



British Embassy
Pristina

The “other” that does not exist

Incomplete and biased information
about war crimes in Kosovo

A research report on
the content published
in 2023 in the field
of transitional justice



BIRN
BALKAN INVESTIGATIVE
REPORTING NETWORK

TPNJ	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
KJC	Kosovo Judicial Council
SP	State Prosecutor
EULEX	Mission of the European Union for the Rule of Law in Kosovo
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KASA	Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
AMMMCK	Agency for the Management of Monuments and Memorial Complexes of Kosovo
HLC	Humanitarian Law Center
MJ	Ministry of Justice
MCYS	Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports



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IN UNITY WE PROSPER



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public discourse in Kosovo continues to be dominated by topics related to war crimes and the events between 1998 and 2000.

The data show that a significant number of news published by the institutions of Kosovo during 2023 were on this topic, while on the monitored dates, the main media in the country had the events about the conflict and their commemorations as a key topic.

The last campaign for the parliamentary elections of 2021 was centered on relations with Serbia, investigations into war crimes, enforced disappearances, compensation for damages, and the handling of conflict categories.

Most of the political parties, including the current governing coalition, pledged to build criminal prosecution mechanisms and mechanisms for compensating conflict victims during the new governing mandate.

In the plans of the political parties and in public discourse, special attention was given to the investments that the authorities should make in investigating and documenting the past.

Unlike the authorities, justice institutions that have a key role in accomplishing the goals of transitional justice were extremely inactive in informing the public about topics related to the conflict and transitional justice.

During 2023 and the first months of 2024, BIRN analyzed the publications of public institutions to understand whether these publications had implemented the principles of transitional justice, were inclusive, and did not transmit a mono-ethnic narrative.

BIRN has found that Kosovo's institutions continue to have significant limitations in investigating and documenting the past.

The trial and prosecution of war crimes is one of the main pillars of transitional justice¹.

The Special Prosecution has a team of 4² prosecutors, while in the Kosovo Police, there are fewer than 40 police officers investigating war crimes, with many of them being without any prior experience in war crime investigations³.

This number has been consistently assessed as low and inadequate to document war crimes in the country and to ensure the prosecution of war crimes.

Justice institutions have not taken any steps to notify the public of war crimes trials and investigations or to build archives documenting these judicial processes.

BIRN has found that the KJC and the SP have not built platforms where cases are archived and data on war crimes are provided. Furthermore, on the websites of these institutions, there is no data on the trials conducted by UNMIK and EULEX in Kosovo, nor data on the trials at the ICTY in The Hague.

For this reason, the main source of data for the media continues to be politicians, who do not provide complete information about the judicial processes and the events that happened during the conflict, particularly complete data about the victims.

¹ Criminal Justice, International Centre for Transitional Justice, <https://www.ictj.org/criminal-justice>

² Official website of the State Prosecutor's Office <https://prokuroria-rks.org/psh/prokuroria-speciale/401/departamenti-pr-krime-lufte>

³ More than half of the new war crime are without experience in investigation, Kallxo.com, <https://kallxo.com/gjate/me-shume-se-gjysma-e-hetuesve-te-rinj-per-krime-te-luftes-jane-pa-pervoje-ne-hetime/>, 2023



In the field of scientific research, the country has no serious publications carried out by universities and the Academy of Sciences that address the topic of transitional justice.⁴

The authorities of Kosovo recently established a war crimes institute, called the “Institute for War Crimes Committed During the War in Kosovo”⁵. This mechanism is expected to be fully operational in the coming years.

Due to the lack of serious documentation work, Kosovo has significant problems with data on the past, especially in regard to accurate data on victims and the calculation of conflict damages.

Kosovo's institutions do not have an officially confirmed list of the number of victims of the last conflict. The lack of an official list has created confusion on the ground, where some of the victims of the conflict have received epithets of martyrs or former KLA soldiers without being such. Similarly, some Serbian civilian victims are portrayed as former members of the police and paramilitary forces.

The only list that is being used as a confirmed list per se is the list of forcibly disappeared persons, which has been agreed upon between the government of Serbia and the authorities of Kosovo. Official lists and figures for civilian victims, including the killed and injured, victims of sexual violence, and people with psychological trauma as a result of the conflict are missing, along with lists of uniformed members who were killed and injured.

The only relevant source of information on the number of victims and damages in the country is the Humanitarian Law Center. According to the HLC⁶, out of the 13,535 victims of the conflict, Kosovo Albanians make up the largest number with 10,812, Kosovo Serbs with 2,197 victims, while Kosovo Roma, Kosovo Bosnians, Montenegrins, and other communities make up 526 victims.

BIRN has found serious issues in the use and interpretation of data on victims.

In most of the analyzed cases, the materials published on websites or on social media platforms, or politicians' speeches, only mention victims of one ethnicity. In this spirit, public posts by political leaders lack commemoration for victims of other ethnicities.

The collected data shows that only a small number of monuments, such as the Bllaca Monument, the Heroines Memorial, and the Obelisk for the Missing, represent victims from all communities. Other monuments are mono-ethnic and only represent victims of one ethnicity.

Researchers found cases like that of the village of Upper Potërç/Potrč in Peja/Peć⁷, where on March 29, 1999, 15 people were killed. Three of the killed were from the Kosovo Ashkali community, while the others were Kosovo Albanians. BIRN found that the Kosovo Ashkali community victims were not buried in the martyrs' complex but in the village cemetery.

Due to the lack of accurate data, even 25 years after the conflict, the information published in the media is incomplete and does not fully reflect the conflict and its aftermath.

In the analyzed media reports of one ethnicity, no data on the victims of other ethnicities of the conflict were ever found.

⁴ Response from the Academy of Science.

⁵ Law No. 08/L-177 On The Institute Of Crimes Committed During The War In Kosovo, 2023, <https://md.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/CC3B7B97-709E-4E46-A5B6-73A7768C4985.pdf>

⁶ Kosovo Memory Book, Humanitarian Law Centre (HLC), http://www.kosovskaknjigapamcenja.org/?page_id=29&lang=de

⁷ In-field visit from the project researchers, 2024

The monitoring of the media shows a serious omission of data on the trials at the Hague Tribunal. There are especially no determinations made as to who has been convicted for war crimes in Kosovo.

Despite the challenges and problems on the ground, researchers have observed that in the majority of the public discourse of Albanian politicians, there has been significant progress in avoiding generalized language and collective blame of ethnicities.

In the media and in politicians' profiles analyzed for this research, the blame narrative for crimes in Kosovo is attributed to the "Serbian regime" or the "Milošević regime," avoiding the collective blame of the Serbian people. This language shows good will to take positive steps towards meeting justice standards, respecting the principles of dealing with the past, and avoiding the discourse of collective blame. However, the research reveals that the narrative continues to promote only blame as a concept, whereas there are no instances of promoting stories of solidarity and help between communities. The researchers met with 30 people⁸ who had experienced solidarity stories, however, only a few of them were ready to share their stories. Their stories consisted mainly of stories when houses were kept safe, securing food, and sharing information regarding possible ongoing attacks.

⁸ In-field meetings were realized by project researchers in multiple locations, 2024



Methodology

The aim of this research is to identify information about the events of the conflict, presented in monuments, official documents, and public discourse built by institutions, politicians, and the media during 2023-2024.

This report presents data collected during the period between October 2023 to March 2024 from interviews, field visits, and direct monitoring of media and social media publications from over 50 information sources.

The research aims were to understand whether:

- public platforms online present narratives of solidarity;
- the content on public platforms online respects the principles of dealing with the past and transitional justice;
- politicians have disseminated narratives that are aligned with the principles of dealing with the past and transitional justice;
- monuments of memory and commemoration, as well as commemorative inscriptions, present the full history of the event and whether public institutions have funded or supported initiatives that promote transitional justice;
- the media have managed to publish information that shows the full story of the events;
- the media have published stories of solidarity; and
- the media have not disseminated materials on collective blame.

To conduct comprehensive research, BIRN Kosovo also determined samples for measurement. In the content published during 2023, researchers analyzed data on the official websites of institutions and the social media profiles of institutions such as:

- Authorities of Kosovo
- Presidency of Kosovo
- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports
- Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
- Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts
- Institute of History
- Agency for the Management of Monuments and Memorial Complexes
- Kosovo Judicial Council;
- State Prosecutor
- Targeted municipalities (Rahovec/Orahovac, Gjakovë/Djakovica, Prishtinë/Priština, Graçanicë/Gračanica, Pejë/Peća and Gjilan/Gnjilane)

To measure the narrative disseminated in the media, BIRN Kosovo monitored publications from 10 Kosovo media outlets, including 5 TV channels and 5 online media, to analyze the reporting manner on two specific dates: 15 January, the date of the Rečak/ Rečak Massacre, and 24 March, the day NATO bombing of the former Yugoslavia began.

The monitoring included:

- 7 media in the Albanian language
- 2 media in the Serbian language
- 1 media from other non-majority communities

Limited content from institutions

In their publications on official websites, Kosovo's institutions do not have a dedicated platform or structured content that offers the public complete data on conflict events and transitional justice. After analyzing the online content of 16 institutions, BIRN Kosovo found that the information is incomplete and does not provide the full story.

The institutions included in the research have not used data from the ICTY, data from the UNMIK judicial system, EULEX data, or local courts in their publications related to conflict and transitional justice.

Another challenge is that the institutions have not published basic statistical data on conflict events, including the number of victims and registered conflict damages. In this year's population census, the Kosovo Agency of Statistics⁹ began collecting data on declared conflict damages from residents. Along with this list, accurate data and precise determinations on the categorization of victims and narratives on where and who committed the crimes are also missing.

On the monitored institutions' addresses, most of the information about the conflict is provided in the form of news, which, during publication, lacks significant information, including the start time of the conflict, the number of victims, the ethnicity of the conflict victims, and the perpetrators convicted so far.

Another identified challenge is the lack of linkage between the news and addresses where basic data, such as the list of missing persons, the legal basis regulating the issue of victims, and institutional addresses dedicated to promoting transitional justice, are located.

No.	Institution	Dedicated space for data on conflict events
1	Presidency of Kosovo	None
2	Office of the Prime Minister	None
3	Ministry of Justice	None
4	Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation	None
5	Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports	None
6	Kosovo Judicial Council	None
7	State Prosecutor	None
8	Agency for the Management of Monuments and Memorial Complexes	None
9	Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Arts	None
10	Institute of History	None
11	Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština	None
12	Municipality of Pejë/Peć	None
13	Municipality of Gjakova/ Djakovica	None
14	Municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac	None
15	Municipality of Gračanica/Gračanica	None
16	Municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane	None

Graphic 1: Dedicated space for conflict-related data

⁹ 2024 Census of Population, Family Economy and Housing, <https://ask.rks-gov.net/Rekos>



The above table shows that the aforementioned institutions do not have a dedicated space within their websites where all information about the conflict and subsequent events is published. BIRN Kosovo found that the published materials on the websites were deficient in content.

Mono-Ethnic Character of Institutional Publications

In addition to analyzing the archived online content of the institutions, BIRN Kosovo also analyzed the information shared by the institutions on social media and news sites.

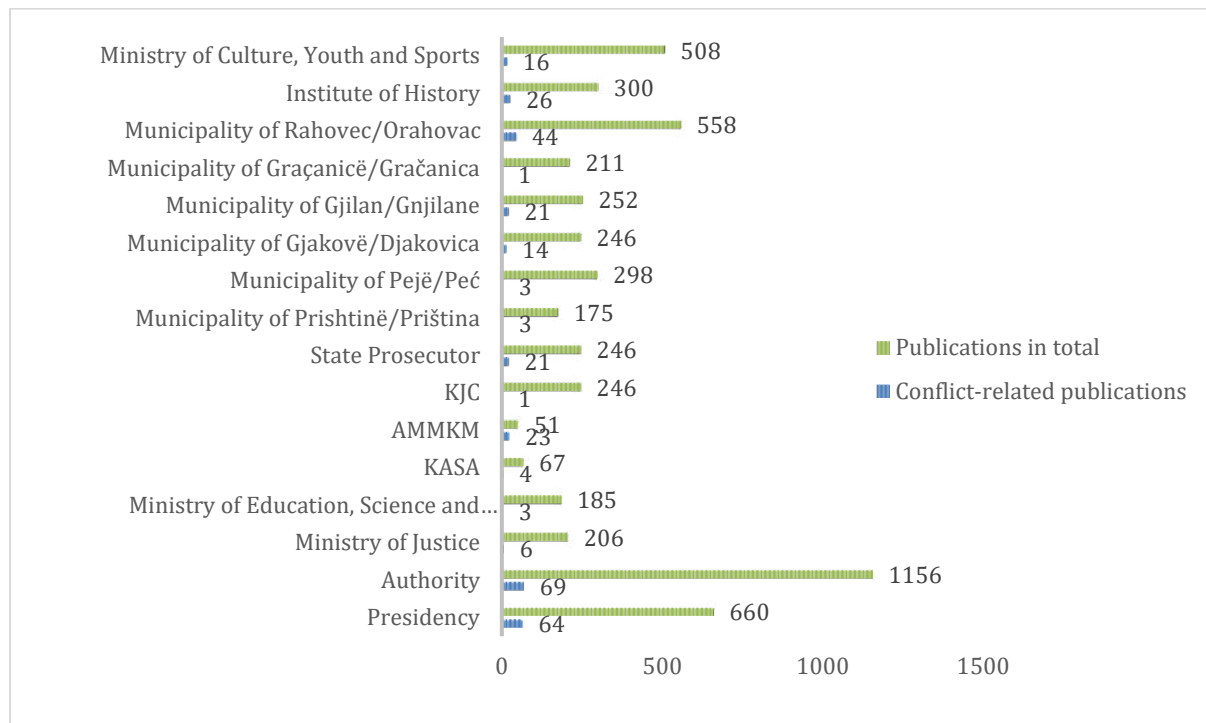
BIRN Kosovo found that the institutions in Kosovo included several conflicts and TJ-related publications, however, the data shows that the heads of public institutions, in their online publications, have not commemorated victims of all ethnicities in Kosovo. This has created a trend where Albanian leaders of institutions commemorate only Kosovo Albanian victims, while Serbian leaders (such as those from the Municipality of Gračanica) commemorate only Kosovo Serbian victims.

Number	Institution	Publications related to the conflict	Publications related to other ethnicities in conflict	Publications in total
1	Presidency	64	0	660
2	Authorities	69	0	1156
3	Ministry of Justice	6	0	206
4	Ministry of Education	3	0	185
5	KASA	4	0	67
6	AMMKM	23	0	51
7	KJC	1	0	246
8	State Prosecutor	21	0	246
9	Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština	3	0	175
10	Municipality of Peja/Peć	3	0	298
11	Municipality of Gjakova/Djakovica	14	0	246
12	Municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane	21	0	252
13	Municipality of Gračanica/Gračanica	1	0	211
14	Municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac	44	0	558
15	Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports	16	0	508
16	Institute of History	26	0	300

Graphic 2: Publication character of news from different institutions

In 16 institutions, 5,365 news articles were analyzed, of which 320 were found to be related to transitional justice.

In the diagram below, the total publications of individual institutions are highlighted along with the data relevant to the research. Overall, institutional interest in the research topic is 5.9%. Most of these publications have only commemorated victims of one ethnicity, while basic data on conflict events are missing.

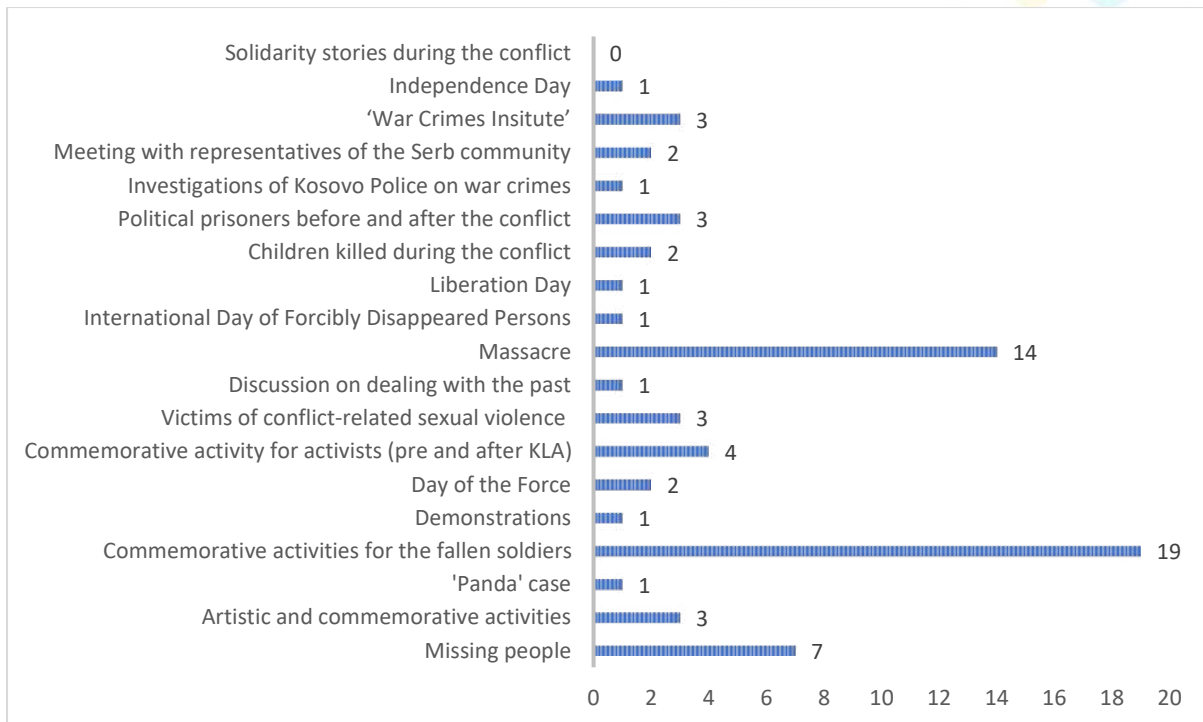


Graphic 3: Category of news published from the different institutions

On the official website of the Prime Minister's Office¹⁰, about 5.6% of the news is related to this topic.

Throughout 2023, **1,156** news articles were published on the Prime Minister's website, of which **69** articles or 5.6% of the total were related to the conflict, transitional justice, peace, dealing with the past, collective memory, and memorialization.

¹⁰ Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo website, <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/en/news-en/>



Graphic 4: The category of news published from the Prime minister

What is of interest to this research are the **69** articles published by the authorities, of which 47.8% are about the Prime Minister's participation and honors in the commemoration of massacres against Kosovo Albanians and the commemoration of KLA martyrs.

In all published articles, the Serbian community is mentioned **only twice**: once in a meeting held by Prime Minister Kurti for Nikola Sandulović¹¹, Chairman of the Republican Party in Serbia and once during a visit to two Serbian families¹² who benefited from farmer subsidies from the relevant ministry.

In this analysis of news publications on the Prime Minister's website, **zero stories of solidarity** between communities living in Kosovo and **zero stories that show solidarity** between communities during the Kosovo conflict were found.

The amount of information about the conflict is higher in the Prime Minister's social media posts. During the period from January to December 2023, the Prime Minister made 207 posts on the social network Facebook, among which 38 posts were about conflict events. In none of them were all the victims of all ethnicities mentioned. The Prime Minister has written less on the social network 'X' (formerly Twitter). According to the data, out of **530** tweets during 2023, only 9 were about the conflict¹³.

On Prime Minister Kurti's official profile, none of the posts promote solidarity or tell a story of solidarity between communities, highlighting help, protection, or cooperation

¹¹ Prime Minister Kurti hosted the candidate for president of Serbia, Nikola Sandulović, 2023, <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/en/blog/prime-minister-kurti-hosted-the-candidate-for-president-of-serbia-nikola-sandulovic/>

¹² Prime Minister Kurti visits the Miletić and Komatović families from the Municipality of Istog, 2023, <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/en/blog/prime-minister-kurti-visits-the-miletic-and-komatovic-families-from-the-municipality-of-istog/>

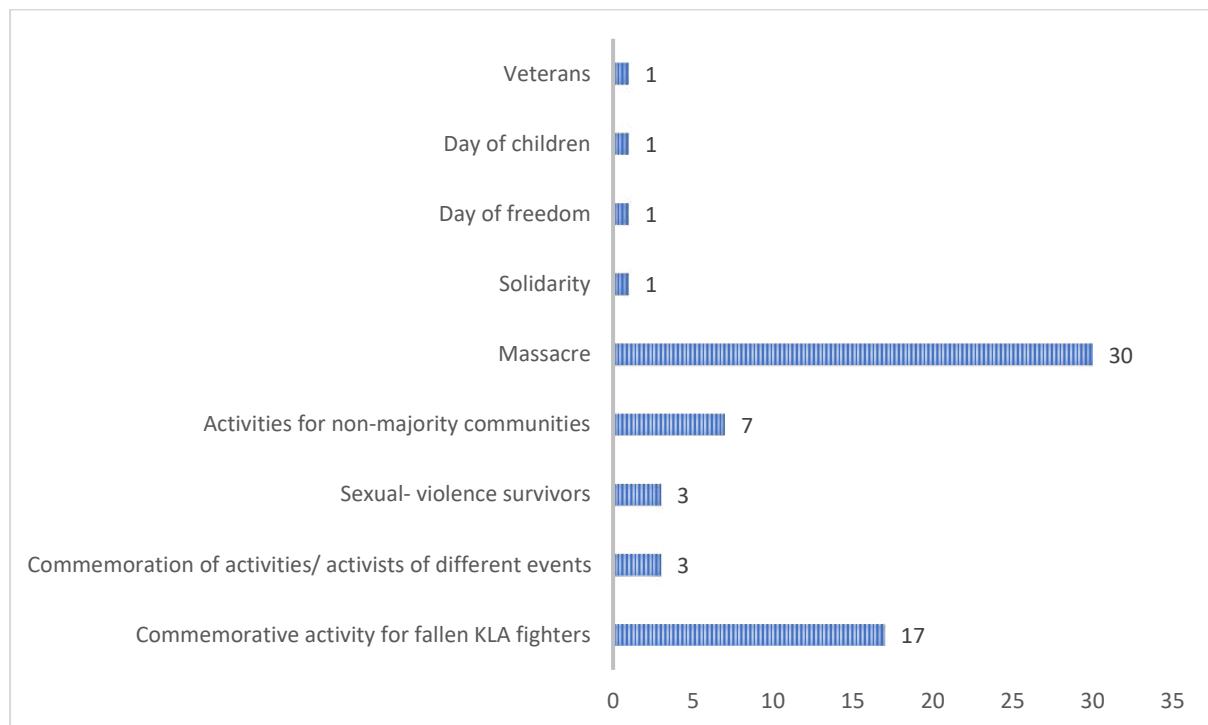
¹³ Data gathered from monitoring the profile of Albin Kurti in X, 2023, <https://rb.gy/61sp8g>

between unarmed civilians from different communities found amidst fighting and conflict zones, as well as post-conflict social recovery. Similar to the Prime Minister's website, the Presidency's page¹⁴ does not have a clear division of the conflict narrative, and it is covered only with news and statements.

On the official website of the President of Kosovo, 660 news articles were published in 2023, of which 8.8% or 64 articles were related to the issue of transitional justice, dealing with the past, and the conflict in Kosovo, accounting for 8.8% of all news articles.

Of the 64 articles or 8.8% of the published articles, 46.9% are about the commemoration of massacres against Kosovo Albanian civilians. In no single case where victims are commemorated is there a crime or murder that commemorates non-Kosovo Albanian victims of the conflict. 26.6% of these articles are about the commemoration of martyrs, memorial academies for martyrs and heroes, their birth dates, and their dates of death.

In the publications of the Presidency, only one story of community solidarity was found, in the village of Zllakuqan/Zlakućan in the municipality of Klinë/Klina, where during the conflict, the inhabitants helped refugees from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. However, this is a story where Kosovo Albanians helped Kosovo Albanians.



Graphic 5: The category of the news published by the Presidency

On social networks like 'X', the President has made several posts about the issue of conflict victims, but none of them contained stories of solidarity.

¹⁴ Web-page of President Vjosa Osmani, 2024, <https://president-ksgov.net/en/>

Lack of Data from Justice Institutions

One of the main pillars of transitional justice is prosecution, hence accountability and informing the public about the punishment of war crimes.

The Ministry of Justice has the Department for Transitional Justice and Support to Crime Victims, while the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council (KPC) has the State Prosecutor's Office, and the Kosovo Judicial Council (KJC) has the courts.

BIRN found that the KPC and KJC¹⁵ have failed to build dedicated platforms offering data on the process of investigating and punishing war crimes. These institutions have not managed to create a digital archive for the flow of judicial processes related to transitional justice.

Researchers found that the platforms managed by the KJC lack a section that makes data and the history of war crime processes in Kosovo public. There are no transcripts of the processes nor archived video materials of war crimes trials on these platforms.

Additionally, the KJC's official website has not transferred information on judicial processes conducted by UNMIK and EULEX judges.

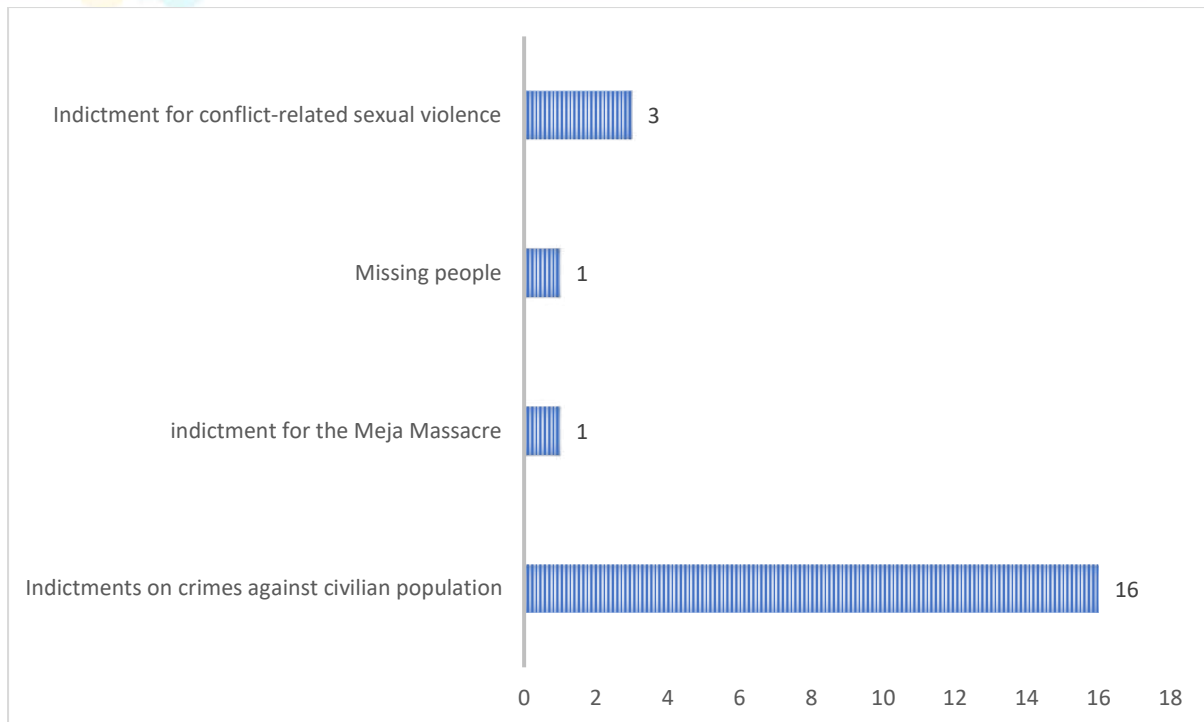
The situation is similar on the official websites of the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council and the State Prosecutor's Office. The State Prosecutor's website does not have materials providing data on the past and processes related to transitional justice. The only data available are news about indictments and the strategy for investigating war crimes, which are insufficient for the public and do not offer basic data on ongoing processes. Similar to the KJC, the SP has not built a dedicated platform for war crimes, as the ICTY, the Specialized Chambers in The Hague, or even the Special War Crimes Prosecutor's Office in Serbia have done. The only information published by the State Prosecutor's Office during this time is news about indictments, which are incomplete and do not provide a historical account of the events.

Within the KJC and SP websites, there is not a single indictment for war crimes that has been edited and published, a standard used in international tribunals as well as by the Specialized Chambers.

For this research, BIRN Kosovo analyzed the content of materials published by the prosecutor's office during 2023. It was found that there are 21 news articles related to the research topic, that is, 21 news articles talking about war crimes. Of these articles, 76.2% are news about indictments made for war crimes against the civilian population, 14.3% are about sexual violence during the conflict, 4.8% are about the issue of missing persons, and a percentage similar to that, is about massacres committed in Kosovo.

Among the analyzed war crimes indictments, in only one case the accused was from the Kosovo Roma community, while the others were from the Kosovo Serb community, mostly with both Serbian citizenship and Kosovo residency.

¹⁵ Monitoring of the KPC and KJC web pages from the project researchers, 2024



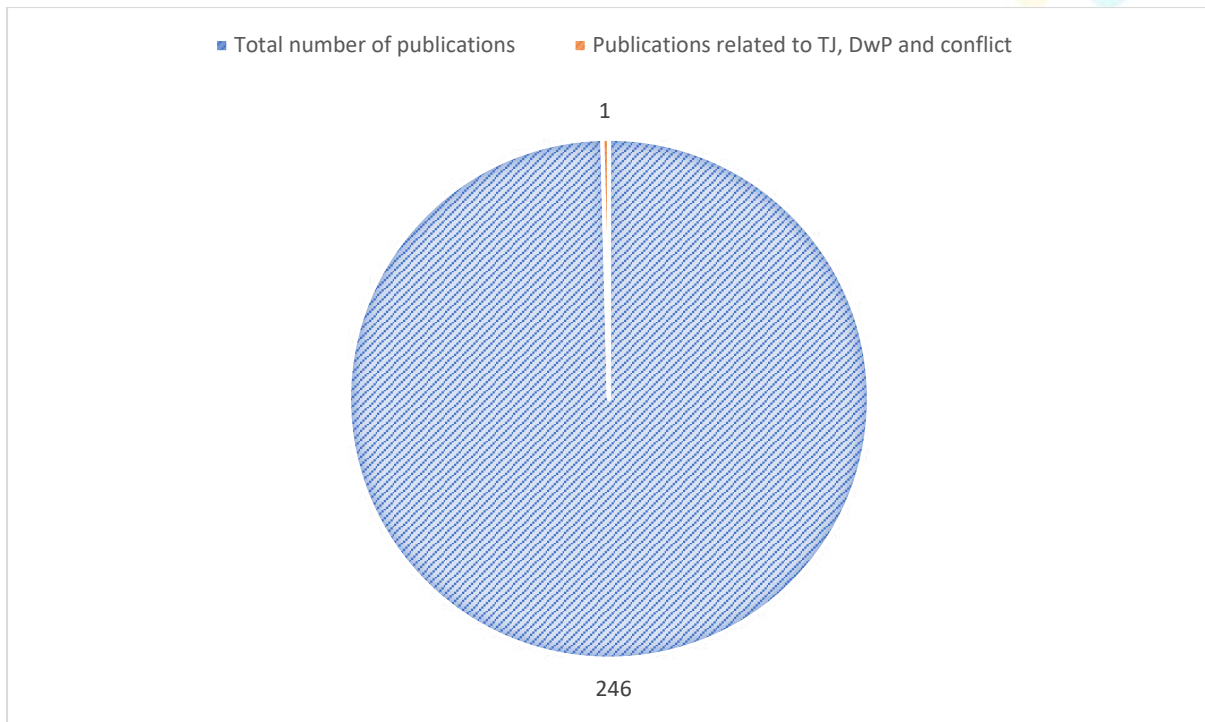
Graphic 6: The category of the news published by the State Prosecutor

Unlike the State Prosecutor's Office, which at least offers some news, the KJC has not provided information even through published news. Out of 246 news articles published throughout 2023, the KJC has not published any news related to wartime processes, dealing with the past, transitional justice, or collective memory.

Most of the published news articles are about KJC meetings, forums attended by its members, meetings of the KJC Chairperson with various parties, internal technical notices, public announcements regarding job positions filled, Civil Code meetings, workshops, and other activities. In only one news article coexistence was promoted, but the content does not include any representatives from non-majority communities who are part of the KJC participating in a forum¹⁶ where trust-building as a commitment to peace and stability in the Western Balkans was discussed. The statement does not clarify the content of this participation¹⁷.

¹⁶ KGJK, 2024 <https://www.gjyqesori-rks.org/2023/11/23/kgjk-pjese-e-forumit-te-kombeve-te-bashkuara-per-ndertimin-e-mirebesimit-ne-kosove-te-mbeshtesim-bashkejetesen-per-nje-te-ardhme-me-te-mire/>,

¹⁷ Kosovo Judicial Council, 2023, <https://www.gjyqesori-rks.org/2023/11/23/kgjk-pjese-e-forumit-te-kombeve-te-bashkuara-per-ndertimin-e-mirebesimit-ne-kosove-te-mbeshtesim-bashkejetesen-per-nje-te-ardhme-me-te-mire/>



Graphic 7: The category of the news published by the Kosovo Judicial Council

In addition to justice institutions, the data or platforms that collect materials on the punishability of war crimes are also missing from other institutions' websites.

On the Ministry of Justice's website, there is a section offering information about the Department for Transitional Justice and Support to Crime Victims¹⁸, but this section provides no other information beyond the basis for establishing this department.

Also missing on the Ministry of Justice's website are publications and information on transitional justice. The only accessible materials on this topic at MoJ are news formats. Throughout 2023, the Ministry of Justice published 206 news articles on its website, of which only six were related to the conflict, dealing with the past, transitional justice, collective memory, mono-ethnic memorialization, and mono-ethnic narratives, making up only 2.8% of the publications.

For this research, from the six news articles related to this research topic, 33.3% are news about commemorations of events related to resistance and conflict, which take into consideration the resistance of women before and during the conflict in Kosovo. Victims of sexual violence during the conflict also make up 33.3%, or two published news articles, while the others are news about the issue of the missing (16.7%) and 'Youth and Transitional Justice Strategy' (16.7%)¹⁹.

¹⁸ Department for Transitional Justice and Support to Crime Victims, 2024, <https://md.rks-gov.net/page.aspx?id=1,162>

¹⁹ Youth and transitional justice, 2023, <https://md.rks-gov.net/page.aspx?id=1,15,3075>



Challenges in Scientific Publications

The study of the historical aspect and scientific publications in social sciences is the responsibility of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo and the Institute of History.

During 2023, the “Ali Hadri” Institute of History in Pristina published several publications and organized several meetings, publication releases, retrospective publications, and conferences. On the social network Facebook, during 2023, about 300 posts were made, most of which were retrospective postings of publications at different times shared with the Institute's audience on this social network. In the interest of the research are 26 posts among the publications in 2023, related to the research topic. Notable among them are:

- “The massacre by Serbian forces in Pastasel, Rahovec” (March 31, 1999), Pristina, Institute of History, 2023
- “Kosovo Liberation Army - Operational Zone of Llap”, Skender Zhitia, Institute of History, 2023

In addition to relevant activities, posts related to older publications at different times, related to the last conflict in Kosovo, are published. Also, several conferences and scientific sessions have been held, which are related to the research topic. These include the following events with corresponding papers:

- “International Scientific Conference: The Role of Women in the Realization of the State of Kosovo - Social, cultural and political aspects from 1980 to the present day”, and
- Scientific session "Kosovo 15 years of independence - challenges and state building"

Some of the papers presented at these two conferences and scientific sessions include:

- “Albanian women in Yugoslav prisons (1980-1990)” - Prof. Dr. Sabile Keçmezi-Basha
- “The Role of Albanian Women in the Liberation of Kosovo” - Dr. Teuta Hadri
- “Albanian Women, Symbol of Kosovo’s Freedom - Operational Zone of Llap (1998-1999)” - Prof. Dr. Skender Zhitia
- The US Stance on Kosovo's National Security: From War to State-building - Prof. Ass. Dr. Arbër Hadri,
- Operation “Arrow” - Glorious History of the Liberation War 1997-1999 – Prof. Dr. Bedri Muhadri,
- Aspects of Operation Allied Forces (March 24 - June 12, 1999) - Ass. Miftar Kurti.

Overall, activities and publications centered on the conflict have not conveyed solidarity or an inclusive narrative, neither on the website nor on the social network Facebook. Moreover, the periodic journal of this institute – Kosovo for 2023, containing articles and reviews, was also examined. Among the articles related to the conflict, the following can be mentioned:

- The Franco-German Contribution to the Operation ‘Allied Forces’ (March 24 - June 20, 1999) – Miftar Kurti
- “Justification of NATO's Intervention in Kosovo in the Context of International Relations” – Hamit Kaba



- “Status and Benefits of WWII Partisans (1941-1945) and KLA Fighters (1998-1999) – A Comparative View” – Albin Halimi, Endrit Sada

Throughout 2023, 67 news articles were published on the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo's website, of which 4 news articles are related to the conflict, dealing with the past, transitional justice, collective memory, mono-ethnic memorialization, and mono-ethnic narrative, making up 5.6% of the publications. Of these four (4) published articles, all (100%) are related to organizing scientific conferences and publications regarding, as published, the genocide and massacres of Serbia in Kosovo²⁰. Given the significant lack of news publications, researchers also analyzed the publications found in one of the sections of this website. In the social and publications sections for 2023, there are four (4) publications and conferences, of which two (2) are about the Serbian genocide²¹ in Kosovo.

On the website of this institution, there is **no option for translation**, meaning technically, there is no button to help the non-Albanian speaking audience understand what the news is about. Consequently, this means that there is **zero news** translated in other languages. Also, **none** of the published news articles convey any solidarity stories. Apart from ASHAK, the publications on the website of the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports were also analyzed. The MCYS supports cultural projects that recall and showcase the past through cultural activities.

As far as the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports is concerned, researchers have found 16 news related to the category targeted by this news. Of them, 37.5% are news about artistic productions related to the conflict. This includes books, exhibitions as well as theater and film productions.

The 16 analyzed news that are aligned with the research topic are not translated into Serbian. Also, **none (0)** of the published news stories convey any stories of community solidarity during the conflict in Kosovo.

²⁰ Publication regarding the genocide and massacres in Kosovo, 2024, <https://ashak.org/botime/gjenocidi-i-pushtetit-serb-ndaj-shqiptareve-ne-kosove-gjate-viteve-90/>

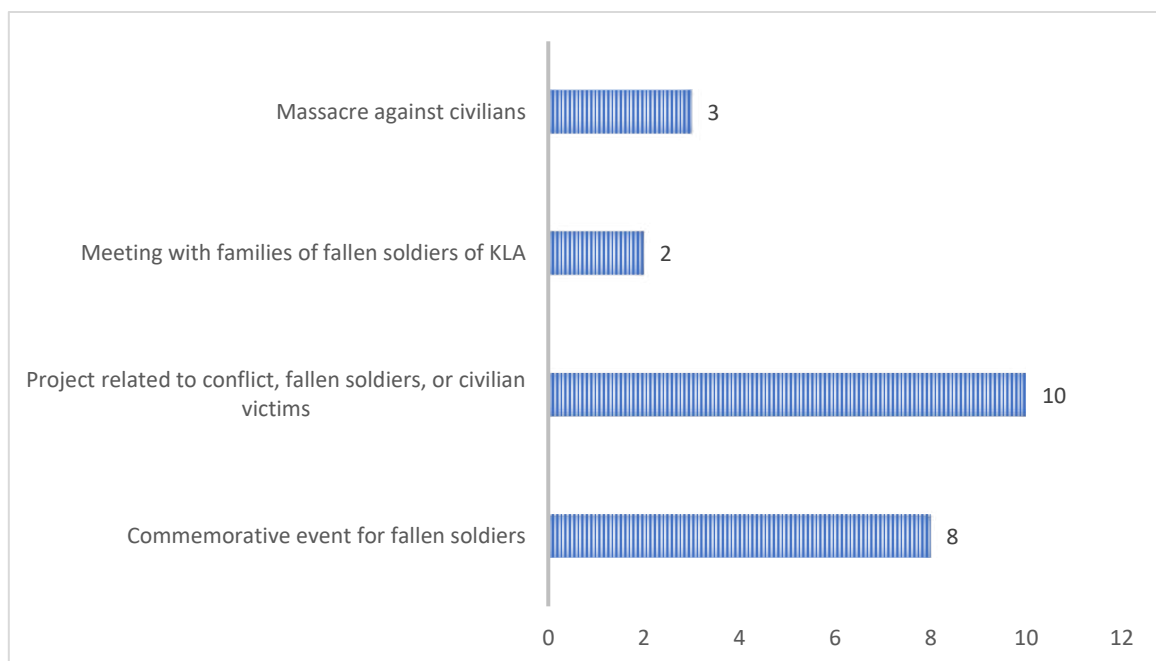
²¹ ASHAK, Scientific conference: Genocide and massacres of Serbia in Kosovo (1998-1999), 2023, <https://ashak.org/konferenca-shkencore-gjenocidi-dhe-masakrat-e-serbise-ne-kosove-1998-1999/>

MONO-ETHNIC CONTENT IN MONUMENTS AND MUSEUMS

In 2013, through a special law²², Kosovo created an Agency for the Management of Monuments and Memorial Complexes. This independent institution is responsible for building museums, preserving relics, and building memorials for conflict events.

Official data from AMMKM show that this agency has about 1547 monuments²³, commemorative plaques or signs registered that commemorate the last conflict in Kosovo. This agency also manages 13 museums related to the last conflict. In the entirety of monuments, museums, and memorial spaces, the Agency counts a small number of monuments that commemorate victims of all ethnicities. The Agency for the Management of Memorial Complexes mentions the Bllaca Exodus Memorial, which commemorates all that displaced outside of Kosovo, the Heroines Memorial, which reflects the victims of violence, and the Memorial for the Missing.²⁴

Throughout 2023, the Agency for the Management of Monuments and Memorial Complexes published 51 news articles on its website, of which 23 were related to the conflict. Among these, 78.3% are news directly related to the conflict, including commemorative activities for martyrs and projects related to the conflict and national martyrs in particular. Of all these articles, only three, or 13%, focus on massacres that belong to a single ethnicity; in all of them, the massacres mention Kosovo Albanian civilian victims. Furthermore, none of the articles are translated into Serbian or other languages, and no news commemorates solidarity between communities.



Graphic 8: The category of the news published by the AMMKM

²² Law No. 04/L-146 on the Agency for the Management of Memorial Complexes of Kosovo

²³ List of Monuments - Source: Agency for the Protection of Monuments

²⁴ Interview with Shqipe Zogaj - Agency for the Protection of Monuments

In the field, researchers visited over 20 memorial complexes for conflict victims. The data shows that most of the monuments are mono-ethnic, and there are issues with the naming of victims. In some cases, civilian victims are named as martyrs, in other cases as heroes of Kosovo, without conveying a consistent narrative.

The research team visited six municipalities to observe memorials and commemorative plaques about the last conflict in Kosovo²⁵. At the cemetery memorial complex in the village of Celinë/Celina²⁶ in the municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac, the research team observed that civilians killed during the conflict, both Kosovo Albanians and those from the Kosovo Egyptian community, were buried in one place, without any segregation. In addition to being buried in the same place, they were also included in the memorial plaque together with other martyrs.

In the cemetery of the village Krushë e Madhe/Velika Kruša in Rahovec/Orahovac, the names of civilians killed and martyrs are placed on the same plaque, but in the section of civilian names, it is inscribed “Those who fell for the freedom of the homeland,” while in the martyrs' section, it is written, “Glory to the martyrs of the nation”. Location of the memorial complex is near the village cemeteries.

During monitoring in the municipality of Peja/Peć, a case was noted where civilians killed in the last conflict were described as martyrs, while three civilians from the Ashkali community were killed in the village of Potërç i Epërm/Gornje Potrče²⁷, in the Peja/Peć region, a village between Klinë/Klina and Peja, were not buried in the same place as other conflict victims, even though they were killed on the same day.

In the center of the city Peja/Peć, the largest memorial describes those who fell in the last conflict. However, only the names of Albanian victims are included in this memorial.

In Gjilan/Gnjilane, at “Kodra e Dëshmorëve,” the largest memorial and cemetery were built to commemorate only Kosovo Albanian victims of this municipality. The Director of Culture in the municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane, Kushtrim Zeqiri,²⁸ confirmed that all persons commemorated on this plaque belong to the Albanian ethnicity.

In the center of the city of Gjilan/Gnjilane, a monumental sculpture was built in memory of women who contributed to society before and after the conflict. This monument has only the description “Heroine of the city.”

In Gjakovë/Djakovica, researchers visited two memorials²⁹, but there also only the names of Albanian victims were present.

From field monitoring in the municipality of Graçanicë/Gračanica, it was found that an art installation, an obelisk dedicated to the forcibly disappeared people in Kosovo, is built in the city center³⁰. As described in the information table, “Missing” is dedicated to Kosovo Serbs, Kosovo Roma, Kosovo Gorani, Kosovo Bosniaks, and Kosovo Albanians who went missing before, during, and after the conflict in 1999. The obelisk is built in a way which displays the letters of the word “Missing” in English. In the obelisk for the missing, words are used to claim that the people displayed by photographs were abducted by the Kosovo Liberation Army, using the term “Albanian extremists.” It even claims that the missing persons are victims of “organ trafficking.” The description for the obelisk is written in three languages:

²⁵ The targeted municipalities: Rahovec, Gjakova, Prishtina, Graçanica, Peja and Gjilan

²⁶ In-field visit in Celina Village, 2024

²⁷ In-field visit in Potërç, Peja, 2024

²⁸ Interview with Director of Culture House in the Municipality of Gjilan, Kushtrim Zeqiri

²⁹ In-field visit in Gjakova city centre and in Çabrat from researchers, 2024

³⁰ In-field visit in Graçanica, 2024



Serbian, English, and Albanian, but the names are only in Serbian, making it impossible to understand if there are Albanian victims included.

In the primary school “King Milutin” in Graçanicë/Gračanica, there is a plaque commemorating two former students at the school³¹. The description on the commemorative plaque states that the two victims, Nikola Petrović and Marija Petrović, are “Victims of NATO aggressors 01.05.1999”.

³¹ In-field visit in Gračanica, 2024

NARRATIVES IN LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

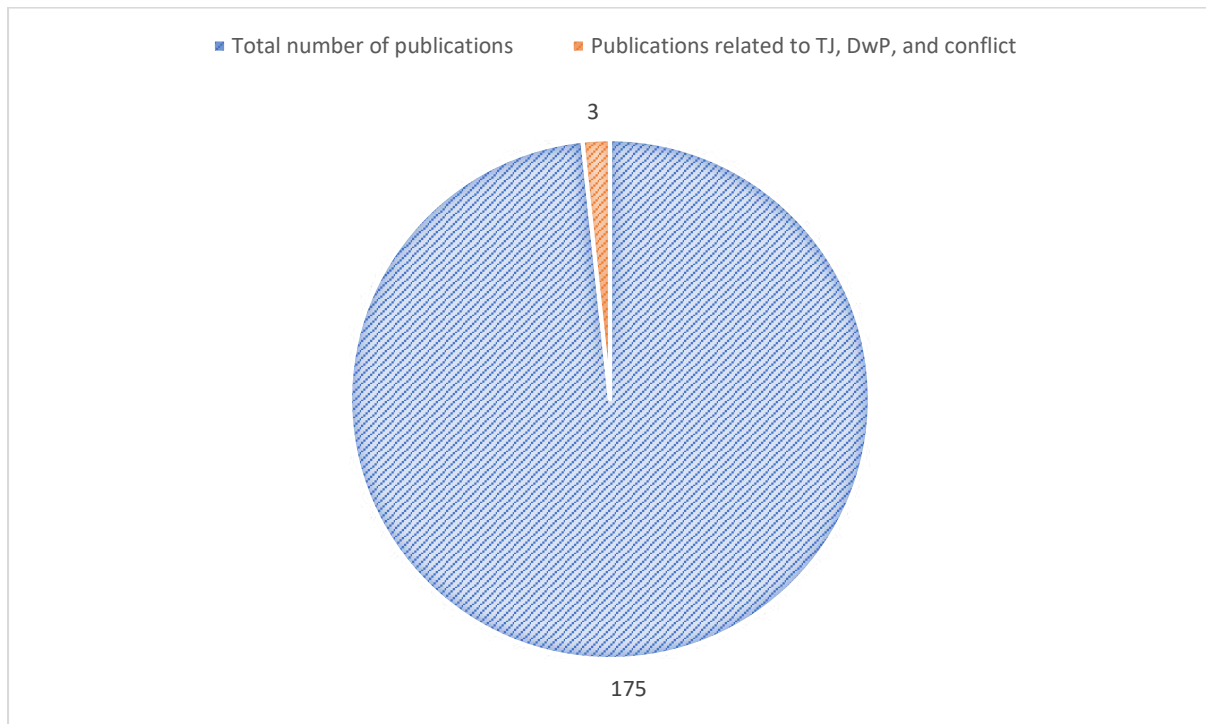
The municipalities of Kosovo, in their entirety, have the competence for cultural and sports life as well as commemorative organizations for most conflict events in the country. BIRN Kosovo analyzed the content published by the municipalities of Prishtinë/Priština, Pejë/Peć, Gjakovë/Djakovica, Rahovec/Orahovac, Graçanicë/Gračanica, and Gjilan/Gnjilane.

The data from the monitoring of publications over a year show that the municipalities have similar issues to the central level in their online content and publications on transitional justice.

In all the monitored municipalities, there is no dedicated space that offers the main data on conflict events, and most of the information is provided in the form of incomplete news that does not provide basic information about the number of victims and their ethnicity.

Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština

Throughout 2023, 175 news articles were published on the website of the Municipality of Pristina, of which only three (1.7%) are related to the conflict, dealing with the past, transitional justice, collective memory, memorialization, and mono-ethnic narratives.



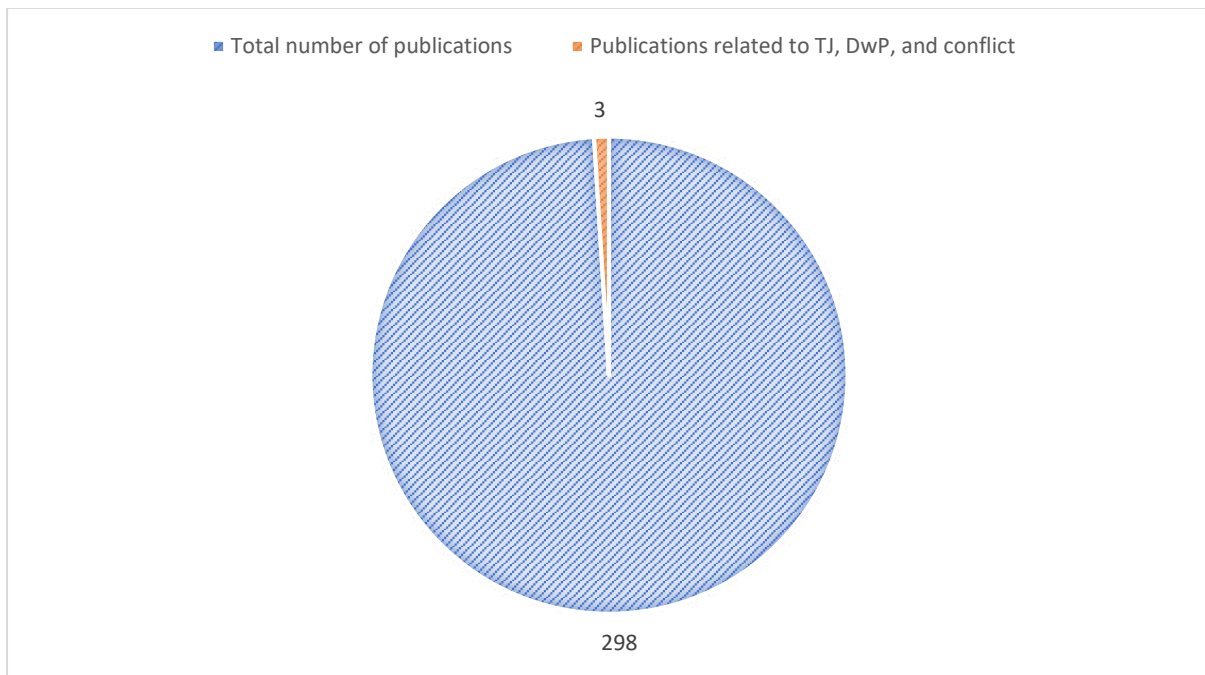
Graphic 9: The category of the news published by the Municipality of Prishtinë/Priština

The publications do not contain information about all conflict victims and are not translated into the two official languages. The data shows that during the celebration of Independence Day, the municipality used the Albanian flag as well.

On February 17, during the official decoration of the city, there were not only flags of Kosovo displayed, representing all ethnicities living in Kosovo, but rather, every third flag displayed was that of Kosovo. The other two flags were those of Albania and the USA³².

Municipality of Peja/Peć

Throughout 2023, 298 news articles were published on the website of the Municipality of Peja, of which only 3 are related to the conflict, dealing with the past, transitional justice, collective memory, memorialization, and mono-ethnic narratives.



Graphic 10: The category of the news published by the Municipality of Peja/Peć

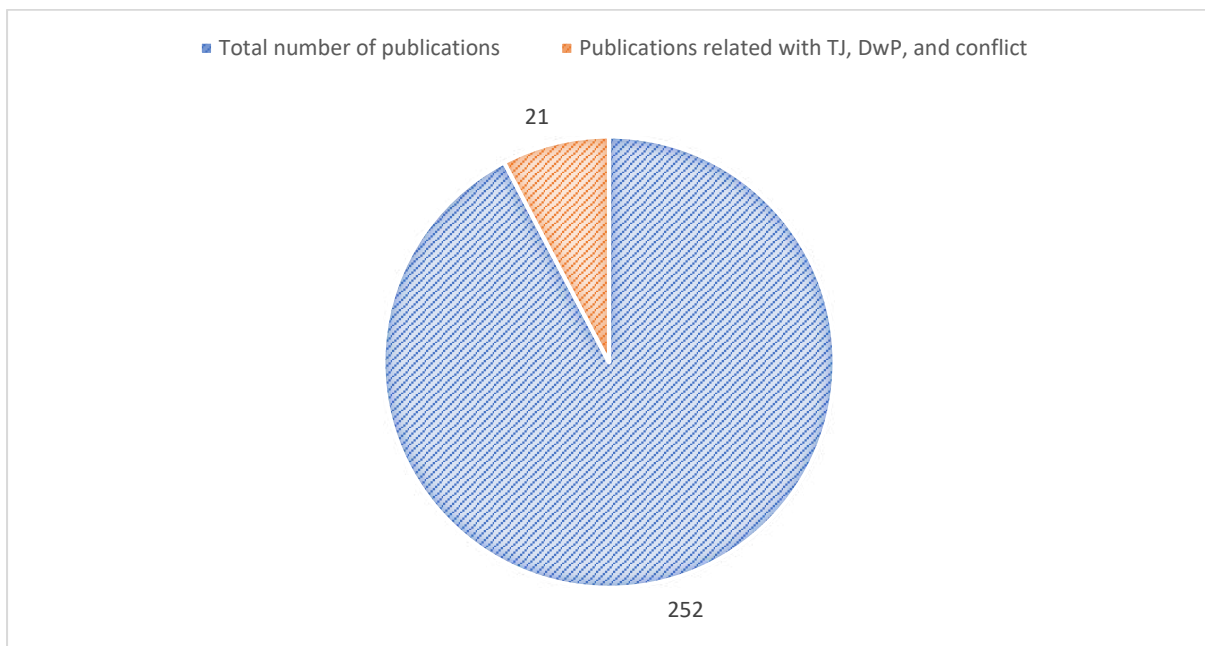
All these news articles are related to commemorations of martyrs and the unveiling of statues commemorating the anniversaries of their fall or marking the Independence Day of Kosovo. In no publication throughout 2023 did the Municipality of Peja/Peć³³ promote, advance, or publish any story of solidarity between communities during the conflict in Kosovo.

³² In-field monitoring of public display of flags in Prishtina, 2024

³³ Monitoring of the web-page of the Municipality of Peja from researchers, 2024

Municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane

Throughout 2023, 252 news articles were published on the website of the Municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane, of which 21 or 7.7% are related to the conflict, dealing with the past, transitional justice, collective memory, memorialization, and mono-ethnic narratives.



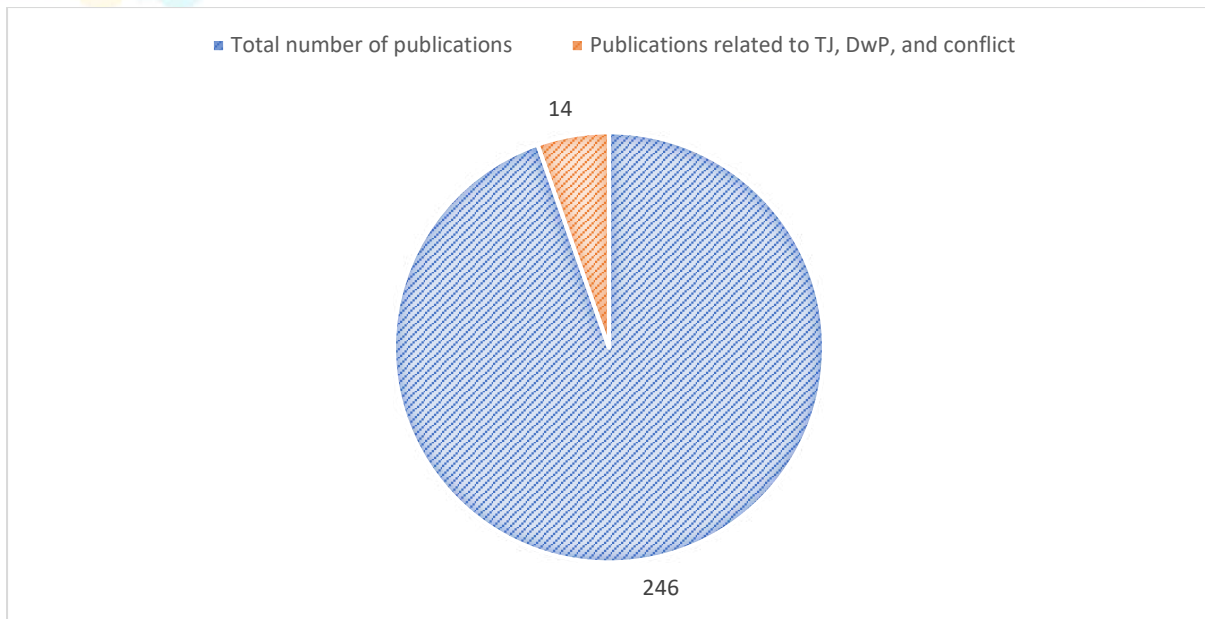
Graphic 11: The category of the news published by the Municipality of Gjilan

Most of the 21 published news articles, or 47.6% of them, are related to the commemoration of martyrs or KLA battles, while 19.1% are related to the use of art, such as the case with the Flaka e Janarit (Flames of January) Festival, through which the Municipality of Gjilan commemorates the courage and sacrifice of the heroes³⁴.

Municipality of Gjakova/Djakovica

Throughout 2023, 246 news articles were published on the website of the Municipality of Peja, of which 14 or 5.4% are related to the conflict, dealing with the past, transitional justice, collective memory, memorialization, and mono-ethnic narratives.

³⁴"Flame of January 2023" - The sacrifice of the heroes of Gjilan is valued, Kallxo.com, 2023, <https://kallxo.com/kulture/flaka-e-janarit-2023-vleresohet-sakrifica-e-heronjve-gjilanas/>



Graphic 12: The category of the news published by the Municipality of Gjakova/Djakovica

Most of the 14 published news articles are commemorations of anniversaries of martyrs and battles of the KLA in the municipality of Gjakova//Djakovica ³⁵. Many of these news have to do with tributes as well as memorial academies with the heads of the municipality participating.

None of the 246 analyzed news items belonging to the year 2023 convey stories of solidarity between communities during the conflict.

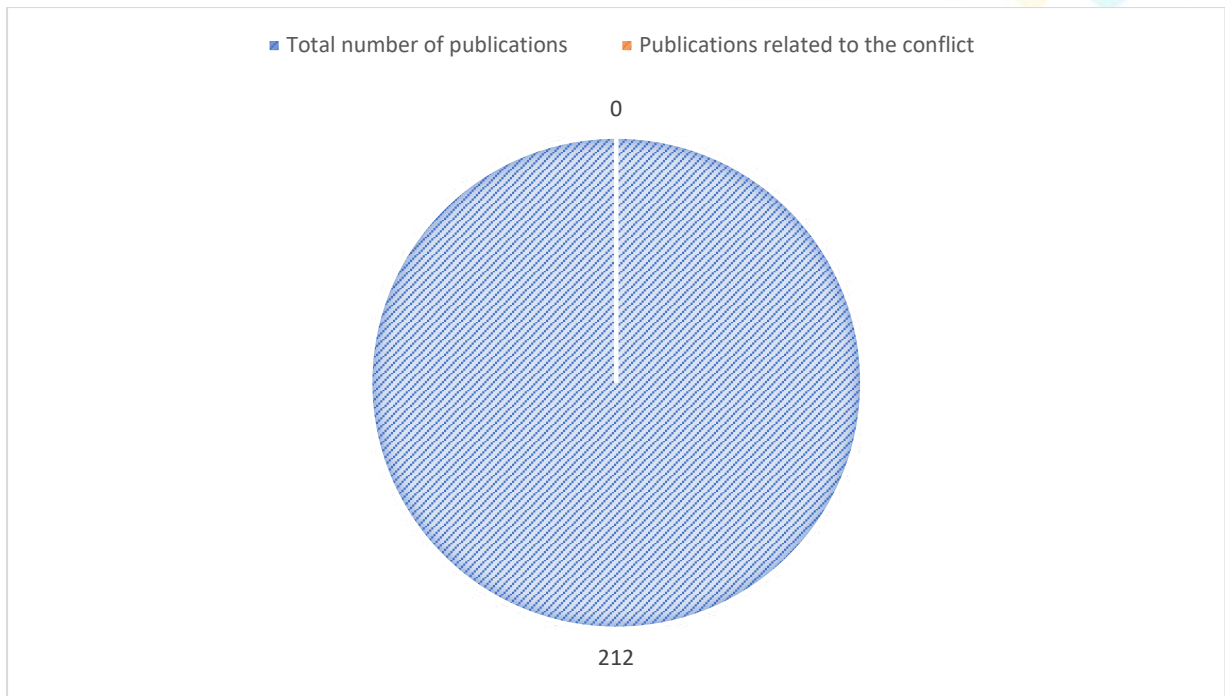
Municipality of Gracanica/Gračanica

In 2023, 212 news articles were published on the website of the Municipality of Gracanica, of which none are related to the conflict, dealing with the past, transitional justice, collective memory, memorialization, and mono-ethnic narratives³⁶.

On the website of the Municipality of Graçanicë/Gračanica, at the beginning of 2024, a series of news articles were published related to the end of 2023. These articles mainly describe the distribution of food packages, stoves, and heating fuel. Overall, the published news pertains to municipal, sports, and cultural activities and does not convey stories of inter-ethnic solidarity.

³⁵ Monitoring of the web-page of the Municipality of Gjakova, 2024

³⁶ Monitoring of the web-page of the Municipality of Gracanica, 2024



Graphic 13: The category of the news published by the Municipality of Graçanicë/Gračanica

Municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac

The Municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac has published 558 posts on its Facebook page³⁷. 44 of the posts shared on Facebook relate to the research topic. The publications have mainly been to commemorate battles, anniversaries of martyrs, and memories related to the conflict, thus only remembering Kosovo Albanians and not conveying any stories of solidarity between communities during the last conflict in Kosovo.

³⁷ The web-page of the Municipality on the news publication section even after many attempts was having evident technical issues, therefore Facebook was used to gather data



Graphic 14: The category of the news published by the Municipality of Rahovec

NARRATIVE BROADCASTED IN MEDIA

The media scene in Kosovo, in both Albanian and Serbian language media, is categorized by broadcasting of narratives the way they are offered by politicians and information sources. Consequently, most of the information broadcast in the media is based on data given from institutions and politicians, neglecting so the data that could be obtained from judicial documents and the prosecution.

BIRN Kosovo monitored the narrative broadcasted in the media during the commemorations in two dates: one of the Reçak//Rečak Massacre and the other one was about the anniversary of the NATO bombings³⁸. The data shows that the information broadcasted during these two dates were incomplete and did not provide a full account of the events.

In all reports, data from the Hague Tribunal and its findings about the responsibility for the crimes committed in Kosovo were avoided.

In some cases, the narrative stated that no one has been convicted for the crimes, despite the fact that the ICTY has held senior political leaders and the command chain of the operation accountable³⁹.

During the commemoration of the NATO bombings, there was no clear explanation of the justification for the bombings and the mission that NATO initiated in Kosovo.

Data from the monitoring of online media and television channels indicate that on these two dates, a high percentage of content was dedicated to conflict reports. For example, on online portals, over 10% of the news was dedicated to commemorating events, while on TV, the first news item in prime time was the anniversary of the massacre and the anniversary of the bombings⁴⁰.

In the monitoring of online media, factual errors, and data inaccuracies were found. The reports in online media were short and did not provide even basic information about the number of victims in Reçak/Rečak, the persons responsible for the crime, and other facts about the massacre. Issues are also noted in television reports, where residents are not provided with complete data on the Reçak/Rečak Massacre, and assertions are made that no one has been convicted for crimes in Kosovo. The reports lacked other general data on crimes and civilian victims in Kosovo, and in none of the monitored cases were there any mentions of victims from other ethnicities.

In the monitoring of March 24, in addition to the lack of information about victims, other problems were observed. In some cases, the phrase “bombing of Serbian targets” was found without specifying that NATO targets were only military and police targets, as well as military and police infrastructure, without targeting civilians. In a large part of the news, the information that the bombings were conducted against Yugoslavia, which at that time was led by Slobodan Milosevic, was omitted, narrowing the NATO bombings to only Serbia.

The monitoring found that the media again conducted mono-ethnic reporting and did not report on the victims of other ethnicities.

In addition to directly monitoring the produced content, BIRN Kosovo conducted a survey for written media, radio, and television in Kosovo. BIRN Kosovo contacted 80

³⁸ Dates monitored by the project researchers are: The Reçaku Massacre (15.01.1999) and the date that marked the beginning of NATO bombing (24 march 1999)

³⁹ <https://balkaninsight.com/ep-content/uploads/2022/08/Mico-Stanisic-Stojan-Zupljanin.pdf>

⁴⁰ Media monitoring in given dates from the research team, 2024



registered radio and television channels in Kosovo and 53 online media to request information on whether they have published stories in the past two years that convey materials of solidarity between communities. BIRN received 35 responses from the media, and most of them indicated that they had not broadcast any stories that show a narrative of solidarity between communities in Kosovo in recent years. Only one media outlet offered such a case, where it reported how a member of the Jashari family, Bekim Jashari, built a house for a member of the Kosovo Ashkali community on May 5, 2022. All these written media, televisions, and radios that responded to BIRN's survey stated that in recent years, they had not published a single story that shows a narrative of solidarity in Kosovo during 1998-1999.



STORIES OF SOLIDARITY BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

An important aspect of this research paper was also the research on the solidarity stories in Kosovo, among communities, with an emphasis on solidarity stories during the conflict and right after the conflict ended. Even though a quarter of a century passed since the conflict ended, knowing the fact that there was indeed solidarity between people who helped each other without considering their ethnic background, we initiated this process. A fact that can not be denied is the readiness to tell the stories as the non-readiness to share their full stories, meaning with name and surname, this comes from a fear that they can be prejudiced and stigmatized not only by their ethnic community but rather from all the communities in Kosovo.

In institutional publications, situations where members of one community helped another community in danger during the conflict were not mentioned, and data on the number of victims from all communities is lacking. In such situations, residents have a pronounced lack of information about the events and the reality that occurred.

BIRN contacted about 30 residents of different ethnicities in Kosovo to understand their personal stories with neighbors from other communities⁴¹.

In people's stories, there were situations where they expressed suspicions that neighbors committed war crimes, but there were also stories that showed neighbors had tried to help each other during the conflict.⁴²

O.V., a member of the Serb community from Prishtina/Priština

"It was 1999, I lived in Pristina in a block that had 20 apartments, and when the bombings started, before KFOR had entered Kosovo, all the communities in our apartment building put money together and we built an iron front door, and the door would be opened depending on who was knocking on it. If the Serb police or army knocked, a Serb resident would come out; no one ran away from their apartments during 1998 and 1999, but instead stayed there Serbs, Albanians, and Bosniaks".

S.M., a member of the Serb community from Gračanica/Gračanica

"Between the Albanians and the Serbs, there have been various mutual assistance. What I can mention is that we have guarded each other's properties and houses, and this has happened at different times; once we guarded theirs and later the Albanians guarded our properties and houses. The guarding of property and houses by one community to another started in 1999 and continues to this day and has never become a problem, but the problem for some time was the politics, and it was it that created the problem".

I.Z., a member of the Albanian community in Klinë/Klina

"We had a great time with those Ashkali families, we never had a problem. For two years, we have helped each other as much as we could, and we have not left them out in anything. On March 29, 1999, 15 residents were killed here, 11 Albanians and 3 Ashkali, and one was a martyr. As the story goes, an Ashkali was killed in front of the door of the house after he refused to remove

⁴¹ Contacting and in-field visits were conducted as per targeted municipalities/regions from the researchers,2024

⁴² The individuals who shared their stories, which include instances of solidarity, have requested that their full identities not be disclosed due to concerns that they may face intimidation from others.



the plis [Albanian tradition hat] from his head, then another two were killed, whereas a total of 11 Albanians were killed in the same front yard".

H.S., a member of the Ashkali community in the village of Celinë/Celina, Rahovec /Orahovac

"We have always had a good time with the Albanians, and we have always attended weddings and funerals together, but the Serbs entered upon my brother-in-law and said to him 'why have you still stayed behind and not run away?' and then they killed him. The Serbs used to be further back in Krushë e Vogël, and we haven't had much contact with them because they were further away. During the conflict, here at home as well as when we fled in the mountains, we ate food together with our Albanian neighbors. And up there in the mountains, they laid us all on the ground, Albanians and Ashkalis, and lined us up for execution, but one of the policemen shouted 'enough, the number has been met', and then they let us go".

S.Q.i, a member of the Ashkali community in Gjakova//Djakovica

"During the conflict, I lived in the Ali Pasha Tepelena neighborhood, formerly known as the Sefa neighborhood in Gjakova. Our Ashkali community, along with the Albanian community in that neighborhood, helped and supported each other a lot. Considering that there was no help from the institutions because there was no one to help us, this increased solidarity even more among families of different ethnicities in our neighborhood. Yes, we helped each other a lot. My family and I helped because we live together with Albanians; around 70% of the neighborhood is Albanian, and about 30% is Ashkali. We helped them, and they helped us."

D.B., a member of the Bosnian community from Peja/Peć

"We belong to the Bosnian community and we lived in Peja even before the conflict. We left Peja only in the last two weeks of the conflict and went to Montenegro with my children, but my parents stayed in Peja the whole time. As is known, the shops were closed, and people lived by helping each other. At that time, solidarity was greater than it is now. We had a large storehouse about 17 meters wide and about 30 meters long, and everything we had there, we shared it with other people. Most of the people who received items there were Albanian, but there were also people from other communities."

D.B., a member of the Egyptian community from Peja/Peć

"I was a representative of the neighborhood even during the conflict, and all the aid I distributed in the neighborhood came from Albanians. Until KFOR started bringing aid, we received aid from Albanians. We did not suffer from anything, neither we nor the children and we did not choose—whatever they gave us, we just said thank you. I am Egyptian and live among Albanians. All the Albanians who left earlier during the conflict left the keys to their houses with me, and I took care of their houses until they returned to Kosovo. Even today, we have good contacts with our Albanian neighbors."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the data collected during the drafting of this report, BIRN has made the following recommendations.

Central institutions should:

- Begin work on creating a database for conflict victims in Kosovo and include data on conflict damages;
- Review all online content published on official websites to ensure it includes data on all conflict victims;
- Ensure that new publications by public institutions follow standards and contain complete data on victims of all ethnicities, as well as full information on conflict events and the first months post-conflict, up to the end of 1999;
- Mention all the civilian victims of the conflict in their publications and speeches.

Local institutions should:

- Reassess all published information related to transitional justice and include complete data on the number and ethnicity of victims, damages, and data on judicial processes conducted for these events;
- Re-curate public spaces dedicated to commemoration of conflict victims, such as monuments, museums, and memorials, and, where agreed with local communities, include the names of all victims.

Justice institutions should:

- Create online archives of war crime trial sessions and present judicial processes related to transitional justice;
- Follow at least the standard used by the Specialized Chambers and the Office of the Special Prosecutor in Kosovo in The Hague to publish information on the procedural flow of tried war crime cases;
- In the case of the Kosovo Judicial Council begin broadcasting video recordings of war crime trials, as the Specialized Chambers do, and in accordance with the practices of the ICTY;
- Increase the publicity standard in war crime cases by publishing transcripts and data from war crime processes;
- Build databases to publish data from archived UNMIK and EULEX processes, which should be made public.

Research institutes should:

- Support scientific and professional studies on transitional justice;
- Conducted research on the field of transitional justice to be inclusive and evidence-based;
- Respect the principles of transitional justice.



Media and media professionals should:

- Initiate special training programs for journalists to improve the quality of reporting on transitional justice;
- Develop editorial policies regarding their approach to transitional justice; and
- Ensure that mono-ethnic language is avoided and that complete data on the number and ethnicity of all victims is included.



IN UNITY
WE PROSPER