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POLICY BRIEF ON RED FLAG ISSUES · SERVICE DELIVERY AND DIGITALISATION



# Online by Default, Offline in Practice: The Hidden Side of Albania's Digital Public Services

**Aurora Halili** – Project Officer, Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM)

## THE RED FLAG

Albania is the Western Balkan front-runner in digitalising public services: more than 90% of administrative services sit on e-Albania and most physical counters have closed. Yet new exit-poll data from 800 citizens in Berat, Durrës, Elbasan and Kamëz show that **for most people the digital journey still ends at the counter**. Only 27% obtained their service entirely online and even among e-Albania users two in three did not. Those who cannot navigate the portal rely on relatives or paid intermediaries, outages and security incidents fall on citizens, and the administration still publishes no data that would reveal these gaps.

**43.5%**
of citizens did not complete any step of their service online

**67.4%**
of e-Albania users could not obtain this service entirely online

**18.1%**
did not know whether any part could be done online

**2.8%**
of e-Albania users are aged 65–74 (INSTAT, 2025)[1]

## 01 A digital champion on paper

The WeBER PAR Monitor 2024/2025 awarded Albania 13.25 of 15.5 points for the digitalisation of service delivery, the highest score in the Western Balkans, within an overall score of 57.25 out of 100 for transparency and citizen-centricity of service delivery.[2] Law No. 43/2023 "On Electronic Governance" makes e-Albania the primary point of access, and the absorption of ADISA into the National Agency for Information Society (NAIS/AKSHI) concentrated responsibility for the whole system.[2] Since May 2022 the physical counters that used to receive applications have been largely closed.[3]

Digitalisation has continued since the monitoring period ended. A virtual assistant, Diella, was launched on e-Albania in January 2025 and, by September 2025, had handled 972,000 interactions before being presented as "Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence".[4] The World Bank reports a 40% rise in applications completed on e-Albania, and the European Commission acknowledged further progress under the Digital Agenda 2022–2026.[5,6]

The same PAR Monitor, however, already pointed to weak spots: electronic payment "usually does not work", no service is organised around life events, no institution publishes user-satisfaction data, and key informants warned that elderly, rural and digitally marginalised citizens are left behind.[2] This brief tests those warnings against what citizens told IDM as they left the offices of public institutions, and against developments in 2025–2026.

**About the data.** IDM exit poll with 800 citizens interviewed right after receiving a service in Berat, Durrës, Elbasan and Kamëz (about 200 per municipality). Because respondents were interviewed at service points, the results describe citizens who still interact with offices in person, not all service users. That is exactly the group a digital-first model must not lose. Percentages are calculated on valid answers; respondent quotes are translated from Albanian.

## 02 RED FLAG 1 A digital front end, a paper back end

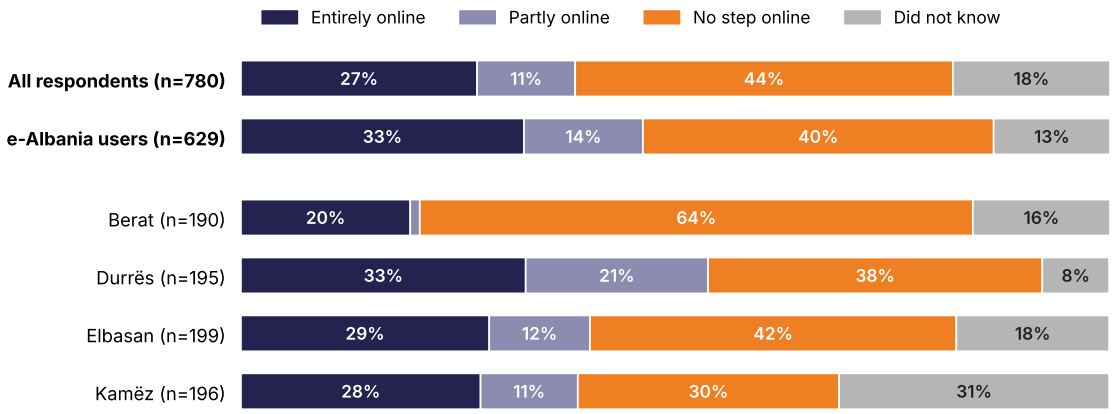
Citizens were asked whether they could obtain the service they had come for entirely online and, if not, whether they could complete at least part of the process online. Only **27.2%** obtained it entirely online and 11.3% completed part of it online. **43.5% did not complete a single step online** and 18.1% did not know whether they could have done so.

The gap is not explained by lack of familiarity with e-Albania. Among the 629 respondents who already use e-Albania, only **32.6%** could obtain this particular service entirely online, while 40.4% completed no step online at all. Where part of the process was online, respondents mostly mention **booking an appointment, uploading documents or downloading a certificate**. In these cases the decisive step (payment, verification, collection) still happens at a counter. Berat stands out, with 63.7% completing no step online and only 1.1% completing part of the process online.

The PAR Monitor found that vehicle registration, passports, ID cards and VAT services still required in-person payment.[2] Card payment directly on e-Albania was finalised for cadastral services only in December 2025.[7] Citizens describe the cost of these hybrid journeys:

FIGURE 1

**How much of the service could be completed online?**




Source: IDM exit poll (questions D3–D4), valid answers. "e-Albania users" = respondents who have used any e-government service (D5).

> *"The procedure was very complicated and required going back to the counter several times."*
>
> Respondent, Elbasan

> *"Services that can be obtained online should be completely independent of the physical administration."*
>
> Respondent, Kamëz

**Why it matters.** A half-digital process doubles the burden: citizens have to master the portal *and* still queue. Respondents who completed the service entirely online reported a positive experience more often (78.8%) than those who did not complete any step online (71.8%).

## 03 RED FLAG 2 Closed counters, open market for intermediaries

When the counters closed, the cost of access shifted to citizens. Stationery shops and private offices began charging for e-Albania applications: around 200 lekë for a password or a certificate in 2023. Citizens hand over their credentials, which gives a stranger access to all the personal data linked to their account.[3] In July 2025 Deputy Prime Minister Belinda Balluku described offices that charge for portal assistance as "entirely illegal" and announced municipal help desks, starting in Lushnja and to be extended to rural administrative units. Local officials reported that pensioners are their main users.[8] The help desks are a welcome step, but they rest on a ministerial initiative rather than a legal obligation, and there is no public information on their coverage. The PAR Monitor recommended exactly such free, assisted digital support points.[2]

National data confirm who is missing. According to INSTAT figures for 2025, people aged 65–74 account for only 2.8% of e-Albania users, and the share of users aged 55–64 fell from 16.5% to 7.2% in one year.[1] About 14% of the population remains offline, mostly in rural areas and among the elderly.[9] In the exit poll, 17.3% of respondents had never used an e-government service. Among them, **40.2% did not know** whether any part of their service could be done online. Non-use is spread across all age groups (13–21%), which

suggests that exclusion is driven by information and service design as much as by age.

> *"There should also be physical points for obtaining certificates, because older people do not know how to use online services well."*
>
> Respondent, Elbasan, aged 63

> *"Services should also be provided in offices, not only digitally. Not everyone is able to use online platforms."*
>
> Respondent, Durrës, aged 55

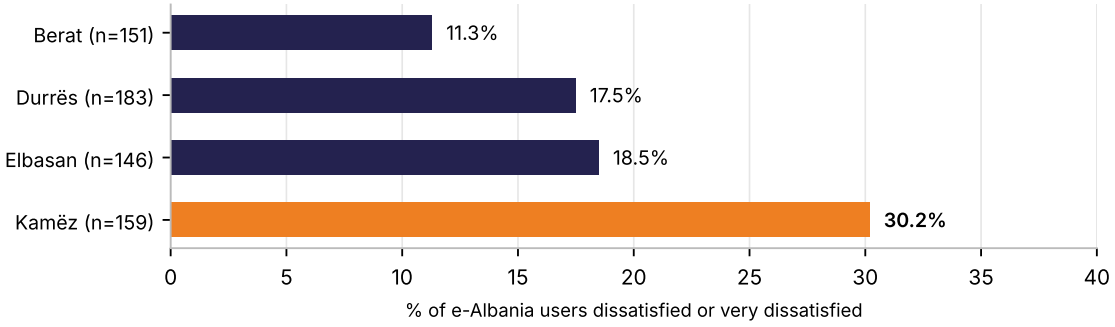
## 04 RED FLAG 3 When the portal fails, the citizen pays

A single-channel model is only as strong as the channel. Respondents report that e-Albania "gets blocked" and that "the system is set up but does not work in most cases". One asks that application deadlines be extended when the portal is down, "because the citizen misses the deadline when the portal does not work". Another asks that "not every employee of the administration should have access to one's personal account".

These concerns have a track record behind them. In December 2021 the salary data of 637,138 citizens was leaked. In July 2022 a cyberattack attributed to Iran took e-Albania offline.[10] In June 2025 the same group behind the 2022 attack hit Tirana Municipality, taking down its website and email and delaying travel documents, licences and nursery registration.[11] The European Commission's 2025 report concludes that *"digital security and equal access for vulnerable groups remain an issue"*.[6] The new Law No. 124/2024 on personal data protection, aligned with the GDPR, and the Cybersecurity Strategy 2025–2030 are important responses.[12,6] Still, no public data exist on e-Albania availability, incidents or their impact on users.

FIGURE 2

**Dissatisfaction with e-Albania among its users, by municipality**




Source: IDM exit poll (question D6), respondents who use e-government services. Average for all users: 19.4%.

Satisfaction with e-Albania is high overall (80.6%), but one user in five is dissatisfied, rising to **30.2% in Kamëz**. Kamëz is also where 31.1% of respondents did not know whether any part of their service could be done online.

## 05 RED FLAG 4 Automation ahead of accountability

The PAR Monitor scored Albania 0 out of 4 on publishing user feedback and 0 out of 3 on using it to improve services. e-Albania collects star ratings, but only a list of "top-rated

services" is public.[2] Citizens notice the missing feedback loop. They describe online applications that have gone unanswered "since 2022", information "you can wait weeks for", and officials who "hide behind the online part, because there you do not know who is in charge".

Meanwhile, the government is adding a new layer of automation. Diella's digital seal appeared on 36,000 documents issued through e-Albania, and the Prime Minister presented the AI "minister" as a guarantee that public tenders will be "100 percent free of corruption".[4,13] The government has not published information on human oversight, error rates or complaint handling for AI-assisted services.[13] Without basic performance data on the services citizens already use, including completion rates, response times, complaints and outages, neither citizens nor oversight bodies can tell whether automation is solving problems or hiding them.

## 06 What has changed since the PAR Monitor 2024/2025

| Date | Development | Relevance for the red flags |
|---|---|---|
| **Jan 2025** | Diella launched as e-Albania virtual assistant[4] | More automation; no published performance data |
| **Feb 2025** | Law No. 124/2024 on personal data protection enters into force[12] | Stronger legal basis for data security (RF 3) |
| **Jun 2025** | Cyberattack on Tirana Municipality disrupts services[11] | Single-channel vulnerability (RF 3) |
| **Jul 2025** | Cross-Cutting PAR Strategy 2025–2030 adopted[6] | Opportunity to set end-to-end and inclusion targets |
| **Jul 2025** | Municipal help desks announced; paid intermediation declared illegal[8] | Partial response to RF 2; no legal basis yet |
| **Sep 2025** | Diella presented as Minister of State for AI[4,13] | Accountability questions (RF 4) |
| **Oct 2025** | EU–Albania PAR Special Group welcomes National Interoperability Framework[14] | Basis for once-only and end-to-end services (RF 1) |
| **Nov 2025** | EC 2025 report: digital security and equal access "remain an issue"[6] | Confirms RF 2 and RF 3 |
| **Dec 2025** | Card payment on e-Albania for cadastral services[7] | First step to close the payment gap (RF 1) |

## 07 Recommendations

1. **Measure "end-to-end" digital completion, not the number of services online.** NAIS should publish quarterly, for each high-volume service, the share of applications completed without any in-person visit, average processing time and the number of counter visits required. This should be part of the open data hub on service KPIs already recommended by the PAR Monitor.

2. **Close the hybrid gap in the 20 most-used services.** Extend online payment (as introduced for cadastral services) and electronic delivery of final documents to vehicle registration, passports and ID cards, VAT and municipal services, so that the counter becomes an option, not a final compulsory step.

3. **Give assisted digital access a legal basis.** Turn the help-desk initiative into an obligation: free assistance points in every municipality and administrative unit, with published locations and opening hours. Add a safe "authorised representative" function on e-Albania so that relatives can act without sharing passwords, and sanction paid intermediation.

4. **Guarantee continuity when the portal fails.** Publish e-Albania availability and incident reports, automatically extend legal deadlines affected by outages, and keep a minimum offline fallback for critical services. Notify affected users promptly after any data breach.

5. **Put accountability before further automation.** Publish user-satisfaction, complaint and response-time data for all e-Albania services, including AI-assisted ones. Make public the rules for human oversight of Diella and set up an independent review of its decisions.

6. **Target information gaps locally.** Municipalities such as Kamëz and Berat, where many citizens do not know what can be done online, should run information campaigns and train frontline staff to guide citizens to the digital option, with a focus on first-time users.

## 08 Conclusion

Albania has built the infrastructure of a digital state faster than most of its neighbours. The red flag is not digitalisation itself but the assumption that putting a service online means citizens can use it. For many of the citizens IDM met at the counters, the digital journey was incomplete, unclear or paid for privately, and the system does not record these failures. Measuring end-to-end completion, guaranteeing free assisted access, ensuring continuity and publishing performance data would turn "digital by default" into "accessible by default".

## Notes

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