



## POLICY REPORT

# THE RESPONSE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS DURING COVID-19 EMERGENCY IN ALBANIA: JANUARY 2020 – APRIL 2020

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## Abbreviations

<b>ALL</b>	Albanian Lek
<b>ASIG</b>	Autoriteti Shtetëror për Informacionin Gjeohapësinor (State Authority for Geo-Spatial Information)
<b>ASLG</b>	Agency for Self-Local Governance
<b>COVID</b>	Coronavirus Disease
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>IIT</b>	Infrastructure Impact Tax
<b>INSTAT</b>	Institute of Statistics of Albania
<b>LG</b>	Local Government
<b>MoFE</b>	Ministry of Finance and Economy
<b>MoHSP</b>	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
<b>NACP</b>	National Agency for Civil Protection
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>OSHE</b>	Operatori i Shpërndarjes së Energjisë (Energy Distributor Operator)
<b>PMO</b>	Prime Minister's Office
<b>PIT</b>	Personal Income Tax
<b>PT</b>	Property Tax
<b>SHAV</b>	Shoqata për Autonominë Vendore (Albanian Association for Local Autonomy)
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

## Summary

This policy report is an effort to document the response of local governments in Albania during the COVID-19 emergency, focusing on the pre-outbreak period (January-February 2020) and on the isolation period (March-April 2020).

With more than 7.2 million cases confirmed around the world and over 413,000 casualties until mid-June (2020), and numbers on the rising part of the curve, COVID-19 remains one of the most important pandemics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Besides being a health emergency, the COVID-19 outbreak has had and will have for close-to-medium-term future serious socio-economic and financial consequences, including implications of moral, ethics and democracy.

In this very complex background, local governments, being closer to citizens, can and should play an important role in managing the emergency and governing for post-disaster recovery and preparedness. However, as various reports show, the response of local governments is territorially asymmetric at international level. This is due to the characteristics of the governance systems in the different countries, the territorial and geographical features, the shape of cities and level of urbanisation, overall level of development and investments levels for enabling local resilience.

In Albania, the COVID-19 emergency is being managed centrally, with a relatively soft, often weak or limited involvement of local governments. This comes in a context where legally speaking, local governments have a significant role in governing disaster events (preparedness, emergency response, recovery and planning), but are technically and financially weak in doing so. The situation is even less promising for biological disaster risks, particularly pandemics, where the effect of the disaster is not territorially bound, and the response should be well coordinated among levels of governance (vertically) and among actors (horizontally).

The focus of this report is comprehending how local governments in Albania have reacted during the COVID-19 emergency. The aim is to shed light on their role and challenges, and subsequently create knowledge for disaster governance and recovery in the near future, as well as propose some stepping stones for enabling local resilience. The report is prepared based on findings from a general survey that Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development and the Albanian Association for Local Autonomy conducted with the 61 municipalities of Albania during April 2020.

## Background

In early 2020, Albania was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, initially detected in China in December 2019 and steadily spreading across the world from January 2020 to current days. This pandemic is caused by a coronavirus, which remains still considerably unknown to the scientific community in terms of behaviour and effects on the human body. To date, there are over 7.2 million cases confirmed and over 413 thousand deaths worldwide, and the numbers keep increasing, with a pace (of this first wave) that is constantly changing<sup>1</sup>. While scientists are striving to find answers, updating their knowledge and advise on daily basis, national and local governments have also enrolled in a marathon of response actions for safety, adaptation and reconciliation with the unknown.

The first COVID-19 case officially recognised in Albania was reported the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2020<sup>2</sup>. Since then, the total number of confirmed cases has increased along a daily fluctuating curve<sup>3</sup>, to reach 1385 infected people and 35 deaths<sup>4</sup> on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020. To respond to the situation, the Government of Albania applied a series of measures, putting the country in a stringent lockdown for almost two months, while adopting from May onward a gradual opening strategy. During March, 15<sup>th</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>, the stringency index of measures for Albania<sup>5</sup> was 84.26 in a scale of 0 to 100 rising up to over 89 by the end of April<sup>6</sup>. An assessment is yet to be made on the impact of the severity and timing of measures over the level and spread of infection. That said, the socio-economic effects of the lockdown are gradually becoming more visible and are expected to be very harsh. Various sources state the COVID-19 outbreak will instigate a recession of the economy, leading to GDP contraction (-5% in 2020 in the baseline scenario and -6.9% in the downside scenario, from an estimated 2.2% growth in 2019), rise of unemployment rates and loss of jobs, with tourism and transport amongst the most affected sectors (OECD, 2020; World Bank, 2020; IMF, 2020; Nientied & Shutina, 2020). In these circumstances, national and local governments should focus on implementing an overarching strategy of recovery that spans from health to socio-economic aspects.

According to Muggah (2020, p.16, author's emphasis), "In times of crisis, most people ... turn to their *governments* for protection and assistance...Emergencies reveal the health of *social contract*. And in crisis *competence* matters." To date, at the international scale,

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1. This data represents the situation of June 11th, 2020, as depicted on the World Health Organization page online, on 11 June 2020. For more information please refer to the following link: <https://covid19.who.int>.

2. For detailed information see: <https://covid19.who.int/region/euro/country/al> and [https://new.shendetesia.gov.al/9-mars-2020-informacion-i-perditesuar-per-koronavirusin-covid\\_19/](https://new.shendetesia.gov.al/9-mars-2020-informacion-i-perditesuar-per-koronavirusin-covid_19/).

3. For a visual representation of the curve see <http://www.ishp.gov.al> and the daily reporting of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in <https://new.shendetesia.gov.al/category/lajme/>.

4. These data represent the situation on 11 June 2020, as reported by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection: <https://new.shendetesia.gov.al/covid-19-ministria-e-shendetesise-44-raste-te-reja-dhe-21-te-sheruar-ne-24-oret-e-fundit/>.

5. For more information and calculation of the index in different time periods in Albania, see: <https://covidtracker.bsg.ox.ac.uk/stringency-scatter>

6. The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) systematically collects information on several different common policy responses governments have taken and calculates the stringency index. The index records the number and strictness of government policies, it has a scale from 0 to 100, where 100 represents the highest level of severity for measures. The data is collected from publicly available information by a cross-disciplinary Oxford University team of academics and students, led by the Blavatnik School of Government. For more information on the index, including methodology, please see: <https://covidtracker.bsg.ox.ac.uk> and <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/coronavirus-government-response-tracker>.

the most agile responses to COVID-19 came from local governments (Muggah, 2020), but this was not the case in every country. As a matter of fact, as Allain-Dupre (2020) reveals in an OECD report, while subnational governments were generally at the frontline of the COVID-19 response, both, their role and effects of the pandemic were asymmetric. Not only responses were differentiated among countries and among regions, but their level of centralization or decentralization was diverse too.

In Albania, the national government led the entire process of crisis management. The government declared the state of natural disaster for the whole territory of Albania on 24 March 2020, for a period of 30 days through the decision of the Council of Ministers no. 243. It then extended it for another two months, until June 23, 2020, through a Parliament's decision, as defined in the Constitution<sup>7</sup>. Within this broader framework, the government applied a number of containment measures, such as closing of borders, setting curfew times, isolation and quarantine, closing schools and any other public activities, banning travel and motorised mobility, forbidding the use of public open spaces and parks, etc.

Structured assessments are yet to take place on the approach adopted by the government for the pandemic response. However, it seems like the latter favours a rather elitist approach (Marisam, 2008), with centralised power exercising and policy decision-making, made on the basis of a closed group of experts' judgements. Such an approach, limits liberties by definition, and does not allow for democratic deliberation during a catastrophe, as this would lead to mistakes in risk assessment (ibid.). However, this approach cannot encompass full knowledge on important aspects of risk assessments, and does not consider insights on societal values and norms that should be normally taken into account, in order to avoid ethical implications.

As French and Raymond (2009) explain, a myriad of legal and ethical implications may arise during a pandemic, because of the infringement of civil liberties and human rights, compromised human dignity, imposed vaccination, loss of individual privacy, etc. Among others, a decision is to be taken on which level of government is best suited to enforce such measures, and this depends on the overall approach a government adopts in crisis management. Through the state of the natural disaster, the Constitution of Albania and the decision of the Council of Ministers no. 243/2020 set limitations for 3 months to basic civil liberties<sup>8</sup> such as: inviolability of home; freedom of movement; expropriation at a fair and just market price; freedom to choose an occupation and engage in work and benefit from social protection; and the right to strike for unfair labour practices. Furthermore, the severe lockdown and quarantine that was applied on the population for two months triggered living difficulties for various citizen groups, particularly the vulnerable categories. For instance, residents living in the outskirts of Tirana and Durrës had limited access to food stores and pharmacies, due to restrictions on the use of cars and banning of public transportation. Elderly people and those with impaired abilities, as high-risk groups, were vastly affected in their daily routine, and therefore in their quality of life. The lockdown had psychological and health effects on children, who were made to stay inside, within the perimeter of their homes, with no access to open spaces.

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7. For more information on declaring the state of natural disaster see the Constitution of Albania adopted with the law no. 8417, date 21.10.1998, as amended, articles no. 174 and 175 paragraph 3

8. For more information on these limitations please see articles no. 174, 37, 38, 41 paragraph 4, 49 and 51 of the Constitution of Albania (law no. 8417, date 21.10.1998, as amended).



Perhaps a communitarianism approach would have been more appropriate to avoid the negative effects of either the very centralised or the very decentralised *modus operandi*, and balance between civil safety and civil liberties. In this context, Albanian local governments could have an important role to play in crisis management. In principle, by being closer to communities and territories, local governments have an undeniable role in governing disaster events at all stages, from planning and preparedness, to crisis response, recovery, and mitigation (Toto, 2020; French & Raymond 2009; French, 2011). Particularly due to the proximity factor, but also because of the subsidiarity principle and the legal frame on local governance, municipalities are the front door where citizens would turn to for help and support in disaster emergencies (see French, 2011). In the case of territorial natural hazards this is more evident, but in case of biological disasters the situation may become blurrier. As per definition, pandemics governance is a cross-territorial concern (local-to-national-to-regional-to-global). Hence, the interests and mobility of stakeholders and the territorial connectedness are common complex challenges, which shape political response and implications (Sivaramakrishnan, 2011) and involve all government levels. However, as in Albania the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the Prime Minister's office managed and conducted all of the communication on the measures, it is not clear to what extent local governments may have contributed.

There are at least two fundamental and complementary mechanisms through which local governments can guarantee effective, fair and democratic pandemic governance: i) galvanising cooperation, coordination, and knowledge sharing among stakeholders and across territorial levels; ii) upgrading cities and urban space to respond better to pandemic emergency, recovery, and mitigation phases. While cities constitute a critical vector in spreading infectious disease, they also encompass the solution to crisis (Muggah, 2020). Infectious diseases are inexorably threatening to cities, due to the growing world population, globalised mobility, urban air pollution, poor urban hygiene in densely populated areas, insufficient decarbonisation of the transportation sector, and lack of green infrastructure and public open space. In these circumstances, traditional strategies of dealing with epidemics and pandemics cannot meet the needs of the densely populated cities (Bell *et al.* 2009). This eventually leads to the need for innovative methods, which foster open and transparent communication, and citizen engagement in preparedness and response through multi-level collaborative governance, otherwise known as the whole-of-society approach to pandemic's response (Schwartz & Yen, 2017; French, 2011; Bell *et al.*, 2009) (see also Allain-Dupre, 2020 and Rajadhyaksha, 2020). Such an approach enables knowledge sharing among stakeholders (French, 2011), as well as promotes community trust in government (Schwartz & Yen, 2017). Furthermore, though cities are the engine of development, they are also home to socio-economic and spatial inequalities and often poverty, therefore having increased exposure and vulnerability towards infectious diseases (De La Barra, 2000). The latter have been historically a powerful reason behind major urban decisions (*ibid.*, p.8; Indorewala & Wagh, 2020). Such a cycle supports the finding that the urban form (size, shape, public open space, road network, solid-void ratio, clustering, landscape, natural ecosystems permeation in the urban core, mixed land use, density, etc.) has important implications and plays a significant role on enabling local resilience (Sharifi, 2019; Jabareen, 2013; Waller & Chakrabarti, 2020; Hooper, 2020), including the ability to manage pandemic emergencies. In addition to urban form, quality of and access to public services and critical infrastructure are among the key elements that reduce territorial disparities and mitigate the negative effects of peripheralities (see Tagai *et al.*, 2017). Local governments are best suited among state actors to efficiently provide qualitative services and influence the urban form so that it responds to the needs of the community, and to liveability and resilience in cities (Toto, 2020; Alam,

2008). Therefore, the assumption that local government can play a crucial role in managing pandemic emergencies, from mitigation to recovery, is not merely empirically drawn, but it lies on the conceptual framework of LGs' very existence.

This policy report starts from the latter statement and examines the response of local governments in Albania during January – April 2020, hence focusing on the pre-outbreak and in the peak emergency periods. The analysis is based on findings from a related general survey (or census) implemented by the Association for Local Autonomy and Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development with the 61 Albanian municipalities in April 2020. The methodology of the general survey and structure of the report are provided in the next chapter.

The primary aim of the analysis and of this document is to share information on the local governments' response to the COVID-19 emergency. Furthermore, the document provides an account of challenges faced by municipalities and their needs for the near future mostly related to recovery processes. However, the pandemics usually come in waves and last on average 18 months (French & Raymond, 2009). While no predictions can be made about the potential of further spread of COVID-19, scientists and the World Health Organisation warn for a potential second and perhaps a third wave by the end of 2020 and during 2021. Therefore, it is important for local governments to get prepared for dealing with an uncertain, but most probably difficult near future of the pandemic. In addition, knowledge and lessons learned from the current situation would be helpful to preparedness and local resilience building for the long-term outlook on the inevitable spread and persistence of infectious diseases.

## 1. Methodology of the survey and structure of the policy paper

The territorial and administrative reform<sup>9</sup> of 2014-2015, reorganised the first tier of local self-governments in Albania into 61 municipalities, consolidated out of the 373 that were in place prior to the reform. It also kept intact the second-tier of local government, composed of 12 *qarks*<sup>10</sup>. Being closer to citizens municipalities are able to address community needs better than other government levels, due to territorial proximity and comparative informative advantages. The legal framework and the principle of subsidiarity places municipalities at the forefront of, among others, actions to reduce disaster risks at local level. In these conditions, it was assumed that Albanian municipalities would play a substantial role in addressing the COVID-19 emergency in their territories, while facing challenges borne mostly out of the distinctiveness of this disaster.

In order to understand the Albanian municipal response to COVID-19 emergency, Co-PLAN and the Albanian Association for Local Autonomy (SHAV) carried out a general survey (census) of 61 municipalities (targeted population) during April 2020. The choice for a general survey or census including all 61 municipalities, over other government levels, was driven by the diversity they present in terms of size and geographical location, territorial disparities, institutional and financial capacities, and preparedness to face disaster risks.

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9. Law no. 115/2014 "On administrative and territorial division of local government units in Albania"

10. Recognized as NUTS 3 regions in Albania. Each qark is composed territorially of 3-7 municipalities.

The Albanian municipalities' response to COVID-19 emergency was explored through a structured questionnaire (see appendix 1), which was administered by e-mail and drafted in the Albanian language. The questionnaire included a total of 31 questions in the form of multiple choice, rating, and closed- and open-ended questions. The questions and expected answers cover the period January – April, 2020, and aim at obtaining information regarding: the general situation on COVID-19 spreading at local level and to what extent the municipal structure was flexible to adapt to a changing working environment (questions 1-7);

- the communication and cooperation of local governments with citizens and other stakeholders to face the emergency situation, ensuring immediate assistance especially to those in a disadvantaged situation (questions 7, 12, 13, 17-21);
- the role and measures undertaken by municipalities in support of local constituencies (questions 8-11 and 14 – 16);
- the problems encountered, challenges faced in terms of local public services provision, answering to vulnerable groups, local finances, and potential socio-economic effects (questions 22 – 30);
- the municipal needs to be addressed in order to face the health and socio-economic impacts during the second half of 2020 and year 2021 (question 31).

The general survey (census) of 61 municipalities, was implemented mainly during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of April 2020, when the COVID-19 measures of isolation and quarantine were at an advanced stage. The questionnaire was sent by SHAV to the 61 Mayors by e-mail on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 being the deadline for the submission of responses. All information provided by participating municipalities is up to the cut-off date of April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and the response rate was of 85.2% (or 52 out of 61 municipalities). The processing of the questionnaires' data includes the following steps:

- Questionnaire coding, from qualitative to quantitative, as a necessary step for enabling elaboration of the information in statistical software;
- Data entry into the formatted template by trained staff, based on the coded information;
- Cleaning the dataset from eventual typing mistakes;
- Data processing, which was carried out partly in Excel, and partly in the statistical software SPSS V.20 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The aggregation method used, based on the question types, was by frequencies [percentage of respondents choosing an alternative compared to total responses] and simple averages. In cases of missing information in any of the questions, results were scaled in order to reflect only valid percentages and the number of respondents is reported in each of the questions.
- Correlation of questions with yes and no answers as well as verification of the relation between territorial disparities and features on one side and some of the survey's findings on the other.

The information obtained through the questionnaires is presented in tables, graphs and occasionally maps, in the second chapter of this policy report. This chapter provides a detailed examination over findings on the local government response during January – April 2020. The first chapter, *i.e. the introduction*, precedes the findings of the survey, by informing on the global and national COVID-19 facts and governance. It also lays out the theoretical and policy frame of the discourse, with building blocks that are referred to mainly in chapter three.

Chapter three advances the analysis of the survey findings by:

- discussing decentralisation and multi-level governance of COVID-19 from a local government perspective;

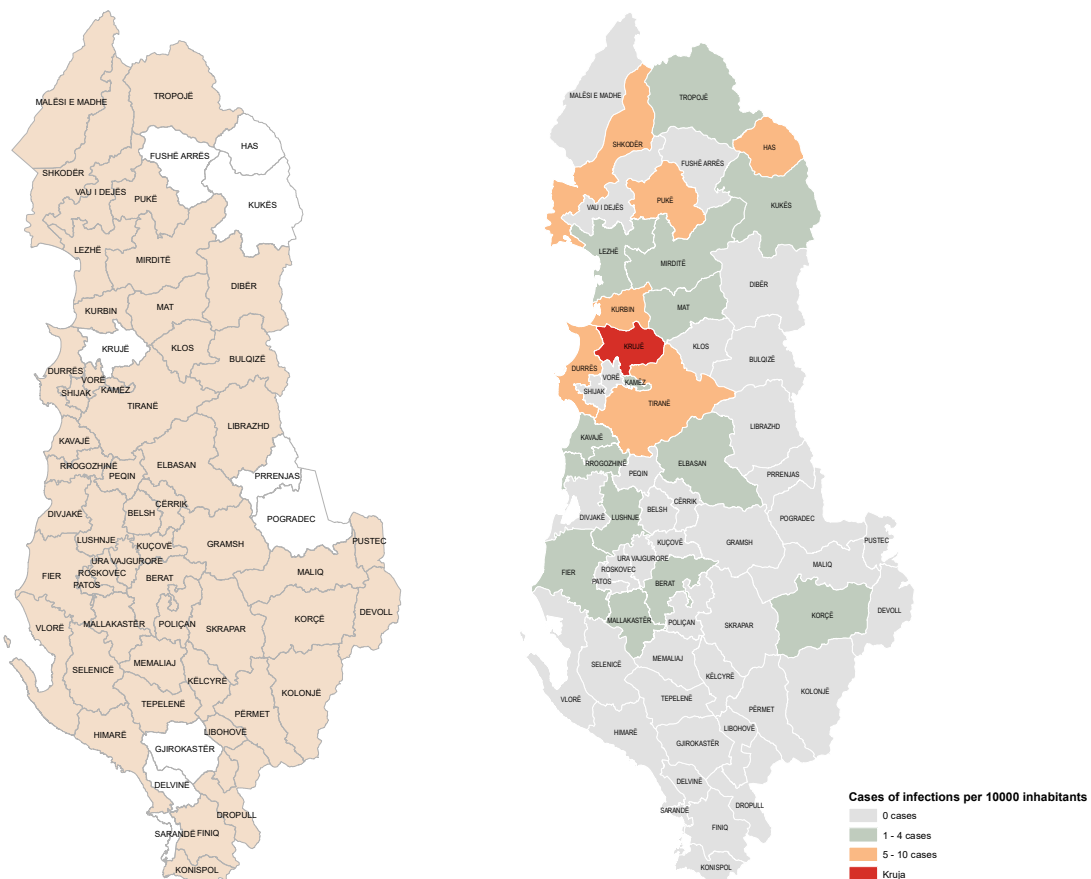
- investigating on local finances and potential future implications;
- examining interconnections with territorial disparities, planning and the distribution of natural hazards over the territory.

The report concludes with a synthesis on local leadership, decentralization and multi-level governance, planning, resilience, and local finances, as well as recommendations for strengthening the role of local governments along the short-to-long term phases of pandemic-risk governance.

## 2. The response of Albanian Local Governments during the COVID-19 emergency – findings from the general survey

This chapter provides a summary of the results from the general survey of 61 municipalities in Albania, aiming at understanding their response to COVID-19, and challenges to be addressed in the mid to long term. The information provided by participating municipalities (as shown in figure 1) is up to the cut-off date April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and the response rate was of 85.2% (or 52/61 municipalities). Figure 1 is also showing the municipalities that have cases of coronavirus infections up to the cut-off date June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, and the density of infections per 10,000 inhabitants, based on data reported by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and Institute of Public Health.

**Figure 1.** Municipalities participating in the survey (lhs); cases/10,000 inh., June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 (rhs)



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

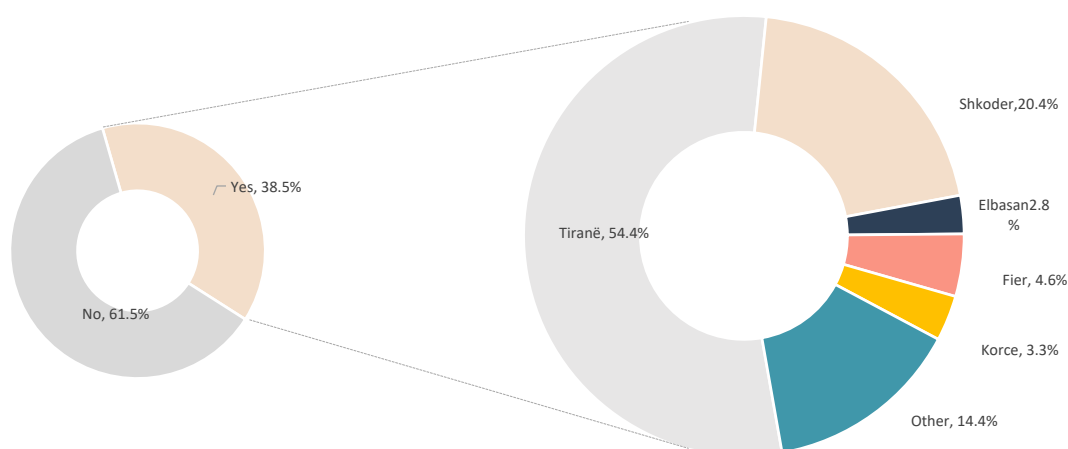
## 2.1 Municipal response to the emergency

The COVID-19 outbreak hit Albania soon after the earthquake disaster of November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020, finding the national and the affected local governments in a recovery struggle. On a local level, the preparedness towards the pandemic was low, if not absent, due to lack of knowledge on this infectious disease, but also because municipalities have weak institutional structures of civil protection and lack disaster risk strategies (for more on this see Toto, 2020). On the other hand, most of the preparedness was taking place at national levels, starting as soon as the virus hit China and WHO warned countries of instigating protection measures. On January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) issued the order of the Minister on preparedness, protection against and prevention of the new coronavirus, addressed to health institutions in Albania. Public information on number of infections, officially and daily made available for the citizens on a national scale by MoHSP started as of January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020.<sup>11</sup>

Alongside tightening the containment measures adopted at central level, municipalities were faced with the necessity to adapt their processes of local services provision, and respond promptly to the health emergency, within their competences defined by law. However, the spread of infections was not territorially equal and it remains so to date. Therefore, the unequal distribution of cases and municipalities' territorial and population size did affect also how measures were implemented across the country.

At the cut-off date of the general survey, 38.5% or 20 municipalities reported the presence of infected people within their territories, with some of them being hit more severely than others (chart 1). The largest number of positive cases was registered in the municipalities of Tiranë (54.4%), Shkodër (20.4%) and Fier (4.6%), both in the city and administrative units. These municipalities account for about 31% of total population based on the Census 2011 data, and are characterized by intensive commercial and social exchanges, which increases the contagion probability. The same pattern is observed at the end of May 2020, based on official figures, where the qarks of Tiranë, Durrës and Shkodër account for more than 80% of total cases. Such a pattern confirms the international findings of OECD (Allain-Dupre, 2020) on the asymmetric impact of the emergency at local level.

**Chart 1.** Distribution of positive cases by municipalities



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

11. For more information on official public communication at national scale please refer to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection: <https://shendetesia.gov.al/koronavirusi-i-ri-dhe-masat-ndaj-tij/>.

As municipalities report, more than 67% of positive cases were offered home-based treatment, while 30% of them were transferred to the Mother Theresa Infection Disease Unit in Tirana. Regional hospitals hosted (for the reporting period) only 2.7% of positive cases, based on reporting of municipalities.

Local governments are responsible for providing a large number of services for the communities. As such, disaster events have a direct influence on their ability to respond to citizens, not only for managing the disaster emergency, but most importantly for delivering all other services. In this context, the Albanian municipalities were challenged on three directions:

1. *Provide essential local public services within the limitations posed by the health emergency.* Municipalities' responses in this regard differ significantly, but some commonalities can however be found:
  - for most of the municipalities, the two main sectors shifted online were pre-school and pre-university education and urban planning and territorial management. There are also few municipalities, which inform to have shifted partially online for almost every sector.
  - Civil registry (application for identification documents) and one-stop-shops were the sectors suspended in most of the municipalities. Then, to a lesser degree, there were cases of suspension of other activities too. The latter include EU integration, communication and public relations; finance and budget, local taxes and fees, asset management; culture, tourism and sports; paper-based work from juridical office and archives; projects and coordination with donors; social services and housing; public transport etc.
  - Civil protection, public services (regardless of some difficulties in specific services), finance and budget, social protection continued to be performed with staff physically present in the municipality/field, in compliance with rules and regulations. Few municipalities chose to have reduced staff presence at the office, sometimes one person per department, on a rotation basis.
2. *Balance human resource presence in the office with the organization of the workflow online, through use of technology.* The responses of municipalities converge to similar working practices under COVID-19, which were mainly suggested on a national level. The responding municipalities reveal that the work was organised in shifts. Furthermore, they adopted easier working conditions (reduced hours or online work) for parents with children under 14 years of age and for those exposed to risks. The sectors and employees that are usually engaged with working on documents and reports, or services that do not necessarily need physical presence, did function online. In average, 67% of municipal employees have been physically in their offices, based on reporting from municipalities. The minimum physical presence was reported at a level of 15%, and the maximum presence (100%) was reported by the municipality of Selenicë. Only eight out of 52 municipalities had a presence of less than 50% of their staff in the office, while 26 municipalities had a presence of more than the average 67%.
3. *Ensure continued decision making from the local legislative institutions* – The responding municipalities report often that not only the management of services, but also the processes of local decision-making from the Municipal Councils were carried online, through online sessions.

## 2.2 Communication and cooperation with citizens and other stakeholders

Communication and cooperation with citizens and other stakeholders, is key for good multilevel governance, as well as it is very important in order to provide effective response to the emergency and minimization of negative effects in disaster events. Municipalities were requested to provide information with regard to communication with institutional stakeholders (the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, National Agency of Civil Protection (NACP) and Other Institutions specified by them), and the topic of such communication. In general, for all three alternatives, a very limited number of municipalities reported to have had communications during the months of January and February. For some aspects of communication such as local taxes, food distribution, maintaining order and safety, provision of services, and volunteer groups there was no communication at all during the first two months. However, communication on all topics intensified sharply in the upcoming two months, March and April, as reported by municipalities. This trend is linked to the encounter of the two first officially announced COVID-19 cases in Albania by MoHSP, which dates March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

*Communication with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection* appears to be rare during January, reported only by 3 municipalities as shown in chart 2. The same is valid during February, as reported by 10 municipalities. Communication with MoHSP increased immediately in March, and had a slight slowdown during April (chart 2 and table 1). All of the listed topics were subject of communication with the MoHSP, based on reporting from municipalities, and in particular: information sharing pre- and during the crisis, information on measures introduced by the central government, guidelines for municipalities during the crisis, and guidelines on how to proceed with social nets/assistance. Less frequent communication can be noticed on guidelines regarding local taxes, cooperation for the transport of infected people, and cooperation for maintaining order and safety.

**Table 1.** Communication with other institutions

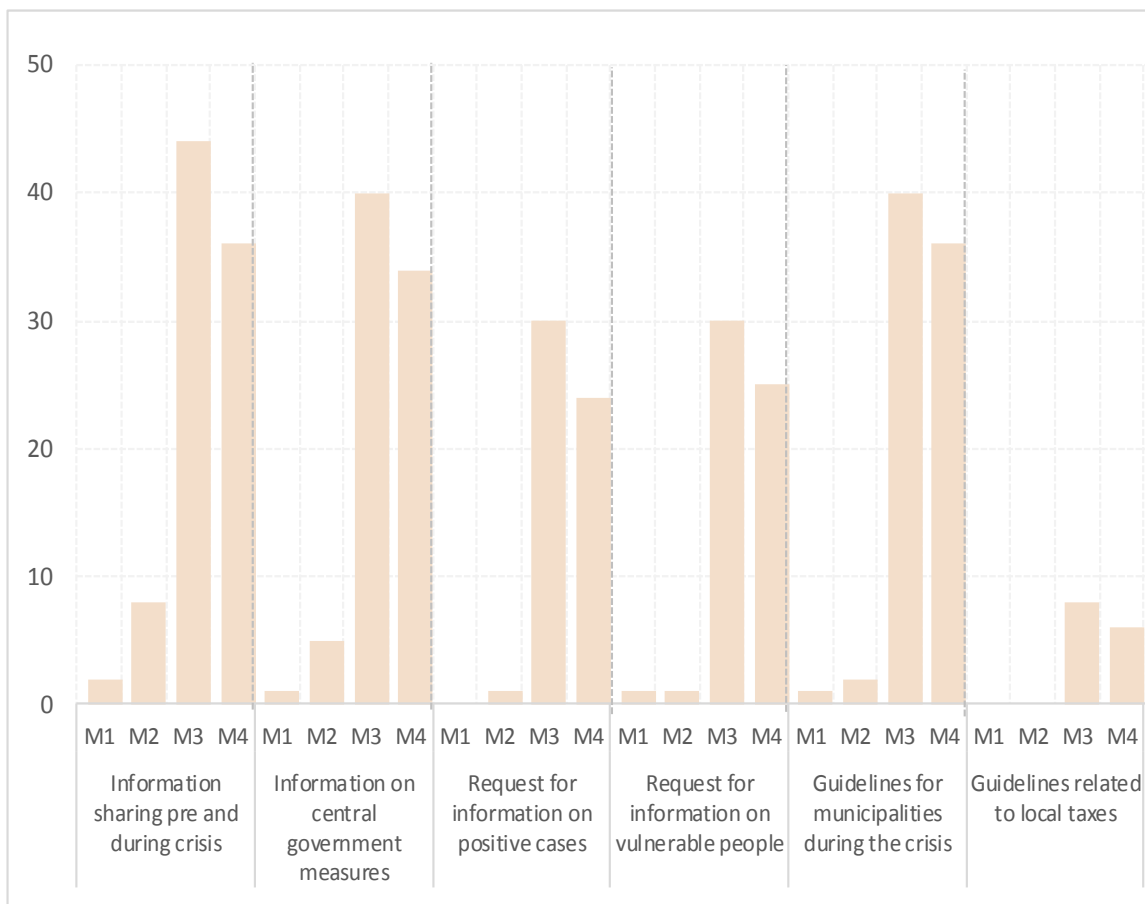
Number of communications for all municipalities per month per stakeholder	MoHSP		NACP		Other: Prefecture, ASLG, Health Inspectorate, Police	
	March	April	March	April	March	April
No. of respondents	48	43	47	43	38	36
Information sharing pre and during crisis	44	36	44	40	32	30
Information on central government measures	40	34	39	33	31	28
Request for information on positive cases	30	24	30	25	25	21
Request for information on vulnerable people	30	25	41	27	29	26
Guidelines for municipalities during the crisis	40	36	39	34	28	26
Guidelines related to local taxes	8	6	6	4	7	6

Guidelines on social net management	37	32	20	18	14	13
Guidelines for food supplies distribution	28	24	37	34	18	16
Cooperation for the establishment of volunteer groups	25	20	34	29	19	18
Cooperation for the transport of those affected	12	11	10	8	11	11
Cooperation for maintaining order and safety	13	11	25	22	28	26
Guidelines regarding the provision of services	32	30	27	25	17	16
Other	7	7	4	3	2	2

Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

Communication with the National Agency on Civil Protection shows similar trends to that with the MoHSP, being relatively weak during the months of January and February and reported at levels of 5 and 10 municipalities respectively for all suggested topics, as shown in chart 3. Following the emergency state declaration from authorities, vertical communication

**Chart 2.** Communication intensity with Ministry of Health and Social Protection (number of times the communication topic has been selected from municipalities)

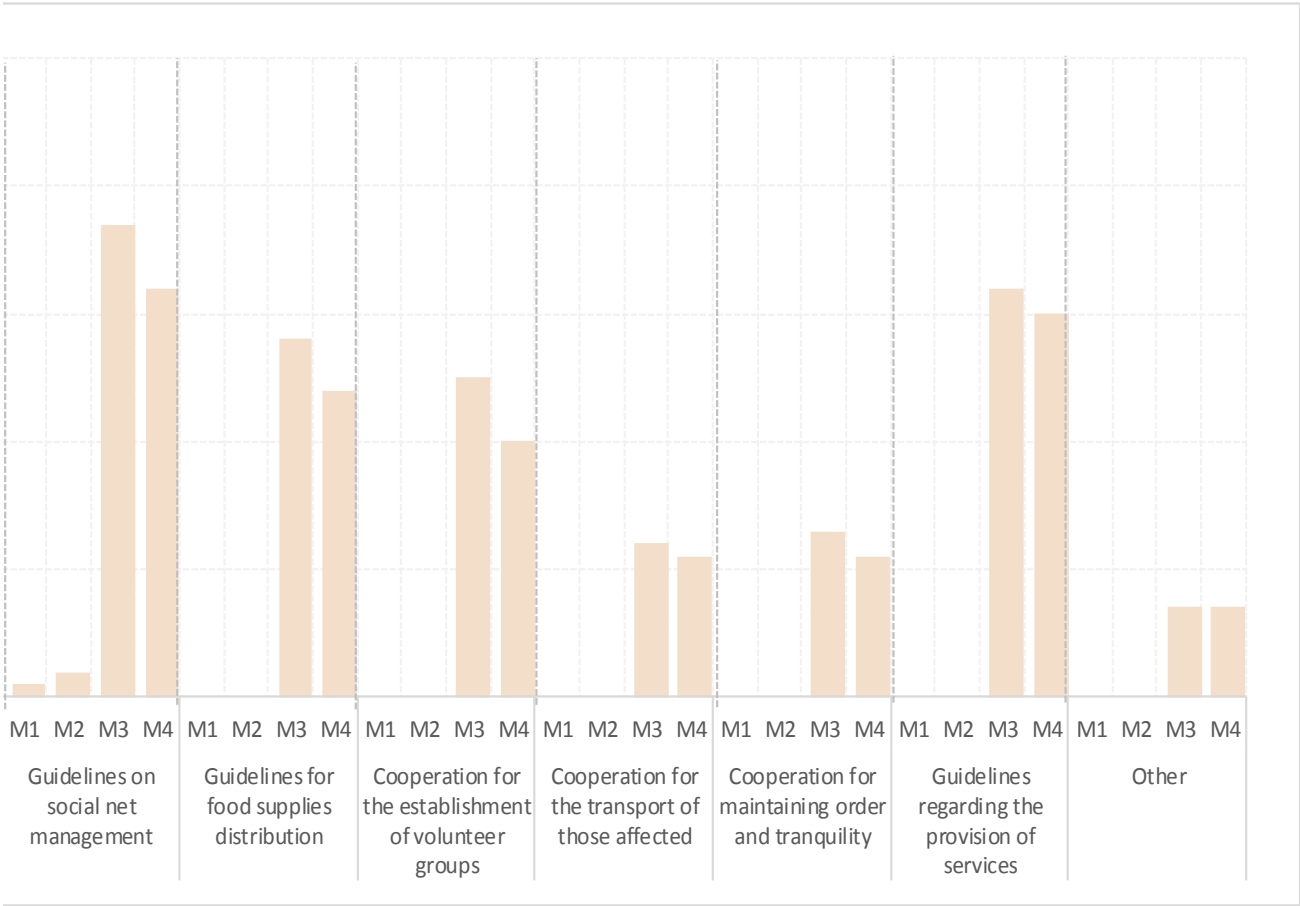


Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

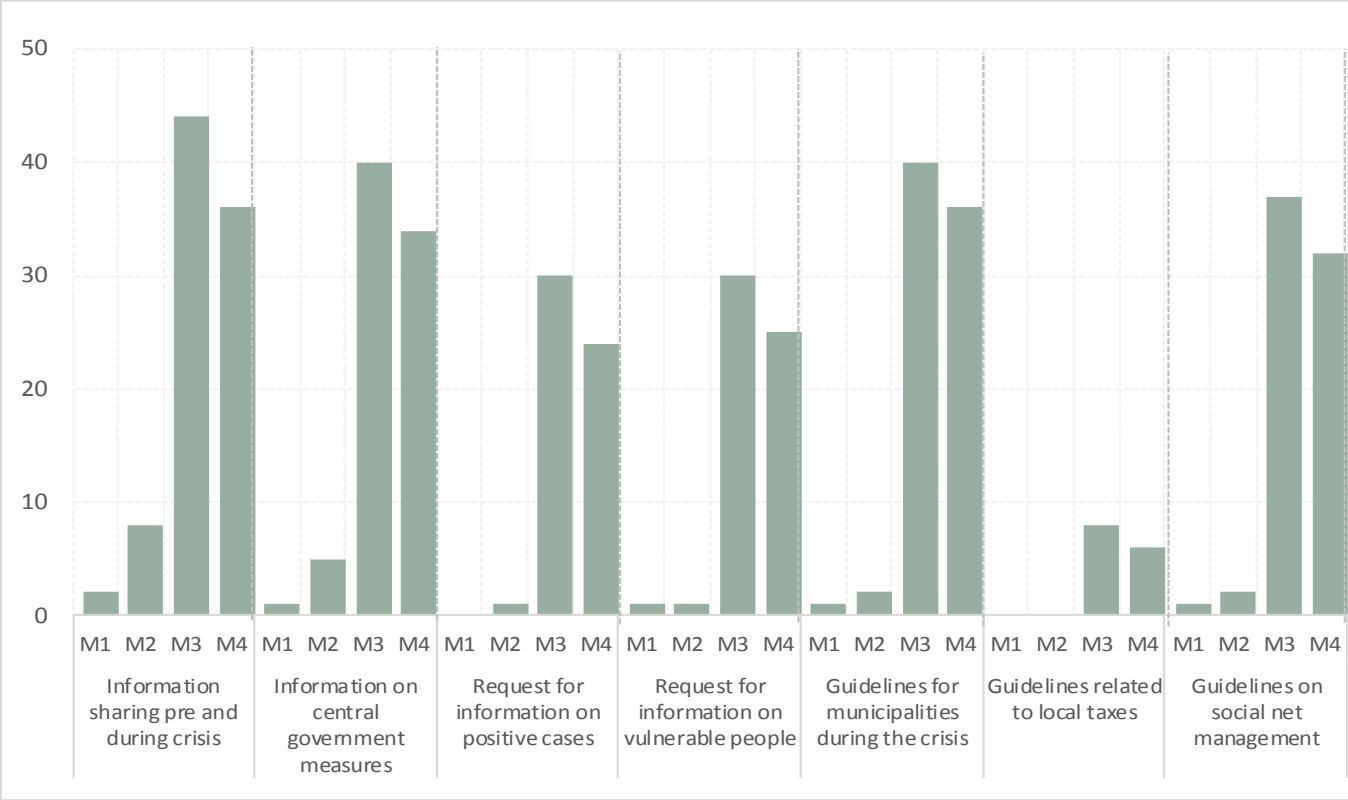


with NACP increased sharply with some slowdown reported for April. During the months of March and April, intensive communication concerned aspects such as: information sharing pre- and during the crisis, information on measures introduced by the central government, guidelines for municipalities during the crisis, guidelines on how to proceed with food supplies distribution and cooperation for the establishment of volunteering groups. Less frequent communication can be noticed on guidelines regarding local taxes and cooperation for the transport of infected people. It might be worth mentioning that the NACP is a new structure, yet to be fully completed with staff. Also, NACP has no training and procedures to respond in cases of pandemics, and it is so far mostly oriented towards the management of territorial natural disasters. Hence, a greater role of the Ministry of Health in COVIDS-19's case.

Communication with other actors such as the Agency for the Support of Local Governance (ASLG), the Prefect, State Police, Local Health Inspectorate (LHI) has followed similar patterns as communication with MoHSP and NACP (chart 4 and table 1). Communication was limited in January and February, to intensify during the next two months. Based on reporting from about 38 municipalities, the high frequency communication with these institutions was broadly related to: sharing of information on the situation pre- and during the crisis, information on measures introduced by the central government, request for information related to infections, requests for information related to vulnerable groups, and cooperation for maintaining order and safety. The communication is less frequent with regard to guidelines for local taxes, cooperation for the transport of infected people, and social net/assistance management.

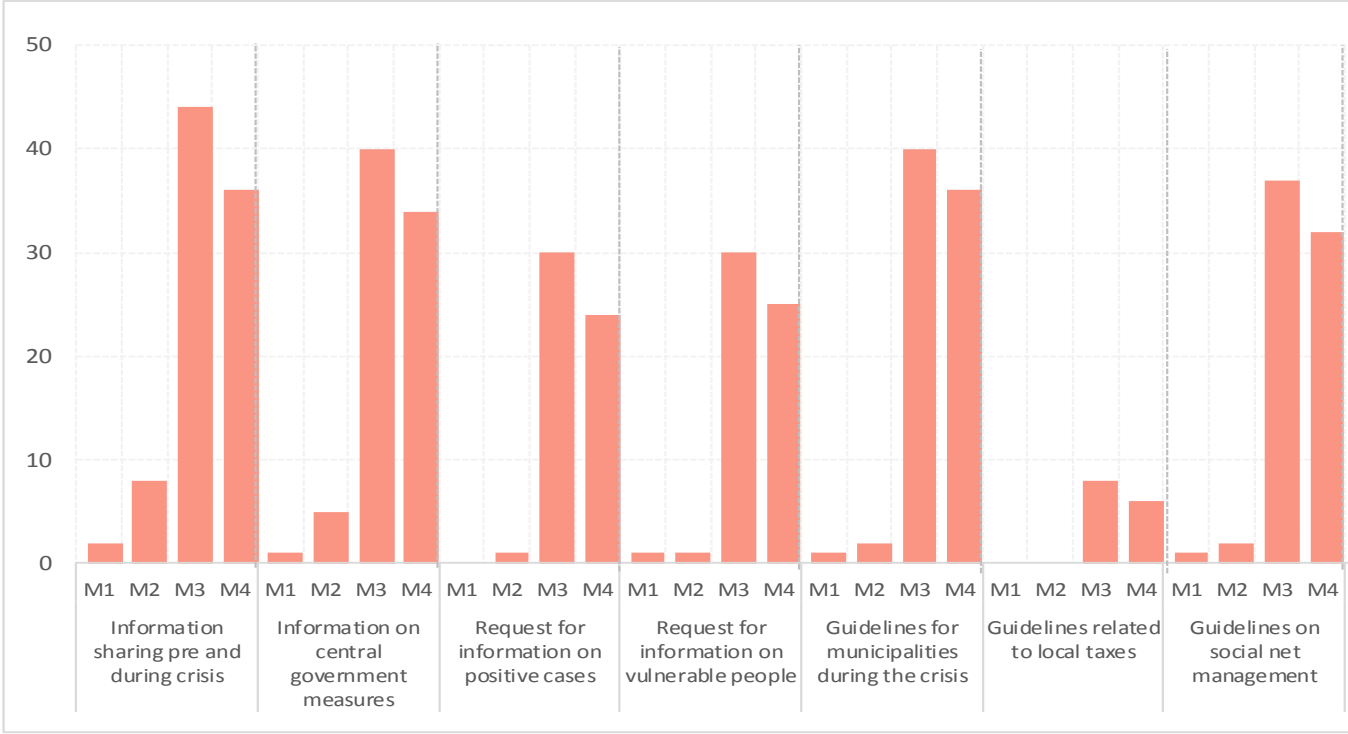


**Chart 3.** Communication intensity with Civil Protection (number of times the communication topic has been selected from municipalities)

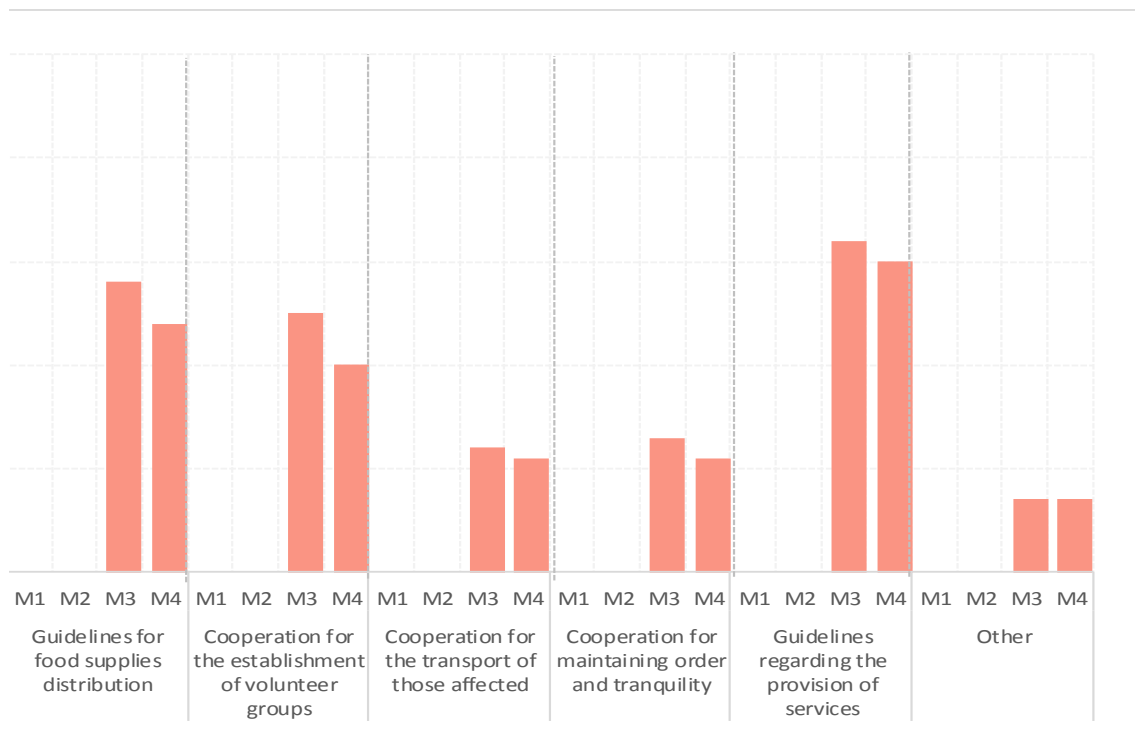
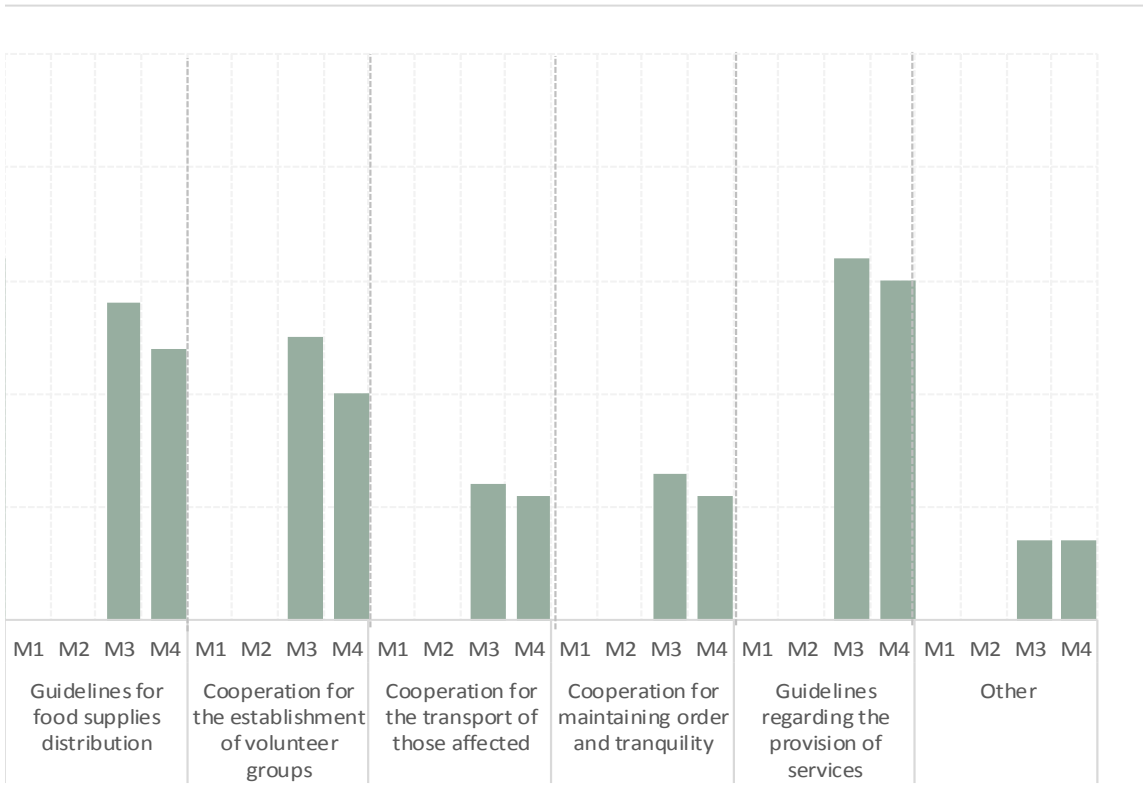


Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

**Chart 4.** Communication intensity with other actors, (number of times the communication topic has been selected from municipalities)



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020



Alongside the abovementioned categories of institutions, municipalities report having cooperated also with other institutions for COVID-19 crisis management. At local level, all municipalities had continuous communication and cooperation with the local State Police department, Prefecture, the local branches of the Albanian Postal Services, and with non-governmental organisations such as Caritas, Red Cross, and World Vision. At the national level, all municipalities had communication with the Ministry of Interior and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Other institutions municipalities communicated with, on a more scattered basis, include: Central Commission for the Assistance, Public Procurement Agency, Directorate of Hospital Service and Public Health, Treasury Offices, etc.

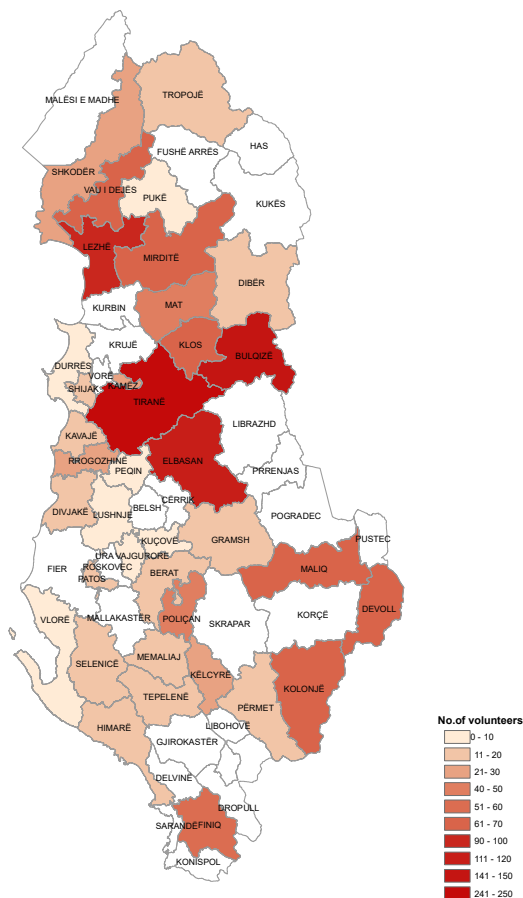
The sudden deterioration of the situation in regard to the increasing number of infected people and the containment measures applied by the national government, necessitated a prompt local response too, which was set in working plans and/or strategies, aiming at COVID-19 crisis management. In 93.5% of the cases (43 out of 46 responding municipalities), these working plans and/or strategies were coordinated and/or consulted with the National Agency for Civil Protection, and other institutions at central level. About 92% (or 46/50 responding municipalities) assert that such working plans and/or strategies are public and accessible to citizens. However, only 51% of the respondent municipalities (25 out of 49) declare to have adopted these strategies/action plans with a decision of the local council.

An important aspect in disaster management is the engagement of volunteers in providing response to the more exposed and affected. During the reported months of COVID-19 crisis management, 36 out of 50 municipalities (72%) report having established or having supported the establishment of volunteer groups. The volunteer groups were set with a Mayor's Order in 14 out of 34 municipalities that show the form of establishment; with Municipal Council Decision in 1 municipality; and without any decision in the remaining 19 municipalities. Some municipalities made use of the volunteers' groups working with international non-government organisation. In one case, the Municipal Council was informed about the establishment of the volunteer group and its activity. In some municipalities, voluntarism is a well-known and frequently used practice (youth, civil society organization, NGOs, social workers, unemployed nurses, citizens etc), while in some others it was a completely new practice.

Out of the total of 52, only 37 municipalities provided data on their volunteer group numbers. The figures range from a minimum of two to a maximum of 250, with about 1,524 volunteers in total, collaborating in different tasks, and an average number of 41 volunteers per municipality. The age of volunteers involved ranges from 21 to about 56 years old, with an average age of about 29 years old, based on the reporting of the 37 municipalities. The volunteers were engaged in several activities and offered assistance to categories in need as specified in the decision of Council of Ministers no. 236, date 19.03.2020, "On measures for offering assistance in residence to vulnerable categories during COVID-19". The categories in need included: persons with disabilities or living alone and not able to care for themselves; homeless families/individuals; families treated with social assistance and living in extreme poverty; orphan children and single mothers; Roma and Egyptian communities; people injured in different accidents and with no one to care for them. The volunteers had a role mainly in delivering food and non-food supplies at residence for people belonging to categories in need; assisting persons with impaired abilities and retired people with monthly bill payments, meals, purchase of medicines, cell phone recharges, etc. Also, volunteers helped municipal teams with the identification of families and individuals in need, provided psychological support, and informed citizens about the COVID-19 emergency.

From a spatial perspective, volunteers have offered their services within the territory under administration of the respective municipality (figure 2). In some of the municipalities the volunteers' intervention was driven by specific requests for assistance. In general, working hours of volunteers depended on the service provided, spanning usually during the first half of the day, and in any case, within limitation imposed by central government. The map of volunteers' distribution shows for concentration of the volunteering work in the central region Elbasan-Tiranë-Bulqizë; in the northern region of Vau i Dejës – Lezhë – Mirditë – Mat – Klos; and in the eastern part, Maliq-Devoll-Kolonjë. The figures do not necessarily correspond with the occurrence of infections in the territory. For instance, the three eastern municipalities, Vau i Dejës, Klos and Bulqizë have zero reported cases of COVID-19 infections. On the other hand, Tirana has the highest number of infected people.

**Figure 2.** Volunteers offering their assistance in municipalities during COVID-19 crisis



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

Besides the volunteers, there are also other civil society organizations and/or local businesses that have provided their support during the COVID-19 emergency in about 94% of the reporting municipalities (47 out of 50 municipalities). In general, local businesses have contributed with financial resources and/or providing food and non-food supplies, which were distributed to the categories in need by the working teams composed of municipal staff and volunteers. Different CSOs and the donor community also provided contributions (financial resources and food and non-food supplies) and were engaged also in direct distribution to categories in need. There are also professionals like nurses, psychologists and employees of municipalities, who individually played a role during the crisis, under the management of municipal teams.

## 2.3 Municipal response: measures and actions taken and/or supported at local level

Municipal response to the COVID-19 emergency was addressed through a series of questions, which aim at exploring the role and the measures taken from Albanian local governments in support of local constituencies, based on guidelines provided by central institutions.

Faced with an unexpected emergency situation, the municipal response was initially materialized into working plans and/or strategies for 51 responding municipalities, in full coordination with Civil Protection Unit in the respective Prefectures. Almost half of them, approved the working plan and/or strategy with a decision of the Municipal Council. The content of the working plan and/or strategy consisted of, among others:

- Identification of vulnerable categories in coordination with the central government, social services unit within the municipality, administrators of administrative units, incoming requests and reporting from citizens, establishment of a green phone number, and reporting from the co-governance platform (*Platforma e Bashkëqeverisjes*<sup>12</sup>).
- Supply and distribution of food items: (i) the financing of food supplies was covered through the municipal emergency fund and other own resources, state reserve, business community and individuals; (ii) the distribution process was carried out by the administrative staff of the respective municipality, administrators of administrative units, volunteers, and village headmen.
- Disinfection of roads and public open spaces which was carried out in 51 municipalities though the Utilities Company/Public Works Unit, Fire Protection and Rescue Unit, or outsourced to and implemented by the same company caring for waste management in the municipality.
- Ensuring that the lockdown hours were enforced, through continuous monitoring of the municipal police, complementary to the state police. Providing information and counselling for citizens to ensure social distancing rules were implemented in commercial and other public areas.
- Controlling and monitoring markets for distances among people, to avoid overcrowding, through: the introduction of horizontal and vertical signs or arranging schedules for the opening of markets; limiting trade within markets area only; establishing disinfecting tunnels; monitoring the compliance with working hours; and convincing traders to expose posters for the use of face masks and disposable gloves.
- The identification and reporting of potential infected cases within the territory of the municipality and reporting to responsible structures. Monitoring of returning emigrants, especially those from highly affected countries, disinfecting their residences and the surrounding area of affected people/families.
- Monitoring for vulnerable or affected residents in areas endangered by the risk of other natural disasters such as landslides, floods, etc. through the local responsible unit for civil protection. During the reporting period no cases of natural disasters were registered in all of the municipalities.

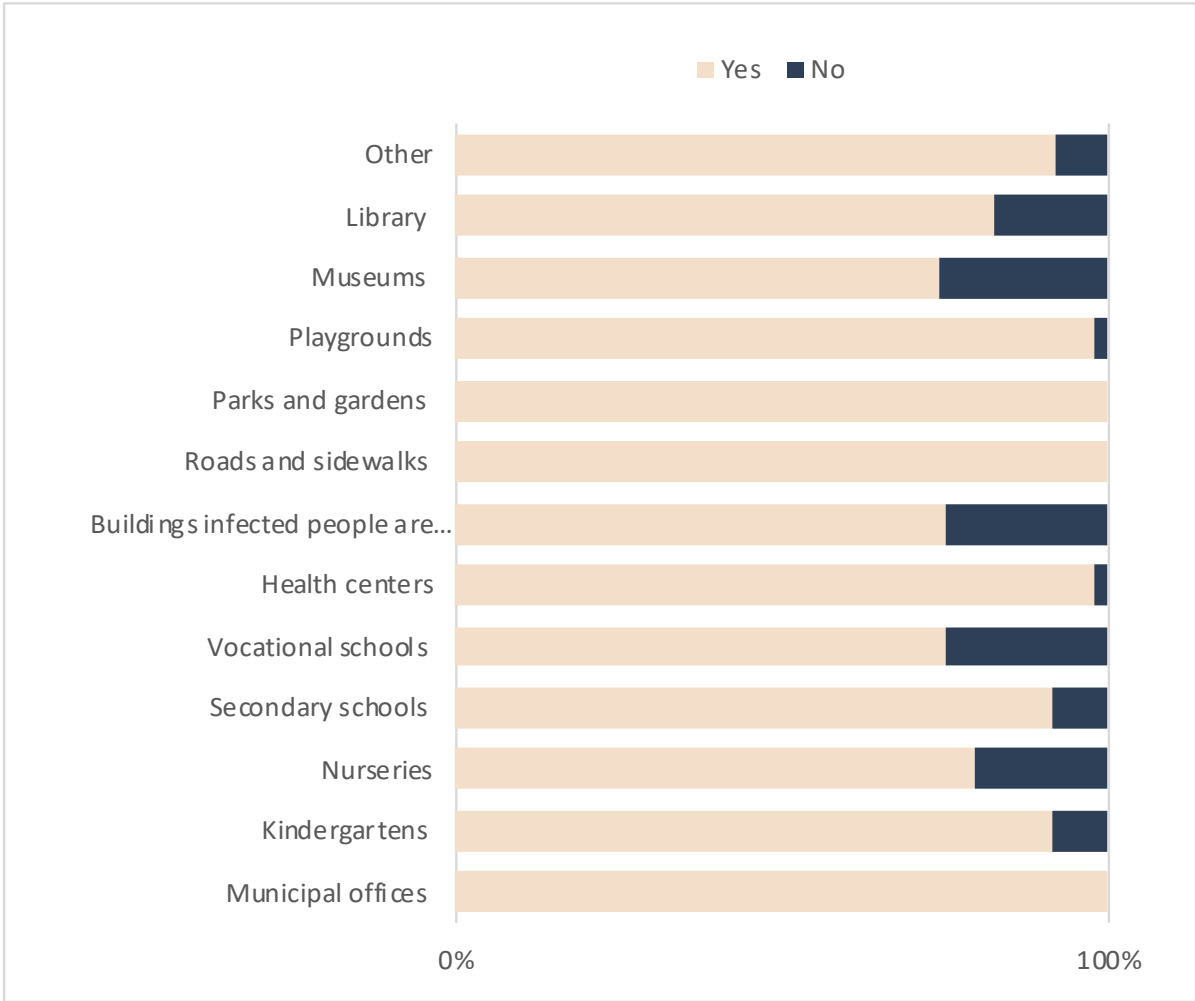
Municipalities affirm not having had a role in the transportation of infected people to Tirana, into the two hospitals designated for COVID-19 patients, while an information and awareness campaign on COVID-19 is reported only by the municipality of Tiranë.

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12. <https://shqiperiaqeduam.al/#notalme>

All 52 respondent municipalities disinfected spaces and objects in their respective territories (chart 5). More specifically, all municipalities disinfected the municipal offices, roads and sidewalks, parks and gardens; more than 90% of respondents disinfected health centres, playgrounds, kindergartens, secondary schools and other objects such as Water Utility and Fire Protection and Rescue premises, Post offices, stadium, high schools, local businesses venues, Energy Distributor Operator (OSHE), public transportation vehicles, cash machines etc. More than 75% of respondents affirm to have disinfected nurseries, vocational schools, residences of the infected people, museums and libraries. In average, the abovementioned public spaces and objects have been disinfected at the range of 95% – 100%, with a minimum level of 20% in a few municipalities and a maximum level of 100%.

**Chart 5.** Disinfection process of public spaces and objects



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

The distribution of food supplies to categories in need is another important action implemented by 50 municipalities. Categories in need are defined in the decision of the Council of Ministers no. 236/2020. In addition, the municipalities defined also some other categories, such as families in extreme poverty conditions, those injured in accidents individuals living in disadvantaged conditions, living alone retirees, Roma and Egyptian communities, single mothers and women with protection orders, orphans and children at risk. Figure 3 shows the municipalities that provided food supplies to the abovementioned categories.

**Figure 3.** Food supplies distribution by administrative units

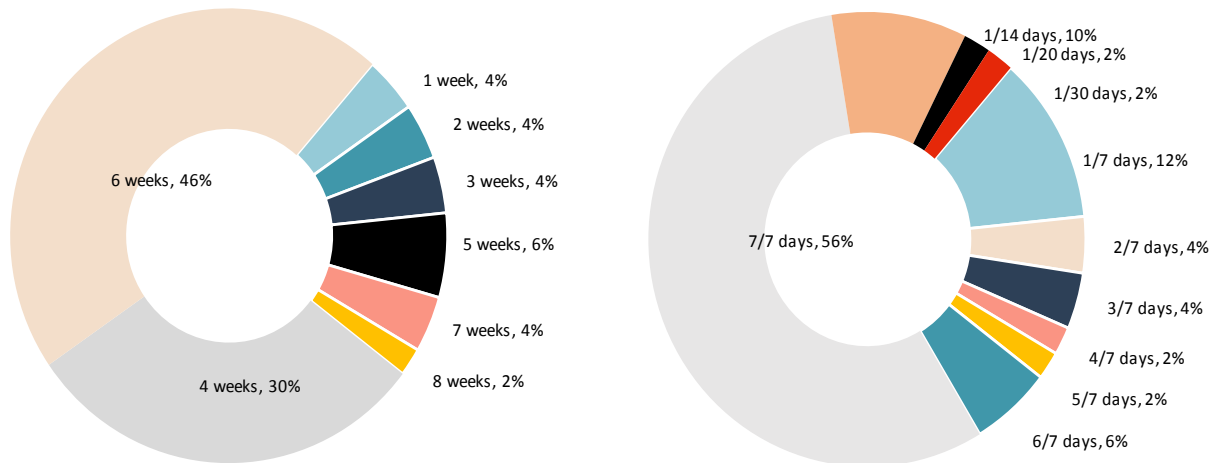


Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

Food supplies distribution frequency differs among municipalities, ranging from daily to monthly (once a month), and not necessarily to the same family. In 56% of municipalities food supplies distribution happens on a daily basis, and in about 30% of them distribution has a lower frequency ranging from once to six times a week. About 10% of the reporting municipalities affirm that food supplies distribution happens once in 14 days, usually on a request-basis.



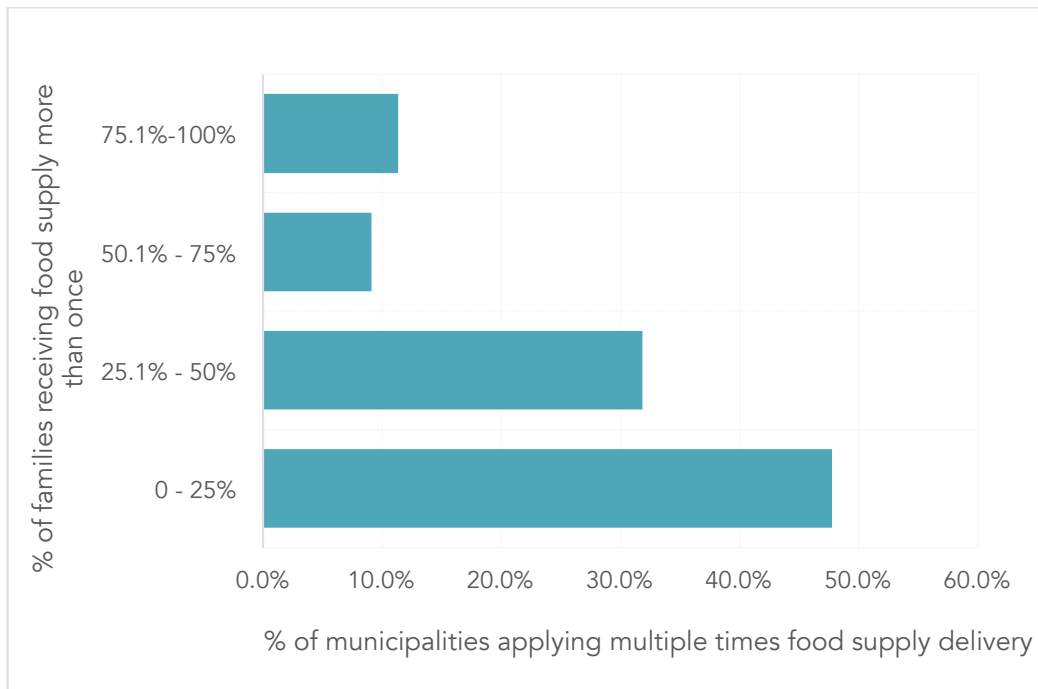
**Chart 6.** Duration (lhs) and frequency of food supplies distribution (rhs)



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

Food supplies distribution has a duration ranging from 1 week to 8 weeks, at the cut-off reporting date (left hand side chart). In 46% of municipalities the duration of food supplies distribution is 6 weeks, while for about 30% of responding municipalities is of 4 weeks.

**Chart 7.** Percentage of municipalities applying more than once the delivery of food supplies to supported families



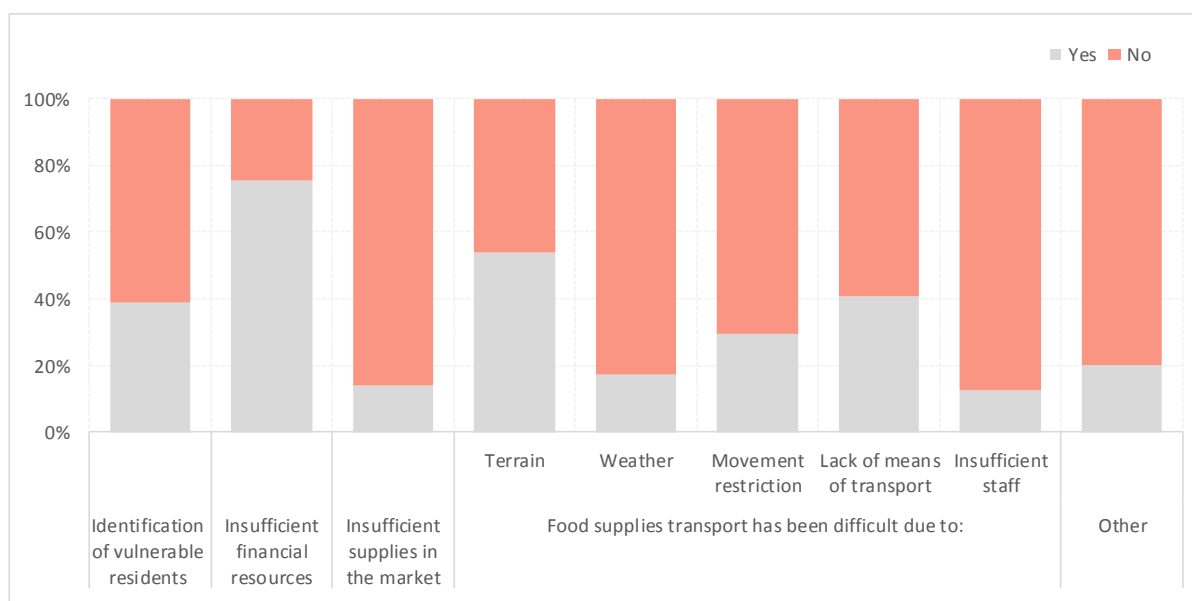
Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

Food supply distribution happened more than once for several families as shown in chart 7. Based on responses of 44 municipalities, about 47.7% of municipalities sent food supplies more than once in less than 25% of the supported families. About 25.1% – 50% of supported families received food supplies more than one time in about 31.8% of municipalities. In about 20% of municipalities, multiple time food supplies delivery happened in more than 50% of supported families.

## 2.4 Challenges: services, finances, vulnerability, socio-economic effects

The first problem faced by municipalities during the COVID-19 emergency was that of addressing the immediate needs for food and non-food supplies as assistance to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Responding effectively was not easy and several related challenges were outlined such as: insufficient financial resources to provide an adequate level of food supply (76% of responding municipalities); identification of vulnerable residents (39% of responding municipalities); difficult transportation of food supplies difficult due to terrain and lack of means of transport (54% and 41% responding municipalities, respectively).

**Chart 8.** Percentage of municipalities facing problems in food supplies distribution to the categories in need

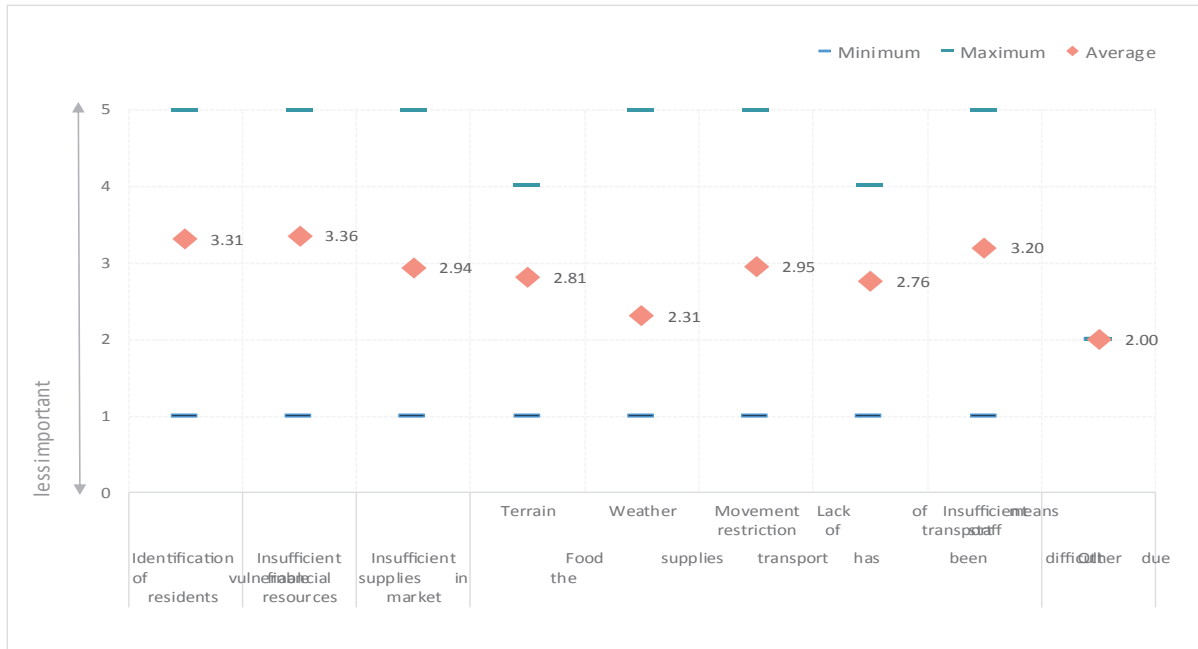


Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

In terms of assessment of the importance of the problem in relation to challenges (chart 9) faced by municipalities, insufficient financial means to provide food supplies was the most pressing issue for about 76% of the responding municipalities, scoring in average about 3.36 (assessment made on scale from 1 – less important to 5 – most important). The identification of vulnerable categories and running low of staff for the delivery of food supplies, are the next two most important challenges, scoring in average 3.31 and 3.20 respectively. On the contrary, whether conditions did not hamper the food supply distribution process, as reported by the municipalities.

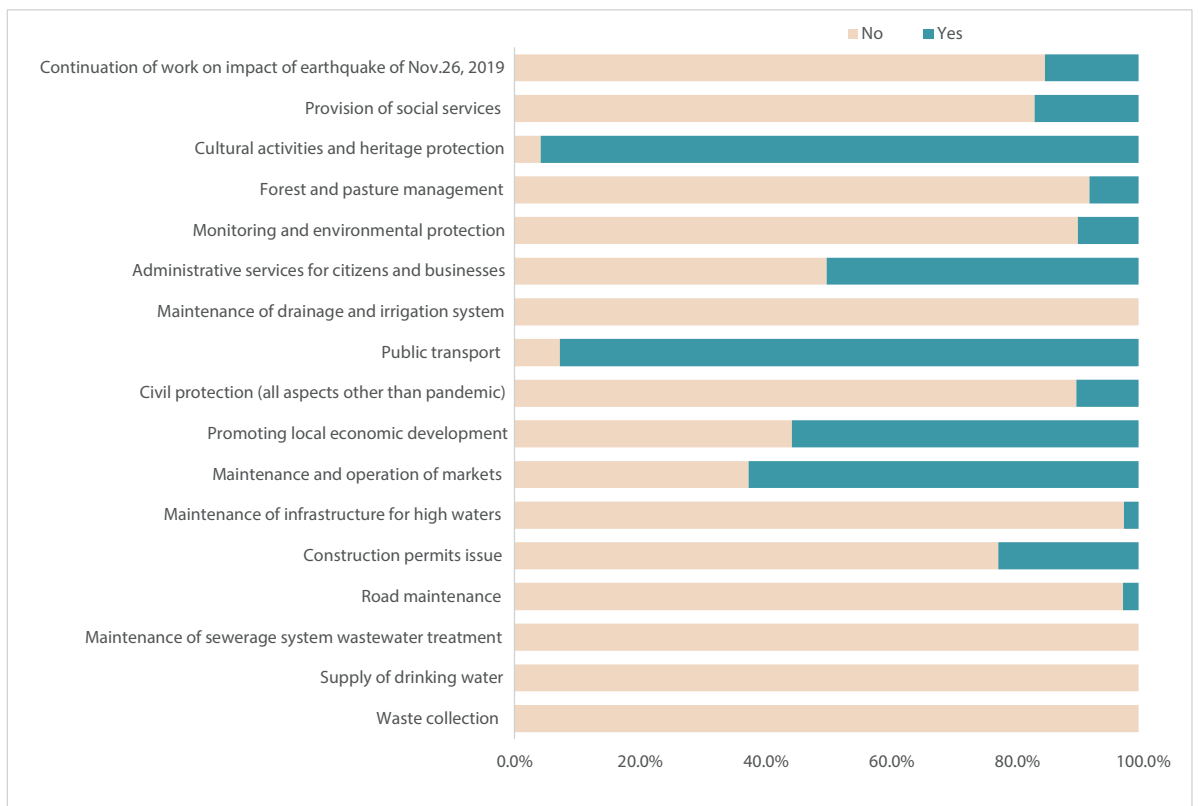
Alongside managing immediate needs of communities, the COVID-19 emergency entails several challenges in terms of local public services provision, local finances and socio-economic fragilities. The local public services as defined by the law no. 139/2015 “On local self-government”, were summarised in a list (chart 10) for municipalities to provide information regarding difficulties faced on their exercising since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in Albania.

**Chart 9.** Assessment of challenges in food supply distribution



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

**Chart 10.** Number of responding Municipalities facing challenges in relation to services provision during COVID-19



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

All responding municipalities do not encounter any problem in relation to services such as: waste collection, supply of drinking water, maintenance of sewerage system wastewater treatment, maintenance of drainage and irrigation systems. These functions continued to be exercised as usual. More than 90% of municipalities did not experience severe problems in the exercising of functions such as: road maintenance, maintenance of infrastructure for high waters, monitoring and environmental protection, forest and pasture management, civil protection (all aspects other than pandemic). In some cases, restriction on movement and general widespread panic acted as a constraint to service delivery.

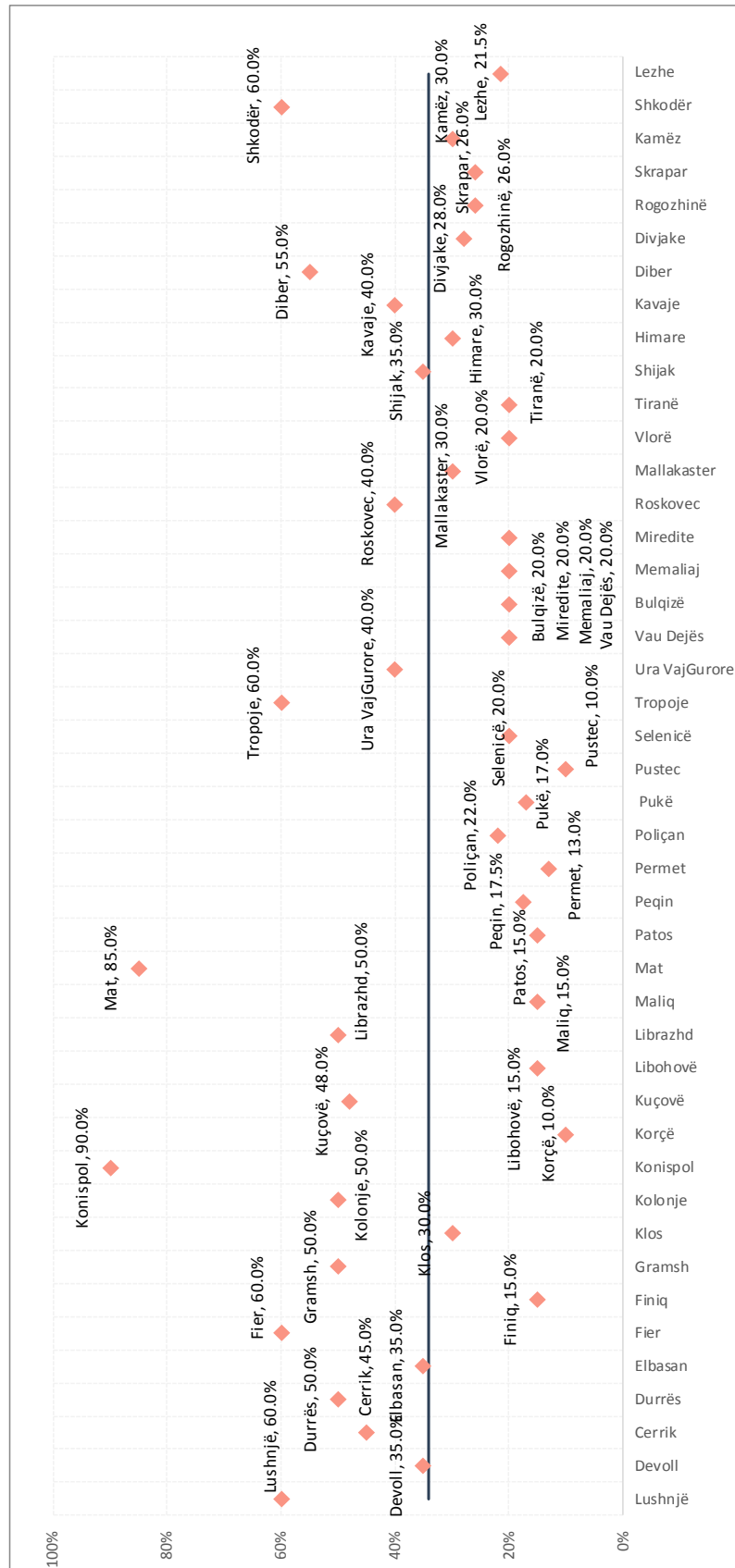
On the contrary, public transport was suspended since the beginning of the crisis and remained available only for medical staff transportation, in more than 92.7% of the responding municipalities. Similarly, cultural activities and heritage protection was suspended in 95.8% of municipalities. In some cases, the responsible units organised online cultural activities. In 83.3% of the responding municipalities the social protection work continued as usual. On the other hand, in 16.7% of them some obstacles were observed, such the need for additional human resources when shifting to online services; or low awareness or acceptance of elderly people about receiving home-based services, etc. Similarly, in 85% of municipalities that were affected by the earthquake, the work on addressing the consequences of November 26th was not interrupted, while in about 16.7% there are still needs for equipping families with temporary tents and damage assessment is suspended. The service of local markets' management also encountered several obstacles in about 62.5% of the responding municipalities, including a total or partial closure, or in the best case, adaption of open markets to function in compliance with legal provisions and continuous monitoring.

The response to COVID-19 crisis and adaptation of local public services provision to a new context, required more financial resources. At the time, local budgets and medium-term budgets were approved by Municipal Councils, enacted by the Prefects, and deposited in the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Given the pressure exerted by the situation, about 55.8% of responding municipalities (or 29 out of 52 responding municipalities), made changes to their initial budgets in order to increase expenditures for the support of vulnerable categories. The Municipalities had municipal council approvals to use the emergency fund and any other extra funds (re-allocations of budget lines) in order to finance emergent expenditures such as: buying food and non-food supplies, paying for disinfecting tunnels to be installed at market entrances, covering extra costs for the disinfection of public spaces and objects, and purchasing disposable materials for employees.

In addition to budget reallocation, 36% of the responding municipalities revised their fiscal packages of year 2020. Yet, about 64% (32 out of 50) of the responding municipalities did not introduce any changes to their respective fiscal packages, currently in force. The fiscal packages' changes are mostly related to:

- the **exemptions** from different taxes of several categories – persons with impaired abilities (those treated with disability payment); market fees and public space occupation fees for the months of the emergency; services fees like lighting, cleaning and greening;
- the **reduction** of the cleaning fee and building and agriculture land tax;
- the **postponement** of payments for local taxes and fees.

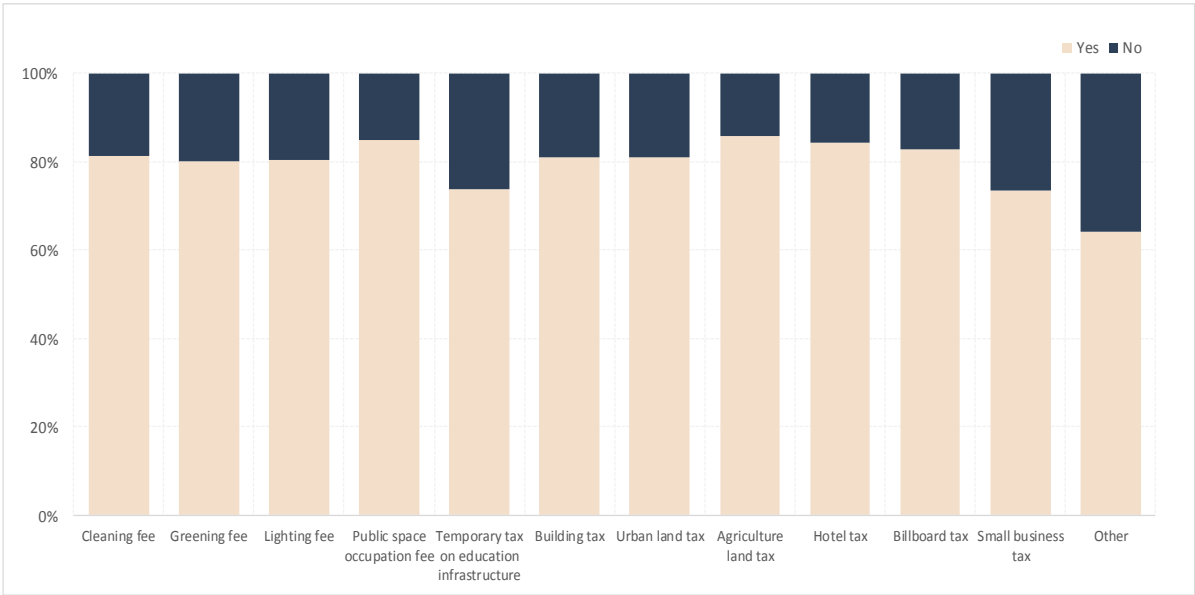
**Chart 11.** Expected collection rate of own source revenues versus plan, over the first four months of 2020



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

Municipalities affirm having reviewed their fiscal policies, in order to provide stimulus to the local economy and alleviate somehow the fiscal burden, during the surveyed period. This implies reduced local revenues. However, even when fiscal policies are not revisited, municipalities expect to encounter problems with revenues' generation due to residents and businesses' lower ability to pay. The responding municipalities expect to collect in average 34.1% of their respective planned own source revenues (taxes, fees and others) for the first four months of 2020, with a minimum level collection level of 10% and a maximum of 90%, as displayed in chart 11. Over 80% of municipalities expect a low collection rate vis-à-vis planning during the first four months of 2020 for: public service fees (cleaning, greening, lighting), public space occupation fee, property taxes (building, urban and agricultural land), hotel tax, and billboard tax (chart 12).

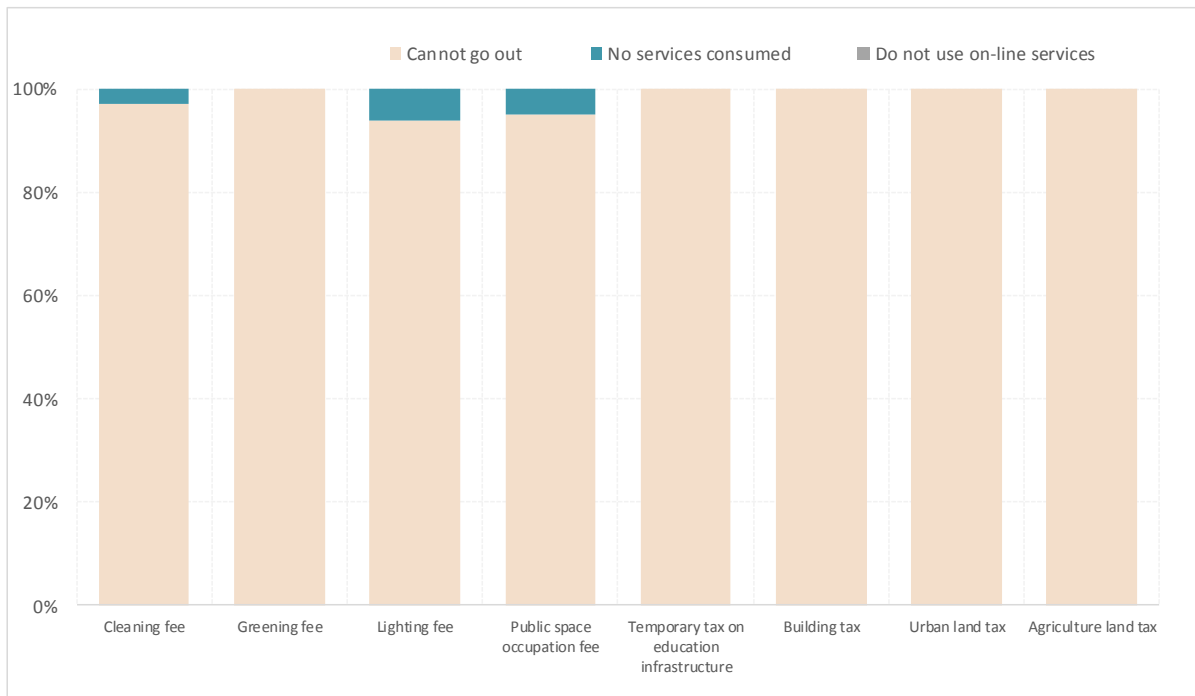
**Chart 12.** Municipalities (%) that expect to encounter problems in own source revenue collection



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

Problems with revenue collection are expected to be encountered in both categories of taxpayers: households and businesses (chart 13 and 14). In case of households, the restriction to movement introduced by central government is listed as the main revenue collection hindering factor in all responding municipalities. Meanwhile, there is an average number of 8 municipalities suggesting that collection problems will arise because families think that the necessary local services were not consumed (public lighting, cleaning, and public space use).

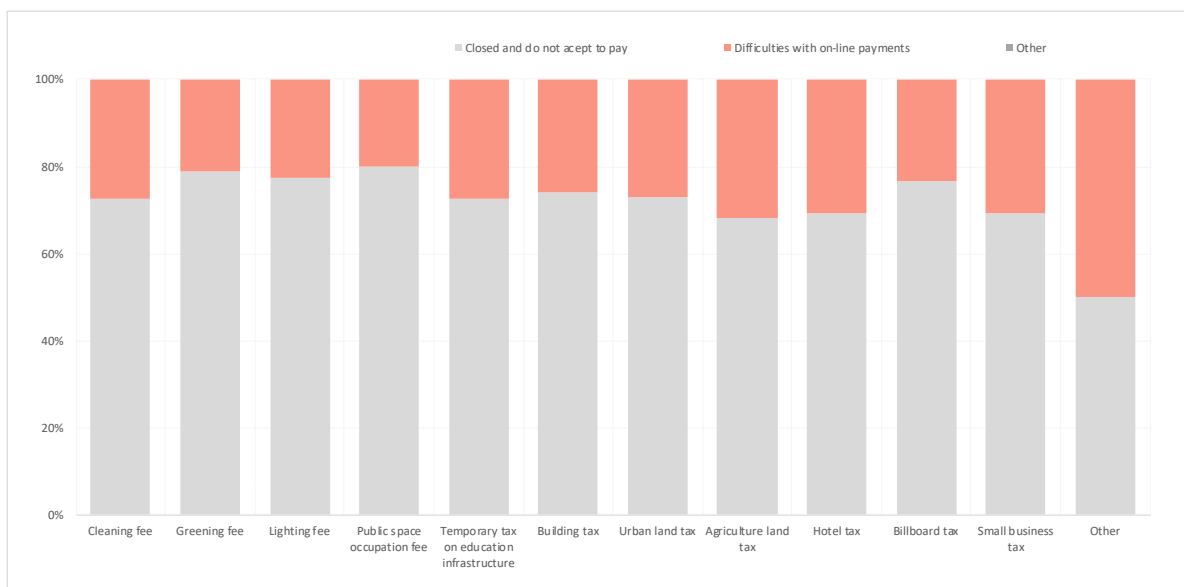
**Chart 13.** Factors hindering payment of local taxes and fees for households



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

Collection of revenues from businesses is also expected to be difficult. Based on municipal responses, in most of cases the closure of businesses and their lack of willingness to pay is the main factor cited. About 80% of the municipalities estimate that they will encounter payment difficulties from businesses regarding the public space occupation fee, and more than 70% of them see revenue collection as problematic for a collection of sources: cleaning, greening and lighting fees; temporary taxes on education infrastructure; and building and urban land tax. Only 28% of the municipalities think that difficulties with online payments will cause low collection rates for revenues.

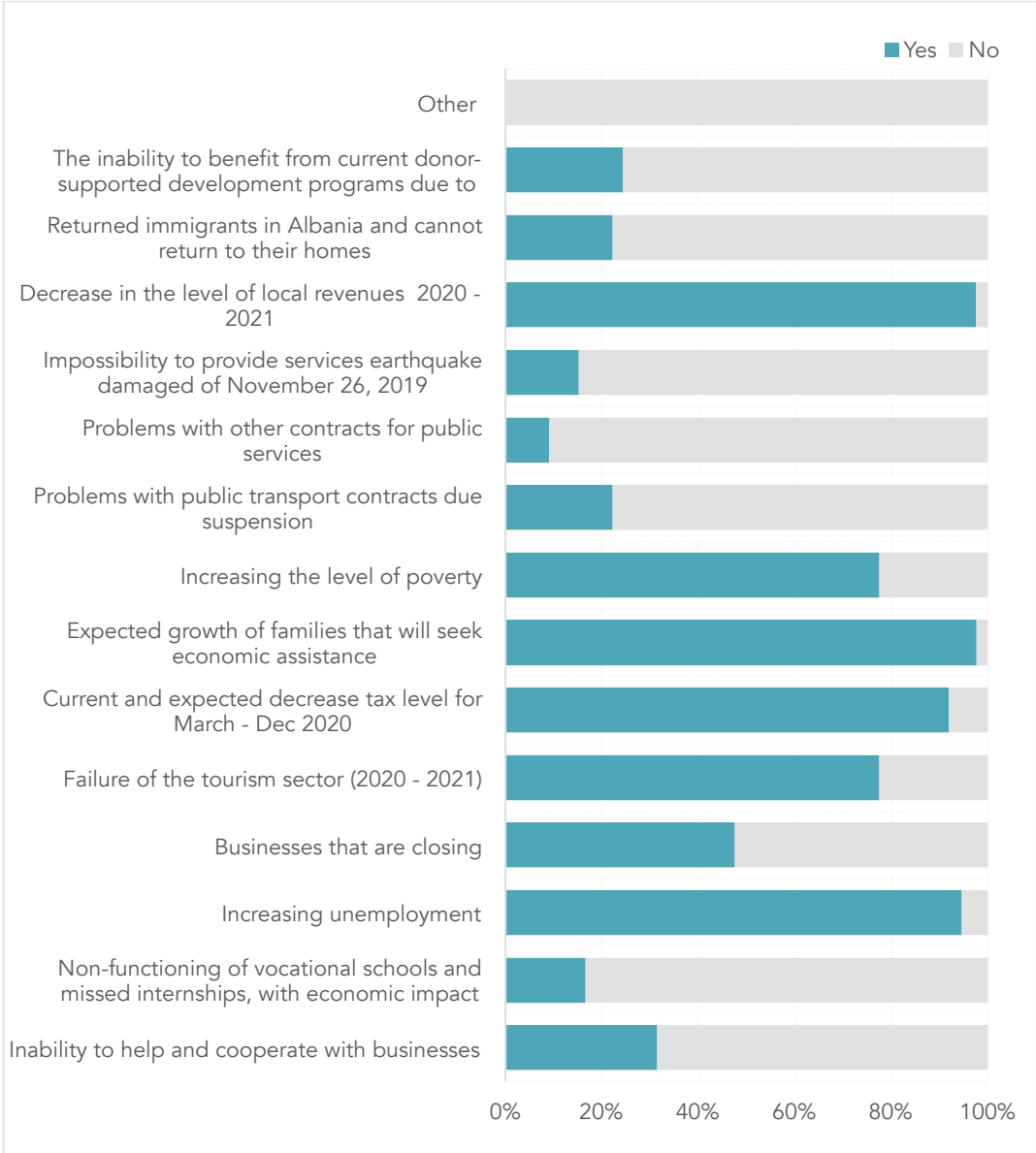
**Chart 14.** Factors hindering payment of local taxes and fees revenues for businesses



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

In addition to short-term financial challenges, municipalities list several other obstacles they will have to face in view of the COVID-19 crisis, and which are assumed to have temporal spill over effects, at least for the upcoming two years (chart 15). For more than 90% of the responding municipalities, a very important challenge remains valid: the level of local taxes applied and the expected revenues from own sources for the years 2020-2021 (estimated to have a downward trend). Some municipalities report that the contraction of local revenues is expected to reach about 50% compared to the planned levels.

**Chart 15.** Other short – medium term challenges [to be] faced by municipalities



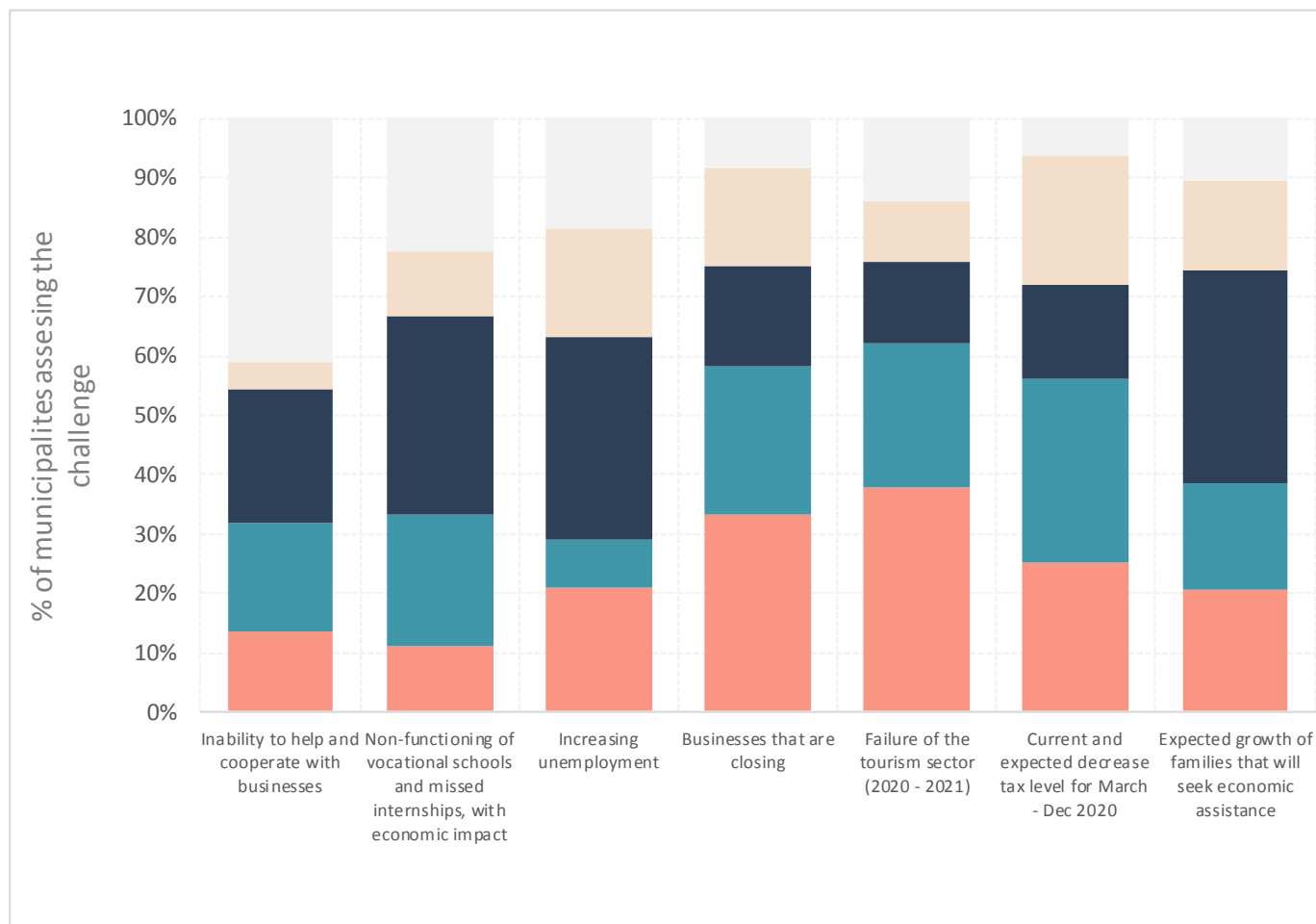
Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

Finally, in a context of less available financial resources and restricted movement, more than 75% of the responding municipalities affirm to have little room for manoeuvre in providing stimulus to the local economy and to the local businesses (especially in the tourism sector). Over 80% of the municipalities state that they expect to face an increase in: unemployment rate, number of families relying on economic assistance, and level of poverty. On the contrary, most of the municipalities (70% or more) do not consider as relevant challenges aspects



like: Albanian migrants who cannot return home due to the lockdown; lack of functioning of vocational schools and missed internships with economic impact; and management of existing contracts for local services (such as transport and other services). In terms of the importance of challenges (chart 16), failure of tourism sector, closing businesses, and decrease of local taxes are selected as first or second level challenges (hence the most problematic) by at least 55% of municipalities. On the other hand, cooperation with businesses and with contractors of public services are selected as 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> level challenges (hence the least problematic) by 45% and 65% of the municipalities respectively.

**Chart 16.** Assessment of challenges in a scale from 1 – most important to 5 least important challenge (frequencies for each challenge based on the assessment of municipalities)

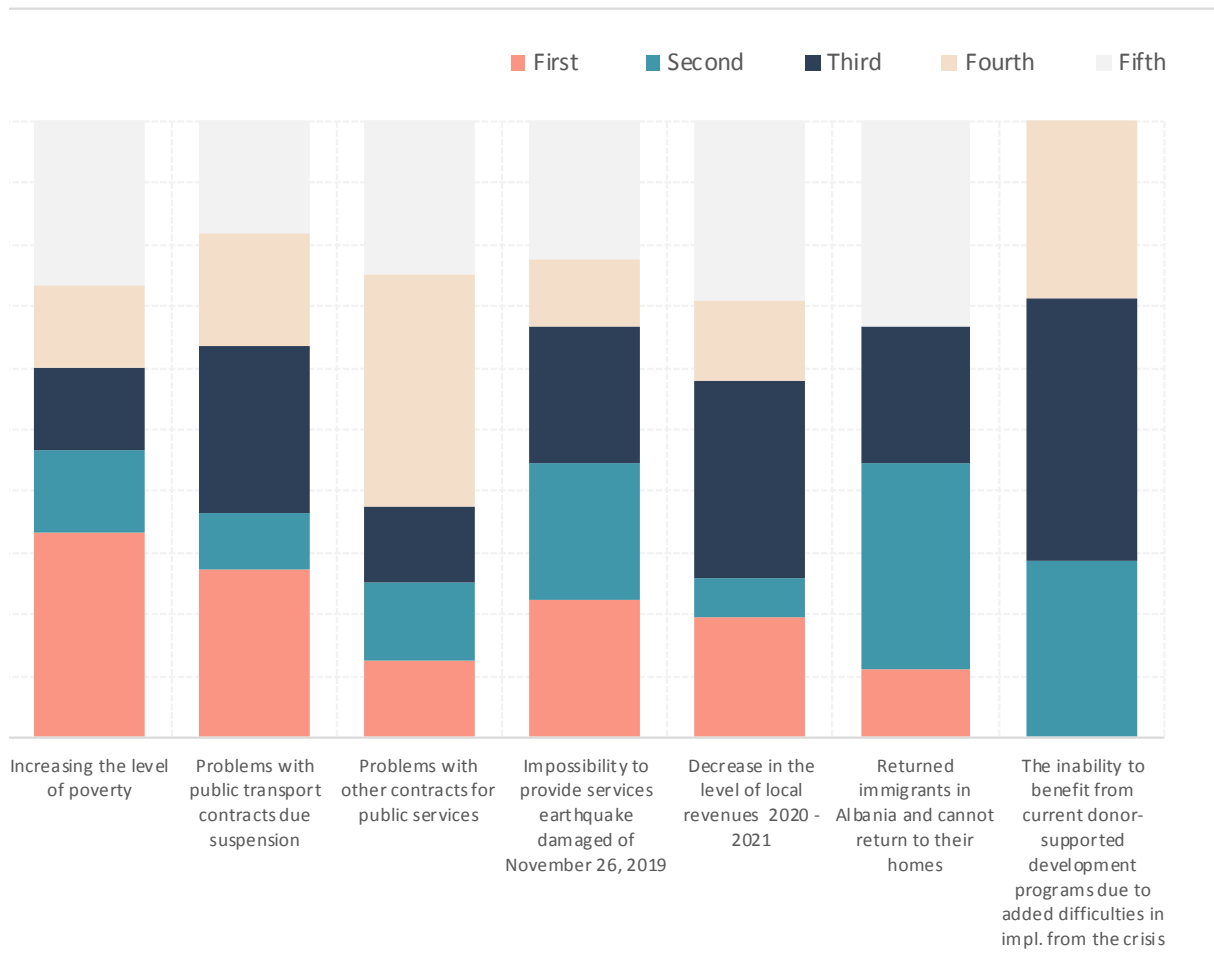


Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

## 2.5 Needs for the future

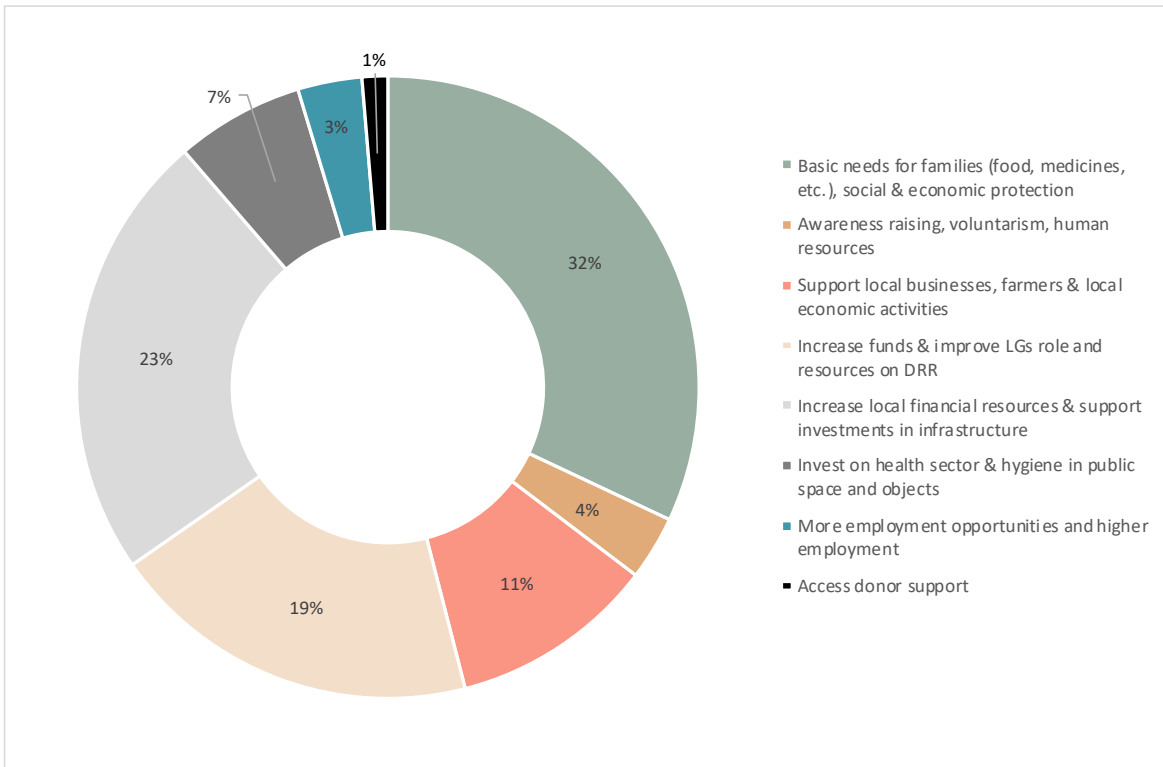
The Municipalities have stated also their most pressing needs for the short- to mid-term future (including the year 2021) in relation to the emergency situation, to potentially repeated waves of infections and to the recovery process. A total number of 150 needs was recorded and it is provided in a detailed table in Appendix 2. Because of the diversity in formulation and in order to analyse the information in terms of types of needs and number of municipalities choosing particular need, the data is organised into eight main categories as follows:

- Respond to basic needs of families on items such as food and medicines (as a more immediate response) and planning support or ensuring finances for social protection and economic assistance for the more vulnerable groups;
- Undertake awareness raising activities for the community, engage in or promote volunteering and improve human resources;
- Support local businesses, farmers and enhance local economic development activities in overall;



- Improve the overall Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) planning and response and increase the related funds;
- Increase overall local financial resources and invest on improving infrastructure;
- Improve the infrastructure of the local health sector and hygiene in public spaces and objects;
- Provide more employment opportunities, help those who lost the job to get access to jobs and increase the employment level in general;
- Access donor funds to help local communities.

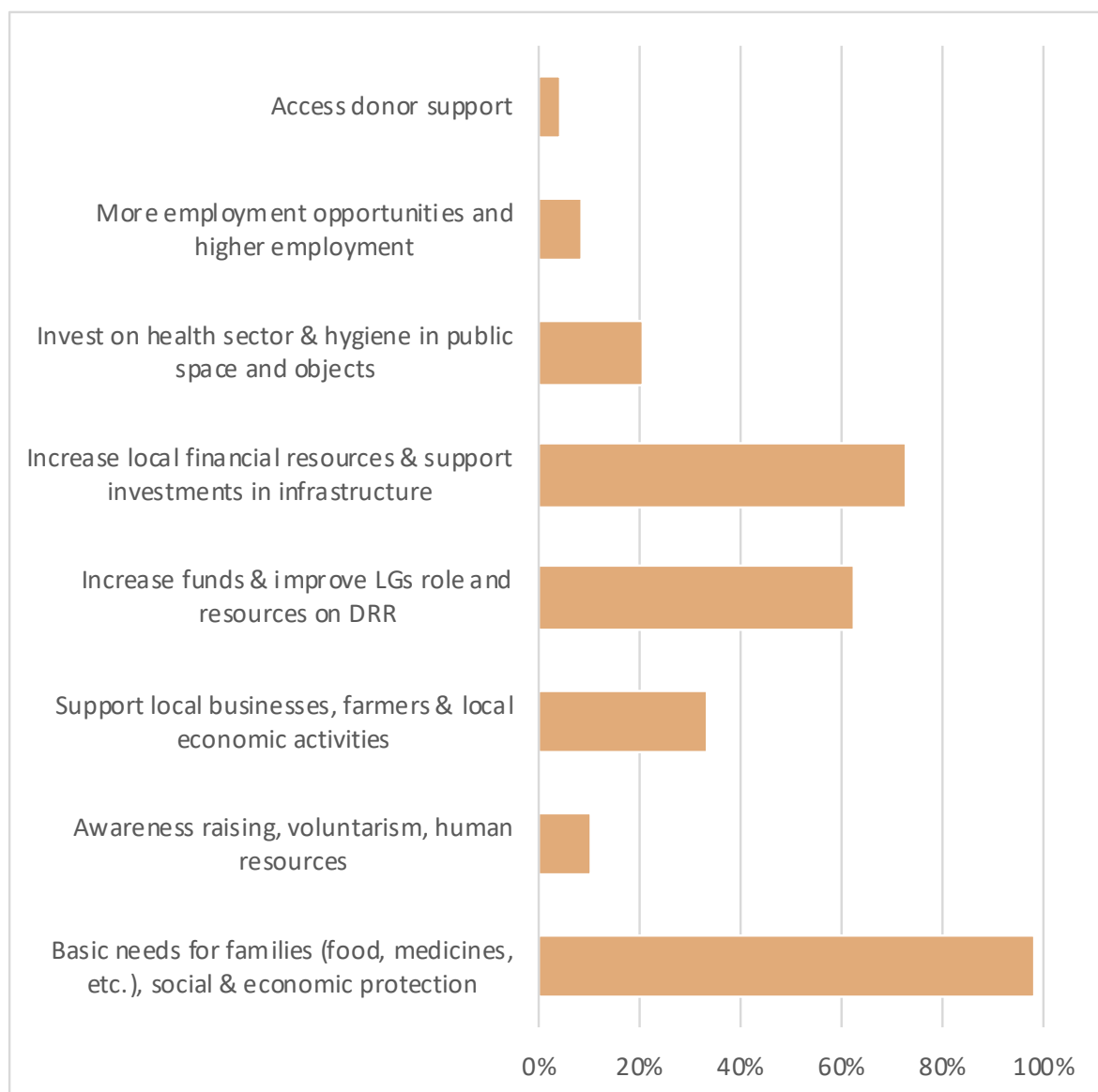
**Chart 17.** Local Governments' needs for the short- to mid-term future



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

Out of 150 needs, 32% belong to the category of providing basic support to vulnerable families and improving social and economic protection (chart 17). This is followed by the need for more financial resources (23%), and the need to increase of funds and technical quality in DRR (19%). Yet for the latter, only few municipalities request support in improving technical capacities and establishing databases or setting early warning systems; most of them emphasize the need for more financial resources at least to the level it is provided by law. Increased access to jobs and support to the local economy are both scoring lower (7% and 11% respectively). Hence, while municipalities recognize unemployment, closure of local businesses and curtailment of tourism sector as important challenges (30% of the total number of 305 challenges defined by local governments – categories defined in chart 15), when it comes to meeting needs, they chose actions the improve emergency response. However, this may be due to the time in which this questionnaire was administered, when most of the attention was focused on the immediate response and concern on local financial resources.

**Chart 18.** Municipalities (% to total responding LGs) that select each of the categories of needs



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

The number of municipalities that select at least once a need that belongs to each of the eight categories follows a similar trend as that of the incidence of needs per category (chart 18). Hence, 47 out of 48 responding municipalities have selected at least once the basic support for vulnerable families. This is followed by the need for more financial resources (73% of the municipalities) and the need for improving DRR (63% of the municipalities).

### 3. Discussion of findings

#### 3.1 Multilevel governance

**Cross-governmental communication and cooperation:** All municipalities have had continuous communication with the national government institutions during COVID-19 crisis. However, the communication was rather infrequent during January and February and very intense during the peak of the pandemic, in March and April. Yet most of the communication has consisted of provision of guidelines for activities that municipalities should engage with and on provision of information. It is however interesting to note that there has been some cooperation in regard to the establishment of the volunteer groups. From the perspective of vertical cooperation, the COVID-19 emergency governance was rather centralized. Municipalities played a role that entailed several tasks, but these were defined centrally. A national-government driven approach is often typical in dealing with pandemics, differently from other natural disaster events. In Albania, such a choice was related to the objective of the government in keeping a flat curve of infections and keeping the pressure on the public health system as low as possible.

Nevertheless, a whole-of-society approach is deemed to be more effective. This approach builds on intensive involvement of all state and non-state actors, where municipalities in particular take a stronger role (Schwartz & Yen, 2016). The Albanian municipalities did not contribute in matters of: transportation of infected people; administration in local and regional hospitals of cases who needed medical assistance; local strategies for use of public space and mobility; and tracking down of COVID-19 positive cases in the community. In a way, the decisions were taken nationally and implemented locally. The efficacy of the applied approach is yet to be assessed. However, there are two important findings to be made from a local perspective: (i) municipalities were unprepared and lacked local strategies and plans for the governance of infectious diseases outbreaks, or at least DRR documents where epidemics/pandemics are addressed as well; (ii) the implementation of a centralized approach places all responsibilities over the [national] public institutions. In the case of Albania, all of the pandemic preparedness and response was a national government responsibility and the public, as well as municipalities, were in a waiting position, expecting the national government to effectively manage it. While the national government bears a huge responsibility on the management of such disaster events, an efficient approach is that where the whole-of-society mobilizes into a collaborative effort (Schwartz & Yen, 2016; Bell et al., 2009), therefore ensuring a fair process the necessary quality of the outcome.

**Voluntarism and cooperation with local non-state actors:** Albanian municipalities can establish or support the establishment of volunteering groups on the basis of power given to them by the law 139/2015, "On Local Self-governance" and by the law 45/2019, "On Civil Protection", and by referring to the law 45/2016, "On voluntarism". However, the absence of bylaws on voluntarism in any of the three cited laws makes it more difficult for municipalities to work with volunteers and take responsibilities in their engagement. Yet, being in a very complex and unprecedented situation, such as COVID-19, several municipalities relied on volunteering work from civil society and young communities, to help the more exposed and the more vulnerable. In a way, the decisions taken by the government during the period March-April were of use to municipalities, to facilitate potential voluntarism processes. For instance, on March 19th, 2020, the Council of Ministers approved the decision no. 236 "On measures for offering assistance in residence to vulnerable categories during COVID-19". Voluntarism is not the focus of this decision, yet the latter defines how support

can be provided at home and allows for volunteering groups to participate in delivering it. The data reported by municipalities are encouraging, but still low compared to the need. Furthermore, the information is territorially asymmetric. Thus, 15 out of 52 municipalities do not provide data on the number of volunteers and sometimes there are as few as 2 volunteers per municipality, and in other cases over 100. This shows not only a different situation across local governments, but perhaps also a different understanding on voluntarism, and lack of information on independent initiatives. It can be assumed also that some municipalities cooperate more with volunteering groups and are better informed on their work, while others are distant to such processes.

In addition, besides organised voluntarism, there have been several cases of local businesses, civil society and community-based organisations, donor institutions, as well professionals (nurses, psychologists, etc.) which provided support to municipalities and to various segments of the population. Municipalities are the best suited public bodies to have information on such initiatives and most importantly, to facilitate them and cooperate with people who are able to help during disaster events. Most probably more could have happened in this regard if preparation steps started as of January-February and if the cooperation with local non-state actors was given more emphasis on a national scale.

**Decentralization and resilience:** In Albania, healthcare services are a national government responsibility, with a limited role from municipalities on primary health care services. In article 23, paragraph 13 of the law no. 139/2015 "On local self-governance" defines the competences of municipalities on *"the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of primary healthcare buildings and the organization of educational and promotional activities at the local level, which are related to the protection of health, as well as to the administration of centres and other services in the field of public health, in the manner prescribed by law."* The financial data ([www.financatvendore.al](http://www.financatvendore.al)) confirm that health care services are exercised almost exclusively at the central level and municipalities have a marginal role. Thus, the municipal expenditures in health services account for about 0.1% of total public healthcare spending; 0.0031% of total municipal expenditures; and about 0.00016% of nominal GDP in year 2019.

Yet municipalities may play an important role in disaster risk reduction, including infectious diseases and biological risks, by addressing other aspects such as: organization of volunteering groups; intensification of social protection and economic aid services for vulnerable groups; management of urban transportation and mobility; improvement of open public space (roads and squares and parks) as spaces for both evacuation (when needed) and refuge and comfort; support to local businesses and farmers so that the local economy is not severely hit by the effects of the disaster event; and awareness raising among citizens and communities so that preparedness, response and recovery steps are achieved not only within public institutions, but at the level of the society. Dealing with all these aspects will build the resilience of municipalities and local stakeholders.

Currently, local resilience is rather weak in Albania due to legal, institutional, financial and technical factors (Toto, 2020). First of all, local governments have weak civil protection departments (both in number of staff and technical capacities) and modest financial resources (the emergency fund and resilience expenditures from other budget items). Second, municipalities have yet to draft and adopt, as defined by law, local risk assessments, disaster risk reduction strategies, and civil emergency plans. Such documents should be supported financially and the respective expenditures should be foreseen in the annual and mid-term budgets. These institutional measures and the awareness raising among citizens would place municipalities in a leading and proactive position, hence guaranteeing their

autonomy and influential role in the management of pandemics too. Third, so far, the horizontal coordination among municipal departments in terms of enabling local resilience is missing or is rather shallow. In general, civil protection is characterised by a fragmented sectorial approach, and the departments are brought together only when the crisis occurs. Finally, there is no inclination to date to mainstream resilience in all municipal work and functions, particularly in infrastructure provision, public spaces management, and spatial planning and land development.

**Local public finances:** are expected to be hit hard on the downward side during 2020-2021. Structural weaknesses in local public finances were noticed immediately after the onset of the pandemic, where municipalities found themselves financially unprepared to cope with the emergency. During the emergency, municipalities were in the forefront of providing support for vulnerable citizens' categories, to fulfil their basic needs in food and non-food supplies, as well as adapting their way of working in terms of local services delivery. Although the latter were addressed (more than 90% of municipalities affirm that no particular problems were encountered, except for transport and cultural activities which were suspended), yet financial resources to face the growing needs of the community were insufficient, particularly for delivering food and non-food supplies (more than 75% of the responding municipalities affirm so). Faced with such a challenge, upon decisions of municipal councils, municipalities made use of the emergency funds, reallocated resources from other budget lines (or used carryovers from previous year), as well as received contributions from national and international donors.

Nevertheless, once the first effects of the health crisis were somehow overcome, the second-round effects in terms of economic, social and financial crisis have to be planned for and addressed. The Albanian economy has come to a halt and the future prognosis is not optimistic, suggesting for low business activity and rising unemployment in the country. At subnational level, the deterioration of the economic situation has important implications both, financially and socially. Based on reports from municipalities, the average collection rate for local revenues is expected to be about 34.1% during the first four months of 2020, as compared to planned revenues, with a minimum level of 10% and a maximum level of 90%. Revenues from local own sources accounted for about 31% of total financial resources based on data for 2019 (Co-PLAN, 2020). If a collection rate of 34.1% is to be extended to the whole year 2020, municipalities could experience a substantial loss of about ALL 16.6 billion (assessed on the data for own source revenues realized during 2019).<sup>13</sup>

Also, about 36% of the responding municipalities revised their fiscal packages of year 2020, including measures such as exemptions from different taxes for several categories (especially those living in disadvantaged conditions), reduction of local fees and postponement of payments for local taxes and fees. There is also a moderate positive correlation (at 52%) between the closure of businesses as a challenge for municipalities and the steps taken by municipalities to revise the fiscal package. All of these measures and the expectations about collection rates of local revenues, shape a pessimistic scenario for municipal finances. Alongside own source revenues, other sources of revenues are expected to experience negative developments during 2020 as briefly described in table 2.

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13. Source of data: [www.financatvendore.al](http://www.financatvendore.al)



**Table 2.** Financial impact of COVID-19 on subnational finances

1. Own source revenues	<b>Negative</b>
1.1 Taxes	<b>Slight decrease</b> Revenues from local taxes were driven by the performance of two main taxes during the last three years: infrastructure impact tax (IIT) and property taxes (PT). Construction is among the sectors that were less impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and data show for an increasing number of building permits (especially in the municipality of Tiranë and other large municipalities). PT marked no major changes during 2019, and similarly, no major changes in their level are expected during the year 2020. mall business profit tax, hotel accommodation tax and other taxes are expected to register a negative performance during 2020. Nevertheless, such a negative effect might be countered balanced from IIT (in a few municipalities) and from PT in all municipalities.
1.2 Fees and charges	<b>Negative</b> Revenues from services fees (waste management fee, lighting and greening fee) are expected to be on the downward side, as also reported by the responding municipalities. Revenues from public space occupation and use fee, are expected to be on the downward side too, while no major changes are expected for other fees and charges.
1.3 Asset management	<b>Negative</b> Revenues from asset management are expected to perform negatively. This is mainly due to uncertainties posed on the use of assets and the failure of businesses and economic activities.
1.4 Other administrative charges	No major changes expected in other administrative charges.
2. Unconditional transfer	<b>No changes</b>
2.1 General	No negative changes, and based on MoFE communication, the general unconditional transfer is expected to increase both in 2020 and 2021.
2.2 Sectoral	No negative changes, and based on MoFE the sectorial unconditional transfer is expected to increase both in 2020 and 2021.
3. Shared taxes	<b>Negative</b>
3.1. 25% of the revenues from the annual used vehicles tax	Negative developments are expected due to potentially lower revenues from this tax;
3.2. 97% of property ownership transfer tax imposed on individuals, physical and juridical persons;	No major changes expected, since the construction sector has continued to function and no major impact is noticed. Yet, fewer personal revenues can affect the demand for new buildings.
3.3. 5% of revenues from the mineral rent	Negative, broadly due to negative signals from international markets.

3.4. 2% of revenues from the personal income tax	Positive, if the tax credit that is not distributed since the entry in force of law no. 68/2017 "On local self-government taxes" is going to be shared with municipalities. Based on a preliminary assessment there are about ALL 1.6 billion that should have been distributed to municipalities during 2018-2019. On the other hand, expectations on PIT for the year 2020 are negative, since this tax is strongly linked and sensitive to overall economic development, which seems being on pessimistic curve.
4. Conditional transfers	No major changes, if central government will keep the same policy regarding social transfers and investments (including RDF).

Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

To conclude, the reporting municipalities have used all emergency funds planned for year 2020 including other available own resources, such as carryovers or budget reallocations. The expected contraction of local revenues collection rate over the first four months of 2020 and the pessimistic economic development scenario for the rest of the year, expose municipalities to vulnerabilities and added pressure for the provision of necessary support to their constituencies. This is particularly important in the case of a potential second wave of the COVID-19 outbreak and in view of other [potential] natural disasters (floods, wild fires and earthquake/s). Similarly, incentivizing the local economy in a context, where unemployment is increasing and business closures are occurring, it will be a highly challenging task for municipalities during the second half of 2020 and during 2021.

**Capacities:** the fact that only 8 municipalities had less than 50% of their staff in office, may imply both, a rather low level of use of technology for providing municipal services online, and the decision of fewer municipalities to take a more conservative approach and deploy less staff in the office, on a rotation basis. In fact, these eight municipalities differ greatly among them in terms of population size, urbanisation rate, geographical specificities, and socio-economic conditions. Therefore, it is not possible to come to the conclusion that these municipalities were better prepared compared to the other ones in terms of human and technological capacities to respond to the situation.

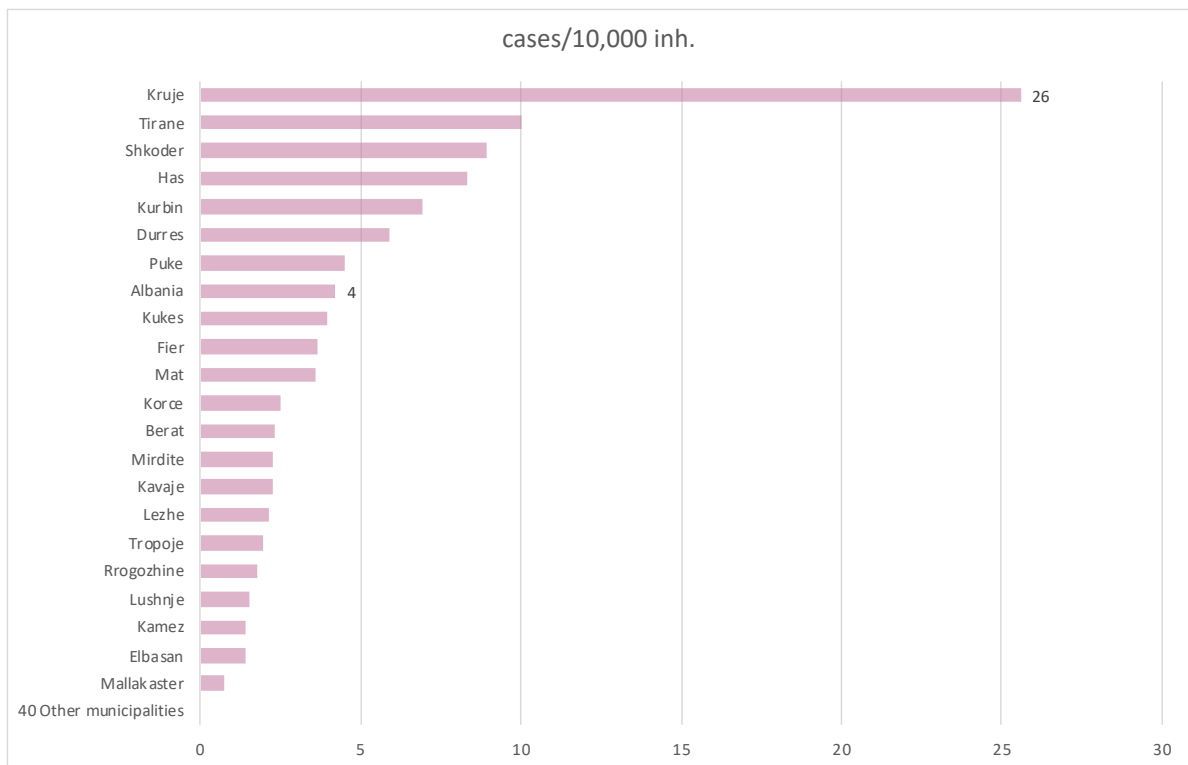
On the other hand, as all of the municipalities do not possess to date a DRR strategy and civil emergency plan, knowledge and capacities to address a biological disaster emergency are either lacking or in the best case, not organised upon a structure, database and use protocol. The COVID-19 emergency, much like the earthquake of November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019 disclosed the low preparedness at local level. Furthermore, in the case of COVID-19, as the response to the emergency was centrally led and organised and was focused on two key measures – social distancing and flattening the curve, the incentive for municipalities to engage into other strategies of outbreak management was not present. As a result, no local knowledge was generated and no particular focus was placed on strengthening the local capacities.

### 3.2 Local response versus territorial factors

When asked about the difficulty in delivering food supplies to families in needs, 20 municipalities responded that the terrain (topography and infrastructure) and the lack of means of transport were a hindering factor in the process. As a matter of fact, the territorial structure and location constitute a factor to look at when trying to understand the effect of the infectious diseases' outbreaks and the respective local response. It certainly goes beyond mere access difficulties in delivering certain services. Other elements should be examined too, particularly aimed at understanding whether there is a certain connection between territorial disparities and local response. The answer may result beneficial not only when analysing the current response, but also in view of the future events.

The cases of people infected with COVID-19, as reported by the official institutions, are scattered across the territory, in 21 municipalities, using June 3rd as the cut-off date. The initial infections were reported in Tiranë and Durrës and then the disease was gradually spread in other municipalities. The chart 19 and figure 4 provide information on the number of infected people per 10,000 inhabitants per affected local government (it does not include deaths). Therefore, while the highest number of infections is recorded in Tiranë, Krujë, Shkodër and Durrës, the municipality of Krujë stands out with 26 infected people per 10,000 inhabitants, while the other three municipalities have 10 or less cases per 10,000 inhabitants. This is primarily linked to the difference in population – Krujë has a population that is less than 40% of that of Shkodër and Durrës, and around 10% of Tiranë).

**Chart 19.** Cases of infections per 10,000 inhabitants at local level (no deaths included), cut-off date June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020



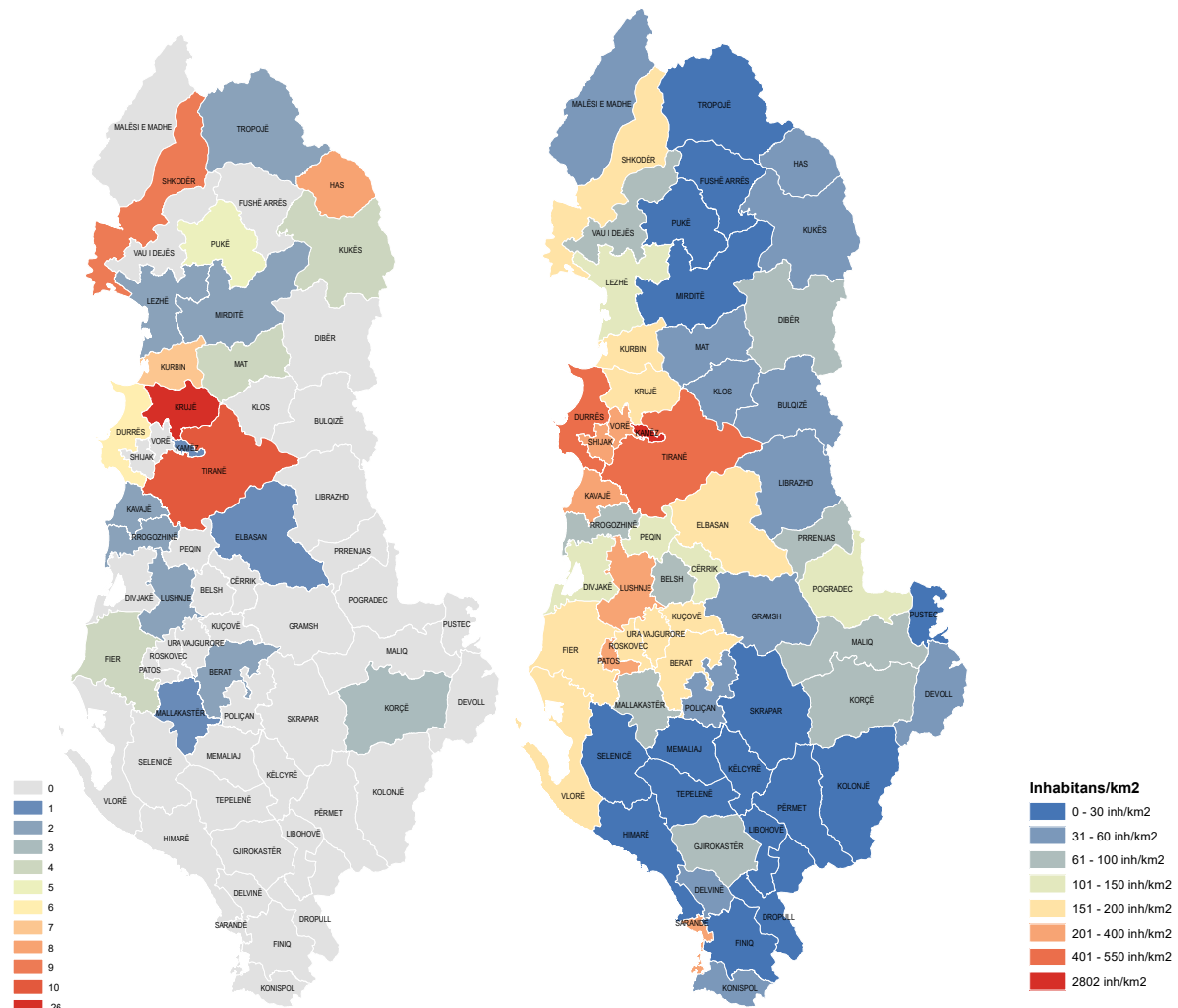
Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy 2020, based on data from Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Institute of Public Health and Open Data Albania.<sup>14</sup> Population from INSTAT Census 2011.

14. <http://www.ishp.gov.al/?p=11780>; <http://open.data.al/covid-19/>; <https://new.shendetesia.gov.al/3-qershor-2020-informacion-i-perditesuar-per-koronavirusin-covid-19/>.

Overall the figures show two tendencies: (i) a concentration of cases in the most urbanised and densely populated area of Albania. This is understandable in view of higher concentration of population, but also due to other factors such: most of the international mobility takes place through this area for the whole country; and all of the emergency-related health support was/ is provided in Tiranë, therefore increasing the potential for infections. (ii) a higher infections' intensity (cases/10,000 inh.) in the northern municipalities compared to the south. This may perhaps be related to the migration destinations of the residing population, which are very scattered across Europe, from Italy to United Kingdom.

Geographically speaking, 97% of the cases with infections (excluding casualties) are from municipalities that have above 75% of their population living in territorial altitudes of less than 700 m above sea level (chart 20). It should be noted that in Albania 44 municipalities have 90% of their population living at lower altitudes than 700 m above sea level, while only 1.2% of the population lives at altitudes higher than 1000 m above sea level, spread across 22 municipalities from north to south.

**Figure 4.** Cases of infections per 10,000 inhabitants at local level (no deaths included), cut-off date June 3rd, 2020 (lhs.)<sup>15</sup> and density of population per km<sup>2</sup> per municipality (rhs.)

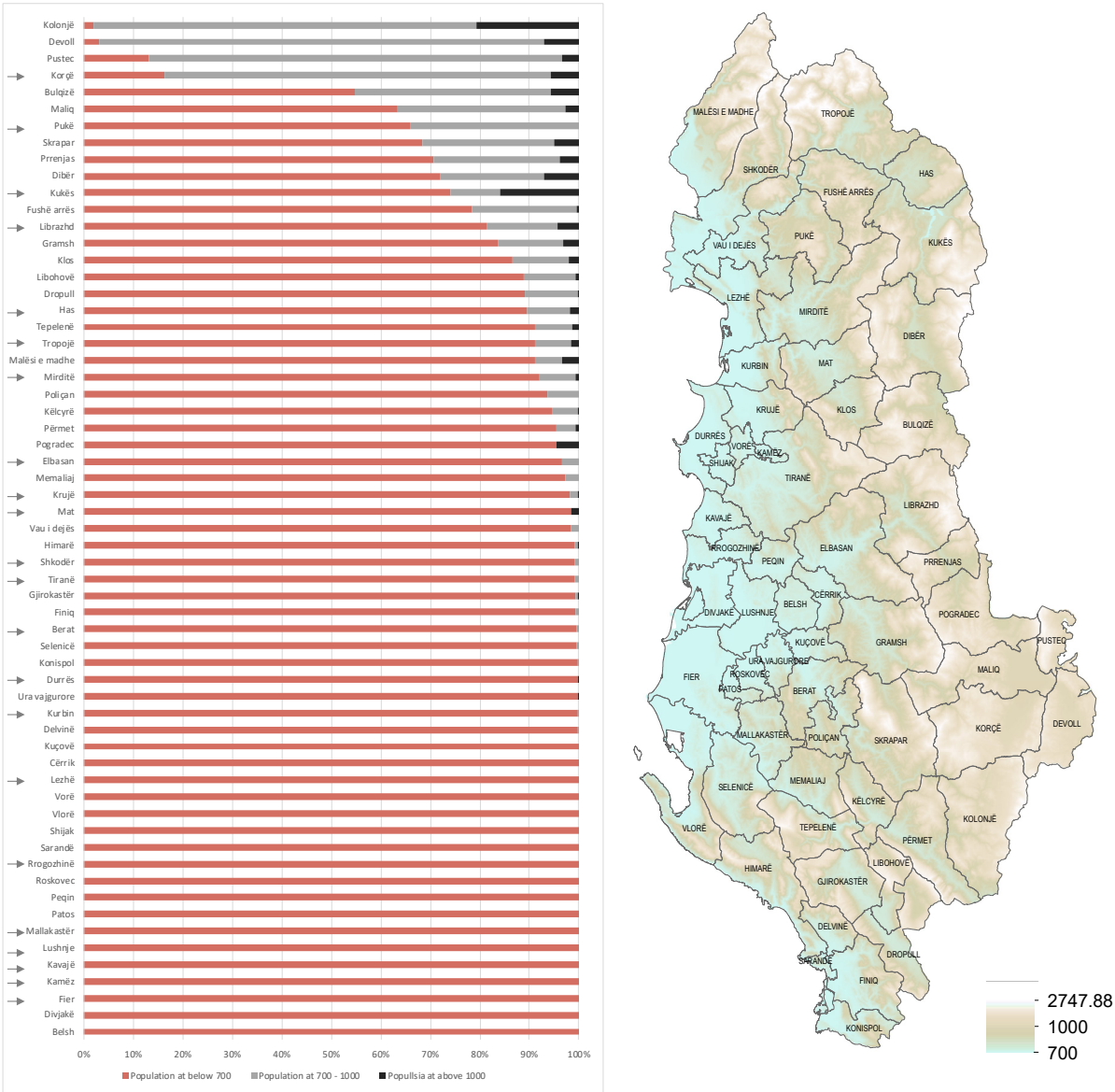


Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020, based on data from Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Institute of Public Health and Open Data Albania; Population from INSTAT Census 2011.

15. Vlorë and Librazhd do not appear on the map because at the cut-off date of June 3rd, 2020, they both had less than 0.5 cases per 10,000 inhabitants.

The territorial structure and altitude are factors of mixed influence in food supplies' distribution. The latter has happened 4-7 days a week, and continued for more than four weeks for most of the municipalities located at more than 700 m above sea level (at least with 50% of their territory). Yet, in all these municipalities (20 in count) the return for a second or more rounds of supply has happened for 50% or less of the families in need. Kolonjë makes an exception with at least a second return in 100% of families. There are 3 mountainous municipalities where only 5% of the families were supplied twice.

**Chart 20.** Distribution of local population according the altitudes above sea level.<sup>16</sup>

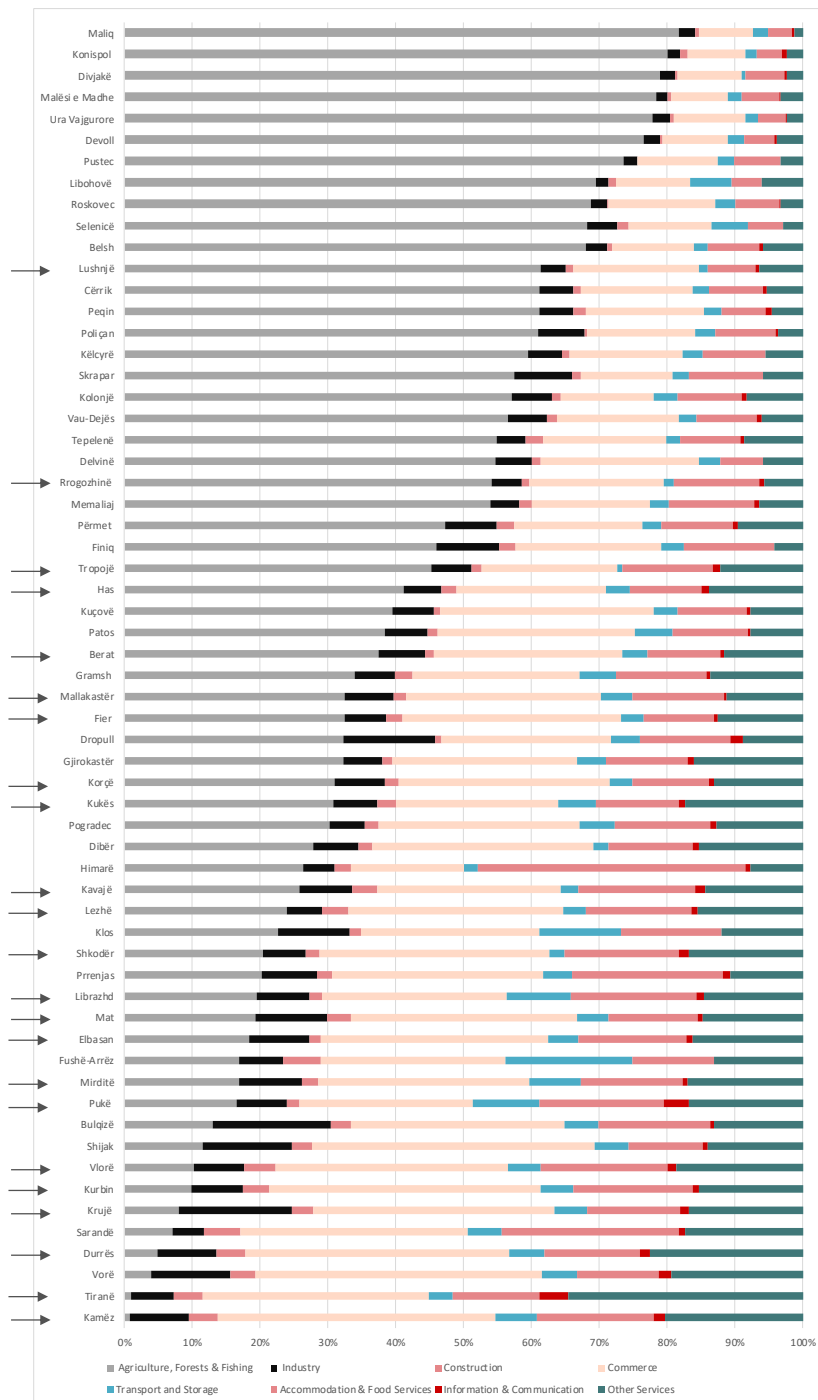


Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy based on data from INSTAT Census 2011 and ASIG maps

16. The arrows on the chart indicate the municipalities with cases of infections until June 3rd, 2020.

Furthermore, all of the municipalities with reported infections are better located in terms of accessibility compared to those who have no official cases recorded. There are very few municipalities that make an exception, such as Gjirokaštër and Pogradec, which have zero cases and good location along the national roads, and are very close to the borders with Greece. Better access to motorways implies faster access to healthcare services in Tiranë, which in the case of the centrally provided health support is very important. Yet, it also implies more communication and exchange, therefore more opportunities for contracting the virus.

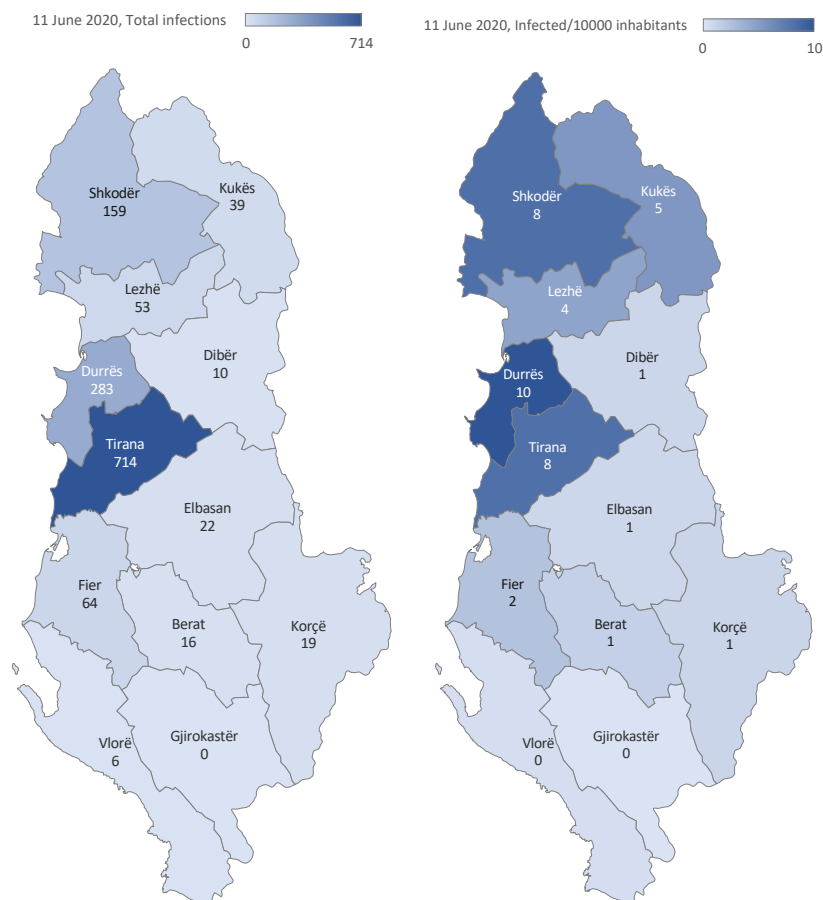
**Chart 21.** Enterprises at local level, per type, 2018



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy, 2020

Finally, at the local level it is interesting to observe also the territorial coincidence between distribution of enterprises per type and the municipalities with cases of infection. Chart 21 shows that except for Lushnje and Rogozhinë, all of the other 21 municipalities with official presence of the infection have less than 45% of their enterprises focussed on agriculture. These municipalities vary between urban and rural typologies, but all have 55% or more of their enterprises operating in the field of accommodation, food services, construction and other services. While, construction was (so far) a sector more or less neutral in terms of COVID-19 effects, tourism and services are among the most affected, vulnerable and high-risk economic sectors. The geographical incidence of the cases with infection in Albania shows that tourism is distressed both, as a sector and territorially speaking - tourism related enterprises are concentrated on the more affected territories.

**Figure 5.** Total infections (lhs) and Infected/10,000 inhabitants (rhs) at qark level, June 11th, 2020



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy based on data from Ministry of Health and Social Protection, Institute of Public Health and Open Data Albania; Population from INSTAT Census 2011.

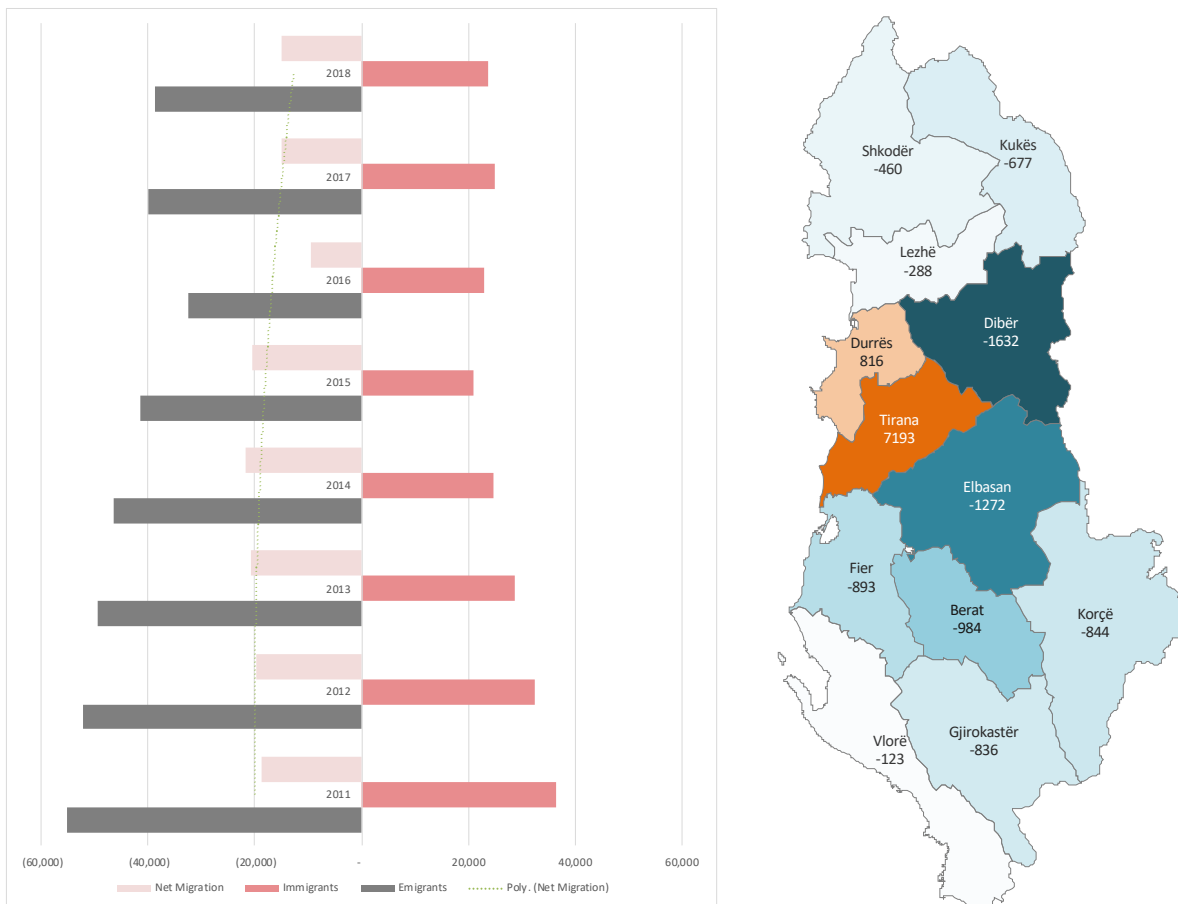
At the *qark* level, referring to the 11th of June 2020 as the cut-off date, the total number of infections is the highest for Tiranë, followed by Durrës with 40% of Tiranë and Shkodër with 159 infected people or almost 56% of Durrës. All other *qarks* have figures with two or one digit only. The density of infections, i.e. the number of infected people per 10,000 inhabitants, is the highest in the *qark* of Durrës (10) followed by Tiranë and Shkodër (8), hence showing for an inversion compared to total values, due to the considerably higher population of Tirana and high rate of infections in Shkodër. Yet, the overall tendency is the same in both maps of the figure 5: (i) the highest concentration (density and total) of

infections is in the metropolitan area (Tiranë-Durrës); (ii) the second highest concentration is found in the northern *qarks* (Shkodër, Kukës and Lezhë), where the difference with the metropolitan area in terms of density is relatively low, because the population in each of these *qarks* is low also; (iii) The southern *qarks* have a considerably lower concentration in terms of density, while total infections vary from 64 in Fier to zero cases in Gjirokastër. Overall, the north appears more affected than the south, while the central metropolitan area stands significantly above the other two regions.

The regional disparities analyses carried out in 2009, 2015 and 2019 with the support of UNDP and EU, GIZ, SDC and ADA, and SDC respectively, have always revealed the northern *qarks* as the most disadvantaged ones in terms of socio-economic development. The metropolitan area Tiranë-Durrës usually scores higher in terms of socio-economic indicators, but has a low environmental performance. The southern regions reveal a more mixed picture, with mountainous and rural areas usually being more disadvantaged than the urban and coastal ones.

Yet, to make a simple analysis between COVID-19 infections incidence, the response of the municipalities and the territorial disparities, few indicators were observed. Hence, in a context of gradually increasing overall net migration, the areas that have received population over the years (Tiranë and Durrës, chart 22) are those that are affected more by the pandemic.

**Chart 22.** Migration over years (lhs) and population change per *qark* (in and out, rhs.)

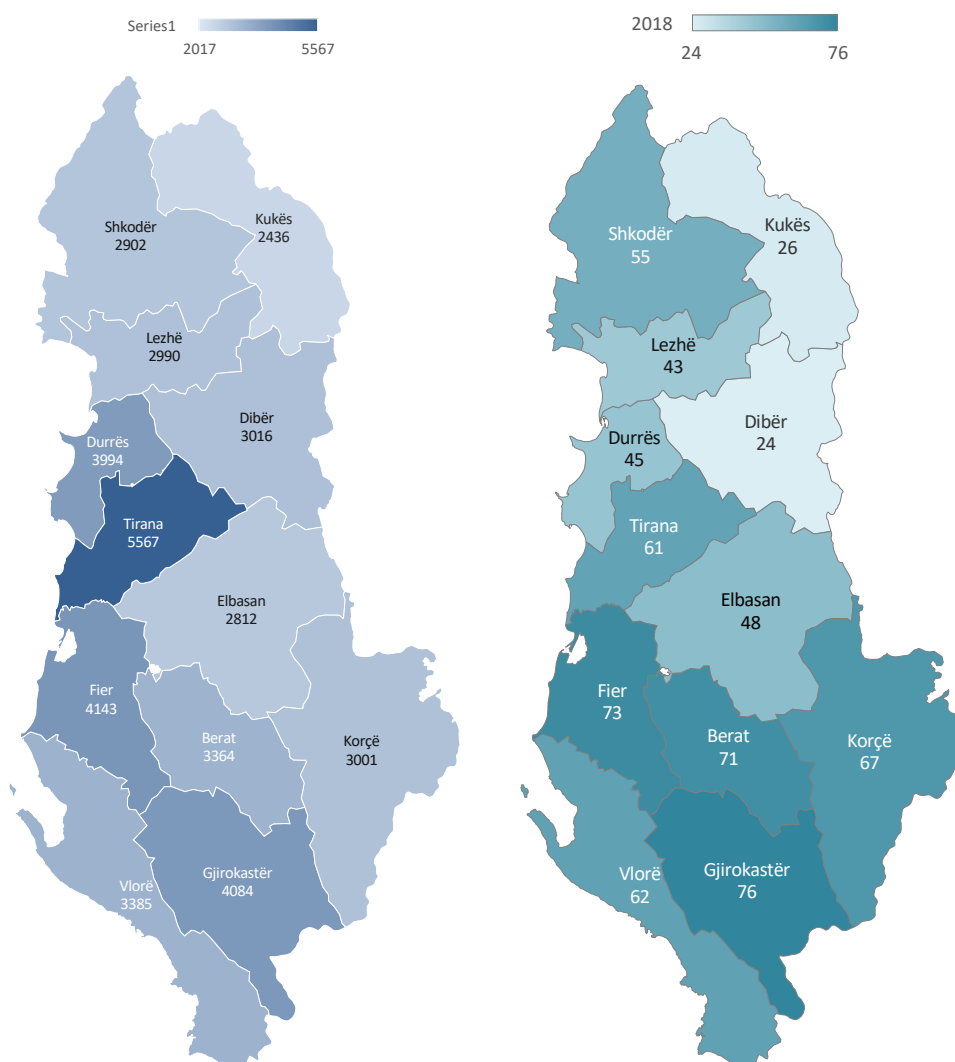


Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy based on INSTAT data



In terms of number of enterprises per 1000 inhabitants, the highest values are in the southern *qarks* where the incidence of infections per 10,000 inhabitants is lower. In the case of GDP per capita, the values are the highest in the metropolitan area (Tiranë-Durrës), which is also the most severely hit by COVID-19. The next higher GDP values are found in Fier and Gjirokastër, with Fier having the highest number of COVID-19 cases in the south, and Gjirokastër recording officially zero cases to date (figure 6). To help businesses, both major municipalities (Tiranë and Durrës) of these two centre *qarks*, including also Kavajë and Vorë, have made revisions to their fiscal packages, which consist mainly in postponing payment of taxes and tariffs, and in the case of Tiranë also exemption from the public space tariff for March and April. The municipalities of these two *qarks* expect to collect between 50% (Durrës) and 20% (Tiranë) of their planned revenues from own sources for the first 4 months of 2020.

**Figure 6.** Regional GDP per capita (lhs, 2017, Euro) and no. of enterprises per 1000 inhabitants at *qark* level, 2018 (rhs)

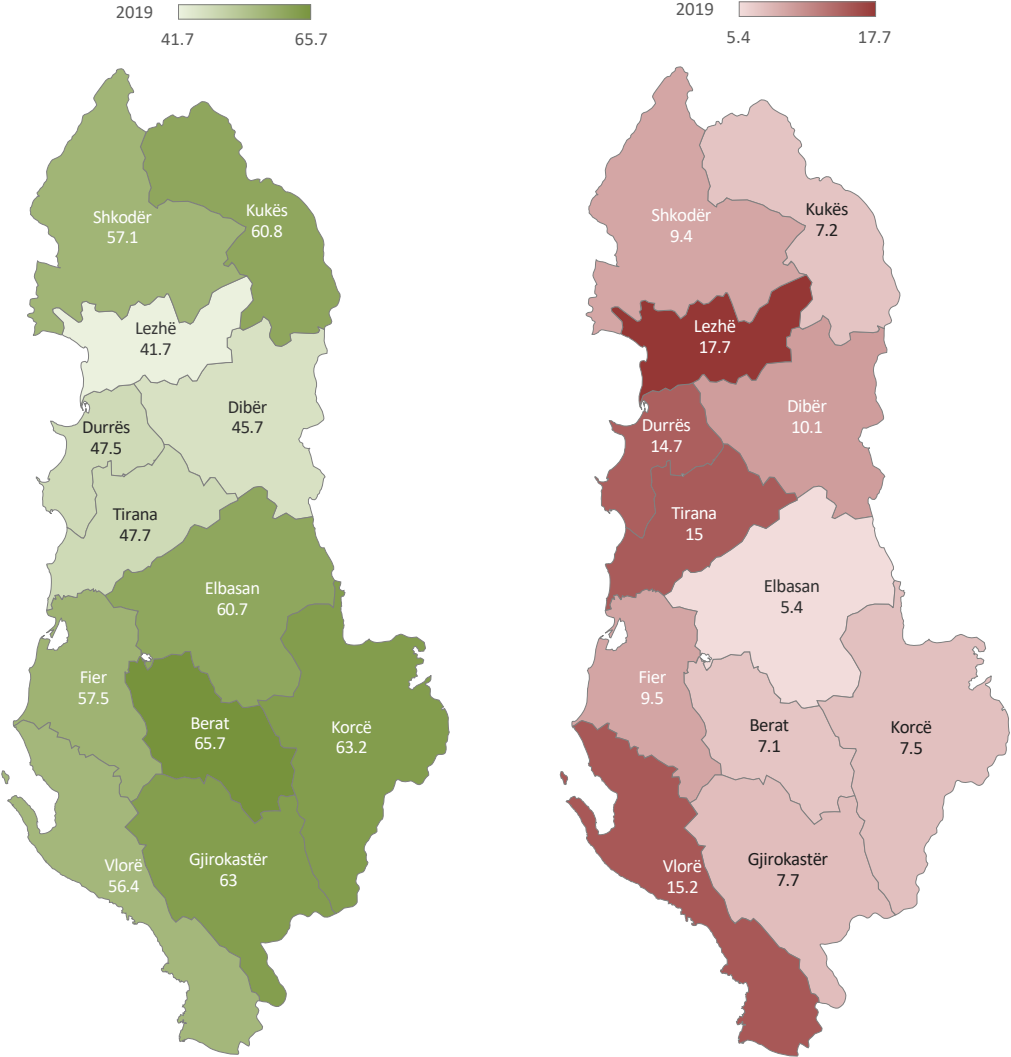


Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy based on INSTAT data

Employment and unemployment figures at *qark* level seem quite correlated among them (figure 7), with four adjacent *qarks* (Lezhë, Dibër, Durrës and Tiranë) as the least performers, creating a visibly cohesive block compared to the other *qarks*. When asked, 80% of the municipalities of these 4 *qarks* view employment as a major challenge for the current and

next year. Particularly their major municipalities fear closure of businesses too, and almost all of them expect decrease of own revenues for the short and mid-term period, as well as an increase of families requesting economic aid. Furthermore, the data on expected future challenges for these municipalities show for considerable positive correlation between closure of businesses and problems with suspended contracts of public transportation (coefficient 0.79). In the southern qarks, unemployment is high particularly in Vlorë (15.2%), followed by Fier with 9.5%. All of the respective municipalities see the increase of unemployment as a short and mid-term challenge of COVID-19, while the closure of businesses is regarded as a challenge mainly for the predominantly urban municipalities. To reinforce this finding, except for Lushnje and Selenicë, the other responding municipalities of these two qarks fear for a distressed tourism sector during 2020 and 2021.

**Figure 7.** Employment (% ,lhs) and Unemployment (% , rhs) at qark level, 2019

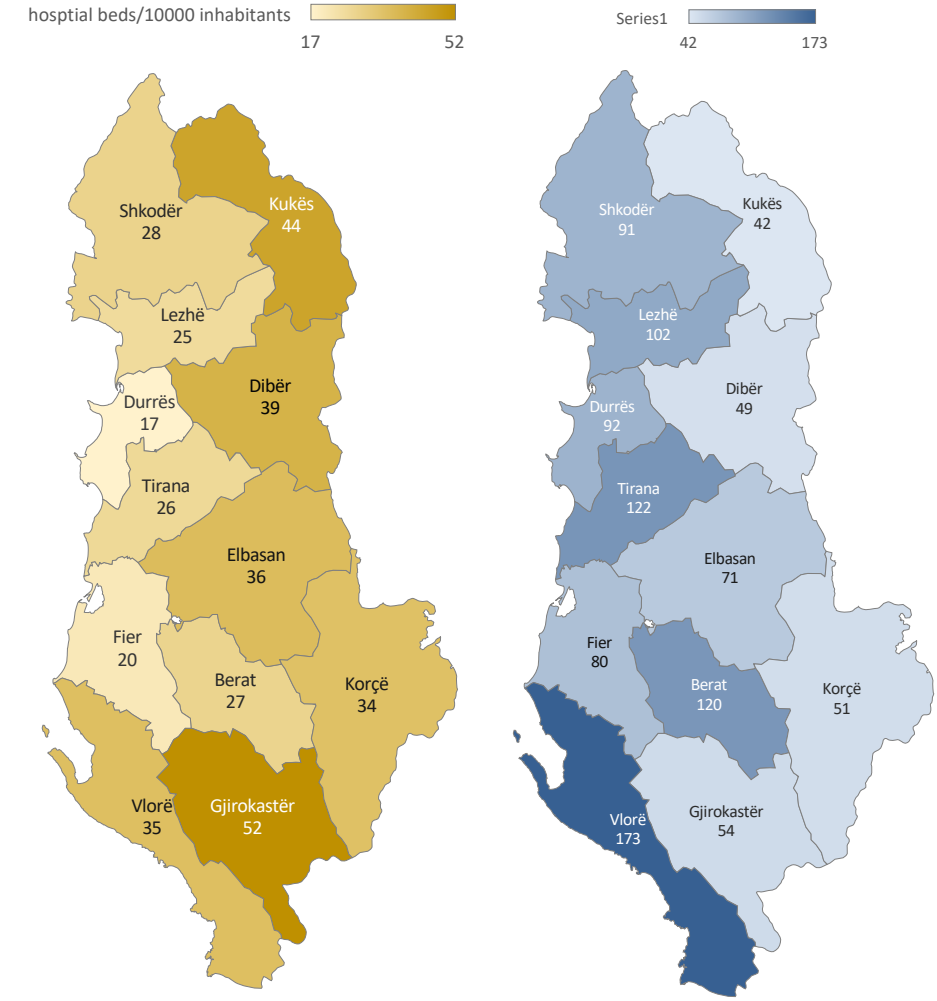


Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy based on INSTAT data

The last observation regards services, specifically health care (hospital beds) and water supply (figure 8). The previous is provided by the central government and the latter by the local governments. These services are extremely important in view of disaster events, including biological disasters and infectious diseases. The specialised medical treatments for the COVID-19 emergency were provided in two hospitals in Tiranë, with limited (if any)

involvement of the regional hospitals. Due to dynamics in population number, the number of hospital beds for 10,000 inhabitants is lower along the coastal qarks plus Berat and higher in the eastern qarks, from north to south. Figure 8 shows for a geographically vertical tendency of the distribution of this extremely important indicator for primary response to several disaster events. Regardless of the territorial disparity of the indicator, it also shows for a potential that needs to be exploited in the future.

**Figure 8.** Hospital beds per 10,000 inhabitants, 2016 (lhs); quantity of water produced per supplied person, 2017 (m<sup>3</sup>) (rhs)



Source: Co-PLAN & Association for Local Autonomy based on INSTAT data

This vertical pattern of the territorial distribution of indicator values repeats for water supply too (though mirrored compared to hospital beds), with the quantity of water produced per supplied person being higher along the coastal qarks plus Berat, and considerably lower in the eastern qarks from north to south. This is a positive finding for the coastal area, which has a significantly higher concentration of the population. Yet, the low values of the mountainous qarks are not encouraging, assuming that in case of evacuation (for instance in climate change events), these are population expecting qarks.

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 4.1 Conclusions

The analysis of the data from the general survey conducted with municipalities on their response to the COVID-19 response reveal a number of conclusions regarding governance and decentralization, financial implications, resilience and civil protection, spatial planning and services.

**Decentralisation and local leadership:** In Albania, the COVID-19 emergency was and is being managed through a centralised approach, where the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection lead the process. The implementation of the isolation measures started in early March 2020 and a gradual opening was carried out from the beginning of May to date (June 2020). The health care for hospitalised people was provided in two hospitals in Tiranë. Currently, as defined by law, healthcare is a function exercised almost fully by central government. Local governments are responsible on primary healthcare services (facilities), which were however not utilised for the purposes of the emergency, unless for counselling.

In a small country like Albania, centralization of healthcare during biological disasters might be an effective solution in principle. Yet, territorial deconcentration (treatment in regional hospitals) could have proven in overall more efficient. While costs for treatment equipment would have perhaps been higher, the faster tracking of cases, treatment and care would have lowered the curve further and interrupted community transmission. Epidemiologists are surely at the position to make such assessments, but the lack of deconcentration approach has kept local governments out of the sight of the pandemic governance, therefore removing their responsibility in the process, lowering their accountability towards their communities, and placing them in a waiting or reactive position.

The local governments have responded to the emergency during March-April mainly by sensitizing the local communities on the risks of the disease and hygiene measures; disinfecting public spaces and markets, public building and any non-public objects where cases of infections were recorded; identifying vulnerable citizen groups and providing them food and non-food supplies during the isolation period; and monitoring mobility and circulation in public spaces, in and out of the cities, keeping order and safety. Local leadership was confined within these activities, and it is hard to assess whether their potential role in crisis management would have improved the overall efficiency of the process, leading to minimal casualties and disruption of public life and service provision.

**Multi-level governance and citizen engagement:** In a centralised approach to pandemic governance, the multilevel cooperation is usually limited to communication, information and implementation of the chain of command. In Albania this has been the case for the vertical cooperation, which was characterised by communication between the MoHSP, the National Agency of Civil Protection, the State Police and the Prefectures on one side and Municipalities and related public local structures on the other. At a horizontal level though, there has been citizen engagement through local volunteers, which in some cases were organised into specific structures and in other cases were acting individually, but always in coordination with the respective local governments. In principle, it is possible and much more appropriate for local governments to promote and implement multilevel cooperation for the governance of disaster emergencies within their territories, due to the proximity with communities. Yet, in biological disasters, the involvement of volunteers may also be limited (in number and type of activities), due to the risk of transmission of infection. The volunteers

helped the Municipalities in Albania with food and non-food supplies distribution as well as awareness raising activities. In overall, due to both, the centralised approach and the nature of the disaster event, multilevel governance was substantially limited during COVID-19 emergency Albania.

**Resilience and civil protection:** Albanian local governments are not well prepared to deal with disaster emergencies due to lack of human, technical and financial resources. Their knowledge is mainly linked to natural hazards and disaster risks, and significantly less so to biological disasters. Since August 2019, municipalities are bound to implement the law no. 45/2019 “On Civil Protection”, which makes a considerable improvement leap in scope and objective, by expanding from civil emergency to civil protection and embracing the concept of resilience. The law requires municipalities to prepare integrated risk assessment documents, disaster risk reduction strategies and civil emergency plans. These documents are to be adopted by the local councils within two years from the law’s approval dates (hence, within July 2021), but so far only the municipality of Lezhë has started the process of preparing such documents, through a participatory approach.

A major difficulty in preparing the civil protection documents lies with the lack of the relevant local databases, with granular information and time series. Still, municipalities possess knowledge through their local experts, and the implementation of the participatory risk assessment could be a very decent substitute for the absence of scientific databases, at least for the short- to medium-term period. On the other hand, the participatory approach may not be sufficient for biological disaster risks preparedness. Surely information can always be withdrawn from citizens and local awareness raising remains a key activity in participatory disaster risk reduction, but healthcare response is strongly linked to the role of the specialised institutions and the national government. In these circumstances, the Albanian municipalities were found unprepared to deal with the emergency, and furthermore, were given very limited role in the response. In most cases, the mayors and the local civil protection structures (departments or sometimes even individual specialists) were the responsible local entities to guide the process of local response and communication with central government institutions. Finally, a discussion can be taken up whether the centralised and rather elitist approach followed by the Albanian government is more effective than a democratic approach to biological disaster emergency governance. Such an assessment is yet to be made, but surely, ethical and moral implications were raised during the isolation period. Furthermore, a discourse of the role of democracy in pandemic’s governance is present at an international scale too. While the centralised approach and stringent isolation may be seen as disease control effective and of less information mistakes, a communitarianism approach would lead to preservation of civil liberties and human dignity, a better balance between democracy and risk assessment and response, and more on-the-ground information.

**Financial implications:** Municipal finances will be severely impacted for the short-term and medium-long term following the COVID-19 emergency of the first half of 2020. Negative or downward trends are expected. Contraction is assessed to occur on almost all of the categories of revenues: own source revenues (taxes, fees and other), shared taxes, and conditional grants. The unconditional transfer (both general and sectoral) is expected to remain at least at the same level as the previous year. The emergency fund was spent partially or totally during the isolation months, together with funds from budget reallocations and use of carryovers, consuming all internal capacities to face unexpected events in the second half of 2020. To date, no additional financial support has been provided by central government for municipalities to bridge the negative gap between the need to make expenditures and the capacity to generate revenues. Under these conditions, the financial stability of

municipalities is questionable and the normal continuity of public services provision cannot be guaranteed, at least for investments.

**Spatial planning and public services:** Municipalities report that most public services were provided during March and April 2020, except for public transportation and cultural activities. The latter two were suspended on a national level. Several municipalities provided some of their services online (for as much as this was possible). Routine monitoring for maintenance and operation of certain public services continued as usual. A challenging situation is expected for the months to come though, due to potential financial contraction and reduction of local own revenues.

As for spatial planning, the activities of local governments were focused on issuing building permits. This service is carried online through a system that is in place for the last three years. As the construction sector was not significantly affected, the issuing of building permits continued as usual. Nevertheless, while land development activities did continue, local spatial planning per se did not change to adapt to the situation. A major problem in urban areas was the building and population density and lack of sufficient public open space, to accommodate the presence of several people at once.

As a matter of fact, urban design and planning for cities in Albania has not so far considered the biological disaster risk. For instance, the urban core communities could easily access food markets by foot, but could not enjoy open air space and were forced to stay for a long time isolated at home. The peripheral communities were more advantageous in terms of access to open air space, but had hard time to reach markets by foot, while the use of cars was banned. In a way, the advantages and disadvantages of living in specific parts of the city were the outcome of distance, density, and territorial distribution of services, as defined by the market forces, rather than by strategic planning and development decisions. One could say that Albanian cities are to date unprepared for dealing with emergencies of infectious disease' outbreaks, as far as space shape and functions are regarded.

**Territorial disparities and disaster risks:** The most affected area in terms of the number of infected people is the metropolitan area Tiranë-Durrës and this is likely linked to: (i) high rate of urbanisation and population density; (ii) intensive exchange of people and goods; (iii) hub for international travel; (iv) and location of specialised hospitals that provided and still provide the health treatment and support for all COVID-19 positive citizens. Hence, in a way, those factors that improve the territorial accessibility and boost economic growth in a region, may easily become factors for worsening the situation during a biological disaster emergency. The situation is worsened further by environmental factors such as air pollution and insufficient green space.

On the other hand, the regions considered as disadvantageous in terms of socio-economic disparities (northern qarks and mountainous rural areas) were also hit more by the pandemic compared to other non-central qarks. Shkodër in the north is the third most affected qark regarding the number of infected people and Kukës and Lezhë are the fourth and the fifth respectively for infections density per 10,000 inhabitants. According to INSTAT (2018), Kukës and Lezhë have the highest age dependency ratios for youth and elderly respectively in Albania; all three qarks have some of the lowest GDP per capital values; and Kukës and Lezhë have some of the lowest values of number of enterprises per 1000 inhabitants. Similarly, unemployment is high, accessibility is low (except for the lowland urban areas of Shkodër and Lezhë), etc.

The analysis of territorial disparities should be interpreted with caution and more indicators might be needed to provide a complete picture. Nevertheless, this report is based also on

previous studies of territorial disparities, which reveal a tendency for disadvantageous and advantageous areas for the last 11 years, since 2009. The current assessment shows that the more disadvantageous areas have the risk of suffering more from the outbreak, not necessarily in terms of COVID-19 health aspects, but mostly in terms of socio-economic effects for the short and the medium term.

## 4.2 Recommendations

The COVID-19 emergency is still in motion. The situation has changed during the months of May and June, with the gradual opening of the economy and social life, but also with an increase on numbers of infected people. It remains unclear what and when the peak will be during summer 2020, as well as what scenarios could one expect for autumn and winter. Isolation and closure of the economy should be avoided, otherwise the socio-economic disaster produced by such measures would outweigh considerably the health benefits. Whilst a rising curve is no good news, perhaps the government should sooner rather than later think of a newly revised strategy, which engages local governments and local actors. On an immediate response level, as raising of awareness on personal hygiene and care is of utmost importance to prevent from contracting the virus, local governments should engage intensively in such activities. This should be followed by close monitoring of public spaces, markets, and other areas of inevitable high public presence, to enforce the use of preventive measures, such as masks and social distancing.

Municipalities should also engage more with the disinfection of public spaces and objects, and make sure that public transportation means are kept clean and free from overcrowding. Municipalities should also start establishing, or improving the already established online systems for services provision, and avoid as much as possible direct contact with citizens when the latter is not necessary. They should prepare for the new school year starting in September-October, by improving the infrastructure to guarantee space, aeration, comfort and disinfection.

For medium to long-term effective results, which go beyond the current pandemic, local governments should initiate immediately the preparation of their civil protection documents (risk assessment, DRR strategies, and civil emergency plans), where biological disasters should be accounted for as well. They should also in parallel start revising their local territorial plans to introduce physical elements of city shape and space, which:

- guarantee more walkability everywhere in the city, centre or periphery;
- improve access to all city centres by both, public transportation and individual motorised vehicles, to guarantee equal opportunities and alternatives for all, at any given time and regardless of the hazard's pressure;
- increase the quantity and quality of public open spaces, especially of green areas and parks in each neighbourhood;
- slowly, but steadily substitute current transportation means by low or zero carbon vehicles;
- encourage the purchase of electric cars (increased number and frequency of charge stations);
- improve the distribution of services of general interest (in this case stores and pharmacies) in all of the neighbourhoods, accessible on foot.

The above review of plans should immediately be translated into concrete projects in the field. The COVID-19 is a historical milestone to the world, and the plague should be turned

into an eye-opening experience for the future of communities and humanity. Every single act of good city governance matters.

Furthermore, financial resources are of utmost importance in every action that municipalities would take to face COVID-19 continued emergency and effects. In order to mitigate pressure on their financial sustainability of municipalities, it would be necessary to take a number of measures both at the central and local level of government.

#### **At central level:**

- A clear statement should be made that the level of the unconditional transfers (general and sectoral) will remain intact throughout 2020 and 2021- 2023, according to the issued MoFE Guideline no. 10/2020 "On the preparation of the local Mid-Term Budget Program 2021-2023";
- Alternatives should be provided to compensate municipalities for the losses they experience in own source revenues, as a result of the pandemic situation, to enable the provision of local public services. A suggestion could be starting to share 2% of personal income tax (including tax credit of 2018-2019), as provided in law no. 68/2017 "On local self-government finances" and the increase of the share municipalities get from other shared taxes, such as the mineral rent and/or used vehicles circulating tax.
- Fiscal rules should be established for the control of municipal expenditures (such as rules that limit operating expenditures to increase annually);
- A conditional fund to cover emergency expenditures related to COVID-19 needs to be established, beyond the emergency fund that municipalities plan annually, which is however estimated to be insufficient to cover their needs;
- Procedures for the reallocation of funds could be facilitated, between different expenditure items for a certain period, to enable timely intervention to cope with communities' needs;
- The local borrowing process should be facilitated (in the local banking system) for financing already initiated or new investment projects against the fulfilment of the conditions specified in law no. 9869/2008 "On local self-government borrowing", for those municipalities that are in a position to cover debt service with their net operating margins.

#### **At local level:**

- Support should be provided to small and medium-sized businesses, by creating fiscal facilities and/or creating small grant schemes to enable the resumption of work, and to avoid as much as possible the possibility of their bankruptcy. For instance, this can be applied to the tourism and agricultural sectors, as the two sectors most hit by the crisis, or other sectors depending on the activities taking place in specific municipalities;
- Ensure the necessary financial resources to guarantee the continuity of investment projects in the process. Applying proactively to currently active donor projects could also help in this regard;
- Prioritize the list of investments by enabling the implementation of those that can have the greatest impact on local economic development and the creation of new jobs;
- Follow a conservative approach in expenditure allocation, especially in relation to current expenditures which since 2015 have followed an upward trend, confirmed also during 2019 (Co-PLAN, 2020). Also, municipalities should avoid current financial difficulties to result in higher arrears stock at the end of the year.



To conclude, this is a moment, where municipalities should be encouraged by the national government to take over the situation for their communities and territories (cities and rural areas), employing a proactive approach and showing high levels of accountability towards their citizens. In addition, municipalities should not anymore position themselves merely as implementers of instructions from the national government. While the response to the health emergency will continue being managed centrally, the municipalities have the full legal and moral mandate to take over with economic, social and territorial planning, to overcome the crisis and prepare resilient local institutions and communities for effective governance of future disaster events. Certainly, local leadership and a system of multi-level territorial governance, where citizens are heavily engaged next to local governments, is paramount to the success of enabling local resilience.

## 5. Appendixes

### 5.1 The questionnaire



#### PYETËSOR

**Roli, sfidat dhe nevojat e bashkive dhe aktorëve në nivel vendor gjatë krizës COVID-19**

**REALIZUAR nga**

**Shoqata për Autonominë Vendore dhe Co-PLAN Instituti për Zhvillimin e Habitatit**

**Prill 2020**

#### Sfondi i Anketës:

Gjatë periudhës Mars – Prill 2020, Shqipëria, sikurse edhe vende të tjera Evropiane, është prekur nga pandemia COVID-19. Prekja nga coronavirusi i ri është shtrirë në të gjithë territorin, duke vënë në vështirësi sistemin shëndetësor dhe atë të mbrojtjes civile. Ndërkohë, masat e marra nga qeveria për vendosjen e gjendjes së fatkeqësisë natyrore, karantinimin dhe kufizimin e disa lirive individuale, janë instrumenti i përdorur për të ulur kurbën e infektimit, transmetueshmërinë dhe presionin mbi shërbimin spitalor. Në këto kushte, roli i pushtetit vendor dhe i aktorëve lokalë për të ndihmuar në zgjidhjen e krizës mbetet i kufizuar, por jo i pamundur.

Pyetëtori në vijim, i realizuar nga Shoqata e Autonomisë Vendore në bashkëpunim me Co-PLAN, synon të mbledhë informacion mbi rolin aktual dhe të ardhshëm të aktorëve publikë dhe jo-publikë në nivel vendor, për të adresuar krizën që shoqëron pandeminë COVID-19, përfshirë sfidat me të cilat përballen këta aktorë dhe nevojat e tyre.

Studime të ngjashme po realizohen në vende të ndryshme, për të kuptuar rolin e mundshëm, forcën dhe aftësinë, si edhe sfidat e nivelit vendor për të adresuar dhe zbutur krizat e fatkeqësive. Ndërkohë që niveli vendor është shumë më afër qytetarëve sesa ai qendror dhe ka aftësi reagimi të shpejta, jo kudo ai përgjigjet në mënyrë të njëjtë, për shkak të kompetencave të kufizuara, mungesës në burime njerëzore dhe financiare, hendeqeve ligjore, mungesës së trajnimit dhe të grupeve vullnetare, etj.

Përgjigjet e dhëna në këtë pyetësor do të përpunohen dhe rezultatet e nxjerra do të përdoren për të ndikuar politikëbërjen dhe procesin e decentralizimit në lidhje me adresimin e krizave të fatkeqësive, për të ndihmuar në forcimin e sistemit të mbrojtjes civile në nivel vendor, dhe për të advokuar në emër të pushtetit vendor për rolin dhe nevojat e aktorëve lokalë në menaxhimin e krizave.

**Emri i bashkisë:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Data e plotësimit të pyetësit:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Shënim:** Ju lutem, plotësojeni pyetësin në word. Nëse nevojitet, mund të shtoni rreshta në tabela. Pyetësin e plotësuar dërgojeni me e-mail brenda datës 30 prill 2020 në adresën elektronike: [adelina.farrici@shav.al](mailto:adelina.farrici@shav.al)

Në rast se nuk mundeni ta nisni pyetësin e plotësuar në mënyrë elektronike, atëherë, Ju lutem ta postoni në adresën:

**Shoqata për Autonomi Vendore;**

**Rruga “Reshit Çollaku”, Pallati 38, shkalla 2, Ap. 13/1;**

*Tiranë*

### I. Pyetje të përgjithshme

1. A ka në bashkinë tuaj persona të prekur nga COVID\_19?  
(a) Po (b) Jo
2. Nëse po, ju lutem specifikoni numrin total të të prekurve deri në datën e plotësimit të pyetësorit:  
Nr. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Sa prej personave të mësipërm, në dijeninë tuaj, po trajtohen:
  - a) Në Tiranë: \_\_\_\_\_ persona;
  - b) Në spitalin rajonal/të bashkisë: \_\_\_\_\_ persona;  
(specifikoni edhe emrin e spitalit nëse plotësoni këtë opsion)
  - c) Në kushte shtëpie: \_\_\_\_\_ persona;
  - d) Nuk e kemi këtë informacion.
4. Listoni më poshtë emrat e njësive administrative nga të cilat vijnë të prekurit e COVID-19:  
Njësitë administrative: \_\_\_\_\_

### II. Pyetje mbi rolin e bashkisë dhe aktorëve të tjerë vendorë:

5. Gjatë periudhës Mars-Prill 2020, afërisht sa % të stafit keni pasur fizikisht në punë? \_\_\_\_\_%
6. Cilët sektorë kanë funksionuar rregullisht, janë pezulluar, apo zhvendosur *online* (vendosni emrat dhe shtoni rreshta sipas nevojës)?

Sektorë që kanë funksionuar rregullisht	Sektorë që janë pezulluar	Sektorë që janë zhvendosur online

7. A jeni kontaktuar nga Ministria e Shëndetësisë dhe/ose nga institucionet përgjegjëse për mbrojtjen civile në lidhje me masat për COVID-19 gjatë muajve si në tabelë dhe cili ka qenë fokusi i komunikimit në secilin rast (plotësoni duke zgjedhur më shumë se një alternativë duke vendosur një kryq në kutitë e përzgjedhura)?

Fokusi i komunikimit	Ministria e Shëndetësisë				Mbrojtja Civile				Tjetër (kush)				
	J	Sh	M	P	J	Sh	M	P	J	Sh	M	P	
a) Ndarje informacioni mbi gjendjen para & gjatë krizës													
b) Informim mbi masat e nivelit qendror													
c) Kërkesë për informacion mbi të prekurit													
d) Kërkesë informacioni mbi banorët vulnerabël													
e) Udhëzime për detyrat e bashkisë gjatë krizës													
f) Udhëzime në lidhje me taksat vendore													
g) Udhëzime mbi trajtimin e ndihmës ekonomike													

h) Udhëzime për shpërndarje të ushqimit																			
i) Bashkëpunim për ngritjen e grupeve vullnetare																			
j) Bashkëpunim për transportin e të prekurve																			
k) Bashkëpunim për ruajtjen e rendit e qetësisë																			
l) Udhëzime në lidhje me ofrimin e shërbimeve																			
m) Tjetër (specifiko)																			

*J – Janar; Sh – Shkurt; M – Mars; P – Prill; Banorë vulnerabël – të gjitha kategoritë që nuk kanë të ardhura, marrin ndihmë ekonomike, janë të moshuar që jetojnë vetëm dhe nuk lëvizin dot nga shtëpia për shkak të kufizimeve, gjendjes shëndetësore, prindër të vetëm me fëmijë, etj.*

8. Nëse keni luajtur apo luani rol në lidhje me menaxhimin e krizës brenda territorit të bashkisë, sipas udhëzimeve të marra nga institucionet qendrore, ju lutem shpjegoni shkurtimisht për çfarë bëhet fjalë.

1. Masa të ndërmarra	2. Shpjegimi
a) Identifikimi i grupeve në nevojë	
b) Furnizimit dhe shpërndarja e ushqimeve	
c) Dezinfektimi i rrugëve dhe hapësirave publike	
d) Kontrolli përmes policisë bashkiake i lëvizjes së qytetarëve sipas orareve	
e) Kontrolli dhe monitorimi i tregjeve dhe njësive tregtare për distancat mes njerëzve dhe mënjanimin e tejmbushjes	
f) Identifikimi dhe raportimi për raste potenciale të të prekurve	
g) Transporti i të prekurve në Tiranë në ndihmë të institucioneve qendrore	
h) Monitorim për banorë vulnerabël ose të prekur në zonat që rrezikohen nga risku i fatkeqësive të tjera natyrore si, rrëshqitje dheu, përmytje, etj.	
i) Tjetër (specifiko)	

9. Masat që keni marrë për menaxhimin e krizës, a i keni përgatitur përmes një plani pune ose një strategji me veprime konkrete për menaxhimin e krizës?

(a) Po (b) Jo

10. A e keni miratuar planin e punës ose strategjinë në këshill bashkiak?

(a) Po (b) Jo

11. A është koordinuar strategjia/plani i punës me Zyrën e Emergjencave Civile pranë Prefekturës?

(a) Po (b) Jo

12. A është koordinuar/konsultuar strategjia/plani i punës me Agjencinë Kombëtare të Emergjencave Civile ose institucione të tjera në nivel kombëtar?

(a) Po (b) Jo

13. A është bërë strategjia publike dhe e aksesueshme për qytetarët?

- (a) Po (b) Jo

14. A kryeni dezinfektime në territor dhe ndërtesa?

- (a) Po (b) Jo

15. Nëse përgjigja për pyetjen 14 është po, cilat prej ndërtesave të listuara janë dezinfektuar dhe sa për qind ndaj totalit të ndërtesave për çdo kategori si në vijim?

Godina/territore	A janë dezinfektuar?	Sa % ndaj totalit janë dezinfektuar?
a) Zyrat e bashkisë	Po Jo	
b) Kopshte	Po Jo	
c) Çerdhe	Po Jo	
d) Shkolla 9-vjeçare	Po Jo	
e) Shkolla profesionale	Po Jo	
f) Qendra shëndetësore	Po Jo	
g) Ndërtesa ku janë identifikuar persona me COVID	Po Jo	
h) Rrugë dhe trotuare	Po Jo	
i) Parqe dhe lulishte	Po Jo	
j) Kënde lojërash	Po Jo	
k) Muze	Po Jo	
l) Biblioteka	Po Jo	
m) Tjetër	Po Jo	

16. Nëse keni shpërndarë / po shpërndani ushqime tek banorët vulnerabël, ju lutem shpjegoni:

Pyetjet	Përgjigjet
a) Kategoritë e banorëve vulnerabël të cilëve u keni shërbyer	
b) Emrat e njësive administrative ku keni shpërndarë ushqime	
c) Sa here në javë keni shpërndarë ushqime	
d) Sa javë ka vazhduar procesi i shpërndarjes së ushqimeve?	
e) Në sa % të familjeve të ndihmuara keni dërguar ushqime më shumë se 1 herë?	
f) Çështje të tjera të rëndësishme që lidhen me këtë detyrë të bashkisë	

17. A është ngritur një grup vullnetarësh pranë bashkisë për menaxhimin lokal të situatës së COVID-19?

- (a) Po (b) Jo

18. Nëse po, Ju lutem shpjegoni si në vijim:

Çështjet	Shpjegimi
a) Numri i vullnetarëve	
b) Mosha mesatare e vullnetarëve	

c) Roli i vullnetarëve	
d) Njësitë administrative ku janë angazhuar vullnetarët	
e) Kategoritë e grupeve në nevojë që ndihmohen nga vullnetarët	
f) Oraret ditore dhe javore gjatë të cilave punojnë vullnetarët	
g) Lloji i ndihmës që japin vullnetarët	
h) Nëse grupi i vullnetarëve është ngritur nga bashkia, shpjegoni kur u ngrit dhe a është krijuar me një vendim të këshillit bashkiak?	
i) Nëse grupi i vullnetarëve është ngritur në mënyra të tjera (angazhim i pavarur qytetar apo me ndihmën e një projekti nga shoqëria civile dhe donatorët), ju lutëm shpjegoni rastin.	

19. Në dijeninë tuaj, a ka iniciativa qytetare, të shoqërisë civile apo të bizneseve lokale që ofrojnë ndihmë për menaxhimin e krizës?

(a) Po (b) Jo

20. Nëse përgjigja e pyetjes 19 është po, Ju lutem përshkruani shkurtimisht iniciativat duke plotësuar karakteristikat në tabelat në vijim (shtoni tabela nëse ka më shumë se tre iniciativa):

<b>RASTI 1.</b> _____	<b>Shpjegimi</b>
Kush është angazhuar?	
Çfarë ofron?	
Me çfarë frekuence kohore?	
Cilat grupe shoqërore ndihmon?	
Përshkruani si e ofron ndihmën	
Përshkruani si bashkëpunon me bashkinë	

<b>RASTI 2.</b> _____	<b>Shpjegimi</b>
Kush është angazhuar?	
Çfarë ofron?	
Me çfarë frekuence kohore?	
Cilat grupe shoqërore ndihmon?	
Përshkruani si e ofron ndihmën	
Përshkruani si bashkëpunon me bashkinë	

<b>RASTI 3.</b> _____	<b>Shpjegimi</b>
Kush është angazhuar?	
Çfarë ofron?	
Me çfarë frekuence kohore?	

Cilat grupe shoqërore ndihmon?	
Përshkruani si e ofron ndihmën	
Përshkruani si bashkëpunon me bashkinë	

21. Përveç Ministrisë së Shëndetësisë dhe institucioneve të Mbrojtjes Civile, me cilat institucione të tjera në nivel qendror dhe vendor po punoni dhe bashkëpunoni konkretisht për menaxhimin e krizës në territorin e bashkisë tuaj (vendosni emrat dhe shtoni rreshta sipas nevojës):

Institucione në nivel vendor	Institucione në nivel qendror

### III. Pyetje mbi sfidat dhe nevojat e bashkisë dhe aktorëve të tjerë vendorë:

22. Nëse keni pasur vështirësi në ofrimin e shërbimeve publike gjatë periudhës Mars – Prill 2020, atëherë ju lutem shpjegoni shkurtimisht se çfarë:

1. Shërbimi	2. Shpjegimi i problemeve*
a) Largimi i mbetjeve	
b) Furnizimi me ujë të pijshëm	
c) Mirëmbajtja e sistemit të kanalizimeve dhe trajtimi u ujërave të ndotura	
d) Mirëmbajtja e rrugëve	
e) Dhënia e lejeve të ndërtimit	
f) Mirëmbajtja e infrastrukturës për ujërat e larta	
g) Mirëmbajtja dhe funksionimi i tregjeve	
h) Promovimi i zhvillimit ekonomik vendor	
i) Mbrojtja civile (të gjitha aspektet e tjera veç pandemisë)	
j) Transporti publik	
k) Mirëmbajtja e sistemit të kullimit dhe vaditjes	
l) Shërbime administrative për qytetarët e bizneset	
m) Monitorimi dhe mbrojtja e mjedisit	
n) Menaxhimi i pyjeve dhe kullotave	
o) Aktivitete kulturore dhe mbrojtja e trashëgimisë	
p) Ofrimi i shërbimeve sociale	
q) Vijimi i punës për trajtimin e impaktit të tërmetit të 26 nëntor 2019.	

\*Ju lutem rendisni të gjithë gamën e mundshme të problemeve, nisur nga vështirësitë për të lëvizur, stafi i kufizuar për të mundur distancimin social, tarifat dhe/ose taksat e pa-mbledhura, aksesit i kufizuar ose i ulur në burimet financiare, ndërprerja e punimeve nga kontraktorët, pakënaqësia sociale, vështirësitë e biznesit, mungesa e komunikimit me qytetarët, pamundësia për të ofruar shërbimet on-line, etj. – shtoni dhe shpjegoni sipas rastit dhe praktikës tuaj.

23. A keni bërë rishikime në buxhetin e vitit 2020 në funksion të përballimit të situatës të shkaktuar nga COVID-19?

- (a) Po      (b) Jo

24. Nëse përgjigja e pyetjes 23 është po, atëherë Ju lutem specifikoni ndryshimet e bëra duke përmendur përdorimin:

- \_\_\_\_\_  
 - \_\_\_\_\_  
 - \_\_\_\_\_  
 - \_\_\_\_\_  
 - \_\_\_\_\_

25. A keni bërë rishikime në paketën fiskale të vitit 2020 në funksion të përballimit të situatës të shkaktuar nga COVID-19?

(a) Po (b) Jo

26. Nëse përgjigja e pyetjes 25 është po, atëherë Ju lutem specifikoni ndryshimet:

- \_\_\_\_\_  
 - \_\_\_\_\_  
 - \_\_\_\_\_  
 - \_\_\_\_\_

27. Sa % të planit të të ardhurave nga taksat dhe tarifat vendore mendoni do të realizoni në katër-mujorin e parë të vitit 2020? \_\_\_\_\_%.

28. A parashikoni të keni probleme në arkëtimin e të ardhurave nga taksat dhe tarifat vendore në 4-mujorin e parë të vitit 2020 (qarko po ose jo) dhe cilat mund të jenë arsyet (vendos kryq në alternativën e zgjedhur)?

Taksa/Tarifa <i>*nëse ju aplikoni tarifë shërbimesh (pastrim, gjelbërim dhe ndriçim), jepni të njëjtat përgjigje në tarifat a, b, dhe c.</i>	Probleme në arkëtim	Arësyet e problemeve në arkëtim					
		Familjarët			Biznesi		
		Nuk dalin nga banesa	Mendojnë se nuk kanë marrë shërbime	Nuk përdorin pagesat on-line	Janë mbyllur dhe nuk pranojnë të paguajnë	Kanë vëshirësi me pagesat online	Tjetër _____
a) Tarifa e pastrimit dhe higjienës	Po Jo						
b) Tarifa e gjelbërimit	Po Jo						
c) Tarifa e ndriçimit publik	Po Jo						
d) Tarifa për përdorimin e hapësirave publike	Po Jo						
e) Taksa e përkohshme për infrastrukturën arsimore	Po Jo						
f) Taksa e ndërtesës	Po Jo						
g) Taksa e truallit	Po Jo						
h) Taksa e tokës bujqësore	Po Jo						
i) Taksa e hotelit	Po Jo						
j) Taksa e tabelës	Po Jo						



k) Tatimi i thjeshtuar mbi fitimin e biznesit të vogël	Po	Jo						
l) Tjetër _____	Po	Jo						

29. Në lidhje me sfidat me shpërndarjen e ushqimeve tek banorët vulnerabël, shënoni me kryq cilat nga çështjet aplikohen dhe vlerësoni vetëm ato që aplikohen (përgjigja është “po”) në një shkallë nga 1 – më pak e rëndësishme në 5 – shumë e rëndësishme.

Sfida:	Aplikohet	Vlerësimi 1 - 5
a) Identifikimi i banorëve vulnerabël ka qenë i vështirë dhe ne kemi mundur ta realizojmë vetëm për banorët në listat e ndihmës ekonomike.	Po Jo	
b) Burimet financiare për të siguruar ushqime për banorët vulnerabël kanë qenë të pamjaftueshme për të gjithë të identifikuarit.	Po Jo	
c) Nuk ka pasur furnizime të mjaftueshme në treg.	Po Jo	
d) *Transporti i ushqimeve ka qenë i vështirë për shkak të (zgjidhni të gjitha ato që aplikohen):	Po Jo	
i) terrenit	Po Jo	
ii) motit	Po Jo	
iii) kufizimeve në lëvizje dhe oraret	Po Jo	
iv) mungesës së mjeteve të transportit	Po Jo	
v) pamjaftueshmërisë së stafit për të realizuar funksionin	Po Jo	
e) Tjetër (specifiko)	Po Jo	

*\*Për pikën d), pasi ta vlerësoni si çështje – nëse e zgjidhni, ju lutem rinumëroni rëndësinë sipas shkallës 1-5 me po të njëjtën logjikë vlerësimi edhe për nën-çështjet. Për çështje apo nën-çështje që nuk aplikohen në bashkinë tuaj, ju lutem mos vendosni vlerësim.*

30. Përmendni, shpjegoni dhe rendisni sipas rëndësisë, sfida të tjera në nivel vendor si në vijim, për situatën aktuale dhe atë afatshkurtër të pritshme (plotësoni vetëm për ato që aplikohen). Sa i përket renditjes vlerësoni vetëm 5 sfidat kryesore ku 1 është sfida kryesore dhe 5 ajo më pak e rëndësishme ndër pesë të zgjedhurat):

Sfida:	Aplikohet	Vlerësimi 1 - 5	Shpjegimi dhe mundësisht shifra mbi magnitudën e problemit
a) Pamundësia për të ndihmuar dhe bashkëpunuar me bizneset	Po Jo		
b) Mosfunksionimi i shkollave profesionale dhe moskryerja e punës praktike të këtyre shkollave, me ndikim ekonomik	Po Jo		
c) Rritja e papunësisë (nëse zgjidhni këtë opsion ju lutem jepni edhe një shifër të përafërt ose % për personat që rrezikojnë papunësinë)	Po Jo		
d) Biznese që po mbyllen (nëse zgjidhni këtë opsion ju lutem jepni edhe një shifër të përafërt ose % për bizneset që mbyllen dhe tipologjinë e tyre).	Po Jo		
e) Mosfunksionimi i sektorit të	Po Jo		

turizmit – sezonet e 2020 dhe ndoshta 2021			
f) Rënie aktuale dhe e pritshme e nivelit të taksave për të gjithë periudhën mars – dhjetor 2020	Po Jo		
g) Rritje e pritshme e familjeve që do të kërkojnë ndihmë ekonomike	Po Jo		
h) Rritje e nivelit të varfërisë	Po Jo		
i) Probleme me kontratat për transportin publik të pezulluar gjatë karantinimit	Po Jo		
j) Probleme me kontrata të tjera për shërbimet publike (cilat konkretisht)	Po Jo		
k) Pamundësi për të ofruar shërbime për të dëmtuarit pas tërmetit të 26 nëntorit 2019	Po Jo		
l) Rënie e nivelit të të ardhurave vendore për 2020 dhe 2021 <i>(shpjegoni konkretisht çfarë, si dhe në çfarë vlerash apo % prisni të ketë rënie)</i>	Po Jo		
m) Emigrantë të kthyer që kanë mbetur në Shqipëri dhe nuk mund të kthehen pas në shtëpitë e tyre	Po Jo		
n) Pamundësia për të përfituar nga programet aktuale të zhvillimit të mbështetura nga donatorët, për shkak të vështirësive në zbatim, të krijuara nga kriza	Po Jo		
o) Tjetër (specifikoni)	Po Jo		

**31.** Rendisni tre-pesë nevojat kryesore që ju keni si pasojë e krizës COVID-19 dhe që do të donit të plotësonit për ta përballuar krizën aktuale (shëndetësore, sociale dhe ekonomike) në nivel vendor përgjatë periudhës prill - dhjetor 2020 dhe gjatë vitit 2021.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## 5.2 Local Governments' needs

**Table 3.** Needs of Municipalities for 2020-2021

	Need 1	Need 2	Need 3	Need 4	Need 5
Lushnje	Food package	Address the rising unemployment	Closing the business		
Devoll	Fulfil the legal obligation for the conditional transfer on civil protection by the government (2.3% of the budget for civil emergencies)	Increased unconditional transfer	Increase support for People with Impaired Abilities (PIA) & Economic Aid (EA)		
Berat	Budget Review	Professional Mobilization	Strengthening volunteer groups		
Cërrik	Rising unemployment	Increase of families that require economic aid (EA)	Increase in poverty level	Address the decrease in level of income	
Durrës	Increase support for PIA & Economic Aid (EA)	Support for small businesses SB	Health assistance for public institutions staff	Health assistance for vulnerable groups	Establishment of mobile services
Elbasan	Address the decrease in level of income	Awareness of residents about the behaviour in markets	Increase funding for the management of situation, especially for vulnerable groups	Awareness of the elderly to be isolated	
Fier	Need for funds to make investments and provide public services	Completion of tourism legislation in COVID situations	Review of the Orders of the Ministry of Finance for the functioning of payments in the Treasury, with aim not to create arrears.	Additional fund for the creation of evacuation centres of the population in case of natural disaster	
Finiq	Increase funding for Economic Aid and food supply for families in need.	Additional funds for the establishment of virtual communication infrastructure for the provision of online services.	Additional funds for the improvement of the infrastructure of the health centres and the creation of the Hospital Emergency in the centre of the municipality		
Gramsh	Increase funds for emergencies	Financial resources to provide food for vulnerable families;	Financial resources to carry out more effective disinfection throughout the territory of Gramsh municipality.		
Këlcyrë	Food aid for families in need	Financial assistance or soft credit for farmers accompanied by concrete projects for the development of their farms with local products;	Finding potential donors for reconstruction of houses of vulnerable persons in order to improve their living condition		
Klos	Increase funding for Economic Aid and food supply for families in need.	Increasing of unconditional transfer	Additional staff for social services (psychologist)	Supplies for health centres	
Kolonjë	Increase funds for emergencies	Support with masks, gloves, disinfectant	Subsidies for businesses, tourism and agro – tourism		

		disinfection of public places			
Korçë	Address the significant decline in revenues from local sources	Additional funds from Central Government			
Kuçovë	Compensation for the lowest level of local revenues following local fiscal facilities undertaken	Support for priority investments and jobs creation	Financial support for social projects that will be able to reduce poverty		
Kurbin	Opening small businesses and self-employed				
Libohovë	Fulfil the legal obligation for the conditional transfer for civil protection by the government (2.3% of the budget for civil emergencies)	Increase funds for people in need	Support with masks, gloves, disinfectant		
Librazhd	Increase funds for people in need	Meeting needs by means of transport and logistics	Support with masks, gloves, disinfectant	Increase the unconditional transfer	
Maliq	Fulfil the legal obligation for the conditional transfer for civil protection by the government (2.3% of the budget for civil emergencies)	Increase funds for people in need	Increase the unconditional transfer	Business support in the agricultural sector	
Mat	Fulfil the legal obligation for the conditional transfer for civil protection by the government (2.3% of the budget for civil emergencies)	Increase funds for people in need	Increase the unconditional transfer		
Patos	Increase funds for people in need	Increase funding for special groups for victims of violence and children in need	Increase the unconditional transfer	Review of the fiscal package	
Peqin	Increase funds for people in need	Increase the unconditional transfer			
Përmet	Fulfil the legal obligation for the conditional transfer for civil protection by the government (2.3% of the budget for civil emergencies)	Increase funds for people in need	Increase the unconditional transfer		
Poliçan	Increase the unconditional transfer	Reimbursement from the central government for unforeseen expenses incurred from the municipal budget	Financial support to day-care center that provides food for people with special needs	Basic materials and strengthening of health center	
Pukë	Fulfil the legal obligation for the conditional transfer for civil protection by the government (2.3% of the budget for civil	Increase funds for people in need	Increasing of unconditional transfer		

Selenicë	Increase funds for emergencies	Increasing of unconditional transfer			
Tepelenë	Increase funds for people in need	Increasing of unconditional transfer			
Tropoje	Increase funds for people in need	Additional staff for social services (psychologist)	Increasing of unconditional transfer		
Ura Vajgurore	Business support through central government packages				
Vau Dejës	Lack of funds to cope with the Covid-19 crisis	Local market opening (according to specifications (signage, schedule)			
Vorë	Fulfil the legal obligation for the conditional transfer for civil protection by the government (2.3% of the budget for civil emergencies)	Increase the unconditional transfer	The need for more food aids		
Malësi e Madhe	Support of small businesses in the field of services, tourism	Support for farmers (product sales)	Financial support for families in need		
Bulqizë	Financial support for the unemployed as a result of COVID- 19	Support for the vulnerable population	Support from donors with infrastructure investment projects and not just to increase the number of employees	Promoting agricultural products and selling them within the Qark	
Dropull	Food aid for families in need	Financial assistance or soft loans for farmers in the area against the respective projects	Finding potential donors for reconstruction of houses of vulnerable persons in order to improve their living conditions;		
Memaliaj	Increase the unconditional transfer	Increase funds for people in need	Completion of the conditional transfer for civil protection by the government		
Mirditë	Increase the unconditional transfer	Fulfil the legal obligation for the conditional transfer for civil protection by the government (2.3% of the budget for civil emergencies)	Increase funds for people in need		
Roskovec	Financial resources to ensure the continuity of public services	Increase funds for emergencies	Inclusion in auxiliary packages of black workers		
Mallakastër	Increase the municipal budget	Expanding social package			
Tiranë	Opening of the public procurement process	Increase of economic aid (EA) and rent subsidy	Attracting foreign investment to create new jobs		
Shijak	Identification of families in need	Defining services for each family in need	Structuring working groups	Information on the measures and services that the municipality will undertake	
Kavajë	Insufficient food packages and economic assistance for people who lose their jobs	Psychological assistance for coping and understanding the situation by citizens; The need for technological tools to enable online learning	Support closed businesses (facilities)	The need for technological tools to enable online learning for children in families in need	

		for children in families in need.			
Dibër	Reimbursement of funds from losses caused by non-collection of local taxes and fees	Support of the agricultural sector with seeds, seedlings, fertilizers; Market insurance for agricultural products (also for stocks)	Support the tourism sector	Support for the unemployed	Equip healthcare centres with materials needed to address the current situation.
Divjake	Increase funds for emergencies	Increase funds for people in need	Increase the unconditional transfer		
Rrogozhinë	Increase funds for people in need	Facilitating package for closed businesses	Additional staff for social services (psychologist)		
Skrapar	Increase funds for emergencies	Need for transparency, need for time to prepare for the implementation of government commission's decisions on civil protection (not today for tomorrow).	Small possibilities for local and foreign donor interventions	Lack of local volunteer group	
Kamëz	Increasing of unconditional transfer	Increase funds for emergencies	Food aid to face the emergency		
Shkodër	Real-time database on the economic and social situation of the family (unemployed, in assistance, with economic aid (EA) from government business packages, from Covid scheme 1, Covid 2, pensioner, etc.)	Participation of municipalities in decision-making in a) assistance in tracking cases; b) in determining the decisions for the protection and prevention of the spread of Covid-19 at the Qark and central level, participating in the provision of solutions and their implementation.	Need for transparency, need for time to prepare for the implementation of government commission's decisions on civil protection (not today for tomorrow).		
Lezhë	Support for families in need	Additional staff for social services (psychologist)	Financial support and consultancy for dealing with Covid-19	Facilitate the transport of goods	

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