

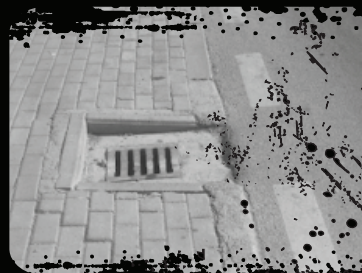


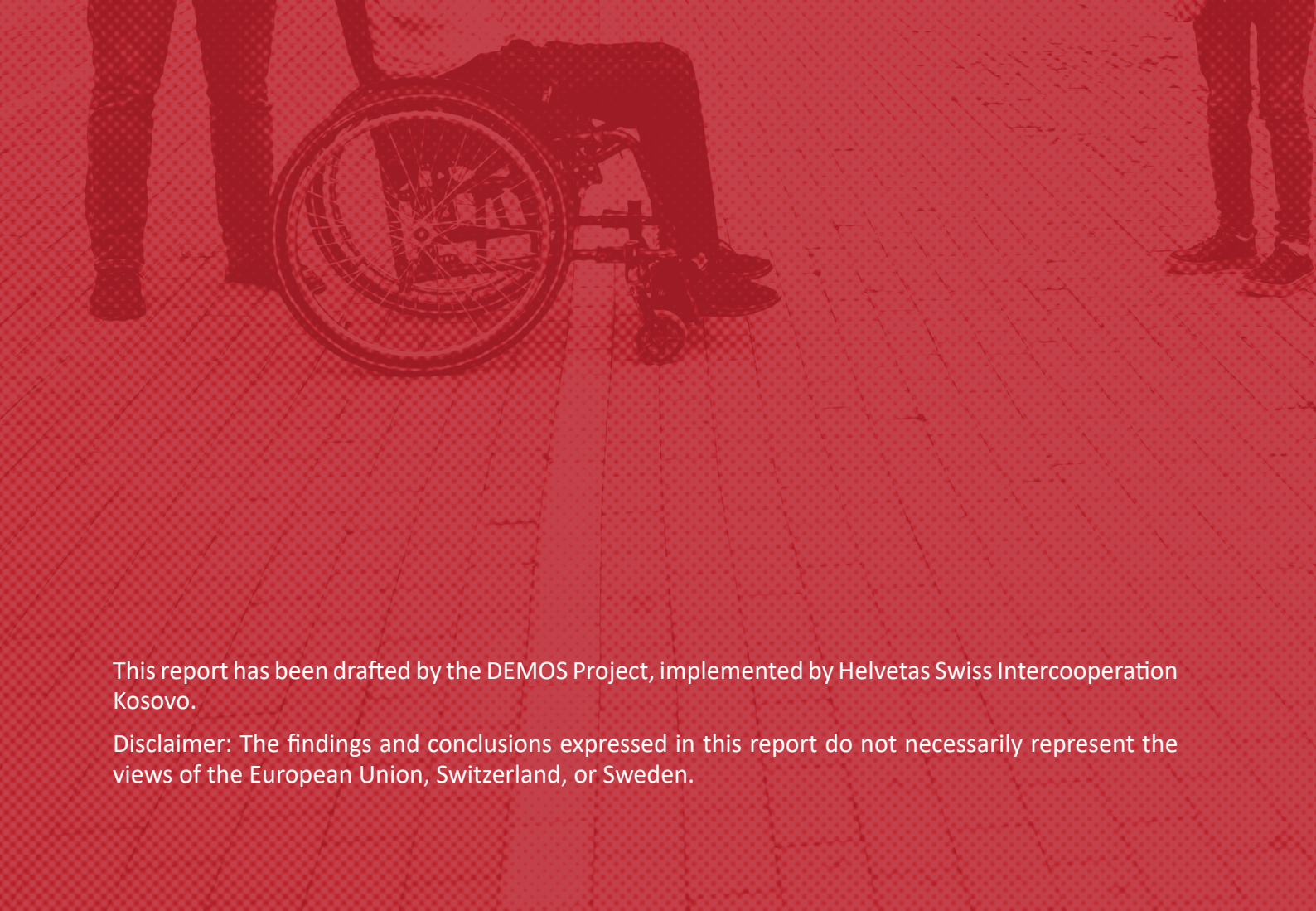
SOCIAL AUDIT REPORT FOR GJAKOVA

MONITORED PROJECTS

"Expansion of Martyrs of the Nation Road – Western Entrance of the City"

"Retender - Construction of Public Spaces in the City Center"





This report has been drafted by the DEMOS Project, implemented by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Kosovo.

Disclaimer: The findings and conclusions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the European Union, Switzerland, or Sweden.

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**“Expansion of Martyrs of the Nation Road – Western Entrance of the City”
“Retender - Construction of Public Spaces in the City Center”**

December 2024



DEMOS Decentralisation and Municipal Support

The Decentralisation and Municipal Support (DEMOS) Project supports 38 municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo in achieving more democratic local governance and better municipal management. Additionally, the DEMOS Project supports the Government of Kosovo in developing policies that are more favorable for rule-based municipal financing.

The project is co-financed by the European Union in Kosovo, the Swiss Government, and the Swedish Government and is implemented by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Kosovo.

DEMOS support for Kosovo's municipalities is part of the Municipal Performance Grant, which ensures support for well-performing municipalities.

A special focus of the Project is also the support for the central government where DEMOS focuses on providing assistance in building policies for a more favorable framework for decentralized governance.

According to the first component of the Project, DEMOS III aims to open data for broader public review of municipal performance and to initiate Social Audits "to monitor the impact of Municipal Performance Grant (MPG) projects ODD citizens"

The DEMOS project has also supported the development of activities involving citizens in decision-making, including Social Audit Teams that have overseen the implementation of projects financed by the Performance Grant.



BIRN Kosovo is an independent, non-governmental organization whose goals are to inform citizens, and contribute to the democratic transition process in the country, promote accountability, the rule of law, and policy reform. BIRN Kosovo specifically aims to serve as an oversight mechanism for public institutions by monitoring the work of governing and public institutions. In addition, through the production of high-quality and impartial televised debates and training young people on argumentation and debating skills, BIRN aims to promote and

encourage a culture of debate in Kosovo. BIRN vision is to secure its position as the leading investigative reporting organization in Kosovo, addressing the need for objective, high-quality, and sustainable reporting on the country's many challenges. BIRN Kosovo, in partnership with Democracy Plus, was commissioned by DEMOS to facilitate Social Auditing in 11 selected projects, in Gjakova, Peja, Klina, Malisheva, Lipjan, and Obiliq.



Democracy Plus (D+) is an independent, non-profit organization established in March 2016. D+ is committed to building a democratic society by increasing citizen participation in political processes, enhancing accountability, and influencing decision-making processes. D+ seeks to integrate information technology into all their efforts to promote the use of the Internet, which plays a vital role in democratizing societies. D+ aims to contribute to the creation of good

governance practices by public institutions at both central and local levels, strengthen the rule of law, advance political parties, and support free and fair electoral processes. D+ undertakes initiatives aimed at bringing decision-makers closer to citizens through policy research, facilitation of dialogue or communication, and public education.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A team of civil society activists, supported by the DEMOS Project training program, began piloting the initiative of civic engagement in monitoring the implementation of public projects. The citizen groups were designated as 'Social Audit' teams.

As a new concept in Kosovo, Social Auditing was initiated by DEMOS and civil society organizations in 2022, continuing through 2023 and 2024. With DEMOS' support, 20 Social Audit Groups were established, involving approximately 300 active citizens in these processes. Trained members of the Social Audit Teams became activists and provided over 100 concrete recommendations for local governance to "improve municipal performance."

In 2024, BIRN and D+, with the support of DEMOS, assisted in establishing 11 Social Audit Teams in six municipalities: Gjakova, Peja, Klina, Malisheva, Lipjan, and Obiliq.

The program received the support of local governance. Six Mayors of Municipalities signed Memorandums of Understanding with the organizations to facilitate the Social Audit

process. Municipality of Gjakova is among the beneficiary municipalities of the Municipal Performance Grant funds, allocated in 2023.

In July, BIRN, in line with the methodology developed by DEMOS, began identifying active citizens from this municipality to be involved in the Social Audit process. Following consultations with the community, interest groups, and civil society, BIRN recommended aligning with the DEMOS project, where 20 citizens were selected to join the Social Audit Team.

After selection and expression of interest, the interested citizens were invited to attend the training program provided by BIRN, during which they were trained on the Social Audit process, document review, conducting interviews, and applying the Social Audit methodology.

In line with the methodology developed by DEMOS and adapted by BIRN, the group of citizens from Gjakova established the 'Social Audit' Team. They were assigned tasks to analyze and oversee two projects: *"Expansion of the Road National Heroes - Western Section"* and *"Rendeter - Construction of Public Spaces in the City Center"*. The value of both projects is over €2.1 million.

The two teams worked separately on monitoring the projects and, after completion, held joint consultations "to identify shared and specific findings of the two monitored projects."



GENERAL FINDINGS FOR BOTH PROJECTS

-  The Municipality of Gjakova complied with the requirements of the Administrative Instruction of MLGA for Open Administration in Municipalities regarding the collection and handling of citizens' requests during budget hearings.
-  The Municipality did not hold public hearings or present to citizens the executive projects financed through the Performance Grant.
-  To expedite the project tendering process, the Municipality of Gjakova shortened the deadlines for accepting tenders.
-  In these two procurement activities, requests for reconsideration and appeals were submitted. The Municipality acted appropriately by approving the reconsideration request, avoiding a potential appeal to the PRB and delaying the tender process.
-  In both procurement activities, the Municipality of Gjakova amended the initial criteria published in the contract notice, lowering some of the requirements.
-  Both projects experienced delays in the execution of works, requiring extensions of deadlines for project completion.
-  The team found instances in both projects where works were not implemented as foreseen in the project design.
-  Project contracts are accessible on the e-procurement website, but other documents related to contract management—such as invoices, completed and paid works, contract amendments, and justifications for position changes—are not available.



SPECIFIC FINDINGS IN THE PROJECT

“Expansion of Martyrs of the Nation Road – Western Entrance of the City”

The project design contained deficiencies and, in some cases, it failed to consider standards to ensure accessibility for all individuals with disabilities.

The project did not include provisions for access for individuals with disabilities, such as tactile strips for the blind.

No bus stop or bicycle lane was planned in the project.

The team found that investments in sidewalks along this road hinder normal movement for citizens, especially for wheelchair users and parents with strollers, as narrow passages were created in some areas due to the placement of benches, electric poles, and trees in the same space.

Benches and trash bins were not installed as specified in the project; instead, they were relocated to a designated location, obstructing free movement in some instances.

Poor planning resulted in additional works being required.

The quality of works during contract implementation was substandard.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS IN THE PROJECT

“Re-tender – Construction of Public Spaces in the City Center”

In the planning process, the Municipality decided to purchase a large number of park benches, which were unnecessary for this project. Once installed in the investment area, the excess benches were removed due to their redundancy.

The Municipality shortened the deadline for accepting tenders.

The team found that inadequate planning resulted in additional works being required.

The team observed that the tactile strip for blind individuals was not built to standard—it was narrower and contained obstacles that could pose risks to blind people.

The tactile strip was installed too close to the side wall, which was considered problematic by visually impaired individuals.

Following a recommendation from the Social Audit Team, the Municipality of Gjakova addressed some issues by widening the tactile strip to 40 cm and removing obstacles.

The team found instances where the acoustic signaling system was not functioning.

Who establishes the Social Audit Team?

Social Audit Teams are independent from institutions and can be established by community representatives, as well as other groups. The teams operate independently of government and do not require approval from public institutions for their establishment.

THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE SOCIAL AUDIT PROCESS TAKES PLACE

The Municipality of Gjakova is the seventh largest municipality in the Republic of Kosovo. According to preliminary data from this year's population census, REKOS2024, by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS), the Municipality of Gjakova has a population of 78,824 residents¹. This marks a decrease of 15,732 residents compared to the 2011 census, when the population was recorded at 94,556 residents.

The budget of the Municipality of Gjakova for 2024 is € 37,483,964². Of the total budget, €12,642,608 (33.73%) is allocated for capital investments.

Furthermore, in the overall performance evaluation under the 2023 Municipal Performance Grant, Gjakova ranked among the six winning municipalities. The municipality received €1,630,000 (€736,000 from the Ministry of Local Government Administration and €898,000 from DEMOS), committed to improving infrastructure³.

The Municipality selected two projects—"Expansion of Martyrs of the Nation Road – Western Entrance of the City" and the "Retendering of the Construction of Public Spaces in the City Center"—to be implemented through the Municipal Performance Grant. The contract value for the Martyrs of the Nation Road project is €1,004,545, while the contract value for the City Center public spaces project is €1,187,211.72.

For the Expansion of Martyrs of the Nation Road project, the Municipality approved a reconsideration request, thus avoiding delays in the tender process at the Procurement Review Body. The Municipality signed a contract for this tender with Company Arfa Group LLC, with a total contract value of €1,004,545. The project duration is 120 working days within a 12-month period from the contract signing date.

The first tender for the Construction of Public Spaces in the City Center project was opened on May 17, 2023, but it was canceled two months later, on July 14, 2023. Following a re-tender, the Municipality finalized the tender process by signing a contract worth €1,187,211.72 with the company FIDANI L LLC, Fidani LLC, Fidani Beton LLC. Both projects were designed by the private company, AI Engineering LLC, contracted by the Municipality of Gjakova for project design. To manage the two contracts, the Mayor of Gjakova, Ardian Gjini, appointed Rexhë Rexha as the contract manager through an official decision⁴.

The Martyrs of the Nation Road project has been considered a significant investment. This road not only connects villages to the city of Gjakova but also links Kosovo to Albania, as it leads to the town of Bajram Curri in Albania. Similarly, the City Center public spaces project is also deemed important by the team, as it is located in the city center and, with new investments, provides greater mobility opportunities, including for people with disabilities. Both road projects were included in the municipality's development strategy or Medium-Term Budget Framework (MTBF). However, due to the high costs, it was impossible to implement them solely with the municipal budget⁵.

1 How did the population of Kosovo's largest cities change compared to 2011?: <https://kallxo.com/lajm/si-ndryshoi-numri-i-popullesise-ne-qytetet-me-te-medha-te-kosoves-ne-krahasim-me-vitin-2011>

2 Law No. 08/L-260, Law on Budget Allocations for the Budget of the Republic of Kosovo for 2024.

3 Gjakova benefits over 1.6 million Euros from the Performance Grant: <https://kk.rks-gov.net/gjakove/?newsqpt=gjakova-perfiton-mbi-1-6-milion-euro-nga-granti-i-performaces>

4 Decision: 112/02-15319, dated: 03.08.2023: <https://kk.rks-gov.net/lipjan/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/09/Vendim-nr.15319-per-menaxher-te-kontrates.pdf>

5 Director of Infrastructure in the Municipality of Gjakova, Shkumbin Kastrati

CHAPTER I - COMMON FINDINGS IN BOTH PROJECTS

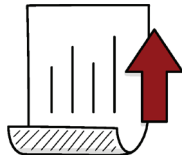
From the analysis of documents and field visits for the two projects in Gjakova, the team identified a range of issues, starting from the preparatory phase of the tender, particularly the project design, through the contracting and implementation phases. These phases were marked by delays, issues with the quality of work, and the need for additional tasks.

Findings related to the public consultation process



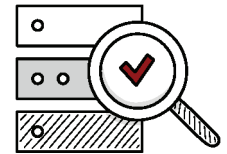
The Municipality of Gjakova, with a population of 78,824 residents, conducted meetings with citizens in 2024 as part of regular budget hearings. Based on the minutes from these hearings, it was found that the Municipality of Gjakova adhered to the standards outlined in the Administrative Instruction of the MLGA for Open Administration in Municipalities. Citizens' requests were documented by the working group, and concrete justifications were provided for these requests.

Community-Driven Projects



From the review of the budget hearing minutes, it was found that both projects originated from community requests during the 2022 and 2023 hearings. Discussions with community representatives, who were part of the Social Audit team, confirmed that these two funded projects were citizen-driven requests, as they involve two main arterial roads of the city of Gjakova. Despite the importance of these projects to citizens, the Social Audit team found that the executive projects were neither presented to the public nor to interest groups. In some municipalities in Kosovo, municipal administrations have initiated practices where, before the start of works, the community is invited to a meeting to be informed about the project details and investment plans. This practice has proven to improve the quality of project planning.

Findings on Project Transparency



The team found that the project contracts are accessible on the public procurement website, e-procurement. This platform also provides some data related to contract implementation, such as the payment schedules and the name of the contract manager. However, the Municipality has not published the executive projects or other documents related to contract management, including invoices, completed and paid works, contract amendments, and justifications for position changes.

Findings on Procurement



The Social Audit team found that the Municipality of Gjakova modified the tender criteria during the public procurement process.

In the first tender, the criteria were changed during the complaint process by economic operators. The second tender was canceled and reissued with revised criteria. The Municipality reduced the number criteria initially set in the first contract notice. In the re-tendering process, softened criteria facilitated the signing of the contract. The adjusted criteria included reducing the required number of equipment (e.g., excavators) and lowering the project managers' required work experience from 5 years to 3 years.

CHAPTER II - SPECIFIC FINDINGS FOR THE MARTYRS OF THE NATION ROAD PROJECT

In the project “Expansion of Martyrs of the Nation Road – Western Entrance of the City”, the Social Audit Team identified specific issues related to this project.

Lack of Accessibility Design for People with Disabilities

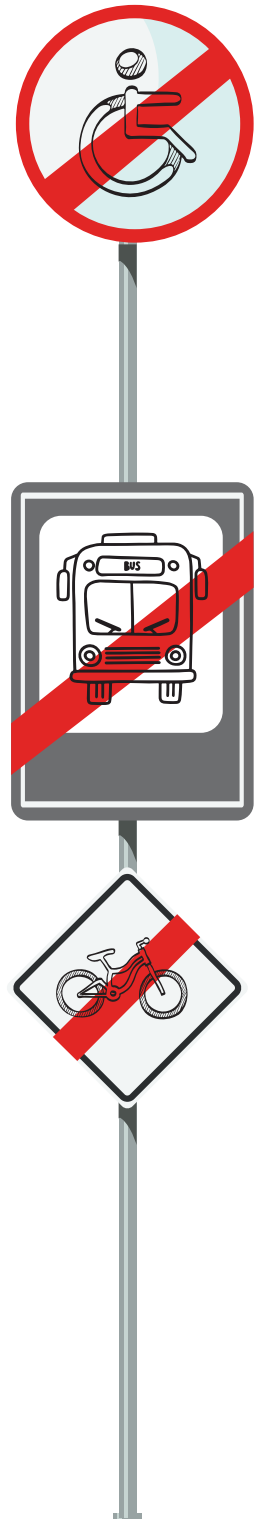
The Social Audit Team found that the Martyrs of the Nation Road was not constructed in accordance with standards to ensure inclusivity, including people with disabilities and, specifically, the blind people. The team noted the absence of designated parking spaces and seating areas accessible for wheelchair users. Lack of special signage and orientation strips for the visually impaired. The absence of tactile strips was justified by the claim that they were installed only in the city center, as it is the most frequented area by the residents of Gjakova and surrounding regions.

Lack of Bus Stops and Bicycle Lanes

The Martyrs of the Nation Road holds significant importance as it not only connects dozens of villages to the city of Gjakova but also links Kosovo to Albania, specifically to the town of Bajram Curri. Despite the heavy traffic and frequent use by buses traveling from various villages to Gjakova, there is no designated bus stop along this segment. Currently, buses stop directly on the road, causing traffic congestion and posing safety risks to passengers and other road users.

The lack of a planned bus stop, according to the Infrastructure Directorate, is attributed to insufficient space and the need for expropriation in the area. The Social Audit Team, after discussions with representatives from the Municipal Project Design Office, found that bus stops are included in the regulatory plan but have not yet been implemented.⁶

The team also observed that no bicycle lanes were constructed. Given Gjakova’s tradition of frequent bicycle use, the team emphasized that roads like this should include a dedicated space for bicycles. In discussions with Gjakova municipal officials, two justifications were provided for the absence of a bicycle lane: that the road was rehabilitated within the existing urban boundaries, and there was no possibility to include a bicycle lane, and secondly, that a portion of the road is classified as a main road connecting Kosovo to Albania, where constructing a bicycle lane is not feasible due to its designation as part of the national road network.



⁶ Conversation with the Project Manager for the design in the Municipality of Gjakova_Lekë Sina, date: 04.11.2024

Obstacles to Movement

The Social Audit Team acknowledged that the reconstruction of the Martyrs of the Nation Road was necessary and that the work has improved and facilitated movement. However, several shortcomings were noted during the implementation of the project: Sidewalk investments along the Martyrs of the Nation Road hinder movement for wheelchair users and parents with strollers. Narrow spaces between installed benches and decorative trees create barriers. Despite the adequate width of the sidewalks, the placement of benches, trees, and manholes made the movement for all road users more difficult.

Stormwater drains were designed to be installed within the sidewalks, creating uneven levels with the pavement. This poses a risk to pedestrians, particularly wheelchair users and parents with strollers. The municipal project design officer stated that the stormwater drains are intended to have a network cover over the access points to ensure unrestricted movement for all citizens⁷.

Valdrin Zenuni, representative of the supervising company AI Engineering LLC, contracted by the Municipality of Gjakova, explained during a meeting with the Social Audit Team on September 26, 2024, that the stormwater drains were positioned within the sidewalk to avoid



damages by vehicles. “It’s better to place them slightly inward rather than leaving them on the road, where they could constantly be damaged and cause noise issues”⁸. Additionally, the team



found that certain parts of the sidewalk require railings due to steep terrain slopes, which could result in pedestrians falling off the road.

A Large Number of Benches and Trash Bins in a Small Area

The Social Audit Team found that in a segment of the Martyrs of the Nation Road, an excessive number of benches and trash bins were installed, exceeding actual needs. After this finding, the team analyzed the signed contract, which revealed the procurement and installation of 86 benches at a unit price of €180 (totaling €15,480). Gjakova Municipality also contracted 86 trash bins at a unit price of €90.

To address this issue, the Social Audit Team met with the engineer from the Gjakova Municipality’s Project Design Office and the Director of Infrastructure, representing the requesting unit.

The Director of Infrastructure, Shkumbin Kastrati, attributed the issue to the designer, who lacked adequate knowledge of the terrain and the limitations for bench placement, resulting in the design of more benches than needed⁹. He also stated that he requested the Public Services Directorate to relocate some of the benches to other locations. The contract manager, however, stated that the project must be executed as written, explaining that changes to the project require additional decisions¹⁰.

The Social Audit Team received a different

7 Supervisory company “AI Engineering” LLC, Valdrin Zenuni, from the meeting with the Social Audit team, dated: 26.09.2024

8 Kompania mbikëqyrëse “AI Engineering” Sh.P.K, Valdrin Zenuni nga takimi me ekipin e Auditimit Social, datë: 26.09.2024

9 Audit Team Meeting with the Director of Infrastructure, Shkumbin Kastrati, on 04.10.2024.

10 Meeting of the Social Audit team with the contract manager of the “Widening of the Martyrs of the Nation Road-Western Entrance of the City” and the contract “Retendering of the Construction of Public Spaces in the City Center”, Rexhë Rexha, on 29.08.2024

response from the manager of the contract signed by the Municipality of Gjakova with the Economic Operator responsible for project design. He stated that the project did not specify the placement of benches as implemented on-site. According to him, the project planned for benches to be installed across the entire road segment, **with far fewer benches than those installed. He explained that when he asked why the implementation differed from the project,** he was told that some businesses and residents refused to allow benches to be installed in front of their properties, resulting in benches being concentrated in a single area.¹¹

During the field visit, the Social Audit Team confirmed the clustering of benches in one area. They recommended that the Municipality of



Gjakova find a suitable solution for the affected residents and businesses. In a meeting with the Mayor of Gjakova, Ardian Gjini, the team presented their concerns about the benches and recommended relocating them to other areas in the municipality. The Mayor agreed to the recommendation and stated that the companies responsible for park maintenance would ensure the benches are relocated in the coming months to areas where they are more needed.

Shortened Tender Submission Deadlines

Every contracting authority, when announcing a public procurement activity, is obligated to allow a time period for the submission of offers by economic operators. The minimum deadlines for each contracting authority must comply with those specified by law and vary based on the estimated value of the contract. However, public procurement laws and regulations allow for reduced submission deadlines in certain legally defined cases. The Social Audit Team found that in both projects, the municipality shortened the tender submission deadlines.

For the Expansion of the Martyrs of the Nation Road – Western Entrance of the City, the tender was published on the e-procurement¹² platform on May 30, 2023, with the deadline for submission set for June 21, 2023. The tender is classified as a large-value tender, with an estimated value of €1,166,873.29. The team found that the municipality shortened the submission deadline to 23 days, compared to the 40 days required by law.

The municipality justified the shortened deadline as follows: “Based on the Financial Support Agreement for the ‘Widening of the Martyrs of the Nation Road – Western Entrance of the City’ Project from the Municipal Performance Grant Scheme with the MLGA and Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation - DEMOS, in order to complete the project in time, we expedited the procurement procedures with a shortened deadline for this project. This is a 6-month contract with an estimated value of €1,166,873.29.”

Upon reviewing the materials, the Social Audit Team found that the tender publication failed to include a prior notice, which is required to justify shortening the deadline but must not reduce it below 24 days, as stipulated in the Public Procurement Rules and Operational Guidelines in Kosovo.

¹¹ Conversation with the Project Manager for the design in the Municipality of Gjakova_Lekë Sina, date: 04.11.2024

¹² Tender: Widening of the ‘National Heroes’ Road - Western Entry to the City, link: https://e-prokurimi.rks-gov.net/SPIN_PROD/application/ipn/DocumentManagement/DokumentPodaciFrm.aspx?id=2484582

Relaxation of Tendering Criteria

Based on the documents published on the e-procurement platform, the Social Audit Team found that the Municipality of Gjakova initially set high criteria for the tender for the widening of the Martyrs of the Nation Road – Western Entrance of the City. The Municipality initially required that the economic operator possess four excavators of at least 64 tons, which was later reduced to three excavators of at least 40 tons. This change was made after the Municipality received a request for reconsideration of the decision.

The Municipality of Gjakova, as the contracting authority, partially approved the request for reconsideration submitted by economic operator Drini Company, thus preventing delays in the tender process at the Procurement Review Body. Although the reconsideration decision of the AC, dated June 5, 2023, does not provide detailed explanations, the contracting authority decided to amend the tender dossier and the contract notice¹³.

Two economic operators competed for this tender: Group of Economic Operators: “PE-VLA-KU LLC, JOOS & Krasniqi-BAZE LLC, Roza Komani B.I,” with a total price of €1,157,934.85, and Arfa Group LLC, with a total price of €1,004,545.60. On August 3, 2023, the Municipality of Gjakova signed a contract with Arfa Group LLC for a duration of up to 12 months.

The contract was awarded based on the most economically advantageous tender. The evaluation criteria showed that the company with the lowest price received the highest score.



Contract for Additional Works

The Social Audit Team found that the project was not adequately planned, leading to additional expenses for unplanned works during implementation. According to documentation, the designer miscalculated the excavations required for the road’s route. As a result, the project could not proceed without completing these excavations. The implementing company requested additional works on July 15, 2024, arguing that further excavation beneath the planned levels was necessary. The Municipality of Gjakova approved this request, signing a contract for €100,182 to cover specific positions on the road, stormwater drains, water supply, and electrical systems.

While contracts for additional works are legally allowed, they are not recommended as they bypass competition in determining operating prices.

The team also found that an additional contract was signed to address issues with a water pipeline crossing the area. Public investment projects should ensure that planning is carried out on public property. The Social Audit Group noted property-related issues in this project, which forced the company to request an extension of implementation deadlines.

On August 5, 2024, the EO requested a two-month extension for execution, specifically until October 3, 2024, citing interruptions due to property-related issues. Additional unplanned work also arose during the implementation phase, including modifications to water pipes requested by the regional water utility, KRU Gjakova. The Municipality approved the operator’s extension request. The Social Audit Team observed that works continued beyond October 3, 2024, when the contract officially concluded.

¹³ Municipality of Gjakova: Decision regarding the Request for Reconsideration of the Decision, date: 05.06.2023

Issues with the Removal of Utility Poles

The Social Audit Team found that utility poles were not removed from the sidewalks, creating obstacles to free movement. The contract specified, under position 7 of the project's bill of quantities and preliminary calculations for the Martyrs of the Nation Road expansion, the Removal of lighting poles along with all their components (anchors, foundations, cables) and transportation to a designated storage facility up to 15 km away, with a unit price of €50 per pole for a total of €450 (9 poles).

The field visit confirmed that utility poles remained along the reconstructed road segment. The Director of Infrastructure explained¹⁴ that the relocation of power supply poles must be coordinated with KEDS (Kosovo Electricity Distribution Company). Although the relocation of poles was included in the contract as a position, it remains an exclusive right of KEDS, as the poles are not municipal assets and cannot be removed without prior approval from KEDS.



¹⁴ Director of Infrastructure in the Municipality of Gjakova, Shkumbin Kastrati, date: 04.10.2024

Issues in Project Implementation

In position 11 of the additional work, the contract required: "Supply, leveling, and processing of soil for the green islands at the P15-P19 intersections. This includes adding a 20 cm humus layer and planting grass (100g/m²).\" The area covered was 141 square meters, at a price of €6 per square meter, for a total of €846. During the field visit, the Social Audit Team found that a portion of the area planned for greenery was only filled with soil and lacked the required grass. Additionally, a pipe remained exposed.



What should a Social Audit Team know?

What should a Social Audit Team know? Teams need civic will and courage; it is recommended that they have basic knowledge in:

- *The functioning of the Municipality;*
- *Access to public documents;*
- *The process of public consultations - in particular during budget planning and municipal investments;*
- *Public Procurement Process.*

Poor quality of works and cracks around manholes

According to the bill of quantities and cost estimates for the Widening of the Martyrs of the Nation Road Project, position 36 specifies the construction and preparation of manholes following technical descriptions and schematics, with dimensions of 160x160x180 cm for the electrical network. The work includes wooden formwork, concreting of walls and bases with a 20 cm thickness, installation of reinforcement meshes, and mounting of square cast-iron covers (40 cm) labeled “ELEKTRIKA 20 kV (400kN)” along with auxiliary equipment. A total of 48 manholes were contracted at a price of €250 each, amounting to a total of €12,000 for this position.

During the field visit, the team found that the concrete placed around some manholes had cracked. The same issue was observed with stormwater drains.



Quality of decorative trees

For the execution of this project, the Municipality of Gjakova contracted 300 decorative tree saplings at a price of €35 each, totaling €10,500. This price included digging holes, planting the saplings at intervals of 8 meters between them, covering with soil, and fertilization. Additionally, the municipality invested in tree grates around the base of the trees at a cost of €120 each. During the field visit, the team observed that while the grates and trees were installed, the quality of the works was problematic. Some trees were leaning, and their crooked growth could affect their aesthetic appeal in the future. The team recommended that the municipality intervene to either replace the affected trees or take measures to straighten them.



Social Audit Team

Social Audit Teams are groups of citizens who come together to engage in increasing the transparency and accountability of public institutions. Voluntary groups analyze processes, with the aim of providing recommendations and greater citizen involvement in decision-making.

CHAPTER III: SPECIFIC FINDINGS FOR THE “CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC SPACES IN THE CITY CENTER” PROJECT

In the “Construction of Public Spaces in the City Center” project, the Social Audit team also identified specific issues related to this project.

Unsuitable parking for persons with disabilities

In the Public Spaces Construction in the City Center project, the Municipality of Gjakova included accessibility features such as ramps for wheelchair users, parking spaces, tactile strips for blind persons, and acoustic signals at traffic lights. However, the Social Audit Team found deficiencies during their field visit, as well as substandard works. The parking space for vehicles of persons with disabilities was deemed unsuitable due to insufficient space for safe exit from the vehicle and the potential risk posed by passing traffic. Despite this, municipal officials stated that it was impossible to provide alternative spaces. The team acknowledged

the Municipality’s decision to mark reserved parking spaces for persons with disabilities but emphasized the need for better solutions in the future.



Tactile strips for blind persons not meeting standards

The Social Audit Team identified several shortcomings in the installation of tactile strips for blind persons: The tactile strip was placed only 60 cm away from the park wall, which the Association of the Blind in Gjakova deemed non-compliant with standards.



Although the standard requires a minimum width of 40 cm for tactile strips, the Municipality installed strips only 20 cm wide. The narrower width makes them unusable for blind persons. Placing the tactile strip at the very edge of the sidewalk further complicates navigation for

individuals using white canes. During initial audits, the team found three specific obstacles on the tactile strip:

It ended at a manhole, it was obstructed by a pole, and a hydrant was located in its path.

The Director of Infrastructure stated that “Initially, the company planned to place the strip even closer to the wall. Our traffic sector intervened and requested it to be placed in the middle of the sidewalk. Regarding the strip’s dimensions, the original plan included a bike lane to be integrated with the upper part of the sidewalk, which required moving the strip closer to the wall to avoid potential injuries to blind persons.”¹⁵.

The Director further noted that the decision to limit the strip’s width to 20 cm was partly due to aesthetic considerations. The Team also met with the design officer of the Municipality of Gjakova, who confirmed that the tactile strip in the project plan adhered to standards, namely it

¹⁵ Meeting of the Social Audit Team with the Director of Infrastructure in the Municipality of Gjakova, [Shkumbin Kastrati](#), date: 04.10.2024

had a width of 40 cm and placement away from the edge of the sidewalk.

Following recommendations from the Social Audit Team, the Municipality of Gjakova took action on October 22, 2024, expanding the tactile strip to 40 cm in compliance with standards and committed to removing all obstacles. However, during subsequent field visits, the Social Audit Team found that part of the road still had tactile strips only 20 cm wide.



Non-functioning acoustic signals for blind persons

Another identified issue is the malfunctioning of acoustic signals at traffic lights for blind persons. During field visits, the Social Audit Team found that in some instances, the acoustic signals were not functioning, creating obstacles for blind persons attempting to cross the street and posing a safety risk. The team documented these issues and archived video recordings as evidence.

The installation of traffic lights with acoustic signals was included in Position 12 of the Bill of Quantities for eight traffic lights in the city center, at a unit price of €500 per traffic light, totaling €4,000. During a meeting with the municipal

project design officer, the team was informed that the issue with the acoustic signals had been resolved.¹⁶ In a subsequent meeting with the Mayor of Gjakova in November, the team confirmed that recommendations regarding acoustic signaling for blind persons had been implemented. Mayor Ardian Gjini committed to incorporating these criteria as basic standards for future infrastructure projects in Gjakova.



¹⁶ Conversation with the Project Manager for the design in the Municipality of Gjakova_Lekë Sina, date: 04.11.2024

Relaxation of tender criteria

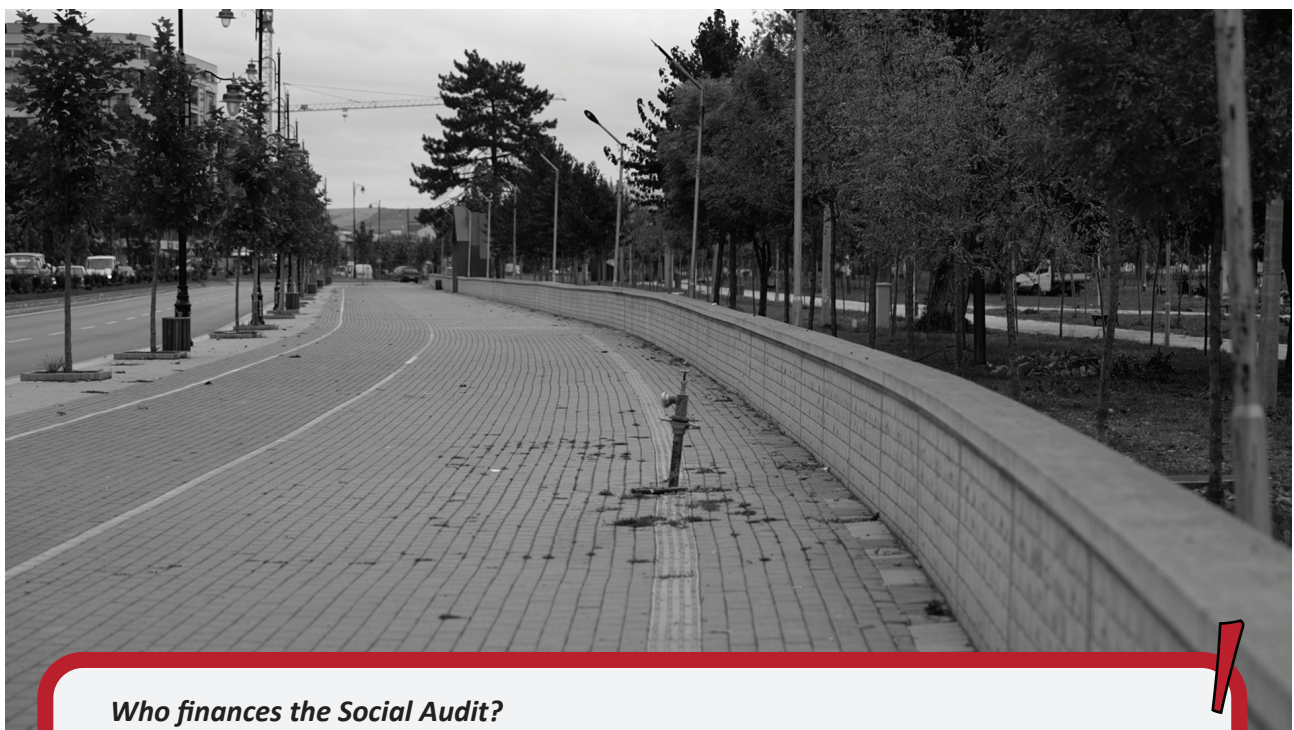
The first tender for the construction of public spaces in the city center was opened on May 17, 2023, but it was canceled two months later, on July 14, 2023. A complaint was submitted to the Procurement Review Body, but no decision was issued by PRB as the complaining economic operator withdrew its complaint. This withdrawal occurred despite that the review expert recommended that the PRB approve the complaint from EO Ramë Haklaj B.I. The expert found discriminatory or excessively high requirements in the Contract Notice for the nature of the works.

For the city center public spaces tender, the Social Audit Team found that the contracting authority (CA) had set discriminatory criteria regarding professional technical capacities. Initially, it was required that economic operators have a lead auditor certified under ISO 45001-2018 (Occupational Health and Safety Management System). This requirement was later revised in

the re-tender. Similarly, the work experience required for managers was reduced from 5 to 3 years.

However, the requirement that the EO must have trained and certified staff for OSH [Safety and Health at Work for 40 workers, Valid MLSW certificates from licensed companies] remained even after the re-announcement of the tender despite having been assessed as discriminatory by the PRB review expert in the previous tender.

The CA also ignored the recommendation to divide the tender into lots to increase competition. PRB required the Municipality of Gjakova to verify the tender requirements in accordance with legal provisions and the expert's report. Setting high and discriminatory criteria not only harms competition but also risks favoring specific companies for winning tenders.



Who finances the Social Audit?

Working in Social Audit Teams is on voluntary basis. All costs related to the Social Audit are covered through the Co-financing Agreement between the Ministry of Local Government Administration and the DEMOS Project. Public investments, monitored by citizens through Social Audit through this year too, were investments financed by the Municipal Performance Grant.

Quality of bricks

The Social Audit Team observed during field visits that the bricks used in the construction of the city center infrastructure were beginning to whiten due to efflorescence. According to the bill of quantities, the construction of walls was to be carried out with 20x10x6 cm bricks resistant to frost and salt, at a height of 20-30 cm. The team recommended identifying the cause of the issue and taking necessary actions to maintain the bricks, which had been installed recently.

These concerns were presented to the contract manager and Mayor Ardian Gjini. The mayor confirmed that after the concerns were raised, the bricks were tested and found to comply with the required standards. Municipal officials explained that in similar projects using the same type of bricks, whitening had occurred temporarily but subsided over time, and the work quality was deemed satisfactory.



Decorative trees blocking traffic signs

In the city center, the Municipality of Gjakova planted decorative trees very close to vertical traffic signs. Trees planted near traffic signs cover them and, as a result, drivers cannot clearly distinguish traffic signs. For example, pedestrian crossing signs or signs signaling car parking are covered by planted trees.

What happens to Recommendations?

Recommendations of Social Audit Groups serve to improve governance. The recommendations will be used to improve future Projects and improve the current Project.



CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

The Social Audit Team, at the end of the Project, analyzed the work and drew several conclusions.

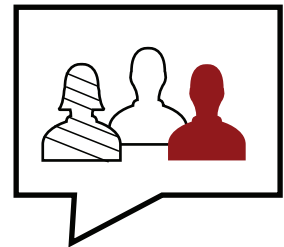
Recommendations for citizen involvement:

The municipality must promote discussion of projects in their planning phase.

In the future, the team recommends that the Municipality of Gjakova publish detailed projects, other documents related to contract management, including invoices paid to, completed and paid works, contract amendments, and justifications for position changes.

The projects have not been presented to the residents or interest groups, which is a good practice applied by other municipalities, thus the Team recommends that the Municipality of Gjakova follows suit.

It is recommended to post the names of contract managers and their contacts on the announcement boards.



Rekomandimet për procesin e planifikimit të projektit:

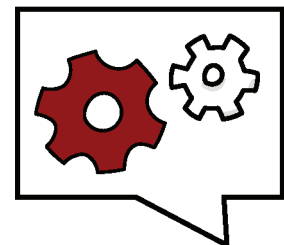
Access for people with disabilities should be planned according to standards.

Improve project timelines to ensure timely implementation.

Projects should be planned to ensure long-term sustainability and avoid the need for interventions to rectify investments.

Future projects should be planned with alignment between the bill of quantities and the project design.

Quantities of items like benches, trash bins, etc., should be accurately planned in proportion to the terrain.



Recommendations for Project Supervision:

The supervision of construction works should be more active and ensure that works are carried out in line with the project and standards.

Supervisors should prioritize the quality of works during implementation.

Road signage is of high importance, so supervision should pay special attention to this aspect.



Recommendations for new investments in the project:

Establish a bus stop on the Martyrs of the Nation Road.

Construct a bicycle lane on the Martyrs of the Nation Road.

A verification of the completed work and an analysis should be conducted to determine if the investment aligns with the requirements.

Relocate excess benches installed in the city area in places where they can be more useful for citizens.

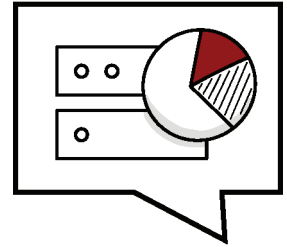
Construct tactile strips for blind people.

Build a roundabout at the junction of the Martyrs of the Nation Road.

Install additional road signs on the Martyrs of the Nation Road in the future.

Increase the number of parking spaces for persons with disabilities in the city center.

Adequate benches should be installed for persons with disabilities.



Technical Acceptance Committee

The Technical Acceptance Commission is a professional team of the municipality, which, at the end of the project, inspects the works and based on this team's report, accepted the works and payments are made.

Contract supervisor

Contract Supervisor is a person or company engaged by the Municipality, responsible for supervising each phase of the implementation of the Contract. The supervisor drafts reports for each phase.

The role of moderators in public discussions

Moderators in public discussions should be more proactive. Moderators should encourage citizen involvement in discussions, Municipal Projects and the Budget. They should encourage debate and seek ideas and proposals from participating citizens.

METHODOLOGY

This Report presents data collected through interviews, requests for access to public documents, field visits, and conversations with municipal officials, implementing companies, and the community. In July, DEMOS and the Ministry of Local Government Administration - based on predetermined parameters - selected 20 Projects, in 12 Municipalities of Kosovo - to be included in the Social Audit process.

DEMOS and MLGA, in an open process, selected the organizations that would facilitate the process. BIRN and D, after an evaluation by a professional jury, were selected for the facilitation of the Social Audit process of 11 projects in 6 municipalities.

Name of the Project	Municipality	Value	Project Phase at the Start of the Audit
Construction of the Klina Riverbed	Municipality of Klinë/Klina	746,046.00	Implementation
Construction of the Settler for Drinking Water Filtration	Municipality of Klinë/Klina	849,921.63	Implementation
LOT 5 - Construction and Maintenance of Paths in 'Karagaç' Park	Municipality of Pejë/Peć	234,500.00	Tendering/Implementation
LOT 6 - Construction of the Clinic in Trestenik Village	Municipality of Pejë/Peć	85,631.00	Tendering/Implementation
Expansion of the 'Martyrs of the Nation' Road - Western Entrance of the City	Gjakova/Đjakovica Municipality	1,004,545.60	Implementation
Construction of Public Spaces in the City Center	Gjakova/Đjakovica Municipality	1,187,211.72	Implementation
Construction, Treatment, and Cleaning of the Riverbed with Accompanying Structures - from the Bridge in the Center to the Transit in Malishevë	Municipality of Malisheva/Mališevo	1,487,459.74	Pre-tendering
Construction of the Kindergarten in Rufc i Ri - Phase II	Lipjan/Lipljane Municipality	247,958.69	Implementation
LOT 1 - Construction of the Sports Hall at 'Ismail Luma' School in Lipjan	Lipjan/Lipljane Municipality	248,226.45	Implementation
Construction of the Park and Sports Field in Bakshi Village	Municipality Obiliq/Obilić	164,614.17	Implementation
Construction of Parking at the Social Housing Units 'Hades' in Obiliq	Municipality Obiliq/Obilić	67,894.05	Implementation

Impact of the Social Audit?

The Social Audit in the Municipality of Gjakova led to an improved Project supervision.

Who Established the Social Audit Group?

The Social Audit Group is a group of citizens who voluntarily respond to the initiative to “engage in the oversight of projects.” To ensure broad community inclusion, BIRN and D+ developed a list of professions and community representatives who would be invited to join the group.

Selection criteria prioritized the inclusion of marginalized groups in society, such as women, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and non-majority communities.

The basis of the selection criteria was the DEMOS methodology which suggests the categories to be included in the process. Based on this methodology, the aim was to create a group with diverse professions and ages to guarantee inclusivity.

BIRN and D+ staff reached out to over 150 citizens from six municipalities to invite them to join the groups. After preparing the preliminary list, BIRN shared with DEMOS the profiles of the recommended members and, after receiving input, 120 citizens from target municipalities were involved in the groups.

Two groups were established in Gjakova, with 22 citizens, to oversee project implementation.



How were the data collected?

To compile this report, the established Social Audit Team used several techniques for data collection.

Team conduct online queries in municipal public data, drafted a list of questions about the projects and requested information from the municipality, and submitted requests for access to public documents and analyzed the received documents. It conducted field visits to document findings, and held meetings with municipal officials in Gjakova.

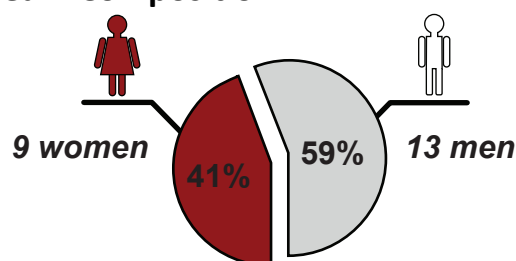
The data in the report was collected by 22 members of two Social Audit teams and the report was drafted with the assistance and support of the BIRN team.

Data validation

The two Social Audit groups in Gjakova worked separately in identifying problems in their projects while joining together as a single group at the end to draft the report. During meetings, the groups agreed on the systematic findings related to both projects and specific findings related to individual projects.

Together, they also reached a consensus on the recommendations included in this report. After structuring the findings, the team met with the Mayor and requested comments from the municipality regarding the report's findings. Before publication, the municipality received the report for comments.

Team Composition



Pensioners; Students; Lawyers; Economists; Teachers; Handikos; People with disabilities; Activists; Businessmen; Reporters; Sociologists; Athletes.

SOCIAL AUDIT GROUP ACTIVITIES

July 2024	• Field visits • Targeting and identifying profiles that will be part of the Team; • Preparation of the List with the profiles of the members of the Social Audit Team; • Selection of Social Audit Team members.
August 2024	• Signing the Memorandum of Understanding with the Municipality of Gjakova • Publishing promotional materials on social networks; • Social Audit Training; • Creating a 'Viber' group; • Team's field visit to both Projects; • Prior to publication, the municipality received the report, and their feedback was incorporated into the final version. • Checking accessible materials on open platforms; • Assigning people within the Team to submit Requests to the Municipality; • Submission of requests for access to public documents in the Municipality of Gjakova
September 2024	• Receiving responses and documents requested by the Municipality of Gjakova • Training on document reading; • After noting that not all requested documents have been received, the team submits a second request for access to public documents. • Field visit to the two projects by the Social Audit team • Meeting with the manager of the two contracts, Rexhë Rexha • Receiving responses and documents by the Municipality of Gjakova • Discussion and analysis of documents received from the Municipality of Gjakova • Official meetings and field visits • Analyzing materials.
October 2024	• Team meeting to analyze all documents received from the Municipality of Gjakova • Meeting with Director of Infrastructure in the Municipality of Gjakova, Shkumbin Kastrati • Recording of the findings by the Social Audit Team.
November 2024	• Meeting with the engineer of the Municipality of Gjakova, Lekë Sina • Division of tasks for the Team regarding report drafting; • Establishing the structure and defining the Report Drafting Points • Defining Tasks for the drafting of the Report; • Drafting of the Recommendations; • Drafting the report with the findings and recommendations; • Meeting with the Mayor and representatives of the Municipality; • Report proofreading; • Addressing comments and suggestions; • Sending the Report for validation to the Municipality; • Presentation of the Report to Municipal officials.
December 2024	• Implementation of a media campaign to promote the Report; • Compilation of Plans for the implementation of the Recommendations of Social Audit Reports by Municipalities.

SOCIAL AUDIT TEAM IN GJAKOVA

No.	Name	Profession / Function
1	Era Zejnullahu	Albanian Language and Literature/ Head of LYAC
2	Arbër Xharra	Lawyer/Handikos
3	Shqipe Bejtullahu	Economist/Women's Network "Cell"
4	Brilanda Ballata	Sociologist/Director of Handikos
5	Lulzim Haxhiu	Civil Engineer/Retired
6	Burim Qarri	Environmental Organization "1 thes me veti"
7	Ideal Zhaveli	Political Scientist/Director of NGO Activism Roots
8	Meriton Binakaj	Sociologist/Handikos
9	Gazmend Doli	Journalist/Radio Gjakova
10	Hare Nuza-Hana	Teacher/Director of NGO "Jakova Innovation Center"
11	Dorina Lluka-Davies	Psychologist, economist/ NGO YMCA Movement
12	Ymer Lota	Coach/Athlete
13	Mark Pjetraj	Chairman/Association of the Blind, Gjakova
14	Sokol Elezaj	Association of the Blind, Gjakova
15	Nazmije Koshi	Association of the Blind, Gjakova
16	Zejnije Elezaj	Association of the Blind, Gjakova
17	Sylejman Morava	OWV KLA
18	Çlirim Shabanaj	Sociologists/Association of the Blind, Gjakova
19	Maxhun Shala	Head of OWV KLA
20	Eda Haxhikadriaj	Women's Network "Cell"
21	Sokol Balaj	Businessman/Chairman of Local Council IX
22	Drita Ibrahim	Association of the Blind, Gjakova

LETTER OF THE MAYOR OF GJAKOVA

Dear citizens of Gjakova Municipality, esteemed collaborators, and respected friends of the “Social Audit” project,

It is a special honor and privilege for our municipality to be part of this important project, implemented by BIRN and DEMOS. This project represents a significant step forward in our efforts to promote transparency and accountability in public administration, especially in the infrastructure sector, which directly impacts the quality of life of our citizens.

The “Social Audit” initiative reflects our commitment to ensuring that every project we undertake aligns with the needs and expectations of our citizens. This initiative aims not only to evaluate projects from a technical and financial perspective but also to analyze their impact on the community.

As part of this project, two major infrastructure projects implemented by the Municipality of Gjakova were audited. These projects were designed to improve our local infrastructure and enhance the quality of services we provide to our citizens. The audit results have provided us with a clear overview of the effectiveness of these projects and highlighted areas where we can further improve.

One of the most important aspects of the “Social Audit” is the involvement of citizens in the evaluation process. This project has created opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between public institutions and citizens, enabling the latter to express their opinions and concerns regarding infrastructure projects. This represents an important step toward fostering a new governance culture where citizens are informed and engaged in decision-making.

At the same time, this project has encouraged a new spirit of collaboration between local institutions and civil society organizations. BIRN and DEMOS have played a crucial role in providing expertise and support for the implementation of this project. This collaboration has contributed to strengthening our capacity to implement similar projects in the future and to improving the standards of local governance.

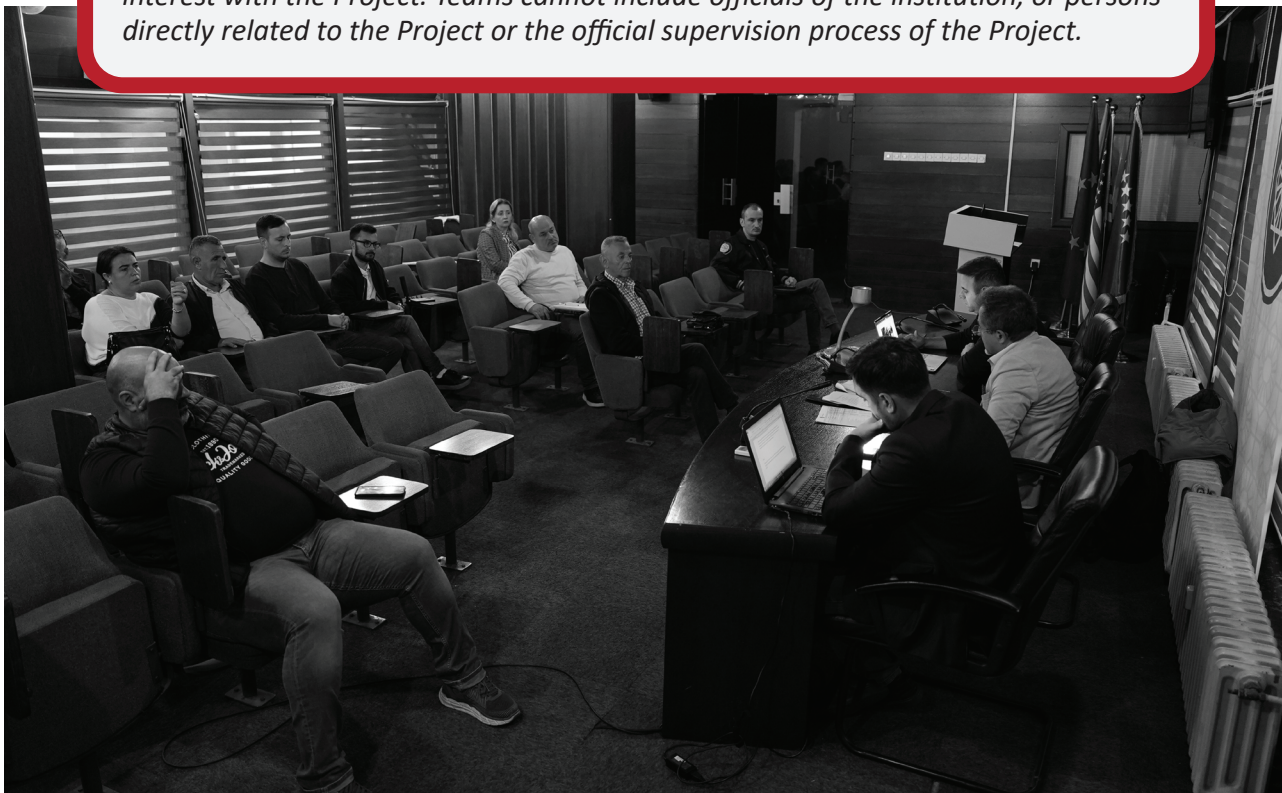
Dear citizens, this project is a continuation of our efforts to enhance transparency and accountability in public administration. We are committed to continuing on this path and applying the lessons learned from this audit to further improve our infrastructure projects. Your engagement and active participation in these processes are essential to our success.

In conclusion, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to BIRN and DEMOS for their invaluable support in realizing this project. I also thank all the citizens who participated in the audit process and offered their opinions and suggestions. Together, we will continue to work toward building a better Gjakova, with improved infrastructure and a transparent and accountable public administration.

*Sincerely,
Ardian Gjini*

Who are Social Audit Team members?

Members of Social Audit Teams are community members who are not in conflict of interest with the Project. Teams cannot include officials of the institution, or persons directly related to the Project or the official supervision process of the Project.



LETTER FROM THE SOCIAL AUDIT TEAM IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF GJAKOVA

The Social Audit is a new initiative we had heard about but had no prior information on. After training provided by BIRN and DEMOS, it became very clear, and we understood the importance of the Social Audit process.

In the city center project, the adjustment of the tactile strip to meet standards is a great example of how an engaged and organized community can improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. The intervention carried out through the Municipality of Gjakova demonstrated its effectiveness.

Meanwhile, for the Martyrs of the Nation Road Project, it appears that the Social Audit identified critical issues that may not have been adequately considered during the planning phase. The lack of bus stations and the clustering of elements like benches are examples of planning issues that can be improved. These challenges can be addressed in collaboration with the Municipality of Gjakova and the contracted companies to ensure that the infrastructure is functional and serves the interests of the community.

We believe that the Social Audit was very necessary for the improvement of the entire community, and we hope it will continue in the future as a process, enabling all citizens to be directly involved in projects implemented in their neighborhoods or municipalities.

We are proud that the work of our team has had an impact and contributed to improving the projects we monitored. Therefore, we are confident that the Social Audit will encourage greater and more direct citizen participation in decision-making processes, as well as promote increased transparency and accountability.



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