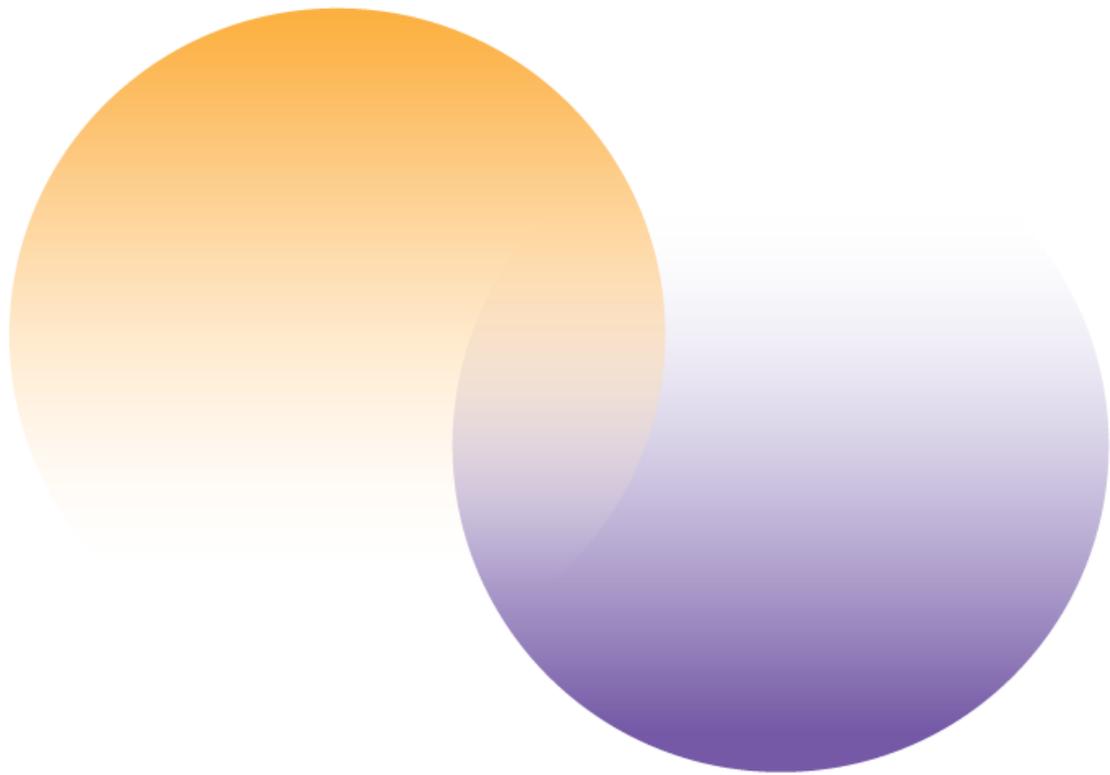


STUDY ON EMERGENCY NEEDS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN KOSOVO



Asociacioni i Komunave të Kosovës
Association of Kosovo Municipalities
Asocijacija Kosovskih Opština



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

“Study on Emergency Needs and Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Local Government in Kosovo”

*Report on Emergency Needs and Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 -
Web Based Survey and Focus Group Discussions*

This study is financed by the Swiss Cooperation Office in Kosovo (SDC).

This report has been produced by UBO Consulting, on behalf of the Association of Kosovo
Municipalities (AKM).

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List of Abbreviations

AKM	Association of Kosovo Municipalities
CBK	Central Bank of Kosovo
CPA	Central Procurement Agency
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EU	European Union
IFIs	International Financial Institutions IFI
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KBRA	Kosovo Business Registration Agency
MAFRD	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development
MCYS	Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports
MEETESI	Ministry of Economy, Employment, Trade, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Strategic Investments
MEST	Ministry of Science, Education and Technology
MFT	Ministry of Finance and Transfers
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MoH	Ministry of Health
MLGA	Ministry of Local Government Administration
SDC	Swiss Cooperation Office in Kosovo
NIPHK	National Institute of Public Health of Kosovo
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the period of May-July 2020, UBO Consulting, on behalf of the Association of Kosovo Municipalities (hereby referred to as AKM), conducted a study on “Emergency Needs and Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 in Local Government in Kosovo”. It aimed to identify the difficulties encountered by the municipalities during the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, measures taken by the latter to manage this situation, cooperation with the central level and the AKM, as well as emergency needs of municipalities to overcome the socio-economic consequences by the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. The study was supported by the Swiss Cooperation Office in Kosovo (SDC).

For the purpose of this study, a total of 255 semi-structured interviews and eight (8) focus group discussions were conducted. While interviews included both municipal mayors and directors, focus group discussions were held only with municipal directors. The study covered all 34 municipalities of Kosovo, members of the AKM.

The following section presents key findings derived from the interviews and focus group sessions with the aforementioned target groups.

1.1. Key Findings

- Limited budget and lack of protective measures such as face masks, gloves and hand sanitizers, were mentioned as the main difficulties encountered by the majority of municipalities since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Other difficulties included lack of medical staff, technology for online classes, banning of certain economic activities, etc.
- The majority of municipal representatives (57%) declared that they were somewhat prepared in dealing with such a pandemic situation.
- In general, measures taken by the municipal directorates in order to manage the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic included disinfection of the municipal facilities and public spaces, equipping staff with protective measures, reduction of staff and rotation work. Also, Local Emergency Headquarters were established in all municipalities.
- Other measures taken by specific directorates were reallocation of budget, designing of economic recovery package, providing information on Government’s decisions to the local businesses and community, distribution of food and hygiene packages for families in need, etc.
- Most municipal representatives (71%) declared that they had cooperated with all line ministries/central level institutions during the spread of COVID-19 pandemic and 55% of them were ‘Very/somewhat satisfied’ with this cooperation.
- More than half of municipal directors (57%) in this study have cooperated with the AKM, while the majority of them (82%) were “Somewhat/very Satisfied” with this cooperation. The cooperation between the municipal mayors and AKM was even higher (66%).
- Emergency needs varied according to the specifics of the municipal directorates. However, two common emergency needs of most municipal directorates were the need for an economic recovery package, and allocation of the emergency fund.

- Other emergency needs included: lack of health staff, lack of technological tools in schools, accurate guidelines for disinfection of public spaces, roads and urban furniture, etc.
- The provision of protective measures, support funds and subsidies for various businesses were mentioned as measures that could also be taken by donor organizations, lending institutions, various associations, which would help in managing and overcoming this situation in municipalities.
- Lastly, according to the majority of municipal directors (70%), their officials need capacity building/trainings on different topics such as managing emergencies, budget planning in emergency situations, online services training and procurement training, which most of them (78%) preferred to attend these trainings in person, rather through online platforms.

2. INTRODUCTION

In May 2020, UBO Consulting was commissioned by the AKM to conduct a study on the Emergency Needs and Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Local Government in Kosovo. The main purpose of the research was to better understand the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in the local level, as well as give the chance to municipal representatives to express and define their emergency needs, that will later on be presented to all relevant institutions and stakeholders. This study was supported by Swiss Cooperation Office in Kosovo (SDC).

Due to the rapid spread of the virus, frequent changes on the restrictions and budget limitations, Kosovo municipalities, being in the front line for delivering services to their citizens and managing the situation with COVID-19, faced numerous new challenges and difficulties. Consequently, the AKM has been facing countless requests by the municipalities. Being responsible to address those requests to the central level institutions and help them during these difficult times, the AKM initiated the idea of conducting a study on Emergency Needs and Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Local Government in Kosovo. Among others, this study's results would be presented to all relevant institutions and stakeholders, and serve as a guideline for them to design their programs, activities or forms of interventions, towards supporting Kosovo municipalities improve their mitigation efforts, in response to COVID-19.

For this assignment, UBO Consulting agency assisted the AKM with technical advice in designing, developing and administering the study. Namely, the agency's major tasks included:

- Preparing the research instruments (Mayors' and Directors' Questionnaires)
- Proposing the data collection methods and procedure
- Conducting semi-structured interviews with Mayors and Directors
- Conducting focus group discussions with directorates
- Conducting an in-depth analysis of the interviews and focus group discussions
- Drafting a general report

This document is drafted to present the results derived from 255 semi-structured interviews and eight (8) focus group discussions. Furthermore, it includes the methodological approach, instrument and recruitment process. Conclusions and recommendations from the results of this particular study are part of the report, as well.

2.1. Background Information on COVID-19

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). In 2019, it was identified as the cause of a disease outbreak that originated in China. In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic¹. It has now spread across the globe and to date, there are 11,790,944 confirmed cases and 541,895 deaths². According to the latest statistics, United States ranks the first country with the highest number of confirmed cases -1.8 million confirmed cases, followed by Brazil and then India. ³

Situation with COVID-19 in Kosovo

The first two confirmed cases in Kosovo were registered on 13 March, and located in two different municipalities, Viti/Vitina and Klinë/Klina. This was followed by an immediate decision of the Kosovo Government to quarantine and block the entrances and exits of these two cities.⁴ As of 11 March, schools have been closed, air and land travel lines suspended, public and non-public activities were allowed only in-doors, without the presence of public, and all restaurants, nightclubs, gyms, swimming pools etc. have stopped their activity⁵. Due to the increase of the number of confirmed cases with COVID-19, on 15 March, the Government has declared public health state of emergency⁶, whereas the restrictions have tightened and intensified, by a recent decision of the Government, made on 15 April⁷. The restrictions in response to COVID-19 were further changed, according to the phases depicted below:

Phase 1

Considering that the number of confirmed cases had reached its peak and started to decrease, Kosovo Government in collaboration with the Ministry of Health has eased the restrictions, by beginning with the Phase 1 on May 4, 2020. In this phase, citizens were allowed free movement for three hours per day (1.5 hr. a.m. and 1.5 hr. p.m.) - the schedule variation was based on the penultimate number on the ID number of citizens. Moreover, the companies that were allowed to begin their normal operations were construction companies, companies that do vehicle trade (partly), retail (partly) and service repair companies, and consulting companies.

¹ Mayo Clinic (2020). Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)—Symptoms and causes. Retrieved 14 April 2020. url: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coronavirus_disease_2019

² Worldometer (2020). World coronavirus cases. Retrieved 06 July, 2020. url: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

³ *Coronavirus*. Who.int. (2020). Retrieved 4 June 2020, from <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

⁴ Wikipedia (2020). 2020 coronavirus pandemic in Kosovo. Retrieved April 22,2020. url:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_coronavirus_pandemic_in_Kosovo

⁵ Kosovo Government (2020). Decision No. 01/07. Retrieved April 22, 2020. url.: <https://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Vendimet-e-Mbledhjes-s%C3%AB-7-t%C3%AB-t%C3%AB-Qeveris%C3%AB-s%C3%AB-Republik%C3%ABs-s%C3%AB-Kosov%C3%ABs-2020.pdf>

⁶ Kosovo Government (2020). Decision No. 01/11. Retrieved April 22, 2020. url.: <https://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Vendimi-nr.01-11.pdf>

⁷ Ministry of Health (2020). Decision No./2020. Retrieved April 22, 2020. url.: <https://msh.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Vendim.pdf?fbclid=IwAR35jlkDWH6kpNrlCwBfA78TWpNdK9LeKRdsuTegP9txN66cLHlio2LvShI>

Phase 2

The second phase began on May 18, 2020. In this phase, citizens were allowed free movement for four hours per day (2 hr. a.m. and 2 hr. p.m.) – the schedule of the citizens depended on to the penultimate number on the ID number of citizens. Companies which were allowed to operate fully were retail companies, dentists and physiotherapists, hairdressers and beauty centres, and green markets. In addition, restaurants and bars were allowed to provide their products only by doing delivery or take away. Railway and urban transport were allowed. And lastly, museums, galleries and call centres were opened.

Phase 3

The final phase began on May 28, 2020, where the restrictions on the citizens' movement were almost discharged; movements were restricted only from 21:00 until 05:00. From June 1, 2020, taxis were allowed to work, urban and interurban transport have officially started their complete operation, restaurants and bars started to operate normally, cinemas and theatres were opened and some sport activities in halls were allowed to take place. Concerning the education, important exams in higher education and achievement exam was allowed to be held physically by students.⁸

Unfortunately, the number of confirmed cases has significantly increased with the full removal of the Government's restrictions, on June 1, 2020. To date, Kosovo registers a number of 3,508 confirmed cases and 75 deaths⁹.

Consequences of COVID-19

The main focus of Kosovo Government was to stop the intensity of the spread of the virus; however, these measures had side-effects when concerning the socio-economic issues. The fallout is present in every country that has been touched by COVID-19, but it is more emphasized in developing countries such as Kosovo. The outbreak of COVID-19 and the necessary containment measures have put investment, private consumption, but also exports and remittances from the diaspora, under unprecedented strain. For Kosovo, the World Bank report projects that the economy will contract by 4.5 percent in 2020, followed by a rebound in 2021¹⁰.

Fiscal Emergency Package

Due to major consequences from the measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Kosovo Government in collaboration with Ministry of Finance and Transfers has implemented a Fiscal Emergency Package. The Fiscal Emergency Package had the value of 179.6 million euros. This package had 15 measures that included almost every individual and business that struggled due to the COVID-19 circumstances such as citizens with social schemes and pension, employees that worked immensely hard during these difficult times like police staff, nurses, doctors, firemen and employees that worked in supermarkets, drugstores, and bakeries. Companies which had to stop

⁸Shfuqizimi i vendimeve të datës 31.03.2020 dhe vendimet e reja të Ministrisë së Shëndetësisë rreth Covid-19 – Ministria e Shëndetësisë. Msh.rks-gov.net. (2020). Retrieved 4 June 2020, from <https://msh.rks-gov.net/vendimet-e-reja-te-ministrise-se-shendetesise-rreth-covid-19/>.

⁹ Ministry of Health (2020). Daily Coronavirus Statistics. Retrieved April 22, 2020. url.:<https://kosova.health/>

¹⁰ Kosovo's Economy Projected to Contract by 4.5 Percent in 2020 Due to COVID-19. Worldbank.org (2020). Retrieved 19 June 2020, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/29/kosovo-economy-projected-to-contract-by-45-percent-in-2020-due-to-covid-19>

their operations due to COVID-19 and needed financial aid, benefited mostly from this package since they were helped with the rent, exports, their loan interest rates were pushed for three months and were helped with the salaries of the employees for April and May- this package paid employees that had a valid work contract and employees that got fired due to the circumstances. Unemployed citizens were also part of the benefits of this package. Additionally, fiscal emergency package included grants for the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development and for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport.¹¹

Emergency Fiscal Package is designed to minimize the damages that are caused by COVID-19, rather than compensate all the consequences from this pandemic. Hence, another package is being designed. Economic Recovery Package is a package which is planned to be designed for Kosovo companies and citizens to give them an additional financial push that will help them overcome this situation.

2.2. Association of Kosovo Municipalities Activities regarding COVID-19

Municipalities of Kosovo were activated and have worked immensely to make better decisions for citizens in regards to fighting the battle against the spread of the pandemic. They have faced various challenges and struggles due to the pandemic. As almost all decisions and measures were taken by the central level institutions, the cooperation of the local level authorities with the Kosovo Government during this period was very important. In this context, the AKM, being the main facilitator of this cooperation had a crucial role. Having in mind its role as well as being faced with countless requests by the municipalities, AKM was very active in terms of addressing municipalities' requests towards central level institutions, and at the same time, informing the municipalities on all decisions and measures taken by the Government, in response to COVID-19. The following section presents some of the activities carried out by the AKM:

- On March 11, before any confirmed cases in Kosovo, AKM had requested from the Government to supply the municipalities with all necessary measures for protection from the coronavirus such as gloves, masks and disinfectant; especially for health workers which were always on the front line.
- The Collegium for Health and Social Welfare of the AKM on March 17, 2020, under the leadership of the Chairman Mr. Bujar Gashi, held the next meeting regarding the situation created in Kosovo after the first confirmed cases with the COVID-19.
- On March 18, AKM addressed the Government and the Ministry of Finance for the permission of the reallocation of financial means that could help Kosovar citizens fight COVID-19; this reallocation of the budget was approved by the Ministry of Finance two days later.
- On March 20, AKM addressed the Government with another request; to prohibit restaurants to offer take away services, since the gathering of citizens in these operators could cause the spread of COVID-19.
- On March 21, municipal mayors had collectively made an appeal for the citizens to stay in their homes and respect the measures of their institutions to fight the spread of the pandemic.

¹¹ Mf.rks-gov.net. (2020). Retrieved 5 June 2020, from <https://mf.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/CF860B38-765C-41B3-87D0-6E38AD371584.pdf>.

- On March 22, AKM published the “National Reaction Plan” which included all responsibilities made for municipalities and mayors.
- On March 23, AKM had insisted to ease the procedures of public procurement in emergency situation.
- On March 24, the request of AKM for the suspension of law activities of municipalities’ assembly in regards to financial aspects for fighting the COVID-19 was approved.
- On March 27, AKM requested to change the schedule of free movement. Firstly, the restrictions were from 10:00-16:00 and from 20:00-06:00, but due to the limited time for free movement, AKM had asked to change the schedule and make the restrictions from 18:00-06:00. This request was approved on March 28.
- On March 30, collegium for Budget and Finance of AKM requested the postponement of interest rates of loans and penalties for taxpayers. The request was approved on April 1st.
- Following the request of the Collegium for Budget and Finance of the AKM addressed to the Ministry of Finance and Transfers, on April the 1st, the latter approved the ban on interest and penalties for all citizens of the Republic of Kosovo for delays in paying property tax until the transition of pandemic.
- On March 31, AKM had requested to include municipality inspectors in the Fiscal Emergency Package.
- AKM was continuously coordinating with the Ministry of Health on the establishment of schedules for the free movements of Kosovo citizens.
- On April 14, AKM has reacted towards the measures to begin on April 15, as they were taken without the consultation with the local authorities.
- Additionally, AKM had requested free movement, without any restrictions, for the farmers from April 14.
- On April 15, AKM had requested to allow the infrastructure investments and maintenance services in municipalities. This request was approved on April 18th.
- On April 22, AKM representatives have met with the Ministry of Local Government Administration to further discuss about the measures that should be taken for fighting COVID-19.
- Municipalities were prohibited to continue procurement activities for capital investments; hence, AKM has reacted against this decision on April 23. After AKM’s reaction, on April 27, municipalities could publish tenders since procurement activities were no longer suspended.
- On April 28, AKM made a request towards the opportunity of not applying for interest-rate delays or unpaid tax fines for the year 2020.
- On April 29, AKM had organized a meeting with the Working Group of Municipal Officials regarding waste management through online platforms.
- Upon the proposal by AKM, on May 5th, it was decided to not issue fines for unpaid taxes on property for the year 2020.

- During May and June, the director of AKM had visited municipalities such as Suharekë/Suva Reka, Istog/Istok, Skenderaj/Srbica, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Pejë/Peć, Deçan/Deçani, Mamushë/Mamuša, Prizren/Prizren, Obiliq/Obilić and Viti/Vitina. The director of AKM met and discussed with every mayor of these municipalities about the current situation with COVID-19 and about municipalities' plans for the prevention of COVID-19.
- On May 22, AKM had requested from the Ministry of Agriculture to revalue and evaluate again the refusal list of the farmers since some of them were not aware of some procedures that had to be followed; thus, they were excluded from potential financial aids.
- On May 23, AKM had requested to shorten the Phase 2 period of the measures for fighting COVID-19.
- On May 26, with the request of AKM, fines regarding civil registration delays were also suspended.
- On June 2, AKM had reacted on the decision for not opening the kindergartens on June 1 as planned, as well as on the lack of inter-institutional coordination between the Government and AKM for this issue.
- The Executive Director of the AKM, Mr. Sazan Ibrahimiri visited the municipality of Viti/Vitina on June 2. Director Ibrahimiri informed Mayor Haliti about the activities and actions of AKM on the support of municipalities in terms of coordination with the central level.
- On an inter-institutional meeting, held on June 8, the Minister of Health, Mr. Armend Zemaj and the Council of Mayors met in an afternoon meeting to debate the current situation with Pandemic Covid-19. During his speech, the Vice President of AKM, Mr. Xhafer Gashi emphasized the availability of AKM to support and assist in the fight against COVID spread 19.
- On June 10, mayors and the Government of Kosovo discussed the budget review process. During this meeting, they had a discussion regarding the review of municipal budgets in the process of budget review, economic and budgetary situation as a result of COVID-19 Pandemic and Economic Recovery Package.
- MEST, MoH, NIPHK in consultation with AKM, on June 13, decided that the supplementary lesson for the secondary school certificate test to be held online.
- On June 30, Minister of Trade and Industry met with the Inspection Collegium of AKM. They discussed on measures to prevent the further spread of COVID -19 as well as the imposition of fines provided for citizens and businesses that do not comply with the instructions of relevant institutions in pandemic times. At the end of the meeting the participants agreed on the following conclusions of the meeting:
 - a. Establishment of a Task Force for coordination between the central and local levels in the field of sanitary inspections, where identification and problem solving will take place.
 - b. The number of Sanitary Inspectors should be increased in order to continuously monitor businesses by inspectors during pandemic measures.
 - c. The assistance of the Police is necessary in the implementation of the measures foreseen by the manual of the Ministry of Health.

- d. Greater cooperation is needed between the Kosovo Food and Veterinary Agency and the Municipalities.
- On July 1st, at the request of the Association of Kosovo Municipalities, the Central Procurement Agency (CPA) has allowed Municipalities and all contracting authorities to complete and amend as needed Procurement Plans for 2020.

3. STUDY METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, UBO Consulting used the qualitative method of research, namely semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. This method of research is usually used to draw in-depth information from the complex personal experiences, beliefs and perceptions of participants.

Accordingly, UBO Consulting conducted 255 semi-structured interviews with municipal representatives from all 34 municipalities of Kosovo, members of the AKM, and a total of eight (8) focus group discussions with the most affected directorates of the aforementioned municipalities. Semi-structured interviewing resulted as most advantageous due to the fact that it allowed the participants to fully express their experience and concerns surrounding the COVID-19 socio-economic impact on their municipalities.

Considering the Government's measurement in response to COVID-19, the study was conducted using **ONLINE PLATFORMS**. Namely, the semi-structured interviews were conducted through a web-based survey questionnaire, which was divided into 5 themes, with a total of 18-21 questions. The vast majority of the questions were open-ended questions, where the respondent could express in-depth information regards the issues that were treated by the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into the following themes:

1. The difficulties faced by municipalities/directorates since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic
2. Measures taken by municipalities/directorates to manage the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic
3. Cooperation with central level institutions, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities/directorates
4. Cooperation with the Association of Kosovo Municipalities, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities/directorates
5. Emergency needs of municipalities/directorates to manage and overcome the situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic

Further, the semi-structured interviews were primarily finalized in Albanian, with then being translated to English and Serbian.

After identifying the list of contacts provided by the AKM, the participants were recruited through emails, followed by direct phone calls. The emails contained the purpose of the study, the attached web-based online survey link, and the researcher's email and telephone contact information. In the midst of 300 municipal representatives that were contacted, a total of 255 of them responded to the web-based online survey; therefore, accounting for a response rate of 85%.

Municipal Representatives	Number of conducted Interviews
Mayors	29
Directorate of Budget and Finances	32
Directorate of Health and Social Welfare	27
Directorate of Economic Development	29
Directorate of Education	28
Directorate of Agriculture	28
Directorate of Youth, Culture and Sports	24
Directorate of Administration	26
Directorate of Public Services	32
TOTAL	255

Moreover, for the second phase of this particular study, UBO Consulting also conducted a total of eight focus-groups, categorized as follows:

- One (1) focus group discussion with Directors of Budget and Finances
- One (1) focus group discussion with Directors of Health and Social Welfare
- One (1) focus group discussion with Directors of Economic Development
- One (1) focus group discussion with Directors of Agriculture
- One (1) focus group discussion with Directors of Education,
- One (1) focus group discussion with Directors of Culture, Youth and Sports
- One (1) focus group discussion with Directors of Administration
- One (1) focus group discussion with Directors of Public Services

These focus group discussions were divided into such categories which represented the collegiums of the AKM. These meetings provided the municipal directors with the opportunity to discuss their work models of functioning and exchange good practices, in terms of managing the situation created by COVID-19. At these meetings, members had the opportunity to discuss concretely and in more detail the crisis caused by the spread of the virus and at the same time describe their emergency needs, to recover from the consequences of COVID-19.

The potential invitees for the focus group discussions were selected from the lists of the directors, submitted by the AKM, used for the web-based questionnaire, as well. In order to produce the lists of

the potential directors for the focus group sessions, UBO Consulting used a random sampling methodology, through which the directors in the lists were divided by directorates or collegiums.

In the case of this study, UBO Consulting recruited up to twelve directors, in order to reduce the number of no-shows. All confirmed participants were contacted the day before the session was held, to be reminded of the time of the online focus group and to confirm, once again, their participation.

Considering the situation created by COVID-19, the discussion took place online, through the connection to an online platform. The focus group discussions consisted of a total of 90 directors, from the selected directorates/collegiums.

4. STUDY RESULTS

The following sections disclose the results from the web-based questionnaire and focus group discussions with municipal representatives, namely municipal mayors and municipal directors, on emergency needs and socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on local government in Kosovo. This research addressed various topics, including difficulties that had been encountered by municipalities during the pandemic, measures taken by municipalities in order to manage the situation, cooperation with central level institutions and the Association of Kosovo Municipalities and the emergency needs of these municipalities.

The results from the questionnaire and focus group results are integrated into the same topics, whenever similar issues were explored.

4.1. Results from the Mayors' Questionnaire

A total of 29 municipal mayors participated in this study. Through this study, the latter had the opportunity to express their opinions on certain issues, including difficulties faced by municipalities since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, measures taken by municipalities to manage the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, cooperation with central level institutions and AKM, and emergency needs of municipalities to manage and overcome the situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic. The results from interviews with municipal mayors are depicted in the following subsections.

4.1.1. The difficulties faced by municipalities since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic

The semi-structured interview's initial question aimed to reveal the difficulties faced by the municipalities' mayors since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Given that, the municipalities' mayors were asked to list the most prominent difficulties they encountered while managing the COVID-19 circumstances within their municipalities.

In this context, the responses of the municipal mayors quite varied from lack of funds, limited budget and lack of economic-wise preparation for such a pandemic situation. The limited budget issue proceeded to cause other difficulties among the municipalities' mayors, such as failing to direct the budget distribution to sufficient preventive measures, such as face masks, gloves, hand sanitizers and other essential pandemic measures.

Within the same theme of question, responding on which would be the second most faced difficulty in terms of managing the COVID-19 pandemic, the respondents highlighted issues such as being short on medical staff, the suspension of foreseen capital projects to be executed on this year, and the decrease of municipalities incomes. Furthermore, a number of municipal mayors declared that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the number of families in need; therefore, complicating the process of allocating resources to this category. On a different matter, the mayor of the municipality of Kllokot/Klokot, voiced on the psychological and mental health issues that the citizens had to endure during this period of isolation and economic hardship.

A popular response identified amongst the respondents was the fact that the mayors found themselves unprepared and not trained for the state of affairs that emerged. Being inexperienced led to difficulties in managing and operating under the given circumstances.

Moreover, as the below chart depicts, the municipal mayors were specifically asked on how prepared their municipalities were to deal with a pandemic situation. While the majority of municipal mayors (21 out of 29) stated that they consider their municipalities to have been prepared to a certain extent, there was a small number of those (7 out of 29) who confidently affirmed that they were well prepared to manage the situation. On the other hand, the mayor of the municipality of Vushtrri / Vuçitër was the only one who declared that they were largely unprepared for such a situation.

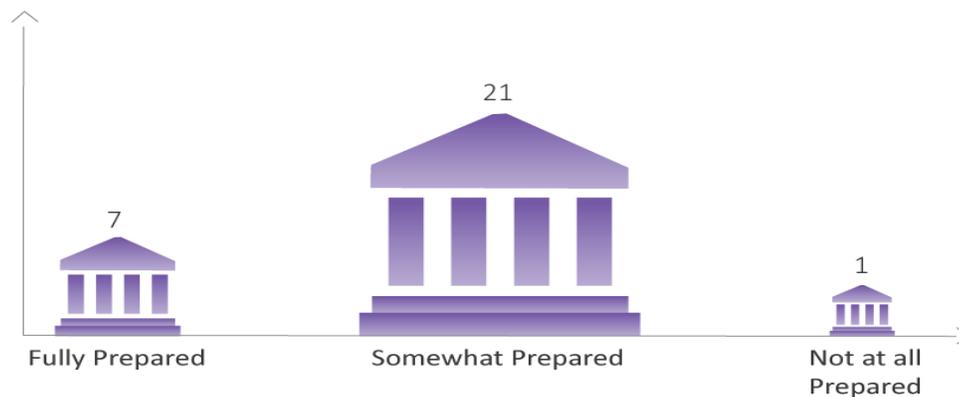


Figure 1. Level of preparation in dealing with such a pandemic situation

4.1.2. Measures taken by municipalities to manage the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic

In order to grasp even further information on the immediate measures taken by the municipalities, each respondent was asked to list other courses of action made in an attempt to manage the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, respondents expressed various actions that were adapted, such as allocating an emergent fund of 200.000€ to families in need, and respecting the recommendations of National Public Health Institute in Kosovo (hereby referred to as NPHIK), in order to prevent the further spread of the virus. Moreover, the mayor of municipality of Vushtrri/Vucitër declared that in cooperation with the farmers and other small manufacturers, they established groups so as to be able to sell their products directly, considering the fact that this group was highly impacted by the pandemic.

Considering the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic caused on the psychological wellbeing and general mental health of the citizens, mayors of the municipalities of Suharekë/Suva Reka and Prizren/Prizren established an online platform that provides free psychological consulting. The same approach was employed by the municipality of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, where in addition to that, pamphlets that contained information regarding the virus were provided, two large objects were

assigned as quarantine and treatment locations for emergent cases, and emergent teams were organized to monitor and examine travellers at the border checkpoint of Bërnjak/Brnjak.

Furthermore, particular interest shown in this study was recognizing the measures taken by the municipality's mayors during the COVID-19 pandemic towards four categories that are considered most vulnerable:

- Individuals with special needs,
- The elderly,
- Women, and
- Rural area citizens.

Within the first category, on the basis of the measures that the participants undertook in assisting individuals with special needs, their responses were quite similar. The majority of the municipal mayors stated that they took upon providing food supplies, hygienic items, medicines and arranging free medical visits. Other than that, the mayor of the municipality of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, voiced his difficulties in identifying the demands of this category, on which he requested the support of civil society organizations that work with individuals with special needs.

Secondly, when asked about the actions that the municipalities took in assisting the elderly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, common answers were recognized. The participants explained that they engaged in providing food supplies, medicines, daily meals and free medical visits. In addition, medical teams were sent out to execute medical check-outs to the elderly in their own homes in the municipality of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. Further on, the mayor of the municipality of Vushtrri/Vučitrn expressed that they had engaged a voluntary staff to assist the elders that lack basic social care, while also providing a free helpline for the elders in need.

In addition, a special focus was placed on the measures engaged by the municipalities towards women during this pandemic period. In this regard, the majority of municipal mayors stated that this category was assisted in accordance to their individual requests. Other measures taken included allowing women to not be obliged to go to work (i.e. giving all women the option to work from home). Furthermore, the mayor of Ferizaj/Uroševac stated that a particular focus was placed on aiding single mothers and war victims of sexual violence.

As a last category, taking into account the measures taken by the mayors was that towards the citizens that live in rural areas. The results implicated that the mayors of municipalities employed actions that generally assisted the rural area citizens with food supplies, hygienic items and medicines. For instance, the mayor of the municipality of Ferizaj/Uroševac stated that in collaboration with the villages' representatives, 2000 food items were distributed to citizens of rural areas. A different approach was brought up by the municipality of Vushtrri/Vučitrn, which included organizing COVID-19 emergent teams in each village with the purpose of assisting the citizens during the pandemic circumstances.

As a final point, on this topic of the measurements taken by the municipalities in order to come in aid to the aforementioned categories, it can be concluded that the series of actions employed to the distinct categories were quite similar. Nearly all municipalities focused their assistance to providing food supplies, hygienic items, medicines and free medical visits.

Further, a cursory glance at the Figure 2. shows that while 23 out of 29 municipalities have relocated municipal budget to fight COVID-19 pandemic, 6 out of 29 have failed to do so. As for the amount allocated for this aspect, it varied in the municipalities, starting with a minimum amount of 1000.00 EUR (Municipality of Kačanik/Kaçanik) to that of 326,000.00 EUR (Municipality of Podujevë/Podujevo), which were intended mainly for protective equipment, such as face masks, gloves, disinfectants and other hygienic equipment, food packages for families in need and for the disinfection of public institutions and collective housing.



Figure 2. Relocation of Municipal Budget in fighting COVID-19 pandemics

With respect to the preparation of an Emergency Package to assist private businesses and other categories in need, data reveal that 16 out of 29 municipalities in this study, have established such a package. The amount allocated for these businesses has been included in the above-mentioned amount for budget relocation. However, as additional assistance to businesses was the decision to exempt businesses from tax for 3 months (or 25% of the annual tax) specifically for municipal taxes for the use of public spaces, as well as the exemption for 6 months for all leases to the municipality.

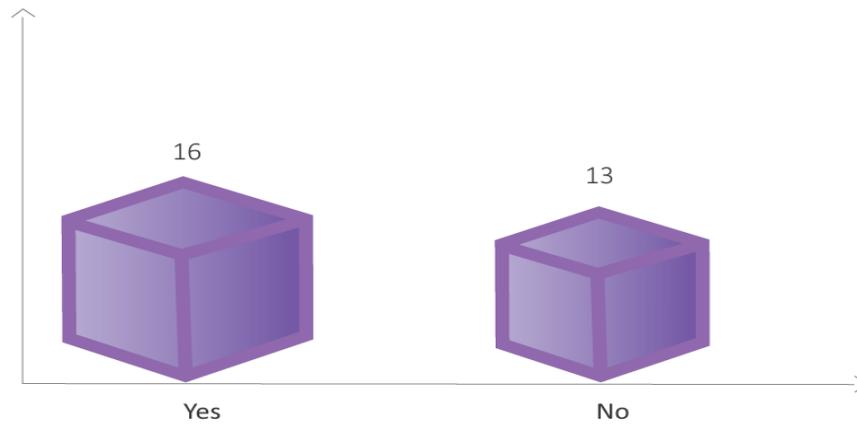


Figure 3. Preparation of Emergency Package in helping private businesses and other categories in need

4.1.3. Cooperation with central level institutions, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

A matter of significant importance in this study was recognizing the requests of the municipalities that were addressed to the central levels of governance in relation to the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As illustrated in the chart below, the pattern of communication between the local and the central government appears to have varied across municipalities. While 12 out of 29 municipalities have engaged in systemic and persistent communication with central level institutions, 10 out of 29 municipalities often encountered such a cooperation. Less municipalities (7 out of 29) claim to have encountered rare communication and cooperation activities with the central government.

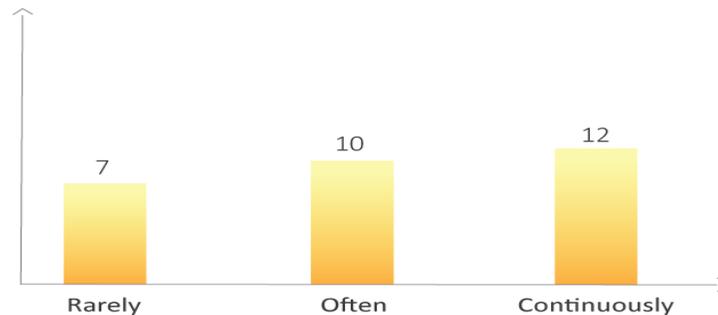


Figure 4. Cooperation with central level institutions, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

Furthermore, the results of the study show that the municipalities addressed common requests regarding the situation caused by the pandemic. Their main requests revolved around the emergent need for financial support and prevention products such as masks, gloves and sanitizers. Moreover, the majority of the participants stated that they had also requested for medicines, explaining further that the urgency was high considering that hospitals were undersupplied. In addition, the participants required information from the NPHIK regarding the number of COVID-19 cases in their municipalities, on which they voiced their criticism directed to the NPHIK, explaining that the only way to gain access to this kind of information was through social media platforms.

Further on, it is worth noticing that the mayor of the municipality of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica filed the request of being granted permission to continue working on infrastructure projects so that the citizens could be provided with water supply and waste waters that are essential for hygiene, which accordingly is crucial in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of the extent to which the central government has managed to address the demands of the municipalities, only 2 out of 29 municipalities stated that the government has fully addressed their requests, while 10 out of 29 asserted that the government has failed to fulfill their expectations. However, 17 out of 29 municipalities claimed that their demands were addressed to a certain extent.

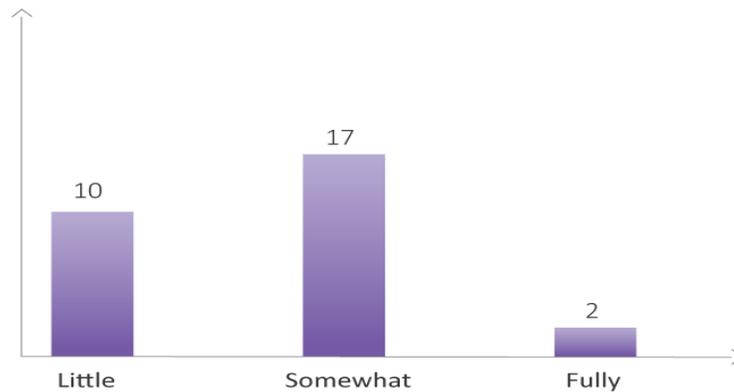


Figure 5. Evaluation of cooperation with central level institutions / line ministries, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

4.1.4. Cooperation with the Association of Kosovo Municipalities, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

This study, among others, aims to shed light to the requests addressed to the AKM by mayors of municipalities in Kosovo. Similar to above sections, the participants were asked to assess the level of communication they had with the AKM and list the requests that were addressed, in order to further explore their emergent needs with respect to the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of municipal mayors (21 out of 29) have been continuously communicating with the AKM, since the spread of COVID-19. On the other hand, the remaining municipalities have described their communication as frequent (5 out of 29) and rare (1 out of 29). Only two out of 29 municipalities reported a complete lack of communication with the AKM.

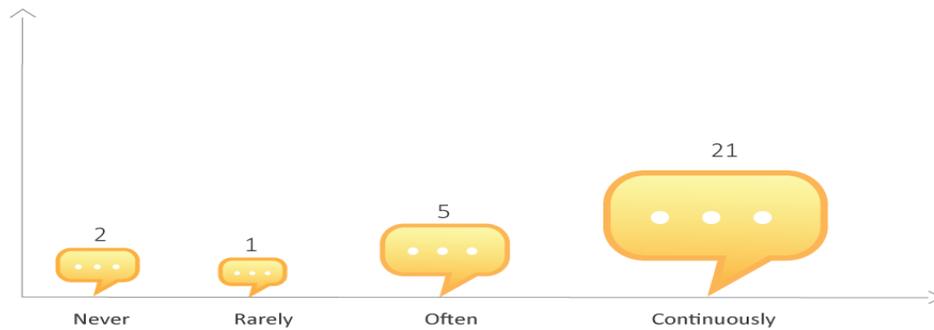


Figure 6. Cooperation with Association of Kosovo Municipalities, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

According to the research results, the participants provided various responses in relation to the main types of requests that they addressed to the AKM regarding the COVID-19 pandemic situation. A number of participants stated that they demanded the AKM to voice their concerns/requests to the government. Others implied that they requested information regarding the number of COVID-19 cases in their municipalities, implementation of large capital projects, incorporation of other professionals such as inspectors, waste management workers and municipalities' officials on Emergency Fiscal Package, as well aid the farmers through permitting them performing their activity during the movement restriction period.

In addition, the mayors of Shtime/Štimlje and Junik/Junik elaborated further details on the requests addressed to the AKM, (i.e. remove administrative barriers when purchasing prevention products and help mitigate the stigmatization placed upon individuals infected with the COVID-19 virus). The mayors of Prizren/Prizren and Shtime/Štimlje also recommended for the government to help farmers by purchasing their products and distributing them to the citizens in need, therefore benefiting both groups.

The data summarized in the chart below, unveiled that 18 out of 29 municipalities have regarded AKM as having fully addressed their requests to the central level. On the other hand, 9 out of 29 municipalities stated that the AKM has met their expectations to an extent.

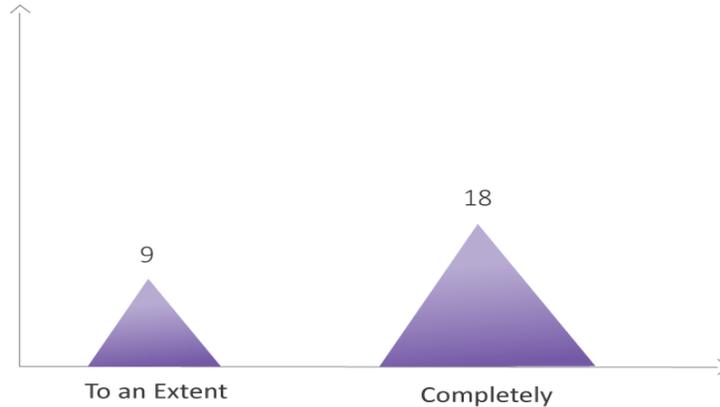


Figure 7. Evaluation of cooperation with Association of Kosovo Municipalities, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

4.1.5. Emergency needs of municipalities to manage and overcome the situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic

This study's imperative aim was to investigate the municipalities' emergent necessities that needed to be met in order to properly manage and overcome the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study show that financial support and funding were identified as emergency needs for the municipalities in order to successfully mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic consequences. However, the participants voiced that other emergent needs such as preventive measures, financial aid to farmers, seasonal employment to individuals living on social assistance and improved coordination between central and local levels of governance would be of great importance in overcoming the situation.

Moreover, the mayors of Hani i Elezit/Elez Han and Podujevë/Podujevo expressed that they are in emergent need of medical teams at the border check points of Hani i Elezit/Elez Han and Merdarë, implicating that the municipalities are unable to employ medical coverage in these areas.

On a different note, the mayor of Obiliq/Obilić in response to the given question gave the recommendation that the budget foreseen for this year's capital projects that has not been executed due to the emerge of COVID-19 pandemic, should be saved and carried to next year's projects.

In order to expand understanding on the greatest concerns faced by the mayors regarding the measures that must be taken by the government to facilitate the mitigation of obstacles generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants were asked to communicate their judgment on the measures they deem suitable given the situation. The majority of mayors stated that the government must place their focus on supporting the business community. In addition, they declared that the central government should assist categories that were excluded from the emergent financial package, farmers, and mothers and children. Furthermore, given the insufficient budget, the participants of this target group stated that the government should compensate the municipalities' expenses that incurred when dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, on a more positive note, the mayor of Gjakovë/Đakovica pointed out that he believes that the government is taking all the required measures in order to assist all municipalities in managing and overcoming the circumstances generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, this study tackled the measures that would be of great assistance to municipalities from different charity organizations, lending institutions or non-profit organizations in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The participants stated that, considering the unfortunate circumstances, any help would be useful.

However, the mayor of Rahovec/Orahovac declared that there is an emergent need for an advancement of informative technology (i.e. the projects that were to be implemented virtually, could be performed due to the insufficient number of computers in the municipality). In addition to that, the participants expressed their gratitude to multiple organizations such as The Red Cross, Islamic Council, Balkan's Orphans and Diaspora. They claimed that the further assistance towards the provision of free phones or other devices for children that lack the means to attend online lectures would be highly appreciated.

The last part of this section, tackled the issues that are of great importance to be addressed to the government through the AKM, while placing particular attention to the legislation. Participants' responses touched on different issues listed below:

- Propose a new law that covers the management of similar pandemic situations,
- Simplify procurement procedures, and
- Grant additional financial competences to local governance.

Nevertheless, the majority of participants stated their belief that the AKM is already providing great assistance in voicing the municipalities' demands to the central governance.

4.2. Results from the Directors' Questionnaire

Municipal directors participated in this study, as well. Namely, a total of 226 semi-structured interviews were carried out with this target group. Similar to municipal mayors, the municipal directors were asked on similar aspects. However, they were requested to provide their responses from the directorates' perspectives, rather than the perspective of the municipalities as a whole.

4.2.1. The difficulties faced by the directorate since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic

To begin with, the municipal directors were initially asked to describe the difficulties faced by their directorates since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. They had the opportunity to address up to a non-limited number of difficulties. In general, the majority of municipal directors listed common difficulties, which they encountered during the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. The most mentioned difficulty by all directors was the lack of protective equipment, such as masks, gloves and alcohol disinfectants. Also, the increase in the prices of previous products was considered an injustice to the citizens, considering their socio-economic situation and thus preventing them from having access to a better protection against the virus.

Further, it was no surprise that the main listed difficulty by municipal directors in general was lack of municipal budget and funds, in order to cover the expenses caused by the pandemic. As a result, many directors listed budget allocation as one of the difficulties encountered during an emergency

period. The timing of the decisions taken to allocate the budget was quick and short, making it difficult to assess which sectors should take precedence during the allocation, the latter taking into account the inefficiency of directors in such emergencies. With the ban on the movement of citizens and the closure of businesses, municipal revenues had dropped significantly during this period. This resulted in an increase in the number of unemployed citizens.

Communication between local and central level is considered to be one of the main points in the management of such situations. However, a significant number of directors interviewed in the research said that there were difficulties in communicating with line ministries.

What can be distinguished among the answers of different directorates are the answers of three particular directorates, **the directorate of Education, Agriculture and the directorate of Health and Social Welfare. Directors of Education** stated that the organisation of online classes produced a lot of difficulties among municipalities. Lack of technology such as personal computers and smartphones among their residents, especially in rural areas, increased the number of difficulties encountered by this collegium. As a result, many students have not attended online learning, which will affect their end of year results. Furthermore, in addition to the lack of computer tools among the citizens of the municipalities, the director of Education in Pejë/Peć stated that there was a low participation of the Roma Community, Ashkali Community and Egyptian Community in online classes.

“To this date, we have received 170 devices, such as tablets and computers from charity organizations dedicated to students that do not have the financial capability to afford them. If there is a chance that the students will not be returning to schools in September, we ask from the government to pay for the e-schooling platform, basing this request on the premise that students would be obliged to pay in order to attend lectures.” - Director of Education in the Municipality of Vushtrri / Vučitrn

As for the **directors of Agriculture**, in addition to the general requirements described in the paragraphs above, the latter had encountered other specific difficulties in relation to their directorates. The lack of a market during the period of pandemics and protective measures taken in municipalities, such as the quarantine of municipalities and the limited movement of citizens, had affected the sales of farmers' products. The production of milk and its sales decrease turned out to be one of the biggest difficulties and consequences in damaging the sectors of this directorate. Furthermore, the banned activity of gastronomy had decreased the sales of fresh products. What made the situation of this directorate even more difficult were the demands of the farmers for their movement. As stated by these directors, the lack of good communication with the Ministry of Agriculture affected the delay in the realization of these farmers' requests.

“One of the main difficulties that we have encountered was being incapacitated to execute farming related projects that are supposed to be executed under a foreseen timeline. To this date, only one project has been performed, particularly the greenhouse project. The meat and bird sector have suffered the most consequences, this due to the fact that they are entirely dependent on the diaspora-based incomes. Unfortunately, the budget distributed to our directory is 92.000 € (subventions and transfers), therefore we were incapable of attributing our aid. However, we are attempting to provide assistance through farm loans on which we aim to pay for the interest, while the farmers will be given the opportunity to repay within the three-year period.” – Director of Agriculture in the Municipality of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica

Based on the results, the **directors of Health and Social Welfare** also listed some more specific difficulties than others. Considering the encounter with an unknown virus, the lack of information about COVID-19 at the beginning of its spread was listed as one of the biggest difficulties of this directorate. This, according to them, had also affected the increase of panic among the citizens. However, even with the increase of panic, it was noticed that there was a lack of deep awareness among the citizens regarding the protection against the virus. Therefore, directors stated that this has caused difficulties in applying the recommendations of the NIPHK and the Ministry of Health.

In addition to these difficulties, according to the directors of Health, the lack of medical staff in the municipalities and the lack of protective equipment had made it difficult to manage this situation. The municipalities of Gjilan/Gnjilane, Prizren/Prizren and Han i Elezit/Elez Han, designated to cover border crossings, had encountered additional difficulties compared to other municipalities. The directors of Health from these municipalities stated that these directorates have encountered a lack of staff to cover the border points and lack of protective equipment for the staff assigned to those border points. Also, the lack of vehicles and the ban on public transport had hampered the movement of medical staff.

“In our municipality there are a total of sixteen COVID -19 cases. We have struggled with the issue being that out of sixteen COVID -19 cases, seven of them were health workers. However, no service has been left unprovided, this due to the support of several volunteers who were appointed through the Ministry of Health. Moreover, for the time being, we consider ourselves well-supplied with preventive products such as masks, gloves and sanitizers.” – Director of Health and Social Welfare in the Municipality of Obiliq/Obilić

What can be added to the difficulties encountered by the above-mentioned directorate was the identification of families in need, a number that had increased significantly, especially during this period. According to the results, the lack of budget had made it difficult for these families to receive social assistance, including food and hygiene packages.

Considering the difficulties encountered in managing the situation, but also the measures taken by the directorates, the chart below shows that more than half of the directors (61%) considered to be as somewhat prepared, against the pandemic situation.

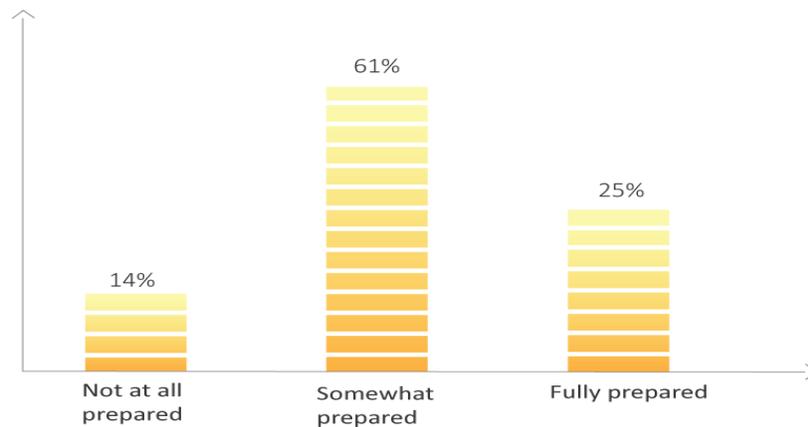


Figure 8. Level of preparation in dealing with such a pandemic situation

Among others, this study aimed to shed light on the subject of which sectors within municipalities were most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the analysed data, a number of participants stated that all sectors within their directorates were equally impacted. However, distinct responses that were unique to each directorate were also recognized.

Directorate of Administration

With respect to the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic within the directorate of Administration, the directors' responses were quite similar. The participants stated that sectors such as civil status sector, archive office and administration services staff were largely affected by the pandemic. However, other sectors recognized as generally impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic were security employees, reception office and the civil registration sector.

Directorate of Education

Based on the participants' responses on the most impacted sectors within the directorate of Education, the students, particularly high-school students were recognized as the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the director from the municipality of Junik/Junik stated that the private sector experienced most difficulties based on the premise that the private sector teachers were underpaid even though they were constantly engaged on the virtual teaching process.

Directorate of Agriculture

Based on the results, the participants representing the directorate of Agriculture maintained that meat, plant and greenhouse sectors within their directory were largely affected by the pandemic. Furthermore, the two sectors that the participants considered to be of high risk were the livestock and farming sectors. In addition to that, the director representing agriculture in the municipality of Vushtrri/Vučitrn stated that the inability to place agricultural products in the gastronomy sector has severely damaged the agricultural sector.

Directorate of Budget and Finances

While recognizing that all directorates are interdependent with the directorate of Budget and Finances, it was highly important to address the most impacted sectors within this directorate. The most popular response identified among the participants was that the property tax sector resulted in being the most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the finance and inspection sectors were also seen as largely influenced by the situation created by the pandemic.

Directorate of Culture, Youth and Sports

Based on the results of the study, while considering the effects of the pandemic on individual sectors within the directorate of Culture, Youth and Sports, the participants' perspectives were quite homogeneous. Most of the participants tended to state that the cessation of sports activities, such as the various matches, highlighted that the sports sector was most affected by this situation.

Directorate of Health and Social Welfare

While considering the Health and Social Welfare directorate had an essential role in handling the situation generated by the pandemic, it was important to address the sectors most impacted by it. Based on the participants' responses it was recognized that the medical staff, such as doctors and nurses, who had faced a new and unknown challenge, long working hours, lack of protective equipment and the fact that they have been the front line against the virus, made this the most affected group within this directory. However, other sectors such as the social welfare and financial sector were additional targets of impact.

Directorate of Public Services

Shedding light on the influence targeted to the sectors within the directorate of Public Services by the COVID-19 pandemic, the results of the study indicate that the communication, environment, capital investments and tourism sectors were the most affected by the situation. Moreover, the participants stated that the emergency department was impacted in staff and reaction period due to its essential role during this pandemic. On the other hand, the director in the municipality of Shtërpçë/Štrpce stated that no sector within his directory was impacted by the pandemic.

Directorate of Economic Development

Lastly, based on the responses accumulated regarding the sectors that were largely affected by the pandemic within the directorate of Economic Development, it was noticed that gastronomy, trading, construction and other private sector institutions were the target of the negative influence generated by the pandemic. However, the participants stated that other sectors such as agriculture, tourism and economic efficiency sectors were also largely impacted.

4.2.2. Measures taken by the directorate to manage the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic

Further, municipal directors were asked to list the measures that they have taken in order to manage the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In general, most of the municipal directors mentioned the same priority measures taken in order to manage the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Disinfection of the directorates' facilities, supply of staff with protective measures, reduction of staff and rotation work were mentioned by all participating directors in this research. Also, among all directorates, Local Emergency Headquarters were established. Furthermore, the temporary dismissal of staff over the age of 55 was one of the other measures taken to protect the health of workers in their directorates. However, there were differences in the answers of the directors when it came to measures that belonged only to the sectors of their directorates.

Directorate of Budget and Finances

Unlike other directorates, the Directorate of Budget and Finance has provided financial support to their municipalities. Through this directorate, funds were allocated during the pandemic period. Also, this directorate has helped in the preparation of the emergency package. General information on Government's decisions towards businesses and engagement of the inspection sector in providing contracts to businesses for compliance with measures and rules established by NIPHK, were considered as the measures taken by these directors.

Directorate of Health and Social Welfare

Regardless of the general measures taken by all directorates, the Directorate of Health and Social Welfare has taken specific measures, considering that they were the directorate of the front line in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, the declaration of pandemic as a global crisis had affected the decision of these leaders to prepare for staff training on crisis management. In continuation, in all municipalities of Kosovo, management staff and 24-hour mobile teams were established to monitor suspicious cases of infection. After that, with the spread of the virus in Kosovo, the disinfection of public, residential buildings, spaces, parks and areas affected by the virus had begun. Supply of protective equipment, such as face masks, gloves and disinfectants, although difficult due to the budget, had been successfully done for all municipalities.

This directorate had also divided the staff for the border points, who had the task of supervising the situation of the persons entering and leaving the borders of the state. In case of need, in some municipalities, the number of staff was increased by employing 7 doctors and 3 additional nurses. Further, municipalities had established call centres, in order for citizens to be properly informed in cases of emergencies. Overall, all decisions and recommendations by the NIPHK and Ministry of Health were addressed as timely and accurately by these directorates.

Directorate of Economic Development

Based on the results, the measures taken by the Economic Development Directorate included: timely notification of businesses for all measures from the central level to the local level, preparation of the recovery package, verification of prices in businesses, business consulting about online applications and tax relief for all businesses: exemption from taxes for exercising business activities for three months and exemption from rent payment for the use of municipal property for six months.

“We have addressed our main request that inquiries for the business to be supported by the government. Based on our assessment, we have lost up to 43 million euros. The diaspora ‘s expenses during their visiting period have a great impact on the economy. The businesses have requested financial aid from the municipality in order to be able to manage the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic; nevertheless, the municipality does not hold the sufficient financial resources to respond to these requests.” – Directorate of Economic Development in the Municipality of Deçan/Dečani

Directorate of Education

Considering that online learning/classes was organized for the first time in Kosovo, the organization and supervision of this process were among the first measures taken by this directorate in the beginning of pandemics. Establishment of communication group with school managers was important in order to assess the continuity of participation and quality during distance learning. Thus, virtual meetings with school principals were held on a weekly basis, where they discussed different instructions given from MEST, regards the situation created by pandemics.

This directorate also distributed electronic devices among the students with difficult economic conditions and shot video materials in Turkish and Bosnian language by the teachers of the municipalities with higher participation of other communities. It should be distinguished, that the municipality of Prishtinë/Pristina created the E-school platform and created a psychological/speech therapy service for students, a service which has been requested by other municipalities as well. The latter was an intervention practiced by the municipality of Prizren/Prizren, as well.

Directorate of Agriculture

Based on the results, one of the most innovative measures taken by the Department of Agriculture could be considered the creation of Eco Market, through which the sale of farmers' products could be done. Other measures of this directorate included: equipping farmers with Farmer Certificates (NIF) for carrying out agricultural activities and assistance with medical equipment in the agricultural sector.

Directorate of Culture, Youth and Sports

From the beginning of pandemic, the directorates of Culture, Youth and Sports had suspended all activities of their directorate, be they cultural, sports or youth. With this decision came the closure of gyms and sports fields. However, many directors have tried to find solutions so that at least some of the activities of these directorates can be conducted through online platforms. These included several online theatres and musical performances, which were organized in municipalities. Through these events, directors also allocated subsidies for different categories.

“All sport activities in the municipality of Drenas/Glogovac have been suspended for the time being. Consequently, this suspension of all activities has caused large financial difficulties. Moreover, financial complications also derived from the lack of support from different sport federations and the misdistribution of the emergent financial package from the government. However, the municipality continues assisting the sport activities through subventions.” – Director of Culture, Youth and Sports in the municipality of Drenas/Glogovac

Directorate of Administration

Considering the work with the citizens, the administration directorates in most municipalities had to put glass protectors, through which, according to them, the protection of the citizens and workers of the directorate had increased. Also, many of them had built an online platform, through which civil status documents could be extracted. Citizens could find the published manual, about using this platform, in order to help them find information.

Directorate of Public Services

The Directorates of Public Services in the municipalities had taken several different measures, based on the nature of the work of their directorate. In addition to disinfecting roads, municipal buildings, school buildings, religious buildings, and public spaces, they paid special attention to cleaning up areas with large numbers of infected people. The fire brigade had constantly intervened in the cleaning and disinfection of urban roads and contacted on a daily basis with all representatives of villages and neighbourhoods in order to have information for each family and for possible cases with symptoms of the virus. Moreover, they had activated the Emergency Local Operations Centre, where the requests about the emergency needs of the population have been identified.

4.2.3. Cooperation with central level institutions, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

Cooperation with central level institutions, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities was another aspect assessed by the questionnaire. As such, municipal directors were asked on their cooperation with ministries/central level institutions. Most of them (71%) said that they cooperated with line ministries/central level institutions during the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

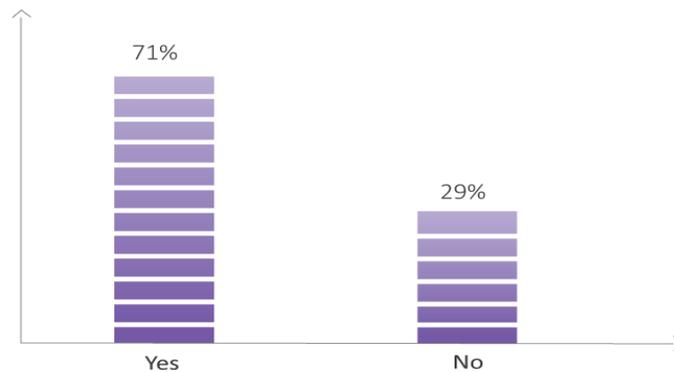


Figure 9. Cooperation with central level institutions, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

Ministry of Health (MoH) and Kosovo National Institute of Public Health (NIPHK)

Considering that the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic was a health situation, all directorates from all municipalities stated that they had cooperated with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the National Institute of Public Health (NIPHK). Through this collaboration, initially, all directorates had been informed about decisions, guidelines and recommendations.

Based on the results of this study, this ministry has supplied all Family Medical Centers, in all municipalities, with protective equipment as needed. Taking into account the recommendations of these two institutions, the relevant directorates had taken decisions in managing the situation. The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the relevant directorates, had decided to form Operational Centres, which operated 24/7 during the pandemic period. In addition, it can be said that the cooperation was done through the Emergency Headquarters, established in the municipalities. The members of the latter have followed the recommendations and strategies in facilitating the management of the situation. Also, considering that many municipalities have been tasked with overseeing border points, this ministry has also been contacted about additional health teams for those tasks.

Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA)

Taking into account the mission of the Ministry of Local Government, which is to increase local autonomy and strengthen the ability of municipalities, through active participation of citizens and democratic representation, to provide cost-effective services to increase quality of life, security and local economy, this ministry played the same role during the pandemic period. The cooperation of this ministry with the directorate of Administration included exchange of information on the current situation, coordination and support for the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ministry of Finance and Transfers (MFT)

Allocation of funds with the 2020 budget, execution of requests for transfer and allocation of funds in the code created to cope with the consequences of COVID-19 were issues that constituted cooperation between the directorate of Budget and Finance and the Ministry of Finance and Transfers (MFT). The latter had allowed budget transfers to many municipalities, in order to better manage the situation.

Ministry of Science, Education and Technology (MEST)

Based on the results, all directors of the Directorate of Education have had contact with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). Cooperation with this line ministry has included reviewing issues of online classes. In addition, this cooperation has resulted in clarifications about the laws on salaries and pensions in times of pandemic. It is worth mentioning that the directors have assessed the cooperation with this ministry as very satisfactory, except when the decisions about education have been taken in a short time.

Ministry of Economy, Employment, Trade, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Strategic Investments (MEETESI)

The suspension of businesses' activities during pandemics, as a result of preventive measures imposed by central level institutions, have influenced the latter to direct many requests about the implementation of work to the directorates of Economic Development in their municipalities. The Ministry of Economy, Employment, Trade, Entrepreneurship and Strategic Investments, assisted and advised on the requirements of businesses, through the Kosovo Business Registration Agency (KBRA). Furthermore, through this cooperation, businesses were coordinated and notified with regards to their economic activities.

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFRD)

The demand for free movement of farmers was listed as the main reason for the cooperation of the directorate of Agriculture with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFRD). Considering the difficulties caused to this sector of Agriculture, farmers were given permission to sell their products during the time of the pandemic. However, the lack of movement of citizens and the lack of market have caused great damage to this category.

Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS)

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS) was contacted mainly about the cancellation of activities in this field. The directors stated that in agreement with this ministry, they suspended all cultural and sports activities. However, through this collaboration they have tried to find ways to execute capital projects, including the conceptions of online theatres and subsidies for artists.

Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA)

In order to exchange professional experience in emergency management, the directors of the Public Services had cooperated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). Requests for permits for the movement of citizens in need were made by this ministry. According to directors, this cooperation has helped in coordinating and implementing decisions and measures taken by local levels.

Among other things, municipal representatives in this study had the opportunity to express their level of satisfaction on their cooperation with line ministries/central level institutions. Based on the results, more than half of municipal directors (55%) that participated in this study were 'Very/somewhat satisfied' with this cooperation; whereas, 9 percent claimed to be 'not at all/partly satisfied'.

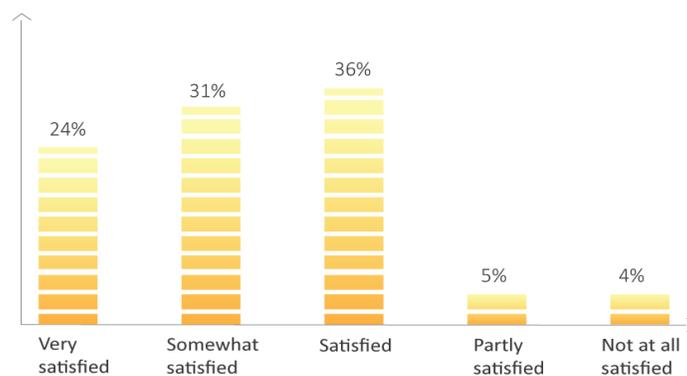


Figure 10. Evaluation of cooperation with central level institutions / line ministries, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

4.2.4. Cooperation with the Association of Kosovo Municipalities, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

Among other things, municipal representatives in this study had the opportunity to express their level of cooperation with the AKM, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of the municipal directors (57%) said that they cooperated with the AKM during the time of the pandemic.

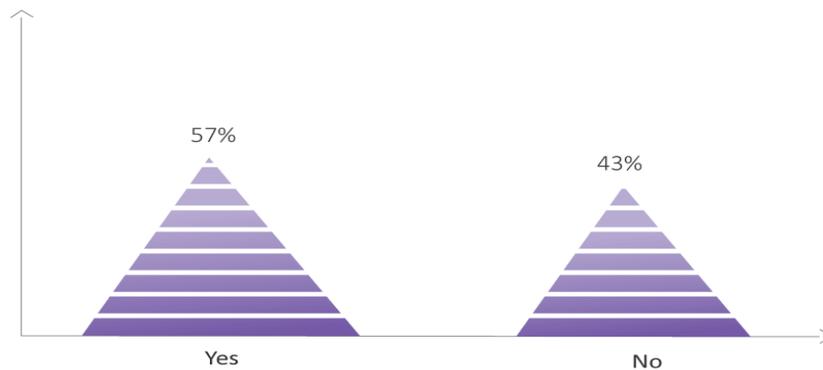


Figure 11. Cooperation with Association of Kosovo Municipalities, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

In general, based on the results, all directors had difficulty in understanding the decisions taken by the government at the beginning of the pandemic. In this way, the AKM had helped to clarify the ambiguities that the directors had, especially about the many different guidelines regarding measures against COVID-19.

Moreover, all the issues addressed to the line ministries by the directorates were initially addressed to the AKM. The latter had served as a bridge between the government and the municipalities, even during the period of pandemic. More specifically, the AKM had updated municipalities on government decisions, providing additional clarification via email, collegium groups in Viber, and when necessary through meetings.

Based on the results, the AKM had intervened to facilitate the various procedures encountered by the relevant directorates. The issue of property tax, namely the postponement and removal of interest and fines on taxpayers was addressed since the beginning of pandemics by various directors. With the intervention of the AKM, the Minister of Finance had approved this request.

Other requirements listed by other directors, such as: allowing the exercise of the activities of some enterprises such as construction, continuing the work of economic operators in municipal projects (with which contracts were concluded), allowing the movement of farmers for the performance of works in agriculture and the prohibitions of the activities of the companies for the maintenance of the local roads, were approved with the intervention of the AKM at the line ministries.

Further, other requests to the Association included cooperation in enforcing the rules of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, organizing and coordinating the activities of the members of the Association in the fields of investment, improving the legal basis, supporting businesses, culture, education, science, health and social protection, resolving conflicts, improving services for citizens and similar issues. Also, the postponement of the punitive measure for the subsequent registration of births/deaths, which in the normal state are penalized with municipal fines, was listed in the requests of the directors.

Regarding whether they were satisfied or not with this cooperation, the overwhelming majority of municipal directors (45%) were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied (37%) with this cooperation.

Based on these results, according to municipal directors, one can conclude that the AKM has addressed the municipalities' requests at the central level at the right time and successfully.

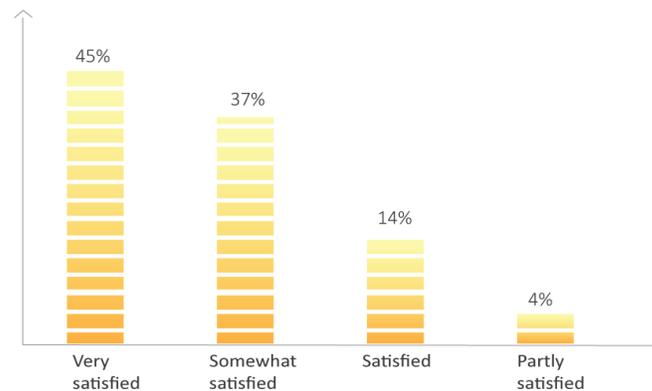


Figure 12. Evaluation of cooperation with Association of Kosovo Municipalities, since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in municipalities

4.2.5. Emergency needs of directorates to manage and overcome the situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic

One of the main parts of this study was identifying the emergency needs of directorates, in order to manage and overcome the situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic. In this case, the study results showed us that members of different directorates of municipalities had more common emergency needs, in the aspect of overcoming the consequences. According to the latter, based on the results of the study, municipal directors had listed some of the most urgent needs for their directorates.

What was found in the answers of all municipal directors was the need for a feasibility study for economic damages. Through this study, supportive measures for economic recovery could be created. Furthermore, they declared that the latter should be done through the allocation of a specific emergency fund for the management of the situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic for each of the municipalities of Kosovo.

In addition, municipal directors included reviewing the budget, re-allocating it and transferring it as an emergency need. Considering they had already encountered problems in managing municipal budgets during the pandemics, assistance, recommendations and clarifications towards this issue were needed. Further, and no less important, was the need to supplement and amend procurement laws in emergency situations.

On the other hand, online services have encountered many difficulties during the pandemic period. Most municipal directors have sought to create opportunities for more efficient online services, in the event of a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked what other measures could be taken by other stakeholders, such as donor organizations, lending institutions, various associations, municipal directors stated that the provision of protective measures, support funds and subsidies for various businesses would help in managing and overcoming this situation in municipalities.

However, results showed that there were differences of emergency needs depending on the directorates, in addition to the general emergencies that all directorates had in common. The following sections present the emergency needs divided by directorates.

Directorate of Budget and Finances

Regarding the directors of Budget and Finance, in addition to the general requirements expressed in the above paragraph, they addressed some other emergency needs, specific to the sectors of their directorate. Financial assistance, including economic recovery packages for businesses, was considered to be the main emergency need for this category. According to them, since the property tax revenues are the main revenues of the municipality, this directorate will have many difficulties in realizing the budget planning and implementation of projects.

Other emergency needs listed by this directorate were:

- Amending the Law on Public Procurement,
- Amending the Law on Public Finance Management and responsibilities, and
- Implementing the Operational Plan of the Emergency Fiscal Package.

Directorate of Health and Social Welfare:

The Directorate of Health and Social Welfare had listed a large number of emergency needs. According to them, during the period of coping with pandemics, there was a great lack of health staff, which in normal circumstances should be in proportion to the population of the municipality. Furthermore, the need for medical devices was mentioned, specifically in the emergency departments, laboratories and radiological diagonals, the lack of which had hampered the work of this sector during the pandemic.

Other emergency needs listed by this directorate were:

- Increasing the number of Health inspectors,
- Providing food and hygiene packages for families in need, and
- Providing ambulances for transporting cases with COVID 19 and a combination bus for transporting patients on haemodialysis.

Directorate of Economic Development

Regarding the directorate of economic development, the directors of the latter listed as an emergency the financial support for the various sectors of businesses affected during the pandemic. According to them, the definition of a plan for economic recovery and economic activity, represents an urgent need, through which other problems could be addressed. The return of workers to work, the support of farmers through financial packages and the abolition of the tax in the hotel and tourism services sector, would help in managing the emergency needs of this directorate.

“The emergent package distributed by the government as a mean of assistance in managing and overcoming the circumstances generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has managed to fulfill certain needs; however, left other essential necessities unmet. The incomes have decreased to 50% in comparison to last year; however, we remain optimistic that we will increase our incomes due to property tax. Nevertheless, I believe that the government should establish a budget dedicated to emergencies, in case of a second COVID-19 wave outbreak.” – Director of Economic Development in the Municipality of Shtime/Štimlje

Other emergency needs listed by this directorate were:

- Opening the call for grants and subsidies
- Allocation of the remaining 50% of funds from the consolidated budget of Kosovo for the implementation of municipal projects, and
- Selling farm products.

Directorate of Education

The Directorate of Education had undergone one of the biggest changes during the pandemic, in the realization of online lectures/classes. This had led the Education Directors identifying the lack of technological tools in schools as an emergency. The latter has influenced a large number of students not to have access to education, especially students from rural areas of municipalities. With the advancement of technological tools in schools, there is a need for training in the use of information technology. Lack of knowledge in this field often, according to principals, comes as a result of the high average age of teachers.

Other emergency needs listed by this directorate were:

- Disinfection of school facilities and kindergartens and
- Analysis of the distance learning process.

Directorate of Agriculture

Increasing investment in agriculture, especially subsidizing farmers to meet the damage caused either by pandemics or by natural disasters was identified as the main emergency need of this directorate.

Directorate of Culture, Youth and Sports

Further, based on the results of the Directorate of Culture, Youth and Sports, emergency needs included: supporting the culture sector in its reactivation, immediate club support by subsidizing them from the MCYS emergency package and supporting the youth of the municipality in undertaking activities related to the avoidance of the consequences caused by pandemic among young people, including stress management, emotional state, etc.;

Directorate of Administration

Considering that Administration was one of the directorates that had the most contact with citizens/clients, they had listed the creation of online services as the main and only emergency need.

“Our capacities have begun to deplete and we are left unable to cover the large expenses. Coming from the fact that our directory is responsible for providing services and addressing requests, we are handicapped to the large amount of demands and requests that we receive on a day to day basis. In addition to that, we are in low supply of preventive products such as masks, gloves and sanitizers, which are essential to our work.” – Director of Administration in the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje

Directorate of Public Services

Lastly, accurate guidelines for preparations and ways of disinfection of public spaces, roads and urban furniture, trainings of management staff and emergency workers through trainings on emergency situations were listed as emergency needs of this directorate.

“The new government has made many changes and repealed numerous decisions. Therefore, the expenses that we made worth 30.000 € for food, hygiene and medicine supplies will not be reimbursed according to the new government's enforced decisions. Consequently, the citizens' requests will fail to be addressed.” – Director of Public Services in the Municipality of Istog/Istok

4.3. Capacity building / training needs for municipal representatives

The last topic addressed in the study was the topic of capacity building/trainings, where municipal directors were asked about the need for these trainings and the topics that should be addressed during them. Most of them (70%) stated that a significant number of their officials need capacity building/training. During the response, they had the opportunity to specify the areas that should be tackled by these trainings. What stands out, among other things, was the need to share experiences in managing emergencies, such as COVID-19 pandemics. According to the directors, difficulties in managing the situation and experiences, whether positive or negative, can be exchanged between them. Other topics included training on budget planning in emergency situations, online services trainings, procurement training, and training on crop protection (orchards, puericulture) by pests and various diseases.

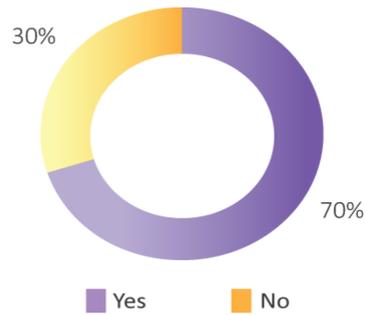


Figure 13. The percentage of municipal representatives that need capacity building/training

In addition, from the number of directors who stated that there is a need for capacity building/training for the officials of their directorate, most of them (78%) preferred that these trainings be held in person, rather than through online platforms. According to them, through physical participation, the possibilities of exchanging experiences between directors would be greater.

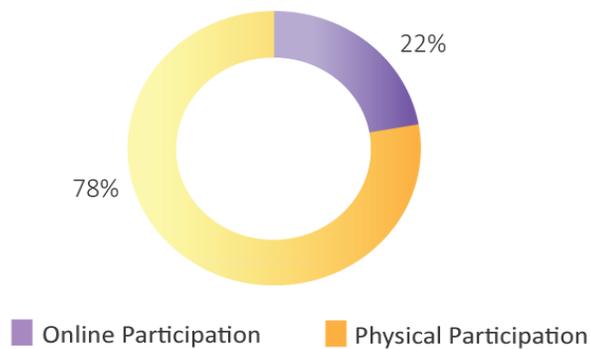


Figure 14. Preferred mode of participation in trainings

4.4. The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on municipal own revenues

Beyond the health and human tragedy of the coronavirus, it is now widely recognised that the pandemic triggered the most serious economic crisis in a century. The regional and local impact of the COVID-19 crisis is highly heterogeneous, with a strong territorial dimension and significant implications for crisis management and policy responses:

- **Health/social impact:** some regions, particularly the more vulnerable ones, such as deprived urban areas, have seen higher caseloads and mortality rates than others. Vulnerable populations, too, have been more affected.
- **Economic Impact:** regional economic exposure to the crisis is varying based on an area's exposure to global value chains and specialisation in specific sectors like tourism, at least in the initial stages.
- **Fiscal impact:** the crisis is resulting in increased expenditure and reduced revenue for subnational governments, and while its impact on subnational finance is not uniform, it is expected to be long-lasting.¹²

Most municipalities get their revenues from a combination of sources, such as real estate tax, tax for the license to exercise business activity, taxes for professional leave and services, taxes on motor vehicles, municipal administrative fees, taxes for building and demolition permits for buildings and other structures, taxes for issuing official certificates and documents, regulatory fees for infrastructure development or maintenance, fines in traffic, fines for violating municipal regulations, revenues from rent, co-payments for education and health, and each of these revenue sources has been impacted differently.

Based on the results of the study, municipal directors stated that the government's decisions to manage the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as restrictions on citizens' movements, suspension of business activities, exemption of businesses from taxes on property use, lack of traffic fines, caused a significant decrease in the municipality's own revenues.

According to municipal reports in the Ministry of Finance and Transfers, in March and April 2020, all municipalities in Kosovo have collected revenues worth about 5.8 million euros, or about 9.3 million euros less compared to the same period last year. The crisis has also precipitated a sharp fall in government revenues, by 11 percent as compared to last year, leaving limited fiscal space to finance these programs. The government will therefore require external support to provide much needed financial assistance to poor and vulnerable households over the coming months to respond to the direct economic consequences of the pandemic and the containment measures.¹³

The biggest effects will be on the decline in property tax revenues. The Ministry of Finance and Transfers has removed as an obligation the payment of property tax as a condition for registering the vehicle in the municipality. For the period from mid-March to June 2020, vehicles can be registered only with the payment of the insurance policy. Taxation on property represents the main entrance

¹² OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19). The territorial impact of COVID-19: Managing the crisis across levels of government (2020). Retrieved from: <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-territorial-impact-of-covid-19-managing-the-crisis-across-levels-of-government-d3e314e1/>

¹³ The World Bank Kosovo Emergency COVID-19 Project (2020) Retrieved from: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/688551588682793534/pdf/Project-Information-Documents-KOSOVO-EMERGENCY-COVID-19-PROJECT-P173819.pdf>

for most municipalities. In addition, other revenues generated by the municipality will fall significantly, as all sectors from which local government revenues are collected are affected by measures taken to curb the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴

Further, key spending and tax measures include: (i) allocation of €6 million to the health ministry; (ii) deferrals for corporate income and personal income taxes, and VAT; (iii) advancing payments for social assistance schemes by additional one month's amount (from one month to two months) to support families in need; (iv) removal of VAT on imports of wheat and flour; (v) deferral of public utilities payments until end of April. In addition, fiscal package in the amount of 180 million-euro (2.5 percent of GDP) has been adopted by government and 48 percent of this package has been executed as of June 30. Ministry of Finance has approached International Financial Institutions IFIs (e.g., International Monetary Fund - IMF, World Bank- WB, European Union - EU and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development - EBRD) and other bilateral donors for financial support. Ministry of Finance has started making payment to workers as been planned under fiscal package where 82 million euro been paid so far. The Central Bank of Kosovo (CBK) together with the Kosovo Banking Association decided to suspend the payment of loan instalments for businesses and individuals starting from March 16 until April 30 and then extended it to three months until mid-June, lastly extending it until mid-August. The CBK will apply regulatory forbearance on loan provisions and capital requirements on reprogrammed loans.¹⁵

¹⁴ GAP INSTITUTE. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on local government (2020). Retrieved from:

https://www.institutigap.org/documents/23503_Ndikimi%20i%20pandemis%C3%AB%20COVID-19%20n%C3%AB%20pushtetin%20lokal.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1dmr4MX0cKS0q0bVJPhZ41oxj29w2lOejhrhMzUNj0iXYdn5N_iqF30

¹⁵ International Monetary Fund. Policy Responses to COVID-19. Retrieved from: <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19>

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study, in addition to identifying the emergency needs and the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on local government, will provide a guideline for designing programs, activities or forms of intervention to support Kosovo's municipalities in their fights against the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the consequences caused by the latter. This guideline will be used from all relevant institutions of local and central level as well as other stakeholders.

As such, the following section presents conclusions derived from the study results that could lead to a better and more efficient guidance towards supporting municipalities to overcome the situation created by COVID-19.

The difficulties faced by municipalities/directorates since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic

In general, the difficulties encountered by different municipalities during the COVID-19 pandemic period are almost the same. Decisions of the government, regarding the restrictions on the movement of citizens, the interruption of the work of various businesses and the suspension of foreseen capital projects have significantly affected the decrease of municipal revenues. Thus, the limited municipal budget has made it very difficult to manage this situation.

At first, the whole period of pandemic was an unprecedented challenge for these municipalities. Encountering with an unknown virus, the lack of information about COVID-19 at the beginning of its spread has caused a lot of difficulties among municipalities. On the other hand, results show that more than half of municipal representatives (57%) considered their municipalities somewhat prepared in dealing with the pandemic situation. However, being inexperienced led to difficulties in managing and operating under the given circumstances.

Regardless of the aforementioned difficulties, results indicate that other difficulties encountered by municipalities include the small number of medical staff in Family Medical Centres, lack of protective equipment, such as face masks, gloves and various disinfectants, as well as the increase of the number of families in need. A special challenge during this period presented the distance learning, considering the lack of experience in using this system, as well as the lack of technological tools for students to attend online classes.

The measures taken by municipalities/directorates since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic

In general, there is a number of measures taken by the municipalities, specifically the directorates, that are similar to each other. Initially, with the spread of pandemic, all municipal representatives had made the decision to disinfect the facilities of the sectors they represent. Further, with government decisions on movement restrictions, a large number of municipal staff have been released from work, in order to continue working from home or not to work at all (in cases of advanced age, due to health protection).

Regarding other measures taken by municipalities, the results conclude a number of activities based on the directorates. Financial support, preparation of emergency packages, distribution of food and hygiene packages for families in need, supervision of online learning, equipping farmers with Farmer Certificates (NIF), for carrying out agricultural activities and assistance with medical equipment in the agricultural sector, are the main measures mentioned by the participating directorates.

The cooperation with central level institutions and association of Kosovo municipalities since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic

What helps in managing such situations is the mutual communication between the local and central level. The requests addressed to the central level institutions and the Association of Kosovo Municipalities, depended on the ministry, where the directors directed their complaints, recommendations and clarifications.

According to the results, most of the municipal representatives have cooperated during this time with the central level institutions. The latter declare that they are 'Very/somewhat satisfied' with this cooperation.

The AKM, as always, has played the role of a legal entity that represents the general interests of its members - the local authorities. A significant number of municipal representatives have cooperated with the AKM during the pandemic period, where the majority of them have expressed a high level of satisfaction with this cooperation. Through this cooperation, the directors have addressed their requests towards decisions and management of the situation, while the AKM has informed them about the decisions of the government, giving additional clarifications in case of need.

Emergency needs of municipalities/directorates in managing and overcoming the situation caused by COVID-19 pandemic

Finally, when identifying emergency needs in order to properly manage and overcome the situation created by the COVID -19 pandemic, the results show that there are a number of needs that are shared between the mayors/directorates. In this regard, a large number of municipal representatives think that a study on economic damage in municipalities will help manage the consequences of pandemics. Thus, budget re-allocation, financial support and funding are identified as emergency needs for the municipalities in order to successfully manage the COVID-19 pandemic consequences.

Regarding the emergency needs based on law completion-amendment, municipal representatives consider the completion-amendment of Procurement laws in emergency situations as a priority emergency need. On the other hand, in the event of a second wave of pandemic, improvement of online services should be taken into account, in order to facilitate working processes of municipal representatives.

In addition to that, municipal representatives declare that other emergent needs such as preventive measures, allocation of a specific emergency fund, financial aid to farmers and seasonal employment opportunities to unemployed citizens would be of great importance in overcoming the situation. Fear of a second wave of pandemic has led these municipal representatives to list the supply of protective equipment as an emergency.

Regardless of the emergency needs that different directorates have in common, there are specific emergency needs divided based in directorates, which include financial assistance, including economic recovery packages for businesses, increase of the number of health staff, the definition of a plan for economic recovery and economic activity, etc.

In conclusion, in order to manage the situation created by the pandemic COVID-19, since its spread in March 2020, the relevant local and central level institutions, as well as other stakeholders must take into account the emergency needs listed above. By addressing these emergency needs, through

the design of programs, activities or forms of intervention, the municipalities of Kosovo will be supported to fight COVID-19 pandemics and the consequences caused by the latter.