



SUCCESS STORY

Embassy of Switzerland in Albania

Berat region and UNESCO city move towards sustainable waste management



A new deposit site in Berat municipality ensures that gas emissions are controlled and leakages do not flow into the river Osum.

Five municipalities in the Berat region – in central southern Albania – found a solution for their waste management that is in line with international and EU standards. New waste management units, a collaborative regional plan and renovated deposit sites in Berat, Kuçovë and Dimal have set an example for other municipalities that aspire to achieve sustainable waste management.

An environmental challenge

‘When the burning of waste would start it was really a catastrophe. It created a thick cloud and the smell would reach all the way up here’. This is how Remon Nova recalls the experience from his restaurant at the entrance of Berat Castle, a major touristic spot overlooking the city.

Berat – the central and largest municipality in the region – is a UNESCO-listed city that attracts thousands of international tourists and local visitors each year.

For years solid waste was dumped at open areas close to the rivers. Anyone could enter the fenceless area and dump waste, collect recyclables or set fires.

It was not just air pollution: waste entered the rivers Osum and Devoll and ended up in the Adriatic Sea. ‘More than 90% of waste arriving in Croatia’s coast was coming from the south, mainly Albania. The pollution of the Adriatic Sea is an issue not only for Albania and Croatia, but for the whole region’, explains Croatia’s Ambassador in Albania Zlatko Kramarić.

Municipalities struggled to find a solution due to lack of experience and finance but also due to legislation deficiencies. At national level several solutions were discussed but no harmonised model of waste management was adopted. The five municipalities in the region faced a question: how to solve their waste problem?

Swiss engagement

At this point the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO conducted a study on Albania’s waste management sector. Based on the findings and on a request by the Albanian government, SECO decided to support interventions in the Berat region. Swiss cooperation was already active in water infrastructure, tourism and local governance. Close discussions with the Swiss local governance programme ensured coherence and adjustment to the local context.

However, two obstacles stood in the way. First, not all five municipalities were willing to be involved due to differences in size, population and the cost of waste disposal. Secondly, although the region needed a joint, permanent landfill, its location and funding had yet to be identified and agreed upon. This would take years.

A mid-term solution

Meanwhile, 100,000 tons of waste dumped in the old deposit site in Berat continued to rot, serving as feeding ground for cattle and pigs. Toxic gases and leakages were turning the whole area into an environmental and health hazard.

Therefore SECO opted for a mid-term solution: create new capacities, renovate existing deposit sites, and establish a region-wide collaboration. This would pave the way towards a more permanent solution for the whole region. The Albanian government was convinced, gave its approval and work commenced.

Building capacities alongside infrastructure

Through a SECO grant of 2 million Swiss francs the project established and built municipal capacities. This included plans, policies, budget allocation and human resources dedicated to solid waste management in each municipality.

Alongside with this the project rehabilitated the three uncontrolled dumpsites in Berat, Kuçovë and Dimal, based on international standards. The works included sealing the sites to protect groundwater, creating leachate drainage systems, connecting with new collection ponds and installing gas vents, lighting and fencing. Municipalities financed 20% of these measures and became responsible for the operation and maintenance of the rehabilitated deposit sites.

As a final step, the project established a regional collaboration between the five municipalities with a view towards sustainable, long-term solid waste management. This collaborative approach has laid the foundation for a broader, national integrated solid waste management where the Berat region is a frontrunner.



Recycling is made easier through new collection baskets at Berat Castle area.

Facts and figures

- **120,000** inhabitants have cleaner cities and villages and improved quality of life, health, and business activity
- **3.5 million Swiss francs** from the Swiss government: 2 million for waste management capacities and 1.5 million for the new deposit sites
- **95% of the region** has now a cleaner waste treatment
- **2020:** for the first time waste no longer washed into the rivers Osum and Devoll

A social aspect: Roma collectors

For many Roma and Egyptian families in Berat and Kuçovë, picking waste and recycling is the only source of income. Therefore the project developed plans and policies to integrate their activity and make recycling safer and easier. New collection baskets were installed in Berat while fenced areas were designated for informal waste pickers to separate different types of waste at the deposit sites.

Cleanliness: the 'A' of everything

For local authorities, citizens and private businesses, the change is remarkable. 'With the new deposit site, Berat breathes freely as it solved the 30-year old problem of an environmental disaster resulting from waste dumped in the Osum riverbed, and the Municipality has now increased its management role when it comes to waste', says the Mayor of Berat, Ervin Demo.

"It's been over a year and we have forgotten the smoke. A very good job is now being done by the Municipality especially in our area at the Castle, where cleanliness is visible. Cleaning is the A of everything", concludes Remon Nova as he looks in the direction of the new deposit site.

IMPRESSUM

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