

POLICY BRIEF #4

Water Supply Security in Rural Areas

DISCLAIMER

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ABBREVIATIONS

WSRA	Water Services Regulatory Authority
NIPHK	National Institute of Public Health in Kosovo
RWC	Regional Water Company
ME	Ministry of Economy
UPMPE	Unit for Policy and Monitoring of Public Enterprises
WHO	World Health Organization
UN	United Nations Organization
AWPK	Association of Water Pipes of Kosovo
AI	Administrative Instruction

1. INTRODUCTION

Water is essential for humans and all other living organisms on earth. Providing access to safe water is one of the most effective tools in promoting health and reducing poverty.

Considering that access to drinking water and sanitation are essential for healthy living and human existence, the United Nations (UN) in 2010 defined these as human right. However, according to the data for 2020, about 2 billion people worldwide (26% of the world's population) don't have access to safe water¹. Therefore, according to UN data, about 74% of the world's population has access to safe drinking water, and with this development trend, by 2030 the world population's access to water supply systems will increase to 81% which means that the objective of the SDG 6 ('*Sustainable Development Goal*') for universal access to safe water will not be achieved. To achieve this objective, the rate of current progress must be increase for four times.

Kosovo`s population access to water supply systems is relatively high² , 94.5%³ of the population has access to water supply systems. Out oOf these residents who have access to water supply systems, 79% live in areas where the water supply systems are managed by the Regional Water Companies (RWC), while the rest in areas where the water supply systems are 'managed' by the community/residents.

Urban areas are fully covered by water supply systems, while as for the rural population, about **96,000⁴ inhabitants live in rural areas (300 villages) that do not have public water supply systems**. In these rural areas where there is no water supply system, the population is supplied with water in most cases from the individual wells that are functional (in some cases also from natural water sources).

Numerous studies and reports developed about the rural systems that are not managed by the RWC (for example Coverage and Sustainability Study, CDI/SKAT, 2010) have concluded that even special rural systems, which are functional, are generally poorly operated and maintained. A fundamental problem in these systems is especially the complete lack of water quality monitoring and consequently, the risk that this fact represents for the health of the population that is supplied with water from these systems.

¹ United Nations World Water Development Report 2023: Water Partnerships and Cooperation - <file:///C:/TheUnitedNationsWorldWaterDevelopmentReport2023-Partnershipsandcooperationforwater.pdf>

² Based on data from Regional Water Companies.

³This data does not include the 4 northern municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo.

⁴ Not include the 4 northern municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo.

2. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS

The organizational and institutional structure of the water services sector (water supply and sewage services) is very well arranged and organized, it is even considered a model for the countries of the region from various international forums and organizations for the water sector, but also from the stakeholders and donors from neighboring countries. Organization of services through Regional Water Companies (RWC) and regulation of these services through the independent regulator, Water Services Regulatory Authority (WSRA) are considered the appropriate institutional framework of this sector that has made it possible to increase efficiency and financial sustainability of water supply, the companies and improving the overall performance of this sector over the years. The performance improvement of this sector has been confirmed and evaluated in the reports of international organizations⁵ in which the sustainability of Kosovo's water services sector is considered significantly more advanced than in other countries of the region.

2.1 The legal framework

The most important legal acts for the regulation of water services are as follows:

- (i) *Law no. 05/I - 042 for Regulation of Water Services with its amendments and changes made with the Law no. 06/L-088*

With this law, the Water Services Regulatory Authority (WSRA) was established as an independent economic regulator for public water supply services and sewage services, and all aspects of regulating water services have been regulated, like: providing licensing for these services, determining the service charges to be applied by these companies, service standards to be met by companies providing the services (RWC), mutual rights and obligations of consumers and water companies, etc.

Based on this law, WSRA has issued a number of by-laws-regulations:

- *Regulation No. 04/2016 for Inspection of Fulfillment of Regulatory Obligations by Licensed Providers of Water Services in Kosovo*
- *Regulation No. 05/2016 for the Licensing of Water Service Providers in Kosovo*
- *Regulation No. 06/2016 on Water Service Interruption in Kosovo*
- *Regulation no. 09/2019 for Resolving Consumer Complaints*
- *Regulation No. 10/2019 on the Minimal Standards of Water Services in Kosovo*
- *Regulation No. 12/2020 on the Determination of Tariffs for Water Services in Kosovo*
- *Regulation No. 13/2021 for the Consumer Card and Regulation of Legal Relations between the Consumer and the Water Service Provider*

⁵ Water and Wastewater Services in Danube Region: A State of the Sector – 2018. June 2019 - <https://sos2018.danubis.org/eng/report/country-pages/>

- (ii) Law No. 03/L-87 for Public Enterprises with the changes and amendments made in 2011 with [Law No. 04/L111](#) and in 2015 with [Law No. 05/L009](#)

Establishes the legal framework for the ownership of public enterprises (PE) and their corporate governance in accordance with internationally recognized practices, and as such aims to create effective reporting modalities and accountability for the supervision of PE. The law determines that PE (including RWC) are organized as a joint-stock company. RWCs are classified as national PE owned by the Republic of Kosovo and the property rights are exercised by the Government of Kosovo. The government responds and is accountable to the Kosovo Parliament regarding the achievement of objectives related to the RWC.

Public Enterprises Policy and Monitoring Unit (PMU) of the Ministry of Economy (ME) is a unit established by this law that supports the Government and ME in exercising their responsibilities related to PE. PMU is obliged to evaluate the performance of each PE Board of the Directors on an annual basis.

- (iii) Law No. 02/L-078 for Public Health completed with [Law No. 08/I-048](#)

The Law on Public Health defines, among other elements, the institutions responsible for the implementation of health policies as well as the duties and responsibilities of the National Institute of Public Health of Kosovo (NIPHK) for monitoring the drinking water quality.

Based on this law, the Government has approved, in 2021, [Administrative Instruction No. 10/2021 on the Quality of Water for Human Consumption](#), with which the drinking water quality standards are determined, drinking water quality monitoring, and other issues related to ensuring the quality of drinking water.

- (iv) [Law No. 04/L-147 for Water of Kosovo](#)

The law on the waters of Kosovo in the first paragraph of the first article states that "Water resources are assets of general interest and property of the Republic of Kosovo that are preserved and protected by law." This is emphasized especially in cases where communities oppose the integration of independent rural systems under the pretext that the water is "theirs" or in cases where a village opposes the sharing of resources within their territory with the neighboring village, thus falsely claiming that the water is 'theirs'.

2.2 Institutional framework

Government of Kosovo – Interministerial Water Council (IWC)

To effectively exercise its responsibilities in the water sector, in 2013, with the Kosovo Water Law, the Interministerial Water Council (IWC) was established as a decision-making and supervisory body for the whole water sector, which is led by the Prime Minister and consists of four line ministers, currently, from the Ministers of: (i) MESPI (for water resources), (ii) ME (for water services), (iii) MF (finance and budget) and (iv) MAFRD (for irrigation). The donor community in the water sector also participates in IWC but without

the rights to vote. IWC coordinates and supports relevant institutions in water management in the decision-making process and proposes measures for the development, use, and protection of water resources.

Ministry of Economy (ME)

ME is the successor Ministry of the former Ministry of Economic Development (MED) that, according to Law on Public Enterprises, monitors PE, including RWC and irrigation companies. This monitoring is organised through the PMU and its purpose is to ensure transparency and accountability in PE operation. This law defines the legal framework that regulates the exercise of property rights of PE and regulates the principles of corporate governance.

Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure (MESPI)

MESPI was established in 2002 as the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (Infrastructure was added in 2021) and it is responsible for environmental planning including water resources, waste, air quality, land management, and spatial planning. This Ministry is also responsible for the long-term planning of water resources and the development of the country's water strategy.

National Institute of Public Health of Kosovo (NIPHK)

NIPHK is a Government institution under the control of the Ministry of Health that is responsible for public health issues in Kosovo. It determines, monitors, and implements drinking water standards in accordance with the Law on Public Health (Law No. No. 02/L-78) and UA No. 10/2021 on the Quality of Water for Human Consumption.

Water Services Regulatory Authority (WSRA)

WSRA is the independent regulator of water services responsible for ensuring non-discrimination and providing quality, efficiency, and reliable services at fair and reasonable prices for consumers while respecting the environment and public health. WSRA is accountable to the Assembly of Kosovo, which appoints its director and deputies. WSRA grants service licenses to PE that provide water supply, sewerage, and bulk water services; determines the fees for these services and issues by-laws for licensing, fees, service standards, and water interruptions.

Regional Water Companies (RWC)

All seven RWCs provide water supply and sanitation services to the majority of the population. They are under public ownership and controlled by the Government of Kosovo through the ME. RWC are joint stock companies and are licensed by WSRA. They have service agreements with the municipalities where they provide their services, which describe the duties and responsibilities of each of the parties. RWC is led by a Boards of Directors appointed by the Government.

Municipalities

The responsibility for providing water services lays within the municipalities ([Law on Local Self-Government in Kosovo, No. 03/L-040](#)). They exercise this responsibility through RWC based on service agreements that define mutual rights and obligations.

Association of Water Pipes of Kosovo (AWPK)

AWPK is a non-governmental organization established in 2001 to represent the interests of water supply and sanitation service providers in Kosovo. It provides a forum for the information exchange, it represent the interests of RWC, and delegates their concerns to staeholders. It also has a mandate to strengthen its capacities and build joint policies.

3. CURRENT SITUATION AND CHALLENGES

With the 2030 Agenda approved by the UN in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals have been defined, of which two pillars of 6th goal are related to access of drinking the water and sanitation:

- *6.1 - By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.*
- *6.2 - By 2030, access to adequate sanitation and hygiene without discrimination for all, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.*

These objectives have also been approved by the institutions of Kosovo and therefore the Government of the Republic of Kosovo has committed to accelerate action to fulfill the objectives of sustainable development. This commitment is included within the National Development Strategy 2030 (NDS) and the National Development Plan, approved in March 2023, which describes the Government's vision for sustainable development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

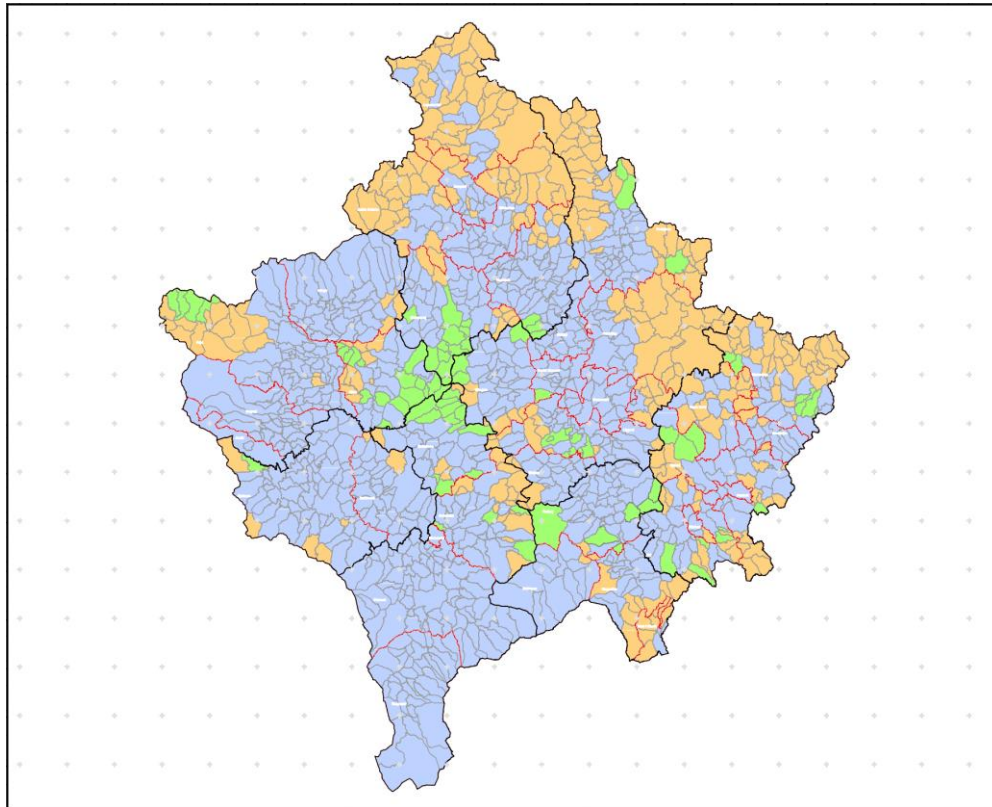
As for the population's access to public water supply systems, it is estimated to be around 95%. This considering that according to WSRA, the percentage of the population that receives drinking water supply services from systems managed by RWC is 79%. When we add to this the 87 functional water supply systems which according to ARRU should have be taken under management during 2023, this percentage will **increase to 84%**.⁶

These data are consistent with the RWC data (see Annex 1), according to which 79% of the population living in 680 settlements are supplied with water from the water supply systems managed by the RWC. Besides these, there are also 279 rural settlements with 275 thousand inhabitants (15.5% of the population of Kosovo) which have water supply systems that are not managed by RWC.

So, according to this, it results that 94.5% of the population of Kosovo (1.65 million out of 1.74 million) have access to water supply systems. The remaining population of about **96 thousand inhabitants living in 300 rural settlements do not have access to water supply systems**. These are in most cases settlements with a small number of inhabitants (or villages without any inhabitants, such as Devetak/Devetak and Duge/Dugë in Municipality of Shtime/Štimlje; Reçicë/Reçica, Përpellac/Prepolac, and Muhazob/Mazap in Municipality of Podujevë/Podujevo; Dobrosellë/Dobro Selo in Municipality of Obiliq/Obilić; Lipovicë/Lipovica, and Shisharkë/Šišarka in Municipality of Lipjan/Lipljan itd).

The above data do not include the 4 municipalities in the north of the country.

⁶ WSRA Report: Level of Services Offered by Licensed Providers 2023 - <https://www.arru-rks.org/assets/Inspektimi/Raportet/RaportiperNivelineSherbimeve2022.pdf>



Legend:


			
Settlements with access to water supply systems - 89.6%	Settlements in the process of building water supply systems - 4.9%	Settlements without access to the water supply system - 5.5%	The boundaries of RWC service areas

Figure: Coverage of water supply systems in Kosovo

3.1 Security of water supply in rural areas that have a water supply system that is not managed by rwc

As stated above, 279 settlements with about 275 thousand inhabitants have water supply systems that are not managed by the RWC.

The water supplied through these systems is not controlled by the water supplier (since there is no licensed water supplier as is the case with RWCs) and is not supervised by NIPHK. Consequently, there is no information on the quality of the water supplied by these systems. Also, the water sources from which these systems are supplied do not have defined protected areas of water sources and, consequently, *no measures are applied to protect these sources* that should be applied based on the legislation in force for the protection of water sources.

The community of these villages does not have any formal agreement either with the municipality or with the relevant RWC for the provision of technical support, payment of water services, investments, etc. Usually, the community appoints a resident of the village who has the basic technical knowledge and that person is responsible for the operation of the system (maintenance and collection of payments). The same does not have any formal status that would address responsibility and accountability in case of mismanagement of water resources, instability of investments, low quality of services, etc.

Based on what was said above, it can be concluded that the safety of water supplied by the water supply systems that are not managed by the RWC *is not at the appropriate level* since it is not subject to any control and supervision by the responsible institutions as well as not protective measures are applied to the water sources from which these systems are supplied. Moreover, considering that there is no regular and preventive maintenance of these systems as well as the fact that there is no incentive for saving water since water is not paid based on the amount consumed, the water supply of these settlements is not regular and there are often interruptions.

3.2 Water security in rural areas where water supply is from individual water sources

The part of the population (about 5%) that is supplied by individual water supply systems (wells, natural sources) is the most vulnerable in terms of water safety.

This is because:

- a) the wells from which this category of population is supplied are usually built *without respecting the standards* regarding protection and insurance against potential pollution;
- b) water supplied by individual water supply systems is usually not subject to control by the relevant institutions, except for the rare control that can be done at the initiative of the user of the well.

As a result, the risk of drinking water contamination in these cases is almost permanent and the safety of the water supplied through individual water supply sources is minimal.

3.3 Government Policies and Strategies

Government Water Policy

With the water policy document that was approved by the Government of Kosovo in 2015, the integration of rural water supply systems under the management of RWC was defined as the Government's Policy. This policy has been adopted with the aim of ensuring proper management and meeting quality standards of water supply and sanitation services in rural areas. At the same time, according to this water policy document, all new water supply systems will be planned and implemented by RWCs.

State Water Strategy

With the Review of the State Water Strategy for 2023-2027⁷, approved by the Government of Kosovo in June 2023, as one of the objectives of the Government, the following has been defined: "Integration under the management of RWC of non-integrated rural systems is considered to be a solution that ensures the long-term sustainability of these systems. This is the only way to enable adequate operation and maintenance of these systems, systematic investments in rehabilitation and renewal of assets, water quality monitoring, etc.

With this objective of the Strategy, it is intended that the population that is currently supplied with water from rural systems that are not managed by RWC, most of them will be integrated into RWCs, and thus **from 13% as they are currently and will decrease to 3% by 2027.**

⁷ <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=78647>

4. RECOMMENDED POLICY

The problem of drinking water safety in rural areas is properly and effectively addressed through:

- 1) Integration of the existing water supply systems under the management of RWCs, and
- 2) Construction of water supply systems in rural areas where they are missing.

Considering that the seven RWCs are public enterprises licensed by WSRA that have the professional and financial capacity for the proper management of water supply systems, including the control of water quality and the provision of safe drinking water, it is of vital importance that all the rural systems which are not currently managed by the RWCs, come under their management.

In this way it will be ensured:

- a) **Adequate quality of drinking water provided to the population which is supplied through these systems.** – This is of essential importance for the life and protection of the public health of the population of these villages and must be ensured through the correct definition and creation of protected zones of the sources as well as through the adequate treatment (purification) of the water distributed in the system.
- b) **Regular monitoring of the water quality supplied through these systems.** – This monitoring should be carried out in a systematic manner in accordance with the laws and standards that are implemented by the responsible institution, which is the National Institute of Public Health in Kosovo (NIPHK). This enables timely detection of potential problems that may affect water quality and the taking of adequate measures to avoid harmful effects on the life and health of the population.
- c) **Implementation of service standards for consumers in accordance with the legal framework implemented by WSRA.** – The legal framework defines the minimum technical, commercial, and consumer service standards that a public provider of water supply and sewage services must meet. The fulfillment of these standards is important for the quality of the service and therefore for the well-being of the population that is supplied with water from these systems.
- d) **Proper management of water demand with adequate mechanisms, keeping in mind the preservation of the environment.** – The implementation of mechanisms that influence the rational use of drinking water affects: (i) the quality of the water supply, and (ii) the optimal use of water resources. Mechanisms such as: measurement of water distributed in the system, installation of individual water meters for consumers, application of adequate fees for billing of consumed water, etc. are considered to be efficient for water demand management.

- e) **Sustainability of rural water supply systems.** – Ensuring the stability of the functioning of the systems and the quality of the service provided through them is essential for the health, economy, and well-being of the population of these villages. This enables the institutional structure for: (i) preventive maintenance of all system components, (ii) systematic rehabilitation and development of all system components (sources, tanks, pumps, distribution network, valves, and water meters) in accordance with technical standards and good practices.

For the implementation of this policy, it is recommended that the Government of Kosovo undertake the following actions:

1. **To request from the RWCs the drafting of plans for the integration of rural of water supply and sewage systems** as well as the expansion of services in rural areas where there are no water supply and sewage systems.
2. **To provide financial support to RWCs for the implementation of the plan** in order to rehabilitate the existing water supply systems before they are integrated as well as for the construction of systems in rural areas where they are missing.
3. **To ensure that the financing of water services in villages is implemented through RWCs** and/or the Ministry of Economy as the responsible ministry for water services and to avoid the allocation of the budget for water supply and sewage through MESPI and the Ministry for Local Government Administration, which contradicts both the law and the institutional responsibilities and capacities of these ministries.
4. **In cases where municipalities finance rural water supply systems**, to require the involvement of RWCs throughout the process of project preparation and implementation.
5. **To support the integration of rural water supply and sewage systems in RWC**, in cases where the village community refuses integration, through the necessary legal, administrative and political actions. These actions should also be taken in cases where the community opposes the sharing of water resources within their territory with the neighboring village.
6. **To adhere to the Revised Water Strategy 2023-2027 action plan** reflecting the costs for fulfilling this obligation in the ME budget as well as in the Mid-Term Expenditure Framework.
7. **The Ministry of Economy to establish the department for water services** and ensure the planning, implementation and sustainability of water services investments.

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- 5) United Nations, *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2023: Partnerships and Cooperation for Water*. UNESCO, Paris - [file:///C:/The United Nations World Water Development Report 2023-Partnerships and cooperation for water.pdf](file:///C:/The%20United%20Nations%20World%20Water%20Development%20Report%202023-Partnerships%20and%20cooperation%20for%20water.pdf).

ANNEX 1:

Coverage of settlements with water supply systems and the degree of integration of rural systems in RWCs

Vendbanime	Banorë	Komuna	Integruar ne KRU			Paintegruar			Total		
			nr i vendb.	popullata	%	nr i vendb.	popullata	%	nr i vendb.	popullata	%
37	40,019	Deçani	34	38,203	95.5	3	1,816	4.5	37	40,019	100.0
54	38,496	Klina	29	24,730	64.2	18	10,865	28.2	47	35,595	92.5
79	96,450	Peja	45	86,309	89.5	14	9,361	9.7	59	95,670	99.2
50	39,289	Istogu	47	37,178	94.6	3	1,486	3.8	50	38,664	98.4
3	6,084	Juniku	3	6,084	100.0	0	-	0	3	6,084	100.0
223	220,338	HIDRODRINI	158	192,504	87.4	38	23,528	10.7	196	216,032	98.0
88	99,610	Gjakova	83	98,500	98.9	2	1,028	1.0	85	99,528	99.9
36	59,213	Rahoveci	32	58,275	98.4	2	823	1.4	34	59,098	99.8
10	16,535	Prizreni	10	16,535	100.0	0	-	-	10	16,535	100.0
134	175,358	GJAKOVA	125	173,310	98.8	4	1,851	1.1	129	175,161	99.9
66	162,085	Prizreni	35	130,142	80.3	22	25,875	16.0	57	156,017	96.3
41	59,772	Suhareka	20	42,955	71.9	7	8,272	13.8	27	51,227	85.7
36	33,997	Dragash	4	5,157	15.2	32	28,840	84.8	36	33,997	100
44	54,613	Malisheva	19	30,271	55.4	17	18,243	33.4	36	48,514	88.8
1	5,507	Mamusha	1	5,507	100	0	-	0	1	5,507	100
188	315,974	HIDROREGJIONI	79	214,032	67.7	78	81,230	25.7	157	295,262	93.4
45	108,610	Ferizaj	40	103,735	95.5	0	-	0	40	103,735	95.5
11	9,403	Hani i Elezit	2	4,785	50.9	2	1,277	13.6	4	6,062	64.5
15	6,949	Shtërpçë	0	-	0.0	13	6,737	96.9	13	6,737	96.9
31	33,409	Kacanik	8	19,820	59.3	15	11,039	33.0	24	30,859	92.4
102	158,371	BIFURKACIONI	50	128,340	81.0	30	19,053	12.0	81	147,393	93.1
49	90,178	Gjilan	15	73,781	81.8	11	12,706	14.1	26	86,487	89.0
39	46,879	Viti	7	12,696	27.1	19	27,905	59.5	26	40,601	86.6
58	36,085	Kamenicë	8	18,459	51.2	12	9,861	27.3	20	28,320	78.5
26	6,729	Novobërdë	7	3,539	52.6	3	1,116	16.6	10	4,655	69.2
4	2,556	Kllokot	0	-	0.0	3	2,316	90.6103	3	2,316	90.6
13	3,866	Ranillug	8	2,881	74.5	3	829	21.4	11	3,710	96.0
3	1,787	Partesh	1	974	54.5	0	-	0	2	974	54.5
192	182,427	HIDROMORAVA	37	112,330	61.6	48	53,904	29.5	85	167,063	91.6
47	71,909	Mitrovicë	26	66,828	92.9	3	1,168	1.6	3	67,996	94.6
65	68,582	Vushtrri	33	56,682	82.6	19	10,310	15.0	52	66,992	82.3
49	50,855	Skenderaj	23	29,422	57.9	22	19,526	38.4	45	48,948	96.3
161	191,346	MITROVICA	82	152,932	79.9	44	31,004	16.2	100	183,936	96.1
43	198,897	Prishtina	23	192,603	96.8	0	-	0	23	192,603	96.8
77	88,499	Podujeva	34	62,553	70.7	5	8,281	9.4	39	70,834	80.0
20	21,549	Obiliqi	16	20,814	96.6	2	733	3.4	18	21,547	100
16	34,827	F. Kosova	15	33,891	97.3	1	936	2.7	16	34,827	100.0
62	57,605	Lipjani	23	33,562	58.3	20	18,863	32.7	43	52,425	91.0
35	58,531	Glllogoc	10	24,198	41.3	20	27,256	46.6	30	51,454	87.9
23	27,324	Shtime	15	24,247	88.7	3	2,518	9.2	18	26,765	98.0
17	10,675	Graçanica	13	9,679	90.7	4	996	9.3	17	10,675	100.0
293	497,907	PRISHTINA	149	401,547	80.6	55	59,583	12.0	204	461,130	92.6
1293	1,741,721		680	1,374,995	78.9	297	270,153	15.5	977	1,645,977	94.5



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Let’s Do It Peja

Address: House of Culture, 3rd Floor

30000, Peja, Kosovo

Email: letsdoitpeja@gmail.com

Phone: +383 49 124 548

www.puacw.ldip.com



Promoting Universal
Access to **Clean Water**