

# GENDER RESPONSIVE BUDGETING IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF FIER

## WATCHDOG REPORT

### NEW EPOCH



## Watchdog Report

### Epoka e Re – New Epoch

#### ➤ Introduction

The Epoka e Re Center was established in 2005 with the main goal of addressing the needs of young people at the local government, empowering young people to undertake activities and self-organize, in order to become an active part of the community. The main focus of the center's activity is to encourage the movement of civil society, undertake awareness campaigns, which aim to improve governance policies related to youth, education, public health, environment, gender equality and citizen involvement in the decision-making process.

Epoka e Re Center has been involved for many years and has taken various initiatives in improving the consulted and participatory budgeting process. Recently, through the project "Participatory Budgeting (BP)" Epoka e Re Center has been involved in evaluating the practices of this mechanism at the local level, creating a practical model of its operation and lobbying and advocating with local authorities for improvement of the BP process. It has also influenced the involvement, awareness and engagement of citizens and capacity building of local elected officials in relation to this important process of involvement and consultation.

The Municipality of Fier has over 10 years of experience in implementing the practice of participatory budgeting. Through support of CSO donors, it has also organized gender budgeting processes, a very positive practice, which has been promoted in other municipalities. For many years, gender budgeting has been seen as a very important process in the work of the Municipality of Fier and the involvement of citizens, the gender perspective is seen as necessary from the moment of drafting various projects or programs. Fier was the first municipality to promote this process, which helps orient the budget distribution where the most immediate needs of citizens and the city are. The implementation of gender budgeting has oriented a budget and program where the needs and priorities of men and women find equal representation.

## ➤ Introduction of the Municipality of Fier

Fier is located in the western part of Albania, south of Fushë e Myzeqe, 18 km from the shore of the Adriatic Sea. The Municipality of Fier lies in a favorable geographical and strategic position, as two of the most important corridors of the country pass through this Municipality, Corridor VIII and Corridor Blu (Adriatic-Ionian Highway). Fier is located in the center of the national road and railway network, giving an advantage to the economic development of the area, especially the municipality.

The Municipality of Fier is characterized by a plain terrain with an average height of 20 meters above sea level and is bordered by the municipalities: Divjakë, Lushnje, Roskovec, Patos, Mallakastër, Selenica and Vlora. Fier enjoys a strategic position in the Albanian territory enabled by several cross-sectoral advantages. It accounts for 5.7% of agricultural land; it is bordered by two main rivers, the Semani in the north and the Vjosa in the south, which have protected natural areas near their estuaries; owns the Apollonia National Archaeological Park; It is rich in oil-bearing areas and inherits industrial areas and enjoys a strategic position of advantages in terms of potential gasification, with the implementation of the TAP Pipeline, which passes within its territory.

The Administrative-Territorial Reform undertaken in 2014 affected the Municipality of Fier by changing its territorial extension and borders. Prior to the territorial division, the Municipality of Fier, which consisted only of the city of Fier and its 18 neighborhoods, had an area of 800 ha and a population of 82,262 inhabitants. After the reform, the new Municipality of Fier has an area of 620 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 204,548 inhabitants. The Municipality of Fier consists of 13 administrative units (4 urban units + 9 rural units), which are: Fier, Mbrostar, Topoja, Dërmenas, Levan, Frakull, Cakran, Libofshë, Portëz and Qender.

The resident population of the Municipality of Fier<sup>1</sup>, compared to the period before the new administrative division is more than doubled. Thus, today the population of Fier is estimated to be around 204,548 registered inhabitants. About 46% of the population is mainly concentrated in the city of Fier, while the rest of it is distributed in 9 administrative units. Of these units, the administrative units of Cakran and Levan stand out, which are the two largest units in the Municipality of Fier, where the majority of the population of the Municipality is concentrated, while the distribution of the population in the rest of the units is approximately 5 to 6%.<sup>2</sup>

Fier is ranked third in Albania in terms of economic importance. The new municipality has a strong economy and is an important center in terms of oil, bitumen and agriculture industries. Fier has large oil and natural gas reserves and produces approximately 2,800 barrels of oil per day, as well as 5 million m<sup>3</sup> of natural gas per year. Other natural resources include bituminous sand, inert materials, and clay. The analysis of local economic development shows that 78% of the businesses registered in the Municipality of Fier are small businesses, while the rest about

<sup>1</sup> Bashkia Fier, Plani i Kujdesit Social 2019 -2023 Available at: [www.bashkiafier.gov.al](http://www.bashkiafier.gov.al)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

22% are large businesses. Most of the businesses are located in the administrative units of Fier, Portez, Mbrostar and Qender.

### ➤ **Budget 2020<sup>3</sup>**

#### Objectives of Budget 2020

- Continuation of significant improvement of road infrastructure in the city and how not to rural roads.
- Providing services in each Administrative Unit in order to improve the standard of living of the rural population by mitigating the contrasts between urban and rural areas, providing support and economic support in less developed and problematic areas.
- Continuation of investments for the increase of green spaces, as well as the improvement of other public services, which have a positive impact on a qualitative increase of life in the city and in rural areas.
- Improving the water supply and sewerage system throughout the Municipality of Fier through the construction of water supply systems in the most problematic areas continuously for 2020.
- To promote the development of tourism through capital investments in attractive cultural, historical and religious areas and on the coast through the priority projects approved in the Development Strategy Document.
- Implement effective procedures for recording the real registration for each taxpayer, and maximize revenues from local Taxes and Tariffs, significantly increasing them by increasing the taxpayer base and not by increasing the value of taxes.
- To choose to carry out those expenses based on the priorities and priorities of the community, creating a balance of finances of the Municipality of Fier.
- Assessing the needs of the Community through public dialogue and allocating resources where it is most needed, positively impacting the development of the economy.
- Increase transparency and good use of public funds.
- Continuation of the liquidation of arrears that the Municipality of Fier has inherited from the implementation of the territorial reform.
- Absorption of more priority projects to help the community.
- Financing of cultural projects for the revival of the artistic life of the city.
- Increasing the number of cultural and sports activities from the Center of Cultural Activities of the Municipality of Fier by approaching students of all preschool and pre-university levels.

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<sup>3</sup> Bashkia Fier, Relacion Buxheti 2020, Available at: [www.bashkiafier.gov.al](http://www.bashkiafier.gov.al)

## ➤ Gender Equality Policies

Based on the law on the administration of social care services in the Municipality of Fier, special structures have been set up for social care services, such as: "Unit for Child Protection" and "Unit for Gender Equality and Domestic Violence"

### *Unit for Gender Equality and Domestic Violence<sup>4</sup>*

The Unit for Gender Equality and Domestic Violence operates on the basis of Law No. 9669, dated 18.12.2006 "On measures against domestic violence", Article 7 "Duties and responsibilities of the responsible authority". According to this law, the unit for gender equality has the following duties:

- Facilitates and supports the cooperation of local government bodies with local institutions for gender equality and against domestic violence;
- Provides technical expertise to the municipality on gender equality issues and take measures to prevent and combat domestic violence;
- Supports local government bodies and facilitates their close cooperation with local non-profit organizations and academic bodies, for achieving gender equality in various fields as well as for programs for the protection of victims of violence in the territory they cover;
- Cooperates with relevant structures in the ministry responsible for gender equality issues and supports local government bodies in collecting, processing and reporting local statistics disaggregated by gender, respecting the format approved by the responsible authority;
- Initiates and actively participates in awareness-raising activities and campaigns on gender equality and against domestic violence, organized by the municipality or organized in cooperation with the ministry responsible for gender equality and civil society (meetings, workshops, media discussions);
- Prepares the necessary information and documentation for the coverage of gender issues on the website, bulletins or other means of information of the municipality.

In cooperation with UNDP, the Action Plan for Gender Equality and Reduction of Domestic Violence has been drafted, which has laid the working rails for the functioning of this directorate.<sup>5</sup>

- Action Plan for Gender Equality and Reduction of Domestic Violence, developed with the support of UNDP;
- To budget for the youth, with the youth, Municipality of Fier, drafted with the support of UNFPA, 2018;

<sup>4</sup> Bashkia Fier, Drejtoria e Shërbimit Social, Sektori i Shërbimeve Sociale. Available at: [www.bashkiafier.gov.al](http://www.bashkiafier.gov.al)

<sup>5</sup> Strategjia Kombetare per Barazine Gjinore dhe Plani i Veprimit. Available at: <https://www.un.org.al/sites/default/files/SKGJB-AL-web.pdf>

- Local Needs Assessment Plan, Analysis and Priorities for the Social Services Assistance Scheme, Fier Municipality.
  - Social Care Plan of the Municipality of Fier 2019 - 2023 Approved by Decision of the Municipal Council no. 51, dated 17/05/2019
- **Actual Budget – 2021<sup>6</sup>**
- Continuation of significant improvement of road infrastructure in the city and especially in rural roads.
  - Providing services in each Administrative Unit in order to improve the standard of living of the rural population by mitigating the contrasts between urban and rural areas, providing support and economic support in less developed and problematic areas.
  - Improving the water supply and sewerage system throughout the territory of the Municipality of Fier through the construction of water supply systems in the most problematic areas continuously for 2021.
  - Implement effective procedures for recording the real registration for each taxpayer, and maximize revenues from local Taxes and Tariffs, significantly increasing them by increasing the taxpayer base and not by increasing the value of taxes.
  - Completion of investments started during 2020.
  - To choose to carry out those expenses based on the priorities and priorities of the community, creating a balance of finances of the Municipality of Fier.
  - Construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of educational buildings of the pre-university school system.
  - Construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of primary health care buildings.
  - Increase transparency and good use of public funds.
  - Continuation of the liquidation of arears that the Municipality of Fier has inherited from the implementation of the territorial reform.
  - Absorption of more priority projects to help the community.
  - Increasing the number of cultural and sports activities from the Center of Cultural Activities of the Municipality of Fier by approaching students of all preschool and pre-university levels.
  - Put in function the Multifunctional Center at ETC for all age groups interested in sports and cultural activities.

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<sup>6</sup> Bashkia Fier, Relacion Buxheti 2021. Available at: [www.bashkiafier.gov.al](http://www.bashkiafier.gov.al)

### ➤ Focus Group Findings

Within the project "Voice of Rural Women", 6 focus groups were held with the participation of 60 women of different age groups, 20 - 55 years old. The purpose of these focus groups was to analyze the situation of women and girls in these areas, to understand their needs, to forward them to the relevant institutions and to highlight on the basis of the findings the recommendations addressed to each of them. This adequacy will be reflected after institutionalization with a specific budget based on needs and priorities aiming at guaranteeing gender equality and minimizing discord in rural areas.

The meetings took place during the period January - March 2021 in the villages: Shtyllas, Levan, Ferras, Topojë, Seman, Sector Seman.

- In the Administrative Unit of Levan there is an increase of 1.04% of the resident population in the last 3 years and an increase of 2.1% in the last 10 years.
- In the Administrative Unit of Topoja, there is an increase of 0.9% in the last 3 years and by 1.6 in the last 10 years.
- There is still the phenomenon of "Illiteracy" most encountered in the Roma community, in the administrative unit of Levan. This phenomenon goes to the extent of 1.35% in rural areas.
- At the level of administrative units, the illiteracy rate is higher in the administrative unit of Levan unit and lower in Fier and Topoja.
- Topoja lacks community centers. An environment that once functioned as such in the village of Seman is now out of function.
- The community center in Levan in the neighborhood "1 Maji" (where the Roma community lives) functions as a kindergarten and center for children of this community.
- Informal employment, one of the problems that has begun to reflect the consequences in rural areas.
- Due to low social, economic, cultural, educational performance, etc., remain: early marriages, mentality, financial impossibility, lack of information and / or opportunities.
- 6.1% of women aged 20-24 are married or in a relationship before the age of 18.
- The phenomenon of unemployment is more pronounced in the age group 18 - 29 years old, and even more pronounced in persons with 8 years of education, for whom it is very difficult to open new fronts of work, as they are unqualified for meet the demands of the market today.
- Women are self-employed in agriculture and are the ones who maintain small economic units. They constitute the labor force in the agricultural economy and the basis of providing the daily subsistence of the family.

- Women in the countryside face a number of constraints on gaining the right to use land, obtain credit, and access rural support services. In addition to these limitations, they face obstacles when they want to gain knowledge and obtain technological information from reliable sources.
- One of the typologies filed by the institution, during the efforts to support the Roma community, is the phenomenon of seasonal immigration / emigration, leaving children in the residence without support and the frequent occurrence of the phenomenon "exit from the Economic Assistance system". This phenomenon is common and has a result of leaving the system about 5-6 families per month (Roma community).
- A worrying phenomenon in both of these areas is the lack of information regarding services, programs and shortcomings provided by local and central government.
- Most of the interviewed women stated that they do not have information on how the government works in general and the local government in particular (municipality and administrative unit), housing programs, social support, services, etc

#### ➤ **Recommendations for budget 2022**

- Social service information campaign for women and girls that reduces poverty and provides better access to social services.
- Information campaign, near these areas, regarding the functioning of local and central government, services, various opportunities related to their quality of life and any other information relevant to the well-being of life and activity of residents.
- Establishment of a permanent institutional information point for each unit / those with special specifics, for each service, opportunity, application, etc.
- Establishment of new community centers / strengthening of existing ones (Levan, Seman).
- The function of the mechanisms and application of relevant procedures for summary, processing and coordinated analysis across all sectors at the national and national level.
- Equal access without distinction, for a quality education. Education - narrows the gap between women and men in the use of socio-economic opportunities.
- Further improve educational policies to eliminate factors that produce vulnerability. This is especially important for access to education for girls and boys from vulnerable groups.
- Prioritization of policies towards vocational education, main focus rural areas based on the typology of the area.
- Gender data should be prepared for the provision of social services, in order to monitor equal access to services, with the specific aim of responding to the needs of excluded, marginalized and vulnerable groups and in particular, women and girls.
- Providing quality and well-targeted health services requires a good knowledge of the situation and specific gender needs.



- Specific data related to vulnerability. (Roma individuals, persons with disabilities, etc.)
- The Roma community needs to disseminate information, provide medical packages and include them in the vaccination process, aiming to isolate the coronavirus infection in disadvantaged and segregated communities.
- Establishment of an on-line data collection system and information on all services, businesses, products, institutional support, communities - typologies-priorities of ... up to the filing of cases of gender-based and domestic violence.
- Improve the collection, processing, analysis and interpretation of gender-disaggregated data and their use for planning and policy at the central and local levels.
- In-depth studies (poverty, health, private sector, informality, land property rights and rural women.)
- Allocation of sufficient human and technical resources for the implementation of gender, sectoral, development policies in rural areas.
- Facility of priority services within the sectoral development.

## Annex I

### Budget 2021

Nr	Budget Programs	Budget in /000 leke 2021
1	Plans/Management/ Administration	853,314
2	Civil Emergencies	81,665
3	Fire Protection	34,076
4	Irrigation and drainage management	68,400
5	Social Care Center	26,000
6	Irrigation and drainage management	4,049
7	Road network	8,494
8	Community development (solid waste)	188,758
9	Community development (local public services)	236,966
10	Community development (rural services)	69,386
11	Cultural Services	59,142
12	Preschool education (educator and other kindergartens)	190,676
13	Pre-university education (dormitory caretaker)	32,272
14	Supportive education (Administration and kindergartens)	188,449
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,041,647</b>

Source: Municipality of Fier, Budget Summary 2021