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Accountability and transparency in digital public services

What is working in the five municipalities, what still needs to be solved, and what we take into the next forum

Project	Promoting Digital Rights and Enhancing Digital Literacy across 5 Municipalities (DREDL)
Date	June 09, 2026.
Format	Online forum, moderated discussion among municipal representatives
Participants	Municipalities of Durrës, Vlorë, Shkodër, Korçë and Elbasan; civil society organisations; universities.

About this forum

The City Digital Forum brings the five DREDL municipalities together every quarter with civil society and academia; to look at how digital public services are working in practice and to share what each municipality has learned. Across twelve sessions the series covers algorithmic decision-making, e-governance accountability, citizen participation through inclusive digital platforms, digital privacy and data protection, and smart city ethics.

This first forum was devoted to accountability and transparency in digital public services. It was an open, working conversation among people who run these services every day. This report presents what the municipalities described in three parts: what is already working, what still stands in the way, and what the participants proposed to take forward.

A note on method. Contributions are presented by institution rather than by name and are summarized rather than quoted. Figures reported by a municipality about its own services are attributed to that municipality. Some points touched on the interpretation of the legal framework and are set out here as questions for clarification, not as conclusions.

In brief

All five municipalities operate a functioning system for receiving citizen requests, registering them and answering within the legal deadline. That was the starting point of the discussion, and it is worth stating plainly: the front line of digital service delivery in Durrës, Vlorë, Shkodër, Korçë and Elbasan works.

The difficulty the participants described lies one step further on. A large share of the requests submitted at a municipal digital counter do not fall within municipal competence — property registration and social insurance are the clearest examples. The municipality receives the request and forwards it to the responsible central institution, which alone can decide. The citizen, however, sees only the counter where the request was submitted, and returns to the municipality with dissatisfaction.

The municipality carries the citizen's dissatisfaction with a decision it does not take and cannot change. Making that boundary visible was, in the participants' view, the heart of the discussion.

Around that central point the forum identified a set of practical gaps — in communicating new online services, in the assistance available to citizens using the national portal, and in the level of participation in public consultations — together with several practices already in place that the other municipalities can adopt. The session closed with seven proposals and two questions to be clarified before the next forum.

1. What is already working

The forum was designed first to surface what functions well, so that it can be shared across the five municipalities.

Every request is registered and answered

Each of the five municipalities has an established system through which citizen requests — including those submitted digitally — are registered, reviewed and answered within the deadline set by law. Where a request concerns another institution, it is forwarded formally and in writing. The system exists and it functions; the questions raised later in this report concern what happens beyond the municipality's own competence, not the municipality's handling of the request.

Practices worth replicating

- **Elbasan — integrated service office.** Staff of the cadaster agency and social insurance are stationed alongside the municipal front desks, so that a citizen dealing with more than one institution is served in one place. The municipality reports that around 80% of citizens' issues are resolved at this first point of contact. Participants saw this as the strongest candidate for replication.
- **Shkodër — proactive publication.** Information is published on the official website before it is requested, and individual requests are answered by referring to the applicant to that publication. One act of publication serves every applicant and removes duplicated work.
- **Durrës — a dedicated officer for citizen complaints.** Each complaint is followed end to end by one responsible officer, with written referral to the competent institution where the matter lies outside municipal competence.
- **Shkodër — one-stop-shop offices in the administrative units,** so that citizens outside the municipal centre are served where they live.
- **Elbasan — cooperation with the law faculty.** Earlier experience of engaging law students on professional placements to help citizens navigate procedures, at no additional staffing cost.

2. What still stands in the way

The obstacles the participants described fall into three groups: the boundary of competence, everyday administrative practice, and the level of citizen engagement.

2.1 The boundary of competence is not visible to the citizen

This was the central issue of the discussion. For services such as property registration through the State Cadastre Agency, or social insurance, the municipality accepts the request and forwards it; the decision belongs to the central institution. Korçë and Elbasan described the consequence, and the other municipalities recognised it: the citizen attributes to the municipality an outcome it did not decide, and the municipality has no public document it can point to in explanation.

Participants agreed that a plain-language "competence map" what the municipality decides, what belongs to a central institution, and where to turn in each case — would be inexpensive to produce and would resolve a large part of the misunderstanding.

2.2 Trust in the outcome, not compliance with the deadline

Durrës, Vlorë and Elbasan each observed that a request can be answered correctly and on time and still leave the citizen feeling that nothing has been resolved. This is a matter of trust and of expectation rather than of procedure, and it is closely connected to the point above: when the answer is that the decision rests elsewhere, a correct answer is received as a refusal. Participants treated this as a shared challenge for both local and central institutions.

2.3 New online services are not announced

When a service is integrated into the national e-Albania portal, no information or awareness activity accompanies it at local level, and citizens learn of the change at the counter. Participants regarded this as an easily correctable omission: the moment of integration is known in advance, and an announcement could become a standing part of the process.

2.4 Structures and capacities differ between municipalities

Municipalities have developed their digital services at different speeds and with different resources. Elbasan, for example, has both a dedicated ICT structure and an integrated service office; elsewhere these functions are covered by smaller teams. This is a matter of resources and of the stage each municipality has reached rather than of commitment, and participants saw the forthcoming territorial and administrative reform as an opportunity to give the ICT function a more consistent place in the municipal structure.

2.5 Assistance in using the national portal is not yet uniform

Support for citizens using e-Albania is available in some municipalities and is still being developed in others; Korçë noted that it does not yet have a dedicated assistance desk. Where public assistance is not available, citizens sometimes turn to private providers who charge for the service. Participants considered a free assistance point in every municipality one of the most immediately achievable measures discussed.

2.6 Digital exclusion is not only a question of age

The assumption that difficulty with digital services concerns mainly older citizens was qualified from two directions: Korçë reported young people asking for help to use e-Albania, and Elbasan reported younger citizens continuing to submit requests in person where an online route exists. Participants read this as a reason to design digital literacy activities around need rather than around age alone.

2.7 Participation in public consultations remains low

Consultations are published as the law requires, and attendance is nonetheless low. Participants noted a degree of citizen skepticism about whether consultation changes outcomes. Their conclusion was not that citizens are disengaged, but that institutions should keep working on how consultations are designed and communicated — more accessible formats, clearer follow-up on what was considered — so that participation becomes worthwhile in the citizen's own experience.

A related observation was that both citizens and institutions still prefer direct, in-person contact. Participants saw this as a matter of habit on both sides, to be addressed by making the digital channel demonstrably easier rather than by withdrawing the counter.

3. What we take forward

Proposals from the forum

- 1 **Publish a plain-language competence map** in each municipality — what the municipality decides, what belongs to central institutions, and where to turn — on the website and at the service counters.
- 2 **Make public information a standing step** whenever a new service is integrated into e-Albania.
- 3 **Replicate the Elbasan integrated service office model** in the other four municipalities, adapted to local structures.
- 4 **Establish a free assistance point for e-Albania in every municipality**, so that no citizen needs to pay for help in reaching a public service.
- 5 **Strengthen the follow-up on digital service requests** — including a clear, published path for a citizen who is dissatisfied with the handling of a request submitted through a digital channel.
- 6 **Give the ICT function a consistent place in the municipal structure** within the forthcoming territorial and administrative reform.
- 7 **Develop cooperation with law faculties** through professional placements, to support citizens at the point of service.

Questions to clarify before the next forum

- **What the legal framework already provides** in respect of complaints and redress for services delivered through digital channels, and whether a dedicated local act is required or a clearer application of the existing framework is sufficient. This will be examined with legal expertise and reported back to the group.
- **How responsibility is shared with central institutions** where a request submitted at a municipal counter is decided elsewhere — and what each side can do to make that visible to the citizen.

Next forum

Trust in digital public services, and citizen participation through inclusive digital platforms, emerged from this discussion as the natural theme for the second City Digital Forum. The findings above will be shared with the five participating municipalities and will inform you about the digital literacy activities carried out under the project.

About the project

Promoting Digital Rights and Enhancing Digital Literacy across 5 Municipalities (DREDL) is implemented in Vlorë, Korçë, Durrës, Shkodër and Elbasan with the support of SWiS. Through twelve quarterly online city digital forums, the project brings municipalities, civil society and academia together around algorithmic decision-making, e-governance accountability, citizen participation, digital privacy and smart city ethics — and turns what is learned into practical improvements in local digital services.