

# THE CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19 ON THE SECTOR OF SPATIAL/URBAN PLANNING, CONSTRUCTION, LEGALIZATION, AND HOUSING





# DISCLAIMER

The information expressed in this document represents the views of all respondents, specifically municipal staff of the Directorates of Urbanism and Directorates of Health and Social Welfare who have responded to the online survey (through survey monkey). Therefore, the report does not necessarily represent the outlook of the UN-Habitat Kosovo office.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# ABBREVIATIONS

AKM	Association of Kosovo Municipalities
COVID-19	Novel SARS virus (inception 2020)
DUEP	Directorate of Urbanism and Environment Protection
DHSW	Directorate of Health and Social Welfare
DRP	Detailed Regulatory Plans
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
MESPI	Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure
MDP	Municipal Development Plans
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
MZM	Municipal Zoning Map
UN-Habitat Kosovo	United Nations Humans Settlements Programme



# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



## » GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a major blow for the global community since the beginning of 2020. It disrupted every aspect of human activity and it continues to present greater challenges for countries trying to contain the pandemic and create a “new normal”. It has affected the economic, political, social, and environmental aspects of each nation. It changed the way we see things and challenged our preparedness for major global outbreaks as such. Furthermore, it puts a light on the inequality that has been prevalent in cities for so long. Low-income families, migrants, and minorities were disproportionately affected. The risk of homelessness and unemployment reached a record

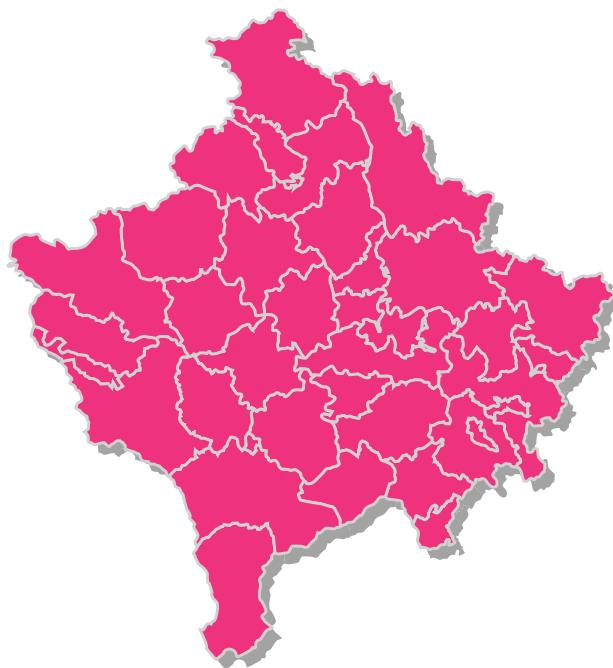
high in most countries and social tension between host and migrant communities reached a tipping point. In some countries, the pandemic created a deteriorating sense of community, where the rich leave the city for their second vacation home in the rural areas while the poor left in the city fighting for survival.

The need for change in urban planning and economic approach has become eminent after the COVID outbreak. The concept of the compact city approach, that has been preached for decades, has now being challenged, as people started to work remotely and communicate through online platform. However, UN-Habitat (2020) study still suggests a compact urban form with mixed land use as a more resilient and sustainable strategy to combat such pandemic, as it promotes green transportation methods and increases the social mix of a city. On the other hand, decentralizing services and promoting economic development in secondary cities has become crucial in reducing the burden off the major cities and enable the regional government to handle housing and unemployment problems that arise as a result of a pandemic. It is believed that decentralized service and amenities serve in the best interest of the people during a pandemic.

Moreover, diversification of economic means is crucial to make cities more resilient. As this pandemic shows, cities that depend on a single sector for economic growth and import most of the goods are affected the most. Besides the negative effect of the pandemic, there are there some positive developments that come in tandem with it. First, it puts a light on the importance of green and blue infrastructure in containing the virus and preventing the crossover of infection from animals

to humans. Moreover, it showed the potential of transport policy interventions in reducing air pollution, which is positively correlated with the transmission of COVID-19. Different studies show that the pandemic has significantly reduced pollutants coming out of the transportation sector, minimizing the infection and transmission rate of the virus. Secondly, it has boosted and showed the potential of the smart city movement that has been rapidly growing in the past few years to make urban life easier. Much of the communication and work was conducted remotely using online platforms. Moreover, they were important in medical areas, real-time data collection mechanisms, and tracking of infected persons.

Concerning the environment, there is no common consensus on the positive or negative correlation of environmental factors such as temperature, wind, and humidity with the transmission of COVID-19. However, it is important to understand how these environmental factors affect the transmission so that urban policymakers and planners prepare in tandem with it.



## » THE CASE OF KOSOVO

As in the rest of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has hampered living and working conditions in Kosovo, prompting the government to implement a series of measures to prevent the spread of the virus and to mitigate its potential effects (including the complete or partial closure of public, private, educational institutions), the closure of all physical businesses, food establishment, service industries, as well as mobility restrictions and mandatory reorganization of workspaces according to health guidelines laid out by the Ministry of Health.

Government induced restrictions have severely impacted the livelihood qualities of Kosovar citizens, with specific mention for residents living within urban areas. Limits on mobility, difficulties in physical distances within housing units, financial constraints, the closure of kindergartens/nurseries, restrictions on attending public places, limited municipal services including water and electricity, as well as difficulties in obtaining health services due to congestion (cases under oxygen therapy), have pushed citizens to seek solutions in suburbs and rural areas far from urban locales perceived as epicenters of the virus.

Despite the difficult circumstances associated with the pandemic, many private and public sector officials have continued to work with under such restrictions in order to evade the interruption of service provision to citizens. The subsequent exposure at the workplace, often under insufficient physical distance measures, as well as reduced working hours, has increased the pressure of working officials including staff members of the Directorates of Urbanism. These issues are exacerbated by a lack of interaction with community representatives, reduced financial revenues at the municipal level, as well as difficulties using online technological tools due to limited knowledge of staff members.

Given the persistence of the pandemic for unforeseeable future, there is an indisputable need to reflect at the local level through spatial planning and management perspectives. In so doing, authorities would have an increased understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 on the daily life of citizens, whilst simultaneously highlighting the need for transformative change in planning the future development of cities.

Due to the magnitude of issues surrounding the Directorates of Urbanism, UN-Habitat inspired by the joint work (drafting process of the Socio-economic Recovery Plan) of all UN organizations operating in Kosovo has initiated this rapid assessment. The assessment will capture the various difficulties facing the institutions of Kosovo during the pandemic, in order to form a clear understanding of the eventual implications for development management within the municipalities' sector offices of spatial planning, construction, legalization, and housing. The findings will be an important tool for UN-Habitat and other relevant organizations and institutions to better identify the measures required to minimize the difficulties faced by municipalities in Kosovo.

The report evaluation aims to stimulate debates between local/central authorities, policy makers, planners, and various supporting organizations, so as to provide efficient support to the Directorates during the pandemic. The harmonization of planning processes will ensure innovative ways of drafting strategic planning documents (municipal development plans, zoning maps, detailed regulatory plans, housing programs, sectoral strategies), using participatory practices as a precondition for transparent and consensus-based decision-making. Strengthening the resiliency of local contexts through such features will be critical in establishing a safer environment for all communities in the face of future pandemics.

## 1.1 MAIN FINDINGS

The primary objective of this section is to identify how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the Directorates of Urbanism's capacities to properly conduct day-to-day activities. The findings show that despite the disruptive effects of the pandemic, a majority of the Directorates have continued operating at a professional level notwithstanding limited human resources and reduced working schedules.

### PARTICIPANT MUNICIPALITIES AND LOCATION OF MUNICIPAL PREMISES

The survey was developed and distributed to all Directorates of Urbanism in the municipalities of Kosovo, **28** of whom participated, including Gjakovë, Glogoc, Suharekë, Viti, South Mitrovica, Istog, Vushtrri, Klinë, Deçan, Dragash, Fushë Kosovë, Shtime, Partesh, Malishevo, Lipjan, Strpce, Skënderaj, Peja, Rahovec, Kamenica, Elez of Han, Kacanik, Podujevë, Junik, Ferizaj, Graçanica, Mamusha, and an additional unspecified municipality.

At the spatial scale, **92.9%** of the Urbanism Directorate offices are located in city-centers of the respective municipalities with as little as **7.1%** existing in peripheral zones. This shows that majority of the municipalities are located in densely populated areas with a probability of a high infection rate. Although the correlation between high density and infection rate is still debatable, it is safe to say high infection rates are observed in city centers due to high connectivity, which studies show is the major factor for the increase

in infection. Therefore, the implementation of cautious measures to keep the health of staff is crucial.

The survey also shows half of the staff live either in the city center or near the vicinity of the office of the directorate. This promotes safe and healthy transportation mechanisms such as walking and biking. However, as observed in other major cities of the world, the survey revealed that most staff choose private car (**75%**) as a mode of transportation followed by walking (**21.4**). The use of the bicycle as a means of transport is non-existence and a small percentage (**4%**) of the staff use public transport due to the infection risk associated with it, signaling the importance of implementing safety, security and affordability measures in public transport to gain the trust of the user and minimize the use of the private car.

### WORK METHODS

The pandemic has disrupted the normal work procedures of government offices around the globe. To mitigate the impact and continue the basic function, different measures such as rotational work schedule and performing with reduced staff members were implemented. Moreover, the use of online communication methods has ensured the continuation of basic activities during the pandemic.

In case of the Directorates of Urbanism in Kosovo, the survey results show that **48.2%** of the municipal offices have experienced some sort of limitation in their activity (including one to three months of work halting) whereas the remaining **51.8%** have worked

continuously despite the difficult circumstances associated with the pandemic.

Relative to COVID-19 work disruptions, The Directorates of Urbanism have undergone disproportionate changes, with **50%** of respondents working in their traditional office locations but with limited staff, **28.5%** utilizing rotational schedules (i.e., 8:00 am – 12:00 pm, or 12:00 pm – 6:00 pm) whilst only **10.7%** have continued operating at full capacity.

It should be noted that out of all the respondent Directorates in the different municipalities of Kosovo, **96.4%** have taken adequate health measures used to mitigate the impact and spread of the virus at the work place. A majority of these institutions (**82.1%**) have been supplied by municipal authorities the required material for prevention of the virus while, **3.6%** of the institutions forced to personally purchase the material. Nevertheless, only **48.1%** of the Directorates have re-organized their offices according to standards set out by the Ministry of Health with the remaining **51.9%** making none or only partial changes.

### WORK FOCUSES (PRIOR TO COVID-19)

According to the survey results, the Directorates of Urbanism have not had a predominant work activity prior to the beginning of the pandemic in Kosovo. The largest share, **20.2%** indicated a focus on administrative duties (including work plans, report drafting, legal decisions, project drafting, and public consultations) whereas **18.4%** spent the majority of their time issuing building permits to relevant citizens/applicants. The remaining percentage (**61.4%**) is

spread nearly evenly between the following work activities: compiling/drafting of planning documents (**17.5%**), legalization processes (recruiting of staff, public informing, consultations with interested stakeholders (**15.8%**), supervision of capital investment projects and infrastructural services (**13.2%**), as well as participatory meetings with community members (**7.9%**) and collaborative efforts between local and central levels of governance (**7%**).

The pandemic has directly impacted the overall work flux of the Directorates of Urbanism, considering that **77.8%** of participants have experienced a reduction in average daily workload. Nevertheless, these effects are not uniformly distributed, seeing as **18.5%** of the Directorates have not perceived a significant change in workload levels, with the remaining **3.7%** reporting a slight increase in their day-to-day work activities.

### WORK FOCUSES DURING THE PANDEMIC

When comparing work focuses of the Directorates prior to and during the pandemic, the results indicate minimal changes. The largest share of participants focusing on administrative duties has increased from **20.2%** to **23%**, while the percentage for issuance of buildings permits has remained the same at **18%**. Legalization processes and the drafting of planning documents have experienced insignificant alterations, with both hovering at approximately **17%**, whilst **13%** of Directorates have continued to supervise capital investment, and infrastructural projects. As a consequence of physical and mobility restrictions associated with the pandemic, there has been a decrease in participatory meetings with community

members to **4%**, whereas the percentage of staff focusing on institutional coordination between local and central levels of governances remains unchanged at **8%**.

## PRIMARY ACTIVITIES DURING THE PANDEMIC

### Administrative duties

While administrative duties may encompass a variety of activities, the largest share of respondent Directorates (**76.5%**) have focused on conducting work plans, reports, and legal matters. The remaining **23.1%** is spread evenly between activities including consultations with interested stakeholders/community representatives, drafting internal regulations, and drafting project concepts.

### Institutional coordination between local and central levels of governance

Governmental restrictions placed to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 have directly impacted central level decision-making including support provision at the municipal scale. **36%** of respondent Directorates indicate a reduction in institutional coordination between the two levels of governance, whereas **52%** have not experienced any significant alterations throughout the pandemic. Moreover, **8%** of Directorates have felt improved coordination, while the remaining **4%** describe a total halting of institutional coordination between local and central levels of governance.

### Spatial Planning

Spatial planning in the context of this assessment includes a plethora of activities which the Directorates have actively worked on despite associated COVID conditions. A majority of the Directorates (**75%**) indicate a focus on drafting spatial planning documents (including primary data collection, participatory meetings with community representatives, approval of documents, etc.) during the pandemic, while the remaining **25%** have focused primarily on coordinating meetings with other municipal Directorates and relevant stakeholders.

### Support from Donators

The pandemic has resulted in financial stress in municipalities due to a reduction in tax collection and other incomes generation activities. Cities struggle to manage and function properly due to limited resources. The Directorate of Urbanism under the municipality also faces a financial struggle that needs to be filled through the support of central government and local and international organizations. The survey results indicate that **22.2%** of Directorates have received in-kind contributions, **11.1%** have accepted some form of technical assistance, with only **3.7%** receiving financial support. The remaining **63%** have not received any form of support from local/international organizations.

### Public Participation

Although mobility restrictions have made it difficult for the Directorates to conduct participatory meetings with community representatives, **56%** have

nevertheless managed to organize meetings in open or office spaces. The remaining **44%** have engaged in virtual meetings through platforms such as Zoom and/or Skype. Despite the ability of the Directorates to conduct these meetings, **68%** of municipal officials have declared that overall participation has been low, with **24%** indicating satisfactory levels, and **8%** claiming no participation whatsoever.

### **Building Permits**

The survey results indicate that **91.7%** of the Directorates have continued issuing building permits despite the conditions associated with COVID-19, with the highest percentage (**33.4%**) issuing up to 3-5 permits. Only **20.8%** have given more than 10, whereas **8.3%** have not distributed any permits during the pandemic. Nevertheless, **68%** of the municipalities have declared that income from building permits has been reduced as a result of COVID-19.

### **Legalization Processes**

The Directorates of Urbanism have indulged in various legalization processes during the pandemic, with the issuance of building permits being the predominant activity at **28.8%**. Similarly, **27.1%** have accepted applications and consulted with community members, whilst Directorates spent fewer time verifying applications during field work at **13.5%**, as well informing the public and recruiting relevant staff, including legalization assistants, at **10.2%** respectively. The Directorates spent the least amount of time integrating legalized buildings to GIS databases, factors which coincide with the inhibiting effect of the

pandemic considering that **44%** of municipalities have not legalized any buildings throughout the spread of the virus in Kosovo.

### **Work Supervision**

With regards to the completion of supervised project, the Directorates have focused primarily on supervising construction works, including infrastructural services, (**26.5%**), supervision of residential buildings (**21.5%**) and the supervision of public/social facilities at (**21.5%**). Fewer Directorates have focused on technical control of associated projects (**16.9%**), with the lowest percent aimed at the architectural design of facilities (**9.3%**) and geodetic measurements at **4.6%**.

### **Housing Support**

Prior to the spread of the pandemic in Kosovo, the municipalities had received scores of requests for social housing from various vulnerable communities. Although some of the Directorates have not provided adequate data regarding housing applications, the results indicate that families receiving social welfare assistance contributed to the largest share of existing applicants (**27.3%**). The Directorates have also received a high number of requests from homeless people (**18.2%**) and families who for socio-economic reasons could not adequately maintain rent payment (**13.7%**). The remaining percentages cover other vulnerable communities including repatriated families (**9.1%**), families who cannot afford monthly mortgage payments (**9.1%**), returnees (**4.5%**), families affected by natural disasters (**4.5%**), and other unspecified individuals (**4.5%**).





Source: UN-Habitat Kosovo



# INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted living conditions around the world, forcing governments to take strict measures in order to prevent and mitigate the spread of the virus. Starting on 13 March 2020, with the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 occurring in the municipalities of Kline/Klina and Viti/Vitina, the Kosovar institutions have introduced a series of counter-measures to protect against the virus; the imposition of a two-week quarantine for all incoming citizens into the country, restricted urban mobility, the complete closure of land borders for non-Kosovo citizens, a halting of all business activities besides that of essential workers, postponements in rental and loan payments, as well as the indefinite closure of schools and a transition to remote/online learning.

Various organizations around the world, including WHO have attempted to identify the epidemiological causes and risks of the virus, whilst simultaneously analyzing its widespread impact in order to draft relevant policies for socio-economic recovery of institutions, businesses, and local communities. UN-Habitat (through the Inclusive Development Program) has developed this assessment in order to form a comprehensive understanding of the systemic problems faced by the Directorates of Urbanism during the pandemic, with regards to the management of development activities in the fields of spatial and urban planning, construction, legalization, and housing. Furthermore, it is necessary to highlight these implications including the impact on:

- ▶ Daily work of the Directorates during the pandemic in the fields of spatial and urban planning, construction, legalization, and housing;
- ▶ Identifying health measures and opportunities for viral transmissions of COVID-19 at the workspace;

- ▶ Health of municipal officials due to exposure at the workplace (office and field spaces);
- ▶ Mobility patterns of municipal officials and transport modalities;
- ▶ Coordination between local and central levels of government;
- ▶ Participatory practices and consultations with community representatives during the pandemic;
- ▶ Housing support provision for vulnerable groups;
- ▶ Support for municipal Directorates from relevant ministries and organizations;
- ▶ Assessment of the current needs of support (financial, technical, professional, etc.) of municipal Directorates.

To understand the impact of the pandemic at the municipal planning level, the UN-Habitat has decided to conduct a survey through which participant municipalities can share imperative data regarding issues faced by COVID-19 in the management of daily tasks and activities. The survey was also consulted with the Association of Kosovo Municipalities, considering their continuous cooperation with municipalities. By forming a comprehensive understanding of these problems, the UN-Habitat will be better equipped to provide supportive efforts to municipalities in order to adequately address the spatial/urban challenges associated with COVID-19. The report assessment will also create room for important discussions between a variety of stakeholders, as well as potential areas for future research, as a means of reducing the negative impacts of the pandemic (future pandemics) on the management of day-to-day activities of Kosovar institutions and its residents.

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**METHODOLOGY**

The restrictive measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic have mitigated impacts and the overall spread of the virus, whilst simultaneously dictating the selection of tools required to create opportunities for rapid response systems. In order to preserve the health of all, a survey research method (through the has been chosen as a main tool of assessment in this report; the questionnaire is semi-structured, composed of 26 open and closed questions.

The main target audience of this survey include the Directorates of Urbanism and Environmental protection, as well as certain housing questions directed towards the Directorates of Health and Social Welfare. When considering that several of the targeted officials have faced technical problems (limited internet access, etc.) throughout the online survey completion, permissions were made for members to complete the survey on Microsoft Word with results later being sent via email. Furthermore, a certain number of officials who have encountered other difficulties in completing the survey online were contacted by phone in an effort to maximize the number of participants, thereby increasing the representativeness of final results.

Data interpretation and subsequent generated tables/ diagrams, have been developed separately for each question, while a general analysis of survey results was conducted according to the following aspects:

- ▶ **Participant municipalities and location of municipal facilities** (participant municipalities, office locations of the Directorates, residence locations of relevant staff, transport modalities);
- ▶ **Working methods** (working hours, and types,

reorganization of offices including the provision of protective COVID-19 materials);

- ▶ **Work focuses prior to the spread of the pandemic** (types of activities and tasks, work flow/intensity);

- ▶ **Main activities implemented by the Directorates during the pandemic** (administrative work, coordinative efforts between the municipal and central governments, donation support, spatial/urban planning and management, public participation, building permits, legalization processes, supervision work, and housing support);

- ▶ **Difficulties faced by the Directorates should the pandemic persist** (by category/type of activities);

- ▶ **Necessary support provision for the Directorates** (type of support and from whom i.e., supporting organizations, donators, etc.).

The survey analysis will highlight conclusions and opportunities for suggested recommendations in minimizing the challenges faced by the Directorates of Urbanism in spatial planning management during the pandemic, as well as the preventative measures required to reduce its associated impacts.

## SURVEY DISTRIBUTION

In August 2020, the survey “Consequences of COVID-19 in the spatial planning, construction, legalization, and housing sector”, was sent to municipalities (Urbanism Departments) through a link on the survey monkey engine. Of a total of 34 municipalities (AKM members), only 28 (**82.3%**) have responded to the survey, some of which have done so only on a partial basis. Some

municipalities have responded to the survey twice; ones with more complete information were selected for the assessment. The open period for completing the online survey ranged from August to October 2020.

## ONLINE SURVEY (CONTENT)

The semi-structure of the survey ensures that respondents have a variety of options to choose from in a given question, often including open-ended answers should provide options fail to represent the situations faced by respective participants.

As such, the survey begins by gathering general information regarding the Directorates of Urbanism and associated staff members. Emphasis is placed on identifying the geographical location of the Directorate offices, including current living situations of the respondent staff (whether they live at urban/rural zones), as well as gathering information on preferred transport modalities used by staff throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following introductory questions, the focus shifts towards understanding how participants in the different municipalities have been affected by disruptions associated with the pandemic. More specifically, respondents were asked to identify the ways in which the pandemic has interrupted the management of day-to-day activities, and what measures have been taken to reduce such impacts. Example answers include the re-organization of work stations/offices according to standards set out by the Ministry of Health, reduced work hours or conducting work on a staff-rotational

basis, as well as the integration of remote working tools.

The survey seeks to classify how these changes have affected the flux of day-to-day activities, identifying whether the pandemic has increased or decreased the overall workload of the Directorate staff, and if there has been a noticeable shift in time spent on major activities pre-and-during COVID-19.

After forming a general understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 on the Directorates, the survey highlights how the pandemic has affected the Directorates in the sector of spatial/urban planning, construction, legalization, and housing.

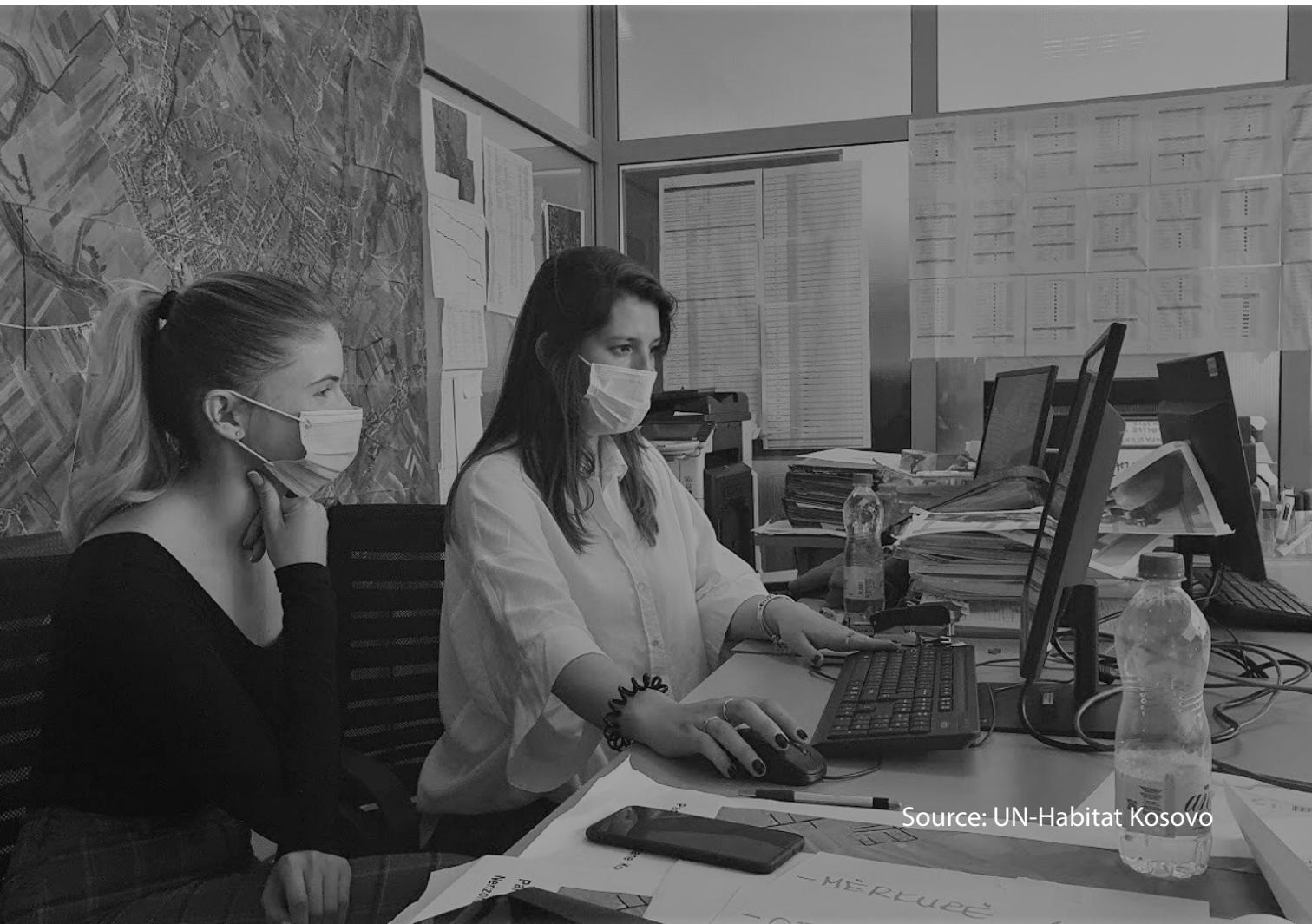
For instance, Question 15 addresses respondents who have selected spatial planning as a key focus of activity during the pandemic, seeking to identify specifically what tasks/duties have been most central for the Directorates. Options include data collection and analysis on the grounds of Geographical Information Systems (GIS), cartographic data composition, internal consultations with municipal officials and client organizations, etc.

In the housing related questions, the survey attempts to accumulate data regarding the number of requests for social housing received by municipalities prior to the start of the pandemic, and how the Directorates have responded to such applications during following months. Focus is placed on identifying the number of requests based on applicant status (repatriated persons, victims of family abuse, homeless individuals, social welfare recipients, etc.) whilst simultaneously

forming an understanding of how municipalities have supported these vulnerable groups. Options included the provision of financial support for groups in need of rental payment, shelter provision for the homeless, other kinds of support dependent upon housing request category, etc.

The survey concludes by asking the respondents which of the four subjects they think is most likely to be affected

by the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, and their expectations regarding the provision of support from relevant stakeholders including local level municipalities (specifically the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure), the Association of Municipalities of Kosovo, and other relevant institutions such as possible donors and international organizations.



Source: UN-Habitat Kosovo

# 4

**SURVEY RESULTS**

#### 4.1 PARTICIPANT MUNICIPALITIES

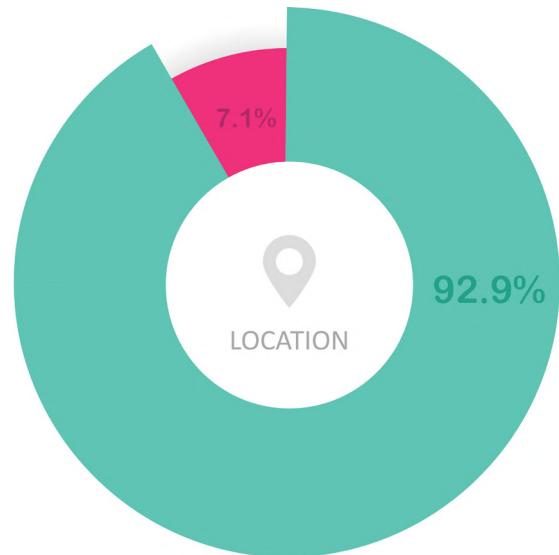
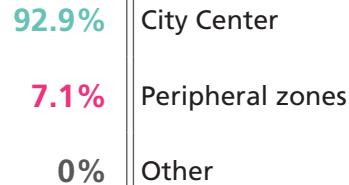
Q1: Which municipality are you from?



**Question 1:** The respondents reside in the following municipalities: Gjakova, Gllogoc, Theranda, Viti, South Mitrovica, Istog, Vushtri, Klina, Decan, Dragash, Fushë Kosovë, Shtime, Partesh, Malishevë, Lipjan, Strpce, Skënderaj, Peja, Rahovec, Kamenica, Elez of Han, Kacanik, Podujeva, Junik, Ferizaj, Gracanica, Mamusha, and an additional unspecified municipality.

#### 4.2. OFFICE LOCATIONS OF THE DIRECTORATES OF URBANISM

Q2: In which part of the city is the office of the Directory of Urbanism located in?

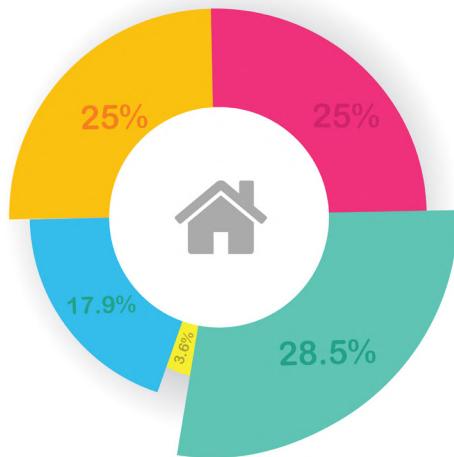


**Question 2:** Relative to the zonal design of the municipalities, the results show that an overwhelming majority of the Directorates of Urbanism are found in city-centers (92.9% of municipalities), whilst the remaining 7.1% are positioned around the outskirts of cities.

### 4.3. RESIDENCE LOCATIONS OF DIRECTORATE STAFF

Q3: In which zone do the majority of the Directorate staff live in?

17.9%	City Center
25%	Peripheral zones
25%	Villages
28.5%	City neighborhoods
3.6%	In different (cities or municipalities)

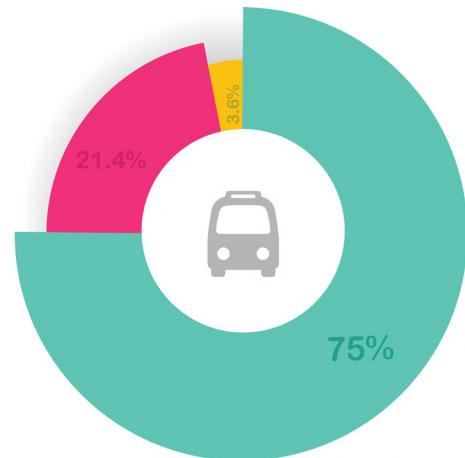


**Question 3:** The respondents live in various parts of the respective municipalities. According to the results, **17.9%** of Directorate staff reside in-and-around city centers, **25%** in peripheral areas, **25%** in rural areas including villages, with as much as **28.5%** living in neighborhoods encompassing the city. Nevertheless, we have received an answer from the Municipality of Mamusha, where the respondent staff indicate residing and traveling from different municipalities (**3.6%**).

### 4.4. TRANSPORT MODALITIES

Q4: What transport modalities have been used by respondent staff members during the pandemic?

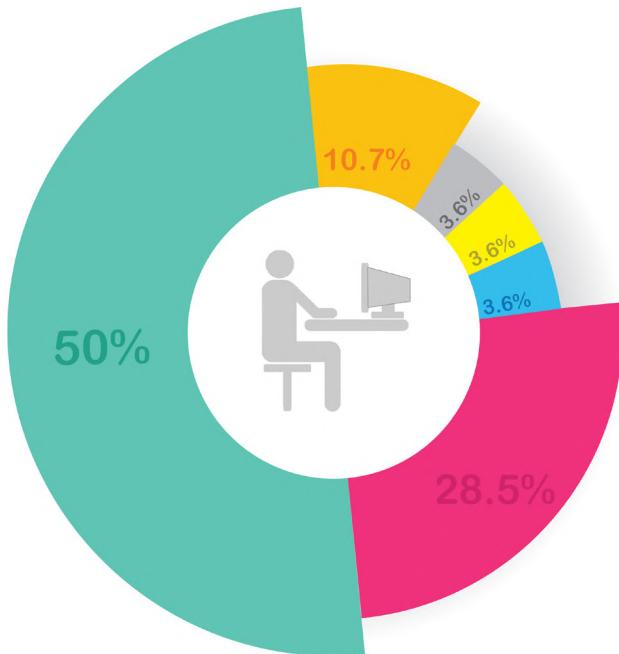
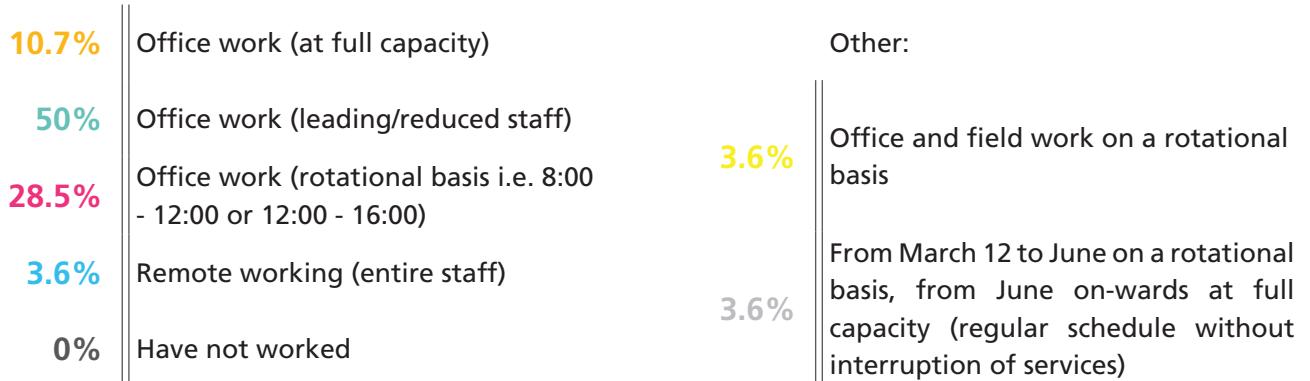
21.4%	Walking
0%	Bicycle/Biking
75%	Vehicles
3.6%	Public Transport
0%	Taxis
0%	Did not use transportation methods



**Question 4:** Considering potential mobility disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, a majority of the Directorate staff (**75%**) report using personal vehicles as preferred methods of transportation, **21.4%** favored walking, and less than **4%** relied on public transport. The results indicate no existing uses of bicycles as possible transport modalities to-and-from the workplace.

## 4.5. WORKING METHODS

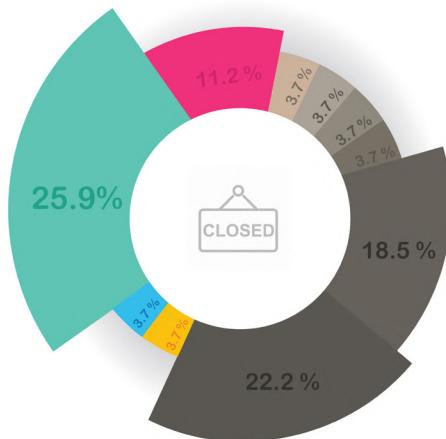
Q5: After the spread of COVID-19, the Directorates of Urbanism have practiced:



**Question 5:** After the spread of COVID-19 a majority of the Directorates have experienced changes in work flow. More than half of the respondents (**50%**) reveal conducting work operations without the presence of all staff members, **28.5%** have worked with rotated schedules (8:00 AM – 12:00 PM, or 12:00 PM to 16:00 PM), whereas only **10.7%** have continued working in full capacity. For **3.6%** of Directorates, the staff have switched entirely to remote working, whilst another **3.6%** have conducted operations on a rotational basis. We have also received an answer where the staff has worked on a rotational basis from 12<sup>th</sup> of March until June, prior to returning to full capacity and a consistent work schedule. Considering the small percentage (**10.7%**) of respondents, who have not experienced changes in day-to-day management of activities, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic has forced the Directorates to undertake various measures including rotational work schedule, or reduced staff capacities, as well as a transition to remote working.

**Q6:** Longitivity of working disruptions that have been experienced by the Directorates since the beginning of the pandemic:

25.9%	Less than 1 month
3.7%	1 month
11.2%	1.5 months
3.7%	2 months
0%	More than 2 months
	Other:
22.2%	No work interruptions
18.5%	No interruptions but with reduced staff
3.7%	No interruptions but only
3.7%	2 months, but meanwhile we have issued building permits according to needs
3.7%	In the municipality of Podujeva, we have worked with reduced staff and working schedules for 2 months
3.7%	No interruptions despite the difficult circumstances associated with the pandemic

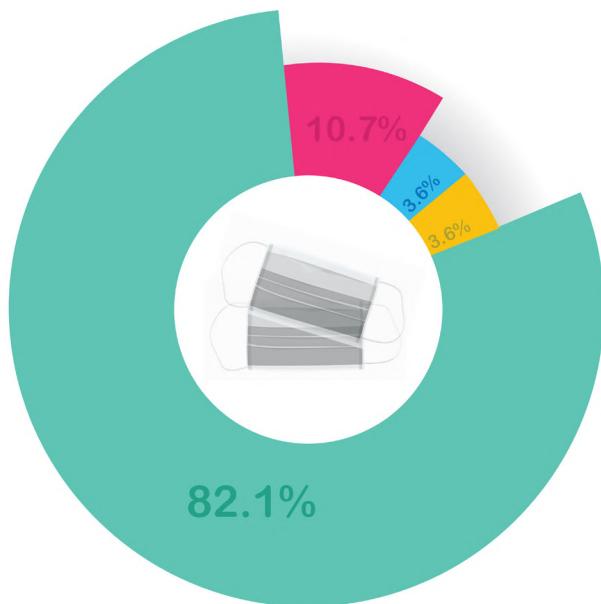


**Question 6:** While the options indicate a specific time frame, a large percentage of the responses have been open-ended. There have been municipalities which have worked without any interruptions (**22.2%**) as well as those who have worked consistently, but with reduced staff members (**18.5%**). In Podujeva, it is specified that staff have worked on a rotational basis including shortened schedules, whilst in another municipality there have been no interruptions despite the difficult circumstances involving COVID-19. One response indicates no disruptions, but only for 2-3 staff members (**3.7%**), whilst another **3.7%**, have not worked at all during a two-month period, barring the provision of building permits dependent on number of requests. Despite over **51.8%** of respondents not experiencing any disruptions in the management of day-to-day activities, **25.9%** of the Directorates have not worked for a 1-month (or a lesser) period, whilst another **11.2%** have experienced longer interruptions (up to 1.5 months). Moreover, there has been one municipal Directorate (**3.7%**) which has not worked for 2 months, and another municipality (**3.7%**) which has experienced disruptions for a 1-month period. According to the responses, it is evident that a majority of the Directorates of Urbanism have continued working despite the disruptive conditions linked with COVID-19. Some have worked on shortened work schedules, whilst others have experienced a reduction in available staff. Nevertheless, there have been various work interruptions for at least **48.2%** of the respondent staff.

## 4.6. PREVENTIVE MEASURES AND PROTECTIVE MATERIALS

**Q7:** Who has supplied the staff with protective materials (protective gloves, surgical masks, anti-bacterial handgels, thermometers, etc.)?

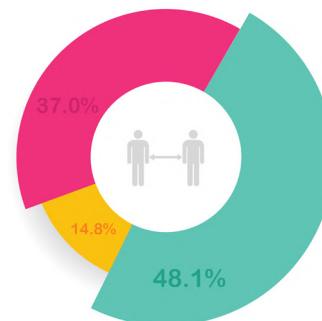
<b>82.1%</b>	Municipal authorities
<b>0%</b>	Donators
<b>0%</b>	Private companies
<b>10.7%</b>	Directorate staff
<b>3.6%</b>	No provision of protective materials
<b>3.6%</b>	Partially by Directorate staff, and municipal authorities



**Question 7:** Regarding the delivery of protective materials associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (protective gloves, surgical masks, anti-bacterial hand gels, thermometers, etc.) a majority of the respondents (**82.1%**) have been supplied by municipal authorities, with just **10.7%** of the Directorates having to personally supply designated resources. Moreover, **3.6%** of the participants have relied on a mix between municipal and personal delivery mechanisms, with the remaining **3.6%** failing to take adequate defensive measures against the current pandemic. Despite differences in resource distribution, it is evident that a majority of the Directorates (**96.4%**), have taken adequate measures to prevent the impacts of COVID-19 in respective work offices.

**Q8:** Have you re-organized office spaces, including those for citizens, according to standards set out by the Ministry of Health?

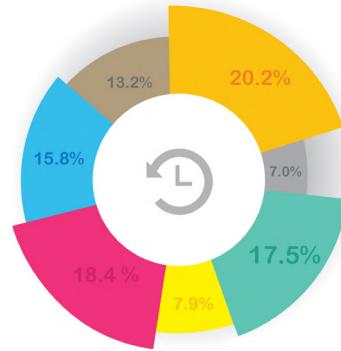
<b>48.1%</b>	Yes
<b>14.8%</b>	Partially
<b>37.0%</b>	Office spaces have remained the same
<b>0%</b>	Other



**Question 8:** According to the regulations laid out by the Ministry of Health, **48.1%** of the respondents have taken the appropriate measures in tackling COVID-19 at the workplace, **37%** indicate no changes at all, and **14.8%** report undertaking limited measures. In a general sense, it is evident that only half of the municipalities have successfully applied regulations set by the Ministry of Health, whilst the remaining municipalities have not been able to do so due to various reasons not subject to this survey.

#### 4.7. WORK FOCUSES (PRIOR TO COVID-19)

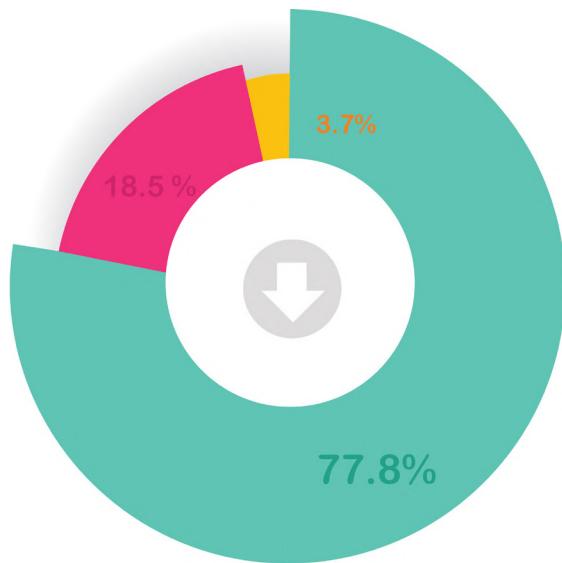
**Q9:** One week prior to the spread of COVID-19, the Directorates have focused primarily on:



**Question 9:** The results show that the Directorates were focused on a variety of activities prior to the spread of COVID-19. **20.2%** of participants reveal a focus on administrative duties, including work plans, legal matters and decision-making processes, project-concepts, as well as consultations with community representatives, **17.5%** were involved with drafting and submitting planning documents (Municipal development plans, zonal mappings of municipalities, detailed regulatory plans, etc.), **18.4%** with issuing building permits, **15.8%** on legislation processes including staff recruitment, citizen information provision, and consultations with diverse stakeholders, another **13.2%** supervised work projects (infrastructural and capital investment projects), **7.9%** held participatory meetings with citizens, and lastly, **7%** of respondents have indulged in co-operative efforts with various institutions (Ministries, other municipalities, donators, etc.). As shown in the results, none of the Directorates have offered housing support to vulnerable communities prior to the spread of the pandemic. It is important to mention that the respondents were asked to select up to three options, thereby signifying that the municipalities may have focused on various projects simultaneously.

**Q10:** How has the spread of COVID-19 affected the workload of the Directorates of Urbanism?

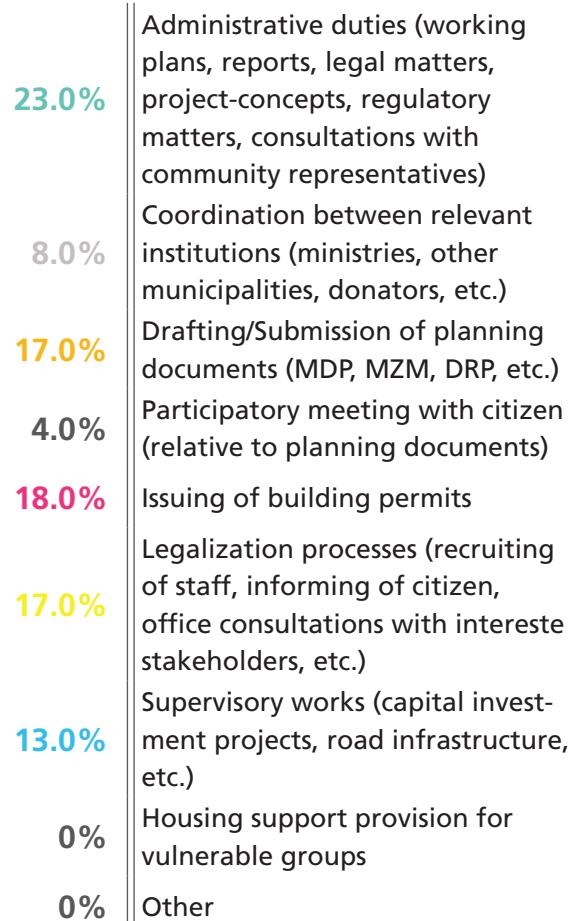
- 18.5%** No changes
- 3.7%** Increased
- 77.8%** Decreased
- 0%** Has completely stagnated

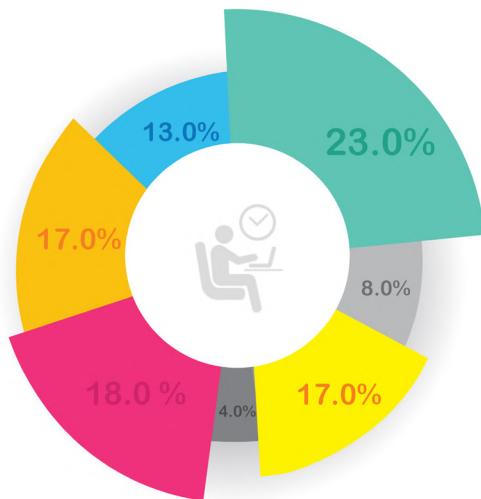


**Question 10:** Considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Directorates of Urbanism, **77.8%** of municipal staff report experiencing a reduction on average workload, while **18.5%** have not highlighted any noteworthy changes. Only **3.7%** of respondents report facing an increased workload during the pandemic. As predicted, COVID-19 has negatively impacted the Directorates, considering the majority of staff that have experienced disruptions in the management of day-do-day activities.

#### 4.8. WORK FOCUSES (DURING COVID-19)

**Q11:** Since the spread of COVID-19, in which activity has the municipal staff spent the most time on?



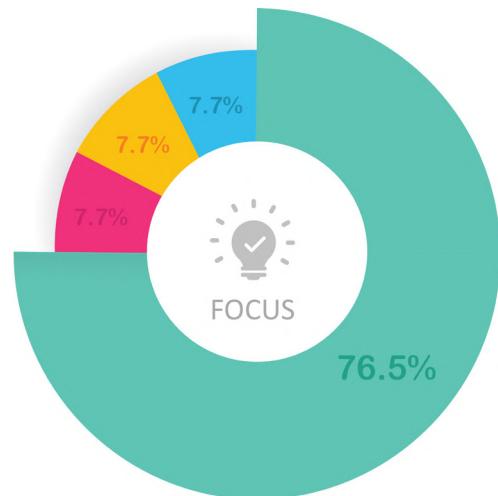
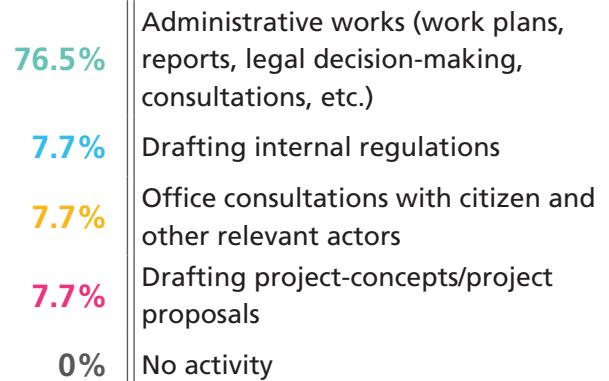


**Question 11:** Question 11 is closely linked to question 9, where the former seeks to identify the work focus of the Directorates during the spread of COVID-19; in this sense, there have been slight changes. **23%** of the respondents have continued focusing on administrative duties, including report writing, work plans, legal rules and decision-making, project concepts, whilst **17%** were involved with drafting and submitting planning documents (MDP, MZM, DRP, etc.). Moreover, the percentage of respondents focused on the provision of building permits has remain unchanged (**18%**), a pattern followed by an increase in staff who have dealt with legislation processes including staff recruitment, citizen information provision, and consultations with various stakeholders (from **15.8** to **17%**). **13%** of respondents have continued to focus on project supervision (infrastructural and capital investment projects), **8%** on establishing co-operative efforts between different institutions, and lastly, **4%** respondent staff have spent a majority of their time holding participatory meetings with municipal

residents. The results show that despite a slight flux in the management of day-to-day duties in the last week prior to the spread of COVID-19, there has been a continued focus on administrative duties, legislation processes, and the submitting/planning of municipal development projects.

#### 4.9. ADMINISTRATIVE WORKS

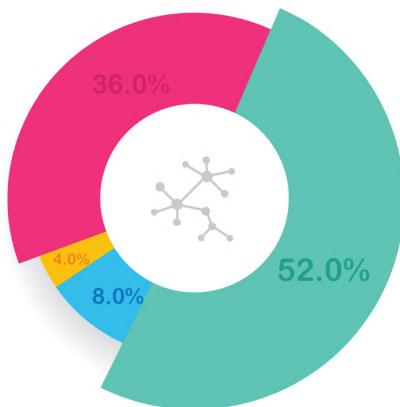
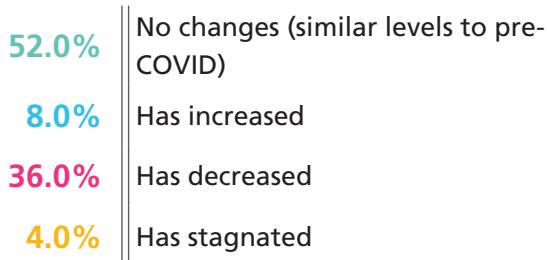
**Q12:** During the spread of COVID-19, the Directorates have focused on:



**Question 12:** This question identifies the administrative work focuses of Directorate staff during the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of **28** participant municipalities, **76.5%** report a focus on administrative tasks related to the development of project plans, various reports, legal matters, consultations, etc. The remaining **23.1%** municipalities are engaged evenly (**7.7%**) in activities such as drafting internal regulations, office consultations with community representatives and groups, and with the drafting of project concepts and proposals.

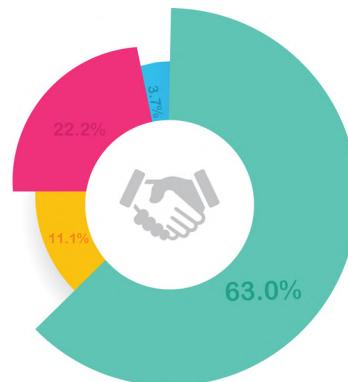
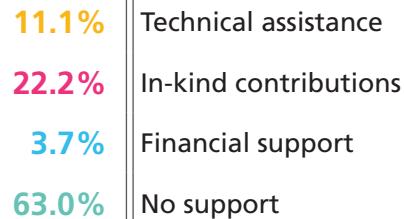
#### 4.10. COORDINATION AND SUPPORT

**Q13:** Has the coordination between local/central levels of government changed during the spread of COVID-19?



**Question 13:** Regarding coordinative efforts between local and central levels of governance during the spread of COVID-19, survey results show that in **52%** of municipalities (Directorates of Urbanism), cooperative levels have remained the same and have not changed in comparison to the pre-COVID period. In **36%** of the municipalities, officials indicate that these coordinative efforts have decreased during the pandemic, **8%** report an increase, while only **4%** state the full halting of central and local level cooperation. Analytically speaking, the survey results reveal a **12%** difference between municipalities (**52%**) where coordination has remained relatively the same, and those where it has decreased or stalled completely (**36+4%**).

**Q14:** What type of support have you received from international organizations/donors during the spread of COVID-19?

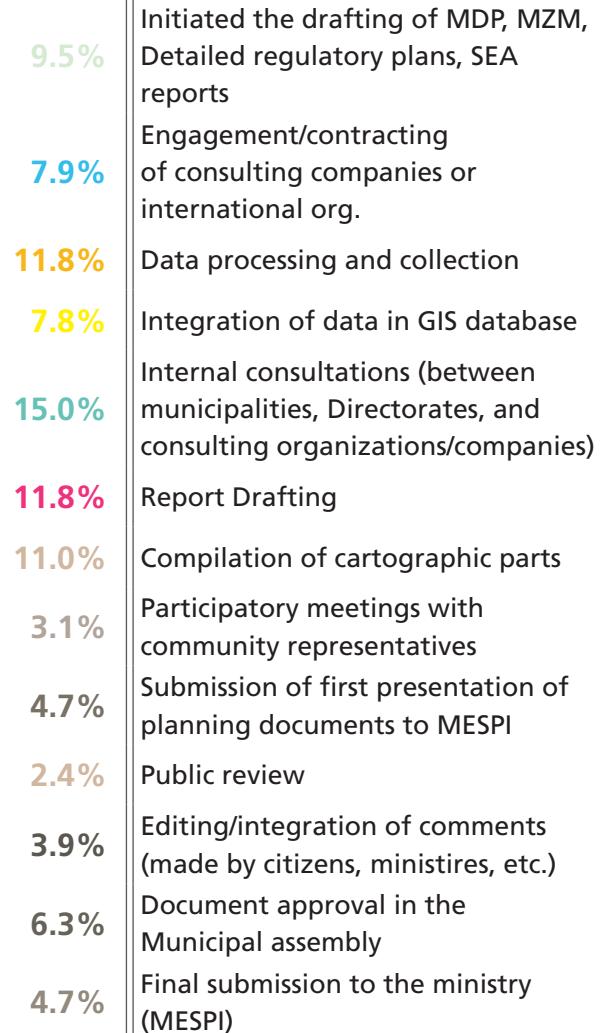


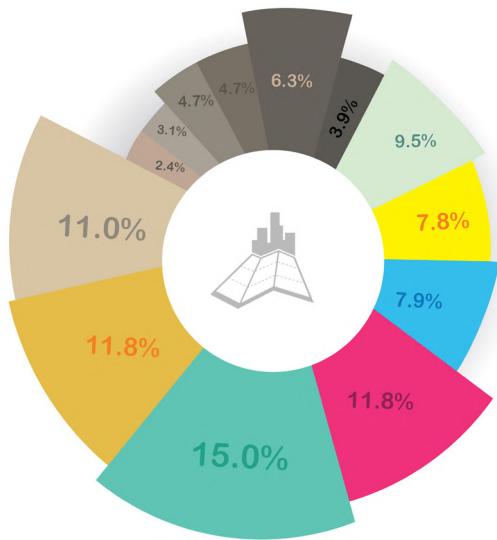
**Question 14:** The results highlight that more than half of participant municipalities (**63%**) have not received any support from international organizations/donors. **22.2%** have received contributions in-kind, specifically protective materials used to minimize the spread of the virus, food and hygiene kits, as well as assistance and support from KFOR and UNMIK in the municipality of **Partesh**. **11.1%** of municipalities indicate that they have received technical assistance or protective materials; the municipality of **Viti/Vitina** has secured support from GIZ in drafting a Waste Management Plan, while the municipality of **Junik** has also benefited from assistance by EULEX. Nevertheless, only **3.7%** of participating municipalities have received some form of financial support, with the **Podujeva** municipality specifying a donation in its housing sector.

It should however be acknowledged that respondent staff may not have had the necessary information required to respond, and that the survey question could have benefited from including additional options regarding categorizations of support received. For example, the Directorates of Urbanism supported by UN-HABITAT (Inclusive Development Program), have been assisting several municipalities in developing cohesive spatial planning databases, drafting MZM, MDPs, Strategic Environmental Assessment Reports (SEA), community-based planning, financial/technical support, as well as supporting in the development and implementation of capital investment projects.

#### 4.11. SPATIAL PLANNING

**Q15:** At what stage of the planning process did you work hardest during the spread of COVID-19?





This question identifies the various working activities of the Directorates of Urbanism in the spatial planning sector throughout the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, the Directorates were asked to reveal in which planning phase they spent most of their focus on; the categorization of work focuses is as follows: drafting of planning documents (MDP, MZM, DRPs, SEA, etc.); engagement/contracting of consulting companies or international organizations; data collection and processing; integration of data in GIS database; internal consultations (between municipalities, directorates, and consulting organizations/companies); drafting of reports; compilation of cartographic part; participatory meetings with community representatives; submission of first presentation of planning documents to MESPI; public review; editing/integration of comments (made by citizens, ministries, etc.); document approval in the Municipal assembly; and final submission to the ministry (MESPI).

Regarding the initialization of planning documents, the results indicate that **16.7%** of municipalities have begun drafting MDPs, **33.3%** have assisted in the development of MZM, **41.7%** have compiled SEA reports, **8.3%** drafted mobility plans (**overall 9.5% in drafts**), and **7.9%** engaged in contracting consulting companies/international organizations. Nevertheless, none of the municipalities (**0%**) have initialized drafting detailed regulatory plans during the spread of the pandemic.

### Document drafting process

Document drafting process began by data collection and processing, which is done by **11.8%** of municipalities. After the collection of data, around **11.8%** of the municipalities drafted a report and **11%** worked on the compilation of cartographic parts. However, the integration of the collected data into GIS was done by only **7.8%** of municipalities.

On the other hand, the presentation of planning document to MESPI was conducted by **3.9%** of the municipalities and **4.7%** of the municipalities submitted finalized document to the ministry (MESPI). Amongst other drafted or published plans during the spread of the pandemic, the municipality of South Mitrovica have successfully published the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan.

The participation and consultation with different stakeholders were also given the necessary attention. According to the survey, the majority of the respondent officials (**15%**) have engaged in internal consultations between municipal directorates and consulting

companies/international organizations. Furthermore, participatory meetings with community representative and public review session were conducted in **3.1%** and **2.4%** of municipalities respectively. After the public review, **3.9%** of municipalities integrate the comments made by the public into report editing and **6.3%** of the municipalities oversaw document approval in the municipal assembly.

**Regarding cumulative survey results on the spatial planning sector**, a majority of the municipalities (**75%**) have primarily focused on drafting various reports (including accompanying elements such as data collection and processing, participatory meetings with community representatives, public reviews, approval of documents, etc.). Only **25%** of the respondent officials have focused on coordinative efforts with other municipal directorates and consultant companies, a factor that was expected to be much more intensive during the COVID-19 pandemic.

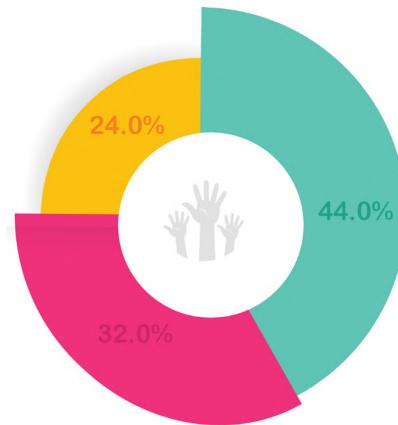
#### 4.12. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

**Q16:** During the spread of COVID-19, participatory meetings with citizens were organized on:

- 32.0%** Municipal premise
- 24.0%** Open areas
- 44.0%** Online (zoom, skype)

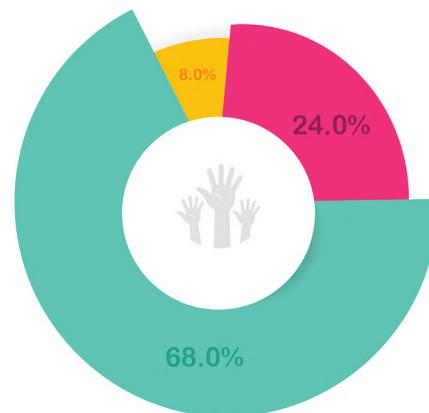
**Question 16:** During the spread of COVID-19, survey results indicate that a majority of participatory meetings (**44%**) have been organized in an online format, utilizing platforms such as Zoom or Skype.

On the other hand, **32%** have held physical meetings in Directorate offices, with the remaining **24%** of meetings taking place in outdoor areas. (D.16)



**Q17:** During the spread of COVID-19, public participation levels were:

- 68.0%** Low
- 24.0%** Satisfactory
- 8.0%** No public participation

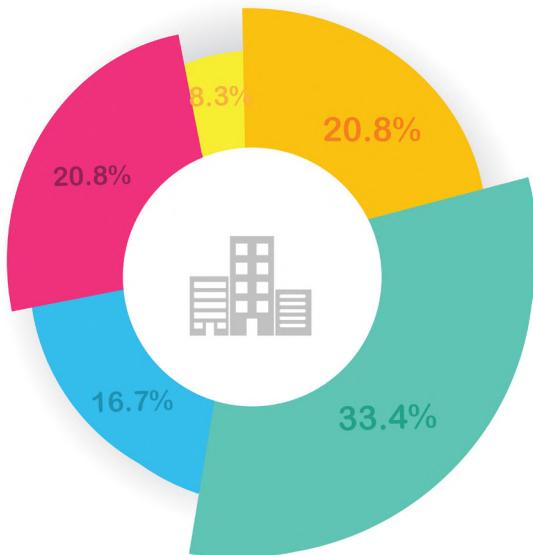


**Question 17:** In relation to the number of participant citizens during public meetings, **68%** of municipal officials state that participation was generally low, with **24%** claiming a satisfactory participation rate, and the remaining **8%** declaring no citizen involvement throughout the meetings.

#### 4.13. BUILDING PERMITS

**Q18:** During the spread of COVID-19, the Directorates have issued:

<b>20.8%</b>	1-3 permits
<b>33.4%</b>	3-5 permits
<b>16.7%</b>	5-10 permits
<b>20.8%</b>	More than 10
<b>8.3%</b>	None

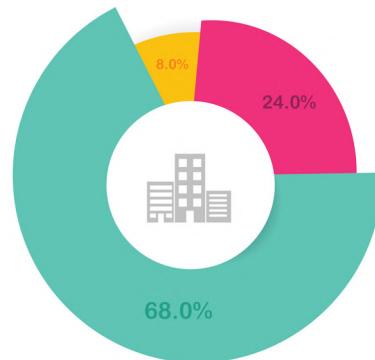


**Question 18:** Despite the difficult conditions associated with the pandemic, the respective Directorates have continued issuing building permits. The number of permits issued varies by municipality: **8.3%** have not issued any permit; **20.8%** have issued 1-3; **33.4%** have issued 3-5; **16.7%** of municipalities have issued 5-10, while only **20.8%** have issued more than 10 building permits during the pandemic.

Based on the cumulative results, during the August-October period, **91.6%** of municipalities have continuously issued building permits, with the exception of **8.4%** municipalities who have not issued any permits. Despite the ability for a majority of the municipalities to issue building permits throughout the pandemic, **68%** have declared a reduction in financial income from such activities.

**Q19:** During the spread of COVID-19, income from building permits has:

<b>68.0%</b>	Decreased
<b>24.0%</b>	No change (same as before)
<b>8.0%</b>	Increased



**Question 19:** As stated in the previous question, **68%** of participant municipalities have observed a reduction in income received from issuing building permits. A smaller percentage, **(24%)** state that revenues during the pandemic have remained the same as before, with only **8%** declaring an increase in income from permit activities.

#### 4.14. LEGALIZATION PROCESS

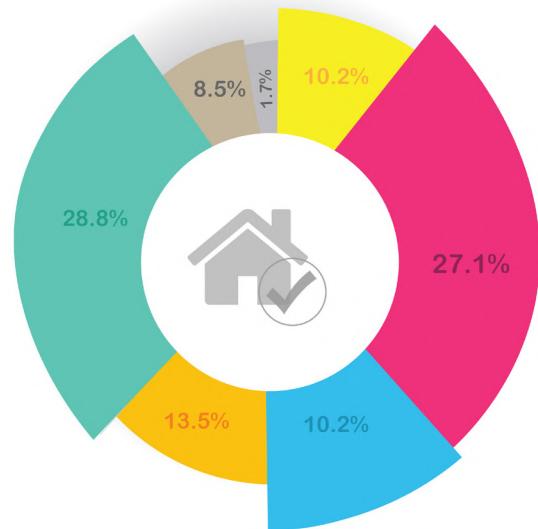
**Q20:** During the spread of COVID-19, the Directorates have completed the following activities:

<b>10.2%</b>	Staff recruitment (legalization assistants) and equipment
<b>27.1%</b>	Office consultations with interested citizen (processing of applications)
<b>10.2%</b>	Informing of citizens (field work)
<b>13.5%</b>	Field work (verifying of applications)
<b>28.8%</b>	Issuing of building permits
<b>8.5%</b>	Data integration on the GIS database
<b>1.7%</b>	No activities have been started

**Question 20:** Regarding legalization processes and relevant activities during the spread of the pandemic, the issuance of building permits (for buildings that have not been legalized) dominates as the primary work focus of the respondent Directorates **(28.8%)**.

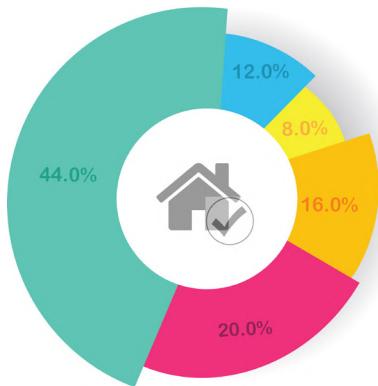
A similar percentage **(27.1%)** have organized office consultations with relevant citizen (accepting

applications), **13.5%** verified applications vis-à-vis field trips, **10.2%** have informed citizen over legalization processes, whilst another **10.2%** recruited relevant staff (including legalization assistants) and necessary equipment. A smaller number of Directorates **(8.5%)** have successfully integrated legalized buildings on the GIS database, with only **1.7%** indicating no engagement in any activity.



**Q21:** How many buildings were legalized during the spread of COVID-19?

<b>44.0%</b>	None
<b>20.0%</b>	1-3 buildings legalized
<b>16.0%</b>	More than 10 buildings legalized
<b>8.0%</b>	3-5 buildings legalized
<b>12.0%</b>	5-10 buildings legalized

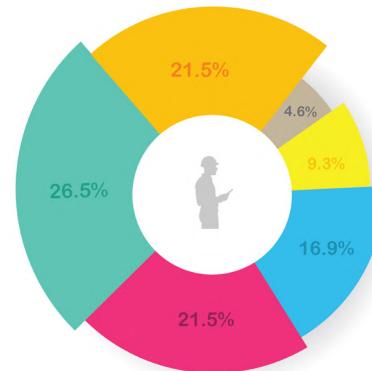


A majority of respondent municipalities (**44%**) reveal that they have not legalized any buildings during the pandemic, **20%** legalized 1-3, **16%** legalized more than 10, **12%** legalized 5-10, and lastly, **8%** of municipalities have legalized up to 3-5 buildings during the pandemic.

#### 4.15. SUPERVISORY WORKS

**Q22:** During the spread of COVID-19, the following supervisory works have been conducted:

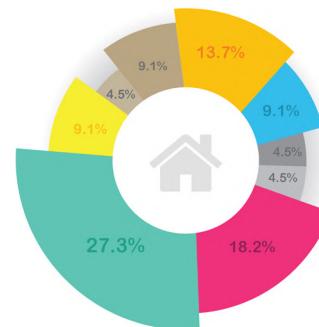
<b>21.5%</b>	Supervision of construction works (residential buildings)
<b>26.5%</b>	Supervision of construction works (road infrastructure)
<b>21.5%</b>	Supervision of construction works (public/social buildings)
<b>4.6%</b>	Geodetic measurements
<b>9.3%</b>	Defining of construction lines
<b>16.9%</b>	Technical control
<b>0%</b>	Other



**Question 22:** Within the supervisory works carried out during the pandemic, a majority of the Directorates have focused on construction works specifically the supervision of road infrastructure (**26.5%**). Similarly, **21.5%** have supervised construction works of residential buildings and social/public buildings. Other supervisory activities have included: Technical control (**16.9%**); Defining of construction lines (**9.3%**); as well as geodetic measurements (**4.6%**) of municipalities.

#### 4.16. HOUSING

**Q23:** How many cases/requests for housing support (family/individual) were registered in the municipality prior to the spread of the pandemic?



18.2%	Homeless people
27.3%	Vulnerable communities/social welfare recipients
9.1%	Repatriated families
4.5%	Returnees
9.1%	Domestic abuse victims
13.7%	Expelled families (that could not afford monthly rent payment)
9.1%	Families who cannot afford to pay their monthly loan/mortgage
4.5%	Families affected by natural disasters (floods and strong winds) during the pandemic
4.5%	Other

**Question 23:** The housing section of the survey discusses registered municipal cases for housing support by individuals/families prior to the pandemic. Although some of the respondents have presented such statistics, a large number have not provided adequate data, while some state that there have been no declared cases to the municipality.

Of the available data, support for vulnerable families/ social welfare recipients dominates at **27.3%**, where two municipalities have registered more than 10 cases, 5-10 cases, and two other municipalities with 1-5 registered cases.

Other types of support were oriented towards the homeless population (**18.2%**), where two

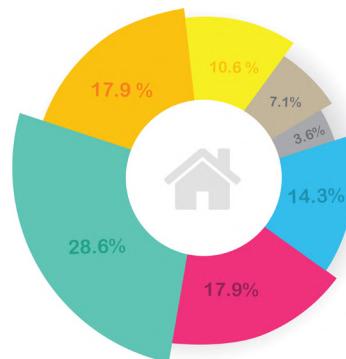
municipalities have registered over 10 cases; one with 5-10 cases, and another with 1-5 requests. A similar category includes the provision of support towards families who for socio-economic reasons could not afford to pay their monthly rent, and as such have been evicted from their homes. **13.7%** of the municipalities have registered such requests, with one municipality citing over 10 cases, and two others registering 1-5. At **9.1%** respectively, the Directorates have also accepted requests from:

- ▶ families unable to afford monthly rent payment mechanisms (one municipality registered 1-5 cases, another with 5-10);
- ▶ repatriated families (one municipality registered 1-5, another 5-10);
- ▶ victims of domestic abuse (one municipality registered 1-5, and the other more than 10 cases).

At **4.5%** respectively:

- ▶ returnee families (1-5 requests);
- ▶ victims of natural disasters (1-5 requests);
- ▶ other (20 requests).

**Q24: What type of housing support has been provided during the pandemic?**



14.3%	Housing (homeless people)
17.9%	Social housing
28.6%	Construction of new residences
17.9%	Support for reconstruction/ reparation (materials)
10.6%	Payment of monthly rent for families who were evicted, or could not afford to pay monthly rent
0%	Loan payment or term extension for families who could not afford to pay the monthly loan/mortgage
7.1%	Other housing support (victims of domestic abuse)
0%	Other housing support for families affected by natural disasters (flood and strong winds)
3.6%	Other housing support for new cases

**Question 24:** Regarding the provision of support based on the abovementioned categories, a majority of the Directorates (in association with the Directory of Health and Social Welfare) have not provided adequate data, with some revealing a total lack of realized cases. The remaining municipalities have provided housing support for the different vulnerable groups (prior to the start of the pandemic). Most of the realized support (28.6%) has materialized in the form of new houses, with one municipality claiming support to 1-5 families, another with 5-10 families, and three others have helped more than 10 families.

17.9% of Directorates indicate that they have provided support in the reconstruction/repair of existing houses, with two municipalities helping 1-5 families, while

three respondent municipalities have helped more than 10 families. At the same percentage, Directorates have also provided support for social housing, with one municipality supporting 1-5 families, two with 5-10 families, and another two helping over 10 vulnerable families.

14.3% of Directorates have provided housing for homeless individuals/families, with one municipality helping 5-10 cases, and three municipalities supporting over 10 families.

10.6% of Directorates have also provided assistance to families who could not afford to pay their monthly rent/evicted families, with two municipalities helping 1-5 families, and one supporting over 10 families.

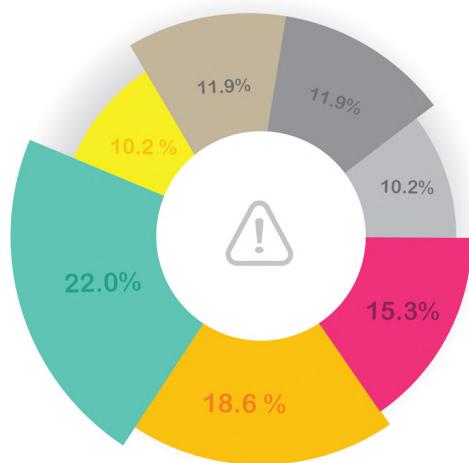
Out of the total 28 respondent municipalities, only two of them (7.1%) have provided support to victims of domestic violence, one with 1-5 families, and the other supporting 10 such cases, whilst one municipality (3.6%) has assisted 1-5 unspecified housing cases.

#### 4.17. MAJOR DIFFICULTIES (SHOULD THE PANDEMIC PERSIST)

**Q25:** In which sector do you think you will encounter greater difficulties in supporting the citizen, should the pandemic persist?

15.3%	Administrative works and coordinative efforts (work plans, reports, legal matters, project-concepts, regulatory matters, citizen consultations)
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18.6%	Drafting/Submission of planning documents (MDP, MZM, DRP, etc.)
22.0%	Participatory meetings (related to planning documents)
10.2%	Issuing of building permits
11.9%	Legalization processes (recruitment of staff, informing of citizen, office consultations with interested actors, etc.)
11.9%	Supervisory works (capital investment projects, road infrastructure, etc.)
10.2%	Housing support for vulnerable communities
0%	Other (please specify)

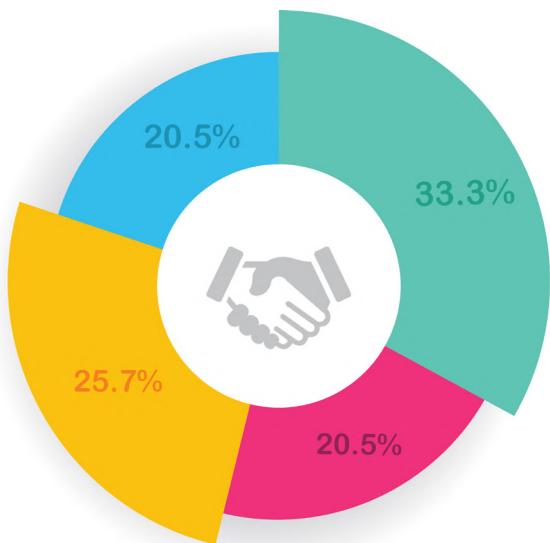


**Question 25:** When asked about the potential difficulties involving public activities, a majority of the Directorates (22%) believe that organizing participatory meetings in relation to spatial planning documents could prove the most difficult during the pandemic, whilst 18.6% point towards the drafting/submission of such documents (MDP, MZM, DRPs, etc.). Moreover, 15.3% rank administrative works and coordinative efforts (including work plans, reporting, legal decision making, project concepts, regulations, and consultations with citizens). Legalization processes (recruitment of staff, informing of citizens, in-office consultations with potential stakeholders, etc.) and supervision of works (capital investment projects, road infrastructure) are categorized at 11.9% of Directorates. At 10.2% respectively, the Directorates rank issuing of building permits and support for housing of vulnerable communities as the most difficult participatory/public activities in case the pandemic continues to persist.

#### 4.18. THE NEED FOR SUPPORT

**Q26:** From what type of organization/institution do you expect to receive support?

33.3%	Central level (Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure)
20.5%	Association of Kosovo Municipalities
25.7%	International organizations (technical assistance)
20.5%	Donators
0%	Other institutions/organizations



During and after the spread of COVID-19, **33.3%** of the Directorates expect support from central level actors (**specifically the Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure**). Some emphasize the need to request financial assistance, various training provisions, simplifications of administrative procedures, as well as an overall improvement in the cooperation between the two levels of governance. **25.7%** expect assistance of various types from international organizations including financial, technical, human resources, as well as support in professional programs (GIS), whilst a smaller percentage of Directorates (**20.5%**) emphasize the need for assistance from the Association of Municipalities with specific mention for greater municipal cooperation and coordination of actions and various trainings. The remaining **20.5%** of Directorates request financial support from donators including the delivery of protective COVID-19 materials, as well as professional training for their current staff.



Source: UN-Habitat Kosovo

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# **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

COVID-19 has brought unprecedented challenges for the global community, forcing the implementation of restrictive measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Such has been the case in Kosovo, wherein measures have included the shutdown of all physical retail businesses, public and private education, mobility restrictions, and lowered support provision towards local institutions (i.e. Directorates of Urbanism). Despite all, the survey ultimately reveal that a majority of the directorates have continued to operate their day-to-day activities with lower levels of human resources and/or working schedules. Among these activities, those related with spatial planning, legalization, housing, and construction are mainly assessed in this paper and recommendations are forwarded thereafter.

### **Spatial planning and public participation**

The pandemic has changed how we see and plan cities. The critical question of how spatial planning should be approached to make cities resilient in a time of similar pandemic and the debates on issues such as density and public space, which are indirectly related to the pandemic, are a hot spatial planning topic of discussion. Especially, the correlation between COVID transmission and high density observed in the city is still debatable. Some studies argue that the availability of resources and preparedness has benefited densely populated areas in containing the pandemic in contrast with sparsely populated areas. Others think it has become the hot spot for the transmission of the virus, although studies show high connectivity rather than density is the cause of transmission. In Kosovo, the situation has been aggravated, especially in large cities, where the density is higher and public spaces are scarce. This is especially true for Prishtina where a significant part of the citizens lives in high-rise apartment buildings.

On the other hand, the issue and importance of public spaces is another topic highlighted during the pandemic, as they were serving as a crucial instrument to implement social distancing, relaxation, and healthy activity. In some instances, their use extends to serving as a formal meeting place for organizations with the required social distancing. However, the situation in Kosovo is difficult. Most families live in a very closely built apartment without greenery and adequate public spaces. For many citizens, the most likely solutions have been their balconies, the few public spaces available within the urban centre, as well as their homes in rural settlements (for a certain group of citizens).

Therefore, developing a comprehensive spatial plan in consideration with density, public space and all other crucial planning issues is an important step towards resilient recovery. To this effect the directorate is involved in different activities, including draft of spatial planning document, which it started before the pandemic. These activities have continued without significant change during the pandemic, especially the preparation of spatial planning document including drafting reports through data collection, public review and approval of documents were common. However, as the current crisis continues to impact global trends and livelihood opportunities, participatory practices have notably affected by the restrictions imposed under COVID-19 health guidelines, compromising the quality of the spatial planning document. It is known that participatory practices are seen as transformative tools used to strengthen democracy, transparency in planning, effectiveness of solutions, and public accountability through increased collaboration between different layers of governance and the inclusion of citizen voices in wider decision-making processes. To this effect, the majority of directorate tried to conduct meeting using online platforms such as zoom and skype despite its limitation. Few directorate offices

conducted physical meeting either in their office or in outdoor area. However, in both cases the participation of the community was insignificant in most of the municipalities. On the other hand, weak financial capacity, poor coordination between different layers of government, and change in work mode, which weaken the coordination between staff members have further affected the quality of the spatial planning document. Therefore, a more integrated and well-thought spatial planning approach, that is in consideration with the realities on the ground, is required to overcome these challenges.

### **Housing and construction**

The pandemic has put a spotlight on the need for affordable housing to reduce the inequality gap and protect low-income and marginalized communities from the risk of infection. It has disproportionately affected these groups due to lack of housing, medical service, sanitation, and overcrowding, which makes social distancing a challenging task. Although it is in a disintegrated way, the government of Kosovo put in place different mechanisms to help low income and marginalized communities get adequate housing support. Moreover, eviction is minimized and support mechanism is provided for those who can't afford rent in some municipalities. The Directorate of Health and Social Welfare also engaged in receiving social housing request from different groups that are affected during the pandemic. Especially families receiving social welfare constitute the largest share of request followed by homeless people and those who can't afford rent for socio economic reason.

On the other hand, the directorate get involved in the supervision of construction projects, infrastructures, and public facilities. However, it gives little attention to technical control of the different construction

projects, neglecting the long-term consequences. To reverse this, the directorate need to implementation appropriate technical standard and pursue towards green building standards. Moreover, it needs to encourage construction companies to follow different green building standards and use local and energy-efficient materials while giving appropriate support and incentive for the private sector to involve in green infrastructure investment.

### **Legalization**

The Directorate of Urbanism is involved in different legalization process and activities. Especially processing of building permit, recruiting staff and assets legalization are the most common. However, the crucial work of integrating the legal buildings into GIS was given little attention due to the restrictive nature of the pandemic. Moreover, lack of awareness raising campaign to encourage people with legal documents to apply for building permit has impacted the rate of legalization. Therefore, awareness campaign in the areas where the communities live and work is essential. On the other hand, the financial and technical capacity of municipalities also need to be assessed and upgraded/supported to seamlessly operate the legalization process.

### **Institutional coordination between local and central levels of governance**

The survey revealed a reduction in institutional coordination between municipalities and lack of support from local and international organization, affecting their capacity in battling the pandemic. This shows the importance of implementing multi-level regulatory governance as a critical planning tool wherein cooperative mechanisms between central and local level officials can be effectively utilized to

develop more integrated, inclusive, and innovative support frameworks for various regional communities. As such, it is vital to ensure the strengthening of capacities including trainings, human resources, financial supports, as well as the development of cohesive regulatory and institutional policies at local levels of governance. Considering their role as frontline responders as well as suppliers of local goods and services, it is imperative for local governments to receive financial and technical support as a means of reducing regional inequalities whilst simultaneously increasing the efficiency of service delivery. A study conducted by UN-Habitat (2020) also signal “mapping the flow of goods, labor, and market and strengthening and enhancing links between cities, states, and regions as an important step in building socio-economic resilience where mitigation measures can be expedited, and alternative can be sought to minimize disruption”.

### **Addressing COVID-19 related social inequalities**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of socio-economic status as a determinant of health and general quality of life. Social inequalities irrevocably affect the distribution of various epidemiological risks including lower levels of awareness as well as limited access to service provision including housing. It should be highlighted that adequate housing represents a tool for socio-economic integration wherein the disparities faced by marginalized communities could be effectively reduced.

The survey results (although very few municipalities responded on questions related to sheltering/housing) have revealed that majority of the municipalities have managed to provide some form of relief including reconstruction/repair of existing households, provision of shelter to homeless individuals/families, as well as assistance towards families who for socio-economic

reasons could not afford to pay their monthly rent. However, an integrated and coordinated approach in dealing with inequality is crucial to maximize the impact and to quickly recover from the pandemic.

### **Necessary support provision**

As per insinuations throughout the report assessment, it is pivotal for the Directorates of Urbanism within the respective municipalities of Kosovo to receive the necessary support required for the continuous management of development planning within the fields of spatial and urban planning, construction, legalization, and housing. More specifically, there is an enhanced need for a synergetic relationship between local and central level actors, whilst simultaneously ensuring the inclusion of public opinion through participatory tools as a means of redeveloping the way in which decision-making practices are shaped. In strengthening the capacities and resiliency-building tools at local and national contexts, through the support of donators and regional/international organizations, Kosovar institutions will be better equipped in responding to emergency situations such as COVID-19, other future pandemics, and potential natural disasters.

As suggested throughout the report assessment, UN-Habitat strongly promotes aspects of good governance, security of tenure, and access to basic services and amenities, based on the ethos of sustainable human settlement development, and socially inclusive spatial planning processes in Kosovo. The COVID-19 pandemic, despite its negative implications in everyday settings of life, should therefore be seen as a potential catalyst for transformative change, rooted in an acknowledgment of the nexus between social, environmental, cultural, political, and economic contexts.



Source: UN-Habitat Kosovo



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