



Kosova Women's Network

Serving, Protecting and Promoting the Rights of Women and Girls

18 December 2014

Letter to Members of Kosovo Parliament

As citizens of Kosovo and as taxpayers who have the right to participate in the democratic process of determining the budget of Kosovo, we are writing to express our concerns with regard to the current draft budget proposed by former Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi. We do not feel that it adequately reflects the needs of Kosovar citizens nor puts aside sufficient resources for implementing Kosovo's laws and protecting the rights of Kosovo citizens. More specifically, we request that, at minimum, the following changes be made to the Budget of Kosovo for 2015.

1. Increase social assistance: Persons dependent on social assistance are living below the poverty line in Kosovo. Despite requests from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) in prior years, the budget for social assistance has yet to be increased. In line with the Government of Kosovo's strategic objectives to support social welfare and to decrease poverty, we implore you to ensure the basic living conditions for all Kosovars. In [Budgeting for Social Welfare](#) (2014), the Kosova Women's Network's (KWN) in cooperation with MLSW has provided relevant evidence and estimated the cost of this:

"The current SAS benefit amounts were calculated in 2002-2003 based on the price of consumption of the minimum basket of goods. UNDP Kosovo's 2014 indexation of the minimum basket of goods consumption shows that the cost of the minimum basket of goods has changed [See UNDP, [The Real Value of Social Assistance: An assessment of Social Assistance benefit adequacy](#)]. For a household with four members, the minimum average cost should be €164.25 per month. The 2015 budget line for social assistance can be estimated based on the average family size of households receiving social assistance in previous years (four members) and the indexation of the minimum basket of goods. Thus the social assistance budget following the indexation of the minimum basket of goods should be **€55,069,109** for 2015."

2. Couple social assistance with improved vocational training and job placement services: Towards decreasing the number of Kosovars reliant on social assistance, support market research on labour demands and set aside resources to invest immediately in furthering the capacities of unemployed persons to enter the labour market. To realize this, it is necessary to allocate a special fund of employment, which will be used to invest in active programs of the labour market. MLSW should create annual employment programs under this fund, which would invest in: work training, salary subsidies, and practice in work, public employment and self-employment. MLSW has estimated the costs for each scheme, clearly described in the operational manuals for each program. This fund for 2015 should be financed from the state budget, until other mechanisms to finance the fund will be established. In previous years, these programs were mostly funded by different donors, but considering that these funds are not sustainable, the state should finance the capacity building of unemployed persons according to the needs of the labour market. Based on the research [Budgeting for Social Welfare](#) (2014), Kosova Women's Network (KWN), has provided the necessary evidence that during 2013 and 2014 not a single part of the budget was spent for these programs. We request that the budget of Kosovo for 2015 to finance the employment fund, thus starting to show evidence that employment is a priority of the government.

3. Set aside adequate funds for health insurance and improvements to the healthcare system, according to the [law on health insurance](#).
4. Set aside funds for opening more subsidized public day care centres, towards enabling more women to enter the workforce and decision-making positions. Women are among Kosovo's most unemployed (40% of women, compared to 28% of men). Almost 79% of women in Kosovo are inactive (See KAS, [Results of the Kosovo 2013 Labour Force Survey](#), November 2014). Thus addressing women's unemployment rate will help Kosovo decrease overall unemployment. Insufficient childcare has been identified as a key factor preventing women's participation in the labour market (see Sida, [Kosovo Country Gender Profile](#), 2014). In addition, research using Kosovo labour force data shows that the probability of women to be active in the labour market is higher in the municipalities with a greater number of kindergartens. Kosovo does not have enough day care centres in accordance with EU standards. As the [Gender Study in Kosovo](#) reported:

"A key factor in women's economic empowerment is childcare availability. The Barcelona Agreement has set a target for childcare provision for 2010. Childcare should be provided to at least 90% of children between the ages of three and school age and to 33% of children under the age of three. Kosovo clearly falls short in this area where public childcare is scarcely available and few can afford private care. Opening day cares would create jobs and contribute to improved early education facilities, towards advancing educational attainment in Kosovo."

5. Decrease expenditures on roads: We disagree strongly with the foreseen allocation of **€170,055,171** Euros in capital expenditures to the Ministry of Infrastructure, particularly related to the new road. Evidence has suggested that the road to Albania, which was foreseen to generate income from trade has failed. According to [Balkan Insight](#):

"Trade between Albania and Kosovo has seen only a modest increase since the road opened last year, but it has not led to the queues of trucks commonly seen at other Balkan borders. Experts estimate the road is being used at just 10 per cent of its capacity."

There is no clear evidence that another new road will contribute to revenues for Kosovo. Such extravagant expenditures do not benefit the people of Kosovo and should be withheld until Kosovo's economy becomes more stable.

6. Decrease expenditures on salaries of parliamentarians: The total budget proposed for parliamentarians in 2015 is €4,301,383, divided by 12 months, is on average €2,962 per parliamentarian per month. According to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the average salary of Kosovars is €360 per month. We do not think that a parliament that receives eight times the wage of the average Kosovar can adequately represent the interests of Kosovar citizens. We call for a decrease in this budget line, so that the remaining resources can be used for the wellbeing of Kosovars as proposed in the aforementioned bullet points.
7. From now on, we ask for the Ministry of Finance to require all budget organizations to be required to report on the impact of expenditures on both women and men in order to inform the next budget of Kosovo with evidence-based arguments.

With respect,
Igballe Rogova
Executive Director
Kosova Women's Network (KWN)
(This letter is supported also from the Kosovo Lobby for Gender Equality)