



# From organized crime to gender equality – Confiscated cars from criminal organizations transformed into mobile libraries

## Introduction

How can seized cars that have been used by organized criminal groups contribute to gender equality? How can these cars improve access to education for youth in remote areas in Albania?

In a joint intervention, the Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development (GPDPD) and the Global Programme Combating Illicit Financial Flows (GP IFF) are transforming seized cars from drug traffickers into mobile libraries. This case of social reuse of confiscated assets is conducted in close cooperation with the Albanian municipalities of Dibra and Shkodra, the Albanian Agency for Managing Confiscated and Seized Assets and the Albanian Ministry of Interior.

<b>Project Partners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipalities Dibra and Shkodra</li> <li>• Agency for Managing Confiscated and Seized Assets</li> <li>• Ministry of Interior</li> </ul>
<b>GIZ projects involved:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development (GPDPD)</li> <li>• Global programme Combating Illicit Financial Flows (GP IFF)</li> </ul>
<b>Country</b>	Albania
<b>Period</b>	2021 - (ongoing)

The mobile library will serve the remote areas in the municipalities of Dibra and Shkodra to increase access to education which is considered a major problem the areas face. Schools are in poor conditions, and pupils have few possibilities to pursue a higher education. Access to education is key for sustainable development and in promoting gender-equality.

## Transforming seized assets for community use

When drug-traffickers are condemned, the authorities can seize all assets that have been bought with illegal money or that have been used to conduct the crime. But what do you do with a seized car? How can public institutions use seized assets to promote sustainable development and gender equality? How could you maybe even use the



assets to prevent youth from engaging in drug cultivation and trade due to their poor social and economic conditions?

In a joint intervention, GPDPD and GPIFF supported the authorities in transforming seized cars from drug traffickers into mobile library for the Albanian communities of Shkodra and Dibra. The objective of this intervention was to promote access to education for the youth, which is crucial in promoting gender equality.

The selected project areas are in very remote mountainous territories. For the inhabitants it is difficult to access the libraries of the cities and in the centre of the municipality. According to a baseline study, which interviewed 320 families in drug crop cultivating areas in Albania, access to education was considered a major problem faced by these areas. The mountainous areas that the library will cover have only one elementary school per village. This mean that a child must travel up to 1-2 hours walking to get to school. To access the high school pupils have to travel to the next village and find accommodation with families there, or miss classes. The quality of education remains low as the schools' condition is very remote. On the other side Dibra has the lowest rate of women into the labour market in Albania.

Figure 1 **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.** shows how a mobile library can look like. The car on the left is a seized car while the one on the right is a transformed one. *The outside parts of the cars display designs from children living in benefiting areas.*

*Figure 2 A Transformation of a seized car into a Mobile library*





## The mobile library

The mobile library will serve communities in remote areas to increase access to education. The selection of books ranges from the most sold books, to encyclopaedias, and books on promoting gender equality. The books target children from 5 to 18 years. Schools will furthermore have a time schedule when the mobile library will visit them, and pupils can take the books or read the books at the mobile library.

The direct beneficiaries of the mobile library are the children and youth living in remote areas in Dibra and Shkodra. Additional beneficiaries are all those who would like to read a book and enjoy the program that the mobile library will offer, such as author's readings, competitions, or movie nights. The mobile library is expected to bring cultural and educational events to the villages. A distribution plan for the mobile library's first year of operation will be drafted by the municipality and the GIZ team. The mobile library will also be present at local celebrations.

The plan will cover activities such as:

- book readings
- artistic days for children
- telling of local legends etc.

## Other social use of the mobile library

The mobile library will be also used by the social directorate of the municipalities for their **campaigns against domestic violence and child protection**. Both municipalities have their own staff member on social protection offering counselling and advice to families in need. Also, the municipalities undertake specific campaigns specially against domestic violence and child protection. Due to lack of transport means the municipality fails to offer those services in the remote areas, therefore the mobile library will be used to bring not only books, but also the mobile social services to the villages.

The GIZ Global project the Bridge Component Albania aims to offer **socio-economical support for returnees from Germany**, who are facing economic social psychological and cultural challenges during the reintegration process. In this context the project is focused in offering returnees the initial guidance and emergency assistance immediately after their arrival, to cover all their basic needs to facilitate their long-term reintegration process in Albania. The support consists also of psychological care and counselling for the families of returnees. The project considers psychological support to be vital as it helps in reducing stress, processing trauma, and building constructive relationships, especially for vulnerable groups. The project staff faces some challenges when it comes to the environment where the counselling takes place, most notably, when providing psychological counselling sessions for families. In most cases, the clients live in difficult and poor conditions where the counselling process cannot be productive. While counselling women, children are often a distraction. A safe space for both needs to be offered. For that a Memorandum of Understanding will be signed between the project and

the municipality of Shkodra, clarifying that the mobile library will be used when counselling women, to provide a better service in dainty conditions. While women are being counselled their children will make use of the mobile library. The mobile library will be used also during therapeutic sessions or educative activities with minors.

### **Local engagement, sustainability and scaling-up**

Local ownership is very important for the design, transformation, and operation of the mobile library. The cars are and will be in the ownership of the municipalities. The outside of the mobile library is being decorated by drawings of children living in the areas that the mobile library will visit, so, that also the children feel more connected to the cars.

The mobile libraries will be used by different departments at the municipality.

Since 2019 the Albanian government has adopted a law on social reuse of seized assets. Yet, the law has only seen very limited application, with only some immovable properties being used for social purposes. Only in 2021, a total of 117 cars were seized from illegal activities, which were not being used prior to the project but stored at a warehouse until they would become unfunctional. Since the transformation of the first car into a mobile library, 20 cars have been transferred to the municipalities for social reuse purposes. One of those municipalities has shown interest to transform one truck into a mobile youth centre. The intervention is also shared with other donors to make use of the seized cars and transform them into mobile services for youth and social services.