



Institute  
for Democracy  
and Mediation

Study report (Short Summary)

# Assessing the experiences and potentials for the functioning of Local Public Safety Councils



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## INTRODUCTION

The Local Public Safety Council (LPSC) is an advisory mechanism established and operating in every local self-government unit. Its main purpose is to develop comprehensive policies and action plans that contribute to the increase of public safety at the local level.<sup>1</sup> The practice to date has revealed that the effective implementation of this mechanism by local institutions has been a hard nut to crack. Established in some 58 municipalities across the country, these councils have featured a variety of approaches in addressing local security issues. Yet, all these approaches are far from a consolidated and comprehensive model. The formal character of their operation is also highlighted in the Crosscutting Community Security Strategy (CCSS) 2021-2026. This strategy underlines the lack of effective and practical implementation of this instrument, which has not produced the expected effects in relation to local security and safety issues and joint planning of available resources.

LPSC is conceptualized as a local-level comprehensive and multi-stakeholder mechanism that relies on the horizontal partnership of public and non-public institutions. An adequate functioning of this mechanism at municipalities not only helps to address conventional threats related to law enforcement and public safety, but also to prevent other phenomena, such as radicalism and violent extremism. In addition, this mechanism contributes to the prevention and fight against crime and to a sustainable development of communities. Furthermore, the mechanism gives the municipality the missing role in security governance and in improving services in the field of security and public order, a function which the municipality must exercise in pursuance of the organic Law No. 139/2015, “On Local Self-Government”.

In the framework of the “Sustainable Community-Based Reintegration of Albanian Nationals Returning from Syria” Project, the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) conducted research to assess the experience and possibilities of LPSC operation. This research seeks to analyze the perceptions and experience of frontline practitioners and local stakeholders regarding the functioning and efficiency of the Local Public Safety Council as a mechanism designed to address public safety concerns at the local level. On the other hand, the research produces evidence-based data and recommendations, which can be used by local- and central-level policy makers to design a more comprehensive approach to the operation of the LPSCs.

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<sup>1</sup> A roadmap on the Establishment and Functioning of Local Public Safety Councils, January 2023.  
<https://idmalbania.org/a-roadmap-on-the-establishment-and-functioning-of-local-public-safety-councils/>

## METHODOLOGY

This research seeks to analyze the perceptions and experience of frontline practitioners and local stakeholders with regard to functioning and efficiency of Local Public Safety Councils. The study also strives to inform local- and central-level institutions as well as other stakeholders on the progress to date, needs, and recommendations for designing and promoting a more comprehensive approach to the operation of the LPSCs in the long run. **A mix methods approach** was employed to ensure accuracy and quality of findings and conclusions.

### **Quantitative Method: A Survey with Frontline Practitioners and Local Stakeholders**

81 frontline practitioners and local stakeholders, including LPSC members, completed the semi-structured questionnaire, which was administered online in 20 municipalities, selected by size, location, and the dynamics of security issues. The purpose of this instrument is to collect information from frontline practitioners and local stakeholders regarding their knowledge of LPSC, participation in LPSC meetings, and efficiency in inter-institutional coordination and cooperation. The instrument examined, among other things, the stakeholders' perceptions with regard to the most effective approaches to adequate LPSC functioning. The quantitative data collection process was carried out online via Google Forms during December 2023-January 2024.

### **Qualitative Method: Focus Group Discussions**

Focus group discussions were held in seven municipalities across the country –Kukes, Mat, Pogradec, Tirana, Cerrik, Shkodra, and Elbasan– during November-December 2023. 81 representatives of local institutions participated in these meetings, including LPSC members, senior management, specialists from the management and operational staff; social administrators from administrative units, representatives of police, social services, education, healthcare, justice, non-profit organizations, Municipal Councilors as well as other stakeholders at the local level. Discussions were focused on the identification of challenges and experiences in the organization of work, application of internal procedures, information and awareness on LPSCs as well as on an assessment of the adequacy of professional capacities.

### **Meetings/Semi-Structured Interviews with LPSC Members**

Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the LPSCs and high-level representatives of local institutions to obtain insights about how LPSCs operate, their decision-making processes, organization of work, and the support provided to them.

## CONCLUSIONS

Local Public Safety Councils are advisory mechanisms established in every local self-government unit with the aim of developing comprehensive policies on actions that contribute to increased public safety at the local level. The conceptualization of LPSCs and the competences of municipalities and other institutions within the LPSC reinstate the misconception that only the police, prosecutor's office and/or the judiciary can help to reduce the crime rate and increase community safety. A conception, standardization, and assessment of public safety require a clear definition of the role of each actor. It is also indispensable to avoid exclusion of the any of the involved institution, actor or party "in the shadow". The role of citizens, civil society organizations, and, in particular, young people remains crucial in the preventive processes and in maintaining public safety. The standards of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union<sup>2</sup> promote a different solution. Partnership is a prerequisite for effective crime prevention and improved public safety. The goal is to build safe communities and this means an active joint work within the partnership of different local stakeholders, with the aim of preventing violence and criminal activities as well as improving the quality of people's lives. The model of the Municipality of Elbasan is precisely based on the horizontal partnership of local institutions and the direct involvement of citizens in the design of a local security agenda.

- ***The regulatory framework of LPSC functioning:*** LPSCs function formally, although not efficiently. Lack of a "sample" or "standard" regulation that clearly defines the participating institutions, the roles and responsibilities of the institutional actors involved in the structure causes the lack of an integrated approach to address any threat to security. The ambiguity of internal procedures and the lack of a clear and unified methodology for the identification, analysis and reporting of security risks in each municipality can become an obstacle to timely address any risks and weakens, to some extent, the preventive role of this mechanism. These aspects undoubtedly hamper the sustainability and effectiveness of the LPSC's work. The regulation of Elbasan LPSC and the positive practice of the operation of this mechanism can serve as a model to refer to for the design of a regulatory framework of LPSCs, which will be adapted by any LPSC according to the local context.
- ***Deficiencies of a consolidated regulatory framework lead to inefficient operation of LPSC:*** The current practice of the LPSC operation is still short of an institutional evaluation procedure for the multi-stakeholder activity of LPSCs. In addition, while they have tried from time to time to assist in revitalizing and reactivating the LPSCs, civil society organizations and international partners have not succeeded in creating a continuity of the efficient functioning of the mechanism and in involving citizens in this process. These initiatives are prone to failure unless they are coupled with adequate budget, regular data collection and sharing, crosscutting local plans, and indicators for monitoring and

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<sup>2</sup> ECOSOC Resolution 2003/26 – Prevention of urban crime; ECOSOC Resolution 2006/20 – United Nations standards and norms in crime prevention; ECOSOC Resolution 2007/12 – Strategy for the period 2008-2011 for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; ECOSOC Resolution 2008/24 – Strengthening prevention of urban crime: an integrated approach; Recommendation No. R (87) 19 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Organisation of Crime Prevention; Resolution 160 (2003) on local partnership for preventing and combating violence at school; Council Decision 2009/902/JHA of 30 November 2009 setting up a European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) and repealing Decision 2001/427/JHA.

evaluating their performance. Reasons for the low efficiency of this mechanism include the lack of protocols and standard operating procedures, lack of instruments for data collection and reporting, inadequate documentation of meetings, scarce human and financial resources, weak infrastructure, and limited support services. In addition to the implementation of the measures defined in the multi-stakeholder action plan, the lack of measurable indicators hinders the process of continuous monitoring of the activity of these structures, a process required to assess the status of implementation of the measures set out in the plan.

- ***Communication and exchange of information*** in compliance with the requirements for the protection of personal data and preservation of confidentiality or sensitive data improves the functioning of the mechanism. Professional administration of information reduces the risk of stigmatization of a certain community or group and helps to avoid discriminatory behavior towards it. Furthermore, in cases of dealing with important matters of public security, of a secret and sensitive nature, the duty of each member of the LPSC is to comply with the ethical principles and the applicable legislation for respecting the principles of confidentiality.
- ***Multi-stakeholder coordination and cooperation***: a horizontal cooperation among various stakeholders can be achieved through clear and agreed-upon procedures established for institutional roles and responsibilities. Multi-stakeholder coordination and cooperation also require the will of the institutions' leadership. Frequent turnover and replacement of LPSC members affect, to some extent, their regular attendance of and participation in LPSC meetings, causes the loss of institutional memory, and reduces the consistency and effectiveness of the response to referred issues as well as the buildup of institutional capacities. The lack of ongoing follow-up and reporting of agreed measures weakens the mechanism and reduces the likelihood of success of good practices. **The introduction of the "institutional triangle" model of municipality-police-prosecutor interaction** helps to boost the efficiency of the action plans and concrete measures designed for crime prevention and public safety through a comprehensive approach. The active participation of the Prosecutor's Office gives greater credibility to the process, as it enhances communication on the legal education of young people and disseminate public information on local statistics and trends of criminal activity as a means of prevention. However, the recent reorganization of the prosecution body may temporarily constrain the institution's regular participation in this partnership. While the Prosecutor's Office supports efforts to prevent crime and brings value to this partnership, due to its reorganization, its commitment will depend on the case and the municipality's context.
- ***Coordination with other local mechanisms***: The existence of local thematic mechanisms, such as the Mechanism Against Domestic Violence or the Intersectoral Technical Groups, underscore the need for an institutional culture to coordinate the work in order to maximize impact. As a comprehensive mechanism, the LPSC is an effort to institutionalize an effective model of horizontal cooperation and partnership, defining the roles and



responsibilities among all local stakeholders, including approaches of coordination and cooperation with other structures and mechanisms at the local level. Along these lines, a prospect is created for a faster and coordinated response.

- ***Strengthening of professional capacities of LPSC members:*** due to the frequent turnover of local staff, change of local structures, increase/limitation of human resources and capacities, LPSC membership is not stable. This has caused a transitory interruption in the LPSC operation, lack of information on and identification of urgent needs for continuous training on the regulatory and institutional framework of LPSCs, capacity building for the needs identification and assessment, for unaccompanied children from third countries, for victims of violence, bullying, substance use, public safety issues, returnees from conflict zones, or the impact of migratory flows, etc. as well as the need for more awareness campaigns and proactive role of local stakeholders (such as CSOs) in this mechanism. The proactive approach to the development of human capacities contributes to the continuous growth of professionalism, motivation and to the maximization of joint work. Empowerment of LPSC member institutions, awareness and institutional information of all actors about the role of these focal points at the local level increases the sustainability of the mechanism, helps to establish communication bridges, identifies solutions, and builds the trust of communities in the mechanism.
- ***Awareness and information on role of LPSC:*** Strengthening the proactive role of citizens in the functioning of the PSCs remains crucial. The lack of their involvement in the process of identifying the major security concerns creates a deep gap in the horizontal communication between institutions and citizens. LPSCs operate as a permanent mechanism of the local self-government units, in their function as key links that “attend to the safety and well-being of citizens” and are responsible for guaranteeing the quality of life and social well-being of citizens. Citizen involvement consolidates institutional practices and strengthens the resilience of communities to any negative phenomenon that threatens public safety. This participation, in turn, ensures ownership of the process and enhances accountability. The latter promotes the discourse on security at the local level, which will sequentially influence the change of social mindset on shared responsibility and cooperation between institutions and citizens. The public involvement and consultation on mapping public security risks, in accordance with the characteristics/dynamics and recognition of the problems that concern local communities, certainly strengthens this important local mechanism.

An active participation and involvement of citizens call for actions to inform and make them aware about the process and the importance of mapping the public security risks. Active participation in the LPSC, as described in the study findings, guarantees real-time and professionally exhaustive responses to any potential threats that arise within communities. It is in the interest of communities that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and supported by data, that public consultations are open, and that transparency is guaranteed. Only in this way, are LPSCs given the

“missing” voice to their communities and the democratic principles of active participation and inclusiveness guaranteed for every local actor, especially the citizens.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Functionalization of Local Public Safety Councils call for interventions in several aspects:**

- **The internal regulatory infrastructure:** The LPSC has value and functions well when its activity is regulated through internal documents, such as a standard regulation on the organization and functioning of LPSC, which can be adapted by municipalities according to their local context. The regulation will have to include templates and guidelines on LPSC operation. It should define the roles and responsibilities of each member of the LPSC, its protocols and standard operating procedures, the instruments for data collection and reporting, clear rules on ethics and confidentiality as well as inter-institutional communication.
- **The design of a unified methodology** that provides practical guidelines on operation of LPSC. This instrument should include the identification and assessment of local security risks. It is to be adopted by a public authority with powers in the LPSC scope of work. This methodology will need to be implemented by every municipality with the aim of developing a multi-stakeholder plan on the management of risks of public security at the local level.
- **Delivery of training** to LPSC members on assessing public security risks, planning and addressing security threats in response to dynamics and developments in local communities. The Municipal Council and the local administration need to enhance their technical and professional capacities to provide a real and professional contribution to the operation of the LPSC.
- **Increase of infrastructure and human capacities and financial support** for the operationalization of LPSC.
- **Awareness and institutional information** of all stakeholders and communities on the role of LPSC member institutions at the local level.
- **Coordination and cooperation of LPSCs with other structures and mechanisms** at the local level in addressing community concerns. The systematic and harmonized collection of data on security issues, case handling or inter-institutional coordination with other local mechanisms should be performed through a more pro-active coordination and a standardized practice.
- **Undertaking local/national awareness campaigns** for the proactive involvement of citizens in the public consultation of mapping of public security risks, in accordance with the characteristics/dynamics and recognition of the problems that concern local communities. Advocacy and awareness campaigns with narratives that target local communities as a whole, young people in upper secondary schools and universities, and vulnerable groups can contribute to changing attitudes and behaviors to these phenomena.





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