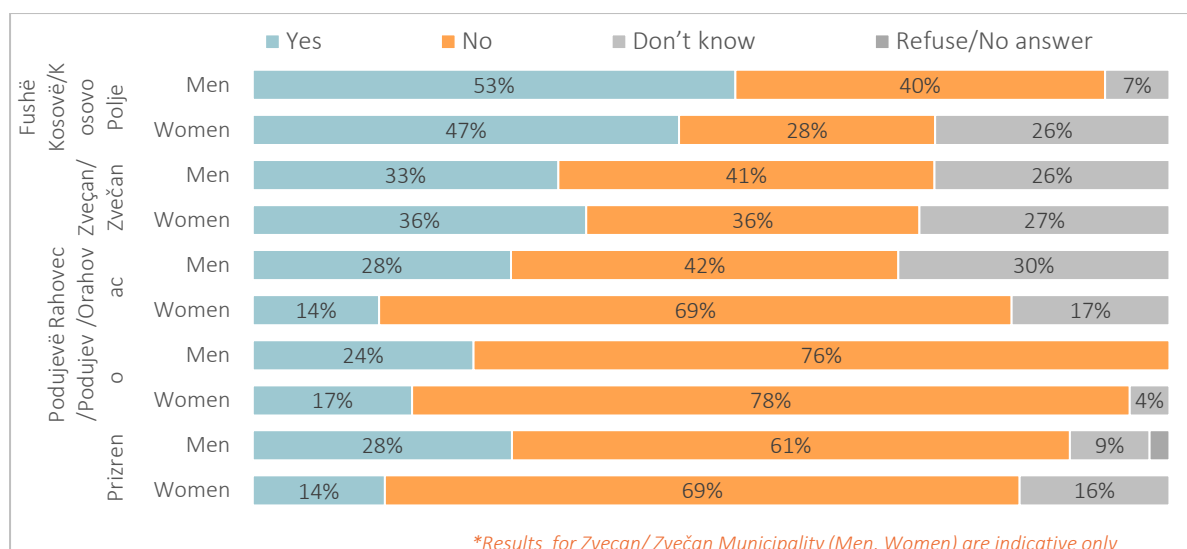
Respondents were next asked whether they were aware of any initiative that their municipality has taken regarding COVID-19. Only about 15% of respondents from Prizren were aware of such initiatives, followed by 21% from Podujevë/Podujevo, 24% from Rahovec/Orahovac, 34% from Zvečan/Zvečan, and 50% from Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje.

Figure 17 Are you aware of any initiative that your municipality has taken regarding COVID-19? - by municipality



In all municipalities, except for Zvečan/Zvečan, more men declared to be aware of COVID-19 related initiatives in their municipalities than women.

Figure 18 Are you aware of any initiative that your municipality has taken regarding COVID-19? - by gender



The survey respondents who declared to be aware of the initiatives that their municipalities had undertaken were asked to share a few initiatives that they heard or knew of. The majority of those who knew of such initiatives in Podujevë/Podujevo indicated that their municipality had distributed food packages to families in need (95%), disinfected public spaces and distributed food packages to families that had members infected with COVID-19 (43% respectively). When asked about what initiative the municipality has taken to reduce the damages caused by the pandemic, Podujevë/Podujevo focus group participants mentioned social assistance packages distributed for people and families in need. They also mentioned the need to increase the number of beds in hospitals/medical centers during the pandemic.

*"(...) I know that they donated food packages for poor families (...) Regarding the health aspect, I know that the number of emergency beds was initially three, while, as a result of the pandemic, they were forced to expand this part and currently there are 11 beds for people affected by COVID-19. Also, an entire ward has been opened in which infected people are treated separately from those who have other diseases." **Man, 28 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Podujevë/Podujevo***

*"I think that during the pandemic, the municipality responded well and the medical staff was helpful enough. Regarding the initiatives taken by the municipality, I am not informed too much. I believe that we have no reason not to be satisfied with the municipality because it has helped families in need. However, I think they could have worked harder." **Woman, 21 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Podujevë/Podujevo***

Municipal representatives were also asked about the initiatives that the municipality has undertaken. Podujevë/Podujevo municipality representatives claimed that their municipality has effectively carried out its duties and obligation to meet the needs of the residents during the pandemic. One of the representatives, responsible for the Business Registration Sector explained that during the pandemic, the number of registered businesses has increased, due to subsidies for businesses promised by the central institutions. Participants mentioned the anti-COVID-19 teams established during the pandemic as one of the positive undertakings their municipality has done in coordination

with health specialists. These teams have helped clinics and the residents to be tested and get the adequate treatments during and after the infection. Participants also mentioned that their municipality has constantly disinfected public areas such as: hospitals, schools, institutions, and so on. They also mentioned that “Alo, Komuna!”, a phone line where residents could call to address their concerns was activated.

A substantial portion of respondents from Rahovec/Orahovac declared that their municipality had distributed food packages to families in need and disinfected public spaces (88% each), followed by more than a third who declared that their municipality provided personal protective equipment (PPE) to families in need (38%). Focus group participants in the Albanian speaking group shared opinion that their municipality did not manage the availability of rapid tests efficiently, resulting in shortages in the beginning of the pandemic.

According to the participants in the Serb speaking focus group, there are still parallel municipal structures in Rahovec/Orahovac, and the Serb parallel municipality has undertaken some actions to mitigate consequences of COVID-19 by organizing blood pressure measurement, purchasing groceries for the elderly, among others. By contrast, the Municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac within the legal institutions did not take such initiatives.

*“[...] The management of the pandemic by our municipality has been very good, because the mayor has used as much information as he could to inform us through social networks. We were informed that there were measures taken from government institutions where our municipality could move more freely and we have adhered to the rules as well. Because we are known as the agricultural working villagers [...] but in terms of the pandemic [...] people respected the measures. Also, the municipality has done its best, but there is always room for improvement although it was not bad either.” **Man, 21 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Rahovec/Orahovac***

*“I know that because my parents are older and no one asked them anything, and people who are older, they have needs for groceries, for medicines that are consumed quickly [...] and neither pharmacies nor shops worked, therefore, these people needed to have some interventions, examinations, measuring blood pressure [...] nothing, absolutely nothing worked and so the municipality failed in every sense.” **Woman, 24, Serb, Rahovec/Orahovac***

Rahovec/Orahovac municipal representatives highlighted the constant disinfection of all public spaces as one of the main initiatives to mitigate COVID-19 in their municipality. They also pointed out launching the Emergency headquarters led by the Mayor of Rahovec/Orahovac. Representatives mentioned that the movement restrictions have not been as strict as in other cities, since Rahovec/Orahovac is an agricultural region. Therefore, people involved in such activities were equipped with a document which allowed them to travel during curfew. Representatives also claimed that the municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac exempted businesses from municipal taxes for 2020.

The great majority of the respondents of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje declared that their municipality had distributed food packages to families in need (86%), but only 54% declared that it had disinfected public spaces. Another 42% of respondents acknowledged that their municipality has provided financial assistance to families in need. When asked about initiatives the municipality has taken, focus group participants mentioned that the municipality provided humanitarian aid and organized online

classes for school children. Some participants in the focus group discussions also mentioned that it had also provided some subsidies for residents. Nonetheless, they thought the distribution of subsidies was not transparent and they did not know anyone who received them.

*"I know that there are a lot of packages in the school and it is always placed [either] in the assembly room, [or] in the hallway ... those donations are always at the school entrance, everyone is obliged to use them (...)." **Woman, 43 years old, Serb, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje***

*"In the neighborhood where I live, an emergency branch has been set up which helped with basic things for three months, but then not anymore. A good job has been done, transparency has been lacking and this was a problem and has caused dissatisfaction. I know about the activities that have been taken while on the municipality's website they are not listed. Medicine (Health professionals) needs to be more informed about how to treat patients." **Woman, 27 years old, Roma, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje***

Representatives of the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje emphasized that their municipality has tried to serve its residents and help them during the outbreak of COVID-19 in all ways possible. They also highlighted that the municipality is overwhelmed with an enormous number of residents who use the infrastructure, but the budget is estimated based on the 2011 population census. As a result, the municipality does not have enough funds to cover the needs of its residents, especially those infected with COVID-19. Nonetheless, they gave figures on how many patients were treated and contacted for health matters besides the limitations from the budget. According to one municipal official, a total of 4678 patients received medical services in 2020, including intravenous and intramuscular injections, lab and radiological examinations. A total of 7395 patients received the same treatments in 2021.

About 71% of respondents in Prizren stated that their municipality has distributed food packages to families in need and 46% declared that their municipalities provided financial assistance to families in need. About 18% each mentioned the disinfection of public spaces and distribution of food packages to families who had members infected with COVID-19. Most of the participants from focus groups expressed satisfaction with the work done by their municipality and highlighted municipality of Prizren's initiatives to help families in need and businesses affected most by the pandemic. Taking everyone's comments into consideration, the majority agreed that the municipality of Prizren has addressed the needs of its residents effectively during the pandemic. Some participants mentioned that the initiatives took the forms of distribution of food packages, hygiene packages and distribution of 170 euros per household which was delivered by the central level through municipal channels as well as economic packages - for businesses in the forms of starts up and subsidies, and social assistance for people who lost jobs.

*"I think that the municipality has been well organized, has informed us, and that we as citizens have been cautious and did respect the restrictions. As far as I know, it was good." **Woman, 48 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Prizren***

"Normally the beginning of the pandemic was unknown (...), but we were more or less prepared from the news, from various portals; even the news that were fake. But the municipality of Prizren, I believe,

*has been a strong and successful municipality with the mayor who has also taken immediate action against COVID-19." **Woman, 23 years old, Kosovo Roma, Prizren***

Representatives of Prizren municipality claimed that they had followed all instructions from the National Institute of Public Health. They created an emergency headquarter responsible for fulfilling the needs of the residents, helped families in need with food packages, improved health services and tried to offer all needed services in their municipality including oxygen-therapy. A few participants explained that the municipality activated the "Alo, Komuna!" phone line through which the residents share their problems, ask for help and communicate with municipal officials for various issues during the pandemic. Some expressed their satisfaction with the efficiency of this phone line while others claimed that this line has not been as effective as expected.

More than half of the respondents who heard of such initiatives in Zvečan/Zvečan said that their municipality had disinfected public spaces (53%), another 35% said it disinfected apartment buildings and 29% indicated that it provided PPE to families who had members infected with COVID-19. Focus group participants also mentioned similar initiatives such as humanitarian aid, food, disinfection of public spaces, installation of disinfection tunnels and vaccinations of the elderly.

*"As for the municipality, I think it has done everything that a municipality should do. I think that even though we are a minority in the municipality of Zvečan/Zvečan, we have not been discriminated in terms of protection from COVID, starting with the postmen, then it has often helped residents, even those in need of humanitarian assistance, such as food and other issues, then disinfected the schools that were our students, present there. Then it equipped many institutions and many people with masks, gloves and other protective equipment. Until the end where it started with the vaccination of our citizens, over 75 years old. These are the things that I am aware that the municipality has done so far. I think that based on its competences as a municipality – a good job was done. One can never be 100% satisfied, but it had the opportunity and capacity as a municipality." **Man, 48 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Zvečan/Zvečan***

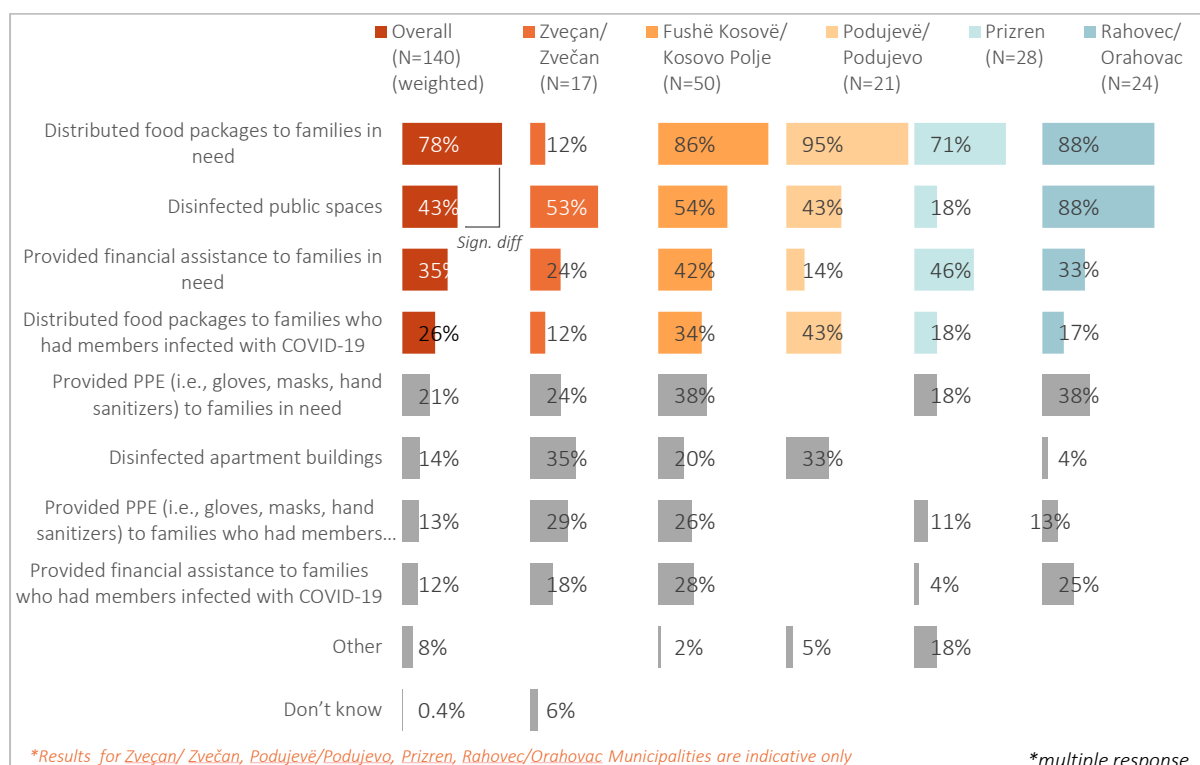
*"Last year, somewhere at the beginning of the pandemic, in late March or early April, in fact sometime after the pandemic was declared, the borders were closed and I know that the municipalities had offices to provide assistance to citizens. It was specifically there to give them money, i.e., to order medicines from Raška, because they had their own team that went to Raška¹⁵ to procure medicines for people who could not go there...." **Man, 40, Kosovo Serb, Zvečan/Zvečan***

Municipal representatives of Zvečan/Zvečan revealed some of the initiatives that they undertook after the COVID-19 outbreak. At the beginning of the pandemic, informative material concerning COVID-19 was forwarded to schools and other institutions and mobile health teams were formed and visited residents at their homes. Moreover, the municipality organized procurement of medicines and delivered them to the resident's homes while most school children in rural areas were equipped with electronic devices in order to be able to attend classes online. Further, the municipality organized volunteers to help the elderly who were not allowed to go out. They also claimed that it supported almost half of all residents with any kind of materials. They also disinfected public spaces, provided

¹⁵ Raška is a town in Serbia.

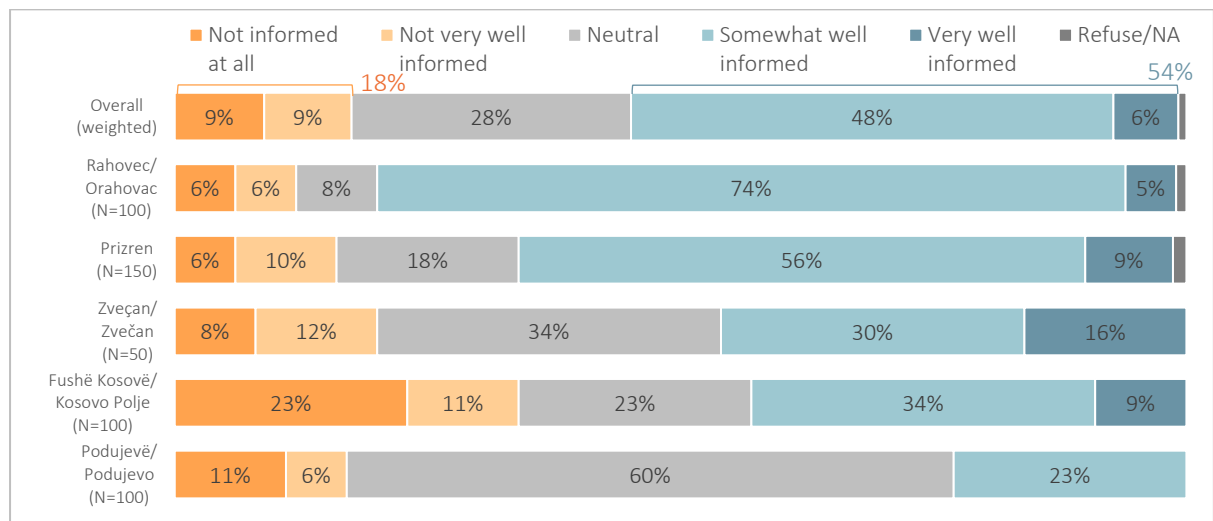
hygienic products to schools and families as well as subsidies to about 50 residents in 2021 and 30 residents in 2020.

Figure 19 Initiatives taken by municipality regarding COVID-19 – by municipality



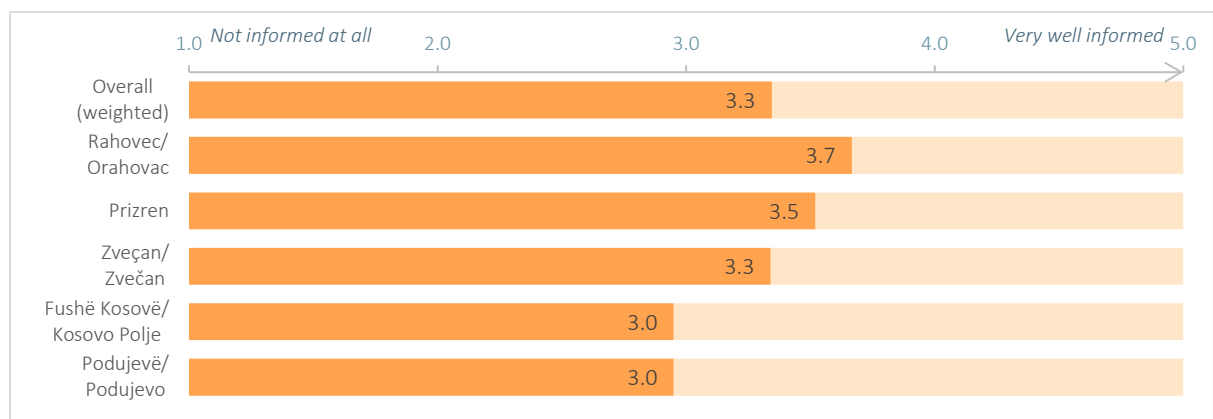
The municipalities which were the subject of this research, seemed to have succeeded in keeping their constituents well informed regarding COVID-19 relevant facts and information. Overall, about 54% of all respondents from these municipalities consider that they have been kept somewhat well or very well informed by their municipalities regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. A large majority (79%) of the respondents of Rahovec/Orahovac and more than half (56%) of the respondents of Prizren were somewhat or very well informed. A third or less of the respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje (34%), Zvečan/Zvečan (30%), and Podujevë/Podujevo (23%) were somewhat or very well informed while around 60% of the respondents of Podujevë/Podujevo felt neutral about being informed by their municipal authorities.

Figure 20 How well informed or uninformed is your municipality keeping you regarding the COVID-19 pandemic? - by municipality



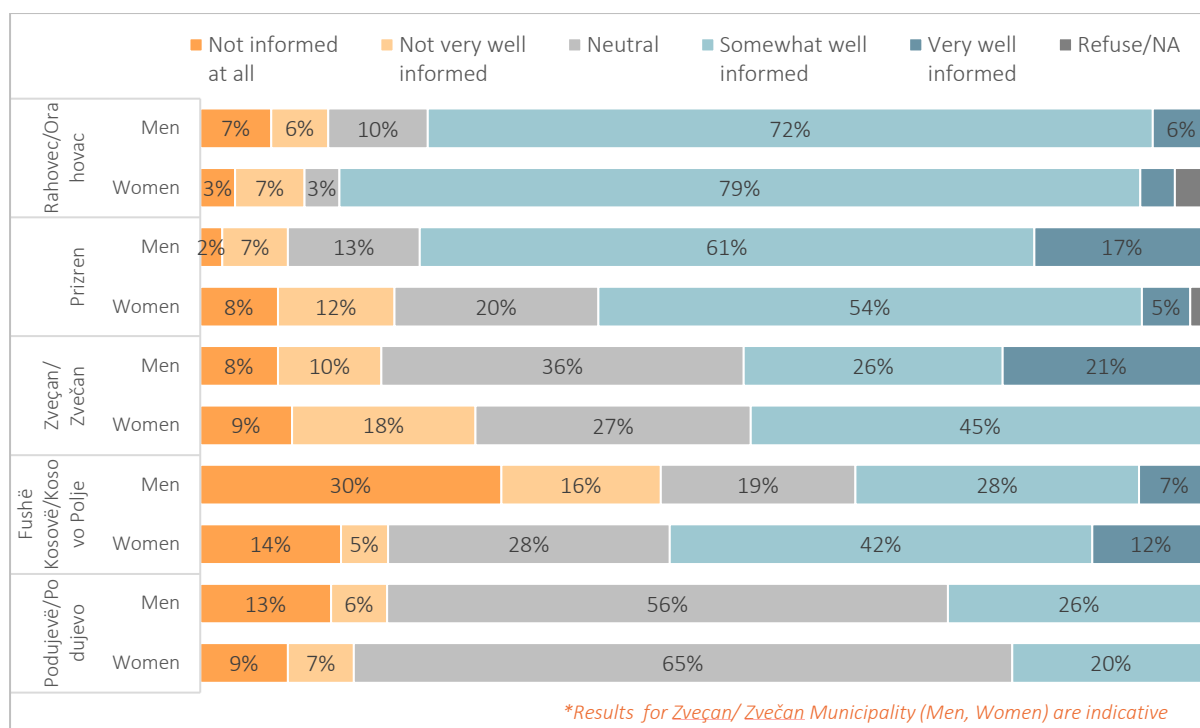
It is notable that, on average, the level of satisfaction with *information* provided by the municipalities is higher than the level of satisfaction with the *initiatives taken* by the municipal authorities. On a scale of 1-5 where 1 equals ‘not informed at all’ and 5 equals ‘very well informed’, the level of being informed by their municipalities regarding the COVID-19 pandemic is on average 3.3 points including all five municipalities. The average for Rahovec/Orahovac is 3.7 points, for Prizren 3.5 points, for Zvečan/Zvečan 3.3 points, and for Podujevë/Podujevo and Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, 3.0 points each.

Figure 21 How well informed or uninformed is your municipality keeping you regarding the COVID-19 pandemic? – by municipality, on a 5-point scale



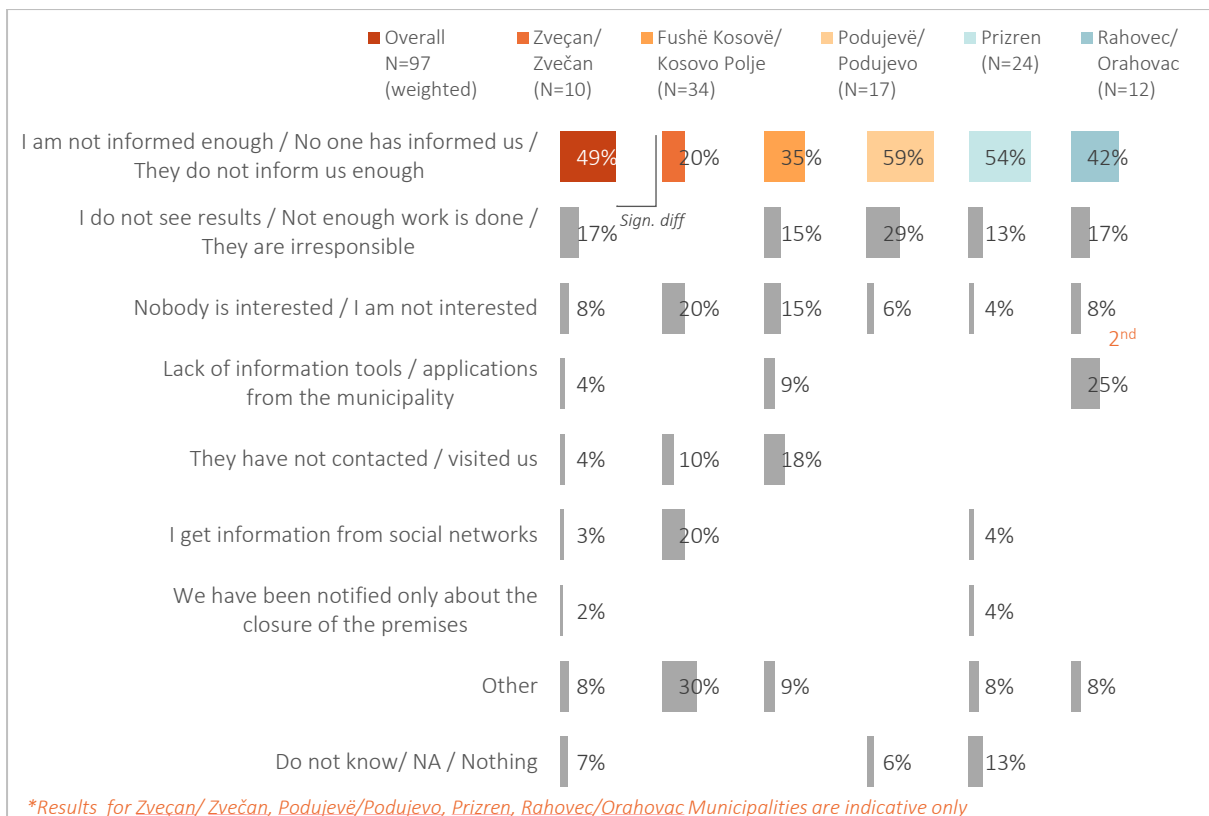
The perceptions of men and women varied regarding how well informed the residents were. In some municipalities there were slight differences, while in others more significant differences between men’s and women’s perceptions were observed. For instance, in Rahovec/Orahovac, 84% of women and 78% of men felt somewhat or very well informed by their municipality. Whereas in Prizren, 78% of men and 59% of women felt the same. Furthermore, in Zvečan/Zvečan, 47% of men and 45% of women felt somewhat informed but none felt very well informed. In Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, 54% of women and 35% of men; and in Podujevë/Podujevo, 26% of men and 20% of women felt they were somewhat or very well informed by their municipalities regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 22 How well informed or uninformed is your municipality keeping you regarding the COVID-19 pandemic? - by gender



Respondents who declared that they were not kept very well informed or not well informed at all about the COVID-19 pandemic were asked for the respective reasons. Almost half of the respondents claimed they were not being informed enough or that no one from the municipalities was informing them (49%), about 17% did not see the results or deemed the municipality as irresponsible, and about 8% said that they are not informed because nobody is interested in informing them. 4% each claimed they were not well informed, or at all, due to a lack of information channels used by the municipalities and that the municipalities have not contacted them in any manner. Another 3% mentioned they were informed through social media and about 2% claimed they were only informed about closing of premises and nothing else.

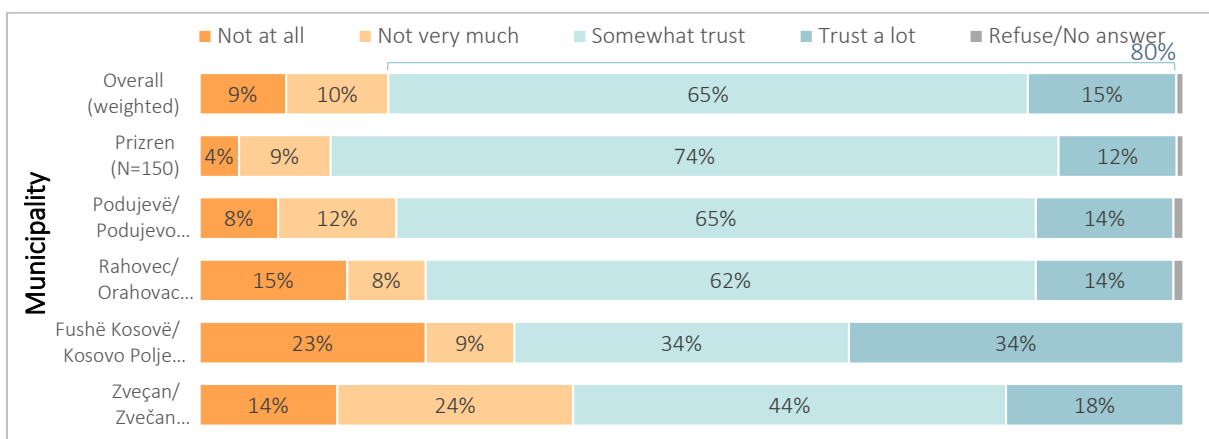
Figure 23 Why do you think you are not being kept well informed or are not informed at all? – by municipality
*only those who are not kept informed by their municipality regarding the COVID-19 pandemic



The general reliability of the information provided by municipalities regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in the five municipalities was perceived as adequate. Overall, 65% of all respondents in the five municipalities somewhat trusted the information received from their municipalities, and 15% of them trusted it a lot. About 10% did not trust it very much and 9% did not trust it at all.

Data disaggregated by municipality showed that 86% of the residents of Prizren, 79% of the residents of Podujevë/Podujevo, 76% of the residents of Rahovec/Orahovac, 68% of the residents of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, and 58% of the residents of Zvečan/Zvečan somewhat trusted/trusted a lot, the information received by their municipality.

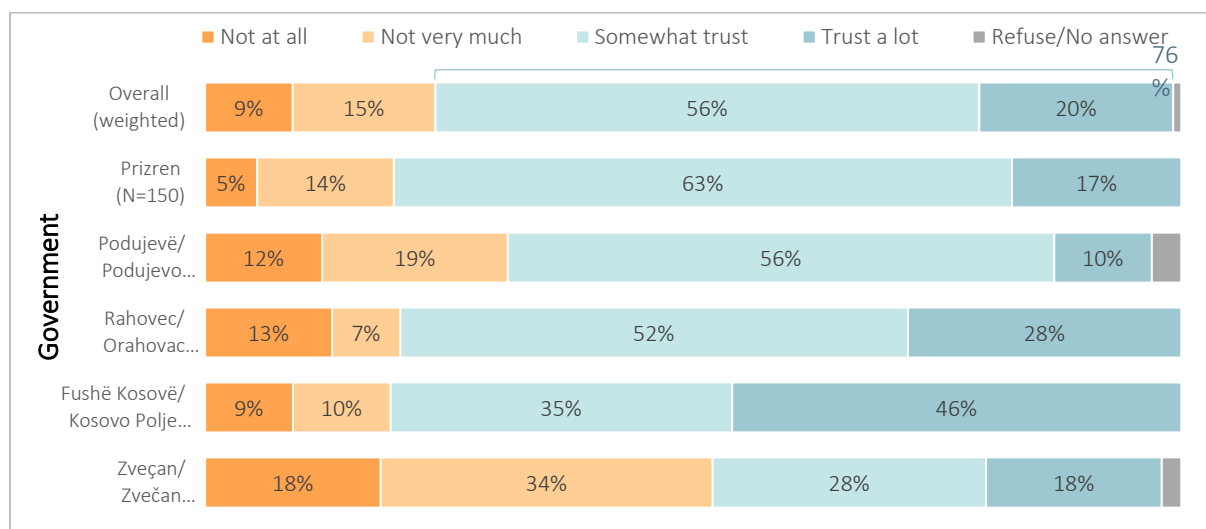
Figure 24 How much do you trust the information you are receiving about the COVID-19 pandemic from your municipality? – by municipality



Similarly, the information received by the central institutions such as the National Institute of Public Health in Kosovo (NIPHK), the Ministry of Health and other relevant line ministries is trusted to a certain extent. In total, 56% of all respondents in five municipalities somewhat trusted and 20% of them trusted a lot. Another 15% of them do not trust it very much and 9% do not trust it at all.

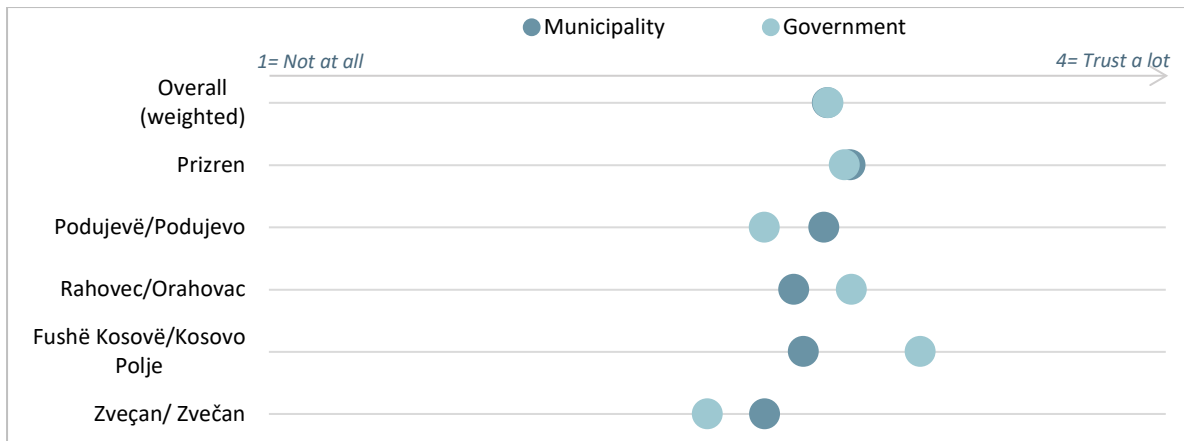
About 83% of the respondents in Prizren somewhat trusted/trusted a lot the information they received about the COVID-19 pandemic from the central institutions. 66% of the respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo, 80% of the respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac, 81% of the respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, and 46% of the respondents in Zvečan/Zvečan trusted somewhat/trusted a lot the information received by their municipality. 83% of the respondents in Prizren, 81% of the respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, 80% of the respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac, *somewhat trust/trust a lot* the information received from the central institutions whereas 66% of the respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo, and 46% of the respondents in Zvečan/Zvečan *somewhat trust/trust a lot* the information received by their municipality.

Figure 25 How much do you trust the information you are receiving about the COVID-19 pandemic from the central institutions (e.g., NIPHK, Ministry of Health, etc.)? – by municipality



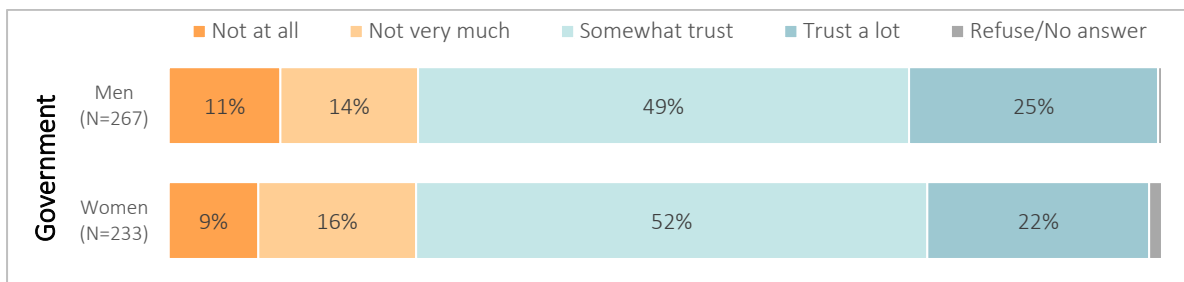
On a scale of trust from 1-4, where 1 equals 'not at all' and 4 equals 'trust a lot', the distributed information from the central institutions and municipalities are at about the same level in all municipalities, on average. In Prizren, the respondents seemed to trust the municipality (2.94) information slightly more than that of the central institutions (2.93). In Podujevë/Podujevo the situation is the same but the only difference is that the gap is bigger (2.86 municipality vs. 2.70 central institutions). Although the overall trust in Zvečan/Zvečan is lower than in other municipalities, they trust the information received from their municipality (2.66) more than the central institutions (2.47). Whereas in Rahovec/Orahovac, the opposite is the case; the respondents seemed to trust the central institutions (2.95) information more than municipality (2.76). Respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje had the same convictions but gap is wider (2.79 municipality vs. 3.18 central institutions).

Figure 26 Trust in Municipality vs. Central institutions distributed information – on a 4-point scale, by municipality



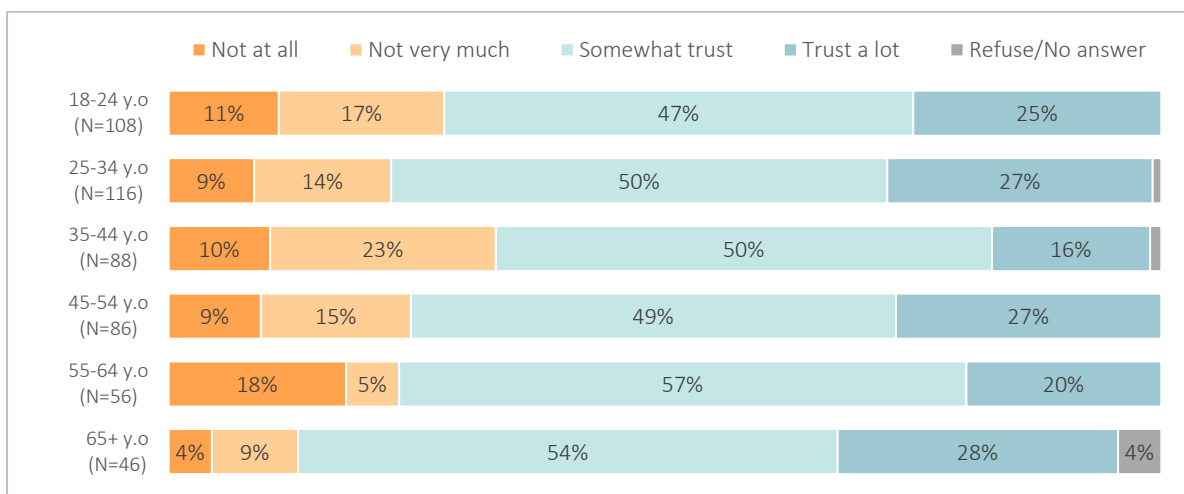
The trust in the information of the central institutions is similar for men and women, where 52% of women and 49% of men somewhat trust, and 25% of men and 22% of women trust it a lot.

Figure 27 How much do you trust the information you are receiving about the COVID-19 pandemic from: the central institutions (e.g., NIPHK, Ministry of Health, etc.)? – overall, by gender



Different age groups showed varying degrees of trust towards central institutions' information. The highest portion of the retirees (65+ years old), senior residents (55-64 years old), and millennials (25-34 years old) somewhat trusted or trusted the information a lot (82%, 77%, and 77% respectively) while 76% of the middle aged (45-54 years old) and 72% of the young adults (18-24 years old) somewhat trusted or trusted a lot.

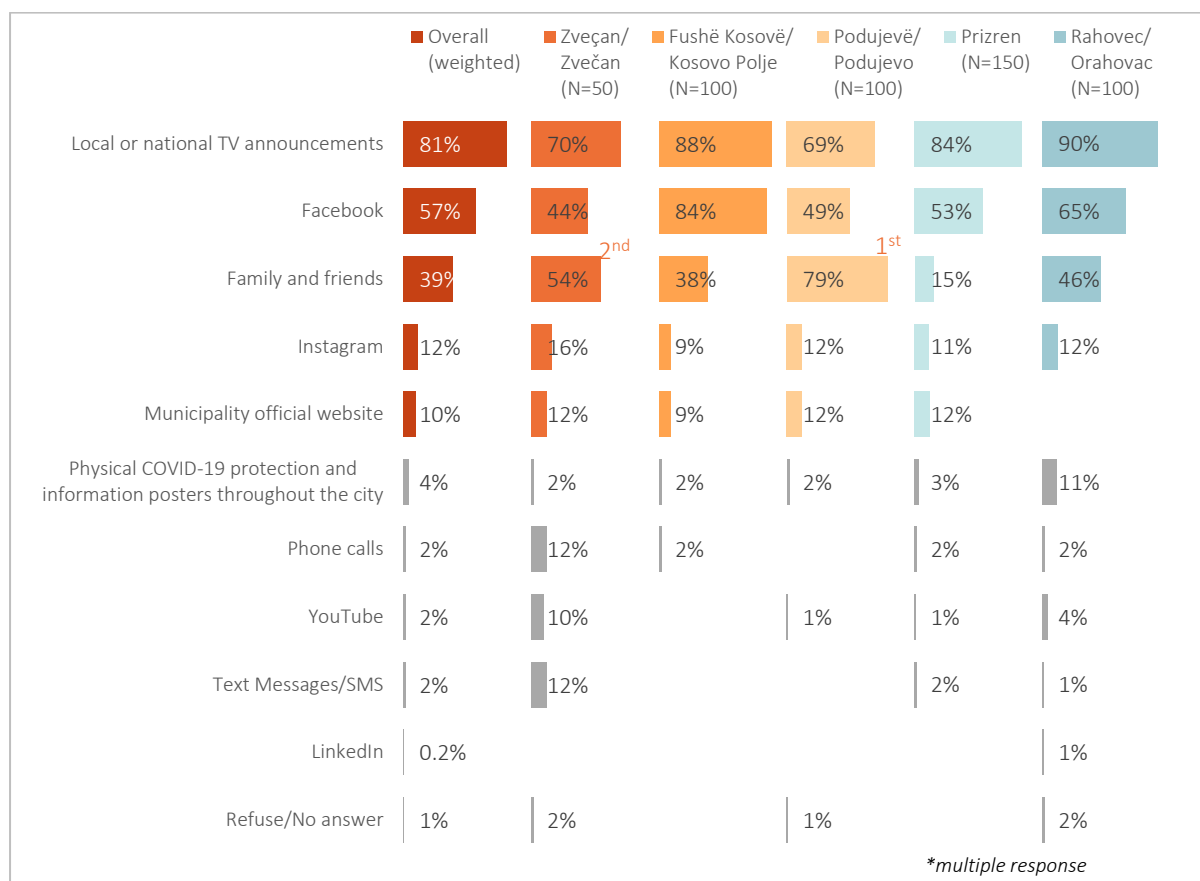
Figure 28 How much do you trust the information you are receiving about the COVID-19 pandemic from: the central institutions (e.g., NIPHK, Ministry of Health, etc.)? – overall, by age



When asked how they received information regarding COVID-19 related matters, measures, and support available in their municipalities, 81% of the respondents claimed to use local or Kosovo TV announcements, 57% use Facebook, 39% rely on family and friends, 12% on Instagram, 10% on municipal official website, and a minority of respondents have also seen informational posters throughout the city (4%), received phone calls (2%) and text messages (2%). Very few also use YouTube (2%) and LinkedIn (0.2%) to get such information.

The top three sources of information in all municipalities were local or Kosovo TV announcements, Facebook, and family and friends. However, the differences in the ranking of family and friends as a source of information are noteworthy. For instance, a significant portion of the respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo rely on their families and friends (79%) as their first source of information and more than half of the respondents in Zvečan/Zvečan (54%) consider it as their second source of information. Almost half of the respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac (46%), more than a third of those in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje (38%), and less than a fifth in Prizren (15%) reported the same.

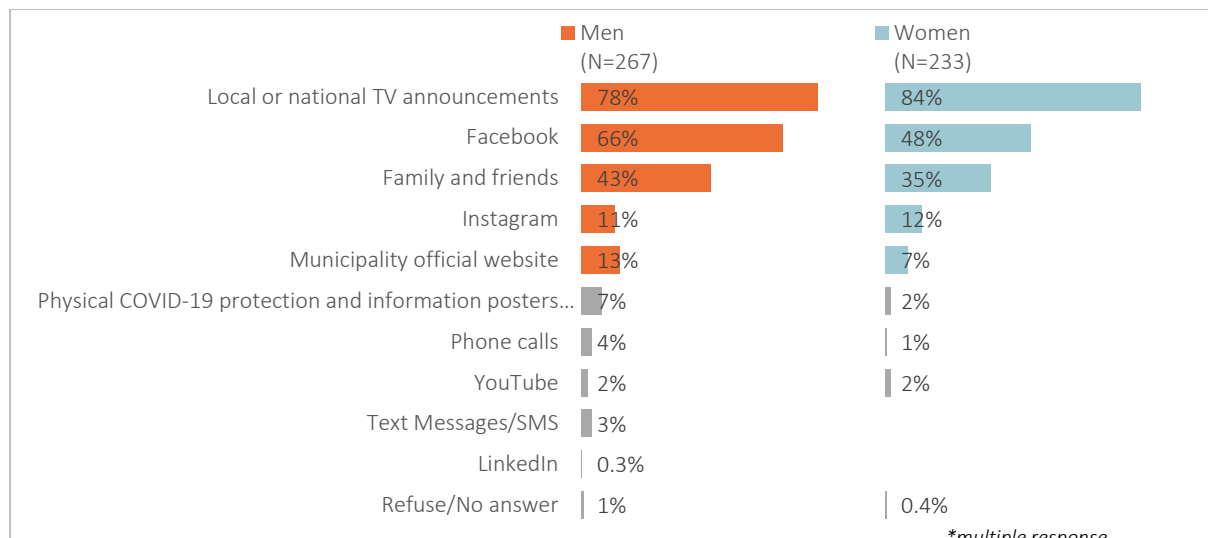
Figure 29 How do you usually receive information regarding COVID-19 related situation, measures, and support available in your municipality? – by municipality



There are some differences on how men and women receive information regarding COVID-19 related situation, measures, and support available in their municipalities as well. More women (84%) than men (78%) use local or Kosovo TV announcements as a primary source of information. More men use Facebook (66%) and rely on family and friends (43%) as their secondary and tertiary source of information than women (48% and 35% respectively). Women (12%) use Instagram slightly more than

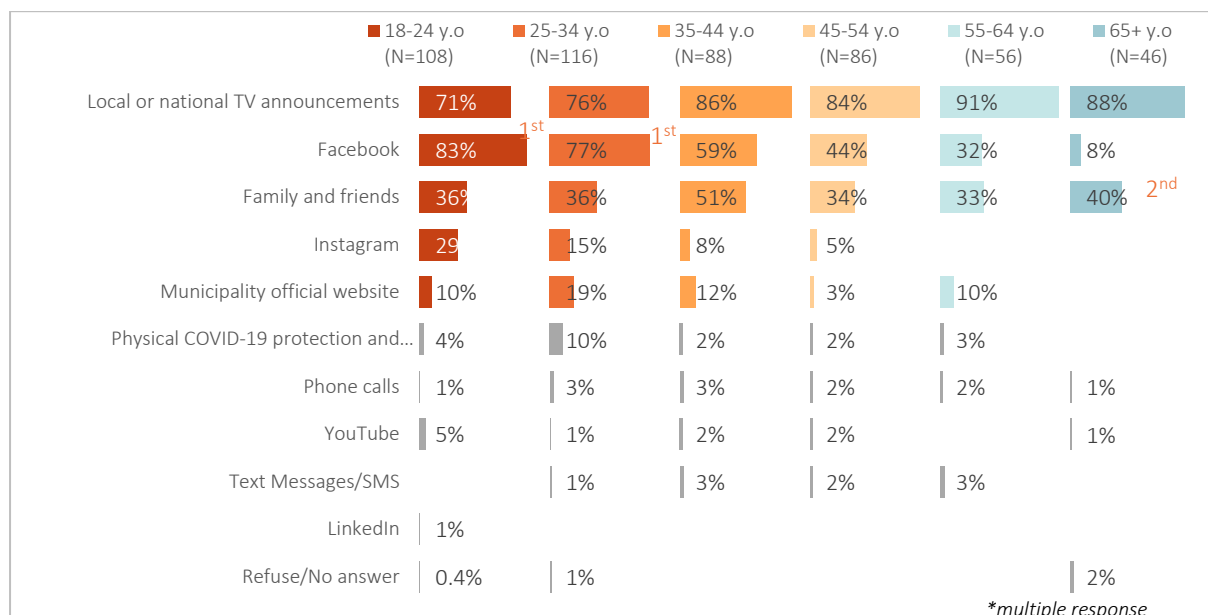
men (11%), whereas men (13%) use municipal official websites more than women (7%) and have also come across posters throughout the city (7%) more frequently than women (2%).

Figure 30 How do you usually receive information regarding COVID-19 related situation, measures, and support available in your municipality? – overall, by gender



More respondents from younger generations use Facebook and Instagram to receive information regarding the COVID-19 situation, measures, and support that is available in their municipality. Nonetheless, sometimes younger generations rely more on local or national TV announcements or municipal official websites than older generations. Specifically, it is noted that 18-24 and 25-34 year-olds use Facebook as their primary source of information (83% and 77% respectively) and local or Kosovo TV announcements as a secondary source. Whereas all other age groups use local or Kosovo TV announcements as their primary source of information and Facebook as second, except for the elderly/retired residents for whom family and friends come second.

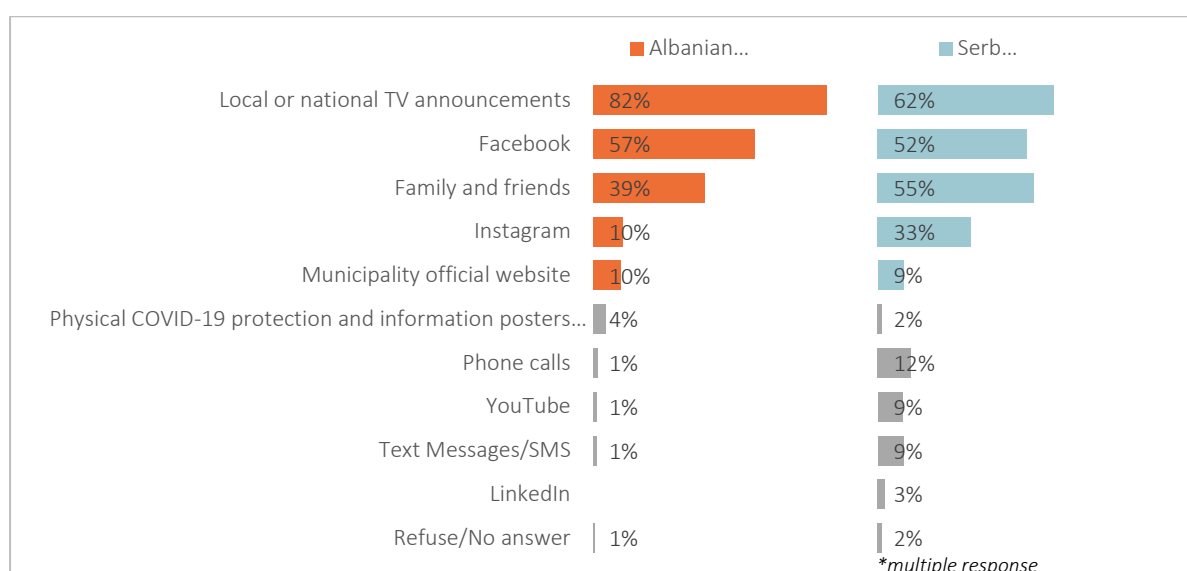
Figure 31 How do you usually receive information regarding COVID-19 related situation, measures, and support available in your municipality? – by age



It is important to assess how Kosovo people of different ethnicities get informed regarding COVID-19 related issues in their municipalities. Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs alike mostly rely on local or Kosovo TV announcements although to quite different extents (82% and 62% respectively). Facebook comes second for Kosovo Albanians (57%) and family and friends for Kosovo Serbs (55%). Family and friends come third for Kosovo Albanians (39%), and Facebook comes third for Kosovo Serbs (52%).

It is also notable that significantly higher portion of Kosovo Serbs (33%) than Kosovo Albanians (10%) use Instagram to receive information on COVID-19. Moreover, more than one in ten Kosovo Serbs declared to have had phone calls, and almost one in ten have received text messages (9%) or used YouTube (9%) compared to Kosovo Albanians (1%, 2%, and 1% respectively). Overall focus group discussion confirmed these findings with the majority mentioning “media” in general as their information source, TV and social media specifically.

Figure 32 How do you usually receive information regarding COVID-19 related situation, measures, and support available in your municipality? – by ethnicity



*Other ethnicities not presented in the graph as a result of the low number of cases

Besides inquiring about the main sources of information, the respondents were asked whether the information that was available to them was received in a timely manner. Overall, 94% of those who used municipal official websites, 86% of those who used Facebook and Instagram, 83% of those who used local or Kosovo TV announcements, and 79% of those who relied on family and friends perceived that the information they received on the topic concerning their municipality was timely.

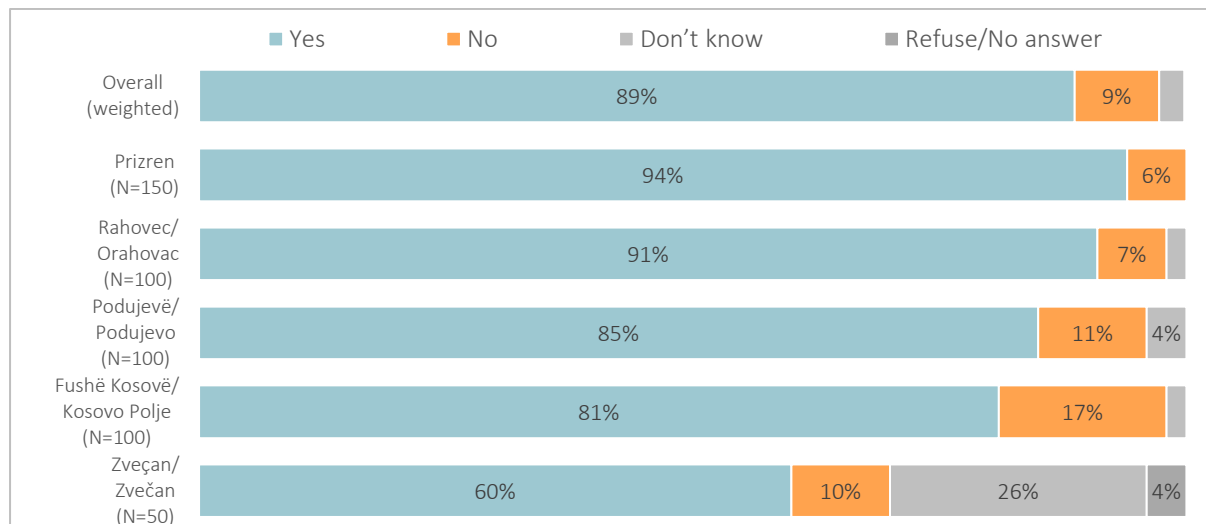
Table 1 Do you receive this information in a timely manner or too late? - based on the type of all communication channels used

	Local or national TV announcements N=408	Facebook N=300	Family and friends N=212	Instagram N=58	Municipality official website N=45
Yes	83%	86%	79%	86%	94%
No	15%	11%	17%	13%	6%
Don't know	2%	2%	4%	2%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

*Results for other ways of receiving information are indicative only, thus are not presented in the table

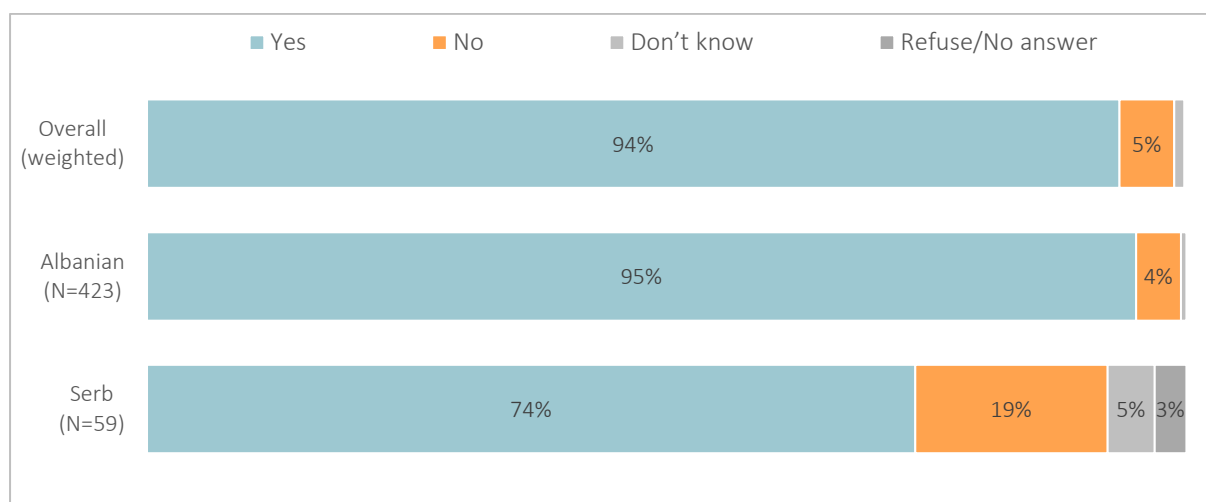
The majority of all respondents (89%) perceived that the COVID-19 related information which was provided by their municipality was easy to understand, i.e., the language was clear and non-technical, the visuals were appropriate, the messages were concise, and so on. Broken down by municipality, 94% of the respondents in Prizren, 91% of the respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac, 85% of the respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo, and 81% of the respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje claimed that the COVID-19 related information was easy to understand. Nonetheless, only 60% of the respondents in Zvečan/Zvečan thought so and 26% of them claimed not to know whether the information was easy to understand.

Figure 33 Is the COVID-19 related information provided by your municipality easy to understand (clear non-technical language, photos/videos used when appropriate, concise messages, etc.)? – by municipality



Furthermore, the respondents were asked whether the COVID-19 related information provided by their municipalities was in their native language and 94% of them said yes. When compared by ethnicity, 95% of Kosovo Albanians and only 74% of Kosovo Serbs said the information they received was in their native language.

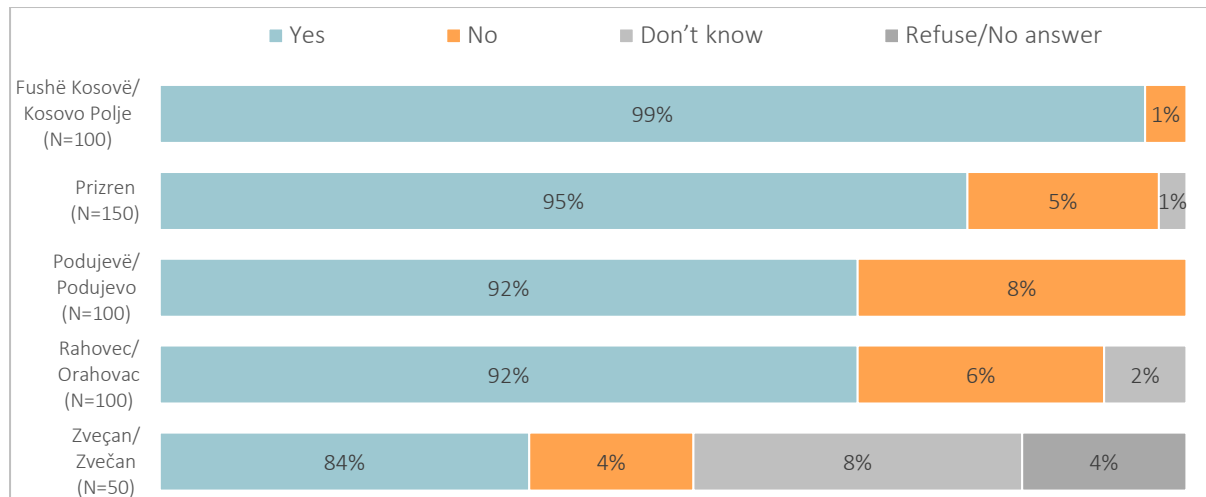
Figure 34 Is the COVID-19 related information provided by your municipality in your native language? – by ethnicity



*Results for Kosovo Bosniaks and Kosovo Turks are indicative only, thus are not presented in the graph

When compared by municipality, 99% of the respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, 95% of the respondents in Prizren, 92% of the respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo, 92% of the respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac, and 84% of the respondents in Zvečan/Zvečan claimed that the information provided by their municipalities was in their native language.

Figure 35 Is the COVID-19 related information provided by your municipality in your native language? - by municipality



Through an open response question, respondents were asked to list other channels of communication the municipalities should use to provide COVID-19 related information to reach them more effectively. The respondents mentioned four main sources, including TV advertisements and COVID-19 tailored programs, social media such as Facebook and Instagram, text messages, as well as visits to villages and municipalities and/or public meetings. The majority of the respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo (71%) preferred more COVID-19 content on TV. 43% of the respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac wanted more use of TV and 28% wanted active use of social media. To a lesser extent - but concerning the same channels of communication, respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje preferred the use of social media (21%) and TV content (20%) - rather than other channels, and a significant portion also listed the use of municipal official website (19%) as a preferred option. Higher portions of respondents in Prizren and Zvečan/Zvečan thought there was no need for other forms of communication. Nonetheless, about one in five respondents (18%) in Prizren mentioned that another key communication channel should be text messaging. One in five respondents in Zvečan/Zvečan (20%) preferred more active use of social media.

It is noteworthy that there are respondents who wanted more communication channels in their languages, such as Bosniak and Turkish. Fewer respondents mentioned phone calls, radio, and email as channels of communication through which they would be better reached by their municipalities.

Table 2 What other communication channels should the municipality use to provide COVID-19 related information in order to better reach you? - open ended question, by municipality

	Overall (weighted)	Zvečan/ Zvečan (N=50)	Fushë Kosovë/ Kosovo Polje (N=100)	Podujevë/ Podujevo (N=100)	Prizren (N=150)	Rahovec/ Orahovac (N=100)
TV (more ads, programs etc.)	30.4%	12%	20%	71%	10%	43%
Social media (Facebook, Instagram)	11.9%	20%	21%	11%	5%	28%
SMS	9.8%	8%	3%	2%	18%	1%
There is no need for other information media /I am pleased	9.5%	30%	8%		8%	24%
Visits to villages and municipalities / Public meetings	5.9%	6%	12%	3%	7%	4%
Leaflets, Billboards and Advertisements	4.3%	2%	3%	4%	6%	1%
Official site (Municipalities and relevant institutions)	3.2%	6%	19%	1%	2%	
Internet	2.4%		5%	6%	1%	1%
Telephone / Phone calls	2%	2%	12%	2%	1%	
Radio	1.3%	4%	1%	3%	1%	
Channels in Bosniak	1%		1%		2%	
Newspaper, E-news	1%	2%		2%		3%
Family, relatives and friends	0.3%				1%	
Channels in Turkish	0.3%				1%	
Email	0.2%	2%	1%			
Other	0.3%		1%	1%		
Na / Nothing	30.3%	16%	19%	11%	46%	22%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

**Indicative only due to the low number of cases*

Questions on information dissemination were explored in the focus group discussions as well. Albanian speaking participants in the Rahovec/Orahovac focus group were satisfied with the way the municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac has informed its residents. Some participants mentioned that activities and decisions undertaken by their municipality have been shared in the official website of the municipality. Most of the participants highlighted that they received information also from their local radio station, news portals and claimed to be satisfied with the way their municipality has communicated with them. However, those from the Serb speaking group expressed that the municipality rarely contacted them and the Serb community is not aware of the municipal services available to them and generally do not expect any support from the municipality. According to them, Kosovo Serbs in the municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac are mainly elderly residents who do not use internet and social networks. Thus, they were mainly informed through their children or other acquaintances who received the information online or through TV channels in Albanian and shared the information verbally.

When asked about how the municipality has informed its residents about issues and measures taken to address COVID-19 situation, municipal officials and assembly members of the municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac explained that they have constantly used social media as a tool to inform others and keep them updated. They also mentioned cooperation with medical centers to inform their

residents on a daily basis about the situation, number of infected people and initiatives related to health services and social care.

The participants from the Albanian speaking focus group and Serb speaking group in Prizren had different experiences regarding the information received by the municipalities. For the former, the majority of the participants claimed that in most cases they were informed by local and regional media and other social networks about recent events, the number of infected cases and all the measures that were taken by central institutions in their municipality. According to them, the information provided have been sufficient, timely and fair. The latter was aware that information was disseminated and felt that it was trustworthy but mentioned that there were problems related to the language used; posters and advertisements were only available in Albanian.

Some municipal officials and assembly members believed that the Municipality of Prizren has managed to inform its residents well, while others claimed that there is room for improvement. Representatives explained that measures taken by their municipality have been disseminated through Kosovo media and social media. Some mentioned that announcements have been posted on the official municipal website for the timely notification of changes and measures. Yet, some did not agree that the channels used to inform others have been satisfactory or efficient enough.

Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje Albanian speaking focus group participants expressed dissatisfaction with the way the municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje informs its residents. Participants felt that the information provided on the official website of the municipality was often not informative and some of the information regarding activities or decisions made were entirely missing. Most of the participants stated that they received all information from local and regional media as well as social media. Serb speaking participants mentioned that they were informed through traditional media or social networks. The municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje used a store in Uglarë/Ugljare as a bulletin board, to inform the residents of the events or news concerning their municipality. Moreover, the participants claimed that oftentimes the information about municipals' measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 was not disseminated in a timely manner. Nonetheless, most of the focus group participants felt that the information from the municipality is reliable.

Most of the representatives and officials of the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje have pointed out that even though their municipality has undertaken many measures aimed at tackling the effects of the pandemic, they did not put enough efforts in informing their residents through various channels. They were also self-critical about the lack of transparency in the process. Yet, most of them claimed that people living in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje have been informed through national media, which has been covering the events in the whole of Kosovo and region.

Albanian speaking focus group participants in Zvečan/Zvečan mentioned the office for communication between villages in Lipë/Lipa where most Kosovo Albanians of the area reside increased accessibility to the information transmitted to the villages. They also believed it was appropriate and timely. However, some Kosovo Albanian participants have explained that they do not receive information or services directly from the municipality but from a liaison office – namely, the Office for Communities – created by the municipality and located in the Kosovo Albanian populated village of Lipë/Lipa.¹⁶ This has allowed for the information to reach residents in due time.

¹⁶ This office serves as a special office for Kosovo Albanians residents of the municipality. Within the Office for Communities, there are several separate sectors in which Kosovo Albanians from the villages of Zvečan/Zvečan may receive information

Although Serb speaking participants believed that they were fairly well informed, they thought that the municipality did not inform residents about the initiatives. Also, the information they received was delivered either through social media or TV and they felt the information was reliable.

In the focus group of municipal officials and assembly members, participants claimed that people were informed only through TV, radio and municipal website due to the prohibition of movement. Information was also disseminated in Albanian language and the promotional materials related to prevention were placed in visible locations; a billboard was mobilized. They also mentioned that the municipality is ready to improve and address shortcomings.

Participants in the Podujevë/Podujevo focus groups said that they were informed mainly through regional, local and electronic media. Participants also noted that the trust in the sources of information varies significantly, depending on each individual and their accessibility to the type of sources. During the discussion, it was pointed out that older people, for example, have more difficulties in understanding technology-based information than younger generations.

In the focus group of municipal officials and assembly members, participants claimed that their municipality has taken advantage of various channels to inform its residents - mainly local TV and social media platforms. Activities, initiatives, and information on the movement restrictions and public hearings were also posted on Podujevë/Podujevo's municipality official website as the new mayor has won the mandate¹⁷.

People's Satisfaction with Municipality People-Engagement

The second module of the survey examined respondents' knowledge and satisfaction on people engagement channels that municipalities have used during the pandemic (during a one-year period), such as public hearings. Indicative research¹⁸ suggests that people in Kosovo do not participate much in municipal public hearings - which are a necessary tool and a legal stipulation to ensure that the budget planning of municipality activities is in line with the expectations of different stakeholders such as people, businesses, and other entities living and operating in the municipality.

Overall, data findings of this module suggest that people-engagement at municipalities stood at low levels and were rare among survey respondents. The majority of respondents claimed that their municipalities did not hold any public hearings before or after the pandemic. Many admitted not being aware of whether any hearings had taken place; this was especially evident among residents of Zvečan/Zvečan and Rahovec/Orahovac. Only 33 survey respondents in total stated that their municipalities held public hearings since the outbreak and only four respondents participated in them. The information of the public hearings was mainly distributed via social media.

However, focus group discussions revealed that the majority of participants did not feel well informed about when and where hearings were held, or were not at all aware that they took place. Especially

regarding various measures, decisions, actions and activities undertaken by their municipality and necessary services in the Albanian language. People can also address concerns and problems through this office to the municipality of Zvečan/Zvečan. Nonetheless, the official website of the municipality of Zvečan/Zvečan does not contain any information; however, there is a parallel website which has information in Serbian and Albanian. See parallel website here: <http://www.ezvecan.com/>

¹⁷ Extraordinary mayoral elections in Podujevë/Podujevo were held on 29 November 2020. The elected mayor was Shpejtim Bulliqi, a candidate from Lëvizja Vetëvendosje. For more information, please visit: <https://www.kqz-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/1.-Rezultatet-sipas-komunave.pdf>

¹⁸ Kosova Democratic Institute "the 2019 Municipal Budget Development Process in Kosovo" 2019. <<https://kdi-kosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Municipal-Budget-Development-Process-in-Kosovo-ENG-me-ISBN.pdf>>

Kosovo Serbs felt poorly informed, while a considerable number of participants also admitted that there is a lack of interest in civic engagement activities. These qualitative findings may suggest, the lack of relevant information on the public hearings may have contributed to their unawareness. Focus group participants who took part in hearings stressed the importance of participation in such activities as an active resident. They also highlighted that due to the pandemic, some of the hearings were moved to online platforms, adding difficulties for the older generations who are less proficient in using the technology to access and participate.

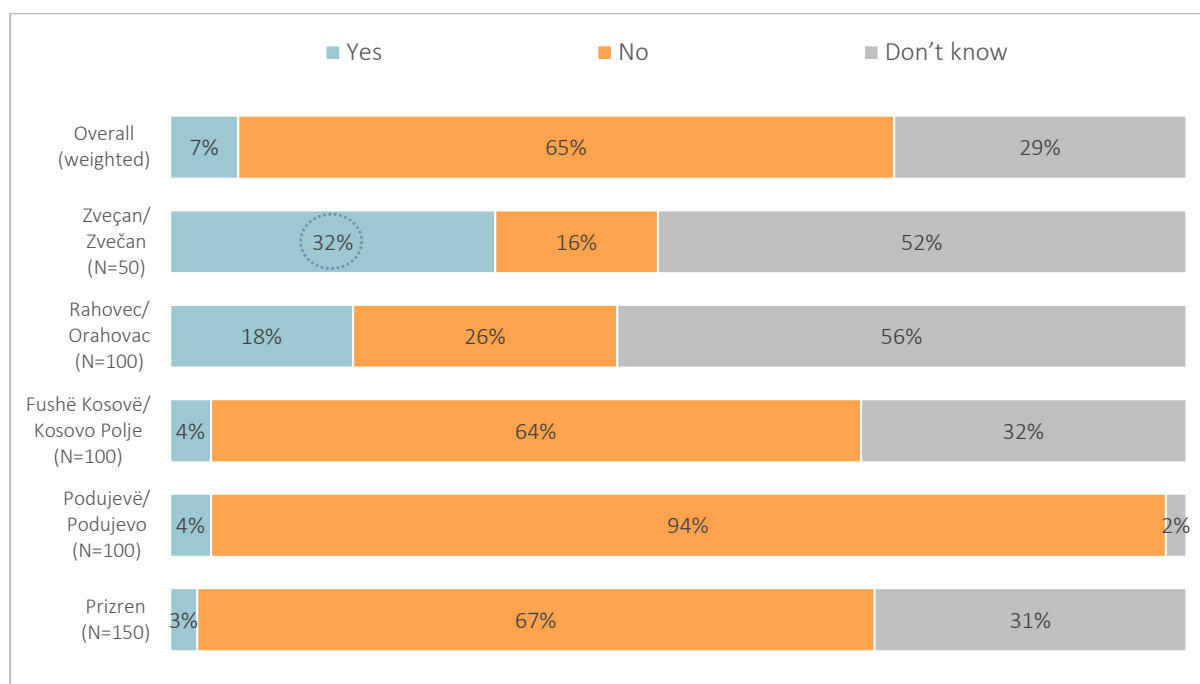
Generally, survey and focus group data findings suggest that there is room for improvement when it comes to communication and interaction between the municipality and residents. Some of the representatives that took part in the focus groups highlighted that more public hearings and similar activities are needed to enhance information and idea exchange between the municipalities and their constituents. Survey findings further underlined this matter with nearly all respondents stating that their municipality has not reached out to them through any other means, while residents also made no efforts to reach out to them.

Findings of this module further revealed that residents felt that their municipalities should prioritize the provision of financial assistance for families in need and those affected by COVID-19 while some mentioned the need for subsidizing businesses or stricter prevention measures against COVID-19 as top priorities.

When asked whether their municipalities had held public hearings **before the outbreak** of COVID-19, 65% of all respondents representing the five municipalities claimed they did not, about 29% of the respondents claimed to not know, and only 7% said yes.

More than half of the respondents in Zvečan/Zvečan (52%) did not know if public hearings in their municipality were held before COVID-19, about a third of them (32%) claimed that public hearings were held and 16% claimed otherwise. More than half of the respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac (56%) did not know if their municipality has held public hearings while 26% of them said the municipality did not hold any and 18% said it did. About two thirds of the respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje (64%) said their municipality did not hold any public hearings before the outbreak of COVID-19, 32% did not know, and 4% claimed that it did. The majority of the respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo (94%) claimed that there were no public hearings held in their municipality before COVID-19, 4% claimed there were, and 2% did not have information in this regard. Lastly, about two thirds of the respondents in Prizren (57%) also claimed that their municipality had not held any public hearing before COVID-19, 31% did not know, and 3% said yes.

Figure 36 Has your municipality held any public hearing **before** the outbreak of COVID-19 (before March 2020)? - by municipality



According to the Law on Local Self-Government, each municipality holds public meetings at least twice a year in which any person or organization residing and operating in the respective municipality can participate. One of the meetings must be held during the first six months of the year. In the meetings, municipal representatives inform the participants about the activities of the municipality, and the participants can raise various issues and present proposals.

In 2020, Prizren, Podujeva/Podujevo and Rahovec/Orahovac have both organized two public meetings with residents while Zvečan/Zvečan and Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje have not held any public hearing.¹⁹

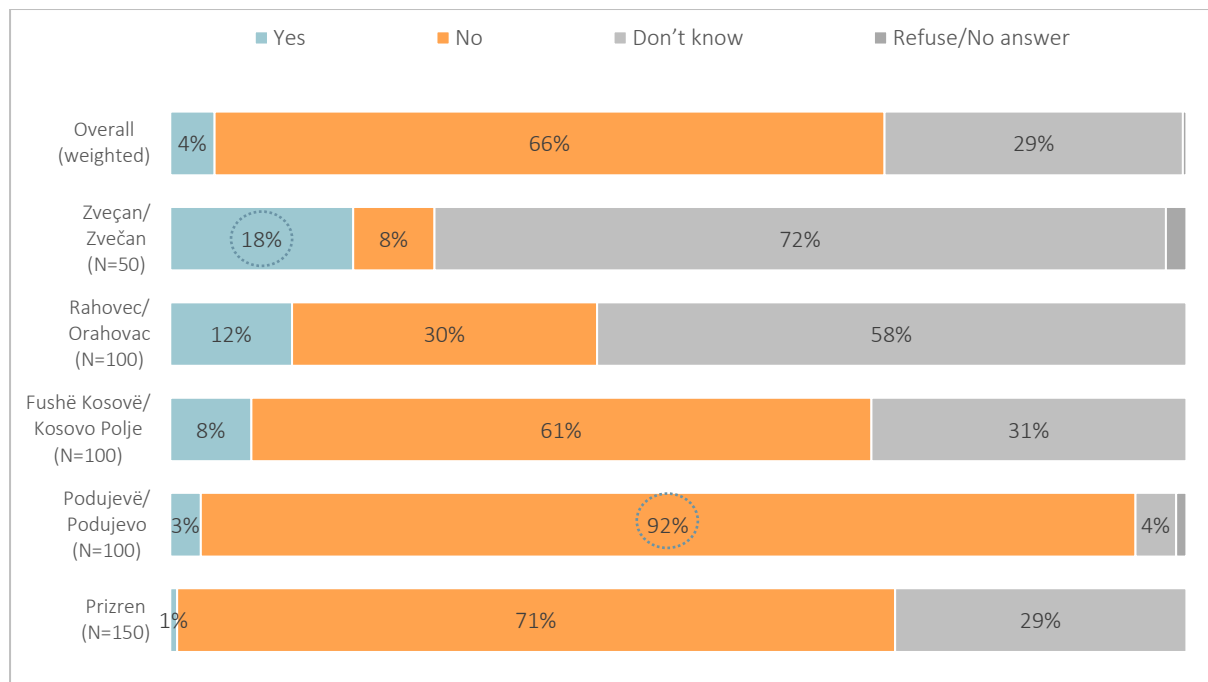
In addition, the respondents were asked whether their municipalities have held public hearings **after the outbreak** of COVID-19. Similar to the previous results, 66% of all respondents representing the five municipalities said no, about 29% of the respondents claimed to not know, and only 4% said yes.

Compared to the above, even more respondents in Zvečan/Zvečan (72%) did not know if their municipality held any public hearings after the COVID-19 pandemic, 18% claimed they were held and 8% claimed they were not. Similarly, 58% of the respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac did not know if their municipality held public hearings while 30% of them claimed the municipality did not hold public hearings and 12% said it did. 61% of the respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje claimed their municipality did not hold any public hearings after the outbreak of COVID-19, 31% did not know, and 8% claimed that it did. Again, a high portion of the respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo (92%) claimed that there were no public hearings held in their municipality after the outbreak of COVID-19, 4% claimed they were held, and 3% did not know. Even higher portion of the respondents of Prizren (71%)

¹⁹ Ministry of Local Government Administration. Municipal operation report in 2020. <<https://mapl.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/1.-Raporti-i-funksionimit-te-komunave-2020-FINALE-1.pdf>>

claimed that their municipality have not held any public hearing after the outbreak of COVID-19, 29% did not know and 1% said it did.

Figure 37 Has your municipality held any public hearing **after** the outbreak of COVID-19 (since mid-March 2020 until now)? – by municipality



Only a few respondents (33 out of 500 in total) claimed that their municipality held public hearings since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These respondents were next asked how they were informed about the public hearings, if they knew how many were held, and how they were organized. A total of 60% of the respondents claimed to have been informed through Facebook, 27% through local or national TV announcements, 23% through municipal official websites, 14% through the village representative, 11% through phone calls, and 5% through text messages. About 72% of the respondents said there were 0-1 public hearing held in their municipality, 24% said 2-3 public hearings, 2% said 4-6, and 2% said that more than 6 public hearings were held. Furthermore, 58% of the respondents said that public hearings were organized at physical premises, 23% said that they were organized online, 15% said mixture of both modalities, and 4% did not know.

Figure 38 How were you informed about the public hearing(s) after the COVID-19 outbreak?

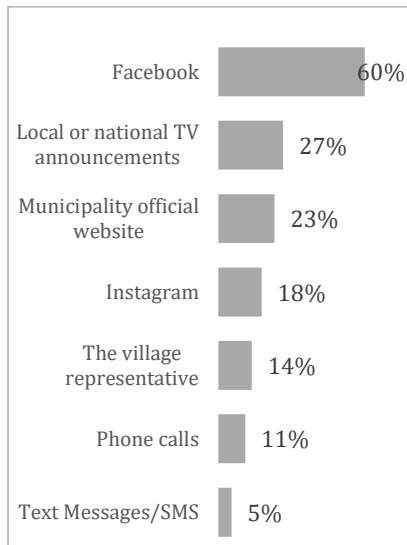


Figure 39 Do you know how many public hearings it held after the COVID-19 outbreak?

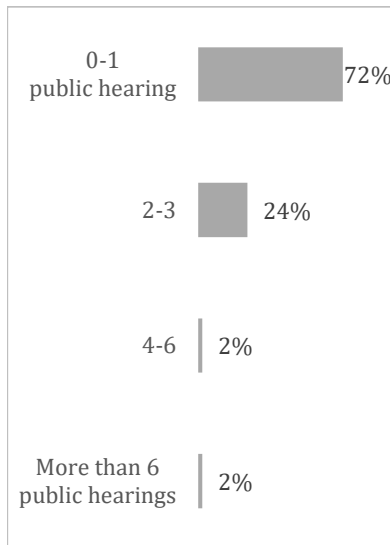
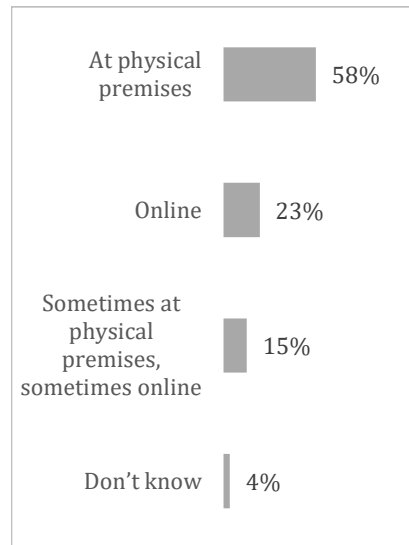


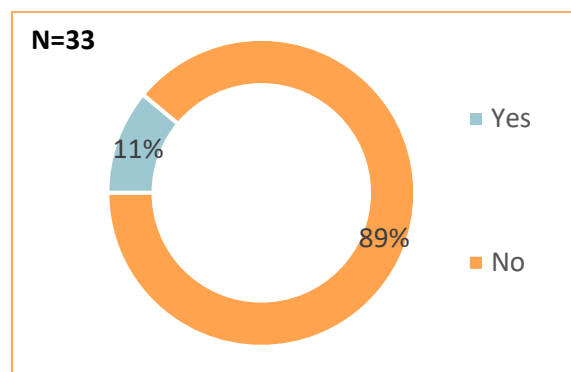
Figure 40 How were the public hearings organized after the COVID-19 outbreak?



**only the cases when respondents claimed the municipality has held a public hearing after the outbreak of COVID-19, N=33*

The respondents who were informed about public hearings were asked if they participated in any of them, what topics were covered and whether they expressed their concerns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Only four out of 33 respondents who had heard of the public hearings said they participated in them. The topics that were covered include issues related to the pandemic, water supply, street lighting and road construction and maintenance.

Figure 41 Have you participated in any of the public hearings held after the COVID-19 outbreak? **only the cases when the municipality has held a public hearing after the outbreak of COVID-19*



The topic of people engagement in municipal matters was also discussed in the focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of the level of involvement as well as inhibiting factors.

Albanian speakers rarely participated in public hearings in Prizren. What stood out from the discussion was that out of six participants, only two participants who belong to the Roma community stated that they have participated in public hearings as civil society organization representatives. The rest of the participants explained that either they were not informed, did not have the time to attend or did not feel the urge to be involved in such decision-making activities through public hearings held by their municipality.

"I did not participate either. We were at work, we came back tired, we had to deal with our families – so we did not participate." **Woman, 48 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Prizren**

The Serb speaking group in Prizren were generally not engaged through public hearings either, unless representing CSOs or some other legal entities. There were public hearings before the pandemic and they were announced through the municipal website. The hearings were organized through Zoom platform during the pandemic; however, the majority of residents were unaware of it. The two Kosovo Serbs participants in the group; however, had never heard of public hearings, nor were they informed about them.

"(...) public hearings were also available online, on Zoom so it was open to those who wanted to participate. I followed one public debate that was two weeks ago since we were looking for a youth center that we haven't gotten yet." **Woman, 19 years old, Kosovo Bosniak, Prizren**

Municipal representatives of Prizren claimed that during the pandemic the municipality has organized four public hearings; most of them about budgeting and it also has informed its residents about them through its official website. The recording of the hearing was published on the website afterwards for the sake of transparency. Participants agreed that the public hearings have proven to be effective and acted as a channel through which the residents' requests were collected and addressed by the municipalities afterwards. Municipal representatives attributed the low participation rate of residents to the imposed restrictions on movement and gatherings. Moreover, they also believed that a significant number of people are not familiar with online platforms and social media, especially the older generations.

The group of Albanian speaking participants in Rahovec/Orahovac claimed that they have heard of public hearings organized before the pandemic. Some of them said that they were not informed about any public hearing since the outbreak of COVID-19, while others said that hearing have been organized online during this period.

"(...) As for the public hearings, they were organized online as far as I know, but did not have much impact. Residents were reached more through social networks." **Man, 21 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Rahovec/Orahovac**

Those from the Serb speaking group in Rahovec/Orahovac claimed that there was no public hearing or at least the Serb community was not aware of it. Only one claimed to have participated in a public debate on security and he did not feel that his ideas were taken into consideration. Most expressed that there is no engagement of the members of the Serb community in the municipal processes through public hearings.

"I spoke about some problems - young people are constantly coming, provoking, shooting, shouting KLA and even then, I was in that place and talking about what was happening, but there was no understanding. " **Man, 38 years old, Kosovo Serb, Rahovec/Orahovac**

Municipal representatives of Rahovec/Orahovac pointed out the lack of a local television channel as one of the main reasons for the low participation rate of its residents in public hearings in general. In addition, local radio is also considered unpopular and ineffective in informing people. Representatives stated that even though people are not well-informed about the public hearings or other initiatives undertaken by their municipality – the work of the municipality during the pandemic is satisfactory.

Most of the participants in the Albanian Speaking group in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje claimed that they have never participated or joined any public hearing held by their municipality. Many of them stated that they were not informed about public hearings while others stated that it was not important to them or in their interest to participate. It is worth highlighting that participants from the Kosovo Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities have been active in public hearings held by the municipality before the outbreak of the pandemic. Participants from these communities stated that they were informed about the hearings held during the pandemic but claimed to not have been able to attend due to personal reasons.

"I have participated in several public hearings. The last time I was in one was two years ago, when they presented the budget. In that meeting, we managed to get the pavement of a road [in our area]." **Man, 27 years old, Kosovo Egyptian, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje**

In general, Kosovo Serb participants have not attended public hearings in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje. They are aware that a public hearing where municipal budget is discussed is organized at least once a year but none of them ever participated. Some also think that the work of municipality was not transparent enough since they feel that the municipality does not inform them about anything.

"No, it's all done behind the scene, that's how we find out only when it's all over and that's the way it is." **Woman, 43 years old, Kosovo Serb, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje**

Some assembly member participants as part of the representatives of the municipality stated that the municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje does not stand well in terms of communication with residents as they do not hold enough public hearings, with or without the COVID-19 crisis therefore improvement in this regard is necessary.

Most participants in the Albanian speaking focus group in Zvečan/Zvečan were not informed of any public hearings since the beginning of the pandemic. However, some mentioned that there were public hearings held before the pandemic but most did not show any interest in participating.

"I did not take part in any public hearing, because I was on maternity leave. I was very passive in 2020, in October 2019 I went on leave until December 2020. " **Woman, 46 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Zvečan/Zvečan**

The group with Serb speaking participants in Zvečan/Zvečan has not attended public hearings although they are aware of them being organized. Participants described the reason behind low participation that information is not disseminated through the right channels to reach them. None of the group members has ever participated in the hearings and the residents contact the municipality only when necessary, for the matters such as vehicle registration.

"Sometimes they called the residents to check what they think about these projects, but I don't know if residents go there at all. Let's say there are some construction projects for which they need to inform the people. They have really bad communication with the residents, I really don't know, let's say I hear "there was someone, then I heard someone ..." but nothing concrete." **Man, 27 years old, Kosovo Serb, Zvečan/Zvečan**

Representatives of the municipality of Zvečan/Zvečan claimed that before the pandemic, they have organized public hearings for all topics that were mandatory to be presented to residents, and the invitations were posted on a bulletin board and disseminated through media. During the COVID-19 period, the municipality organized two online public hearings to avoid physical gathering but representatives were concerned that Zvečan/Zvečan residents do not respond to municipal calls neither for public hearings nor for volunteering activities.

Most participants in the Podujevë/Podujevo focus group claimed that they have never participated or joined any public hearing held by their municipality. One of the main reasons mentioned by some of the participants was that they have not been affected by the problems or topics discussed in these hearings. Participants also explained that they were informed about the hearings held during the pandemic but did not have any interest in attending them.

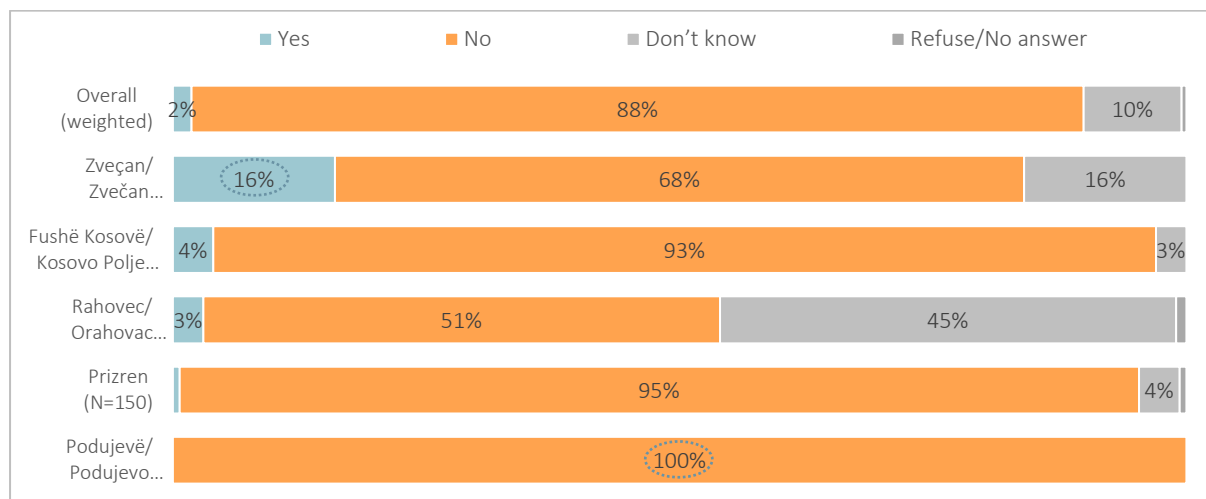
"Public hearings in the Municipality of Podujevë/Podujevo were held during the previous government and are being held now; with the new government. These discussions have a satisfactory level; however, I have kind of a remark: People are not so interested in participating in public discussions. A month ago, I participated in a public discussion and I saw that only those people who were affected by the topic discussed, participated in the public discussion, but not other people who are not directly impacted by the topics discussed." **Woman, 27 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Podujevë/Podujevo**

Representatives of the Municipality of Podujevë/Podujevo stated that the current mayor (candidate of the Lëvizja Vetëvendosje) has organized two public hearings to present his work and progress during his 6-month mandate and inform residents about upcoming activities. According to the representatives, there was a satisfactory level of residents' participation during these two hearings.

The survey further explored if the municipalities had tried to reach out to their constituencies in any other way aside from public hearings since the COVID-19 outbreak. The majority of the residents (88%)

in all municipalities claimed they were not reached in any other way from their municipalities, about 10% did not know/could not remember, while 2% claimed they were. About 16% of the residents in Zvečan/Zvečan, 4% of those in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, 3% of those in Rahovec/Orahovac, and only about 1% of those in Prizren said that the municipality reached out to them through other means. None of the respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo claimed to have been reached by their municipality in any other way.

Figure 42 Did your municipality reach out to you in any other way, aside from public hearings, after the outbreak started? – by municipality



The respondents that were reached out to by their municipality in another way after the COVID-19 outbreak were asked how they were contacted. In total, only 16 of them were contacted; eight of them through phone calls asking their concerns and/or proposals, three through the phone survey, two through text messages and one through emails. Four of those who described the way they were reached out by their municipalities claimed that they responded to the municipality by talking about their concerns and proposals, seven said they did not, and three refused to answer.

Table 3 How did they reach out? *only those who were reached out by their municipality in another way after the outbreak started

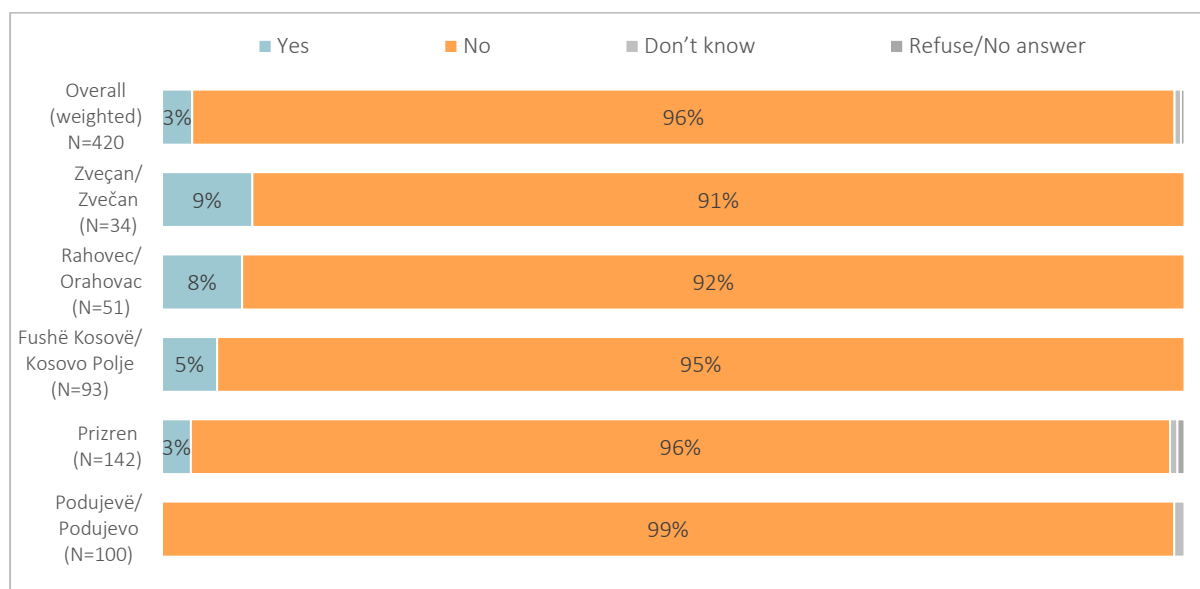
	N
They called us on the phone to ask about our concerns and/or proposals	8
They conducted a survey about our concerns and proposals via phone	3
They sent us text messages (SMS) to ask about our concerns and/or proposals	2
They sent us emails to ask about our concerns and/or proposals	1
None of the above	2
Total	16

Table 4 Did you respond to the municipality by talking about your concerns and proposals? *only those who were reached out by emails, SMS, phone calls

	N
Yes	4
No	7
Refuse/No answer/Don't know	3
Total	14

The survey then explored whether residents reached out to the municipality regarding COVID-19 or any other topic since the beginning of the outbreak, and almost all the respondents said they did not (96%) with a mere 3% of them who did. Nine percent of the respondents in Zvečan/Zvečan, 8% of those in Rahovec/Orahovac, 5% of those in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje and 3% of those in Prizren said that they reached out to the municipality, while none of the respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo claimed to have reached out by their own initiative.

Figure 43 Did you reach out to the municipality by yourself regarding COVID-19 or any other topic since the start of the outbreak? *only those who were not reached out by their municipality



The 16 respondents that reached out to the municipality used different means of communication. Six of them went physically to the municipality building, four of them called the relevant departments on the phone, two of them sent someone from the family to the municipality building, and one of them wrote a request, while three of them did not do any of these.

Table 5 How did you reach out? *only those who reached out their municipality by themselves

	N
I went physically to the municipality	6
I called relevant departments on the phone	4
I sent someone from the family to the municipality	2
I wrote a request	1
None of the above	3
Total	16

Eight of the respondents claimed that it was easy to contact the municipality while eight others thought the contrary. Nine of the respondents claimed that their concerns/proposals were not taken into account, four of them said they were partially considered, two of them claimed they were fully taken into account, and one of them does not know if they were taken into account or not. Moreover,

eight respondents claimed that the municipality did not explain the reasons why they could not implement their request, four of them received partial explanations while one of them received a full explanation.

Table 6 Were your concerns or proposals considered?
*only those who reached out their municipality by themselves

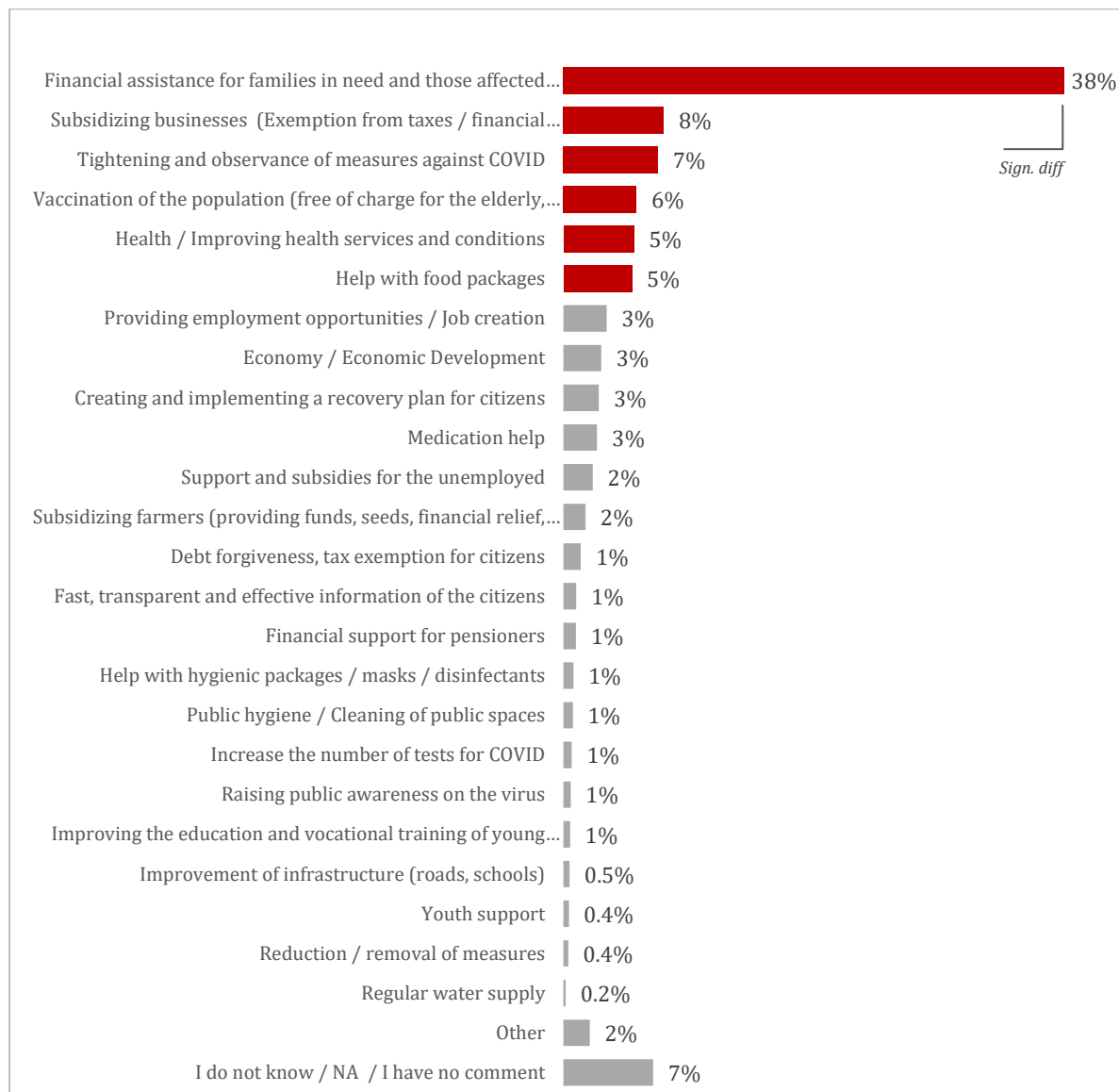
	N
No	9
Yes, partially	4
Yes, fully	2
Don't know	1
Total	16

Table 7 Did the municipality explain why the request could not be accommodated in full/at all? *only those who reached out their municipality by themselves

	N
No	8
Yes, partially	4
Yes, fully	1
Total	13

Next, the respondents were asked to select the top three priority areas for municipalities to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 in their livelihoods. The first priority was financial assistance for families in need and those affected by COVID-19 (38%) followed by subsidizing businesses (e.g., exemption of taxes, financial support, rent relief) (8%). 7% mentioned tightening and observance of measures against COVID-19, 6% mentioned free vaccination of the elderly and the sick while 5% each mentioned improving health care services and provision of food packages.

Figure 44 Please tell us the top three priority aspects in which your municipality should focus to combat the damage done by the pandemic? – **first aspect mentioned**



The top three aspects mentioned under the second most important priority were financial assistance for families in need and those affected by COVID-19 (19%), tightening and observance of measures against COVID-19 (10%) and help with medication (9%). While the top three aspects mentioned under the third most important priority were tightening and observance of measures against COVID-19 (9%), financial assistance for families in need and those affected by COVID-19 (8%) and help with medication (9%).

Provision of Regular Services during the Pandemic and Availability of Resources

The third module of the survey studied respondents’ perceptions regarding the sufficiency of the financial, human, and infrastructural resources of their municipality for COVID-19 response.

Moreover, this module also inquires whether the public services were provided regularly during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, the perceived sufficiency of municipal resources regarding financial means, available personnel and infrastructure dedicated for COVID-19 response stood at a fairly high level among survey respondents. The majority believed that the financial resources earmarked for COVID-19 response were sufficient, while around two thirds of all respondents believed the municipal human resources²⁰ as well as infrastructural resources²¹ were sufficient for adequate COVID-19 responses.

Prizren and Zvečan/Zvečan municipality stood out in this regard with fewer residents who felt that financial and human resources were sufficient. About infrastructure, fewer residents of Rahovec/Orahovac expressed that the resources were enough.

Findings suggest that the effects of the pandemic on the efficiency of public service provision such as waste and sewage management, road maintenance and local transport as well as water supply and street lighting were not severe. The great majority felt that public services were provided in an efficient manner even after the outbreak of COVID-19. The provision of health care through FMCs and the payment of social scheme obligation stood out with slightly fewer respondents who felt that these services were conducted in an efficient manner. Municipal disaggregated data showed that satisfaction with public service provision among Zvečan/Zvečan residents is lower than other municipalities, while residents in Rahovec/Orahovac were the most content in this regard. The most common cause of dissatisfaction with public services was unprofessionalism and the lack of accuracy when providing the services.

Some of the focus group discussions showed a fairly high level of discontent with municipal resources dedicated to the pandemic response. Kosovo Albanian participants often perceived their municipality as ill prepared and lacking proper planning abilities, as well as efficient budget allocating abilities. Kosovo Serbs highlighted inefficient budgets and ineffective distributions specifically with regard to rural areas and the health sector. Some perceived municipal budgets and connected processes as lacking transparency. Municipal representatives from Rahovec/Orahovac and Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje agreed that budgets for unexpected events such as the onset of a pandemic were not sufficient enough to properly mitigate oncoming risks and consequences. Representatives of the municipality of Zvečan/Zvečan claimed that their budgets and resources were already inefficient before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked if the financial means available to their municipalities for COVID-19 response were sufficient or insufficient, 52% of all respondents thought they were sufficient – 12% of which believe they were more than sufficient. About 17% of the respondents believed they are insufficient.

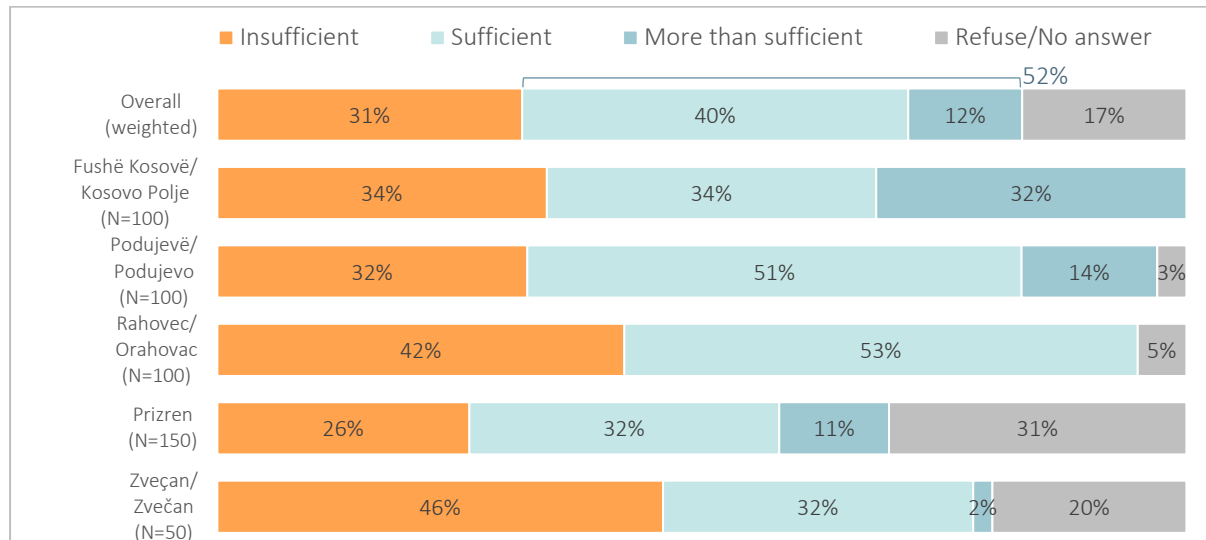
A total of 34% of respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje thought they were sufficient while 32% thought they were more than sufficient, and 34% thought they were insufficient. A total of 51% of respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo thought they were sufficient, and another 14% thought they were more than sufficient, whereas 32% thought they were insufficient. More than half of the respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac (53%) also felt that the financial means in their municipality were sufficient, however, 42% believed that they are not. Only about a third of respondents in Prizren (32%) perceived the financial means as sufficient and 11% felt that they are more than sufficient, while 26% thought

²⁰ including municipal officials, health professionals, education professionals, and other public servants

²¹ including roads, railways, bridges, tunnels, water supply, sewers, electrical grids, telecommunications

they were not. Similarly, 32% of the respondents in Zvečan/Zvečan believed that their municipality had sufficient financial means, while a mere 2% thought that they had more than sufficient financial means, and almost half felt that they did not (46%).

Figure 45 Are the financial means (i.e., budget from MoF, loans, donations, taxes, etc.) available to your municipality for COVID-19 response sufficient or insufficient? - by municipality



The views of men and women differed moderately when it comes to the availability of financial resources in their municipality to undertake activities as a response to the COVID-19 crisis.

A total of 37% of women and 32% of men in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje thought their municipality's financial resources were sufficient; however, 42% of men and only 19% of women thought they were more than sufficient. On the other hand, 44% of women and 26% of men felt the opposite.

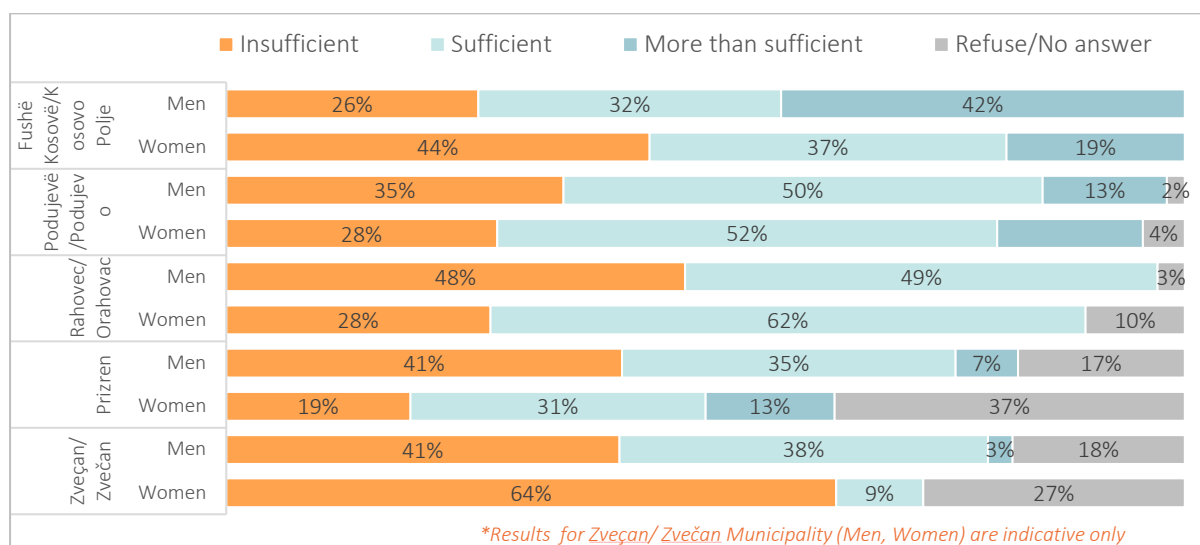
More than half of women (52%) and half of men respondents (50%) in Podujevë/Podujevo thought that their municipality's financial resources were sufficient and an additional 15% and 13% respectively believed that they were more than sufficient, whereas 25% of men and 28% of women felt that they were insufficient.

Almost two thirds of women (62%) and 49% of men in Rahovec/Orahovac (53%) believed the financial resources in their municipality were sufficient whereas 48% of men and 28% of women believed the opposite.

On the contrary, more than a third of men (35%) and a bit less than a third of women (31%) in Prizren felt that the financial means in their municipality were sufficient; yet, 13% of women and 7% of men thought they were more than sufficient. Significantly more men (41%) than women (19%) believed that their municipality's financial resources were insufficient.

Significantly more men (38%) than women (9%) in Zvečan/Zvečan believed that their municipality had sufficient financial means, while 3% of men and none of the women thought they had more than sufficient financial means. Almost two thirds (64%) of women and 41% of men thought their municipality did not have sufficient financial means to respond to COVID-19 effectively.

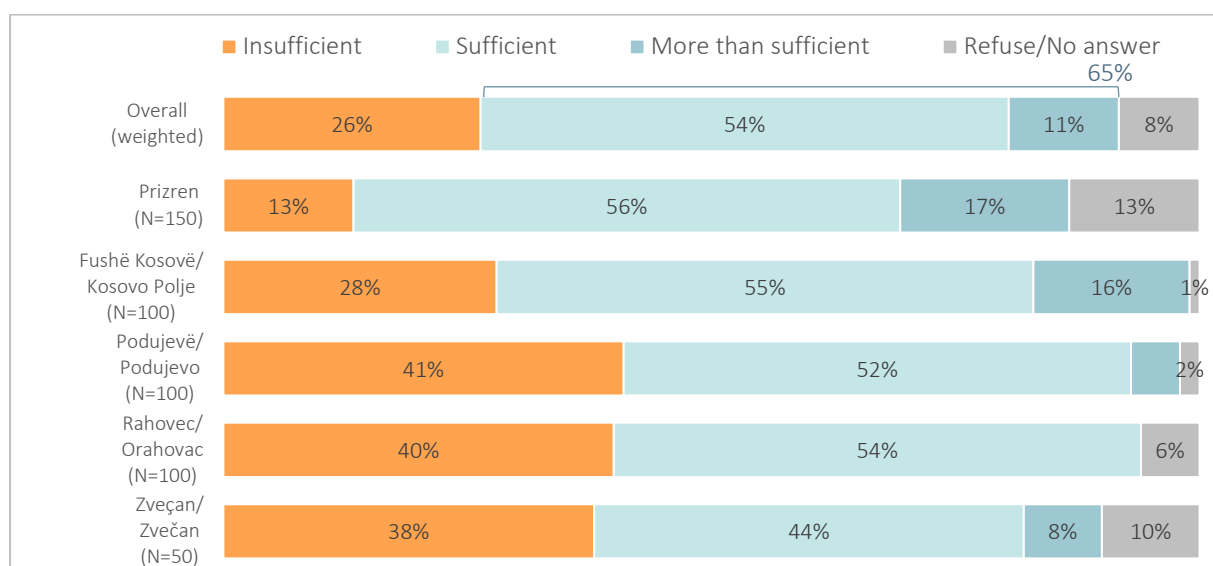
Figure 46 Are the financial means (i.e., budget from MoF, loans, donations, taxes, etc.) available to your municipality for COVID-19 response sufficient or insufficient? - by gender



Additionally, the respondents were asked whether the human resources of their municipalities, including municipal officials, health professionals, education professionals, and other public servants, are sufficient or insufficient to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic at the local level. About two thirds of all respondents (65%) believed the municipal human resources were sufficient or more than sufficient, while 26% thought they were insufficient.

Data disaggregated by municipalities showed that 73% of the respondents in Prizren, 71% of the respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, 57% of the respondents Podujevë/Podujevo, 54% of the respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac, and 52% of those in Zveçan/Zvečan think the human resources available to their municipalities are sufficient or more than sufficient. More respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo (41%), Rahovec/Orahovac (40%), and Zveçan/Zvečan (38%) than in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje (28%) and Prizren (13%) considered them as insufficient.

Figure 47 Are the human resources/personnel (i.e., municipal officials as well as health professionals, and education professionals, and other public servants) available to your municipality for COVID-19 response sufficient or insufficient? – by municipality



When compared through a gender perspective, it can be observed that generally more women than men believed the human resources in their municipality were sufficient with the exception of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje.

A total of 58% of women and 52% of men in Prizren thought that their municipality’s human resources were sufficient. Nevertheless, 20% of men and 16% of women felt that they were more than sufficient. Still, 22% of men and 10% of men thought that the human resources of their municipality were insufficient for COVID-19 response.

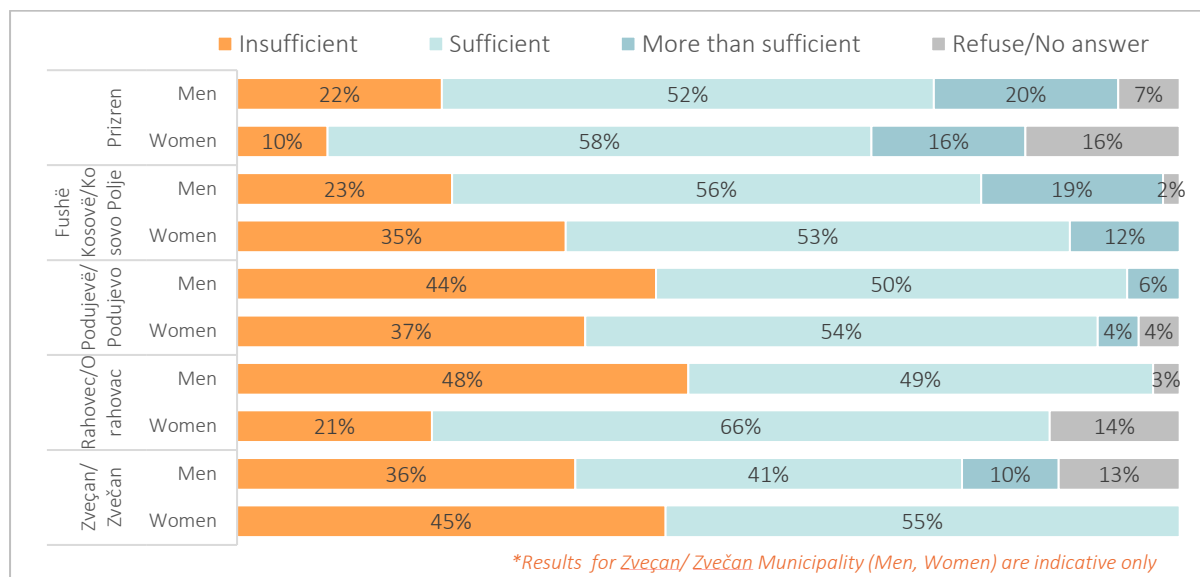
A good portion of women (56%) and men respondents (53%) in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje felt that their municipality’s human resources were sufficient and another 19% and 12% correspondingly thought they were more than sufficient. However, 35% of women and 23% of men felt otherwise.

More than half of women (54%) and half of the men respondents (50%) in Podujevë/Podujevo believed that the human resources in their municipality were sufficient, and 6% of men and 4% of women believed that they were more than sufficient. Substantial portions of both men (44%) and women (33%) in this municipality deemed human resources insufficient.

Two thirds of women (66%) and 49% of men respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac (53%) thought the human resources in their municipality are sufficient whereas the opposite was the case for 48% of men and 21%.

55% of women and 41% of men in Zveçan/Zvečan thought that their municipality had sufficient human resources while 10% of men and none of the women felt that they had more than sufficient human resources. 45% of women and 36% of men believed that human resources at Zveçan/Zvečan municipality were insufficient.

Figure 48 Are the human resources/personnel (i.e., municipal officials as well as health professionals, and education professionals, and other public servants) available to your municipality for COVID-19 response sufficient or insufficient? – by gender

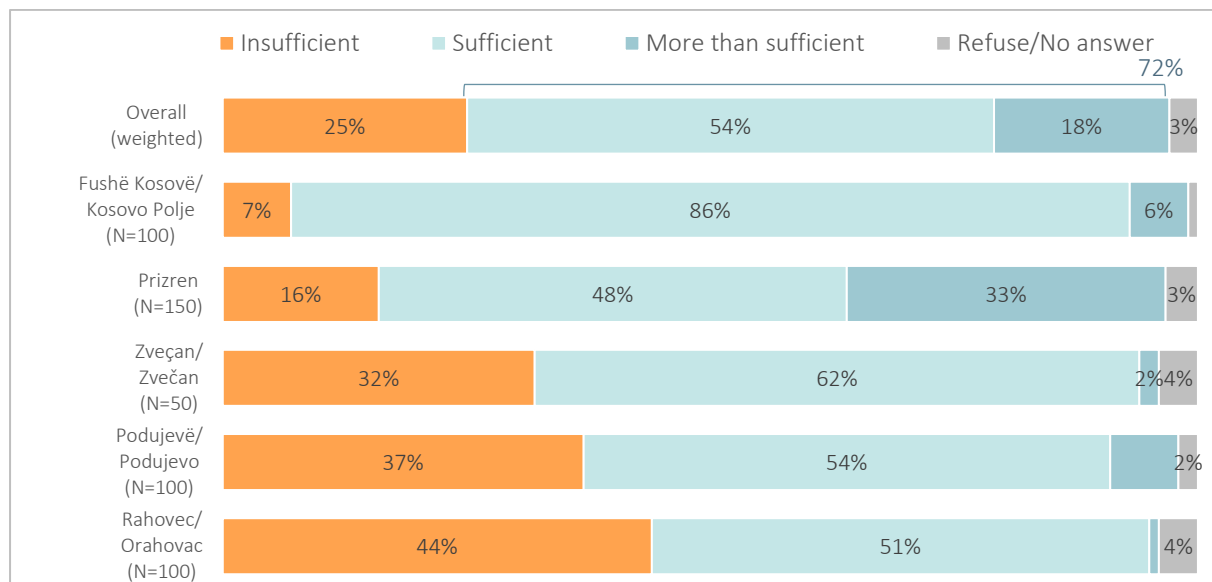


Respondents were also asked whether the infrastructural resources of their municipalities, including roads, railways, bridges, tunnels, water supply, sewers, electrical grids, telecommunications, and so on are sufficient or insufficient for COVID-19 response. Overall, 54% of all respondents think they are

sufficient and another 18% trust they are more than sufficient. One in four (25%) of the respondents trust infrastructural resources means are insufficient for COVID-19 response.

A whole of 86% of respondents in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje thought infrastructural resources there were sufficient while 6% thought they were more than sufficient, and 7% thought they were insufficient. 48% of respondents in Prizren thought they were sufficient and 33% thought they were more than sufficient, while 16% thought they were insufficient. Substantial number of respondents in Zveçan/Zvečan (52%) claimed their municipality has sufficient infrastructural resources while only 2% claim they have more than sufficient, and 37% claim they do not. More than half of respondents in Podujevë/Podujevo (54%) trust the infrastructural resources in their municipality were sufficient and 7% thought they were more than sufficient, while 37% thought they were not. More than half of respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac (51%) also thought the infrastructural resources in their municipality were sufficient, 1% thought they were more than sufficient, while 42% thought they were insufficient.

Figure 49 Are the infrastructural resources (i.e., roads, railways, bridges, tunnels, water supply, sewers, electrical grids, and telecommunications, computers, cameras, scanners) available to your municipality for COVID-19 response sufficient or insufficient? – by municipality



The views of men and women differed more in some municipalities than in others when it comes to how they view the infrastructural resources available to their municipalities.

The same portion of men and (86% each) in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje believed the infrastructural resources there were sufficient; and 7% and 5% each believe they were more than sufficient. Only 9% of women and 5% of men believed the contrary.

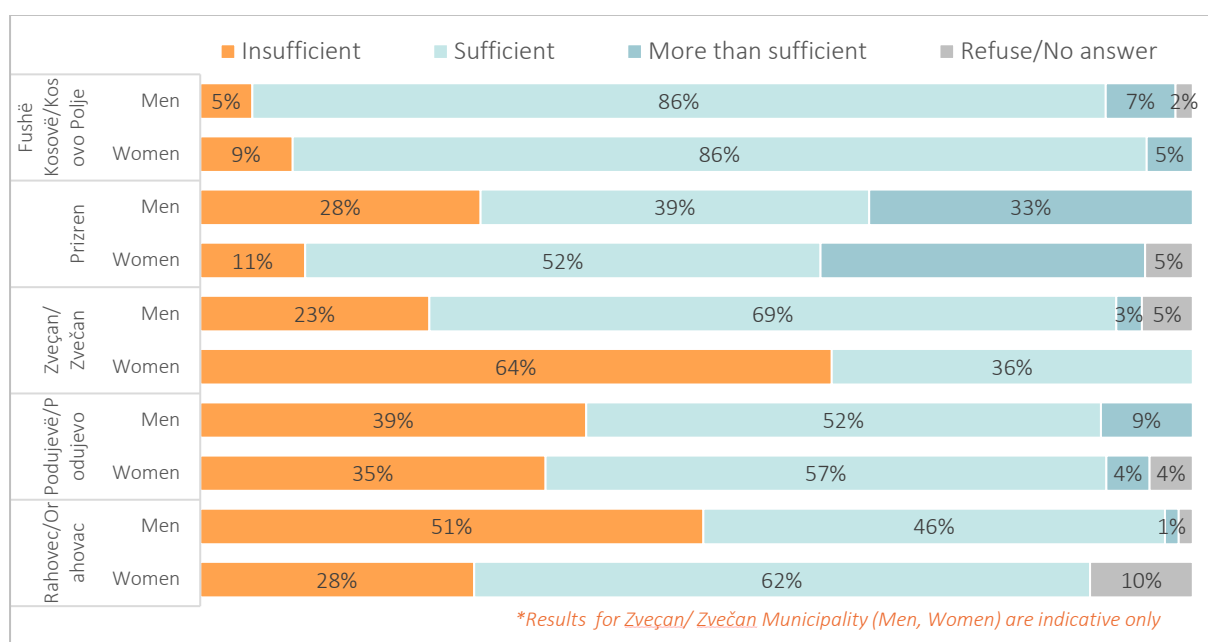
More than half of women (52%) and 39% of men in Prizren believed their municipality's financial resources were sufficient and 33% each believed they were more than sufficient, while 28% of men and 11% of women believed they were insufficient.

More than two thirds of men (69%) and 36% of women in Zveçan/Zvečan thought that their municipality has sufficient infrastructural resources while 3% of men and none of the women thought they have more than sufficient infrastructural resources. Almost two thirds (64%) of women and 23% of men thought their municipality has insufficient infrastructural resources.

57% of women and 52% of men in Podujevë/Podujevo believed that the human resources in their municipality were sufficient and an additional 9% of men and 4% of women believe they were more than sufficient. About 39% of men and 35% of women thought that their municipality's infrastructure resources were insufficient.

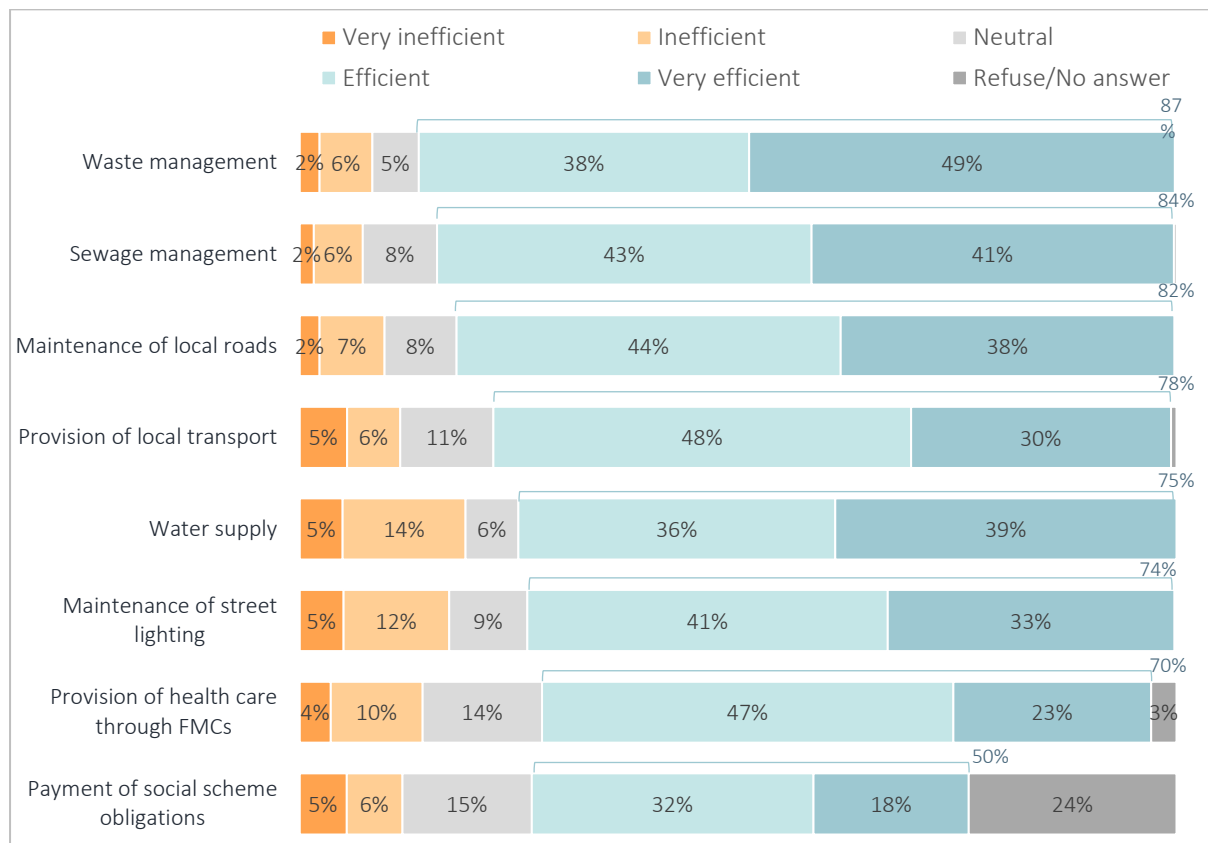
Almost two thirds of women (62%) and 46% of men respondents in Rahovec/Orahovac believed the infrastructural resources in their municipality were sufficient whereas 51% of men and 28% of women believed they were insufficient.

Figure 50 Are the infrastructural resources (i.e., roads, railways, bridges, tunnels, water supply, sewers, electrical grids, and telecommunications, computers, cameras, scanners) available to your municipality for COVID-19 response sufficient or insufficient? – by gender



Municipalities are expected to provide public services regardless of the crisis they encounter, such as COVID-19 pandemic. To understand the capacities of the municipalities to provide those services, respondents were also asked about the efficiency of their municipalities to provide public services. 87% of the respondents in all five municipalities said that the municipality was efficient or very efficient in waste management, 84% thought the same about sewage management, 82% about maintenance of local roads, 78% about the provision of local transport, 75% about water supply, 74% about maintenance of street lighting, 70% about provision of health care through FMCs, and only 50% about the payment of social scheme obligations.

Figure 51 After the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 and until now, how efficient was the municipality in providing public services?



Reporting these results per municipality on a scale from 1-5, where 1 equals 'very inefficient' and 5 equals 'very efficient' can portray a more detailed picture of how people view the efficiency of their municipalities in times of the pandemic.

Respondents from Rahovec/Orahovac rated the efficiency of their municipality in taking care of waste management at 4.62, of sewage management at 4.36, of maintenance of local roads at 4.38, of the provision of local transport at 3.61, of water supply at 4.56, of maintenance of street lighting at 4.10, of provision of healthcare through family medical centers at 4.01, and the provision of social scheme obligations at 4.23.

Respondents from Prizren rated on the efficiency of waste management at 4.54, of sewage management at 4.39, of maintenance of local roads at 4.19, of the provision of local transport at 4.27, of water supply at 4.02, of maintenance of street lighting at 3.98, of provision of healthcare through family medical centers at 3.81, and the provision of social scheme obligations at 3.64.

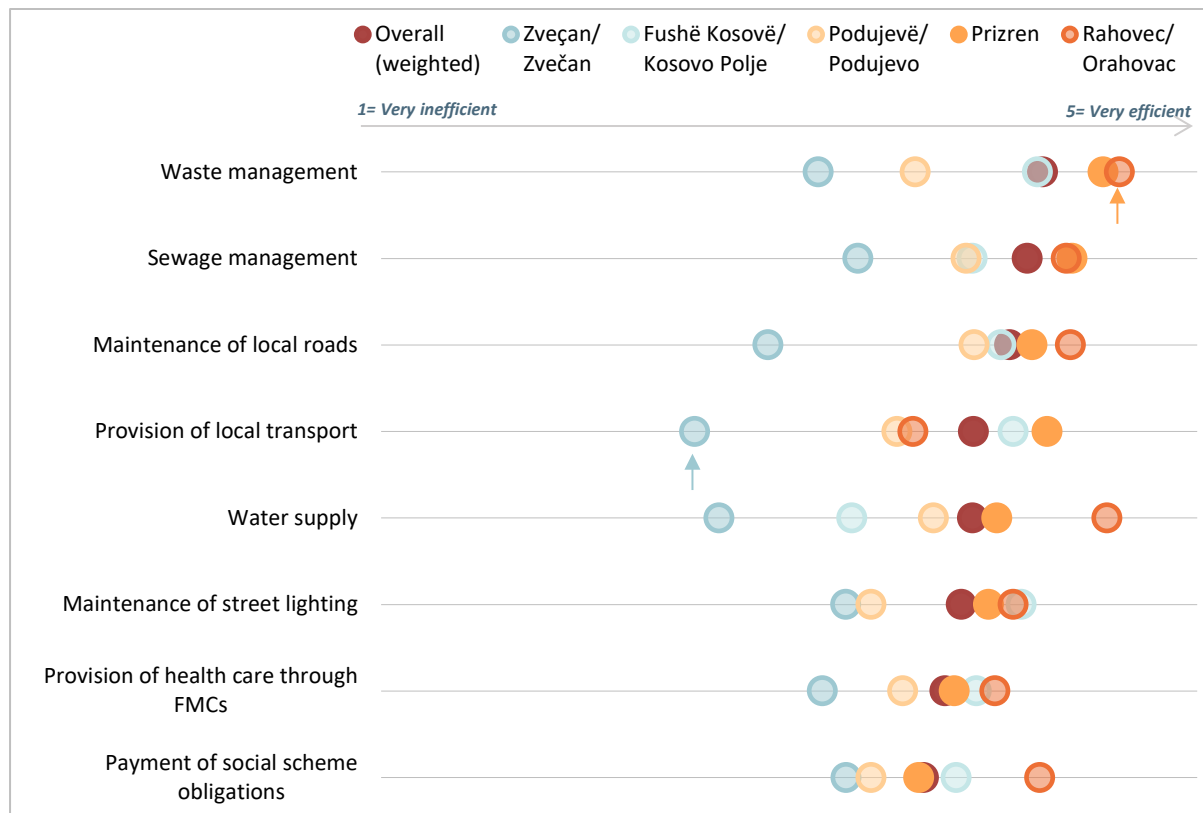
Respondents from Podujevë/Podujevo rated on the efficiency of waste management at 3.62, of sewage management at 3.87, of maintenance of local roads at 3.90, of the provision of local transport at 3.53, of water supply at 3.71, of maintenance of street lighting at 3.40, of provision of healthcare through family medical centers at 3.56, and the provision of social scheme obligations at 3.40.

Respondents from Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje rated on the efficiency of waste management at 4.22, of sewage management at 3.90, of maintenance of local roads at 4.04, of the provision of local transport at 4.10, of water supply at 3.31, of maintenance of street lighting at 4.14, of provision of

healthcare through family medical centers at 3.81, and the provision of social scheme obligations at 3.82.

Respondents from Zvečan/Zvečan rated on the efficiency of waste management at 3.14, of sewage management at 3.34, of maintenance of local roads at 2.9, of the provision of local transport at 2.54, of water supply at 2.66, of maintenance of street lighting at 3.28, of provision of healthcare through family medical centers at 3.17, and the provision of social scheme obligations at 3.28.

Figure 52 After the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 and until now, how efficient was the municipality in providing public services? – by municipality, on a 5-point scale

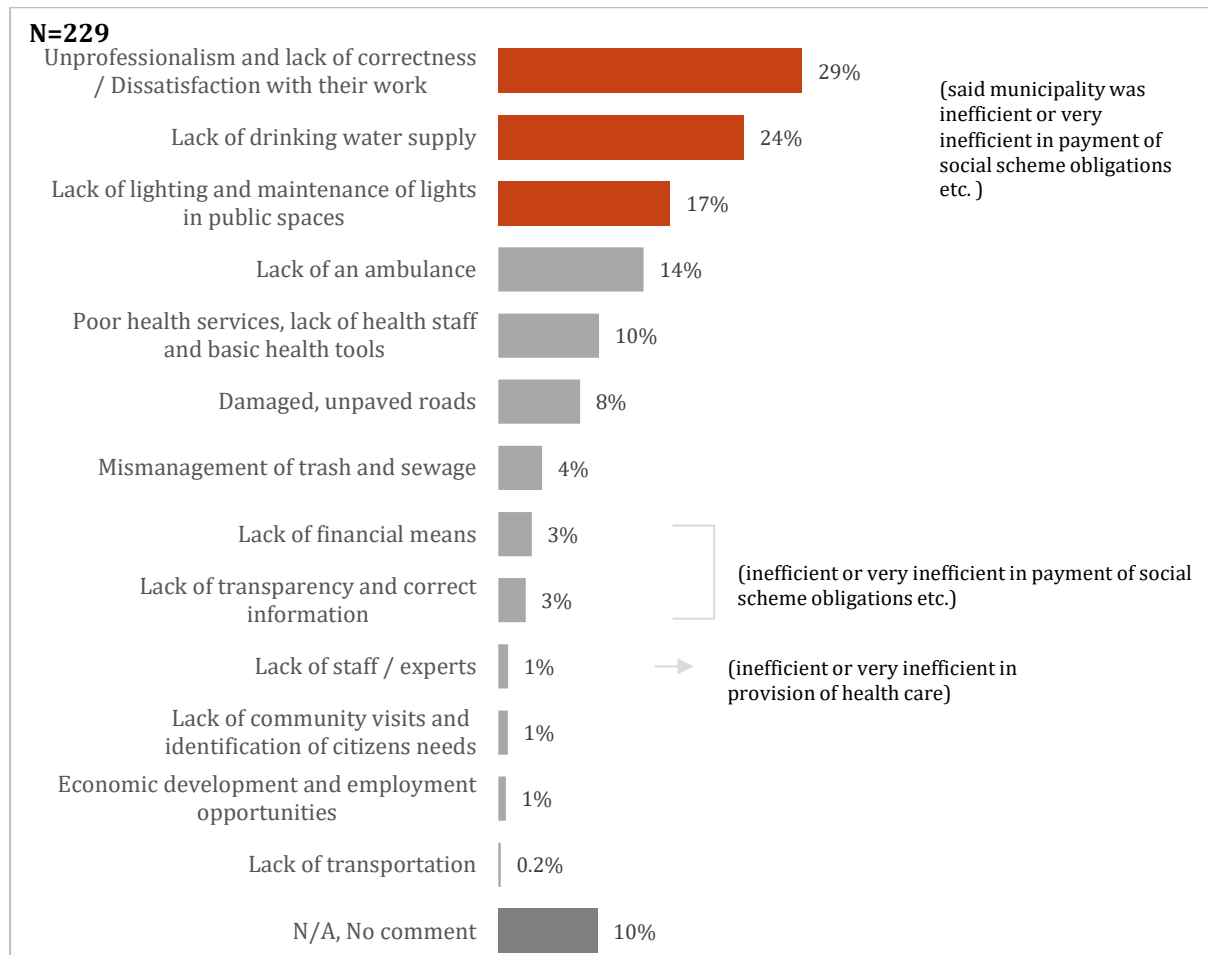


Respondents who declared that their municipality was inefficient or very inefficient in providing the services mentioned above were further asked why they thought so.

For instance, those who declared the municipality was inefficient or very inefficient in the payment of social scheme obligations considered that there was unprofessionalism or lack of correctness, thus overall were dissatisfied with their work (29%). About 3% each mentioned the lack of financial means and of transparency and correct information. A total of 24% of those who felt the water supply was inefficient or very inefficient mentioned that they lacked drinking water supply. Regarding maintenance of street lighting, 17% mentioned that they observed lack of lighting in public spaces. Some pointed out different reasons in inefficiency in providing healthcare at the local level; municipality lacked ambulance (14%), poor health services, lack of health staff and basic health tools (10%), and lack of staff (1%).

Regarding other issues they deemed their municipalities inefficient, a few claimed damaged and unpaved roads (8%) as inefficiency in road maintenance, 4% mentioned mismanagement of trash and sewage, and so on.

Figure 53 Why was the municipality inefficient or very inefficient in providing the mentioned services? *only those who said that the municipality was inefficient or very inefficient for at least one of the services mentioned



Participants in the focus group discussions were also asked to discuss whether they think their municipalities have enough budget, infrastructure, and human resources and whether they were able to provide the general public services under their competencies.

According to the majority of participants in Albanian speaking groups, most municipalities do not have sufficient budget to properly manage the pandemic situation, including the municipality of Prizren. Some participants emphasized the lack of compliance, improper planning and budget allocation as some of the main aspects in which their municipality has not proved to be effective enough to mitigate COVID-19 effects. Additionally, some participants also pointed out that the situation caused by the pandemic has revealed that most of the states are unprepared to act properly.

“I do not think that the municipality has enough budget for COVID-19, because it is known that COVID-19 was not planned earlier that it could happen and it is known that unexpected things will take much

longer until a good budget can be planned that can withstand every field that COVID-19 touched.”
Man, 21 years old, Ashkali, Prizren

The Serb speaking group in Prizren was not satisfied with the budget distribution as only few projects were targeting minorities. They felt that the distribution of budget was not well planned. When it comes to health workers in urban areas, most participants thought that there were not enough health workers before, but now with additional employments, the human resources in this sector stand at satisfactory level. They also shared the opinion that it has been very difficult to effectively cope with the pandemic in rural areas and claimed that there is not enough workforce that could support the fight of COVID-19 and its consequences.

“The Municipality of Prizren returns a surplus of around five million euros to the center [Ministry of Finance] each year!” **Man, 44 years old, Gorani, Prizren**

When asked whether their municipality has been efficient in mitigating the COVID-19 impacts, representatives of the Prizren municipality claimed they did their best when it comes to health services. Most of the participants were positive about the work done by their municipality, but also claimed that halting or reducing some of the planned activities as a result of the pandemic had a negative impact on Prizren’s improvement as a municipality. Regarding the provision of public help and services in an efficient way during the pandemic, most of the respondents agreed that even though the number of public service employees was reduced, residents were still able to receive the necessary services. According to them, “Alo, Komuna!” phone line has been considered a big help mechanism during the pandemic.

Most of the group of Albanian speaking participants in Rahovec/Orahovac agreed that the municipality did not have sufficient funds to manage and maintain itself in every aspect; the budget was not enough for the municipality to meet all its needs, even less to mitigate the damage caused by COVID-19. While the lack of medical staff in ambulances and hospitals in this municipality is one of the main issues mentioned in the discussion, participants agreed that in other public sectors the staff is sufficient to provide services to the residents of Rahovec/Orahovac.

“Regarding the budget, I also do not have any information about the current amount, but regarding the leading positions in health, some changes have been made that were necessary (...) the nursing staff has increased and some positive changes have been made. There is always room for improvement, but there have been changes, so we cannot say there were none.” **Man, 27 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Rahovec/Orahovac**

The Serb speaking group participants in Rahovec/Orahovac also shared the opinion that the municipality had a very small budget, which was not sufficient to mitigate the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, they said that the municipality is very poor and even the Albanians who live there are not economically strong and the purchasing power is very low. Moreover, they claimed

that there were not enough health workers, drugs, or medical materials in all parts of the municipalities regardless of the ethnicity which populates it.

"I am very sorry that there is not enough budget, although the prices are very favorable, low ... There are a lot of cheap things to buy and regardless of that, it is poor again. I don't know what needs to be done to improve that." **Woman, 26 years old, Kosovo Serb, Rahovec/Orahovac**

"As for the public services, water, electricity, garbage and so on - it went normally" **Man, 38 years old, Kosovo Serb, Rahovec/Orahovac**

Rahovec/Orahovac municipal representatives stated that their municipality does not have the means to function in unexpected situations, such as with the COVID-19 pandemic where the municipal assembly could allocate only 10,000 euro from their own budget without any financial assistance from the central level. According to them, this amount is not sufficient and only through donors and other people that were willing to help, the efficiency of the municipality in dealing with the consequences of the pandemic could be increased. They also stipulated that their municipality had one of the lowest budgets in Kosovo in comparison to other municipalities. Yet, they believed a great job was done within the capacity.

Most of the participants in the Albanian Speaking group in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje agreed that the municipality of Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje did not have sufficient funds to manage and provide public goods and services. This budget insufficiency contributed to the mismanagement of the pandemic situation in general. It should be noted that the budget allocation is based on the previous population from 2011, and the number of residents in this municipality has increased significantly over the years. It is evident for the focus group participants that the budget is not enough for the municipality to meet all its needs, even less to mitigate the damage caused by COVID-19. While the lack of medical staff in family healthcare centers in this municipality was one of the main issues mentioned in the discussion, participants agreed that staff was sufficient in other public sectors to deliver services to the residents of Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje.

"We conducted a municipal population census [with a private company] and it turned out that the population is larger than the one registered by the government. This also happens because people living in Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje are not registered in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje. So, they come from other cities, they live in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, but they are not registered here. The population in this municipality is much larger than in other years, while the government provides a budget based on the previous population." **Woman, 27 years old, Roma, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje**

The opinion of the Serb speaking group participants regarding the budget is divided because none of them was sufficiently informed about this matter. Some of them thought that there was sufficient budget and some felt the opposite. Overall, the group was satisfied with services that the municipality provides on a regular basis such as issuing of documents and waste management, among others. The participants believed that there was sufficient number of municipal workers and they were efficient in doing their job, except for the case of cadastral workers. Moreover, they also believed there were

enough health workers although health services were perceived as not well organized. Therefore, most claimed that people had to pay for every medical examination and treatment at private clinics or laboratories.

“Well, for example, each of us was in contact with COVID-19, many of us also got infected with it, and when we did blood tests (...), we had to look for a private clinic or laboratory” **Woman, 46 years old, Serb, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje**

During the discussion, most of the representatives of the Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje municipality highlighted the fact that insufficient budget has led to poor service provision for the residents in general, especially under the unexpected circumstances. Moreover, inadequate budgeting from the government was mentioned as another reason the municipality has not been able to fulfil all its duties. Yet, most of the participants expressed that as a municipality with insufficient funds, they have managed to do an impressive job during the pandemic. Participants also pointed out that when it comes to health services, financial support for marginalized groups such as families in need, people of the Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, the municipality has done its best. All participants agreed that there is always room for improvement of services and help provided for its residents, however, considering the circumstances and the low budget available, they believe that the work done by the municipality was adequate.

Most participants in the Albanian speaking focus group in - Zveçan/Zvečan agreed that in general there were sufficient financial, health, and infrastructural resources to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic and provision of public services was up to par.

“We have had help since the beginning of the pandemic. Whoever needed social assistance has been helped with both packages and other elements, they have been effective.” **Woman, 24 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Zveçan/Zvečan**

Serb-speaking participants of the focus group in Zveçan/Zvečan claimed that the budget of the municipality of Zveçan/Zvečan is not sufficient to mitigate effects of COVID-19 and some believed that even if it was, they did not spend well. They are very unsatisfied with the medical care, describing poor management of the medical services as the main reason. In terms of other human resources, they thought there were sufficient numbers of clerks and other municipal employees. Also, they were satisfied with the municipality’s efforts to fulfil its duties, make social payments and manage utilities.

“Well, I think that the budget of the municipality of Zveçan/Zvečan is used irrationally. I am a witness that the municipality in Zveçan/Zvečan, these cold days, several weeks ago did not provide enough energy to heat the school, since it is its obligation. And there is money for some unnecessary things, to put up some billboards that have nothing to do with the current situation and with what is really

needed to invest that money in, but they are spending on those things unnecessarily.” **Man, 32 years old, Kosovo Serb, Zvečan/Zvečan**

Representatives of the municipality of Zvečan/Zvečan claimed that they had insufficient budget even under normal circumstances. They claimed that the budget covers only salaries for employees and nothing else. Moreover, they felt that there were insufficient number of medical workers to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on the residents’ health since no new staff was employed since 2014. According to them, the biggest problem is lack of money for different activities and municipality tends to depend on the good will of donors and volunteers. Municipal representatives also considered this matter as a significant issue and highlighted the insufficient number of municipal workers and the need to prioritize increasing the number of workers.

Most participants in the Podujevë/Podujevo focus group were informed about the amount of the municipal budget. However, they agreed that the municipality of Podujevë/Podujevo does not have sufficient funds to manage and maintain the organization in every aspect. Some participants claimed that in the past, mayors had to be extremely insistent to receive funding or benefit from the central level to provide services and improve conditions within the municipality. Based on the shared opinions, mismanagement of the municipal budget has contributed to unsatisfactory management of the pandemic situation.

“I do not know how much it has/how much the municipality can have, but I think there is not enough budget. I speak not only for our municipality, but for all municipalities in Kosovo. Because a lot of work is needed, I think the budget is not enough. Former municipal officials and the former mayor had to take some things from the state by force; grants, subsidies, etc., so that they could invest in the municipality. Maybe it's mismanagement too. I think the municipality needs more budget from the state.” **Man, 22 years old, Kosovo Albanian, Podujevë/Podujevo**

Representatives of the Podujevë/Podujevo municipality stated that the situation for this municipality was especially tough since they were managing the pandemic for a few months without a mayor and highlighted that they needed to prepare for elections and the new cabinet. Even so, most of the participants agreed that taking these things into consideration, a good job has been done by the municipality. Some participants claimed that their municipality did not use all its budget to mitigate COVID-19 effects and expressed that returned funds at the end of 2020 could have been used differently. On public goods and services, the representatives believed that they have delivered in an efficient manner. Even though public services have been offered with reduced staff, all participants were positive about the aspect that the needs of people asking for help have been met. In this municipality as well, the “Alo, Komuna!” phone line was also mentioned as one of the best and efficient ways this municipality used to communicate with its residents and has proven to be a great way to address residents’ concerns and provide help needed.

Conclusion

This research explores the capacities and effectiveness of municipalities in Kosovo in coping with the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. It assessed whether municipal residents have been satisfied with the support given by their respective municipalities, whether communication channels are in place and functioning, as well as the effectiveness of public service provision in the context of the pandemic. Perceptions regarding sufficiency of municipal funding and civic engagement were also measured through data collected.

Survey findings overall indicated that majority of residents have considered the municipal support toward them and their family inadequate while the support to their communities was perceived as more efficient. Financial assistance for families affected by the pandemic was viewed as the most effective way to support the residents of municipalities that were subject to this study. Subsidizing businesses and increasing measures against the spread of COVID-19 were also highlighted by a considerable number of survey respondents as important types of support when tackling the effects of the pandemic.

Awareness of municipal initiatives aimed at mitigating the effects of the pandemic varied. While survey data indicated general low levels of awareness among the residents, focus group discussion revealed that some municipal representatives as well as residents felt that their municipalities had successfully implemented a variety of mitigation and support measures.

Information about municipal initiatives for managing the impact of the pandemic, as well as about public hearings appeared to be unorganized and often not easily available. This has led to some residents with certain demographics being less informed than others (e.g., respondents that are part of older generations and do not make use of social media). Conversely, general COVID-19-related information has been mostly well received through various channels by majority of survey respondents as well as focus group participants.

Results further indicated that the lack of harmonized mechanisms to distribute information about municipal events, such as public hearings, is one of the main causes of low levels of civic engagement. While most of the municipalities held public hearings regularly, as stipulated in the relevant laws, most survey respondents thought that such hearings did not take place. Focus group discussion underlined this issue, with various participants highlighting absence of relevant information and proper communication channels between residents and their municipalities. The low level of awareness regarding the importance of civic engagement was identified as another obstacle to facilitating efficient exchanges between the residents and municipalities in Kosovo.

Overall, majority of survey respondents perceived their municipalities' budgets and resources for the pandemic response as sufficient and did not experience worsening in the effectiveness of public service provision. However, various qualitative findings indicated opposing perceptions: insufficient budgets and resources stemming from before the pandemic, the lack of effective planning and budget allocations that meet the needs of the residents, among others, were highlighted as impeding factors for the effective pandemic response by some of the municipalities.

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Annex 1 Methodology

The methodology for this research study included a survey with 500 respondents in five municipalities in Kosovo, namely, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Podujevë/Podujevo, Prizren, Rahovec/Orahovac, and Zveçan/Zvečan. Additionally, there were nine focus group discussions with Albanian and Serb speaking participants in Kosovo including Kosovo Albanians, Kosovo Serbs, Kosovo Roma, Kosovo Ashkali, Kosovo Egyptian, Kosovo Bosniaks, and Kosovo Gorani. There were two focus groups conducted per municipality with participants spoke Albanian and Serb, respectively - with the exception of the municipality of Podujevë/Podujevo where we only held one focus group with Albanian speaking participants there are almost no Serb speaking residents in Podujevë/Podujevo. Moreover, there were also five focus group discussions conducted with municipal officials and municipal assembly members.

Survey Sample

The survey was conducted in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Podujevë/Podujevo, Prizren, Rahovec/Orahovac, and Zveçan/Zvečan. The survey targeted the adult residents of these municipalities with the aim to explore the residents' engagement with the local government and vice versa.

A sample size proportional to each of these municipalities' population share in Kosovo would be feasible if the research aimed to only analyze the overall results or findings of the study while considering all five municipalities as a whole entity. However, such a sample would not produce significant results for some of the municipalities since the number of surveys would be very low given their share of population in the entire Kosovo's population is small. Therefore, the study uses quota samples (over samples) which let to ultimate sample size consisting of 100 surveys for three municipalities Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Podujevë/Podujevo, Rahovec/Orahovac, 150 surveys for Prizren and 50 surveys for Zveçan/Zvečan. However, when considering the results for the five municipalities we applied weights, so each municipality has the same share as indicated by official data.

Table 8 Survey Sample by municipality

Region	Municipality	Population ²²	Percentage to Kosovo	Percentage to total of five municipalities	Percentage of interviews	Interviews (Quota)
Prishtinë	Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje	34,827	2%	9%	20%	100
Prishtinë	Podujevë/Podujevo	88,499	5%	24%	20%	100
Prizren	Prizren	177,781	10%	48%	30%	150
Prizren	Rahovec/Orahovac	56,208	3%	15%	20%	100
Mitrovicë	Zveçan/Zvečan	16,500	1%	4%	10%	50
Total of 5 municipalities		373,815	21%	100%		500
Total of Kosovo		1,819,907	100%			

²² The overall population figure presented above is taken from the 2011 census (or authoritative estimates where the census figure is not available), whereas the voters list is a reflection of all people with a civil registration entry in the municipality. In some cases, the voters list figure is higher than or similar to the overall population number due to insufficient updating of the civil registry or a significant proportion of people registered in the municipality but actually living elsewhere or abroad. Source: OSCE <https://www.osce.org/mission-in-kosovo/410279>.

With an estimated population of 373,815 residents in these five municipalities in Kosovo based on the Census 2011 and KAS estimations, the margin of error for a total sample of 500 interviews in Kosovo is $\pm 4.38\%$.

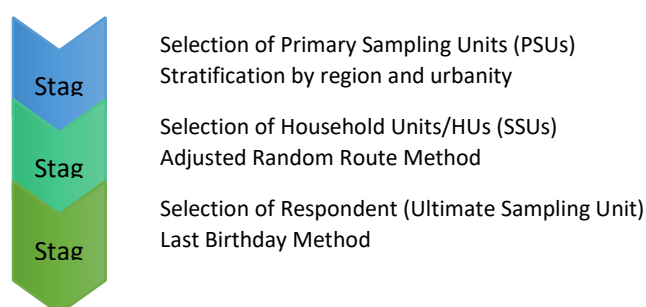
Even though the quota sample ensured enough respondents to be able to do a municipal level analysis, the overall results in the graph are shown as weighted to show the actual representative level of each municipality of the entire population of the whole municipalities. Weighting is a correction technique that is used by survey researchers. It refers to statistical adjustments that are made to survey data after they have been collected to improve the accuracy of the survey estimates. Thus, the interpretation of the results is done in the same manner.

Table 9 Weighting Procedure

Region	Municipality	Population ²³	Percentage to Kosovo	Percentage to total of five municipalities	Percentage of interviews	Interviews (Quota)	Percentage after weighting
Prishtinë	Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje	34,827	2%	9%	20%	100	9%
Prishtinë	Podujevë/Podujevo	88,499	5%	24%	20%	100	24%
Prizren	Prizren	177,781	10%	48%	30%	150	48%
Prizren	Rahovec/Orahovac	56,208	3%	15%	20%	100	15%
Mitrovicë	Zvečan/Zvečan	16,500	1%	4%	10%	50	4%
Total of 5 municipalities		373,815	21%	100%		500	100%
Total of Kosovo		1,819,907	100%				

Note: Overall results in the graph are shown as weighted and, thus, so is the interpretation of the results.

The overall profile of the respondents corresponds to the overall demographic composition in Kosovo, in terms of gender and age. However, the gender and age distribution per municipality does not correspond to overall Kosovo data since there are municipalities with less/more women or men and age groups. The survey was conducted through Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI), using multistage cluster sampling with stratification through three stages:



²³ The overall population figure presented above is taken from the 2011 census (or authoritative estimates where the census figure is not available), whereas the voters list is a reflection of all people with a civil registration entry in the municipality. In some cases, the voters list figure is higher than or similar to the overall population number due to insufficient updating of the civil registry or a significant proportion of people registered in the municipality but actually living elsewhere or abroad. Source: OSCE <https://www.osce.org/mission-in-kosovo/410279>.

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Annex 4 Focus Group Discussion Demographic Characteristics

Focus Group Discussions with Respondents

Podujevë/Podujevo

Date: 30.04.2021

FG 1 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Ethnicity
P1	M	30	Bachelor	Employed	Albanian
P2	F	26	Master	Employed	Albanian
P3	F	27	Master	Unemployed	Albanian
P4	M	22	Bachelor	Employed	Albanian
P5	F	21	High School	Unemployed	Albanian
P6	M	20	High School	Employed	Albanian
P7	M	28	Master	Unemployed	Albanian

Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje

Date: 07.05.2021

FG 1 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Ethnicity
P1	F	22	Bachelor	Employed	Albanian
P2	M	24	Bachelor	Employed	Albanian
P3	F	20	High School	Unemployed	Albanian
P4	F	20	High School	Unemployed	Albanian
P5	M	30	High School	Employed	Albanian
P6	M	27	High School	Employed	Egyptian
P7	M	49	Bachelor	Employed	Roma
P8	F	27	High School	Unemployed	Roma

Date: 21.05.2021

FG 2 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Ethnicity
P1	M	47	High School	Employed	Serb
P2	F	43	MA	Employed	Serb
P3	M	24	High school	Unemployed	Serb
P4	F	18	MA	Employed	Serb
P5	M	45	High School	Employed	Serb
P6	F	46	High School	Employed	Serb

Prizren

Date: 29.04.2021

FG 1 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Ethnicity
P1	F	48	High School	Unemployed	Albanian
P2	F	48	High School	Unemployed	Albanian
P3	F	31	Bachelor	Employed	Albanian
P4	F	23	Bachelor	Unemployed	Roma
P5	M	27	Bachelor	Unemployed	Roma
P6	M	21	High School	Unemployed	Ashkali

Date: 21.05.2021

FG 2 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Ethnicity
P1	M	44	High School	Employed	Gorani
P2	M	48	High School	Unemployed	Serb
P3	M	42	High School	Unemployed	Serb
P4	F	18	High School	Unemployed	Bosniak
P5	F	19	High School	Unemployed	Bosniak

P6	F	19	High School	Unemployed	Bosniak
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Rahovec/Orahovac

Date: 21.05.2021

FG 1 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Ethnicity
P1	M	38	High school	Employed	Serb
P2	M	27	BA	Unemployed	Serb
P3	M	26	BA	Unemployed	Serb
P4	F	22	High School	Unemployed	Serb
P5	M	30	High School	Unemployed	Serb
P6	F	24	High School	Unemployed	Serb

Date: 04.06.2021

FG 2 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Ethnicity
P1	F	30	BA	Employed	Albanian
P2	M	21	High School	Employed	Albanian
P3	M	23	High School	Unemployed	Albanian
P4	M	48	BA	Unemployed	Roma
P5	F	28	MA	Employed	Albanian
P6	M	28	BA	Employed	Albanian
P7	F	25	BA	Employed	Albanian

Zvečan/Zvečan

Date: 12.05.2021

FG 1 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Ethnicity
P1	M	27	Bachelor	Employed	Albanian
P2	M	48	Bachelor	Employed	Albanian

P3	F	46	Bachelor	Employed	Albanian
P4	M	36	Bachelor	Employed	Albanian
P5	F	24	High School	Unemployed	Albanian
P6	M	27	Bachelor	Employed	Albanian
P7	F	21	High School	Unemployed	Albanian

Date: 21.05.2021

FG 2 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Ethnicity
P1	M	32	MA	Unemployed	Serb
P2	F	41	MA	Employed	Bosniak
P3	F	20	High School	Unemployed	Serb
P4	M	40	High School	Employed	Serb
P5	F	29	High School	Unemployed	Bosniak
P6	M	27	High School	Unemployed	Serb

Focus Group Discussions with Municipal Officials and Assembly Members

Podujevë/Podujevo

Date: 20.04.2021

FG 1 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Position in the Municipality	Ethnicity
P1	Male	Director of Economic Planning and Development	Albanian
P2	Female	Head of Business Registration Sector	Albanian
P3	Male	Head of the Health Sector	Albanian
P4	Female	Head of Budget and Finance Sector	Albanian
P5	Male	Head of Economy Sector	Albanian

Zveçan/Zvečan

Date: 20.04.2021

FG 2 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Position in the Municipality	Ethnicity
P1	M	Finance Department/Expense Officer	Serb
P2	F	Municipal Assembly member	Serb
P3	M	Head of Health department	Serb
P4	M	Assembly Member/Health Department	Serb
P5	F	Business Center	Serb
P6	F	Assembly Member	Serb

Fushë Kosovë/ Kosovo Polje

FG 3 Date: 16.06.2021

Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Position in the Municipality	Ethnicity
P1	Male	Assembly member of LDK	Albanian
P2	Female	Assembly member of LVV	Albanian

P3	Male	Assembly member of LVV	Albanian
P4	Male	Director of Economic Development and Chief of the Emergency Staff during the Pandemic	Albanian
P5	Male	Head of the Directorate of the Inspectorate	Albanian
P6	Male	Assembly member of PDK	Albanian

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Date: 17.06.2021

FG 4 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Position in the Municipality	Ethnicity
P1	M	Assembly Member - VV	Albanian
P2	F	Assembly Member - VV	Albanian
P3	M	Director of Planning and Economic Development	Albanian
P4	F	Assembly Member	Albanian
P5	F	Assembly Member	Albanian
P6	F	Director of Health	Albanian

Rahovec/Orahovac

Date: 30.06.2021

FG 5 Participant profile:

Participant #	Gender	Position in the Municipality	Ethnicity
P1	M	Director of Public Services	Albanian
P2	F	Director of Youth, Sports and Culture	Albanian
P3	M	Director of Economy, Development and Tourism	Albanian
P4	M	Director of Health and Social Care Department	Albanian
P5	F	Director of the Municipal Administration	Albanian