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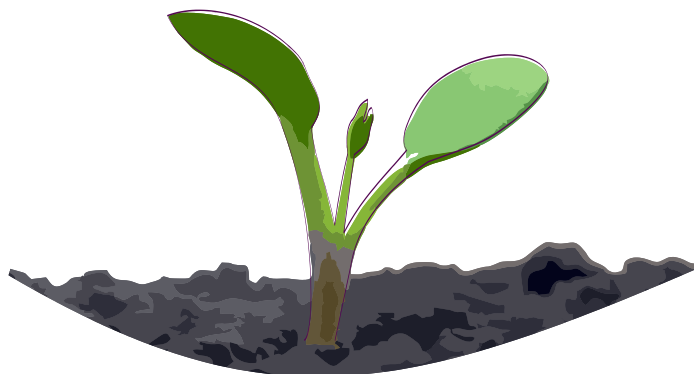


Kosovo Women's Fund

Little Grants,

Big Changes

2015-2016



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www.womensnetwork.org

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Introduction

In 2015 to 2016, with support from the European Union Office in Kosovo, the Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) has provided 26 grants to its member organizations through the Kosovo Women's Fund (KWF), totalling €100,818. In total, **2,526 diverse people** have **benefited** from these initiatives, including women with limited physical abilities, from rural areas of various ethnicities (e.g., Turkish, Gorani, Serbian, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian and Albanian), men, youth, and pensioners. In addition, **713 women have participated in politics and decision-making processes, including 90 different advocacy initiatives.**

During these two years, KWN member organizations had the opportunity to apply for two different kinds of grants: Advocacy grants for a single organization with the maximum amount of €3,000; and Networking for Change Grants where two organizations could apply for a joint initiative up to €8,000. Of the 26 grants, six were joint initiatives and 20 individual advocacy initiatives for one organization. These grants have achieved big changes in a short period of time. This booklet tells some of their stories.

A Brief History of the Fund

With generous support from Kvinna till Kvinna, and later the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and Ipko Foundation, KWN established this Fund to provide small grants to women-led organizations that lack access to other sources of funding. In 2015, the Kosovo Women's Fund received support from ADA and the European Union Office in Kosovo.

The Kosovo Women's Fund initially was established following a series of consultations in 2012 with KWN's member organizations regarding their needs and vision for the Fund.

The Fund meets a crucial need to support grassroots women's organizations amid shifting aid priorities in Kosovo. Shrinking budgets have forced many donors in Kosovo to close their grant programs or decrease funding for non-governmental organizations. Other donors have funds that are extremely difficult for local organizations to access. Women's groups that have limited English language skills struggle to obtain such funds.

Yet, women-led organizations are well-placed to undertake very efficient and effective initiatives towards gender equality and women's rights at the municipal level, as our Kosovo Women's Fund has illustrated. Through the Kosovo Women's Fund, we seek to ensure that their important efforts continue receiving support.

Kosovo Women's Fund Key Achievements

- 2,526 diverse women and girls (and some men) have benefitted in 2015-2016 with EU support
- 713 women have participated in decision-making processes, some for the first time
- 90 advocacy initiatives were undertaken
- At least six public policies were changed to better meet the needs of women and girls, as a result of organizations' advocacy initiatives
- This initiative increased KWN members' capacity to plan projects and write proposals. As a result, diverse KWN members, including rural and minority groups, have applied and received funds for the first time from different donors
- Municipal Gender Equality Officers and officials for gender equality were involved in KWN members' initiatives
- KWN members gained advocacy skills via a 'learning-by-doing' approach and some undertook advocacy initiatives for the first time
- KWN members provided substantial co-financing for their initiatives
- KWN members have gained knowledge in creating and maintaining databases for monitoring and evaluation

How Does the Fund Work?

KWN's diverse member organizations are encouraged to submit applications for initiatives that would contribute to realizing Strategic Goals identified in the KWN Strategic Plan for 2015-2018. KWN members themselves selected these goals through a consultative process. They include:

- Strengthening KWN and its members
- Furthering women's participation in politics and decision-making
- Improving women's access to quality healthcare
- Combating domestic violence and trafficking in persons
- Women's Economic Empowerment

Women's organizations can apply for funding in the Albanian, Serbian or English language, using the Application Form available on KWN's website www.womensnetwork.org.

In order to apply for a grant from the Kosovo Women's Fund, an organization must be a KWN member; plan and implement activities in accordance with their own organizational strategy; undertake activities that contribute to the KWN Strategic Plan; reach grassroots and/or vulnerable persons and groups; and lack other opportunities to secure funds.

The Kosovo Women's Fund Grant Review Committee, elected annually by KWN members, decides whether grant proposals meet the aforementioned eligibility criteria and to award grants using a points-based system.

Beyond Grants...

KWN also provides capacity development opportunities for grant applicants and grant recipients to strengthen our member organizations and our network.

KWN offers hands-on workshops, as well as individualized mentoring in grant-writing, project cycle management, and financial management, furthering organizations' capacities to apply for funding from other donors in the future.

'This Fund serves many purposes, starting from the application procedure for a properly written project to reporting.'

- KWN Member

KWN support for grant recipients does not end once a grant is given. We continue providing one-on-one mentoring for each grant recipient throughout their initiative and often beyond. This includes site visits, skills-building in financial management, assistance with organizational management, advice in effective advocacy strategies, facilitating networking with government officials and problem-solving.

We also support our members in thinking proactively about sustainability, which includes planning initiatives and gaining community level support that will enable their initiatives to continue beyond the life of these short projects.

For more information about the Kosovo Women's Fund, visit our [website](http://www.womensnetwork.org): www.womensnetwork.org. KWN staff members can provide additional information via e-mail at grants@womensnetwork.org or by phone at +381 (0)38 245 850. Please contact us if you or your organization is interested in supporting the Kosovo Women's Fund.

Rural Women Learn about Reproductive Health

Reproductive health remains a fairly taboo topic in public discourse. It is not something that people talk about. Insufficient education about reproductive health seems to be contributing to low use of contraceptives and a high abortion rate in Kosovo due to unplanned pregnancies, recent research by the Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) has found.

Supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (€7,190), the Association for Education and Family Care (AEFC) and organization Divine Women collaborated to increase awareness about reproductive health by holding 48 workshops in Gjakova and Gjilan municipalities.

Through these meetings, 441 women and girls ages 11 to 55 from eight villages acquired knowledge about reproductive health and protective measures, including against sexually



transmitted diseases. Since they came from remote areas, many of the participants had discontinued their education after primary school, so they had not received any formal education related to reproductive health whatsoever. This was the first time.

The partner organizations surveyed women regarding any prior experiences they had with visiting the gynaecologist or using different contraceptive methods. Men also were surveyed. They found the responses very concerning.

'Girls do not perform gynaecological check-ups because of prejudices', participants said during the meetings. Some may visit private clinics so that their identity will be kept more confidential, they said. However, not everyone can afford to visit private

clinics. This may mean that some young women have not received information about reproductive health or family planning options.

This initiative provided an opportunity for them to learn more about these themes in a safe space. Women and girls involved in the initiative said that they were very satisfied because they had never received such information before. They said that they would transmit the knowledge that they gained to other girls and women not in attendance.

Gjilan, Viti Begin Institutionalizing Gender Responsive Budgeting

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) involves ensuring a gender perspective is incorporated throughout the budget process in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the use of public expenditures. It offers a more equitable, effective, efficient and transparent way of planning and executing government budgets. Kosovo's new Law on Gender Equality (2015) made GRB a legal obligation for all budget organizations in Kosovo, including municipalities. Further, Budget Circular 2017/01, distributed by the Ministry of Finance in June 2017, encouraged all municipalities to integrate GRB in their annual budgets.

However, GRB is a fairly new concept both in Kosovo and elsewhere. As of early 2016, few budget organizations in Kosovo had begun implementing this legal obligation, including the municipalities of Viti and Gjilan. Therefore, the Centre for Protection and Rehabilitation of Women and Children *Liria* in Gjilan and non-governmental organization *Legjenda* in Viti decided to team up to push forward the process of institutionalizing GRB in their municipalities.

Supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (€7,780), these KWN members began by organizing informative meetings with women municipal assembly members, members of the Kosovo Lobby for Gender Equality and other women active in their communities. They explained the concept of GRB and persuaded them of its importance.

'Previously they thought that it referred only to one gender', said Melihate Osmani, *Legjenda* Project Field Coordinator. 'Now they know that during budget planning, the budget should be divided based on [the needs of] both genders.'

Indeed, GRB draws from gender analyses to identify the needs of diverse women and men targeted by different government programs, ensuring that such programs are designed to better meet women's and men's potentially differing needs and interests.

Then, *Legjenda* and *Liria* contracted a GRB expert who provided a series of trainings in Gjilan and Viti, in which 147 people participated. Participants included finance officers, gender equality officers, directors of municipal directorates and women municipal assembly members. The trainer emphasized the importance of carrying out research before planning budgets, as well as ensuring the collection of gender disaggregated data.

Since the Municipality of Kamenica has made some groundbreaking successes towards integrating GRB in their budget documents and processes, the project partners invited them to share their experiences. Officials from Gjilan and Viti learned a lot from the Kamenica's experience integrating GRB in their Medium Term Budget Framework.

The meetings and trainings effectively improved awareness about GRB among key institutions, as well as local leaders who can hold institutions accountable to implementing their legal responsibilities pertaining to GRB. Following these meetings several assembly members verbally expressed their commitment to furthering gender equality in their municipalities.

‘The project was very successful,’ said Nazife Jonuzi, Executive Director of *Liria*, ‘as very few officials had known about GRB before [or] what it meant. And very few had practically implemented it before in their institutions’.

While shifting attitudes, furthering capacities and sustainably institutionalizing GRB will take time, this initiative has had some important initial successes. First, the initiative has made officials and activists in these two municipalities more aware of GRB, what it entails and how to implement it in their municipalities. Second, the Municipality of Gjilan took the decision to start encouraging women to apply when job openings exist for civil servants. Related to ensuring balanced public expenditures on women and men, as well as more gender equality within the civil service and in decision-making processes, this affirmative action is an important step towards furthering gender equality. Such affirmative actions are foreseen within the Law on Gender Equality, though few institutions have utilized them to date. With this official decision, the Municipality of Gjilan is setting a very positive example from which other municipalities and central level institutions can learn. Third, this action strengthened cooperation between two organizations who plan to continue advocating towards the sustainable institutionalization of GRB in Gjilan and Vitia municipalities.

***Nas Dom* Advocates for Initiating Gender Budgeting**

Four Serbian majority municipalities of Klokot, Novo Brdo, Partes and Strpce have taken their first steps towards introducing gender responsive budgeting within their municipalities.

Gender responsive budgeting (GRB) is a new legal obligation in Kosovo in accordance with the Law on Gender Equality. However, very few officials within these municipalities had

knowledge about the concept nor how to institutionalize GRB in their budget planning, implementation and monitoring.

Therefore, the Association of Women *Nas Dom* undertook an initiative supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (2,936 €) towards raising awareness about the Law on Gender Equality and this new legal obligation. *Nas Dom* also wanted to find ways to involve women more in society. *Nas Dom* activists sought to improve cooperation between local government and non-governmental organizations, including by organizing meetings among women assembly members, activists from non-governmental organizations, employees in the public administration, local government leaders and media. *Nas Dom* trained a cadre of volunteers to monitor the activities of their local governments, including gender equality officers.

Together, they organized four three-day workshops in four municipalities focusing on the Law on Gender Equality, how to promote it and the importance of creating an action plan for integrating GRB at the local level. During these meetings, they increased the awareness of more than 200 people regarding the Law on Gender Equality and the importance of GRB. They also identified together the main challenges to ensuring that gender equality offices are functional at the municipal level. Since few citizens or officials had ever discussed this topic previously, they considered it very important and successful.

'Such initiatives are very positive, but these processes and work towards them in our municipalities must be unstoppable in order to achieve our long-term goal', said one participant. 'With work and dedication, gender equality can be achieved very easily in all municipalities, since the Law on Gender Equality guarantees, protects and promotes equality between the sexes'.

Persons with Disabilities Empowered to Become Active within Their Communities

Venera Leta is a girl in high school. She has muscular dystrophy, a health condition that weakens one's muscles, potentially making it difficult to walk or even move parts of one's own body.

'It is the first time that someone has visited', she told representatives from the Organization of Persons with Muscular Dystrophy of Kosovo (OPMDK) when they came to see her. 'So far, no one has come, and I have longed to be involved in society.'

While people with disabilities are faced with many challenges in life, perhaps one of the most frustrating is solitude. Many persons with disabilities in Kosovo do not have the opportunity to interact with people outside their immediate family, particularly with other people who have disabilities and face similar challenges. This is among the issues discussed in a new handbook entitled 'Society and its access for persons with disabilities'.

'Sometimes it is difficult to decide between getting out of bed to participate in a meeting, which will definitely require assistance from someone else, or simply not going', the handbook begins, quoting an activist with muscular dystrophy. 'So that I can be active, someone must always help me to get out of bed, to get dressed, to put me in my wheelchair and to follow me to my meetings.'

The handbook deals with the steps needed to create equitable opportunities for persons with disabilities, so that they can become more involved in society. The handbook was prepared by OPMDK, an organization in Prizren that is led by and working with persons with muscular dystrophy.

Arben Shala, an OPMDK consultant, said that this handbook addresses numerous issues and taboos. For example, some persons with disabilities expect that one day they will be

able to create a family, in contradiction to the beliefs held by many people in society.

By publishing this handbook and visiting people with disabilities, OPMDK has sought to make clear that despite the challenges they face, people with disabilities can become involved socially. During their initiative, OPMDK in partnership with another organization, Visionary Women of the XXI Century from Has, sought to improve the position of women family caregivers and family members with disabilities. They visited many families that have members with disabilities, providing assistance such as sanitation materials, food, shelter and orthopaedic tools. However, what the families needed most was for someone to visit them.



‘So far, apart from us, not one association or institution has visited them’, said Resmije Rahmani from OPMDK, an activist who has muscular dystrophy herself. One of the best parts of the visits was that they were made by people with disabilities, she said. Now the families they visited know that there are opportunities for their family members to go out, travel and be an active part of society. ‘Following these visits they now are seeking to be part of every meeting and activity’, Rahmani said.

During visits, OPMDK also conducted research, asking families to complete a questionnaire.

‘Caregivers and people with muscular dystrophy were given

separate questionnaires', said Antigona Shestan, OPMDK Executive Director. 'However the fact that there was inconsistency in statements from parents or caregivers and those made by persons with muscular dystrophy about their needs and problems has raised concerns'. There is still a lot to do, she said.

For example, in some cases, the partner organizations found instances in which people with disabilities had been isolated entirely from society, said Marte Prenkpalaj, Director of Visionary Women of the XXI Century. 'Most persons who suffer from this condition do not even go to school', she said. 'They stay closed away within their homes. This problem needs to be brought to the Ministry of Education'.

Based on the findings from their questionnaire and using the handbook, OPMDK and Visionary Women of the XXI Century identified this issue, among other advocacy points. They proceeded to inform the local government in Prizren and citizens about the issues that caregivers of persons with disabilities face, calling for actions that will improve their lives. They also discussed pensions for persons with disabilities, not only for caregivers because many people with disabilities expressed concerns that any day they could be left without their caregivers and would need financial support.

In the end, perhaps the greatest success of the initiative supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (€7,827) was that it informed persons with disabilities that they are not alone and empowered them to become more active in advocating for their rights. 'The persons who were visited through this project have become activists and can contribute within their own communities now', said Shala.

Skenderaj Unites Together against Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a crime in Kosovo. Yet, socially many people in Kosovo consider domestic violence a private issue that should be dealt with inside the family, recent research entitled *No More Excuses* by the Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) has shown. As a result, criminal acts of domestic violence are not always reported. Some people also do not know how to report domestic violence crimes. When they are reported, institutions have not always had the most coordinated response in assisting and empowering survivors of domestic violence.

Women's Centre *Prehja*, a KWN member, was concerned about the extent to which women and girls suffering from domestic violence in their municipality of Skenderaj have access to institutional support. Therefore, with a grant from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,938), between November 2015 and February 2016 they met with approximately 1,850 women, girls, men and boys in their municipality, providing them with brochures that had information about the Law against Domestic Violence and the judicial proceedings that should be followed in domestic violence cases. During meetings with women and girls, *Prehja* identified approximately 200 girls and women from rural areas who had faced physical, psychological or other forms of violence, assisting them in securing institutional support.

According to *Prehja*, rural women and girls in Skenderaj now are 'more informed and free to address the problems that they face', said Iliriana Shala, Coordinator of the project. 'Now, they will be more secure in reporting violence'.

Further, *Prehja* has advocated successfully to municipal institutions to take concrete steps towards improving cooperation with civil society and better addressing domestic violence. *Prehja* worked closely with the Municipal Assembly of Skenderaj, which created and approved a new Strategy against Domestic Violence for their municipality.

Further, following *Prehja's* advocacy work, municipal institutions including the Department of Administration, the Office for Gender Equality, the Office for Human Rights and the Centre for Social Work all committed to providing support in addressing situations of domestic violence. Coordination also has improved between the police, prosecution and courts in addressing domestic violence cases. As a result of this initiative, they have improved their response, ensuring that domestic violence cases are not closed without notifying the court or prosecution.

To facilitate monitoring of the performance of courts and women's access to justice, *Prehja* also reached an agreement with the Mitrovica Basic Court branch in Skenderaj, whereby the court regularly is providing information to the organization about the number of domestic violence cases. With ongoing updates on cases, *Prehja* is able to monitor court sessions, towards furthering access to justice in domestic violence cases.

Even though financial support from the Kosovo Women's Fund has ended, *Prehja* has set a strong foundation for addressing domestic violence within their municipality, the benefits of which will be sustained in the future. Beyond improving awareness among women and strengthening coordination among institutions, *Prehja* has reached an agreement with the Municipality of Skenderaj, through which the organization will continue participating in the implementation of the Municipal Strategy against Domestic Violence. In this way, *Prehja* will continue working with municipal authorities to reduce domestic violence into the future.

Peja Citizens Unite towards Ending Gender-based Violence

'I won't let my friend go out with a short skirt', said a boy.

'It is alright for a father to hit a mother', another boy said.

These were among the comments made by youth ages 14 to 15 years old when the Women's Wellness Center (WWC) started meeting with students in the Municipality of Peja.

'These comments are disturbing', said WWC Executive Director Ardita Ramizi Bala, 'especially given the fact that pupils made such comments'. Such attitudes encourage children to be violent, as well as to accept violence, she said. If such beliefs exist among children, it shows that much work remains to be done on this issue in society more broadly.

Indeed, two recently published reports by the Kosovo Women's Network entitled *Sexual Harassment in Kosovo* and *No More Excuses*, about domestic violence, have evidenced that the views held by these youths are quite widespread throughout Kosovar society. This is part of the reason that WWC entered classrooms, seeking educate youth about gender-based violence, towards transforming attitudes that enable violence to occur.

With support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (2,980 €), WWC sought to raise awareness in their community about the consequences of gender-based violence, including among students, representatives of municipal institutions and school principals. Through trainings, discussions and presentations in schools, they reached 280 students, as well as 60 women and men in the Municipality of Peja with information about domestic violence. They also presented information about different forms of violence on Radio Dukagjini and Radio Peja, explaining to citizens what constitutes physical, emotional, psychological and economic violence.

Further, in an effort to ensure better and faster services for women suffering from violence, WWC organized two roundtable discussions with representatives of various institutions working with persons who have suffered domestic violence.

'We as an organization have a shelter where women and children who are victims of domestic violence can go', said Ramizi Bala. Their shelter's long experience working with women and

children who have suffered violence has provided them with detailed knowledge regarding the challenges that persons suffering from violence face, as well as the shortcomings of institutions. Through meetings with institutions, they sought to improve the institutional approach in line with the existing legal framework, towards ensuring protection and security for persons suffering violence.

Now, as a result, institutions have a better understanding of the improvements needed to provide women and children who have suffered violence with better services. An important outcome of this initiative is that education institutions now understand better their duty to notify the appropriate authorities regarding every case of domestic violence reported to them. Officials have committed to working more with professors and teachers in identifying cases of violence, in order to intervene early and prevent additional violence.

Additionally, WWC's initiative has made more people aware that women need support not only from institutions, but also from the society. Gaining a better understanding about domestic violence enables students to be more vigilant and has made them aware of how to report cases of violence, particularly how to help their friends or family members if they are experiencing domestic violence. Overall, the community is more aware about strategies for creating a culture of nonviolence, so that each and every member of their society can feel secure.

Women and Girls from Dragash Publish Research on Access to Quality Healthcare

Women and girls from the municipality of Dragash, because they live in a rather isolated area, often do not have access to quality healthcare for a lot of health services are not provided at

all. However, in the beginning of 2017, the municipality will be equipped with a mobile mammography device and the main Family Medicine Centre will employ a woman doctor, following their advocacy efforts.

Since June 2015, women and girls from this region were offered the opportunity to express their dissatisfactions and concerns regarding their access to quality health care for the first time. This was made possible thanks to the project 'Women, Health and Their Legal Rights', implemented by the Women's Initiative Association and financed by the Kosovo Women's Fund (with an amount of €2,822).

First, by participating in debates, broadcasted by local radio stations *Sharri* and *Gora*, they informed citizens of the municipality of Dragash about a research on women's access to quality health care which they planned to conduct. Activists from this municipality were trained by KWN staff on research techniques, drawing samples and how to adhere to this sample during the research. Within a period of four months, they finished the field work in which they interviewed 170 Albanian, Gorani and Bosnian women.

Moreover, the Women's Initiative Association organized meetings with municipal officials with the aim of informing them as well about the research, but more importantly, to establish cooperation through which the recommendations based on the research would be addressed. As for educating citizens on their legal rights, with a special focus on the Law on Health and the Code of Conduct for health institutions, the organization published pamphlets and other informative materials.

'The project has had a lot of impact on the political level in the municipality, which includes the Department of Health within the municipality of Dragash', said Xhejrane Lokaj, Director of Women's Initiative Association.

The main findings of this research show that only 15.3% of women and girls have knowledge about the Law on Health. Only 10% of women utilise public health institutions, while only 6.47%

of them are satisfied with the health services provided by public health institutions. Around 28.1% of women and girls prefer to get treatment at private clinics, stating that there they get better quality treatment, service delivery time is shorter and they are more reliable. Another problem which was emphasised by women and girls was the lack of devices to diagnose cancer, especially those that take mammography tests. Based on these findings, Women's Initiative Association advocated within the municipality to start mammography tests, which will begin in early 2017.

'We will buy the mammography device and later start another initiative to ensure that a radiologist is hired. We are working towards this intensively. The device will be bought by the municipality. This decision has been made', said Lokaj.

As no woman doctor is employed at the main Family Medicine Centre in the Municipality of Dragash, one request from women in the community was for this institution to employ one. For many women, having a woman gynaecologist would make such visits easier.

'We recommended this at the local level,' Lokaj added. 'The request was taken seriously as the Mayor of the municipality promised that in the first six months of 2017 a woman doctor will be employed in our municipality.'

The organization, together with the women and girls who benefitted from this project are continuing their advocacy work at the local and central level. In line with the recommendations resulting from the research, they also will continue pushing for reforms to take place in the health sector, including activating monitoring mechanisms through inspectors; ensuring implementation of laws and regulations that will improve the lives and welfare of citizens; supplying pharmacies with basic medicine; as well as implementation of health advisory services.

PEA Contributes to the Prevention of Human Trafficking

Media and international reports often talk about human trafficking, but the question is how informed are Kosovo citizens about this matter? For this reason, the Kosovo Women's Network member organization Psychotherapist in Action (PEA) from Gjilan, started an initiative to raise this as an issue towards the prevention of human trafficking with the support of Kosovo Women's Fund (in the amount of €2,520).

PEA organized seven workshops in which participants debated actively and productively about human trafficking. This debate resulted in an increase in awareness on this matter among 1000 boys and girls from the municipality of Gjilan.

'Previously we did not know whom to turn to. We were uninformed', said one of the participants in the training.

According to Sevdije Musliu, the Executive Director of PEA, 'After the trainings and the information that they received, women and girls felt more secure to talk about the problems which they face. Now they are able to go to the relevant institutions and report what has happened to them'.

In order to address the issue of a lack of information concerning this issue, PEA has collaborated with *Produksioni i Lirë*, a local radio station, where Musliu talked about human trafficking. She explained what this phenomenon entails, how it happens and how it can be prevented. The effect of this radio broadcast has been rather successful as it was broadcasted four times over a period of five months.

PEA also organized a roundtable with representatives of the Municipality of Gjilan, police, the Department of Education within the municipality and from the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) to discuss human trafficking, protection measures and the prevention of this phenomenon. This activity has led to a number of recommendations being drafted based on which they started advocacy initiatives at relevant institutions. Now, state institutions are more aware about the need that exists to put in place preventive measures and protect citizens against human trafficking, especially youth.

Even though the project came to an end, PEA continues working in this field. Among others, the Department of Education within the Municipality of Gjilan has invited this organization to hold lectures on this matter in high schools during the '16 Days of Activism'.



Partners-Kosova Advocates for Women's Rights to Property and Inheritance

As we know, women's rights to property and inheritance presents a great challenge to Kosovar society for family property in most cases is divided among the men and boys in a family. For this reason, Partners-Kosova Centre for Conflict Management continued its initiative towards increasing awareness on this issue and advocating for women and girls to use their rights to property

and inheritance with the financial support of the Kosovo Women's Fund (with an amount of €2,390).

This KWN member organisation has cooperated with groups of girls and boys, women and men, as well as with representatives of different institutions in the municipalities of Malisheva and Rahovec with the aim of increase awareness and to offer information on how to advocate for women's rights to property and inheritance.

This collaboration included meetings with municipal gender equality officers in both municipalities. During these meetings, presentations were held which focused on women's rights to property and providing guidance on how to advocate for these rights to the relevant institutions.

'In the future, we will divide property equally among children of both genders', said one of the participants at a meeting held in the Municipality of Malisheva.

'We will share the knowledge we gained on the rights to property also with our daughters', said another woman.

Fatmire Limaj, another participant, suggested that children in schools should also be informed about equal rights to property and inheritance, no matter their gender. 'In this way, starting from an early age, you can create better awareness and a culture of equal rights', she said.

These meetings also contributed to women and youth being informed on concrete cases related to the subject. At one of the meetings that were held in Rahovec, civil rights judges, representatives of free legal aid offices and gender equality officers answered in detail women's questions related to cases of family conflicts in which women wanted to register property in their names.

This initiative proved to be rather successful, for out of the 60 women and youth that were informed about their rights, a great number of them now talk freely and openly about their rights to property and inheritance with a broader audience. Moreover, the women who have been involved in court

processes related to property issues, were able to use the information they obtained through the activities that were organised. Participants, among other matters, underscored the importance of including youth in these types of educational projects and plan to spread the knowledge they gained with others, especially among young women and men.

Albanian, Serbian Women Collaborate, Empower Each Other

Women from rural areas in Kosovo are not well informed about their rights and the opportunities they have in participating in politics and decision-making positions. Organizations Open Door and *Ruka Ruci* deemed it necessary to empower women as much as possible by creating and activating two community groups to raise awareness about women's rights and participation in politics and decision-making. Their effort was financed by the Kosovo Women's Fund (with a grant of €7,590).

This initiative, which lasted six months, benefited 450 women and girls that are unemployed, have suffered domestic violence and/or are disabled. The aim was not only to empower them but also to offer a space to different ethnic groups to collaborate and to get familiar with the issues that they each face. The initiative involved women from villages of Hajvali, Bardhosh, Slivovë (Albanian populated) and Graçanica (mostly Serbian populated).

'The communication that was fostered between women from Albanian and Serbian communities has strengthened their relationship. They understood that both groups face the same type of cultural mentality in which strong patriarchal traditions, a lack of education and insufficient self-confidence stand in the way of women demanding their rights', said Nevenka Rikallo, Director of the organization Ruka Ruci.

As part of the program, all women present were informed about relevant laws in order to help them to reach their goals in different fields of women's rights and/or to enable them to carry out their day to day work in a more effective way. Besides the informative character of these meetings, the women were also offered a possibility to receive training on advocacy and communication, based on which they will be able to become active players in the promotion of women's rights and work together towards a joint goal: establishing gender equality.

'We have never participated in trainings like these before. We feel more empowered now that we are included in an active way in all the activities that are organized', said a participant.

Participants from public institutions welcomed this initiative with great enthusiasm as well. The Gender Equality Officer (GEO) from the Municipality of Gračanica said that including women in finding solutions to the problems which the community faces will make them more aware of their rights, about the relevant laws at the central and local level, and also about the ways in which these legal instruments can be used to their advantage.

'These initiatives have encouraged women who live in rural areas and are isolated to start making changes in their current living conditions and demanding these changes as a right which they have', said the GEO.



During the project, informal advocacy groups of women were established that will continue representing women's interests at the local and central level. By way of the new skills that they obtained in the fields of public services and legislation, these women will continue pushing forward women's priorities

in their communities and passing this knowledge on to other women and girls.

Cooperation between Women Assembly Members in Northern Kosovo Strengthened

The political situation in Northern Kosovo, more specifically in the Municipality of North Mitrovica does not make it particularly easy for women assembly members in the north to collaborate with organizations or women's rights activists in the other part of the city. Nevertheless, although slowly and with some challenges, the Mitrovica Women's Association for Human Rights (MWAHR) has found ways to work together.

This organization had come to understand that women assembly members from North Mitrovica, Zubin Potok, Zvečan and Leposavic, among others, lack advocacy capacities. In order to help them increase their advocacy capacities, lobbying skills as well as expand their knowledge of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, MWAHR has initiated and implemented a project to tackle these issues with the support of the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,545). After this initial success, the organisation continued this initiative with a later, second grant from the Fund (€3,000).

Through these initiatives, approximately 152 women assembly members have gained knowledge and more information resulting from trainings and meetings which will help them perform their work as well possible. Ksenija Bozovic, Head of Communities of the four municipalities of Mitrovica, held the training on Resolution 1325. Here, women assembly members had space to discuss and become familiar with all the mechanisms that are needed to implement this Resolution, a Resolution which

underscores the important role that women play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, distribution of humanitarian aid, peace building, peace negotiations, peacekeeping and in reconciliation during the post-conflict period. Besides increasing women assembly members' knowledge, this initiative also created networks and strengthened collaboration among all women assembly members from the targeted municipalities.

Another success was the fact that these women grew professionally in the fields of debate, public presentation and leadership skills.

'The acquired skills have helped women assembly members to perform better, to strengthen their positions during Assembly meetings, to be more visible and to express their opinion on television to voters', said Vetone Veliu, Executive Director of MWAHR.

At meetings organized in addition to the training, women assembly members discussed the possibilities of committing to push forward issues of importance to women. For this, they have worked on details and have created the Strategic Plan of the Group of Women Assembly Members, which they are advocating to have approved by their municipalities.

'Thanks to these meetings, we can conclude that they [women assembly members] showed willingness to work according Kosovo laws. However, there are still some concerns left in relation to the implementation of these laws and how these relate to their work', said Veliu.

For example, the Kosovo Law on Gender Equality could be very useful for women in the north in advocating for their rights. Veliu has attempted to start discussions regarding the appointment of Gender Equality Officers, as foreseen by the Law on Gender Equality. She has spoken of its importance during discussions with representatives from these four municipalities.

However, the broader political situation has created some obstacles that undermine progress in discussions about women's rights and gender equality.

'They were not willing to talk about this because they were frustrated and outraged about the fact that Prishtina allowed the creation of an Association of the four municipalities of North Kosovo (Zajednica) and that there will be no discussion on any other issues, including Officials for Gender Equality', Velju said.

The fact that high politics can trump work related to furthering women's rights is well-known among women's rights activists worldwide. Continuous advocacy is needed to try to bring issues pertaining to gender equality to the fore, in accordance with Resolution 1325.

Thus, women assembly members have chosen group leaders for every municipality in order to facilitate cooperation in the future.

Pushing forward issues pertaining to gender equality in northern Kosovo is difficult considering the broader political challenges that are still unresolved. However, MWAHR plans to continue its advocacy and consistently raise issues important to women in northern Kosovo. MWAHR will continue cooperating with women assembly members, who now, as a result of this initiative, are more aware of the rights that Resolution 1325 and Kosovo law afford them.

Progress Made in Implementing Law for Blind Persons

Seeing the types of problems blind persons face every day, the Committee of Blind Women of Kosovo (CBWK), an organization led by blind women, organized consultative meetings with other associations during which they identified the shortcomings and concrete problems related to the non-

implementation of the Law for Blind Persons (Law No. 04/L-092), especially Article 13 which regulates the issue of public transport for blind persons.

In order to tackle these issues, CBWK started their advocacy work towards ensuring free transport for blind persons, as per the Law, supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,750).

CBWK cooperated with other organizations, meeting with municipal officials to advocate for the implementation of the Law. Activists suggested that officials from the Municipality of Prishtina oblige the economic operators of urban transport to respect this Law.

During the meeting, Mayor of Prishtina, Mr. Shpend Ahmeti, expressed his commitment towards ensuring free transport for blind persons.

Previously, the regulation of urban transport has not considered the needs and requests of blind persons. However, shortly after the meeting, another very important success was achieved. The Municipality of Prishtina invested in a blind person's friendly sidewalk from the Grand Hotel to the Ministry of Justice.

'We achieved this goal, one that was very needed for blind persons who are very satisfied with the advocacy and other work we did', said Bajramshahe Jetullahu, Executive Director of CBWK, happily.

They also organized meetings with women Members of Parliament and assembly members from the Municipality of Prishtina, informing them about the deficiencies in the implementation of the aforementioned Law. With the full support of officials, they decided to organize a workshop with the aim of informing relevant authorities on the lack of implementation of the Law. Through other meetings, CBWK



managed to convince relevant institutions to implement the Law on Blind Persons in practice, more specifically Article 13. Moreover, these meetings resulted in drafting joint recommendations aimed at addressing concrete challenges.

At the same time, inspired through the successes of this advocacy work, CBWK secured funding to start another initiative to continue advocating for a number of other articles of the same Law to be implemented. KWN consistently offered support to CBWK, towards contributing to the protection of the fundamental rights of blind persons in Kosovo.

Don't Be Silent! Activists Encourage Reporting of Sexual Harassment

A recent report by KWN entitled *Sexual Harassment in Kosovo* found that 48.5% of Kosovars have experienced some form of sexual harassment in their lifetimes. In 2014 alone, 45.2% experienced sexual harassment. However, a review of police reports and survey of citizens both suggest that few people report sexual harassment, either because they do not know what types of acts sexual harassment involves or because they do not know how to report it.

Public universities, more specifically, have a Code of Conduct. However, the term 'sexual harassment' is not mentioned specifically nor clearly. Moreover, reporting mechanisms are insufficiently clear. As a result, sexual harassment has seldom been reported at public universities, even though young women have raised concerns about the issue.

In order to address this, Artpolis and Active Women of Gjakova (AWGJ) undertook a joint initiative to address sexual harassment and establish protective mechanisms in the public universities in Prishtina and Gjakova. Through their initiative, more than 200 students were informed about



sexual harassment and its negative consequences. The initiative received support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€7,600) in 2015.

Artpolis and AWGJ informed students of the universities of Prishtina and Gjakova about the ways in which they can address the issue of sexual harassment and how to increase the number of protection mechanisms within these universities, through various meetings with them. In particular, 41 students were informed about Kosovar legislation against sexual harassment and how to identify, address and report sexual harassment inside their universities.

They met with officials from universities and educational institutions, such as rectors, deans and student groups. With a lot of passion, they advocated for the creation of mechanisms to address sexual harassment within these institutions. This advocacy work turned out to be rather successful as the Rector of the University of Gjakova presented the project and the requests to the Senate of the University. He promised the students that he will initiated the creation of this mechanism, but this will take time, given the challenges and the current difficult situation in which the University of Gjakova finds itself.

'Knowing that many women do not know what sexual harassment is or how to report it and also men not being aware that they sexually harass women, it's a long and difficult road, but

we must keep working towards raising awareness about this issue', said Zana Hoxha-Krasniqi, Artpolis Executive Director.

By communicating with students, it became apparent that girls and boys are not informed enough about sexual harassment. Moreover, a large number of boys expressed that they were not aware of the fact that they themselves at times showed behaviour that in reality is harassment.

'I did not know that I was sexually harassing women because I thought I was flirting', said one of the young men participants. 'We did not know that when we tell a girl how beautiful she is or that we repeatedly insist to get a phone number or her Instagram account, that this actually is harassment. We thought that girls feel good when we tease them constantly'.

As part of this initiative, five students from these universities together with professional actors performed an artistic and advocacy driven play entitled 'Don't be Silent'. This play was performed during December at the University of Prishtina and Gjakova, reaching a large number of students and professors. Empowered, after every play, students distributed informative brochures in all faculties one by one, informing not only nearby students but also faculty staff by placing them on white boards. They also informed their peers and the university staff on sexual harassment and the ways in which it can be reported when it happens within the university.

Dealing with sexual harassment in Kosovar universities continues to be a challenge due to lack of will from relevant institutions to address this issue. However, now, many young women and men are empowered and more aware of what sexual harassment is and how to report it to the appropriate authorities. This is evidenced by the fact that some of the youth involved in meetings have actually reported sexual harassment cases to police for the first time.

Youth have said that they will not be silent when faced with sexual harassment, not only when it occurs at the university, but anywhere.

Further, Artpolis has received support from other donors to build on this initiative's successes, expanding this initiative by performing the play in other public universities in Mitrovica and Prizren. Moreover, based on discussions held during the Kosovo Women's Fund-supported initiative, Artpolis plans to create a policy paper on how to introduce a policy against sexual harassment in all public universities, so that the policies needed to address this issue will become part of the existing policies within these universities.

Women, Girls and Men More Aware about Property Rights

In Kosovo, women still face numerous challenges when it comes to using their rights to property and inheritance. Family conflicts and lengthy legal processes make women not have the courage to demand their rights.

There was a case in her family based on which Afërdita Zeneli, Executive Director of organization *Dita*, decided to help and give women the courage to fight for their right to property and inheritance.

'My father divided the family property in an equal manner among the children, but conflicts still happen. Even though the issue is resolved now, I understand very well what a woman has to go through when she is faced with this challenge', said Zeneli.

Supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,988), *Dita* trained 70 women from the Municipality of Gjilan and six neighbouring villages on property and inheritance rights and how they can use these rights.

Officials from the municipal Department of Inheritance and the basic court of Gjiilan were invited to meetings to talk about court procedures and the content of the relevant laws in which they put the emphasis on all have equal rights in this manner. It became clear that women have wanted to use their right to property and inheritance, but have lacked the knowledge as to where to turn to address this issue. At the same time, men and boys expressed that according to the information they had, they thought that the laws on property and inheritance violates their rights and applies only to women.

‘We did not know that this law functions as it does’, said one of the men participants. ‘We thought that this law favours only women and not us men.’

Therefore, *Dita* cleared up any confusion that participants had, providing information on this law. They also informed participants about women’s rights during trainings.

Young women were among the participants most interested in this topic. They expressed the wish and motivation to inform themselves more in order to avoid conflicts within their families and so that they will be able to initiate the needed procedures for the division of property and inheritance.

Assembly Members Inspire Young Women in Prizren

The Law on Gender Equality calls for equality among men and women in all spheres of life. Although it entered into force in 2015, much progress must still be made to implement this Law. The fact that gender equality has tended to remain on ‘a piece of paper’ is shown by the low the number of women involved in politics and decision-making. Especially in Prizren, very few

women hold leadership positions. The ones who do hold such positions are mainly school directors. In the Municipal Assembly of Prizren, out of 13 directorates, only two are led by women: Health and Social Welfare. In political parties, all vice-presidents are men.

Young women from public and private universities, women municipal assembly members, representatives of women's forums within political parties and civil society activists discussed the opportunities and challenges for women's involvement in politics. With support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,581), 30 students discussed this issue for the first time with representatives of the Municipal Assembly of Prizren. Young women also learned more about advocacy, leadership, Resolution 1325 and the new Law on Gender Equality.

During a two-day training, organized by Divine Women on the theme of leadership and advocacy, young women discussed these issues directly with assembly members. This informed young women about women politicians' own journey into politics and the challenges they have faced.

'I am happy that I was part of this project and that I was able to communicate freely with women assembly members for the first time. We must not stop, we have to join forces', said Flame Krasniqi, a student.

The students also raised issues of concern to them within their community. For example, the all-girl basketball team *Bashkimi*, despite their continued success, has been continuously neglected by the municipality. They have a very small budget. They asked the Gender Equality Officer, Mybexhele Zhurri, to come together and discuss how they can request more from the municipality's annual budget. The Gender Equality Officer pledged that this issue will be discussed and taken into consideration.

As a result of this initiative, communication between women assembly members and young women in their community, their constituents has improved. Further, young women have learned

more about the ways in which they can become involved in politics and decision-making processes, inspired by the women who have gone before them.

Municipality of Mamusha Adopts Gender Equality Action Plan

Early marriage, girls discontinuing their education after primary school and a very low number of women in decision-making positions all were among the challenges facing women and girls in Municipality of Mamusha. The lack of gender policies at the municipal level was identified as one of the obstacles to the appropriate planning of projects and their implementation by institutions and civil society, towards advancing gender equality.

Identifying these issues and at the request of municipal officials, organization *Dora Dorës* with support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,994) has prepared a Gender Equality Action Plan for the year 2017-2019, which has been adopted by the Municipal Assembly of Mamusha. The plan deals with key areas including education, health, economic empowerment, women in politics and decision-making, domestic violence and many others. Also, for each of these areas, a person who will be responsible for their implementation was appointed.

'Women here work a lot. They cultivate fruits and vegetables, create hand rafts... and all of this work needs to be acknowledged by others. The education of girls is also necessary', said Luljeta Avdiq, Project Manager of *Dora Dorës*.

In order to draft this plan in the best way possible, *Dora Dorës* organised workshops with representatives from institutions, gender equality officers, relevant directors from Turkish and Albanian communities, women and men. In these workshops, the main areas of action were determined, as well as concrete objectives and activities. Based on best practices, these

were identified following a gender analysis of the situation in the Municipality of Mamusha.

During one meeting, Seilan Mazrek, Human Rights Official within the Municipality, spoke about the importance of this plan which tackles various issues related to women's rights in different fields.

Overall, 189 people benefited from this project, including women and men who contributed directly to its implementation. Now women and men who work in the Municipality of Mamusha will be better prepared to work towards addressing the needs within their community. They plan to continue informing diverse people about the existence of the Gender Equality Action Plan and its importance, towards contributing to its implementation in the future. The fact that the plan has been adopted by the Municipal Assembly, and that institutions have been very involved in the process of drafting it, is a good first step towards ensuring the political will necessary for its implementation in the future.

Women from Villages Successfully Included in the Mobile Market

Women from the villages Llukarë, Makovc and Grashiticë have always wanted to find possibilities to generate income from agriculture. However, they did not know to whom to address this issue. Organisation Education Code, supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,999), has offered them this opportunity and has achieved to include many women in selling their products through the mobile market of Prishtina.

Initially, this organisation analysed the problem from which they understood that women are not informed enough about how they can utilize their natural resources. Few had supported the targeted women with developing tourism and agricultural activities. Further, women living in these areas did not have other opportunities for working to provide income for their families.

The organization held meetings and trainings with women from three villages, helping them with starting a small business using natural resources. Women's businesses dealt related to bee hives, milk products, nuts, strawberries and raspberries.

'Before, I did not know how to enter the market even though I really wanted to do this. Now, with all the knowledge I gained through these activities, I managed to go out and sell my products', said Elfete Krasniqi, a beneficiary.

Women's capacities were increased related to how to apply for subventions from public institutions, as well as how to address institutions with requests to start businesses. Additionally, women were informed about subsidies and grants allocated by the Municipality of Prishtina and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development for these villages. Women immediately made use of possibilities to apply for funding to support their businesses, and some women have secured financial support to this end.

The organization also met with local officials, encouraging support for women's businesses.

'We have noticed on the official webpage of the Ministry of Agriculture that usually grantees of agriculture grants come from the Rrafshi i Dukagjini region or other places, but these villages neighbouring Prishtina have remained excluded. This intrigued us to understand why and how we can help', explained Vjosa Preniqi, Manager of Education Code.

Further, Education Code offered training for young women on how to apply for jobs, how to write a CV and motivational letter, as well as the use of social networks in business networking. These can be used to approach other companies for trade and to promote their products.

Following meetings, local women believe that there was a need to enhance further and continue their coordination. Therefore, the participants decided to start a new association where they can discuss together the problems they encounter

and make plans to advocate their shared interests. Now they are preparing the documents necessary for establishing their organization. Meanwhile, women have a space in one of the villages which they plan to decorate and turn into an attractive tourist point, where they can sell their products and distribute them to other markets.

This initiative has empowered women to collaborate together in taking actions towards improving their economic situation.

Women from Shtërpca Better Prepared for Starting Businesses

The Foundation for Education and Development (FED) has started an initiative for training, idea creation and opening small businesses in the Municipality of Shtërpca with support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,580).

The group, which was formed by women beneficiaries, has held meetings where they presented their individual and collective ideas to open a small business and employ other women. In a meeting with the Mayor of Strpce, Bratislav Nikolic, women expressed their needs and advocated for institutional support. Officials demonstrated their readiness to support and inform them regarding procedures and requirements. Women have learned how to put their projects down in writing.

'I've helped them with the writing process and it became clear what they are able to do and what they need', said Vjollca Zeqiri, Executive Director of FED. 'Another achievement is the improved communication between the group and the municipality, which facilitated debate on problems they have.'

To represent the group in meetings and activities, Sylhane Ramadani was assigned to chair the group. She also is the President of Association Sharri Blueberries. About 500 leaflets were distributed in each municipal office and to the beneficiaries

and community in general. These leaflets contain information on the addresses where they can orient themselves when applying for grants, in order to realize their ideas. Moreover, they were registered at the agriculture and economy departments, through which they will have easier access to information about the projects. For some participants, it was the first time participating in such trainings.

'I have always hesitated to ask for information or something else in the municipality. Now, after these trainings, I no longer hesitate to go personally to the municipality and obtain the necessary information', said a participants who wants to open a bakery.

Women have identified ways in which the woman can earn a salary from home or their yards, helping their families. This group of women is now ready to apply for state subsidies as a group or individually, to write requests for their business plans and to advocate for the realization of their goals.

Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian University Grads Positioned to Secure Jobs

Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian ethnic groups comprise an estimated one to three percent of the population in Kosovo. Several studies have shown that they are among the most marginalized ethnic groups. Very few Roma, Ashkali or Egyptians hold positions in politics, and their unemployment rate tends to be among the highest in Kosovo. Few Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students graduate from university, and marriage at a young age can lead young women in particular to discontinue their education before finishing university. Even so, the number of graduates has increased in recent years. Even after graduating from university, when they seek employment, Roma, Ashkali and

Egyptian students may face additional barriers not experienced by other ethnic groups.

'When I applied for a job vacancy, I was told, "If you had been an Albanian, you would have been chosen without a problem"', a university graduate said, recounting other bitter experiences in seeking a job.

Despite Kosovo's anti-discrimination legislation, including related to labour practices, experiential evidence suggests that sometimes Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians face discrimination when they apply for work.

After identifying these challenges within their municipality, Gjakova, the Kosovo Centre for Development and Multicultural Integration (KCDMI) decided to offer



trainings in order to better prepare Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian graduates to compete for jobs, focusing particularly on young women. KCDMI wanted to help put these graduates on equal footing, so that they would have opportunities to secure employment equal to that of persons from other ethnic groups. Their initiative received support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€3,000).

'Our goal was to qualify these students for work, to show them how to apply and all the procedures of a job vacancy,' said Elvane Qorri, KCDMI Executive Director. 'Before no one dealt with these students. They have been neglected.'

The students participating in these meetings and trainings said that it was the first time that they had ever participated in such an activity or received certificates for attending a training. Further, it was the first time that someone was interested in empowering them in their work.

'If these kinds of trainings were organized earlier, it would have been much easier for us to apply for jobs and become

acquainted with all the related procedures', a graduate said.

Another challenge is the field that graduates have studied. Most students have studied education, which limits the types of job opportunities available to them.

'We will now work with high-schools in order to advise pupils regarding what fields they should study and which types of jobs are more in demand', said Qorri.

KCDMI also advocated to local institutions, insisting that employment quotas be set for persons from minority ethnic groups.

Following their advocacy efforts, Ali Tafarshiku, Spokesperson of the Mayor of Gjakova Mimoza Kusari Lila, reportedly has said that if two or three people apply for a position, the Municipality will offer free training to enable Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians to further their skills so that they can compete equally with other candidates.

Further, the Office of Communities in Gjakova currently has several job vacancies. KCDIM advocated successfully for the office to include a sentence in job announcements that explicitly encouraged young women to apply, towards furthering gender equality within the local government.

Speranza Offers Solidarity, Information for Women Suffering Domestic Violence

An estimated 68% of women and 56% of men in Kosovo have experienced some form of domestic violence in their lifetimes, as *No More Excuses*, a research report published in 2015 by the Kosovo Women's Network has shown. In 2014, approximately 41% of women and 20% of men had suffered domestic violence in Kosovo.

Activists from the organization *Speranza* in Mitrovica were concerned about the prevalence of domestic violence in their municipality. They did not feel that institutions like the municipality, Centre for Social Work and police were working enough to address violence against women. With support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,929), they sought to offer support to women who have suffered domestic violence, ensuring that women are aware of their legal rights.

Speranza organized regular meetings with twelve women who had suffered domestic violence. Lirije Sadiku, a lawyer, informed women about domestic violence, different types of violence and how to recognize signs of physical and psychological violence. Together with participants, they also discussed what steps could be taken in order to prevent domestic violence, as well as to reach out to young women, informing them about domestic violence and what it entails. Women learned how to prepare to take their cases to court and how and which institutions to address.

'I had nowhere to go to cry about my plight', a woman participating in the meetings said. 'I am an orphan. I have no family. My husband beats me. At least the women here [in this meeting] understand my situation better than anyone else will,' she said.

Perhaps one of the most important contributions of this initiative was providing a space for women who have suffered domestic violence to talk with other women who have had similar experiences. This provides an important support mechanism for women survivors of violence.

Besides domestic violence, they also discussed other forms of gender-based violence as well.

'It is important to ... talk about the mistreatment of adolescents who are constantly at risk of sexual abuse and harassment', Sadiku said, 'and for them to become aware of domestic violence'.

Speranza also supported workers from Centres for Social Work, municipalities and women to attend a one-day training provided by the Kosovo Centre for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (KRCT), another KWN member. The training taught participants how to cope with stress.

Many women who participated in this series of trainings, are now more open, have begun to express their problems and talk more freely to others about their lives. Although this project has ended, *Speranza* plans to continue helping them in the future.

***Venera* Advocates on Women's Rights to Property**

Miradije Sheremeti, Director of organisation *Venera*, ever since she was a student, dreamt about and had a goal to work on women's rights, in particular their rights to property. Even though a lot of years have passed, legal issues pertaining property rights remain problematic for women.

For this reason, *Venera*, has organised meetings with women to familiarise them with their legal rights related to the division of property, may that be property acquired by inheritance or property acquired by joint marital contribution. Another aim of these meetings was informing participants about protecting their rights to property.

Sheremeti works and fights for women to get what they are entitled to and to make both women and men aware of these rights. Supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,944), 62 women from Peja and neighbouring villages took part in discussions on this issue organized by *Venera*.

As a result of this initiative, seven women have started procedures related to the division of property and one woman achieved to become a property owner. Gima Ahmeti is the

woman who received a certificate of property inheritance registration.

However, these successes do not mean that the initiative did not face its fair share of challenges. The procedures that Ahmeti undertook affected her family relations, she said.



'This is a very good example of a very strong women whose husband repeatedly told her to give up while her brothers and sisters disowned her and do not talk to her at all' Sheremeti said. 'Even though she faced maltreatment from the court and the municipality, she achieved her goal and used the rights she is entitled to', said Sheremeti who continuously stood by her and helped her through the court procedures.

Venera continues to provide professional legal support free of charge for women dealing with administrative and judicial procedures in matters related to the division of property as in the case of Ahmeti and other similar cases. Moreover, the organisation is still working closely with institutions and courts on raising awareness among officials on this issue in order for them to work in a just way as the law requires them.

Besides women, the aim was to include men in these activities as well. In total, 28 men were part of the aforementioned initiatives. Even though they expressed that women are being wronged in matters of property, none of them confirmed when asked if they will share family property with their own sisters. Their responses exposed the harsh reality and should be taken as a call for the need to do more work on raising awareness on this issue.

A lot of women continue to give up on their rights to property, based on the fear that it will disrupt family relations.

They also are concerned about the long and costly judicial procedures. Clearly, property and inheritance rights remain a serious issue that still requires a lot of effort towards ensuring equal rights for women and men.

Women Become Aware of Osteoporosis

According to the Osteoporosis Association of Kosovo, 150,000 people in Kosovo suffer from this disease. It has become clear that citizens from rural areas face numerous problems and obstacles related to access to health services for the treatment of this disease. Women Pensioners Association *Vita-jeta* with support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,965) has taken on the responsibility of improving women's access to more specialised health services, offering them free of charge check-ups and raising awareness among women regarding the prevention and treatment of the disease in question.

For the first time, in the villages Llajshevc, Makovc, Besia and Hajvali, *Vita-jeta* together with Dashurie Kryeziu, a rheumatologist specialist, held lectures on the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis. Moreover, people attending these lectures were given informative leaflets.

The diagnostic health check-ups undertaken by *Vita-jeta* members revealed that 30% of these women have osteoporosis, 45.6% are in the stage in which osteoporosis can develop (osteopenia), whereas only one-fourth of them have bones with normal density. This means that one in three women over age 50, among their members, suffers from osteoporosis.

Doctor Kryeziu, who always offers free of charge check-ups in the framework of the work that the organization does, has run bone density diagnoses (with the DXA device) on the heel of the foot and also analysed which women have osteoporosis and which osteopenia. She analysed



everything that has to do with prophylaxis and the treatment of this disease.

There was a lot of interest and need. Thus, more than 315 women benefitted from this initiative. They now have more awareness about this issue and are prepared to deal with this disease.

With the results of the diagnoses, *Vita-jeta* will advocate to the Ministry of Health for osteoporosis devices to be installed in every health centre in the region in order for as many women and men as possible to be able to run tests.

Young women also demonstrated an interest in this matter, as they were informed by their families or people close to them about the need to undergo tests related to this disease.

Moreover, based on the analyses conducted with the association's members, it became apparent that the percentage of people suffering from osteoporosis may be higher in cities than in villages, perhaps because people in villages may consume more natural foods.

Association of Deaf Women Advocates for Women's Rights to Health

Fifteen Albanian and Roma deaf women and girls of different ages from rural areas participated in meetings organized by the Association of Deaf Women (ADW). During meetings they learned about breast cancer, cervical cancer and how to detect cancer early on. In addition to women, men also participated, expressing their problems and needs to institution officials. The initiative received support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,966).

Laura Guguli, a gynaecologist, advised women about cancer and also made it possible for ADW members to have visits without payment. This cooperation with ADW has continued even after the project has ended. Also, as a result of these free controls, some cases of cancer were diagnosed among deaf people.

'I discovered that two of the organization's members have cancer', said the ADW Executive Director, Krenare Gashi. This led for the organization to advocate for assistance. 'For one of them the municipal assembly provided €300 to help her treat cervical cancer, and we also made it possible for her to have a pension since she is deaf.'

ADW also used an artistic way to advocate for the rights of deaf people to healthcare, by filming a short movie called "Bribery". The film shows how patients are treated unjustly, particularly women, by medical centres. Meanwhile the film sent a message against corruption in medicine facilities. The film was shown in the Culture Hall in Prizren.

At the request of the deaf, ADW advocated for the local government to work more towards improving health conditions for deaf persons and to have employment opportunities for the

deaf and disabled. Further they advocated for the Health Department in Prizren to ensure that sign language interpretation always is made available for deaf persons both in emergency rooms and medical centres. They also advocated to the Health Department for free medicine for the deaf. One idea was for deaf persons to have cards that they can use for medical visits. The cards would automatically allow patients to use an ATM when requesting medicine or paying for a medical examination.

Youth Engage to Address Domestic Violence in Decan

Protect Your Rights (PYR) is an organization led and comprised primarily of youth who wanted to address domestic violence in their community. Previously, few initiatives had been taken within the Municipality of Decan to address domestic violence.

Supported by the Kosovo Women's Fund (€2,856), their initiative involved a combination of direct support to women who had suffered domestic violence, monitoring of court sessions, advocacy to institutions and awareness-raising to try to prevent domestic violence from happening in the future.

First, PYR representatives met with 10 women who had suffered domestic violence in Decan municipality, visiting them in their families or in shelters. Activists discussed with women the challenges they face and their needs.

'During these meetings, we informed victims of domestic violence of their rights and institutions that can help them', said Fitore Shala, Executive Director of PYR. The organization also supported them in advocating to institutions with regard to their individual cases. PYR supported their cases to be provided with adequate treatment and to assist them in reintegrating into society, Shala said.



Then, after becoming familiar with the cases, in cooperation with the Kosovo Judicial Council, PYR monitored hearings on domestic violence. From June through September 2016, they participated in 10 court cases, related to domestic violence.

S.P. was among the women who had suffered domestic violence who received support from PYR during legal proceedings.

'Representatives of the organization together with the People's Advocate Office and the Office for Free Legal Assistance assisted during court proceedings, so that these procedures could be performed efficiently', S.P. said.

After monitoring these court sessions, PYR concluded that judges in procedural terms are complying with the judicial procedures and cases of domestic violence were a priority for review by courts.

In addition to monitoring court cases, PYR took the initiative to raise awareness among women, men, youth and institutions about domestic violence and how it can be prevented. They organized screening of two movies about domestic violence and violence against children and women: 'Slaves' and 'Hidden'. Young volunteers helped organize the screening at the Youth Centre in Decan. After each screening, youth discussed the messages of the films. They observed that not only physical violence but also 'psychological violence' affects children and youth. Young volunteers also distributed brochures to students in high schools in the municipality, aiming for the society to take action in preventing domestic violence together.

As a result of meetings with women who had suffered domestic violence, court monitoring and discussions with youth, PYR developed recommendations for institutions on how to better meet the needs of persons who have suffered domestic violence in their municipality:

- Women need to receive proper training and appropriate education so that they can become economically independent.
- Psychologists need to be in primary schools to assist children.
- The family and perpetrator of domestic violence should receive psychological treatment.
- Society needs to be informed more about women's inheritance rights, enabling women to have more economic independence.
- The laws pertaining to domestic violence need to be implemented. Protection orders must be fully implemented and child alimony must be paid when requested by the court.

Overall 80 people benefitted from this initiative, including women who suffered domestic violence in the Municipality of

Decan, their families, high school students and representatives of institutions dealing with domestic violence in Decan and Peja. Institutions became more aware of women's needs, including officials from the Kosovo Police, the Basic Court in Peja-branch Decan, the Centre for Social Work, the Office for Legal Aid, the People's Advocate Office in Peja and the Officer for Gender Equality in Decan.

CSOs Support Women in Securing Property Rights

‘There was a case when we went to a family and the man shouted and slammed the table and said, “Who are you to tell my wife about property rights? After many years, you want to divide me from my wife who does not even know how to write or speak, and you’re telling her to ask for her share on my property?”’ Sevdija Ramadani, Director of CSO Gora shared her experience. Later, the woman of the household who was in her 30s apologized for the behaviour of her husband. She said that she would like to come to the activities of the organization, but it was impossible.

Isolation was an occurring theme among women in remote and rural areas of Prizren region.

Having met with many women in Prizren region, Pranvera Bullaku, Director of CSO Rikotta had witnessed that women were exhausted from their difficult lives. Interested to understand more about their lives and to try to economically empower them, she teamed up with Sevdija Ramadani from CSO Gora. Their joint initiative received support from the Kosovo Women's Fund (€5,862). They sought to raise awareness about women's rights to property inheritance and to help women in this region.

The situation of women in villages is very difficult, the activists said. Many women do not know how to read and write, especially women of the Gorani ethnicity. In these rural areas, the activists from Gora and Rikotta were among the first CSO representatives to visit villages like Gornjeselo, Mushnikovë, Sredska, Reqan and Bogoshev to discuss the issue of inheritance and property rights. They went door to door, meeting with women and their families. They discussed each family's story and shared stories related to property and inheritance.



Despite their desire to help women, their work faced many challenges, Bullaku said. 'There were women who refused to be part of this initiative', she said. 'But mostly men created problems for us: husbands and in-laws. In six cases, they drove us out of the house, refusing to allow us to meet with women.'

After individual meetings with many families, the organizations also held joint meetings with women. Women had the opportunity to meet with an official from the agency for free legal assistance in Kosovo, Drita Rexhepi, who spoke about women's right to joint property and family inheritance.

While they faced substantial resistance to the idea of women claiming their right to property, the activists did learn that several people were interested in identifying ways for women to become more economically empowered.

'They said that they're more interested in economic empowerment, and are more willing to work and sell their agricultural products', said Bullaku.

Their experience suggested that much work remains to be done, particularly in more isolated rural areas, towards increasing awareness among women and men about the importance of women claiming their right to inheritance and property.

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the environment in the development of the human mind. It argues that the environment plays a crucial role in shaping the child's cognitive and emotional development. The second part of the paper explores the role of the family in the child's development. It discusses how the family environment can either support or hinder the child's growth. The third part of the paper examines the impact of social interactions on the child's development. It argues that the child's social experiences are essential for the development of social skills and emotional regulation. The fourth part of the paper discusses the role of the school in the child's development. It argues that the school environment can provide a structured and supportive setting for the child's learning and growth. The fifth part of the paper discusses the role of the community in the child's development. It argues that the community can provide a sense of belonging and support for the child. The sixth part of the paper discusses the role of the culture in the child's development. It argues that the culture can shape the child's values and beliefs. The seventh part of the paper discusses the role of the religion in the child's development. It argues that the religion can provide a sense of purpose and meaning for the child. The eighth part of the paper discusses the role of the media in the child's development. It argues that the media can provide a source of information and entertainment for the child. The ninth part of the paper discusses the role of the technology in the child's development. It argues that the technology can provide a new way of learning and interacting for the child. The tenth part of the paper discusses the role of the environment in the child's development. It argues that the environment can provide a source of inspiration and motivation for the child.

Kosovo Women's Network
Hajrullah Abdullahu St., No. 25
10000 Prishtina, Kosovo
+381 (0) 38 245 850
www.womensnetwork.org
info@womensnetwork.org
[Facebook: Kosova Women's Network](https://www.facebook.com/Kosova-Women's-Network)



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