

SALAR International
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Sustainable Municipal Waste Management Services in North Macedonia Project

CAPACITY ASSESSMENT
OF SIX PILOT MUNICIPALITIES IN SOUTH-WEST AND PELAGONIJA PLANNING REGIONS

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BACKGROUND

The capacity assessment was conducted within the framework of the project 'Sustainable municipal waste management services' in North Macedonia implemented by SALAR International. It aimed at understanding the current capacities of municipalities **in 10 key areas** of waste management, including aspects such as organizational structure, resources, policy frameworks, and stakeholder engagement.

The key objective of the assessment was to identify areas where municipalities need to improve in order to develop effective action plans and implement them efficiently. The insights gathered through the assessment established a baseline for measuring project success, which will then lead to the formulation of a capacity development programme tailored to address identified gaps. Ultimately, the assessment will be crucial in supporting the project's objectives of promoting sustainable public services, compliance with EU legislation, environmental responsibility, and strengthening local democracy.

Additionally, the assessment findings provide valuable insights for decision-makers to prioritize interventions and effectively allocate resources for improved waste management practices. Considering the EU accession process of the country, the assessment is very important for ensuring the efficient implementation of national environmental legislation at the local level that has been aligned with the EU Acquis. Overall, the findings and recommendations of this assessment can be an important step towards enhancing municipal waste management services and achieving sustainable development goals in North Macedonia.

METHODOLOGY

The capacity assessment applied a comprehensive methodology that combined both quantitative and qualitative methods including semi-structured questionnaires and in-person interviews with relevant municipal staff in each municipality (managers of public utility companies, heads of municipal departments on environment, local economic development, finances, legal department and human resources, and international cooperation). Around 40 municipal/PUC staff participated in the interviews in all six municipalities (5-8 in each), representing different departments. The questionnaire had 81 questions/indicators measuring the capacities across 10 key areas (each comprising 2 separate criteria) of municipal performance.

The 10 Key Areas of municipal performance are as follows:

I. Regulatory and Policy Compliance
II. Organizational Structure and Decision-Making Process
III. Data Collection and Monitoring
IV. Planning and Reporting
V. Inter-Department Coordination and Inter-Municipal Cooperation
VI. Knowledge, Expertise and Innovation
VII. Resource Allocation
VIII. Infrastructure and Equipment
IX. Stakeholders Engagement
X. Public Awareness and Education

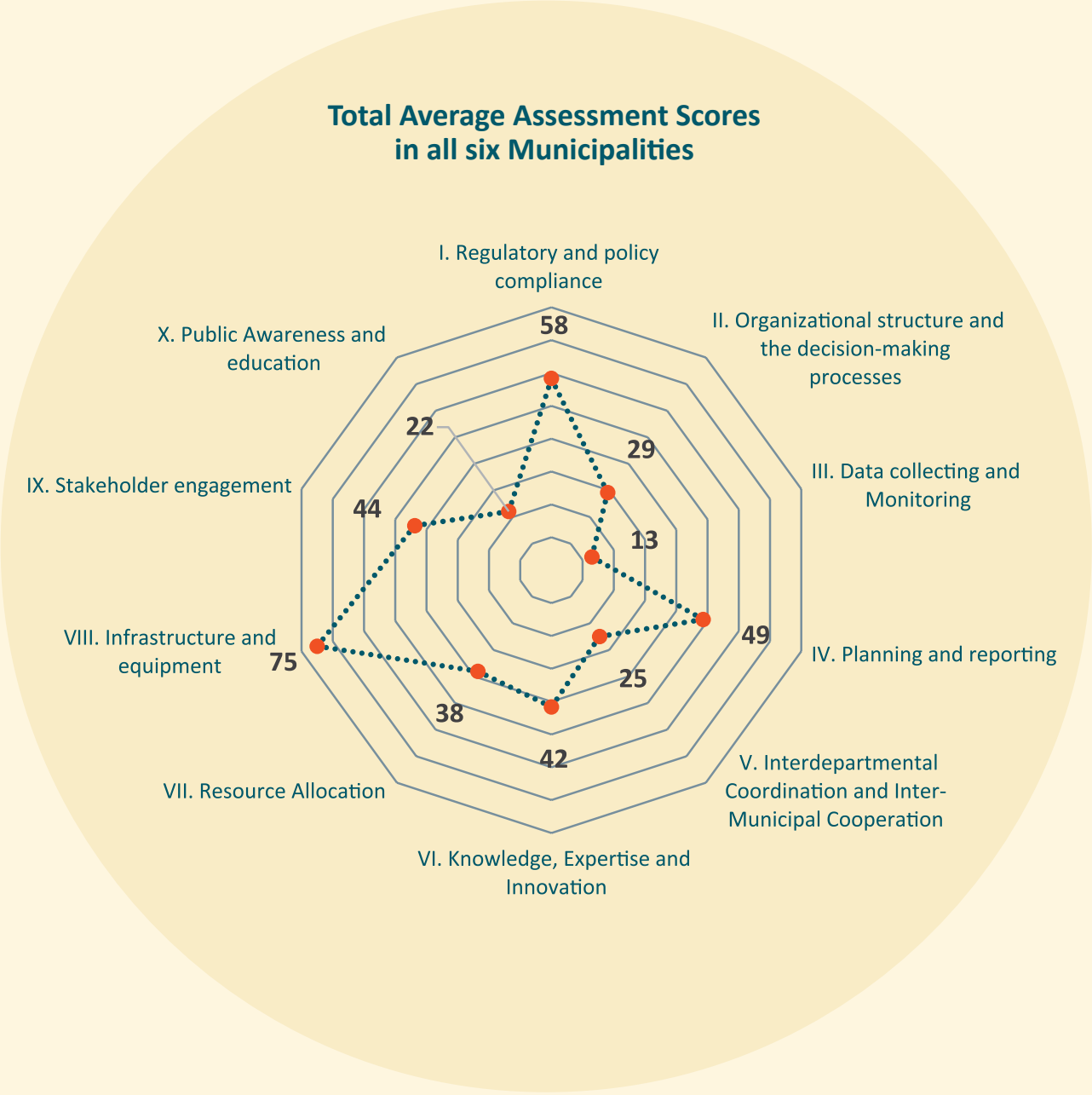
The interviews were carried out through a specially designed Capacity Assessment Tool (CAT) - a spreadsheet that contained all the indicators and calculated and displayed all the scores and information gathered during the capacity assessment.

To receive a score, each municipality underwent a complete evaluation providing answers and evidence for the existing capacities on all indicators (questions), as per the CAT. Based on the answers, capacity scores for each key area were calculated. The total capacity assessment scores, which are composite scores of all key areas, are presented as both a table and a radar graph to provide a visualization of a local government's relative strengths and weaknesses by key area. Apart from the semi structured questionnaire, the interviews were designed to allow open discussions with the municipal and PUC staff providing more nuanced understanding of the reasons behind the current capacity conditions for each of the areas subject to the assessment.

The assessment was conducted from December 2023 to February 2024 in all six pilot municipalities: Ohrid, Bitola, Kichevo, Plasnica, Prilep, and Novaci.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS PER KEY AREA

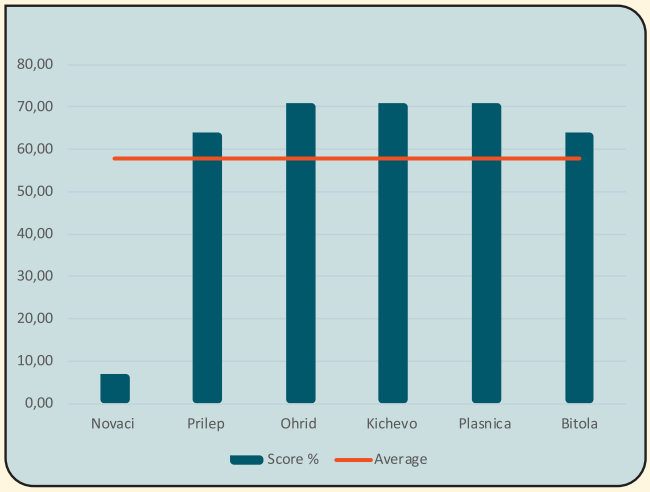
The detailed assessment of waste management capacities in the six pilot municipalities within the Pelagonija and Southwest planning regions highlights both challenges and opportunities that are essential for understanding the current state of waste management and identifying areas for improvement. For instance, the comparative view shows the weakest capacities around data collection and monitoring (13% compliance), while in terms of infrastructure and equipment, there are mostly sufficient resources to cover the current operative requirements (75% compliance), excluding those that will emerge once the regional system for waste management is established.



Area I:
Regulatory Compliance and Enforcement

Findings:

Municipalities face significant hurdles in implementing waste management legislation due to various deficiencies in organizational structure, finances, knowledge, and expertise. Furthermore, municipalities lack effective mechanisms for enforcing legislation and aligning local policies with national and EU requirements.



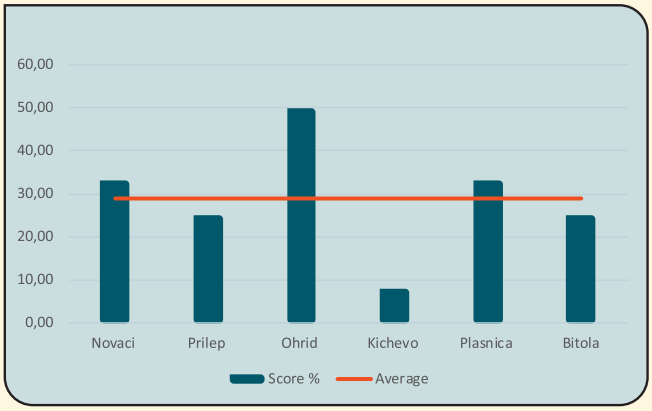
Recommendations:

- Incorporate waste management into new/existing **long-term policies** on local and/or regional development, aligned with national legislation and EU requirements. The policy documents should summarize the main legislative obligations of the municipality/mayor, targets for collecting, recycling and disposing of waste, administrative structure development, financing, data collection and processing, timeline and responsible stakeholders. The document should consider that establishing the integrated regional waste management system is a complex reform to be implemented in the forthcoming years. The process of developing and adopting the policy document should be inclusive and transparent and involve consultations with the MOEPP, the Center for Regional Development, NGOs, citizens, collective handlers, the business sector, the education sector and others.
- Continuous development, revision and improvement of a Local Action Plan on integrated waste management.
- Active work on securing financing for the Local Action Plan on waste management (budget line + projects).
- Improve the knowledge of waste management regulation for the municipal administration and PUC staff.
- Establishment of a mechanism for regular update of municipal documents in line with national legislation and policy frameworks.
- Improve communication between municipalities in the Southwest and Pelagonija regions and establish a technical mechanism for implementing IRWMS as working group/body among the municipality staff, the MOEPP (Environmental Administration), the Center for Development of Planning Region, the State Environmental Inspectorate, the ADKOM Association of Public Utility Service Providers, ZELS and other relevant stakeholders.

Area II:
Organizational Capacity and Decision Making

Findings:

Municipalities face significant shortcomings in the organizational structure, with unclear roles and responsibilities for waste management. Insufficient staffing and expertise hinder strategic planning, enforcement efforts, and decision-making processes.



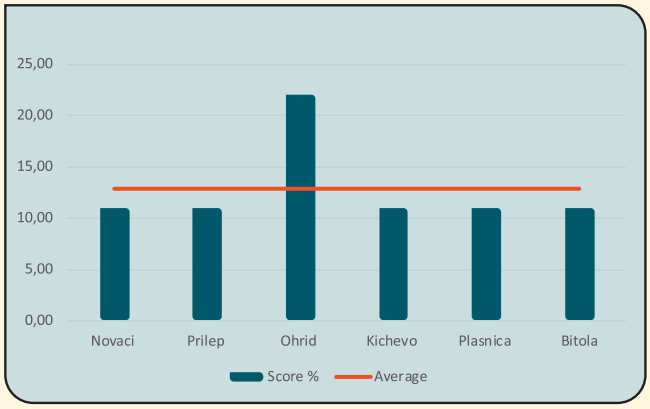
Recommendations:

- Define new positions within the organizational structure specifically dedicated to waste management, with clear responsibilities and obligations associated with these roles.
- Staff-specialized units with employees possessing expertise in waste management, such as lawyers and engineers. Ensure that these individuals have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively address waste management challenges.
- Establish procedures to involve relevant stakeholders, including citizens, NGOs, and educational institutions, in the decision-making process regarding waste management initiatives. Encourage active participation and collaboration to ensure that diverse perspectives are considered.
- Update systematization acts to align with legislative and strategic requirements for integrated waste management. Ensure that organizational structures and processes comply with existing waste management regulations and strategies.
- Establish new units dedicated to waste management within the municipal structure. Clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of these units to ensure effective coordination and implementation of waste management activities.
- Establish mechanisms and written guidelines for involving relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes and initiatives related to waste management.
- Conduct analyses to support the development of the NGO sector involved in waste management initiatives. Identify opportunities for collaboration and partnership with NGOs and explore avenues for securing continuous financing through donors to sustain their efforts.

Area III:
Data Management and Monitoring

Findings:

There are suboptimal data collection and monitoring practices that hinder planning and investment decisions in all municipalities. The absence of comprehensive databases for municipal waste, coupled with inadequate monitoring and evaluation of waste management practices, further increases these challenges.



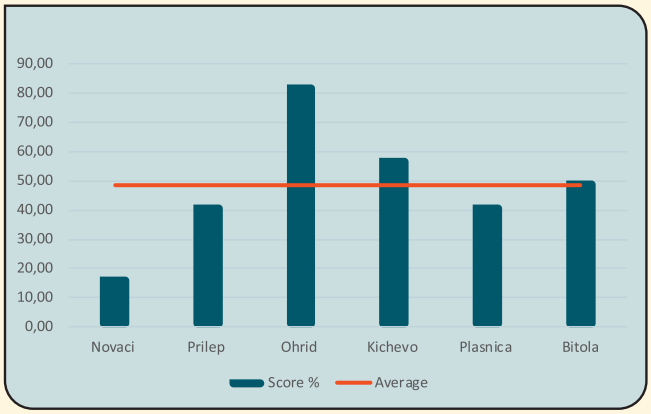
Recommendations:

- Establish a comprehensive and reliable data collection system including a database to track various types of municipal waste more effectively, such as plastic, paper, and electronic waste. This database will serve as a valuable resource for understanding waste patterns and trends.
- Define roles and responsibilities for municipal staff dedicated to processing waste management data. Ensure alignment with national legislative and strategic frameworks to enhance consistency and compliance in data management practices.
- Develop written procedures for processing and communicating data on waste management with relevant stakeholders. Clear guidelines will streamline data management processes and facilitate effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders.
- Improve traceability of agreements with collective handlers through enhanced monitoring mechanisms. Implement measures to track waste quantities, types, and disposal methods to ensure compliance with contractual obligations.
- Enhance monitoring and evaluation of local waste management policies by defining indicators for assessing policy effectiveness. Regular assessments will provide valuable insights into the performance of waste management initiatives and identify areas for improvement.

Area IV:
Planning and Reporting

Findings:

The municipalities have recently developed and adopted Waste Management Local Action Plans, indicating a commitment to improvement. However, mechanisms and procedures for regular monitoring, reporting, and creating indicators for the success of the long-term and annual policy planning documents, do not exist and are yet to be established.



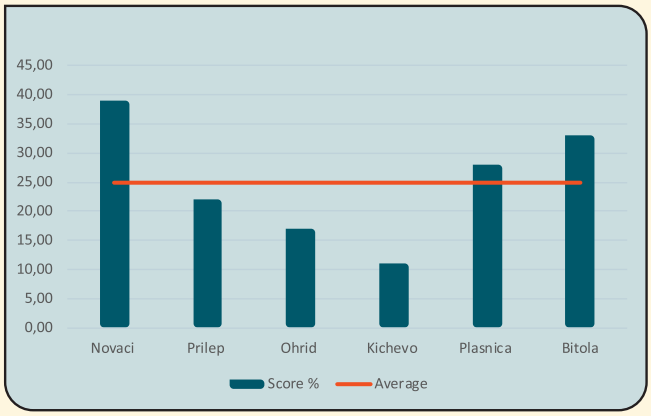
Recommendations:

- Develop mechanisms for monitoring, reporting, and creating indicators for the success of the long-term and annual policy planning documents
- Ensure regular monitoring and evaluation of the local policy documents on waste management by having clearly defined targets and performance indicators.
- Establish a regular reporting on the LAP on WM and other policy and planning documents.
- Develop unified templates and guidelines for reporting on collected waste.

Area V:
Inter-department Coordination and Inter-municipal Cooperation

Findings:

Municipalities lack established mechanisms and procedures for inter-departmental coordination and collaboration and there is insufficient use of the inter-municipal cooperation as an instrument for effective and efficient local service delivery.



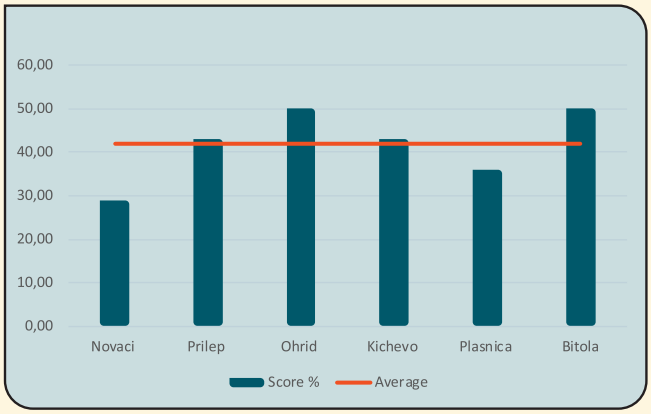
Recommendations:

- Develop procedures and guidelines for effective communication and coordination within each municipality's structure, to enhance collaboration among departments responsible for environmental and waste management issues.
- Initiate inter-municipal cooperation with municipalities in both regions to formalize partnerships and facilitate joint efforts on waste management initiatives, outlined in the regional and local action plans.
- Allocate resources and secure finances for the implementation of IMCs with the identified municipalities, to support the joint activities.
- Develop and implement training programs to enhance staff knowledge in inter-municipal cooperation and its utilization on waste management activities, especially in neighboring municipalities such as Bitola and Novaci.

Area VI:
Knowledge, Expertise and Innovation

Findings:

Municipalities do not have enough expertise for implementing waste management policies and strategies due to a lack of training and insufficient staff dedicated to waste issues. Except for Prilep and Ohrid, most of the staff in the remaining municipalities have only basic knowledge and understanding of the priorities and aims set in the Regional Waste Management Plan 2016 – 2026, as well as the Waste Management Plan 2021–2031. Additionally, apart from the Municipality of Bitola, all other municipalities either do not use any kind of digital tool for optimizing the routes of waste collection and transport (GIS), or do not have sufficient knowledge in using innovative technologies for waste management.



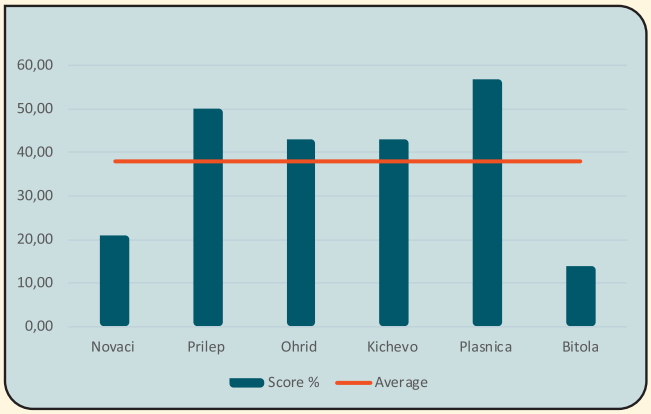
Recommendations:

- Develop and implement a capacity development program focused on waste management topics to address the current knowledge and expertise gaps among municipal staff.
- Develop and introduce a learning platform for municipal staff working on waste management as well as for the staff in the Public Utility Companies, on a continuous basis.
- Explore and utilize opportunities for using innovative technologies for better management of services in the future (e.g. GIS).
- Provide training for municipal and PUC staff on using innovative technologies (including existing ones) for waste management.

Area VII:
Resource Allocation

Findings:

Municipalities face a shortage of resources for waste management and heavily rely on external funding. The existing communal fees often prove inadequate to cover the costs, emphasizing the urgent need for sustainable financing mechanisms.



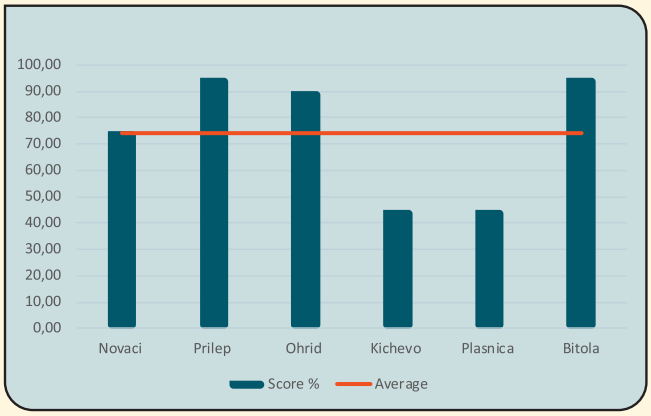
Recommendations:

- Allocate finances for waste management activities in the municipal budget on a multiannual basis to ensure consistent financial support and long-term planning.
- Ensure the municipal budget aligns with the financial allocation from the WM LAP and other policy documents.
- Seek and secure additional funding from sources such as IPA and other bilateral donors to supplement municipal budgets and enhance financial resources for waste management initiatives, in a coordinated manner and in line with the RWMP and LAP.
- Develop a phased plan including a communication strategy for introducing new service fees/tariffs, ensuring compliance with regulations set by the Energy and Water Regulatory Commission.
- Improve the quality of data related to generating and collecting municipal waste to inform fee structures accurately, enabling fair and effective fee implementation.
- Increase the collection rate of existing waste service fees by implementing strategies to improve compliance and reduce evasion.
- Regularly monitor agreements with collective handlers regarding waste amounts, types, and fee payments to ensure transparency, accountability, and adherence to contractual obligations.
- Extend or establish agreements with collective handlers for handling various waste types like packaging and plastics to ensure comprehensive waste management coverage.

Area VIII:
Infrastructure and Equipment

Findings:

In some municipalities there is significantly lower waste collection coverage, particularly in rural areas and distant settlements, primarily due to poor road infrastructure, low population density, and limited cost-effectiveness. Although most municipalities report a sufficient number of waste vehicles, a large portion of their fleet is outdated and there is a need for additional waste equipment (bins and containers). In this context, it should be noted that the ongoing efforts on establishing an Integrated Regional Waste Management System, constructing transfer stations, and acquiring new equipment through projects like the EBRD Regional Solid Waste Project, demonstrate a proactive approach to infrastructure development.



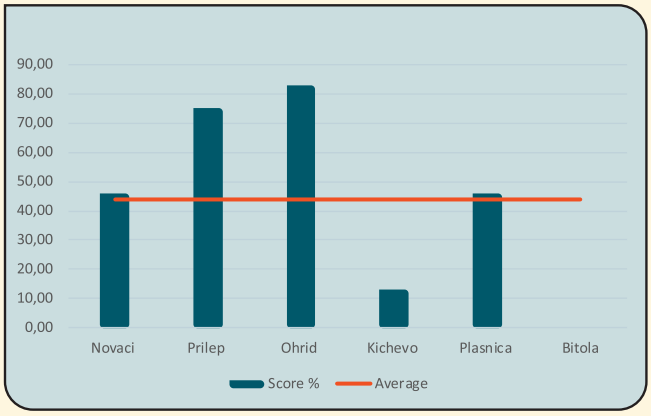
Recommendations:

- Develop a comprehensive resources management and maintenance plan for waste vehicles and equipment to ensure optimal functionality and longevity.
- Conduct a thorough analysis of the need for additional containers or bins to collect various types of waste, including bio-waste and plastic. This analysis should consider factors such as population growth, waste generation rates, and current container capacity.
- Develop plans for acquiring additional equipment, focusing on securing bins for households. Ensure that these plans avoid duplication with other donor-funded projects to maximize efficiency and resource utilization.
- Develop plans for additional infrastructure, such as bypasses and service roads, and equipment, including trucks and bins, to improve waste management practices. Ensure that these plans avoid duplicating efforts with other ongoing projects to optimize resource allocation and project effectiveness.
- Secure finances to address the need for additional infrastructure and equipment. Explore funding options such as municipal budgets, external grants, loans, or public-private partnerships to ensure sufficient financial resources for implementation.
- Analyze and plan for additional containers or bins to collect various types of waste, such as bio-waste or plastic. Potential duplication with other projects should be considered to ensure streamlined efforts and avoid unnecessary expenditure.

Area IX:
Stakeholder Engagement

Findings:

While most municipalities recognize the importance of stakeholder engagement in planning and implementing waste management activities, only a few involve stakeholders in these processes. Even for municipalities that involve stakeholders, there is no regular mechanism/process in place, and the involvement is irregular and occurs on an ad-hoc basis.



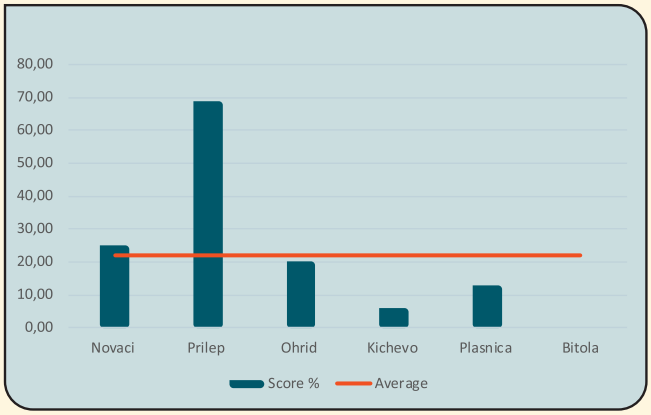
Recommendations:

- Develop a Local Stakeholders Involvement Plan/Programme to actively engage various stakeholders, including NGOs, citizens, the business sector, and collective handlers, in planning and implementing waste management policies at the local level. This program should prioritize inclusivity and collaboration, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making processes related to waste management.
- Conduct comprehensive stakeholder mapping to identify and categorize relevant stakeholders involved in waste management activities within the municipality, including NGOs, citizens, businesses, and collective handlers.
- Establish mechanisms for stakeholder involvement in the policy planning processes.
- Develop tailored engagement strategies to effectively involve different stakeholder groups. This may include organizing public forums, workshops, focus groups, and consultation sessions to gather input and feedback on waste management initiatives.
- Provide training and capacity-building opportunities for stakeholders to enhance their understanding of waste management issues, policies, and best practices. This could involve workshops, seminars, and educational campaigns aimed at raising awareness and promoting sustainable waste management behaviors.
- Facilitate collaborative planning processes that involve stakeholders in decision-making on waste management policies, programs, and projects. Encourage active participation and co-creation to ensure initiatives align with community needs and priorities.
- Develop innovative financing mechanisms to support the implementation of waste management initiatives. This may involve securing funding from municipal budgets, seeking grants from external donors, and exploring public-private partnerships to leverage additional resources.
- Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement activities and the impact of waste management interventions. Regular feedback loops and performance assessments will help ensure accountability and continuous improvement.

Area X:
Public Awareness and Education

Findings:

There are limited public awareness and education initiatives on waste management issues in all municipalities. Communication and public awareness strategies are lacking, and municipalities rarely use public events to promote positive waste management practices. However, some municipalities such as Prilep and Ohrid, cooperate with the local educational institutions (primary schools and kindergartens) in order to integrate lectures on sustainable waste management practices into students' curricula. Educational/mentorship waste management programmes for teaching staff have not been implemented in any of the municipalities.



Recommendations:

- Develop a comprehensive, multiannual strategy/program aimed at raising public awareness and educating both students and citizens about waste management.
- Develop and implement an educational programme on WM intended for teachers in elementary schools.
- Use public events organized by the municipality to promote sustainable waste practices.
- Conduct public awareness campaigns targeting citizens of all ages through various channels such as community events, social media, posters, and informational materials distributed in public spaces.
- Provide specialized training sessions and workshops for specific groups within the community, such as community leaders, local businesses, and waste management workers.
- Forge partnerships with local organizations, NGOs, and community groups to amplify the reach and impact of public awareness initiatives.
- Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of public awareness and education initiatives over time.

Municipalities' scores in each of the 10 areas

	Novaci		Prilep		Ohrid		Kicevo		Plasnica		Bitola		Total average		
Municipality assessment summary	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Max. score	Avg score	Avg %
I. Regulatory and policy compliance	0,5	7	4,5	64	5	71	5	71	5	71	4,5	64	7	4	58
II. Organizational structure and decision-making processes	2	33	1,5	25	3	50	1	8	2	33	1,5	25	6	2	29
III. Data Collection and Monitoring	1	11	1	11	2	22	1	11	1	11	1	11	9	1	13
IV. Planning and reporting	1	17	2,5	42	5	83	4	58	3	42	3	50	6	3	49
V. Interdepartmental Coordination and Inter-Municipal Cooperation	3,5	39	2	22	2	17	1	11	3	28	3	33	9	2	25
VI. Knowledge, Expertise, and Innovation	2	29	3	43	4	50	3	43	3	36	3,5	50	7	3	42
VII. Resource Allocation	1,5	21	3,5	50	3	43	3	43	4	57	1	14	7	3	38
VIII. Infrastructure and equipment	7,5	75	9.5	95	9	90	5	45	5	45	9,5	95	10	8	75
IX. Stakeholder engagement	5,5	46	9	75	10	83	2	13	6	46	0	0	12	5	44
X. Public Awareness and education	2	25	5,5	69	2	20	1	6	1	13	0	0	8	2	22

The municipal capacity assessment was crucial for pinpointing areas needing improvement and offering recommendations to guide municipalities in effectively implementing their Local Action Plans on Waste Management. The project will assist municipalities in transforming challenges into opportunities by focusing on capacity building, inter-municipal cooperation, resource mobilization, and stakeholder engagement, thereby supporting them in improving waste services and establishing an integrated and sustainable regional waste management system.



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