

# The Impact of digitalization of civil status services on municipal budget revenues



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## Executive summary

The Government of Kosovo is aiming to cut the administrative burden by automating service delivery processes and reducing costs that citizens must bear for receiving such services.

To date, steps have been undertaken to collect information and deliver certain services through the e-Kosova electronic platform. In 2022, the Government launched the delivery of such civil status services through this platform. From June through December 2022, citizens retrieved 238,015 civil status documents using the platform. By contrast, in 2022, citizens received nearly 2.2 million documents in paper format from the civil registry section in the 38 municipalities of Kosovo. According to GAP Institute calculations, the introduction of the online service delivery of civil status documents from the e-Kosova platform is expected to produce savings of over EUR 1.5 million per year for the citizens. Similarly, municipalities are expected to reduce their staff related expenditures, particularly in local community facilities, as the closure and restructuring of many of them has been recommended by the Civil Registration Agency (CRA). Currently, in the entire territory of Kosovo, there are 180 administrative units (local communities) that deliver nine types of civil status documents, such as: Birth Certificate, Extract of Birth Record, Citizenship Certificate, Marriage Certificate, Death Certificate, Residence Certificate, Marital Status Certificate, Declaration of Joint Household, and Certificate from Archive.

The dilemma introduced by the initiative to reduce the administrative burden is whether this process would be accompanied by budget losses, especially by the municipalities, since revenues generated by the local administration are considered and treated as own source revenues for the local level. According to GAP Institute calculations, the revenues of the 38 municipalities in 2022 generated from the issuance of documents and delivery of services from the civil status section were about EUR 2.3 million, while the expenditures were about EUR 2.2 million. Total revenues were higher than expenditures primarily due to the larger municipalities, as 20 out of 38 municipalities have more expenditures than revenues from this section. Namely, the Municipality of Prishtinë generated EUR 69 thousand revenues more than expenditures, Prizren generated EUR 54 thousand more, Ferizaj EUR 57 thousand more, Peja EUR 48 thousand more, etc. Whereas, in 2022, the Municipality of Vushtrri generated EUR 73,573 revenues from this section, while the expenditures were EUR 87,000 for the same period. On the other hand, the Municipality of Skenderaj generated revenues of EUR 55,389 while its expenditures were EUR 90,766. Similarly, the Municipality of Drenas generated revenues of EUR 53,604, while its expenditures reached EUR 75,094. The ratio between revenues and expenditures is expected to be further disproportionately affected from 2023 onwards, to the detriment of municipal revenues, with the growing number of documents retrieved by citizens through the e-Kosova platform.

The share of financial revenues from the civil status section services in the municipalities' own source revenues is low. In most of the municipalities, this share ranges between 1% and 4%. Therefore, the reduction or elimination of the administrative burden is not expected to have a significant impact on the municipal budget. From the information received from the municipalities, it can be deduced that there is no correlation between the number of staff in the civil status offices in the municipalities and the number of inhabitants in the respective municipalities. Municipality of Prishtinë, officially estimated to have approximately 220,000 inhabitants, employs 39 staff or one staff per 5,641 inhabitants, while Skenderaj, which is estimated to have 52,600 inhabitants, employs 17 staff or one staff per 3,094 inhabitants, further the Municipality of Klinë with 40,000 inhabitants employs 15 staff or one staff per 2,667 inhabitants.

## Introduction

On December 28, 2022, the Government of Kosovo approved the Public Administration Reform Strategy 2022–2027, as the principal document guiding the public administration reform, and respective Action Plan for 2022–2024.<sup>1</sup>

One of the four objectives of the Strategy (namely, Objective 2) provides for an increase of quality in the delivery of administrative services. To achieve this objective, the main reform measures set out a comprehensive policy agenda for service delivery, including a harmonized legislative framework and a coherent approach to administrative simplification and removal of administrative burdens for citizens and businesses.<sup>2</sup> This was preceded by the approval of the Administrative Burden Prevention and Reduction Program 2022–2027, as well as the Action Plan based on this program.<sup>3</sup>

The term administrative burden means any procedure that creates additional expenses to the citizens and causes delays in receiving administrative services. The administrative burden does not necessarily relate only to the fees in the application and service delivery processes, but also to the speed of receiving the service, without the need to visit the municipality in person.<sup>4</sup> According to the Action Plan of the Administrative Burden Reduction Program, it is foreseen that by 2024, citizens and businesses will save at least EUR six million as a result of administrative burden simplification and elimination.

The prevention and reduction of the administrative burden is also perceived necessary as a form of preventing corruption and creating a better environment for doing business. The administrative burden is usually created by unnecessary procedures, contradictory legislation, improper implementation of legislation, ambiguous information, lack of capacity to provide quality services, insufficient digitalization, and lack of undertaking reforms in administration.<sup>5</sup>

The approaches that are generally considered successful in public administration service delivery support 'one stop shop' or online processes without the need for visits to the institution's counters.<sup>6</sup> Institutions must ensure that no public administration body requires from citizens information or documents, which they have previously submitted to the administration, because the data would be integrated into the system and the same could be used in any case. The full application of this principle is challenged by technological, professional, technical, structural, and legal problems.

In December 2022, the Government established the Commission for Digital Transformation,<sup>7</sup> responsible for overseeing and ensuring a smooth digital transformation process, based on the plans set out in the Public Administration Reform Strategy in Kosovo 2022–2027.<sup>8</sup> The Commission consists of representatives from the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Local Government Administration, and the Office of Prime Minister. This Commission will examine and approve the strategic priorities and initiatives of new government policies in the field of information technology

1 Office of the Prime Minister. Decision No. 17/116. Date: December 28, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/3EsrxnG>

2 Office of the Prime Minister. Public Administration Reform Strategy 2022–2027, p. 39. Source: <https://bit.ly/3ksJN9L>

3 Office of the Prime Minister. Administrative Burden Prevention and Reduction Program 2022–2027. April 2022. Updated Version. Public Consultation Platform. Source: <https://bit.ly/3ZbcDu7>

4 Ibid, pp. 10–11.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid, p. 16.

7 Government of Kosovo. Office of the Prime Minister. The first meeting of the Commission for Digital Transformation was held. December 23, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/3RADiql>

8 Office of the Prime Minister. Public Administration Reform Strategy 2022–2027, p. 39. Source: <https://bit.ly/3ksJN9L>

and digitalization, recommend policies that facilitate and enable digitalization, as well as ensure inter-institutional coordination between the central and local level in projects and issues in the field of digitalization. In addition, the procedure for amending the Law on Civil Status and the Law on Residence<sup>9</sup> has started (according to the Legislative Plan, by June 2023, it is foreseen that these two draft laws would pass the vote by the Government, paving the way for their reading in the Assembly of Kosovo). The need to amend these two laws stems from the principle of service digitalization and administrative burden reduction.<sup>10</sup>

In this brief, the GAP Institute shows how the process of reducing the administrative burden and digitalization of civil status service delivery would affect the municipalities. The analysis does not address all administrative services provided by the local level, such as: service licensing, property certification, title deed, copy of the plan, planning consent, construction permit, legalization, authorization for use or lease of property or space, etc. The brief shows current municipal revenues and expenditures related to the civil status section service delivery, fees applicable to such services, number of documents issued during the year, as well as number of civil status documents that citizens have retrieved through the e-Kosova platform. This analysis was conducted drawing from the official documents for the administrative burden process and the digitalization process, and through a questionnaire administered to receive official data from 32 municipalities. Based on requests by the GAP Institute for access to public documents, the Information Society Agency and the Civil Registration Agency provided data on retrieval of civil status documents through the e-Kosova platform and in paper format.<sup>11</sup>

## Impact of digitalization on municipal service delivery

The first step in the digitalization of local government service delivery was made in 2015, in the Municipality of Prishtinë, with the installation of the e-kiosk system introducing the possibility of retrieving certain civil status documents without the need for citizens to physically approach the respective counter in the municipal front office.<sup>12</sup> E-kiosks allowed citizens to avoid queuing at counters and retrieve documents even after official working hours, but again, citizens had to be physically present to retrieve the documents.

According to the Administrative Burden Reduction Program, the entire administrative burden in the services provided by the municipalities is caused by the central administration legislation, except for those services that derive from the municipalities' own powers.<sup>13</sup>

On June 9, 2022, the Government launched five new electronic services that can be delivered through the e-Kosova portal: birth certificate, extract of birth record, marriage certificate, death certificate, and family member certificate/extract.<sup>14</sup>

9 Interview with Erdon Arifaj, Deputy Director of the Civil Status Department at the Civil Registration Agency. On March 3, 2023.

10 Erdon Arifaj, Deputy Director of the Civil Status Department at the Civil Registration Agency. On March 3, 2023.

11 The municipalities that are not included in this analysis are: Leposaviq, Zubin Potok, Zveçan, North Mitrovica, Klllokot, and Mamushë.

12 GAP Institute. The failure of municipalities to provide administrative services through electronic kiosks. July 2019, p. 3. Source: <https://bit.ly/2lVxlRx>

13 Office of the Prime Minister. Administrative Burden Prevention and Reduction Program 2022–2027. April 2022. Updated Version. Public Consultation Platform. Source: <https://bit.ly/3ZbcDu7>

14 Office of the Prime Minister. Prime Minister Kurti attended the launch of new electronic services on the e-Kosova portal. 9 June 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/3Z9Z51Z>

The e-Kosova platform is a state platform whereby public services provided in the offices and counters of public institutions are delivered electronically.<sup>15</sup> This is considered to be the first step in the digitalization of administrative service delivery, that also affects municipal administrative service delivery.

Additionally, in September 2022, the "e-Municipality" section link was integrated in the framework of e-Kosova.<sup>16</sup> By February 2023, this section includes information on services available for delivery from the Municipality of Prizren and Lipjan. The Action Plan of the Administrative Burden Reduction Program provides that during 2023, this platform will be augmented with information and services applicable to other municipalities as well. The Action Plan also provides that in the first three years services would be streamlined in at least nine municipalities.

The Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLAP) has drawn up terms of reference for the digitalization of services at the local level and according to plans, it is foreseen that such services will be fully digitalized by the end of 2025.<sup>17</sup> Based on established terms of reference, there will be digital monitoring of municipal bodies, increased interaction between constituents and elected local representatives, real-time monitoring and presentation of all investment, budget and municipal own revenues, online and by mail delivery of administrative services for citizens and businesses, neighborhood urban plans, building permits and conditions, real-time display of the process of evaluating the legality of municipal acts, as well as the visualization of the municipal performance process.<sup>18</sup>

### —— Municipal revenues and expenditures from administrative service delivery

The administrative services provided by the municipal civil status section do not fall under the municipality's own powers. This duty is covered as a responsibility delegated by the central level but administered by the local level. Barring proof of residence or proof of change of residence (neighborhood, area), other documents do not contain any distinguishing mark of the municipality, but only the coat of arms of the state.

The revenues collected from the issuance of such documents are treated as own source revenues of the municipalities. The fees for issuing such documents are set by municipal regulations on municipal fees, charges, and fines. The cost incurred by the state of Kosovo for the production of any civil status document is EUR 0.04.<sup>19</sup>

Table 1 shows all civil status documents that can be obtained in municipalities, as well as their cost to citizens.

15 <https://ekosova.rks-gov.net/>

16 Ministry of Local Government Administration. E-municipality platform launched. July 5, 2022. Source: <https://bit.ly/3WJ8GuQ>

17 Ibid. p. 4

18 Ibid. p. 7

19 Interview with Erdon Arifaj. Deputy Director of the Civil Status Department at the Civil Registration Agency. On March 3, 2023.

**Table 1.** List of documents provided by municipalities through the Civil Registry Section and respective cost to citizens

| Documents issued by the Municipal Civil Registry Section | Price (€) |
|--|-----------|
| Birth Certificate  | 1         |
| Extract of Birth Record                                  | 1         |
| Citizenship Certificate                                  | 2         |
| Marriage Certificate                                     | 2         |
| Death Certificate  | 5         |
| Residence Certificate                                    | 1         |
| Marital Status Certificate                               | 2         |
| Declaration of Joint Household                           | 1         |
| Certificate from Civil Registry Archive                  | 1         |
| <b>Municipal Civil Registry Section Services</b>         |           |
| Marriage where one of the partners is a foreign national | 10 to 20  |
| Application for personal name correction                 | 2         |
| Wedding Ceremony   | 15        |
| Wedding Ceremony off-site                                | 30 to 100 |
| Change of Residence Ruling                               | 5         |

Source: GAP Institute, based on regulations on municipal fines and fees.

According to the Law on General Administrative Procedure, if the payment for administrative services is foreseen by law, it shall not be higher than the necessary average cost for carrying out that type of administrative proceeding.<sup>20</sup> The implementation of this legal principle, according to the Administrative Burden Prevention and Reduction Program, would also bring a decline in revenues from payments for receiving such services. According to the Government's estimates, budget revenue losses are expected to be EUR two million per year, while by the end of Program implementation in 2027, own source revenues of municipalities may decline to EUR 10 million.<sup>21</sup>

All municipalities of Kosovo, on a quarterly basis, receive consignments of supplies from the Ministry of Interior which are then used to provide administrative services. Such consignments are calculated to spare municipalities from incurring large administrative expenditures.<sup>22</sup> Yet, still, there are some other supplies (such as acquisition of ink, printers, computers, pencils) which are contracted by municipalities for purposes of administrative service delivery.

Further, the possibility for citizens to receive services online would avoid additional administrative costs, reduce the number of staff in civil status section offices, and consequently reduce the amount of wages and salaries that the institution appropriates for such staff, in addition to introducing faster response time and streamlined procedure. Hypothetically, if 70% of citizens would start to retrieve civil status documents online and without any service fee, and the share of revenues of

<sup>20</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo. Law No.05/L-031 on General Administrative Procedure. Article 12.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3kseVGn>

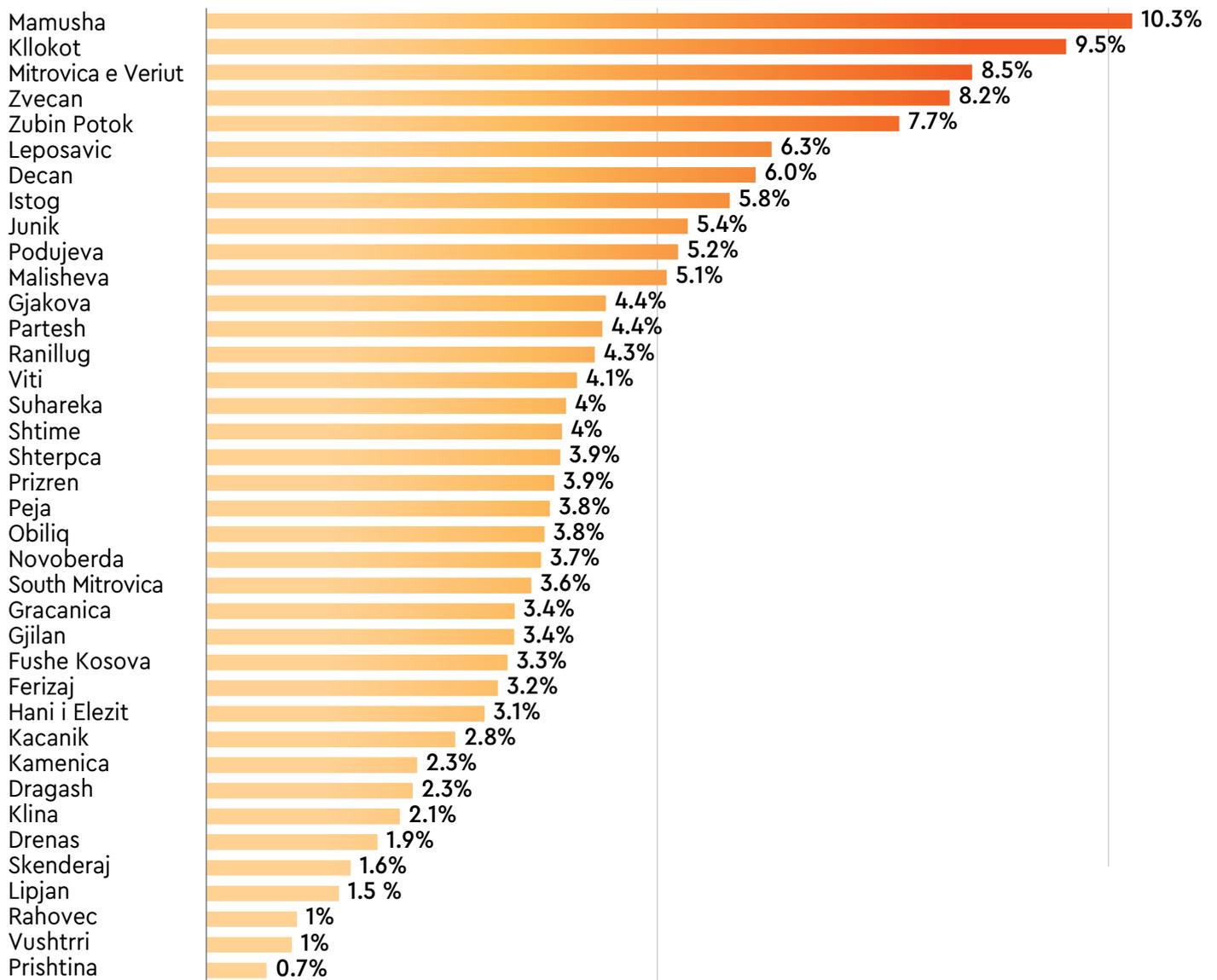
<sup>21</sup> Office of the Prime Minister. Administrative Burden Prevention and Reduction Program 2022–2027. Action Plan, pp. 2 and 4. April 2022. Updated Version. Public Consultation Platform. Source: <https://bit.ly/3ZbcDu7>

<sup>22</sup> Erdon Arifaj. Deputy Director of the Civil Status Department at the Civil Registration Agency. On March 3, 2023.

each municipality from the issuance of civil status documents in municipal service delivery would be at 90%, then it can be deduced that citizens could save over EUR 1.5 million per year.

Administrative burden reduction is not expected to have a significant impact on the municipal budget. The share of financial revenues from the civil status section services in the municipalities' own source revenues is low. Of the 32 municipalities subject to examination, in most municipalities this share is lower than 4%.

**Figure 1.** Share of revenues collected by the civil status section in total municipal revenues, percentage



Source: Information obtained pursuant to the right to access public documents, by respective municipality, calculated by own source revenues.

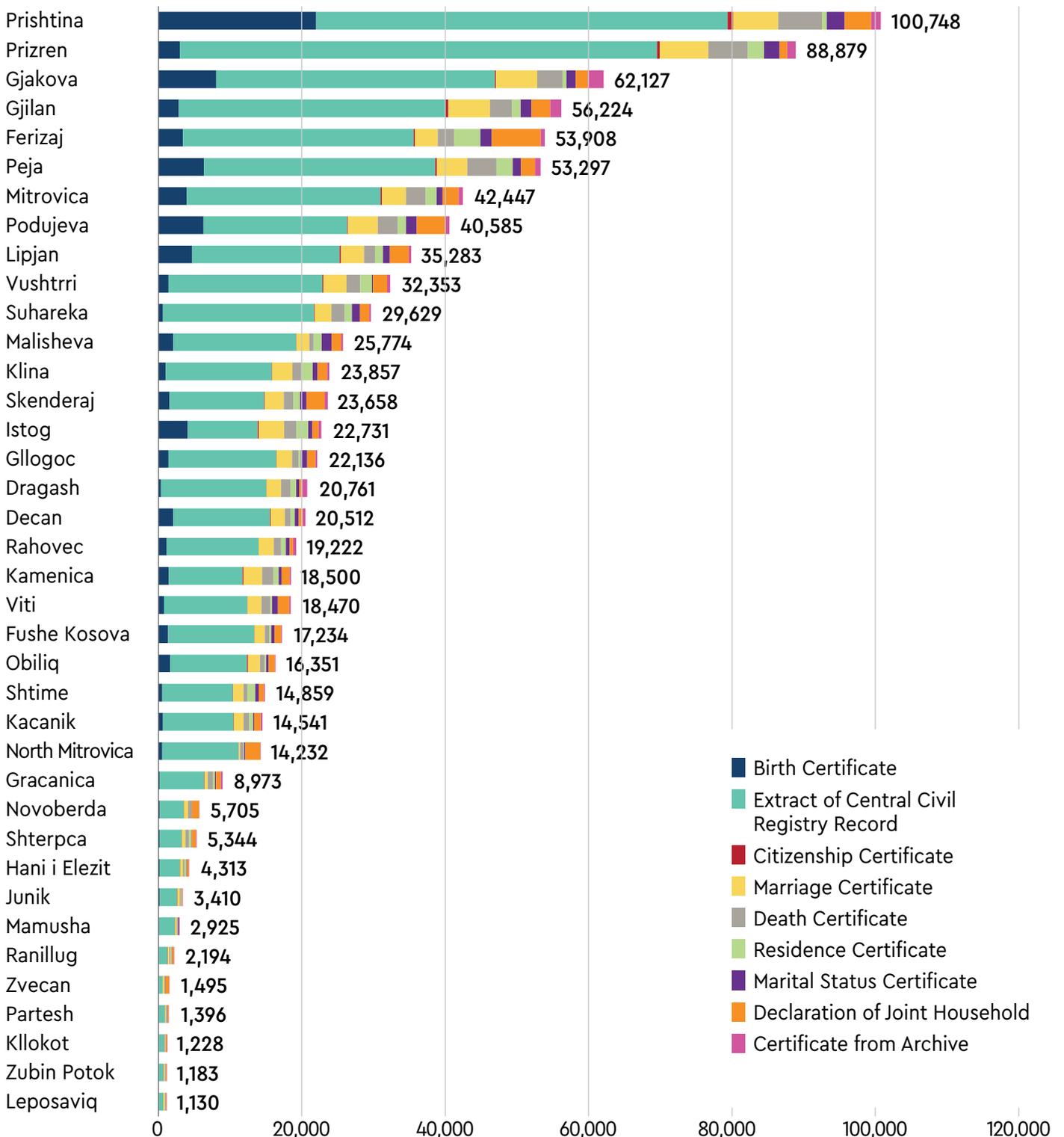
In 2022, all municipalities issued over 2.2 million different civil status documents in paper format or through application by citizens to municipal front office counters.<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that for a significant number of documents issued by municipalities there are no fees charged. Namely, war veterans, families of martyrs, persons in need, and proven cases of persons suffering from serious diseases are exempt from fees applicable for administrative services delivered by the civil status section.

<sup>23</sup> List of documents issued by civil status section offices in municipalities. Request for access to public documents filed by the GAP Institute. Approved by the Civil Registration Agency. March 2, 2023.

In 2022, there were 927,614 documents issued for internal use and 1,236,938 for external use purposes. Documents for internal use are civil status documents that are issued in black and white and without any document security features. They are commonly used for school enrollment, health care, job applications, daycare enrollment, and similar services. While documents for external use are civil status documents that are issued for applications to embassies and such documents have all the security features.

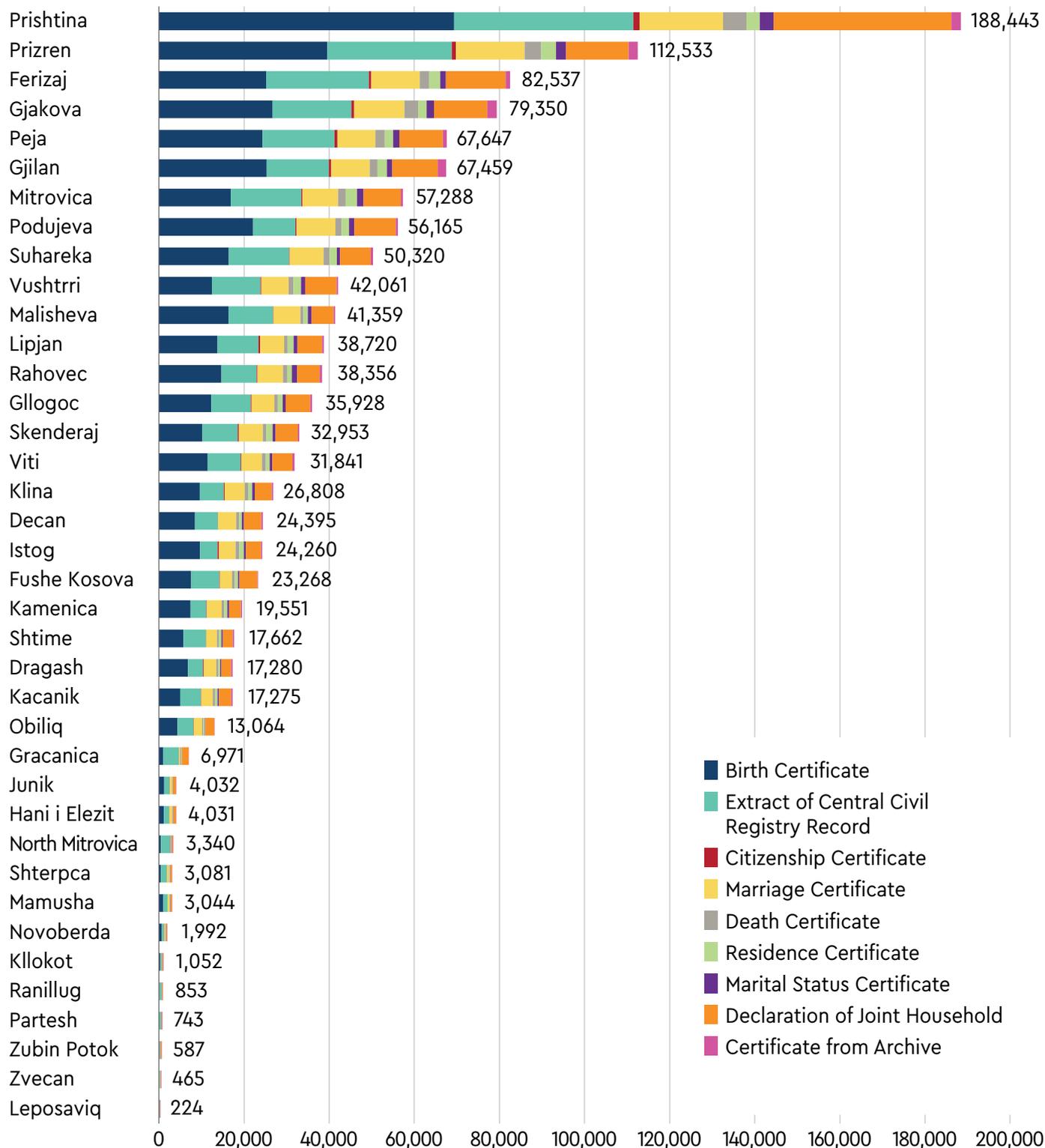
**Figure 2.** Number of documents issued in 2022 in all municipalities of Kosovo through in person application (for internal use)

Source: CRA.



**Figure 3.** Number of documents issued in 2022 in all municipalities of Kosovo through in person application (for external use)

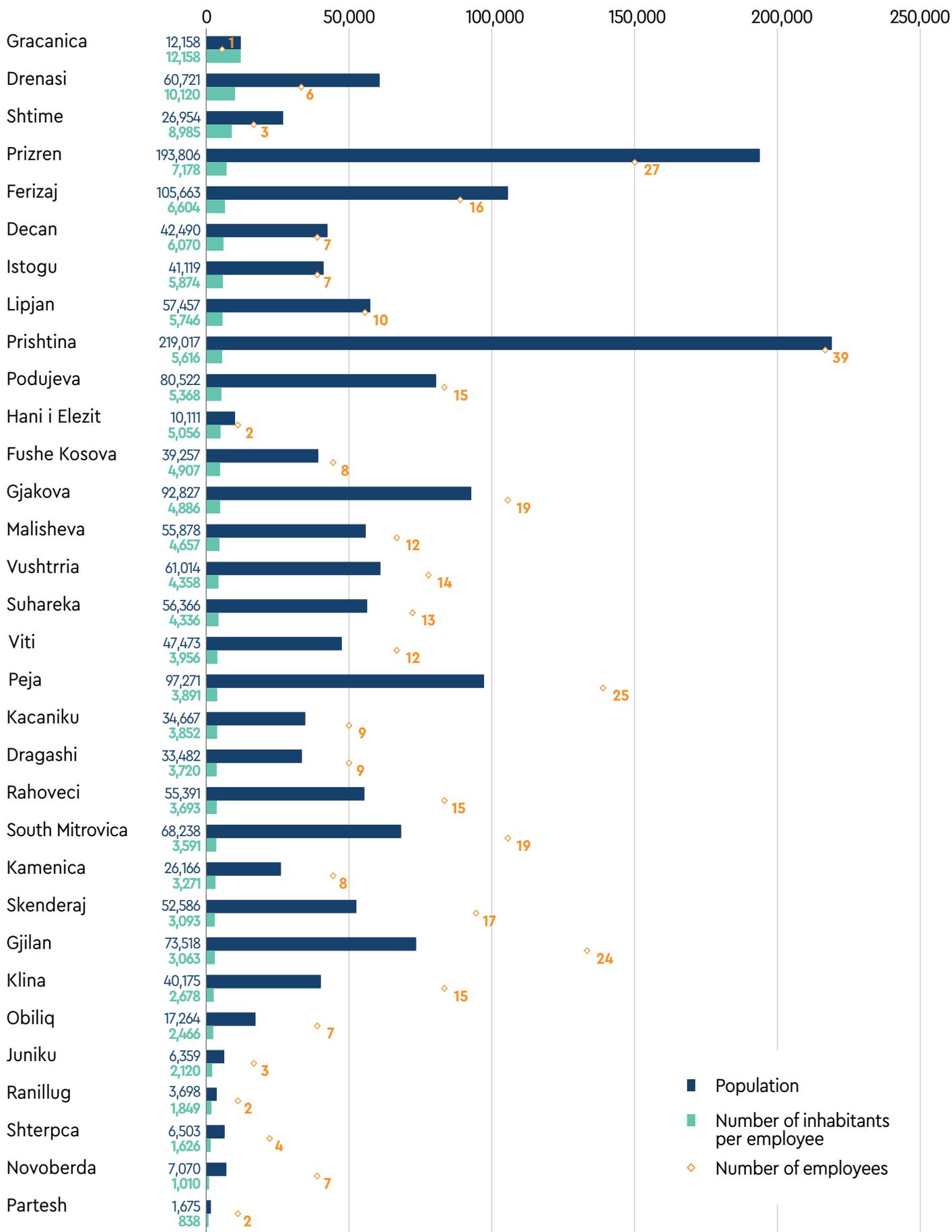
Source: CRA



Based on fees, civil status documents designated for internal and external use do not have any difference.

From the information received from the municipalities, it can be deduced that there is no correlation between the number of staff in the civil registry offices in the municipalities and the number of inhabitants in the respective municipalities. Municipality of Prishtinë, officially estimated to have approximately 220,000 inhabitants, employs 39 staff or one staff per 5,641 inhabitants, while Skenderaj, which is estimated to have 52,600 inhabitants, employs 17 staff or one staff per 3,094 inhabitants, further the Municipality of Klinë with 40,000 inhabitants employs 15 staff or one staff per 2,667 inhabitants.

**Figure 4.** Number of staff employed in civil status section offices in 32 municipalities vs. population (2022)



Source: Information obtained pursuant to the right to access public documents, by respective municipality in 2022.

Based on the amount of wages for municipal civil status section staff, there is no uniformity from municipality to municipality. For example, out of the 32 examined municipalities, following Prishtinë with the highest number of staff employed in such offices comes Skënderaj with a total of 17 staff, but looking at the annual amount of wages, this municipality comes third after Podujevë, which has 15 such staff on payroll. The Municipality of Dragash has most expenses for wages, with a total of nine such staff on payroll, compared to the Municipality of Lipjan with 10 such staff on payroll.<sup>24</sup>

**Table 2.** Amount of revenues and expenditures related to the delivery of administrative services by the civil status section offices in ten municipalities in 2022.

| Municipality    | Revenues  | Expenditures |
|-----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Prishtina       | 289,191 € | 220,500 €    |
| Prizren         | 244,939 € | 191,133 €    |
| Gjilan          | 166,420 € | 118,671 €    |
| Peja            | 159,915 € | 112,165 €    |
| Ferizaj         | 138,385 € | 81,420 €     |
| Gjakova         | 128,695 € | 96,405 €     |
| South Mitrovica | 100,369 € | 89,818 €     |
| Podujeva        | 94,141 €  | 95,941 €     |
| Malisheva       | 82,847 €  | 70,485 €     |
| Vushtrri        | 73,573 €  | 87,000 €     |
| Suhareka        | 73,287 €  | 60,484 €     |
| Rahovec         | 70,000 €  | 65,764 €     |
| Istog           | 66,176 €  | 39,128 €     |
| Lipjan          | 58,222 €  | 58,082 €     |
| Skenderaj       | 55,389 €  | 90,766 €     |
| Drenas          | 53,604 €  | 75,094 €     |
| Viti            | 50,415 €  | 61,552 €     |
| Fushe Kosova    | 46,743 €  | 49,170 €     |
| Decan           | 40,482 €  | 88,799 €     |
| Klina           | 38,302 €  | 58,867 €     |
| Dragash         | 37,000 €  | 52,000 €     |
| Kamenica        | 36,306 €  | 45,862 €     |
| Shtime          | 33,481 €  | 23,331 €     |
| Obiliq          | 28,026 €  | 35,352 €     |
| Kacanik         | 25,581 €  | 44,733 €     |
| Gracanica       | 22,182 €  | 5,613 €      |
| North Mitrovica | 20,492 €  | 5,613 €      |
| Novoberda       | 15,171 €  | 2,204 €      |
| Junik           | 9,682 €   | 15,744 €     |

<sup>24</sup> The average monthly wages in this administration section come out to EUR 370, in some municipalities this amount goes up to EUR 420.

| Municipality  | Revenues | Expenditures |
|---------------|----------|--------------|
| Shterpca      | 8,094 €  | 20,670 €     |
| Mamusha       | 7,758 €  | 15,744 €     |
| Ranillug      | 3,282 €  | 12,610 €     |
| Kllokot       | 3,093 €  | 12,610 €     |
| Zvecan        | 2,859 €  | 2,204 €      |
| Hani i Elezit | 2,500 €  | 14,490 €     |
| Zubin Potok   | 2,458 €  | 15,744 €     |
| Partesh       | 2,139 €  | 8,890 €      |
| Leposaviq     | 2,012 €  | 5,613 €      |

Source: Information obtained pursuant to the right to access public documents, by respective municipality, comparison produced by the GAP Institute.<sup>25</sup>

### Use of e-Kosova platform for administrative services

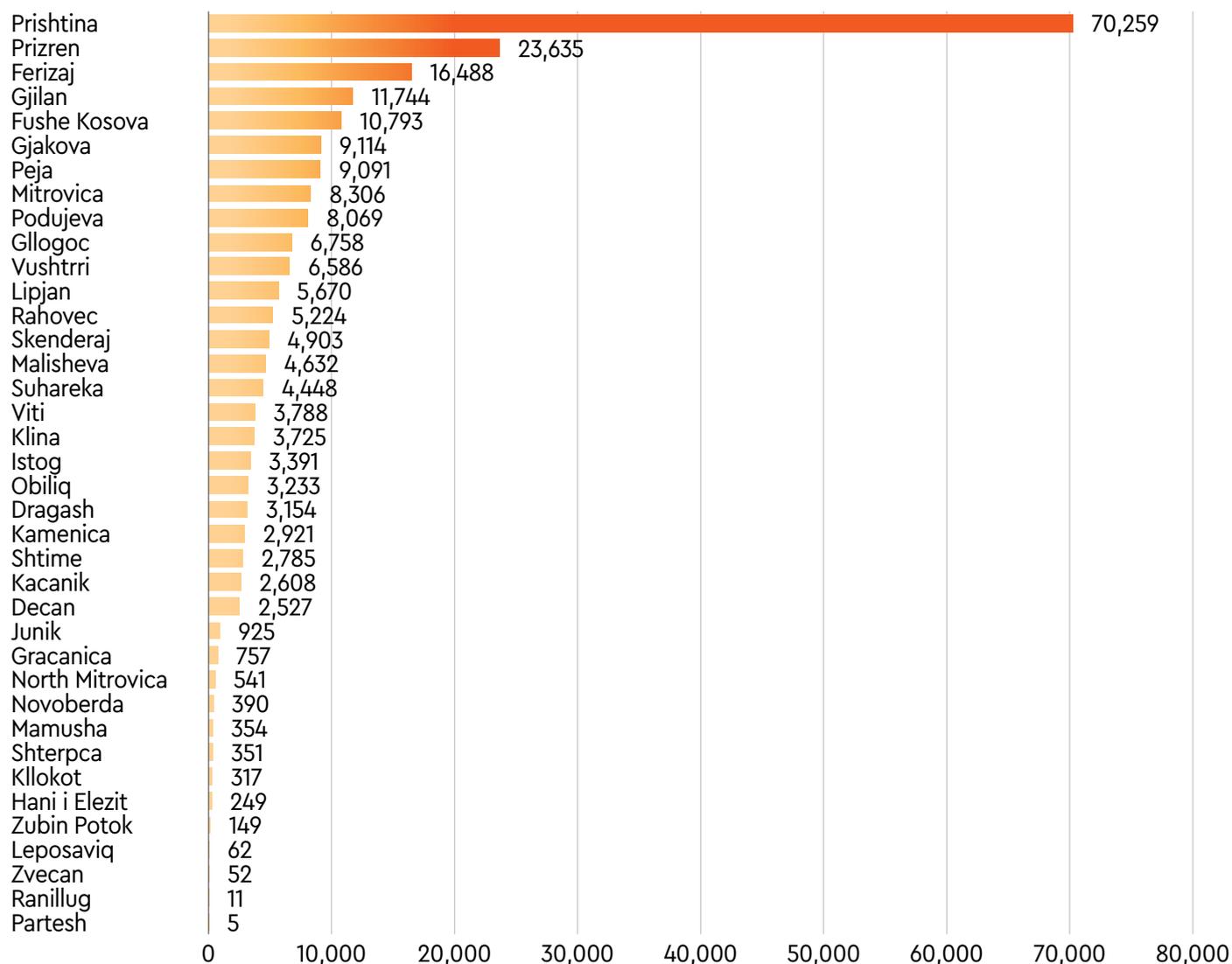
As of early June 2022, under the framework of e-Kosova platform, delivery of certain civil status documents has been incorporated appropriately and citizens have access to documents such as birth certificates, extract of birth record, marriage certificates, extract of marital status, and death certificate. Three days after the launch of this opportunity, over 20,000 documents were retrieved through this facility, with 238,015 documents retrieved by the end of the year. The largest number of documents were retrieved by the citizens of Prishtinë, followed by Prizren, Ferizaj, Gjilan, and Fushë Kosovë.<sup>26</sup>

The online option, in addition to affecting savings for citizens in terms of both expenses and time, also allows for service delivery outside the administration's working hours, on Saturdays and Sundays, avoiding queues at municipal front offices, and allowing municipalities to reduce the number of staff required for administrative services or move some of them, who do not provide civil status services, to other departments.

<sup>25</sup> For the municipalities that failed to send their data, respective revenues were calculated based on the data sent by the CRA on the number of documents issued by the municipalities in 2022 or were assumed to be the same as in municipalities with similar population size. While the expenditures of these six municipalities were assumed to be the same as those of municipalities similar to them in terms of population size. Further, for municipalities that provided their data, expenditures include monthly/annual wages for employees in the civil status section and operating expenses i.e., ink, acquisition of equipment such as computer, printer and inventory. Expenditures do not include utilities such as electricity, water, telephone, internet that are used by local communities where a number of civil status services are also delivered.

<sup>26</sup> Information Society Agency. Overview of the use of e-Kosova platform for the period June-December 2022. Request by the GAP Institute for access to public records, February 2023.

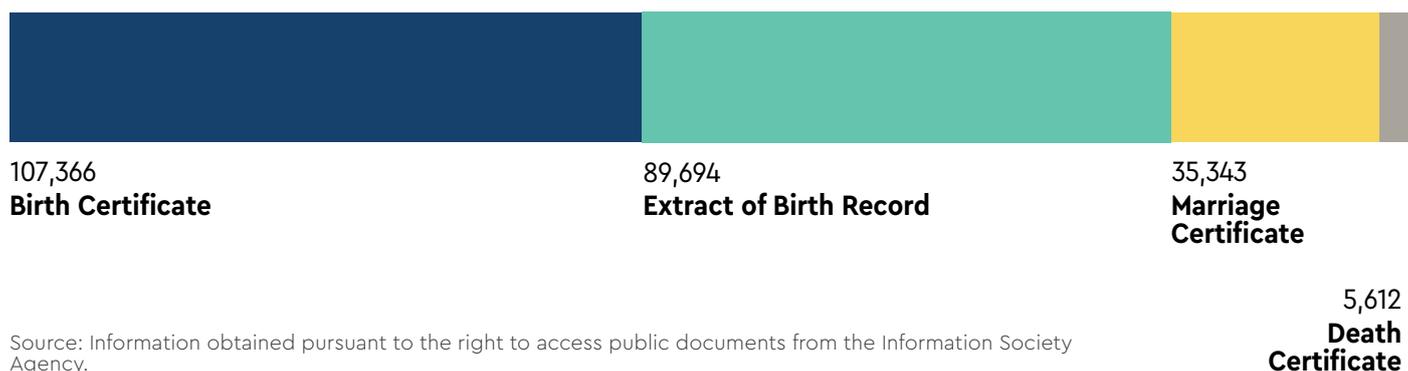
**Figure 5.** Number of civil status documents retrieved from the e-Kosova platform by municipality during the period June-December 2022



Source: Information obtained pursuant to the right to access public documents from the Information Society Agency.

From the nature of the documents retrieved by the citizens, it can be deduced that the largest number are birth certificates. At the municipal front office counters, this service is provided for a fee of EUR 1 per document, while from the e-Kosova platform it is delivered within seconds and no payment is required.

**Figure 6.** Number of civil status documents retrieved from the e-Kosova platform by type of document during the period June-December 2022



Source: Information obtained pursuant to the right to access public documents from the Information Society Agency.

## Conclusion

Public administration reform has been and remains a sluggish process. Public institutions have failed to leverage the advantages offered by technology and the Internet in providing services digitally. Citizens are still compelled to collect themselves the documents already owned by public institutions for purposes of service delivery applications to public institutions. This creates unnecessary expenses, protracted procedures, and waste of time.

Recently, the Government rolled out the process of eliminating the administrative burden, or the elimination of procedures that cause delays and expenditures in administrative service delivery. The administrative burden is usually created by unnecessary procedures, contradictory legislation, improper implementation of legislation, ambiguous information, lack of capacity to provide quality services, insufficient digitalization, and lack of undertaking reforms in administration.

As of June 2022, certain types of civil status documents have been made available in electronic format on the e-Kosova platform. From June 2022 until end of 2022, there were 238,015 documents retrieved through the e-Kosova platform. By contrast in 2022, in 38 municipalities, there were over 2.2 million documents retrieved from the civil status section offices in paper format.

From issuing documents and service delivery in civil status section offices, municipalities currently generate about EUR 2.6 million in revenues, while expenditures reach about EUR 2.1 million. Omitting a few large municipalities, in most municipalities either revenues are equal to expenditures or expenditures are higher than revenues. The disproportionate ratio between revenues and expenses, to the detriment of revenues, is expected to become more pronounced in 2023, when citizens are expected to receive increasingly more services from the e-Kosova platform.

The availability of retrieving documents digitally allows financial savings for citizens, but also saves time otherwise spent in receiving services from the civil status section offices. Specifically, according to GAP Institute calculations, the online retrieval of civil status documents from the e-Kosova platform is expected to produce savings of over EUR 1.5 million per year for the citizens.

This brief shows that the elimination of the cost charged to citizens for receiving administrative services from the civil registry section offices is not expected to have a significant impact on the municipal budget. In most of the municipalities subject to examination this share ranges between 1% and 4%.



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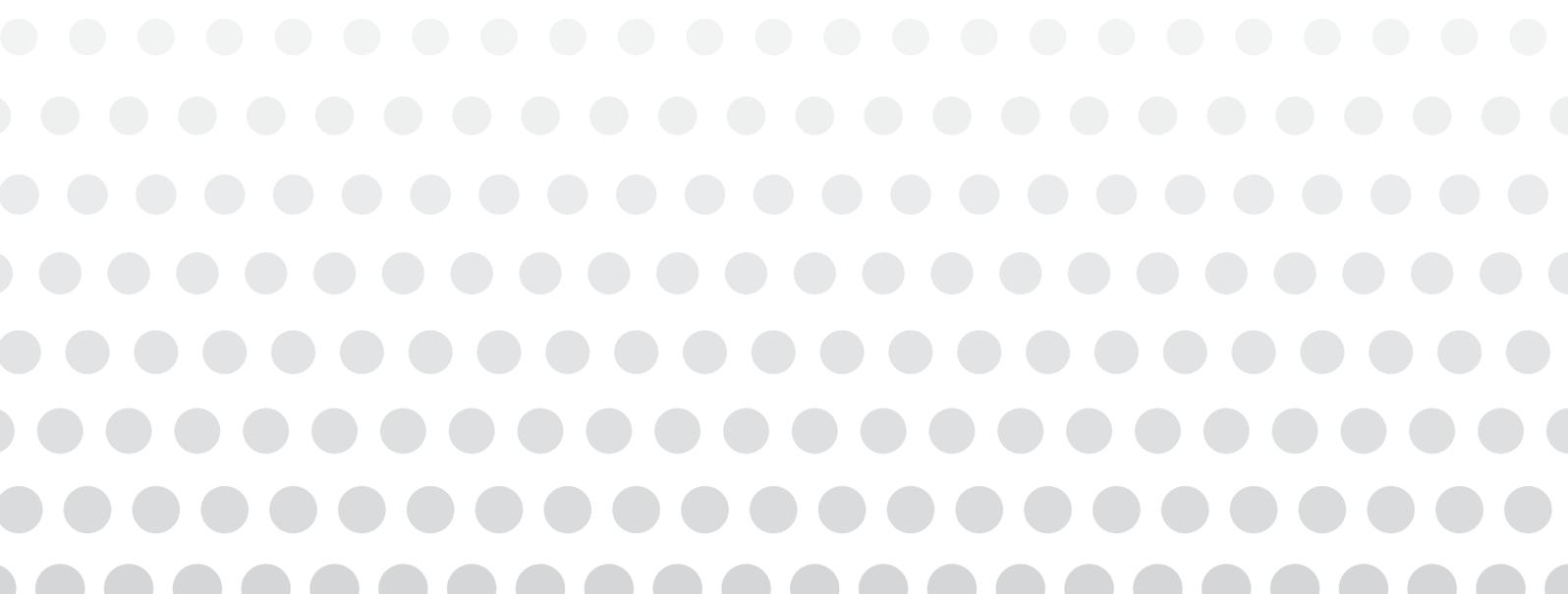
GAP Institute is a Think Tank established in October 2007 in Kosovo. GAP's main goal is to attract professionals to create an environment of professional development and research, as seen in similar institutions in Western countries. This also provides Kosovars with opportunities to research, develop and implement projects in order to advance the Kosovo society. Priority for this Institute is the mobilization of professionals to address the country's economic, political and social challenges. GAP's main goals are to fill the gaps between government and citizens, and between problems and solutions.

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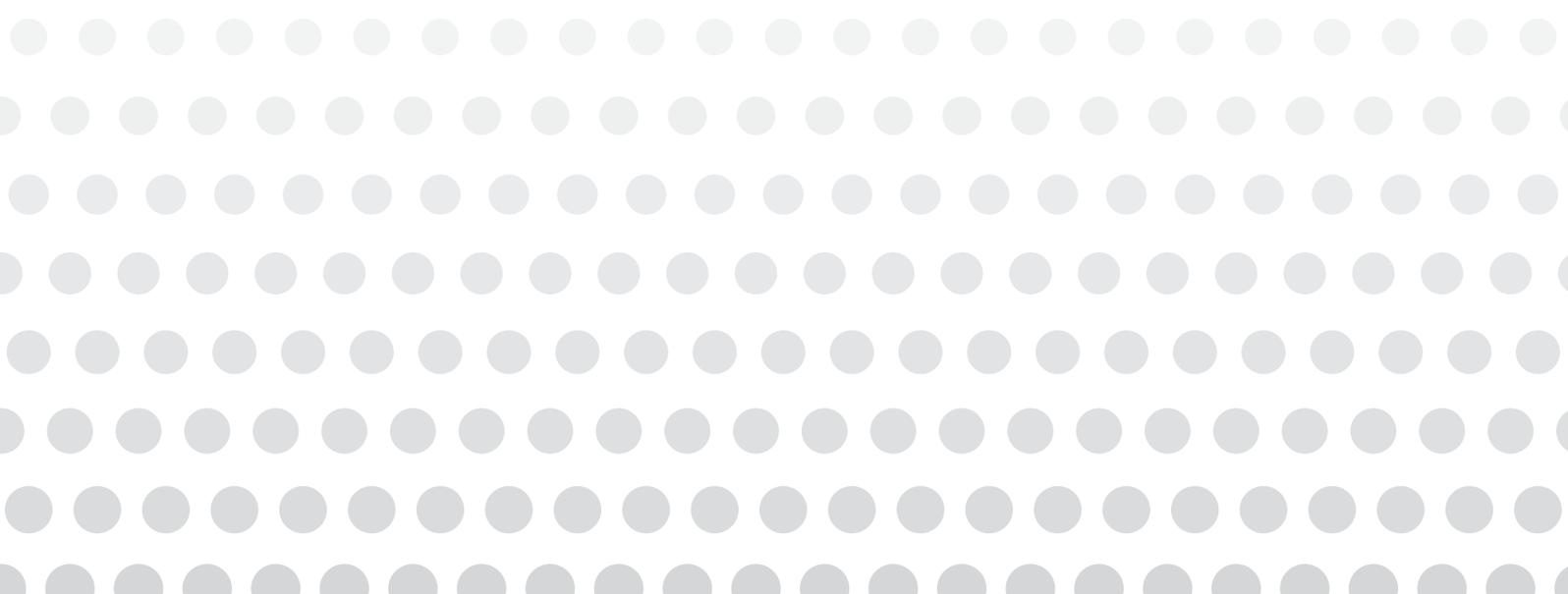
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The Impact of digitalization of  
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