



Integrity, Accountability and Trust in the Kosovo Police in Northern Kosovo

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Kosovo Police in Northern Kosovo**

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KEY FINDINGS

1. The collective departure of 578 Serbian police officers in 2022 seriously disrupted the previously established model of the police structure in northern Kosovo.
2. Subsequent recruitment increased the representation of non-majority communities. In 2025, the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate had 155 Serbian police officers and 120 members of other non-majority communities.
3. Police structures operating in northern Kosovo form part of the unified Kosovo Police system, while the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate, Border Police and centrally deployed units have different functions and competences.
4. Respondents expressed limited trust in the professional and impartial conduct of the police. A negative response is given by 54.4% of respondents, while 17.6% respond positively.
5. Among the 57 survey respondents, 64.9% believe that the police generally do not treat all citizens equally.
6. Respondents more often associate police integrity with political influence, professionalism and selective application of the law than with corruption in the narrow sense.
7. Knowledge of the complaints system is limited. Only 29.8% of respondents know where they can submit a complaint, while 70.1% either do not know or are unsure.
8. The Kosovo Police has internal disciplinary mechanisms, while Police Inspectorate of Kosovo (PIK) provides external oversight and publishes complaint data, including breakdown by ethnicity and sometimes by region. However, data on complaint outcomes are not presented by region.
9. The availability of certain information and documents in the Serbian language remains uneven, particularly in terms of completeness, timeliness and the quality of the content provided.
10. Different forms of police-community communication and civic monitoring of police work exist in northern Kosovo, but their effectiveness depends on continuity and follow-up to institutional responses.

1. INTRODUCTION

The police are among the institutions whose actions most directly affect citizens, as their role includes maintaining public order, preventing crime and enforcing the law. This is particularly important in politically and ethnically sensitive environments, where communities may have different relationships with institutions. The way police officers exercise their powers, treat individuals, communicate with the community and respond to allegations of misconduct therefore has a significant impact on citizens' sense of security and trust in the police.

Citizens' trust in the police has particular practical importance in such an environment. It affects their willingness to report criminal offences and other incidents, provide information, turn to the police when they need assistance and use existing complaint mechanisms. Trust, moreover, is not based solely on the police's ability to maintain public order and respond to security challenges. It is also shaped by the professionalism and impartiality of police conduct, equal treatment of citizens, representation of communities within the police structure, transparency of police work, accessibility of accountability mechanisms and the possibility of communicating with the police in the official languages.

In northern Kosovo, these issues carry additional weight because of the major changes the police structure has undergone over the past decade. The relationship between the police and the local community developed alongside the process of institutional integration in the north, changes in the composition of the police and periods of pronounced political and security tensions. For this reason, citizens' present-day relationship with the Kosovo Police cannot be considered separately from the development and functioning of the institutional model established since 2013.

The Brussels Agreement of April 2013 represented a key point in this process. The Agreement envisaged a single Kosovo Police and the integration of police personnel who had previously operated within Serbian structures in northern Kosovo.¹ A separate Regional Directorate was envisaged for North Mitrovica, Zvečan, Zubin Potok and Leposavić, with a regional commander from the Serbian community appointed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs from a list of candidates proposed by the mayors of the four municipalities. The Agreement also provided that the composition of the police in the north should reflect the ethnic composition of the population, in line with the legal principle that, to the extent possible, the ethnic composition of police officers assigned within a municipality should reflect the composition of the local population.²

The establishment of this model represented an important institutional change, but its functioning also faced a number of challenges. In reports covering the period from 2016 to 2018, EULEX pointed to insufficiently systematic coordination between the regional and central levels,

¹ Government of the Republic of Kosovo, *First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations*, <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/First-agreement-of-principles-governing-the-normalization-of-relations-April-19-2013-Brussels-en.pdf>.

² Skupština Republike Kosovo, *Zakon br. 04/L-076 o policiji*, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=106020>.

political influence, predominantly reactive policing, underdeveloped community policing and weaknesses in the investigations of serious crime.^{3 4 5}

The European Commission pointed to similar problems in its reports covering the period from 2019 to 2022. Organised crime in northern Kosovo was consistently identified as a particular challenge for law-enforcement bodies. At the same time, in assessments concerning the Kosovo Police as a whole, the Commission pointed to the need to strengthen operational independence and integrity, professionalise criminal investigations and apply intelligence-led policing and community policing more consistently.^{6 7 8 9} Findings concerning organised crime relate directly to northern Kosovo, while the other assessments cited describe broader institutional weaknesses of the Kosovo Police and provide the context in which the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate also operated.

During 2021 and 2022, political and security tensions in northern Kosovo gradually increased in connection with certain decisions of the Government of Kosovo, particularly those concerning licence plates and documents, which were opposed by political representatives of Serbs in northern Kosovo. Disagreements over their implementation developed into a series of security crises accompanied by protests, roadblocks and an increased police presence.^{10 11}

Political tensions in early November 2022 led representatives of the Serbian community in the four municipalities of northern Kosovo to collectively leave Kosovo institutions. At that time, 578 Serbian police officers from northern Kosovo left the Kosovo Police, seriously disrupting the previously established balance between the ethnic composition of the police and the local population and making the regional command model more difficult to operate in practice. The European Commission assessed that their departure created a security vacuum.¹²

The period that followed marked a further escalation of the security situation in the north, characterised by protests and roadblocks, an increased police presence and various violent

³ European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), *Compact Progress Report 2016*, <https://www.eulex-kosovo.eu/eul/repository/docs/English-Report-2016.pdf>.

⁴ European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), *Compact Progress Report 2017*, <https://www.eulex-kosovo.eu/eul/repository/docs/CPR-2017.pdf>.

⁵ European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), *Compact Progress Report 2018*, <https://www.eulex-kosovo.eu/eul/repository/docs/106075-CPR-2018-En.PDF>.

⁶ European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2019*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019SC0216>.

⁷ European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2020*, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/kosovo_report_2020.pdf.

⁸ European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2021*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021SC0292>.

⁹ European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2022*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52022SC0334>.

¹⁰ European External Action Service, *Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Chief Negotiators Reach Arrangement to Resolve Tension in North of Kosovo*, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-chief-negotiators-reach-arrangement-resolve-tension-north-kosovo_en.

¹¹ European External Action Service, *Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Statement by the Spokesperson on the Latest Decision Related to License Plates*, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-statement-spokesperson-latest-decision-related-license-plates_en.

¹² European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2023*, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_692%20Kosovo%20report_0.pdf.

incidents. The escalation culminated in an armed attack by a group of armed Serbs on the Kosovo Police in Banjska on 24 September 2023, in which one police officer was killed.¹³

Initially, vacant positions were filled through the temporary deployment of police officers from other parts of Kosovo, after which new recruitment cycles for members of non-majority communities were launched. At the same time, the presence of police officers and units deployed from other parts of Kosovo increased, and police infrastructure in the north was expanded. The new recruitment cycles marked the beginning of a gradual restoration of the representation of members of the Serbian and other non-majority communities within the police structure. In its 2024 report, the European Commission noted that, following the departure of Serbian police officers, 150 members of non-majority communities, including 75 Serbs, had been recruited into the Kosovo Police, while continuing to stress the need for the composition of the police to reflect the ethnic composition of the municipalities.¹⁴

Following the disruption of the previous model in 2022, the relationship between the police and the local community thus entered a new phase in which, in addition to the composition of the police and the way its presence is organised, the functioning of accountability mechanisms, their accessibility to citizens and the quality of police communication with the community have become increasingly important.

This analysis examines the relationship between the Kosovo Police and the local community in northern Kosovo in the current institutional and security context. Particular attention is paid to the changes that followed the institutional disruption of 2022 and to the process of reintegrating members of non-majority communities into the police structure. The analysis considers citizens' perceptions of police professionalism, impartiality and equal treatment; community representation; internal and external accountability mechanisms; the handling of complaints; the availability of information and official languages; and existing forms of police communication with the local community. The earlier development of the police structure is considered to the extent necessary to understand the current institutional framework and the changes that led to the present situation.

The analysis first presents the methodological approach and the legal and institutional framework, including the development of the police structure in the north before and after 2022. It then presents the results of the citizen survey, followed by an analysis of police accountability mechanisms, the handling of complaints, the practical accessibility of those mechanisms and existing forms of communication and civic oversight. Conclusions and recommendations are drawn on the basis of these findings.

¹³ European External Action Service, *Kosovo: Statement by the High Representative Josep Borrell on the Attack against Kosovo Police*, 24 September 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/kosovo-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-attack-against-kosovo-police_en.

¹⁴ European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2024*, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c790738e-4cf6-4a43-a8a9-43c1b6f01e10_en?filename=Kosovo+Report+2024.pdf.

2. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The analysis combines a survey of citizens in the four municipalities of northern Kosovo with an analysis of publicly available legal, institutional and other relevant documents. The survey provides insight into citizens' direct experiences and perceptions, while the legal and institutional framework, the development of the police structure and the functioning of accountability mechanisms are examined on the basis of regulations, official data, institutional reports and independent assessments.

The document analysis covered relevant laws and secondary legislation, the 2013 Brussels Agreement and documents related to police integration, as well as annual reports and other publicly available documents of the Kosovo Police and the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, documents of the Ombudsperson Institution and the Office of the Language Commissioner, and reports by the European Commission, EULEX, UNMIK and civil society organisations. Sources were selected on the basis of their direct relevance to the issues examined in the analysis, the reliability of the source and the possibility of independently verifying the data and findings cited.

The methodological approach is based on publicly available and verifiable sources, so that the key findings and conclusions can be independently checked. The analysis focuses on institutional rules, patterns and the functioning of the system at the public-policy level, rather than independently establishing facts in individual disputed cases. Individual events are used where they help illustrate how a particular accountability mechanism functions in practice and where sufficient publicly available information exists. This makes it possible to distinguish between publicly stated allegations, institutional responses, procedural measures taken by oversight bodies and finally established responsibility.

The survey was conducted through a questionnaire completed independently by respondents via a digital platform. The questionnaire was available in Serbian and Albanian. A total of 57 respondents from the four municipalities in northern Kosovo took part in the survey: 28 from North Mitrovica, 13 from Zvečan, 9 from Leposavić and 7 from Zubin Potok. The questionnaire was completed in Serbian by 48 respondents and in Albanian by 9. In terms of ethnicity, the sample included 43 members of the Serbian community and 9 members of the Albanian community, 2 members of the Bosniak and 2 members of Gorani communities, while 1 respondent did not state their ethnicity.

The questionnaire covered direct contact with the police, professionalism and impartiality of police conduct, equal treatment of citizens, handling of reports, experiences of misconduct, knowledge of complaint mechanisms, perceptions of corruption and areas in which respondents identify increased risk. In addition to closed-ended questions, the questionnaire included open-ended questions through which respondents could describe their own experiences with the police in greater detail, identify problems they considered important for the transparency and integrity of police work, and propose measures that, in their view, could contribute to greater public trust.

Because of the size and structure of the sample, the survey findings are indicative and cannot be statistically generalised to the entire population of northern Kosovo. Their value lies in identifying patterns in respondents' direct experiences and perceptions and in pointing to areas where there is a gap between formally established institutional mechanisms and the way those mechanisms

are known, accessible or perceived by citizens. Respondents' accounts of specific events represent their experiences and perceptions, while assessments of the institutional framework and the functioning of accountability mechanisms are based on documented and publicly verifiable data.

3. LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The relationship between the Kosovo Police and the local community in northern Kosovo is shaped both by the rules governing police organisation and accountability and by the changes the police structure in the north has undergone since the beginning of the integration process. Understanding the current situation therefore requires distinguishing the normative framework, which defines the position of regional and central police structures, community representation and accountability mechanisms, from the way those rules have been applied in a changing political and security context.

The first part of this chapter presents the legal framework for police work and the institutions involved in internal and external oversight of the police. The second part traces the development of the police structure in northern Kosovo from integration following the Brussels Agreement, through the problems that accompanied the functioning of that model, to the collective departure of Serbian police officers from their positions in November 2022 and the subsequent gradual filling of the resulting personnel gap. This overview makes it possible to consider the current police-community relationship within a longer process of institutional development, rather than only through individual events or current public perceptions.

3.1. Legal Framework and Accountability Mechanisms

The Law on Police sets out the basic principles of police work. Article 2(1) provides for equal and fair treatment of all persons, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, political impartiality and neutrality, integrity, honesty and accountability in public service, as well as transparency towards citizens and the public.¹⁵ The principle of community representation is particularly relevant to the relationship between the police and the local community. Article 35(4) of the Law on Police provides that, to the extent possible, the ethnic composition of the police within a municipality should reflect the ethnic composition of the population of that municipality. In northern Kosovo, this principle acquired additional institutional significance following the 2013 Brussels Agreement.¹⁶ Point 7 of the Agreement provided for the integration of the police in the north into a single Kosovo Police, while Point 9 established a specific regional command arrangement for the four Serb-majority municipalities and the principle that the composition of the police in the north should reflect the ethnic composition of their population. Local representation is therefore one of the elements of the institutional model on which police integration in the north was based.

¹⁵ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, *Law No. 04/L-076 on Police*, op. cit.

¹⁶ Government of the Republic of Kosovo, *First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations*, op. cit.

The Law on Police also regulates the operation of central and special police forces within the areas of local police stations. Under Article 35(5), before such actions are undertaken, the commander of the local police station should be informed by the Director General, the regional director or another police officer carrying out the action, unless operational circumstances require otherwise. This is an obligation to provide notification, not a requirement to obtain the prior consent of the local station commander.

In addition to police organisation and competences, the legal framework establishes several mechanisms of accountability for police conduct. The Police Inspectorate of Kosovo represents a separate mechanism of external oversight of the police. Under Article 2(1) of the Law on the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, its mandate includes the prevention, detection, documentation and investigation of criminal offences committed by Kosovo Police employees; inspection of police structures and functions; investigation of certain high-profile disciplinary incidents and disciplinary violations by senior managers; as well as the receipt of all complaints from citizens and the determination of which complaints will be investigated by PIK and which will be referred to the Kosovo Police or another competent institution.¹⁷ Article 17 regulates PIK's investigative competence in greater detail, while Article 18(4) provides that, where there is reasonable suspicion that a police employee has committed a criminal offence, PIK submits a criminal report to the competent prosecutor together with the evidence collected.

PIK also has a separate inspection function. Article 23 of the Law provides that PIK conducts inspections of the Kosovo Police, while Article 24 provides that it may initiate an inspection on its own initiative or on the instruction of the Minister. Under Article 25, areas of inspection include, among other things, human resources management, procedures during detention and arrest, criminal investigations, complaints management and disciplinary proceedings, border control and community policing.

Internal disciplinary accountability constitutes a separate part of the system. Article 43(1) of the Law on Police provides that disciplinary violations by Kosovo Police employees, except for cases placed within PIK's competence by the Law on the Police Inspectorate, are investigated and decided upon by the Kosovo Police. Paragraph 2 of the same Article provides that disciplinary violations, measures and procedures are to be regulated in greater detail by secondary legislation. These matters are currently regulated by Administrative Instruction No. 04/2019 on Violations, Measures and Disciplinary Procedures in the Kosovo Police and its 2023 amendments.^{18 19} Internal discipline and PIK oversight therefore constitute connected but institutionally separate mechanisms, whose competences depend on the nature of the specific case.

¹⁷ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, *Law No. 03/L-231 on the Kosovo Police Inspectorate*, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=2720>.

¹⁸ Kosovo Police, *Administrative Instruction No. 04/2019 on Violations, Measures and Disciplinary Procedures in the Kosovo Police*, <https://www.kosovopolice.com/sr/dokumenti/unutrasnji-policijski-akti-pravilnici-administrativna-uputstva/>.

¹⁹ Kosovo Police, *Administrative Instruction No. 03/2023 Amending and Supplementing Administrative Instruction No. 04/2019*, <https://www.kosovopolice.com/sr/dokumenti/unutrasnji-policijski-akti-pravilnici-administrativna-uputstva/>.

Police conduct may also be subject to oversight by other independent institutions. Under Article 16(1) of the Law on the Ombudsperson, the Ombudsperson investigates complaints by natural and legal persons concerning possible human-rights violations, including actions or omissions by public authorities.²⁰ Article 16(4) also allows the Ombudsperson to initiate an investigation *ex officio*. In addition, as the National Preventive Mechanism against Torture, the Ombudsperson may, under Article 17(2), point 2.1, visit places where persons deprived of liberty are held, including police detention facilities. These powers make the Ombudsperson a relevant oversight mechanism also in cases of police conduct that may have implications for human rights.

The equal use of the official languages is also important for the relationship between the police and the community in northern Kosovo. Article 2(1) and (2) of the Law on the Use of Languages establishes Albanian and Serbian as official languages of equal status in Kosovo institutions and provides that all persons have equal rights in their use.²¹ Article 4(2) additionally guarantees citizens the right to communicate with central institutions and receive their services and public documents in either official language.

The implementation of language rights is monitored by the Office of the Language Commissioner. Under Article 16 of Regulation No. 07/2012, the Office monitors implementation of the Law on the Use of Languages throughout Kosovo, while Article 17(1), points 1.1 and 1.4, provides that it monitors compliance with the Law and conducts investigations on its own initiative or upon complaints by natural and legal persons.²² In police work, these rights relate, among other things, to citizens' ability to obtain information, understand police notices and use reporting and complaint mechanisms in the official language they use.

Finally, when analysing the police presence in the north, it is necessary to distinguish the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate from the Border Police. Article 32(4) of the Law on Police provides for separate border police stations under the authority of the regional Border Police directorates. According to the official organisational structure of the Kosovo Police, the Border Police Department is organised at the central and local levels, while the Border Police Regional Directorate "North" controls, among other things, the Jarinje and Brnjak crossing points and border-surveillance stations in Leposavić and Zubin Potok.²³ Consequently, conduct at border crossing points or during border-control operations cannot automatically be attributed to the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate.

3.2. Development of the Police Structure in Northern Kosovo

The institutional development of the Kosovo Police began in 1999, when the OSCE Mission in Kosovo opened the Police School and started training the first generation of police officers.²⁴ For northern Kosovo, a key institutional change came with the 2013 Brussels Agreement, which

²⁰ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, *Law No. 05/L-019 on the Ombudsperson*, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=10922>.

²¹ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, *Law No. 02/L-37 on the Use of Languages*, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=2440>.

²² Government of Kosovo, Regulation No. 07/2012 on the Office of the Language Commissioner, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=8364>.

²³ Kosovo Police, *Department of Border*, <https://www.kosovopolice.com/en/departments/departments-of-border/>.

²⁴ Kosovo Police, *Istorijska*, <https://www.kosovopolice.com/sr/o-nama/istorija/>.

provided for a single police service in Kosovo, the integration into the Kosovo Police of police personnel who had previously operated within Serbian structures in the north, and a specific regional command arrangement for the four northern municipalities.²⁵ As part of the implementation of the Agreement, the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate was established, covering police stations in North Mitrovica, Zvečan, Zubin Potok and Leposavić. Former members of Serbia's Ministry of Internal Affairs were also integrated into it, and the Regional Directorate became operational in March 2014.²⁶

The first years of the integrated model showed both progress and limitations. In reports covering the period from 2016 to 2018, EULEX recorded progress in the integration and communication of police structures in the north, but also a number of limitations in their practical functioning.^{27 28}

²⁹It pointed to insufficiently systematic coordination between the regional and central levels, political influence and mutual distrust, predominantly reactive policing, underdeveloped community policing and weaknesses in the management of police resources. At the same time, EULEX also recorded progress in certain areas, showing that institutional integration was a process that produced some results but did not eliminate all problems in the functioning of the police in the north.

Certain problems continued in the following years. In its 2019 and 2020 reports, the European Commission identified organised crime in northern Kosovo as a particular challenge for law-enforcement bodies.^{30 31} At the level of the Kosovo Police, it stressed the need for more consistent implementation of intelligence-led policing and community policing, as well as the need to protect operational work from political influence. These assessments did not constitute a separate evaluation of the work of the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate in all of these areas, but they show the broader institutional context in which it operated.

By 2021, the Kosovo Police had adopted a new Strategic Development Plan, an integrated strategy covering intelligence-led policing and community policing, as well as measures aimed at strengthening integrity. The European Commission, however, continued to point to weaknesses in the practical implementation of these approaches and to the need for a greater presence of police officers in the community, more proactive work and trust-building. Organised crime in the north continued to be identified as a particular challenge.³²

A similar picture was present immediately before the institutional rupture of 2022. In its report published in October of that year, the European Commission assessed that the Kosovo Police had adequate basic capacities to combat organised crime, while also warning that organised-crime investigations remained vulnerable to corruption and unlawful influence. The Commission also pointed to the need to strengthen operational independence, implement integrity measures and

²⁵ European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), *Compact Progress Report 2017*, op. cit.

²⁶ European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), *Compact Progress Report 2016*, op. cit.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), *Compact Progress Report 2017*, op. cit.

²⁹ European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), *Compact Progress Report 2018*, op. cit.

³⁰ European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2019*, op. cit.

³¹ European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2020*, op. cit.

³² European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2021*, op. cit.

professionalise criminal investigations, while the practical implementation of intelligence-led policing and community policing continued to be assessed as insufficient.³³

At the same time, from 2021 onward, policing in the north took place in an increasingly tense political and security environment. Decisions of the Government of Kosovo concerning licence plates and documents, which were opposed by political representatives of Serbs in the north, led to several crises accompanied by roadblocks and an increased police presence. In September 2021, the dispute over license plates led to the deployment of special police units at Jarinje and Brnjak and to roadblocks, and, with European Union mediation, their simultaneous withdrawal and the removal of the roadblocks were agreed.³⁴ During 2022, disputes over documents and licence plates continued, while at the end of October the EU called for a longer transition period in implementing the licence-plate decision and for restraint from actions that could further destabilise the situation.³⁵

Tensions culminated in early November 2022 with the collective withdrawal of representatives of the Serbian community from Kosovo institutions in the four northern municipalities. At that time, 578 Serbian police officers in northern Kosovo left the Kosovo Police. The European Commission assessed that their departure created a security vacuum and more favourable conditions for organised crime.³⁶ This event had more immediate consequences for the police structure than the earlier problems in the functioning of the integrated model, because a large part of the local police personnel on which the model had relied disappeared within a short period.

The collective departure of police officers did not formally abolish the legal and institutional model of the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate, but it seriously disrupted its practical functioning. The representation of members of the local Serbian community declined sharply. Initially, vacant positions were filled through the temporary deployment of police officers from other parts of Kosovo, which further changed the previous composition of the police in the north and the functioning of the regional structure. This created a gap between the formally existing model, which continued to rest on regional organisation and the principle of local representation, and its practical functioning after November 2022.

In the period that followed, the Kosovo Police launched several recruitment cycles for members of non-majority communities in order to fill part of the resulting personnel gap. In its 2024 report, the European Commission noted that, following the departure of Serbian police officers, 150 new members of non-majority communities, including 75 Serbs, had been recruited. The Commission also stressed the need for the ethnic composition of the police to reflect the ethnic composition of the municipalities' population.³⁷ These data indicate a gradual restoration of the representation of non-majority communities within the police structure.

Further progress in filling the police structure was also recorded in the European Commission's 2025 report. The Mitrovica North Regional Directorate had 155 police officers from the Serbian

³³ European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2022*, op. cit.

³⁴ European External Action Service, *Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Statement by the Spokesperson on the Latest Decision Related to License Plates*, op. cit.

³⁵ European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2023*, op. cit.

³⁶ European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2024*, op. cit.

³⁷ Ibid.

community, who made up 33.5% of the Directorate, and 120 members of other non-majority communities, or 25.9%.³⁸ The Commission assessed that efforts to recruit Serbian and other non-majority cadets had produced tangible results. At the same time, the same report states that policing in the north continued to be a source of tension in relations with parts of the local Serbian community and records concerns raised by citizens and civil society regarding certain cases of police conduct. Staffing and community trust are therefore related but distinct issues.

Changes in personnel composition were accompanied by changes in the scale and manner of the police presence. After 2022, the presence of police officers and units deployed from other parts of Kosovo increased, while police infrastructure in the north was also expanded. This process took place in a serious security environment that included the armed attack on the Kosovo Police in Banjska in September 2023.³⁹ At the same time, the construction of certain police facilities was linked to disputes over land expropriation. In 2023, the EU Office in Kosovo expressed concern over the establishment of four police bases on private and socially owned land, in some cases before expropriation proceedings had been initiated.⁴⁰ Changes in the police presence in the north therefore took place alongside security challenges and disputes concerning the manner in which new police infrastructure was established.

Within the Kosovo Police, several organisational components operate in northern Kosovo. The Mitrovica North Regional Directorate performs general policing duties in the four northern municipalities, while the Border Police is organised separately within the Department of Border, and central and specialised units may operate in the north within their respective competences. This distinction is relevant because conduct at border crossing points or during centrally managed operations should not automatically be attributed to the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate.

Taken as a whole, the development of Kosovo Police structures in northern Kosovo has passed through different phases of institutional integration, disruption and the restoration of particular capacities.

The integration process after 2013 brought police personnel who had previously operated within Serbian structures into the Kosovo Police and established a specific regional command arrangement with significant representation of the local Serbian community. Nevertheless, during the period in which it functioned, problems were documented in coordination, political influence, proactive policing, cooperation with the community and certain operational capacities. The collective departure of Serbian police officers in 2022 represented a much deeper institutional rupture, as it directly changed the personnel composition and the way the police presence in the north was organised. Subsequent recruitment cycles reduced part of the resulting personnel gap,

³⁸ European Commission, Kosovo Report 2025, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/127563ea-4c03-44a4-b56c-2d569afd86a5_en?filename=kosovo-report-2025.pdf.

³⁹ European External Action Service, *Kosovo: Statement by the High Representative Josep Borrell on the Attack against Kosovo Police*, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Office of the European Union in Kosovo, *Statement on the Government's Decision on the Expropriation of Land for Public Interest in the Municipalities of Leposavić/Leposaviq and Zubin Potok*, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/statement-governments-decision-expropriation-land-public-interest-municipalities-leposavi%C4%87leposaviq_en.

but restoring community representation in numerical terms does not in itself mean that trust has been restored. The relationship between the formal institutional framework, its practical functioning and the way citizens perceive it therefore provides the basis for the analysis that follows.

4. RESULTS OF THE CITIZEN SURVEY

As part of the research, a survey was conducted among citizens of the four municipalities in northern Kosovo to examine their experiences and views regarding the work of the Kosovo Police. The questionnaire covered direct contact with police officers, the professionalism and impartiality of their conduct, perceptions of equal treatment of citizens, experiences of misconduct, knowledge of complaint mechanisms, as well as perceptions of corruption and areas of heightened corruption risk.

4.1. CONTACT WITH THE POLICE AND PROFESSIONALISM OF CONDUCT

Of the 57 respondents, 45, or 78.9%, reported having had direct contact with the Kosovo Police during the previous 12 months. The most common reasons were being stopped during a routine check and crossing administrative crossing points, while traffic offences, filing a report and contact as a victim or suspect were mentioned less frequently.

Among respondents who had direct contact with the police, 45.5% assess the professionalism of the officers they encountered negatively, including 25% who rate it as very poor and 20.5% as poor. A neutral or average assessment is given by 36.4%, while 18.2% assess professionalism positively. Negative assessments are therefore considerably more frequent than positive ones.

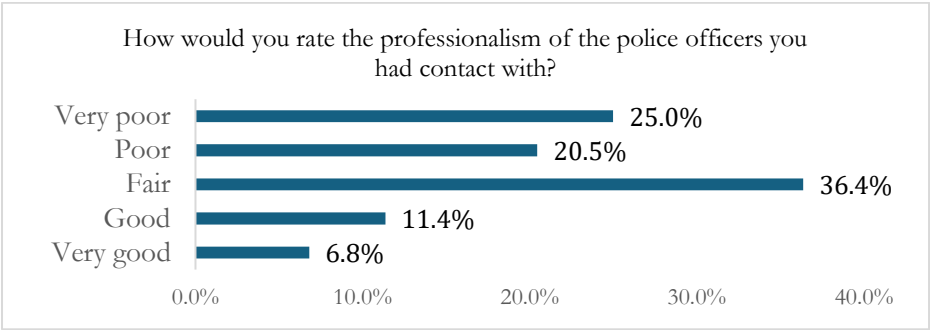


Chart 1. Assessment of the Professionalism of Police Officers

4.2. TRUST IN PROFESSIONAL AND IMPARTIAL CONDUCT

In response to the statement “I trust that the Kosovo Police will act professionally and impartially”, 54.4% of respondents give a negative response: 28.1% strongly disagree and 26.3% tend to disagree.

A further 28.1% neither agree nor disagree, while 12.3% fully agree and 5.3% tend to agree with the statement, meaning that a total of 17.6% give a positive response.

Negative responses are considerably more frequent than positive ones, indicating limited trust among respondents in the professional and impartial conduct of the Kosovo Police.

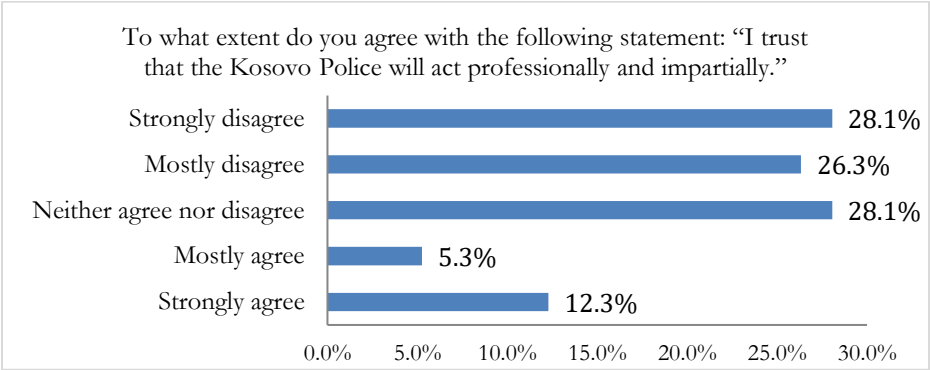


Chart 2. Trust in the Professional and Impartial Conduct of the Kosovo Police

4.3. EQUAL TREATMENT AND RESPONSIVENESS TO CITIZENS’ REPORTS

A similar pattern appears in responses concerning equal treatment of citizens by the Kosovo Police. Almost two thirds of respondents, 64.9%, believe that the Kosovo Police generally do not, or do not at all, treat all citizens equally regardless of their national, political or other affiliation. In particular, 49.1% of respondents say that the police “do not at all” treat all citizens equally.

Partially equal treatment is recognised by 14% of respondents. A total of 14.1% gives a positive response, while 7% state that they do not know.

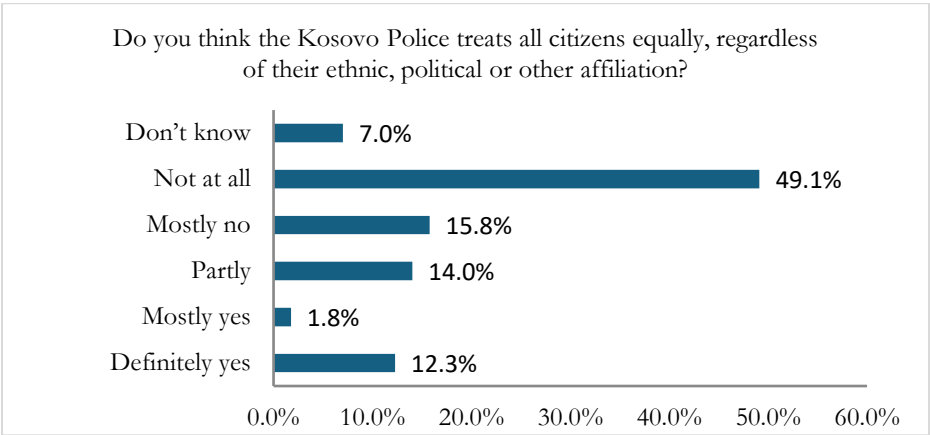


Chart 3. Perception of Equal Treatment by the Kosovo Police

Negative assessments are also present regarding the handling of citizens’ reports. A total of 36.9% of respondents believe that the police handle reports mostly or very irresponsibly, while

29.8% give a middle-range assessment. A positive assessment is given by 15.8% of respondents, while 17.5% say they do not know how they would assess the police's handling of reports.

The findings on equal treatment and the handling of reports indicate that limited trust among respondents relates both to the manner in which police powers are exercised and to the police's response to citizens' reports.

4.4. KEY PROBLEMS IN THE WORK OF THE KOSOVO POLICE

Respondents could select multiple answers when asked about the biggest problems in the work of the Kosovo Police. Political influence on police work was selected most frequently, by 50.9% of respondents. This was followed by unprofessional conduct of individual police officers at 45.6%, selective application of the law and insufficient representation of community members in the Kosovo Police at 42.1% each, and insufficient communication with citizens at 33.3%. Corruption was identified as one of the biggest problems by 19.3% of respondents, and insufficient transparency by 14%.

The distribution of responses shows that respondents more often associate police integrity with political influence, professionalism, selective application of the law, community representation and communication than with corruption in the narrow sense.

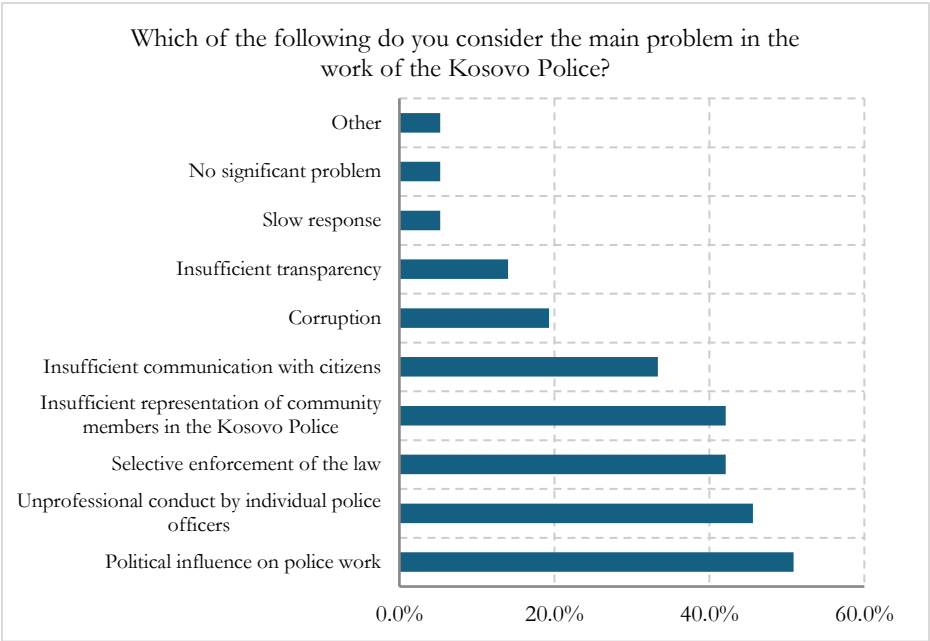


Chart 4. Biggest Problems in the Work of the Kosovo Police

The availability of information about the work of the Kosovo Police is also linked to issues of communication. Only 19.3% of respondents consider information to be fully or mostly available,

while 40.4% assess it as mostly or completely unavailable. A further 21.1% consider it partially available, while 19.3% do not know how they would assess its availability.

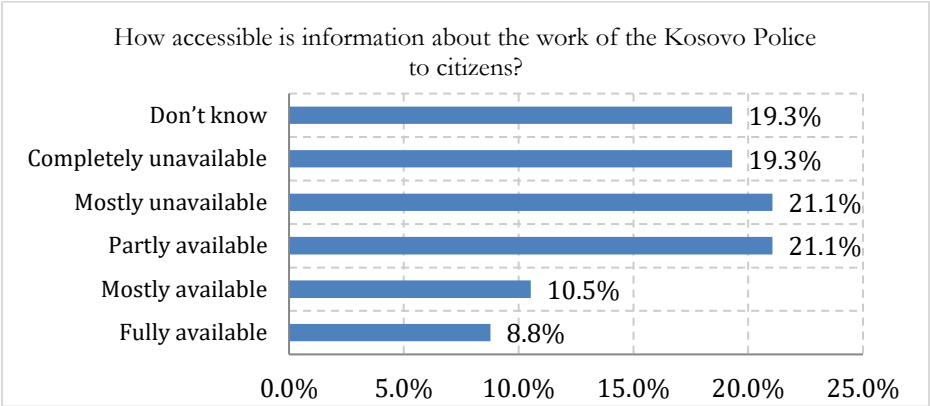


Chart 5. Availability of Information on the Work of the Kosovo Police

4.5. EXPERIENCES OF MISCONDUCT AND COMPLAINT MECHANISMS

When asked whether they had personally experienced misconduct in the work of the Kosovo Police during the previous 12 months, 40.4% of respondents answered yes, 31.6% answered no, while 22.8% said they were unsure.

The concept of misconduct in this question is broader than corruption and may include different forms of conduct that respondents consider unprofessional, inappropriate, selective or unlawful. This result should therefore be viewed as an indicator of respondents' experiences, rather than as data on institutionally established violations of rules.



Chart 6. Personal Experience of Misconduct in the Work of the Kosovo Police

At the same time, knowledge of complaint mechanisms is relatively limited. A total of 29.8% of respondents state that they know where they can submit a complaint if they believe that a police

officer acted unprofessionally or unlawfully. Another 33.3% say they do not know, while 36.8% are unsure. A further 5.2% declined to answer.

This means that a total of 70.1% of respondents either do not know or are unsure whom they can approach regarding alleged unprofessional or unlawful police conduct. This finding is particularly relevant to the subsequent analysis of the accessibility and visibility of the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo and other accountability mechanisms.

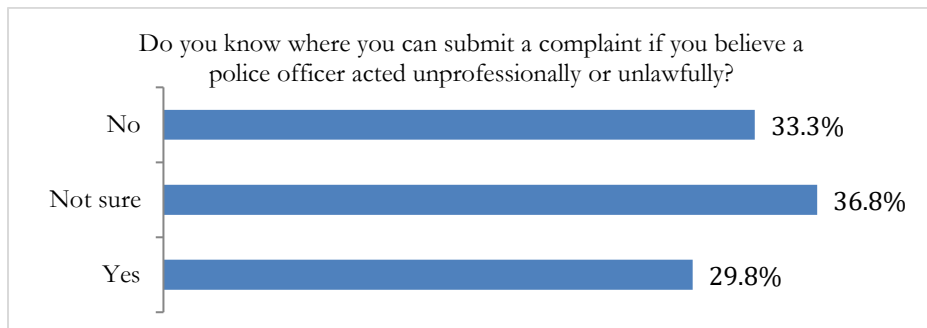


Chart 7. Knowledge of Complaint Mechanisms

4.6. PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION AND AREAS OF INCREASED RISK

Unlike the relatively clear views expressed on impartiality, equal treatment and other aspects of police work, respondents are considerably less certain when it comes to the prevalence of corruption.

The largest group of respondents, 43.9%, say they do not know how prevalent corruption is within the Kosovo Police. A total of 29.8% consider it very or mostly prevalent, while 17.5% assess it as partially prevalent. A further 8.8% believe that corruption is mostly not or not at all prevalent.

These findings show that pronounced distrust in certain aspects of police work is not accompanied by an equally clear perception of the prevalence of corruption. Respondents have more definite views about political influence, selective application of the law and professionalism than about the presence of corrupt practices as such.

When respondents could select multiple areas in which they saw the greatest risk of corruption, border control was mentioned most frequently, by 43.9%, followed by traffic policing at 40.4%. Criminal investigations and internal control and disciplinary proceedings were each cited by 24.6% of respondents, while 22.8% did not know in which area the risk was greatest.

Recruitment and promotion within the police were mentioned by 14% of respondents, while public procurement and the handling of citizens' reports were each mentioned by 10.5%.

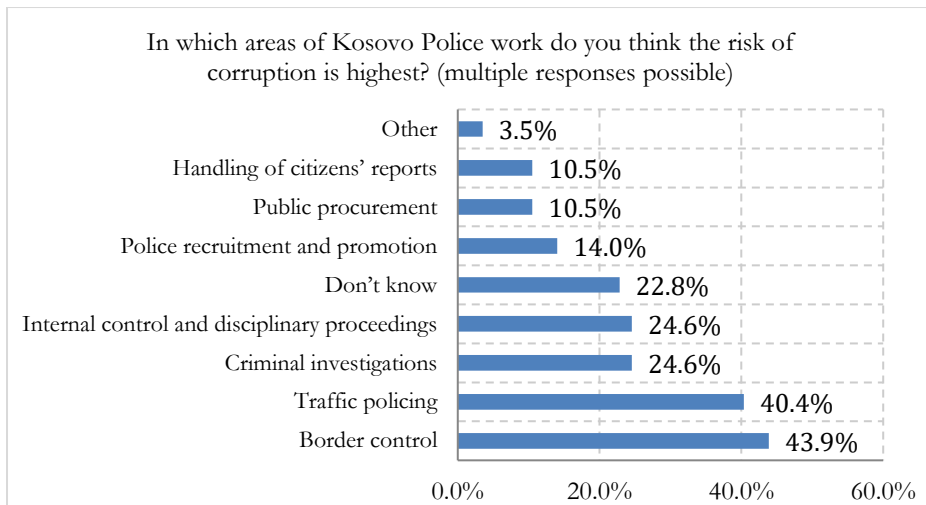


Chart 8. Areas of Kosovo Police Work with the Highest Risk of Corruption

4.7. WILLINGNESS TO REPORT AND FACTORS FOR INCREASING TRUST

When asked whether they would report a case of corruption in the Kosovo Police if they became aware of one, almost half of respondents, 49.1%, were unsure whether they would do so. A total of 31.6% answered yes, while 19.3% said they would not report the case.

The high level of uncertainty among respondents about reporting a possible case of corruption should be considered together with their limited knowledge of the complaints system. The survey, however, does not make it possible to determine whether this uncertainty stems from lack of knowledge about institutions, distrust in the outcome of a report, fear of consequences or other reasons, which means these motivations would require further research.

When asked what would contribute most to increasing trust in the Kosovo Police, the largest share of respondents, 26.3%, chose greater representation of community members in the police. Stricter sanctioning of police officers who violate the law and better communication with citizens were each selected by 19.3%, while 14% identified greater impartiality in police conduct. Faster handling of citizens' requests was selected by 7%, and greater transparency by 5.3%.

The responses show that respondents associate increased trust with several factors. Community representation is the most frequent individual response, followed by accountability of police officers, communication with citizens and impartiality of conduct.

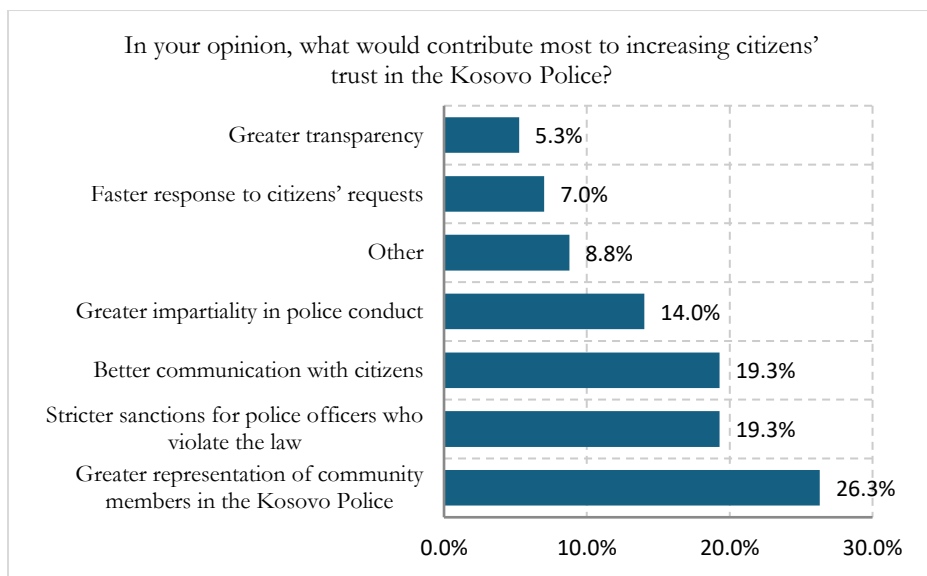


Chart 9. Measures for Building Trust in the Kosovo Police

4.8. RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS AND CITIZENS' EXPERIENCES

Responses to the open-ended questions provide additional insight into how respondents explain their assessments of police work. They should be viewed as a qualitative supplement to the quantitative findings, rather than as an indicator of the frequency of particular views in the overall sample.

Descriptions of direct experiences and observations include allegations of inappropriate conduct and excessive use of force, political bias, different standards of treatment and problems with communication in the Serbian language. Some respondents report negative experiences at administrative crossing points or during other contacts with the police, while several responses specifically point to police officers not speaking or using Serbian. At the same time, some respondents state that they have not had direct negative experiences or have not observed major irregularities, and individual responses also emphasise the importance of the police for maintaining order and security.

When asked about increasing transparency and reducing the risk of corruption, responses most often refer to better communication with citizens, reducing political influence on police work, more consistent and non-selective application of the law and greater accountability of police officers. Respondents also mention more effective internal oversight, stricter sanctions for established misconduct, clearer and safer reporting channels, information activities directed at citizens and additional training for police officers in communication. In some responses, transparency is also linked to greater representation of members of the local Serbian community in the police.

Similar themes also appear in responses concerning measures that could contribute to increasing trust. Respondents particularly emphasise greater representation of local Serbs in the police, professional and impartial conduct without different standards for different citizens, accountability of officers for their own conduct and better communication and dialogue with the local community. Some responses stress the importance of sanctioning officers who violate the rules, while others directly associate trust with greater reliance on local police officers.

The responses to the open-ended questions therefore largely confirm the patterns identified in the quantitative part of the research. Respondents do not primarily associate integrity with corruption in the narrow sense, but rather with the way the police exercise their powers, political impartiality, professionalism, local representation, accountability and communication with citizens. At the same time, the presence of positive or neutral experiences shows that attitudes towards the police are not uniform and that individual experiences with police officers may differ.

5. POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY, HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS AND RELATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY

Police accountability is one of the important elements of the relationship between the police and the community. In addition to the rules governing police powers, it is important that mechanisms exist through which the conduct of police officers can be examined, individual or institutional responsibility established, and identified shortcomings addressed. In Kosovo, this system comprises several interconnected levels: receipt and consideration of citizens' complaints, criminal investigations against police officers, internal disciplinary proceedings, inspection and audit oversight, as well as independent oversight by other institutions.

For northern Kosovo, it is particularly important to examine how these mechanisms function in practice and to what extent they are accessible to the local population. This entails not only the possibility of filing a complaint, but also clarity regarding the competences of different institutions, access to information on the course of proceedings, the use of official languages and the existence of publicly available data that make it possible to monitor the actions of oversight bodies. This chapter therefore first examines the complaints system and internal accountability, followed by the scope of case handling and inspection oversight, specific data and cases from northern Kosovo, the practical accessibility of accountability mechanisms and, finally, existing forms of dialogue and civic monitoring of police work.

5.1. Complaints System and Internal Disciplinary Accountability

The Police Inspectorate of Kosovo receives citizens' complaints concerning the work of Kosovo Police employees and, after an initial review, determines their further course. Within the Complaints Management Department, a complaint is reviewed and classified within five days. Where the allegations indicate a possible criminal offence, the case is referred to PIK's investigative component, which proceeds in coordination with the competent prosecutor's office. Complaints indicating a disciplinary violation are generally referred to the Kosovo Police for administrative-disciplinary proceedings, while under its statutory mandate PIK may also act in certain high-profile disciplinary cases. The complainant is informed about the further course of the case, and PIK states that citizens' complaints and information are treated as confidential.⁴¹

⁴¹ Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, *Frequently Asked Questions*, <https://ipk.rks-gov.net/FAQs>.

Internal disciplinary accountability is regulated by Kosovo Police administrative instructions on disciplinary violations, measures and procedures.^{42 43} Within the internal system, the Directorate for Internal Investigations and Background Checks handles disciplinary cases, the Internal Disciplinary Commission considers cases within its competence and issues decisions, while the Appeals Commission decides on appeals against disciplinary decisions. A disciplinary case may also originate within the police structure itself, without a complaint having first been submitted to PIK.⁴⁴

This arrangement means that PIK statistics and statistics on the Kosovo Police's internal disciplinary proceedings should not be treated as identical or directly comparable categories. Some of the complaints received by PIK are referred to the police's internal structures, but the disciplinary system also includes cases initiated through other channels. The number of complaints submitted therefore does not show how many instances of misconduct were established, just as the number of disciplinary cases alone does not indicate their final outcome. Assessing the functioning of the system requires following the entire course of a case, from receipt and classification of a complaint through investigation and decision-making to any appeal proceedings.

5.2. Scope of Case Handling and Inspection Oversight

PIK data show a significant volume of case handling across Kosovo. By 26 December 2025, PIK had received and processed 2,480 complaints, compared with 2,046 during 2024. Of the total, 1,753 complaints were classified as possible disciplinary matters and referred to the Kosovo Police Directorate for Internal Investigations and Background Checks, while 717 cases were referred to PIK's Investigation Department on suspicion of a criminal offence. The remaining cases were referred to other institutions or to PIK's inspection component.⁴⁵

During the same period, PIK arrested 47 suspects, including 41 Kosovo Police employees, issued 129 recommendations for suspension and two recommendations for transfer. It submitted 110 criminal reports, 36 special reports and 85 information reports to the competent prosecutor's offices.⁴⁶ These data show that PIK's role is not limited to receiving and reviewing complaints, but also includes investigative and oversight functions, including taking procedural actions and recommending interim measures.

The number of complaints increased by more than one fifth compared with the previous year. Such a change, however, does not in itself show a corresponding increase in police misconduct. The number of complaints may be influenced by the accessibility of the mechanism, citizens' awareness and their willingness to report police conduct. PIK itself links the increase in the

⁴² Kosovo Police, Administrative Instruction No. 04/2019 on Violations, Measures and Disciplinary Procedures in the Kosovo Police, op. cit.

⁴³ Kosovo Police, Administrative Instruction No. 03/2023 Amending and Supplementing Administrative Instruction No. 04/2019, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Kosovo Police, Annual Report on the Work of the Kosovo Police – 2025, <https://www.kosovopolice.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/RAPORTI-VJETOR-2025-SERBISHT.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, *Summary of the Activities of the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo during 2025*, <https://ipk.rks-gov.net/Publication/Details?IDPublication=8934>.

⁴⁶ Kosovo Police, *Annual Work Report 2024*, <https://www.kosovopolice.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/RAPORTI-ANGLISHT-2024.pdf>.

number of complaints, among other things, to greater public trust in the institution and its transparency.⁴⁷ PIK's assessment of the reasons for the increase in complaints should be viewed in the context of the data available to the institution itself, while more reliable conclusions about trends in police conduct would require monitoring case outcomes over a longer period.

Kosovo Police data provide an additional picture of the internal disciplinary system. During 2024, the Directorate for Internal Investigations and Background Checks handled 932 disciplinary cases, 648 of which were opened during that year.⁴⁸ During 2025, 1,025 disciplinary cases were administered, of which 743 were opened in 2025 and 282 were carried over from previous years. A total of 741 cases were completed, with 311 assessed as substantiated and 430 as unsubstantiated or unsupported.⁴⁹

During 2025, the Internal Disciplinary Commission issued 458 disciplinary decisions. The measures listed included 18 terminations of employment, one demotion, salary reductions for serious and minor disciplinary violations, disciplinary transfers, and written and verbal warnings. The Appeals Commission received 501 appeals and considered more than 500 cases; most appeals were rejected, while some were granted or partially granted and certain cases were returned for supplementation or reconsideration.⁵⁰ These data show that the internal disciplinary system includes several successive levels: investigation, disciplinary decision-making and appeal proceedings. The published data, however, are aggregated for Kosovo and do not allow multi-year outcomes to be isolated specifically for the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate.

PIK's inspection function should be distinguished from disciplinary proceedings. Its purpose is not to establish individual responsibility in every particular case, but to assess the functioning of police structures and procedures, including their legality, efficiency and compliance with applicable rules. During 2025, PIK conducted 12 inspections, five regular and seven extraordinary, and issued 76 recommendations for improving police work.⁵¹ Areas of oversight included, among other things, the work of police stations, responses to citizens' calls, border policing, domestic violence, execution of court orders, handling of drug-trafficking cases and management of detention centres.

Of particular relevance to this analysis is that the publicly listed inspections for 2025 do not include a regular assessment of a police station in any of the four municipalities in northern Kosovo. The police-station inspection in the Mitrovica region concerned South Mitrovica.⁵² On the basis of publicly available reports, it is therefore not possible to determine to what extent police stations of the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate were subject to specific inspection assessments during that period. This does not mean that other forms of oversight did not exist, but rather that such data are not visible in the published overview of inspection reports.

The Kosovo Police simultaneously carries out its own audits and internal inspections. During 2025, the Audit Office conducted 12 regular audits and issued 55 recommendations, while

⁴⁷ Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, *Summary of the Activities of the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo during 2025*, op. cit.

⁴⁸ Kosovo Police, *Annual Work Report 2024*, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Policija Kosova, *Godišnji izveštaj o radu Policije Kosova – 2025*, op. cit.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, *Summary of the Activities of the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo during 2025*, op. cit.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, *Inspection Reports*, <https://ipk.rks-gov.net/Reports/InspectionReports>.

internal inspections included 27 regular and 23 extraordinary inspections. These covered various areas, including implementation of the intelligence-led policing and community-policing strategy, evidence management, use of police vehicles, execution of court orders and compliance with internal rules on discipline and professionalism.⁵⁴

A preventive approach to integrity complements these mechanisms. The Kosovo Police has an Integrity Plan for the period 2024–2026, which identifies risks of corruption and other integrity violations, existing control mechanisms and preventive measures.⁵⁵ Since 2023, a body-worn camera project has also been implemented, following testing in traffic-control units and designed as an additional tool for documenting police conduct and strengthening accountability.⁵⁶ Publicly available sources, however, do not provide sufficiently regionally disaggregated data to assess the extent to which these measures are implemented specifically in northern Kosovo.

5.3. Complaints from the North and Handling of Specific Cases

Publicly available regional data on complaints are considerably more limited than the aggregate statistics for Kosovo. In September 2025, PIK stated that over a six-month period its office in North Mitrovica and its headquarters in Hajvalia had received and processed 38 complaints from citizens in the four northern municipalities. According to PIK, appropriate action was taken in each case: cases in which elements of a possible criminal offence were identified were referred to the competent prosecutor's offices, while possible disciplinary matters were referred to the Kosovo Police. PIK also stated that complainants were informed about the status of their complaints.⁵⁷

The published statement, however, does not present the final outcomes of these 38 cases. It does not state how many were completed, how many remained pending, how many resulted in disciplinary or other measures, or what the final outcome was in cases referred to other institutions. On the basis of the available data, it is therefore not possible to calculate the share of complaints in which improper conduct was confirmed. The limited availability of outcome data therefore makes it more difficult to assess the actual functioning and transparency of the accountability system.

The functioning of the system can be examined further through individual cases in which allegations concerning police conduct were made publicly, followed by an institutional explanation by the police and the subsequent involvement of oversight bodies. These cases are not used as a basis for drawing general conclusions about police work or for independently determining responsibility, but as examples of how different control mechanisms are activated in practice.

⁵⁴ Kosovo Police, *Annual Report on the Work of the Kosovo Police – 2025*, op. cit..

⁵⁵ Kosovo Police, *Integrity Plan 2024–2026*, <https://www.kosovopolice.com/sr/dokumenti/strateske-dokumente/>.

⁵⁶ Kosovo Police, *Kosovo Police Officially Begins the Implementation of Body Worn Cameras Project*, 1 August 2023, <https://www.kosovopolice.com/en/kosovo-police-officially-begins-the-implementation-of-body-worn-cameras-project/>.

⁵⁷ Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, *Press Release*, 9 September 2025, <https://ipk.rks-gov.net/Publication/Details?IDPublication=8901>.

In May 2025, public attention focused on an incident during a high-school graduation celebration in North Mitrovica. Video recordings of the event and reactions by local actors raised questions about the use of force against one graduating student. Veton Elshani, a representative of the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate, stated that the police had acted to prevent further escalation following provocative gestures and that, in his assessment, there had been no excessive use of force. The student was not arrested but was released with a warning.⁵⁸ By contrast, the Head of EULEX, Giovanni Pietro Barbano, publicly described the conduct as an excessive use of force, while PIK opened an investigation into the case. A subsequent report of the United Nations Secretary-General recorded both the incident and the opening of the PIK investigation.⁵⁹

A year later, the graduation parade in North Mitrovica took place without any incident. The 2026 event was preceded by coordination with the relevant local authorities and prior arrangements concerning the organisation of the parade and the maintenance of public order.⁶⁰

A second example occurred on 10 August 2025 in the village of Vuča in the municipality of Leposavić. According to Veton Elshani's public explanation, Border Police officers stopped a vehicle, after which two persons attempted to leave the scene, and one police officer fired a shot when the person who was fleeing turned towards the police while holding an object that appeared suspicious to the officer. The person later reported voluntarily to the police station accompanied by a lawyer, while PIK became involved in establishing the facts.⁶¹ The report of the UN Secretary-General also recorded the event and the fact that no one was injured.⁶² This case further illustrates the importance of distinguishing the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate from the Border Police, which belongs to a separate organisational structure.

In August 2026, the public reacted to the case of Nenad Rašković from the village of Dren in the municipality of Zubin Potok, who alleged that police officers had physically abused him during a police operation on 11 August. According to media reports, Rašković was hospitalised in North Mitrovica after the incident and was later transferred to Belgrade for further treatment because of his injuries. Kosovo Police representatives initially stated that they had no information that police officers had beaten any person and that the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo had been informed of the allegations. At the same time, the police stated that operations in the area were connected with information concerning unlawful possession of weapons.^{63 64 65}

⁵⁸ Kosovo Online, *Elshani: Minor Incident on the Promenade, High School Graduate Provoked and Showed Three Fingers, Released with a Warning*, <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/hronika/eljsani-manji-incident-na-setalistu-maturant-je-provocirao-i-pokazivao-tri-prsta>.

⁵⁹ United Nations Security Council, *United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo: Report of the Secretary-General, S/2025/634*, https://unmik.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2025_634-en.pdf.

⁶⁰ KoSsev, *High School Graduates in Kosovo Mitrovica Marked the End of Their Schooling with a Parade and Flare Display*, <https://kossev.info/maturanti-u-kosovskoj-mitrovici-obelezili-kraj-skolovanja-defileom-i-bakljadom/>.

⁶¹ Kosovo Online, *Elshani: Kosovo Police Shot at a Person in Vuča Because They Were Holding Something Suspicious*, <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/hronika/eljsani-kosovska-policija-u-vuci-pucala-na-jednu-osobu-jer-je-u-rakama-drzala-nesto>.

⁶² United Nations Security Council, *United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo: Report of the Secretary-General, S/2025/634*, *op. cit.*

⁶³ Kosovo Online, *Rašković from Dren, Who Was Beaten, Admitted for Treatment at the Clinical Center of Serbia*, <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/drustvo/pretuceni-raskovic-iz-drena-primljen-na-licenje-u-kbc-srbije-12-8-2026>.

On 12 August, PIK initiated a preliminary investigation ex officio to verify Rašković's allegations and establish the circumstances of police conduct during the operation in Dren. Following the initial investigative steps, on 18 August PIK recommended the suspension of two officers of the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate on suspicion of the criminal offence of ill-treatment in the exercise of official duty or public authority. PIK stated that the investigation was continuing in cooperation with the Basic Prosecution Office in Mitrovica.⁶⁶

The two police officers returned to duty on 21 September 2026 after their suspension was lifted. Their return was confirmed by Erduan Baliqi, Head of the Operational Planning and Assessment Unit of the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate, who stated that the suspension had expired and that PIK should be contacted for further information about the proceedings. PIK subsequently clarified that the case remained in the preliminary investigation phase and that the officers' return had been recommended because their continued suspension was no longer considered necessary for the conduct of the investigation. PIK also stated that reports on the investigative actions undertaken had been submitted to the Basic Prosecution Office in Mitrovica.^{67 68}

During the Vidovdan commemoration at Gazimestan on 28 June 2026, the Kosovo Police implemented a special operational plan and screened participants as they entered the area where the ceremony was held. After the commemoration ended, the police stated that 37 persons had been taken to police stations for questioning because of what it described as provocative chants containing elements of incitement to hatred, while one person was fined for disturbing public order and peace. According to the police, the persons concerned were referred to the competent court. Local media reported, citing a lawyer representing some of those detained, that 36 persons were released later that day and were required to appear before the court in misdemeanour proceedings. On 1 July, the Basic Court in Pristina imposed fines of EUR 700 on those found responsible, while foreign citizens were additionally ordered to leave Kosovo and were given three-year entry bans.^{69 70 71}

⁶⁴ KoSSev, *Police and PIK Took Rašković's Statement in Hospital; Medical Documentation Also Obtained*, <https://kossev.info/policija-i-pik-uzeli-izjavu-od-raskovica-u-bolnici-preuzeta-i-medicinska-dokumentacija/>.

⁶⁵ Kosovo Online, Baliqi: Police Inspectorate Takes Over Case Following Report That Police Officers Beat a Person in Dren <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/hronika/balijci-policijski-inspektorat-preuzeo-slucaj-nakon-prijave-da-su-policajci-pretukli>.

⁶⁶ Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, *Additional Information – PIK Recommends the Suspension of Two Police Officers of the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate*, 18 August 2026, <https://ipk.rks-gov.net/Publication/Details?idPublication=8988>.

⁶⁷ KoSSev, *Police Officers Suspended over the Nenad Rašković Case Return to Work in the North* <https://kossev.info/policajci-suspendovani-zbog-slucaja-nenada-raskovica-vraceni-na-posao-na-severu/>.

⁶⁸ KoSSev, *PIK for KoSSev: Investigation into the Rašković Case Is Still Ongoing; Police Officers Reinstated as Their Work No Longer Interferes with the Proceedings*, <https://kossev.info/pik-za-kossev-istraga-u-slucaju-raskovica-i-dalje-traje-policajci-vraceni-jer-njihov-rad-vise-ne-ometa-postupak/>.

⁶⁹ Kosovo Police, *Kosovo Police Manages the Security Situation and Ensures the Smooth Conduct of Activities during the "Vidovdan" Commemorations*, <https://www.kosvopolic.com/sr/policija-kosova-upravlja-bezbednosnom-situacijom-i-nesmetanim-odvijanjem-aktivnosti-tokom-manifestacija-povodom-vidovdana/>.

⁷⁰ KoSSev, Filipović: All 36 Persons Detained after Vidovdan at Gazimestan Released; Misdemeanor Hearing <https://kossev.info/filipovic-pusteno-svih-36-privedenih-nakon-vidovdana-na-gazimestanu-sutra-prekrsajno-rociste/>.

⁷¹ KoSSev/Kim, *Basic Court: Fine and Deportation for Persons Detained at Gazimestan*, <https://kossev.info/osnovni-sud-novcana-kazna-i-deportacija-za-lica-privedena-na-gazimestanu/>.

The Kosovo Police later responded to criticism by the Eparchy of Raška and Prizren by stressing that the ceremony at Gazimestan itself had taken place without police obstruction or intervention. According to the police statement, measures taken after the ceremony were not directed at worshippers, Serbian identity or religious rites, but at individuals for whom there was reasonable suspicion that their conduct had incited hatred, provoked others or disturbed public order. The police also stated that decisions on fines, removal or entry bans were not made by the police itself, but by the competent administrative and judicial authorities.⁷²

At the same time, some of the detained citizens alleged that they had been subjected to physical and psychological violence during transport to the police station. On the basis of complaints received, information from non-governmental organisations and media reports, the Ombudsperson Institution initiated an ex officio investigation on 7 July. The Ombudsperson stated that the purpose of the proceedings was to establish the facts and assess whether the conduct of police officers had complied with constitutional, legal and international human-rights protection standards.⁷³

These examples show different ways in which the accountability system can be activated, whether on the basis of citizens' complaints, information published in the media or action taken ex officio by oversight institutions. They also show the importance of distinguishing between an initial allegation, an institutional response, investigative or interim measures, and a final determination of responsibility. In cases involving suspected criminal conduct by police officers, PIK conducts investigative actions in coordination with the competent prosecutor and, where reasonable suspicion is established, submits a criminal report and the collected evidence to the prosecution. Any subsequent determination of criminal responsibility takes place through prosecutorial and, where charges are brought, judicial proceedings. The opening of an investigation, a recommendation for suspension or another interim measure therefore does not in itself establish the responsibility of a police officer.

5.4. Accessibility of Accountability Mechanisms

The existence of a formal accountability system has practical value only if citizens can access it, understand the competences of the institutions involved and obtain information on how a complaint is handled. In this respect, the number and accessibility of reporting channels, the physical presence of oversight institutions in the north, the linguistic accessibility of information and the ability to follow the subsequent course of a case are all important.

PIK provides several ways to submit complaints. They may be submitted in person or by post, through an electronic form, via the toll-free telephone line 08000 3333, directly to PIK officers, through a third person, at the nearest police station or at a PIK regional office. The toll-free telephone line is available 24 hours a day, and PIK states that citizens' complaints and information are treated as confidential.⁷⁴

⁷² Kosovo Police, *Reaction to the Statement of the Eparchy of Raška-Prizren*, <https://www.kosovopolice.com/en/reaction-to-the-statement-of-the-eparchy-of-rashe-prizren/>.

⁷³ Institucija ombudsmana, *Saopštenje za štampu – Ombudsman pokreće istrage o navodima o zlostavljanju uhapšenih na Gazimestanu*, <https://oik-rks.org/sr/2026/07/07/saopstenje-za-stampu-ombudsman-pokrece-istrage-o-navodima-o-zlostavljanju-uhapšenih-na-gazimestanu/>.

⁷⁴ Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, *Frequently Asked Questions*, op. cit.

The physical accessibility of this mechanism in the north was further increased by the resumption of work of PIK's regional office in North Mitrovica. In September 2025, PIK stated that the office was operating regularly and was open to all citizens. The same statement noted that PIK holds meetings in the north with citizens, civil society organisations and local and international representatives, at which it explains complaint-handling procedures and presents data on its work.⁷⁵

Citizens were also informed through PIK's cooperation with civil society. During 2024, public discussions and activities were organised to explain PIK's mandate and the ways in which police conduct can be reported, including discussions with citizens, information materials and media content.⁷⁶ Such activities can increase the visibility of existing mechanisms, particularly in an environment where the competences of the Kosovo Police, PIK and other institutions may not always be clearly distinguished in public perception.

A particular aspect of accessibility is the use of the Serbian language. PIK and the Kosovo Police have websites and other communication channels in Serbian, but monitoring conducted by NGO Aktiv during 2025 pointed to significant differences in the scope, timeliness and quality of available content. In PIK's case, parts of the website were recorded as being available only in Albanian, some documents were unavailable in Serbian and the number of publications in Serbian was limited. The monitoring also found that PIK does not employ a Serbian-language translator but instead uses the services of an external translation provider.⁷⁷

Similar shortcomings were recorded in the monitoring of the Kosovo Police, including uneven availability of certain categories of content and documents in Serbian, as well as considerably lower use of Serbian in communication through social media. The findings therefore point more to the consistency and completeness of available information than to a complete absence of communication in Serbian.

Taken together, these data show that the formal existence of several ways to submit complaints does not necessarily mean that they are equally accessible in practice. In addition to PIK's physical presence in North Mitrovica, the use of existing mechanisms is influenced by the availability of information, clarity of institutional competences, the possibility of following the course of proceedings and consistent availability of content in official languages.

5.5. Dialogue with the Community and Civic Oversight

Police accountability to the community is not exercised only through formal complaints, investigations and disciplinary proceedings. Regular communication with citizens and civil society organisations makes it possible to identify problems before they develop into disputes

⁷⁵ Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, *Press Release*, op. cit.

⁷⁶ ACDC, *Work of the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo*, <https://acdc-kosovo.org/podkast/work-of-the-police-inspectorate-of-kosovo>.

⁷⁷ NGO Aktiv, *Monitoring the Implementation of the Law in Institutions 2025*, <https://ngoaktiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/MONITORING-THE-IMPLEMENTATION-OF-THE-LAW-IN-INSTITUTIONS-2025-1.pdf>.

and allows the police to receive direct information about the security needs of the local community. The Kosovo Police develops community policing as a distinct approach based on partnership, information exchange, prevention and joint identification of local security problems. Local Public Safety Committees, designed as advisory forums for cooperation between the police and citizens, also form part of this system.⁷⁸

According to the Kosovo Police Annual Work Report for 2025, structures responsible for community policing held 153 meetings with institutions, organisations and non-governmental organisations, as well as 87 conferences, round tables and workshops across Kosovo. In addition, 53 information reports for the media were prepared and six media presentations were held. These data relate to Kosovo as a whole and do not separately show the intensity of activities in the north, but they confirm that cooperation with the community is formally incorporated into the organisation of police work.⁷⁹

In northern Kosovo, various forms of direct communication between the police, citizens and civil society organisations have been organised in recent years. During 2024, these included meetings between representatives of the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate and the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo on the one hand, and citizens and local actors on the other, at which police work, institutional competences, complaint procedures and other issues of importance to the local community were discussed.^{80 81} Such meetings enable direct exchange of information, but their occurrence alone does not show the extent to which issues raised during the dialogue are subsequently addressed.

Another form of public communication is the presentation of the results of the regional leadership's work. In February 2026, the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate presented its 2025 results to representatives of judicial and security institutions, various agencies and civil society organisations. The presentation included data on crime, seizures and preventive activities, as well as activities aimed at cooperation with citizens and encouraging reporting.⁸²

Civic monitoring of police work should be distinguished from institutional communication and community policing. One recent example is the "Accountability in Action" programme, launched in 2026, under which multi-ethnic civil society teams monitor the work of security institutions in the Mitrovica region, communicate with citizens and prepare findings and recommendations. The

⁷⁸ Kosovo Police, *Local Public Safety Committees*, <https://www.kosovopolice.com/en/community-policing/local-public-safety-committees/>.

⁷⁹ Kosovo Police, *Annual Report on the Work of the Kosovo Police – 2025*, op. cit..

⁸⁰ ACDC, *A Round Table between the Police and Citizens in the North of Kosovo on Cooperation and Challenges*, <https://acdc-kosovo.org/vesti/a-round-table-between-the-police-and-citizens-in-the-north-of-kosovo-on-cooperation-and-challenges>.

⁸¹ ACDC, *Kosovo Police and PIK Meet with Citizens for Dialogue and Transparency*, <https://acdc-kosovo.org/vesti/kosovo-police-and-pik-meet-with-citizens-for-dialogue-and-transparency>.

⁸² Kosovo Police, *Presentation of the 2025 Annual Report of the Mitrovica North Regional Police Directorate* <https://www.kosovopolice.com/sr/prezentacija-izvestaja-o-radu-za-2025-godinu-regionalne-policijske-direkcije-severna-mitrovica/>.

programme also established the Regional Community Centre for Public Safety in Mitrovica as a space for communication among civil society, citizens and security institutions.⁸³

These examples show that different forms of communication between the police and the local community exist in the north, as do newer forms of organised civic monitoring of police work. Their functions, however, differ. Community policing and direct meetings primarily serve communication and information exchange, while civic monitoring enables more systematic observation of police conduct, formulation of recommendations and follow-up to institutional responses. Their significance therefore depends not only on the number of activities held, but also on whether the issues and recommendations raised through these mechanisms are subsequently followed up and considered.

⁸³ BIRN, *Kosovo Regional Community Centre for Public Safety Opens in Mitrovica*, 16 March 2026, <https://birn.eu.com/news-and-events/kosovo-regional-community-centre-for-public-safety-opens-in-mitrovica/>.

6. CONCLUSION

The relationship between the Kosovo Police and the local community in northern Kosovo cannot be viewed solely through current assessments of police work. The present situation is the result of a longer process of institutional integration, changes in the composition of the police and political and security crises that directly affected the way the police functioned. The model established following the Brussels Agreement linked police integration with a specific regional organisation for the four northern municipalities and with the principle that the police composition should reflect the ethnic composition of the local population. This principle remained part of the legal and institutional framework even after subsequent changes.

The collective departure of 578 Serbian police officers in November 2022 represented the most profound change in the functioning of that model. The regional structure formally continued to exist, but within a short period it lost a large share of the local personnel on which it had previously relied. Vacant positions were initially filled by officers deployed from other parts of Kosovo, while new recruitment cycles for members of non-majority communities were launched later. At the same time, the scale of the police presence and police infrastructure in the north increased during a period marked by serious security incidents and political tensions.

The renewed recruitment process shows that the representation of local communities is gradually being restored. For 2025, the European Commission recorded 155 police officers from the Serbian community and 120 members of other non-majority communities in the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate, assessing that recruitment efforts had produced tangible results. However, personnel representation and public trust are not the same issue. A numerical increase in the participation of members of local communities can contribute to restoring one element of the previous institutional model, but trust is also shaped by the way the police exercise their powers in everyday practice, communicate with citizens and respond when allegations of misconduct arise.

In this respect, the survey results point to a significant gap between the formal institutional framework and the way part of the public perceives police work. Among respondents who had direct contact with the police, negative assessments of professionalism are considerably more frequent than positive ones, while a majority of respondents express distrust in professional and impartial conduct. The perception of unequal treatment of citizens is even more pronounced. Because of the size and structure of the sample, these findings cannot be generalised to the entire population of the north, but they point to areas where further monitoring of the relationship between the police and the local community is needed.

An important finding of the research is also that respondents do not reduce the issue of police integrity to corruption in the narrow sense. Political influence, unprofessional conduct by individual officers, selective application of the law and community representation are mentioned more frequently than corruption itself. At the same time, a large share of respondents have no clear view on the prevalence of corruption. This shows that trust in the police in northern Kosovo is to a large extent linked to the broader question of how police powers are exercised, namely whether they are exercised professionally, impartially and equally towards different citizens.

The legal and institutional framework provides for a developed system of police accountability. It includes internal disciplinary proceedings within the Kosovo Police, criminal investigations and inspections by the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo, appeal proceedings, internal audits and inspections, as well as oversight by the Ombudsperson in cases that may involve human-rights violations. Data for 2025 show that these mechanisms are used on a significant scale. PIK received 2,480 complaints, most of which were referred to the Kosovo Police internal disciplinary system, while 717 cases were referred to its investigative component on suspicion of criminal offences. The analysis of individual cases from northern Kosovo also shows that oversight can be activated on the basis of citizens' complaints, publicly available information or action taken ex officio by oversight institutions.

The existence of these mechanisms, however, does not in itself allow a full assessment of their effectiveness in the north. Publicly available data on complaints, disciplinary proceedings, inspections and their outcomes are generally presented in aggregate form for Kosovo. For the 38 complaints from citizens in the four northern municipalities recorded by PIK during a six-month period in 2025, information was published on their initial review and referral, but not comprehensive data on their final outcomes. It is therefore not possible to determine reliably how many of those cases were completed, how many resulted in a finding of misconduct and what measures, if any, were taken. Regionally disaggregated data and systematic follow-up of outcomes would enable a more complete assessment of the functioning of the accountability system.

A second problem concerns the practical accessibility of mechanisms that already exist. PIK provides several ways to submit complaints and has a regional office in North Mitrovica, but the survey results show that most respondents do not know or are unsure where they can submit a complaint about unprofessional or unlawful police conduct. This indicates that the formal availability of the system is not the same as its visibility among citizens. The practical functioning of the system also depends on a clear explanation of the competences of different institutions, the possibility of obtaining information on the further course of a case and the availability of that information in the official language used by citizens.

Language accessibility is part of the same issue. Monitoring conducted during 2025 pointed to uneven availability of certain Kosovo Police and PIK content in Serbian, including problems with the availability of documents, the quality of translation and the presence of Serbian in certain communication channels. The problem is therefore not a complete absence of communication in Serbian, but its consistency, quality and completeness. In the area of police accountability, this is of particular practical importance because citizens need to be able to understand their rights, the competences of institutions and the procedure through which they can challenge the conduct of a police officer.

Different forms of police communication with the community and newer forms of civic monitoring of police work also exist in the north. These mechanisms provide a basis for more direct exchange of information among the police, citizens and civil society, but their significance should not be measured solely by the number of meetings, round tables or other activities held. More important is whether issues raised through dialogue are linked to an appropriate institutional response and whether it is possible to follow what action was subsequently taken.

The analysis therefore indicates that the relationship between the police and the local community in the north is now in a different phase from the period immediately following the institutional disruption of 2022. Part of the personnel gap has been filled, representation of the Serbian and other non-majority communities has increased, and the existing legal framework provides several mechanisms of internal and external accountability. At the same time, the survey findings and the analysis of the practical functioning of these mechanisms show that questions remain regarding the professionalism and impartiality of police conduct, visibility of the complaints system, transparency of its outcomes, language accessibility and communication with the community.

Further improvement of the relationship between the police and the local community therefore does not depend on a single institutional solution. Representation of local communities remains an important part of the model, but it should be accompanied by professional and predictable conduct, a clear distinction between the competences of different police structures, accessible and transparent accountability mechanisms, equal use of the official languages and continuous communication with citizens. Connecting these elements can gradually reduce the gap between the formal institutional framework and the way citizens experience police work.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue increasing and stabilizing the representation of local communities in the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate.

The Kosovo Police should continue targeted recruitment of members of the Serbian and other non-majority communities, with greater emphasis on retaining police officers who have already been recruited. Data on the composition of the Regional Directorate, new recruitment and staff retention should be published periodically in order to enable monitoring of the practical implementation of the principle of local representation.

2. Rely on regional and local police structures to the greatest possible extent for regular policing duties.

The deployment of central and specialised units should correspond to the nature of the specific security task, while in situations of an increased police presence, the competence of the deployed unit, the reason for its presence and the nature of the task it is performing should be clearly explained to the local public, within the limits permitted by operational security. This would also make the distinction between the Mitrovica North Regional Directorate, the Border Police and units operating from the central level clearer.

3. Introduce regular regional reporting on complaints and their outcomes.

PIK and the Kosovo Police should periodically publish consolidated, anonymised data for the four northern municipalities on the number of complaints received, their classification, the status of proceedings and final outcomes. Publishing these data would make it possible to distinguish the number of complaints from the number of established instances of misconduct and to assess the functioning of the accountability system more reliably.

4. Strengthen inspection oversight of police structures in northern Kosovo and its public visibility.

Within its existing mandate, PIK should periodically include police stations and relevant functions in the north in thematic or regular inspections. Particular attention could be given to complaint handling, the exercise of police powers, community policing and the availability of services in the official languages. Findings, recommendations and information on their implementation should be published to the extent that this does not compromise investigations or protected data.

5. Make the process of submitting and following complaints more visible and simpler for citizens.

PIK and the Kosovo Police should explain more clearly and consistently which institution citizens should approach in different situations, how a complaint is submitted, to which institution it is referred and how information on its status can be obtained. PIK's regional office in North Mitrovica provides an existing institutional basis for continuous public outreach and information without the need to establish new mechanisms.

6. Ensure consistent and complete availability of information in the Serbian language.

The Kosovo Police and PIK should ensure that forms, explanations of procedures, reports, statements and other content relevant to the exercise of citizens' rights are available simultaneously and to a comparable extent in both official languages. Adequate capacity for timely and high-quality translation should also be ensured, together with periodic monitoring of compliance with language obligations.

7. Develop continuous dialogue with the local community, with follow-up on agreed issues and recommendations.

Existing forms of community policing, meetings with citizens and civic monitoring should be linked more closely to a system of institutional response. Issues and recommendations raised through these mechanisms should be recorded, considered with the competent police structures and, where possible, participants and the public should subsequently be informed of the measures taken. This would shift the focus from the number of activities held to the continuity of communication and follow-up on their outcomes.

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