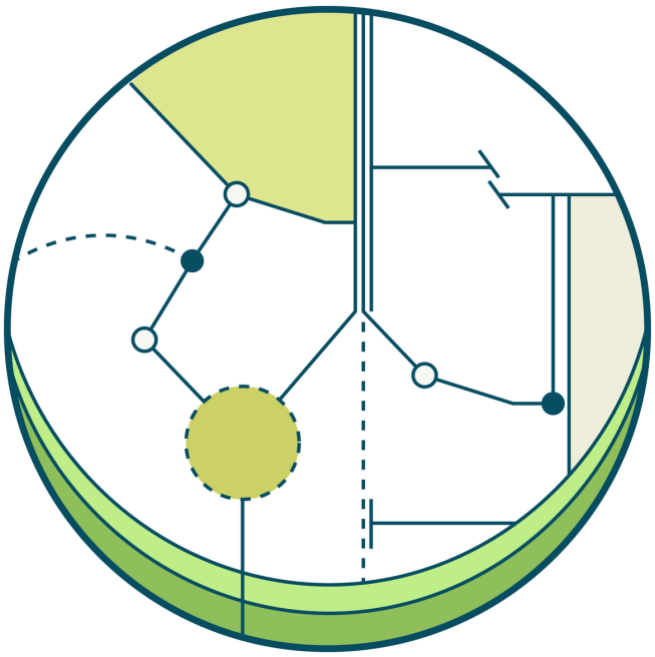
COMPARATIVE REPORT

How residents move, Ulcinj and Shkodra.

Respondents' approach to daily mobility: findings of the Wheels of Change questionnaire



citizen responses on daily travel, accessibility, cycling, public transport and safety in two neighbouring cities.

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October 2026
Ulcinj and Shkodra

1 Purpose and approach

This report compares how residents of Ulcinj and Shkodra describe their daily mobility. It is based on a questionnaire developed and run by the authors of the Wheels of Change study, a project of CoPlan and GreenHOME, between June and October 2026. The questionnaire explored five things: how people travel every day, what makes walking and accessing services difficult, what keeps people from cycling, how they use public transport, and how safe and included they feel when they move around. It also asked which improvements residents would choose first and whether they know the municipal mobility plan.

The aim of the comparison is not to rank the two cities. It is to show where residents start from, what they ask for in common and where their experience differs, so that the two municipalities can plan with the same evidence and learn from each other.

The questionnaire reached 105 respondents in Shkodra and 43 in Ulcinj. Because the two samples were recruited differently and have different profiles, Table 1 is the first thing to read.

Respondent profile	Shkodra	Ulcinj
Submitted responses	105	43
Collection period	Jun – Oct 2026	Jun – Oct 2026
Residing in the municipality	98	37
Women and girls	40	22
Men and boys	45	21
Other or prefer not to answer	20	0
Aged 15–24	39	2
Aged 25–60	53	39
Over 60	13	2
Regularly accompany children, older people or people with disabilities	45	23

Table 1. Respondent profile. Counts of respondents. Source: Wheels of Change survey annexes.

How to read the results. Participation was voluntary and results are not weighted: they describe the people who answered, not the populations of the two municipalities. Percentages are shares of respondents; where several answers were allowed, shares add up to more than 100%. Shkodra's sample is younger and includes 39 respondents aged 15–24, against two in Ulcinj, while Ulcinj's sample is concentrated among employed adults aged 31–60. Differences between the cities therefore describe the respondents and should not be read as proof that one city is better or worse.

2 The two cities in context

Shkodra and Ulcinj lie about 45 km apart by road, on either side of the Muriqan–Sukobin border crossing. They share the lower course of the Buna/Bojana river, a long history of exchange and, in Ulcinj, a largely Albanian-speaking population. Yet they differ in size, in how their populations are changing and in the planning instruments they work with. These differences frame everything that follows.

	Shkodra	Ulcinj
Country and region	Albania, Shkodër County	Montenegro, coastal region
Municipal area	872.7 km²	255 km²
Population, 2023 census	102,434	20,507
Change since 2011 census	−24% (from 135,612)	+3% (from 19,921)
Main town, 2023	61,633 (Shkodër municipal unit)	11,488 (Ulcinj town, preliminary)
Territorial structure	11 administrative units; one city and 93 villages	One town and 39 settlements
Spatial plan	General Local Plan, approved 2017, revised 2020	Spatial-Urban Plan (PUP), proposed for adoption 2017
Mobility or development plan	SUMP adopted 27 November 2025	Strategic Development Plan 2022–2028; no adopted SUMP verified

Table 2. Key facts. Sources: INSTAT and MONSTAT 2023 censuses; Municipality of Shkodër; Government of Montenegro; municipal planning documents.

Shkodra

Shkodra is one of the oldest cities in the Balkans. As ancient Scodra it was the seat of the Illyrian kingdom of Genthius, and the Rozafa castle above the confluence of the Buna, Drin and Kir rivers still frames the city. Over the centuries it became the commercial and cultural centre of northern Albania. The municipality created by the 2015 territorial reform stretches from the Albanian Alps (Shalë, Shosh, Pult) to the lakeshore at Shirokë and the Adriatic coast at Velipojë, so a single municipality combines a compact city, a peri-urban belt, mountain villages and a seasonal beach resort.

The city itself is flat and compact, which has made it known as the city of bicycles. Walking and cycling are part of everyday life and of its identity. At the same time the municipality is losing population: the 2023 census counted 102,434 residents, a quarter fewer than in 2011, while the civil registry still lists more than 200,000 registered residents, a gap that reflects emigration. Planning is anchored in the General Local Plan approved by the National Territorial Council in October 2017 and revised in 2020, and in the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan adopted on 27 November 2025, which sets measures for sidewalks, crossings, school routes, the cycling network, public transport and parking. Council decisions in June 2026 addressed the public transport network and its subsidy.

Ulcinj

Ulcinj is the southernmost municipality of Montenegro, bordered by Albania along the Bojana river and by Bar to the north. Its Old Town, founded in the 5th century BC, passed under Venetian rule in the 15th and 16th centuries and Ottoman rule from 1571, and became part of Montenegro in 1880. It is the municipality with the largest Albanian community in Montenegro, about three in four residents according to the 2023 census.

The town's economy and daily rhythm are shaped by tourism. Velika Plaža, a sandy beach of about 12 km, Ada Bojana and the Ulcinj Salina nature park draw large numbers of visitors in summer, while the resident population of about 20,500 has stayed stable since 2011, in contrast with Shkodra. Settlement is spread along the coast and over hills such as Pinješ and Meterizi, with steep streets and many new buildings. Spatial planning rests on the Spatial-Urban Plan of the municipality, proposed for adoption in 2017; a later decision to prepare its amendments was terminated by the Government in September 2025. The Strategic Development Plan 2022–2028 includes sidewalks, promenades, cycling paths and stops, and the municipality announced a public transport study in 2023. In October 2026 the Chief City Architect publicly raised concerns about intensive construction in Liman, Meterizi and Pinješ.

What the context means for this comparison

The two municipalities differ in scale (Shkodra has five times as many residents), in demographic direction (decline in Shkodra, stability in Ulcinj), in terrain (a flat city against a hilly coastal town) and in planning maturity (an adopted mobility plan in Shkodra, a general strategic framework in Ulcinj). These are the conditions behind the answers that follow: a cycling culture under pressure in Shkodra, and a car-dependent, seasonal town in Ulcinj where residents ask first for sidewalks.

3 Main findings

Different starting points. Shkodra's respondents move by a mix of walking, cycling and bus; Ulcinj's mostly by car, even though their journeys are short.

Different pressure points. Shkodra's respondents point to crossings, lighting and traffic that makes cycling feel unsafe. Ulcinj's respondents point first to sidewalks and to the difficulty of moving with prams, wheelchairs or reduced mobility.

A shared wish. In both cities residents ask for continuous sidewalks, safer crossings and better lighting, and most do not know the municipal mobility plan.

An unequal experience of safety. In both cities women and girls change their route, time or mode for safety reasons more often than men and boys.

Untapped demand. In Ulcinj, six in ten respondents would like to cycle but do not; in Shkodra, one in three already cycles at least occasionally.

4 How people move

The clearest difference between the samples is how people travel. In Shkodra no mode dominates: the car (as driver or passenger) is the main mode for 35 of 105 respondents (33%), while walking, cycling and the bus together account for 55 (52%). In Ulcinj the car is the main mode for 25 of 43 (58%), and none of the respondents names public transport as their main mode.

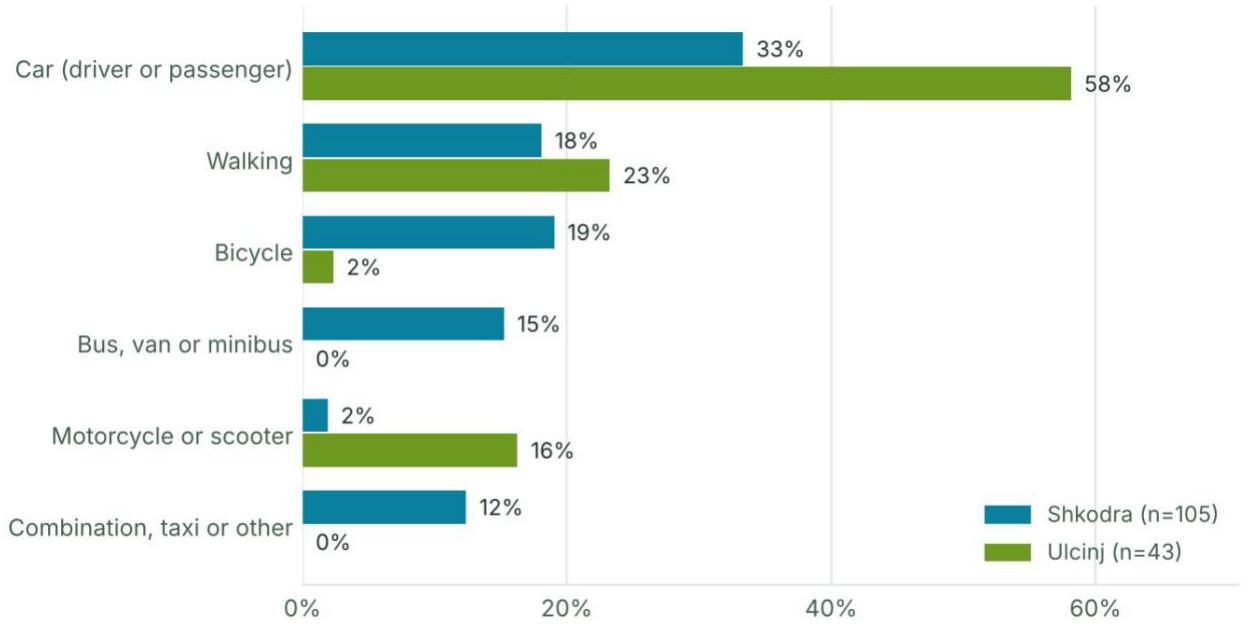


Figure 1. Main daily mode of travel. Share of respondents.

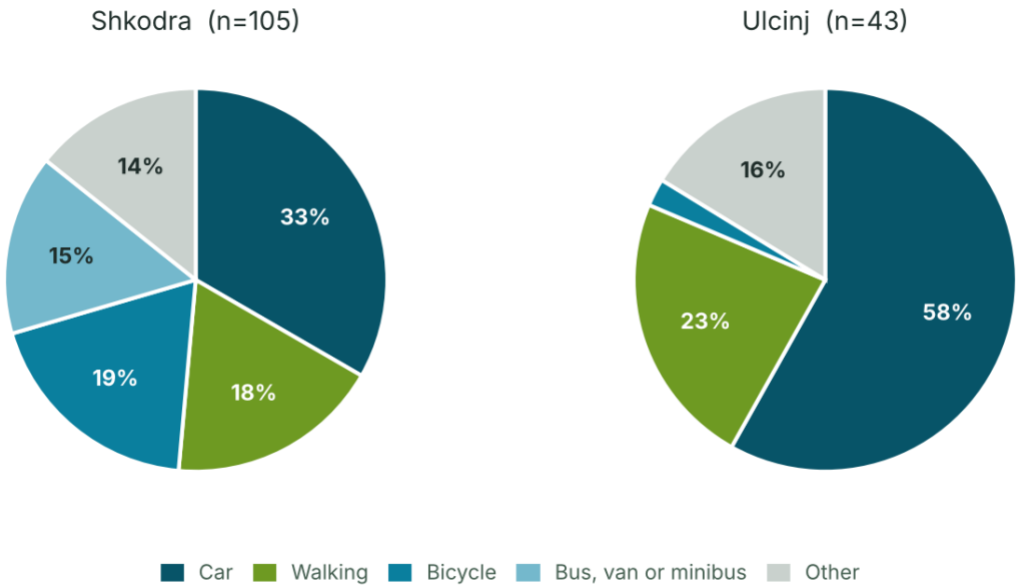


Figure 2. Main daily mode, grouped into five categories. Other combines motorcycle or scooter, taxi, informal transport and combinations of modes.

Distance does not explain this. In Ulcinj 31 of 43 respondents (72%) travel up to 20 minutes one way, against 35 of 105 (33%) in Shkodra, where 31 (30%) travel more than half an hour. Short trips are being made by car in Ulcinj, which suggests that walking and cycling are not competitive options on the streets people actually use.

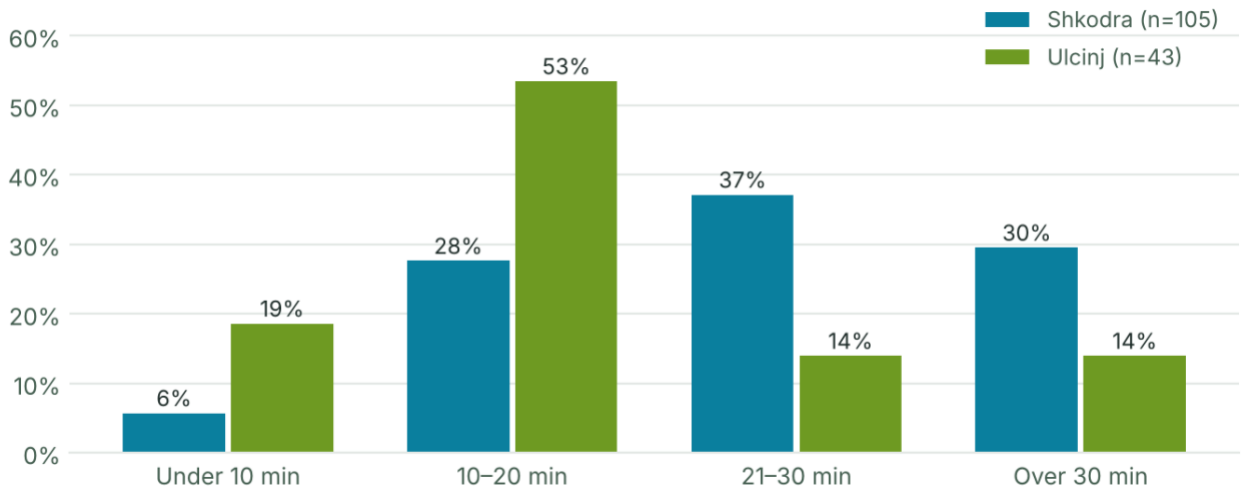


Figure 3. One-way journey time. Share of respondents.

Destinations and timing also differ. In Shkodra the most frequent destinations are markets and shops (74%), work (55%) and school or university (41%), and 72% travel between 15:00 and 19:00. In Ulcinj work leads (58%), followed by tourism or recreation (42%), which reflects the seasonal character of the town. Evening travel after 19:00 is reported by 29% of Shkodra's respondents and by 5% of Ulcinj's.

5 Walking and accessibility

Respondents in both cities describe sidewalks as the weak link, but the barriers they name are different. In Shkodra, damaged sidewalks (51%), missing ramps (50%) and high kerbs (45%) lead the list of accessibility barriers. In Ulcinj, difficulty travelling with a stroller is named by 53%, followed by high kerbs (49%) and obstacles on sidewalks (44%).

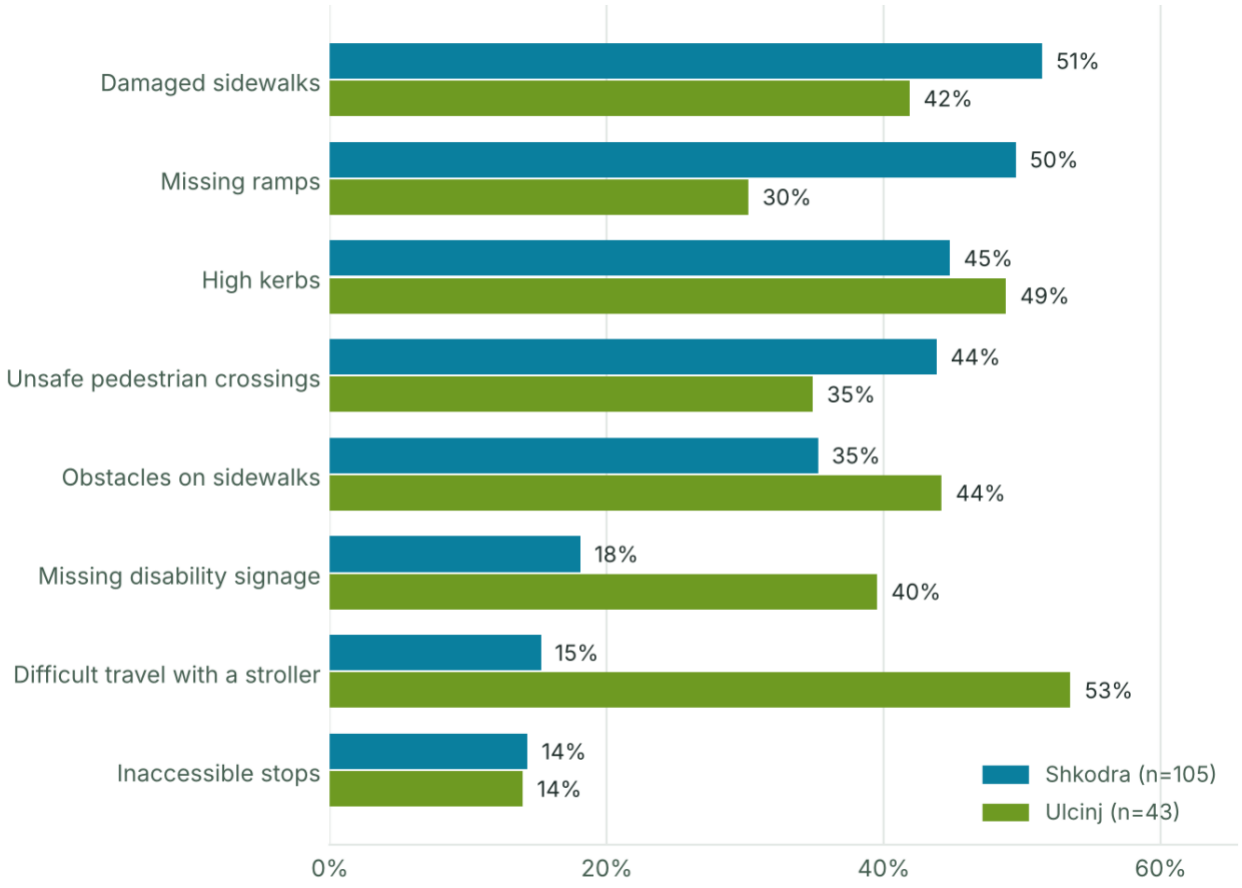


Figure 4. Most visible accessibility barriers. Share of respondents, several answers allowed.

The problem ratings add a second view. In Ulcinj, about seven in ten respondents rate missing sidewalks and cars parked on sidewalks as a large problem (4 or 5 on a five-point scale), and 29 of 39 rate the difficulty of moving with strollers, wheelchairs or reduced mobility the same way. Shkodra's results on these items rest on far fewer answers, because roughly 70% of respondents chose "do not know". They point in the same direction for reduced mobility, but should be treated as exploratory.

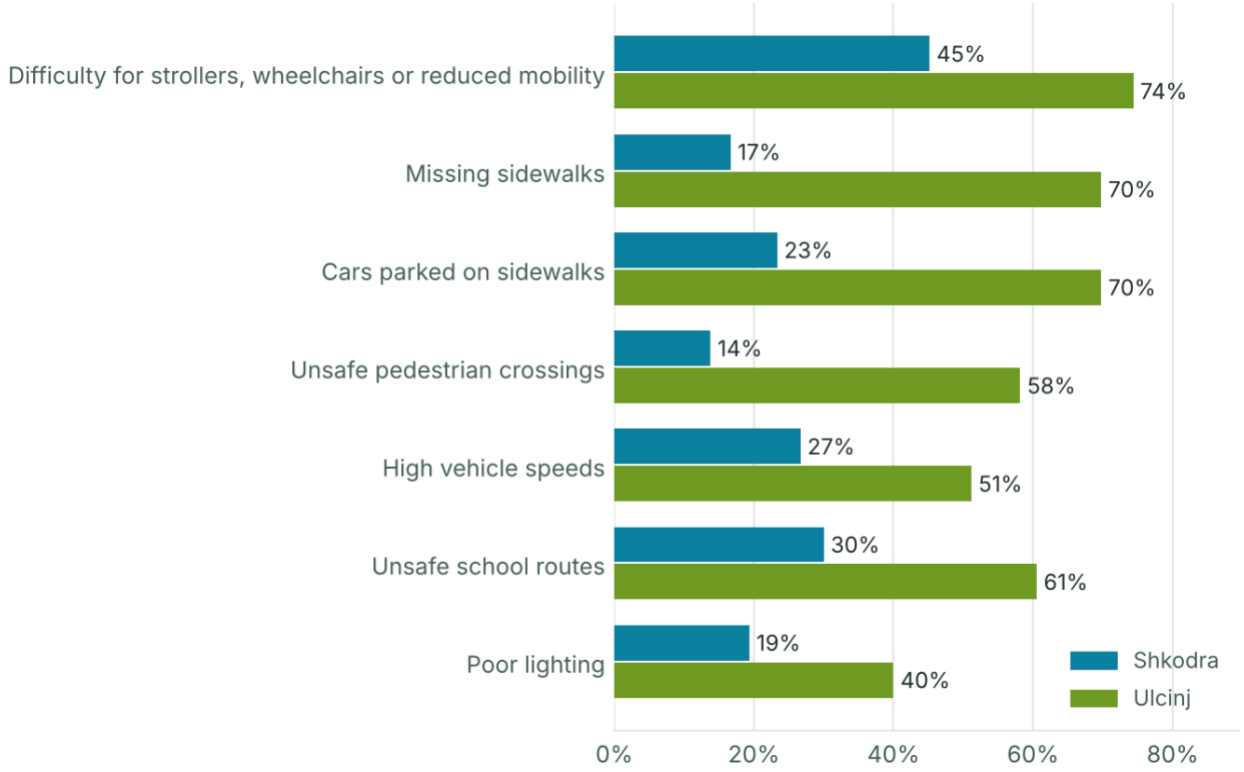


Figure 5. Walking problems rated 4 or 5 (1 = not a problem, 5 = very large problem). Share of valid answers, "do not know" excluded.

6 Cycling

Cycling is where the two samples differ most. In Shkodra, 37 of 103 respondents (36%) cycle at least occasionally, including 20 who cycle every day. In Ulcinj, 7 of 43 (16%) cycle and none does so daily. But 26 of 43 Ulcinj respondents (60%) say they do not cycle and would like to, compared with 13 of 103 (13%) in Shkodra. Cycling is a habit in Shkodra and a wish in Ulcinj.

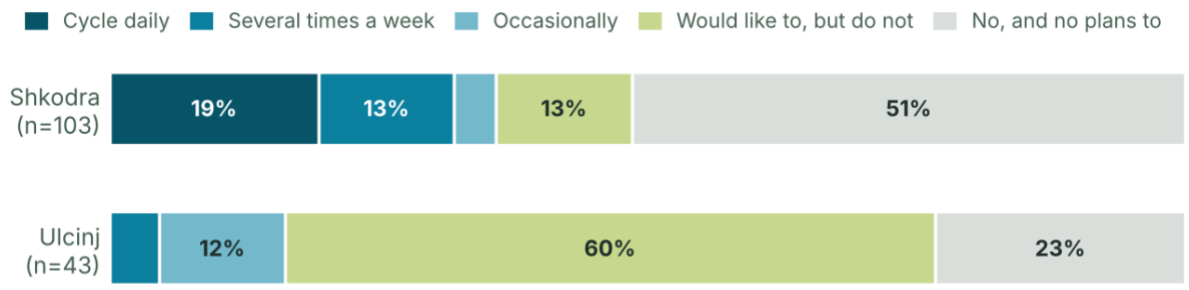


Figure 6. Bicycle use. Share of respondents answering (Shkodra 103, Ulcinj 43).

What holds people back is partly shared. Unsafe traffic is the leading barrier in Shkodra (56%) and missing cycle lanes in Ulcinj (26%); missing lanes is second in Shkodra (48%). Not owning a bicycle is named by 31% in Shkodra and 21% in Ulcinj. In Shkodra poor road quality (30%) and unsafe behaviour by other road users (19%) also stand out. In both cities the barrier is mainly the street, not a lack of interest.

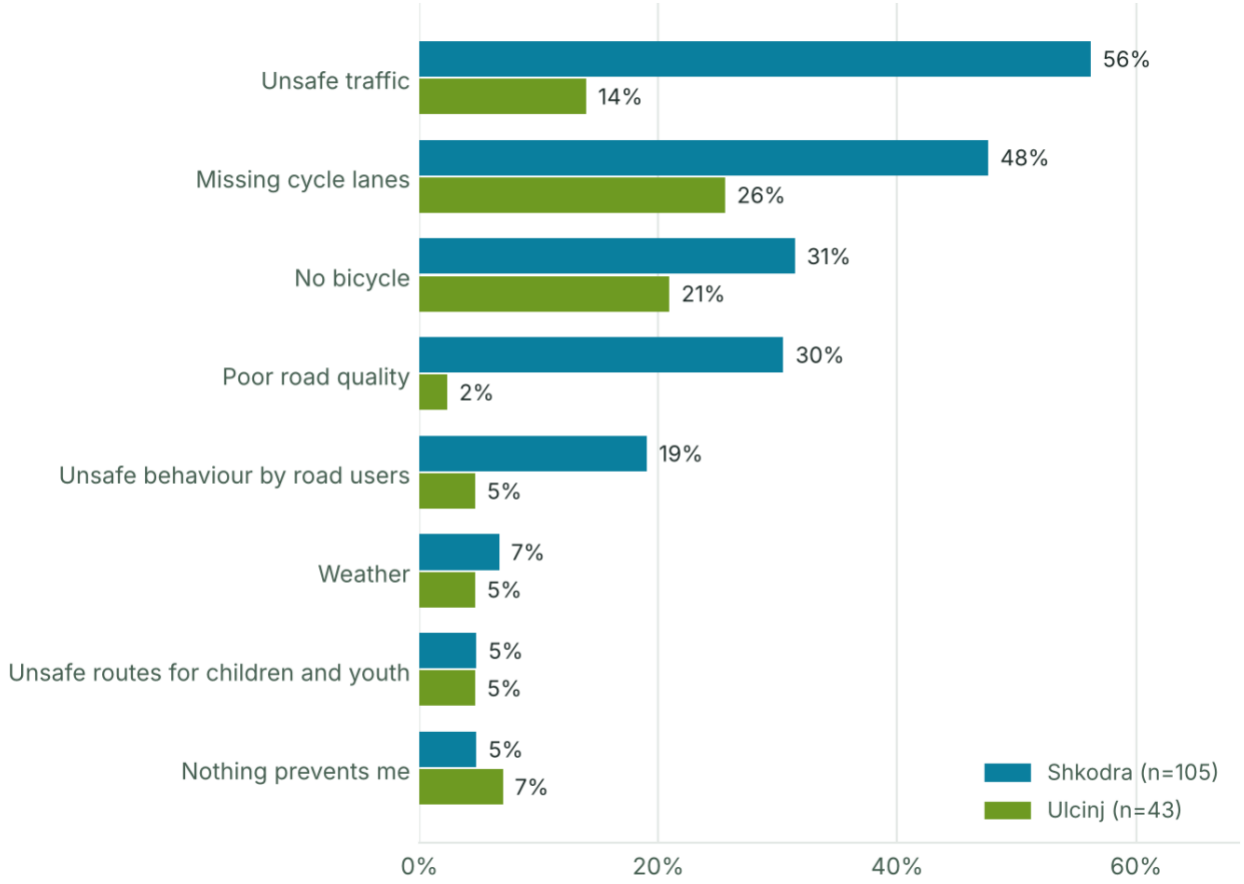


Figure 7. Barriers to more cycling. Share of respondents, several answers allowed.

7 Public transport

Public transport use mirrors the pattern in main modes. In Shkodra 27 of 105 respondents (26%) use public or shared transport daily or several times a week and 11 (10%) never do. In Ulcinj only one respondent uses it that often, and 25 of 43 (58%) never do.

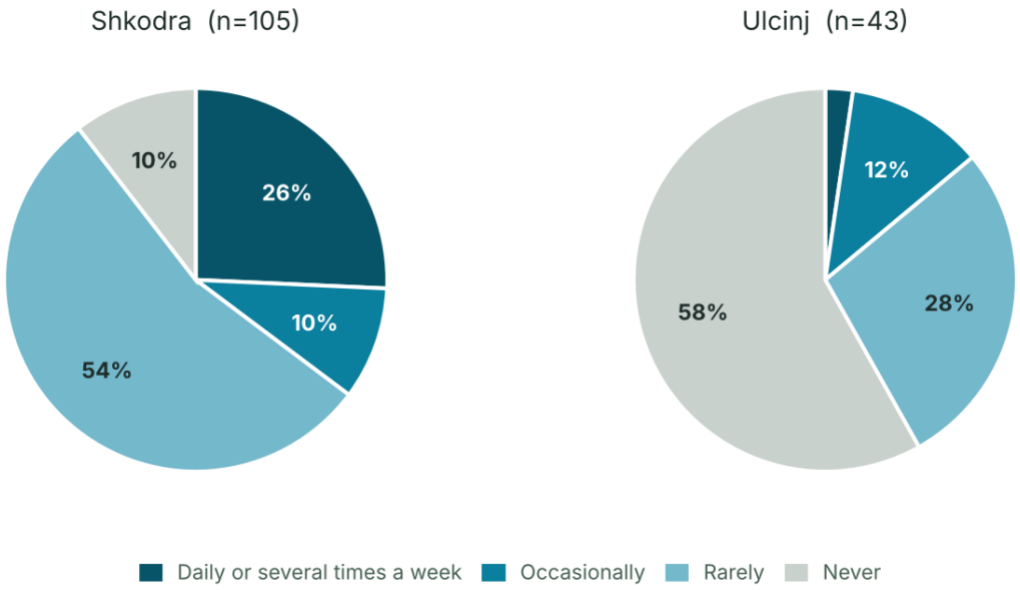


Figure 8. Use of public or shared transport. Share of respondents.

In both cities evening service matters, but for different reasons. In Shkodra 41 of 105 (39%) ask for evening or night public transport and 34 (32%) for higher frequency. In Ulcinj, where most respondents rarely or never use the service, the ratings describe an offer that is hard to rely on: 32 of 43 rate infrequent service as a large problem, and 31 rate the lack of evening service the same way. Low use in Ulcinj should not be read as low demand; it may reflect journeys that are not possible today.

8 Safety and inclusion

Safety shapes everyday travel in both samples. In Shkodra 79 of 105 respondents (75%) say they sometimes or often change their route, time or mode because of safety concerns; in Ulcinj 18 of 43 (42%) say so.

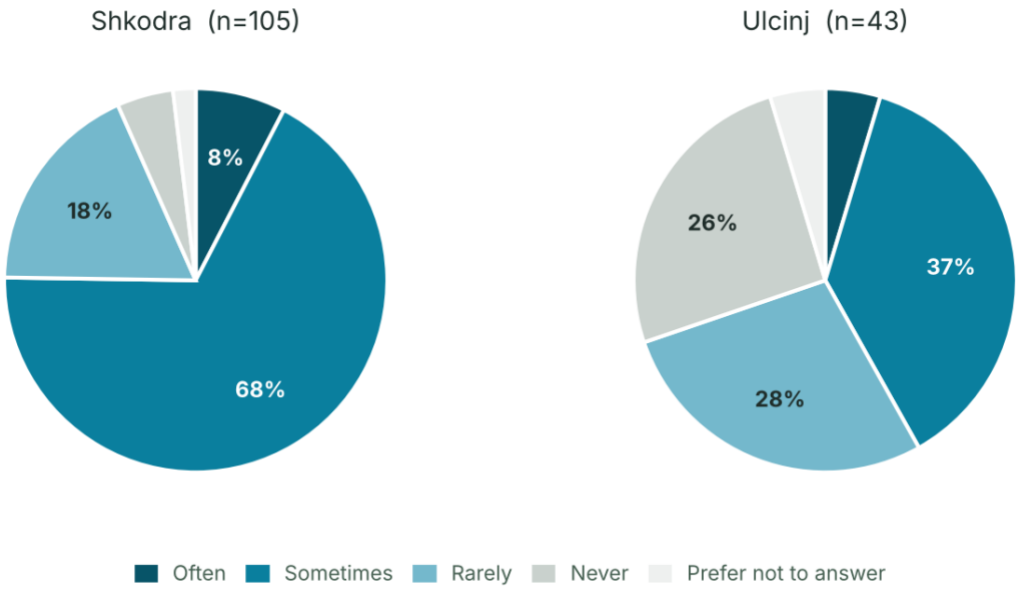


Figure 9. Changing route, time or mode because of safety concerns. Share of respondents.

The burden is not shared equally. Among women and girls, 33 of 40 in Shkodra and 13 of 22 in Ulcinj report changing their travel, compared with 31 of 45 and 5 of 21 among men and boys. The gap is wider in Ulcinj, although the groups are small. In Shkodra all 13 respondents over 60 report changing their travel as well.

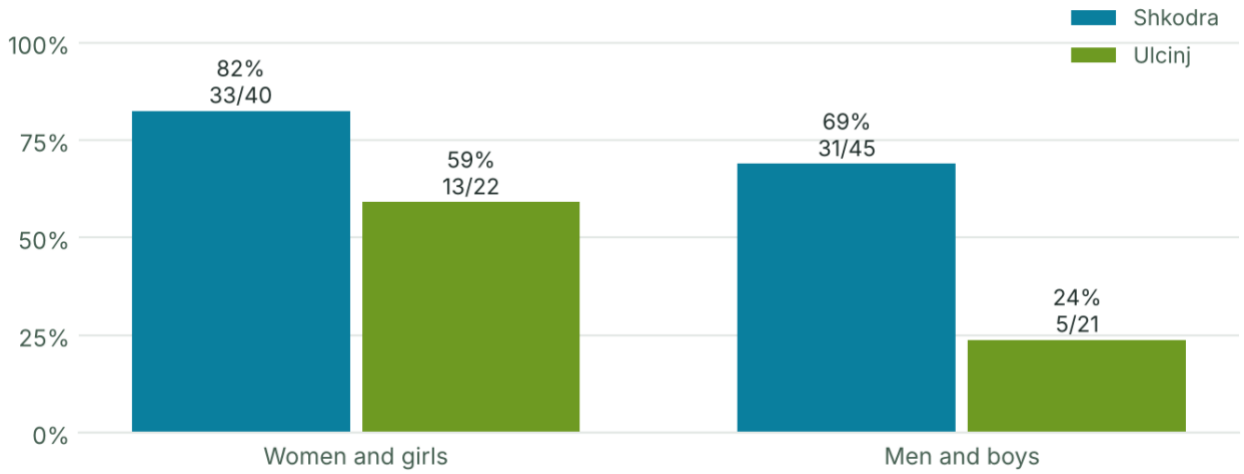


Figure 10. Sometimes or often changing travel for safety reasons, by gender. Share of respondents in each group.

In Shkodra, 56 of 105 avoid certain routes or areas, 55 plan their route or time more carefully and 36 avoid evening or night travel. These adaptations are invisible in traffic counts: they are journeys not made, or made differently, because the street does not feel safe.

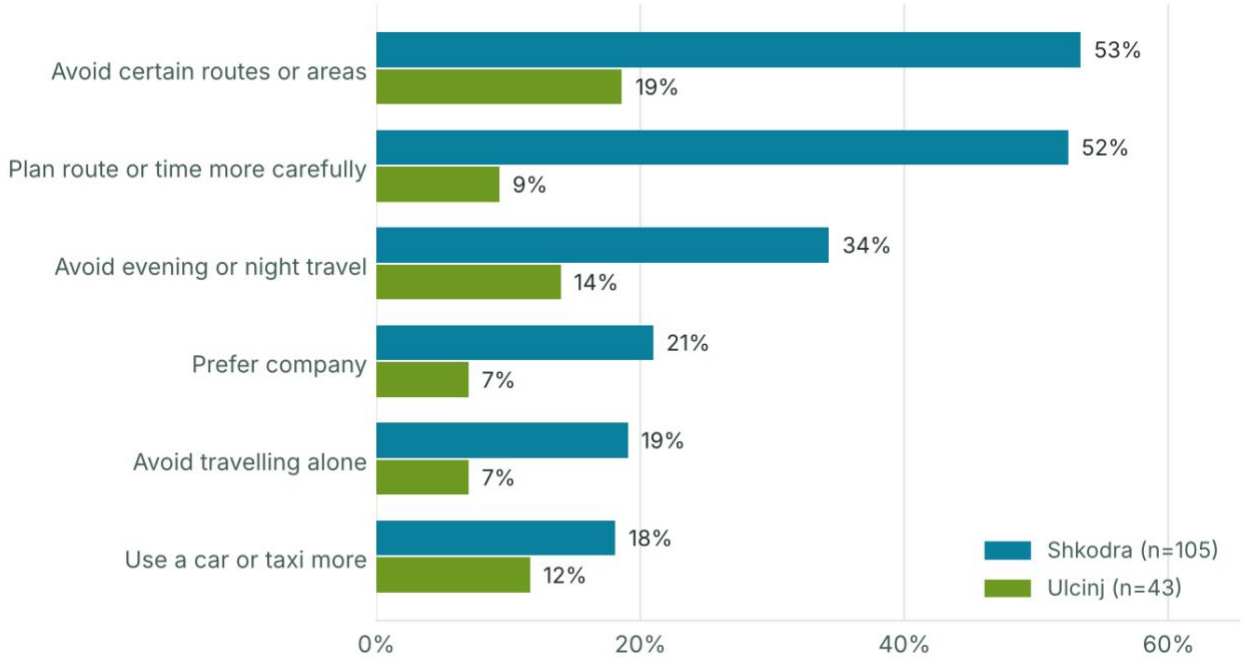


Figure 11. How gender, age or how a person is perceived affects travel. Share of respondents, several answers allowed.

9 What residents want first

When asked to choose the improvements they would prioritise, residents of both cities converge on the same group of measures, in a different order. In Shkodra the top three are safer crossings (66%), more lighting (61%) and new or improved sidewalks (49%). In Ulcinj they are sidewalks (74%), then better access for people with disabilities and safer crossings, each at 44%.

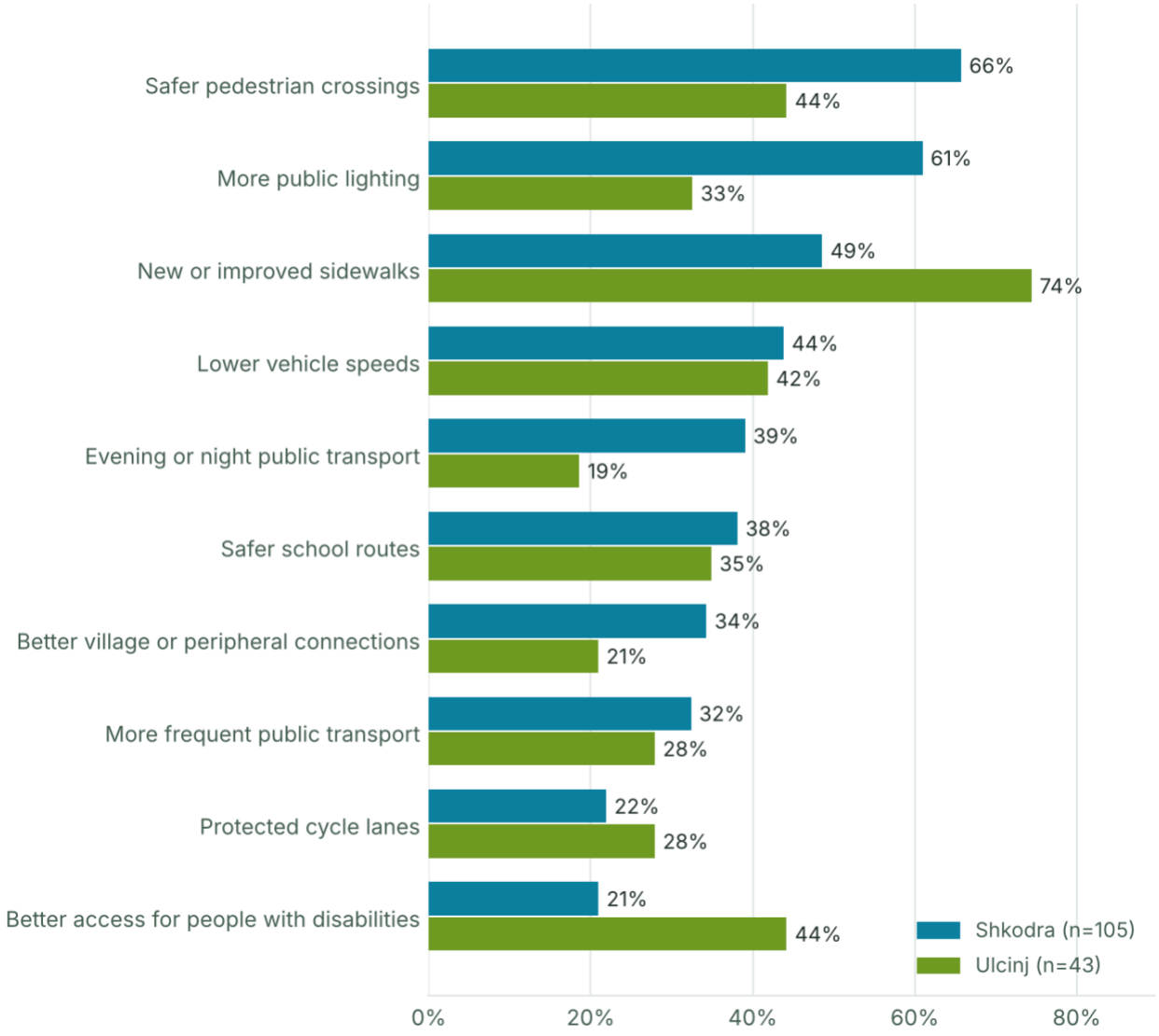


Figure 12. Improvements residents would choose, up to five answers. Share of respondents.

The separate question on the municipality's main priority for the coming years confirms the pattern. In Ulcinj 18 of 43 (42%) choose sidewalks and walking space, with public transport and road safety next at 9 each. In Shkodra public transport and road safety lead with 23 each (22%), followed by safe routes to school (19, or 18%).

10 Knowing and shaping the plan

Most respondents do not know the municipal mobility plan: 58 of 105 (55%) in Shkodra and 32 of 43 (74%) in Ulcinj have not heard of it, and only 4 in Shkodra say they know it well. In Ulcinj an adopted urban mobility plan could not

be verified in the sources reviewed, so the question there reflects awareness of mobility planning more generally. Either way, the finding is the same: residents are not yet part of the conversation.

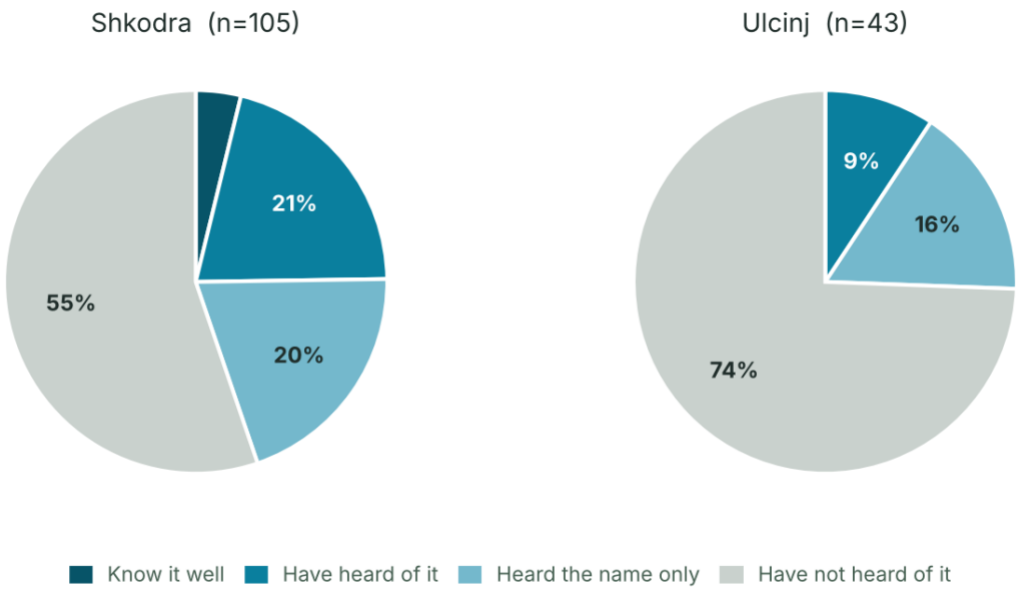


Figure 13. Awareness of the municipal sustainable urban mobility plan. Share of respondents.

11 Comparative reading

The two samples describe two different starting points with a shared direction. Shkodra's respondents already walk, cycle and take the bus, and ask that these habits be made safe; Ulcinj's respondents mostly drive short distances, want to cycle and walk more, and ask first for sidewalks and access. In both cities the request is the same in substance: a street network that can be used from end to end, by women and men, children and older people.

	Shkodra	Ulcinj
Starting point	Mixed modes; cycling is a daily habit for one in five	Car-dependent for short trips; cycling is a wish
First request	Safer crossings and lighting	Sidewalks and access for people with disabilities
Main cycling barrier	Unsafe traffic	Missing cycle lanes
Public transport	Used regularly by one in four; evening service requested	Rarely used; frequency and evening service rated as large problems
Safety	Three in four change how they travel	Two in five change how they travel; gap between women and men is wide
Awareness of plan	Over half have not heard of it	Three in four have not heard of it

What this means for a shared approach. A common method can serve both municipalities: complete-route audits that follow a journey from home to school, market or stop, evening audits with women and young people, shared indicators by gender and age, and a public record of how residents' comments change decisions. What each city chooses to do first can differ: crossings, lighting and cycling continuity in Shkodra; sidewalks, accessibility and a first cycling network in Ulcinj.

Limits. The comparison rests on voluntary, unweighted samples with different age and gender profiles, and Ulcinj has only two respondents aged 15–24. Shkodra's detailed problem ratings rest on about 30 valid answers per item. Results should guide where to look and what to verify on the ground, and should not be read as measurements of conditions in either city.

About the Wheels of Change project

This report was prepared within "Wheels of Change: GIS-Driven and Space Syntax Research for Gender and Youth-Inclusive Public Transport in Albanian and Montenegrin Municipalities". The project is implemented by CoPlan (Albania) in partnership with GreenHOME (Montenegro), with support from Open Society Foundations Western Balkans and the Transport Community. It ran from 1 February to 30 October 2026 in Shkodra and Ulcinj.

Aim. To enhance mobility safety, accessibility and policy responsiveness in the two cities through the involvement of women and young people in evidence-based planning and advocacy, within the just transition agenda.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire was run in Albanian in Shkodra and in Montenegrin in Ulcinj, from June to October 2026. It is anonymous and covers journeys and destinations, walking, cycling, public and shared transport, safety, inclusion, priorities and participation. All figures in this report come from the complete survey annexes for each city, which retain every submission. Open-text answers, standalone five-point scales without labelled endpoints and contact details are not used here. For a full database of the responses, contact the authors at co-plan@co-plan.org.

Reference products

These findings form the basis for several research and policy inputs, such as an accessibility study of Shkodra, Ulcinj and Velipojë, a cross-border mobility brief and an action plan for improved mobility in Shkodra. These open-access documents, as well as the city-level survey interpretations, can be found on the CoPlan website.