



A Seat at the Table

Women's contributions to and expectations from peacebuilding processes in Kosovo



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This publication was produced with financial support from UN Women. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of UN Women.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) would like to express its gratitude to all research participants, including women's rights activists, politicians, and representatives of institutions who shared their stories. The KWN research team, including Majlinda Behrami, José Carpintero Molina, and Besarta Breznica worked tirelessly to conduct, transcribe, and analyse the interview, focus group, and survey data. Nicole Farnsworth supported the team and assisted with report writing. Tijana Simić LaValley conducted focus groups in the Serbian language and advised on the report. Lauren Hanna assisted with proofreading. Loreta Suka facilitated translation. The authors thank KWN Executive Director Igballe Rogova, Finance Manager Besa Shehu, Project Manager Zana Rudi, and Project Coordinator Etleva Malushaj for their ongoing support. The publication was reviewed by Yllka Soba, Lorenta Kadriu, Tijana Simic LaValley, Vetone Veliu, UN Women representatives, and other UN representatives. KWN thanks UN Women in Kosovo for trusting and supporting KWN in undertaking this research. The report has been financed by UN Women with a substantial in-kind, pro bono contribution from KWN staff.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AGE	Agency for Gender Equality
CBM	Community Building Mitrovica
CDHRF	Council for Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPWC	Centre for the Protection of Women and Children
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
HLC	Humanitarian Law Centre
ICITAP	International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
Istanbul Convention	Convention Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence
KAS	Kosovo Agency of Statistics
KCSS	Kosovar Centre for Security Studies
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KGSC	Kosovo Gender Studies Centre
KP	Kosovo Police
KPC	Kosovo Protection Corps
KPS	Kosovo Police Service
KRCT	Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims
KSF	Kosovo Security Force
Kvinna till Kvinna	The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
KWL	Kosovo Women's Lobby
KWN	Kosovo Women's Network
LGE	Law on Gender Equality
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and other identities
MP	Member of Parliament
MWAHR	Mitrovica Women's Association for Human Rights
MWMN	Mediterranean Women Mediators Network
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PBSO	Peacebuilding Support Office
RECOM	Regional Commission for the Establishment of the Facts about the War Crimes and other Violations of Human Rights Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia
RWLSEE	Regional Women's Lobby in South East Europe
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SNC	Serb National Council
SRSG	UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo
U.S.	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USIS	United States Information Service Office
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council resolution
WCOSOs	Women's rights civil society organisations
WPS	Women, peace, and security
YPS	Youth, peace and security
YIHR	Youth Initiative for Human Rights

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Executive Summary

United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, and its “sister” resolutions that followed, have called for women’s increased participation in decision-making processes related to peace and security. Adopted in 2000, 2020 marked the 20th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325. Meanwhile, the resolution’s adoption coincided with the end of the war in Kosovo (1999); 2020 thus dually marked the 20th anniversary of women’s rights activists in Kosovo utilising UNSCR 1325 to make their voices heard, towards securing a seat at the table during peacebuilding processes.

This report examines the roles, contributions, and needs of women related to peace and security processes in Kosovo, including the specific role of women’s rights organisations in peacebuilding. The research sought to document the different perspectives and experiences of diverse activists, politicians, civil society organisations, and women, particularly young women. Conducted in 2020, the research involved mixed methods, including desk research, an online survey, interviews, participant observation, and focus groups. Overall, 483 diverse people participated, including 266 young women and five men.

The first chapter examines how women define and experience peace and security. Findings suggests that peace and security have different meanings for different women, based on their experiences. Women who personally experienced war tended to define peace as the absence of war, while younger women born after the war tended to define peace more broadly, in line with feminist authors’ definitions of peace and security. While some research participants felt secure in Kosovo, others did not. The latter attributed insecurity to poor education, the economy, gender-based violence, weak institutional response, and lacking infrastructure. Interethnic confrontations among Kosovo Serbs and Albanians also concerned women. Towards peace and security, women mentioned their engagement in politics and the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, better education, employment opportunities, more women in the security sector, and safe streets, particularly without threat of sexual harassment.

The second chapter discusses women’s roles and contributions to peace and security. In times of conflict, these varied from engaging in politics towards a peaceful resolution to the conflict between people in Kosovo and Serbia; to safeguarding human security through education, healthcare, and humanitarian aid; to building peace across borders; to documenting human rights violations, leading peaceful demonstrations, and international diplomacy, towards a peaceful intervention and resolution to the war; to organising security for displaced persons. Respondents voiced concern that women’s contributions have been forgotten. After the 1999 war, findings suggest that women contributed to peace and security through interethnic peacebuilding, networking, furthering human security, the security sector, politics, and negotiations and dialogue. The latter sub-section also discusses women’s priorities for negotiations and Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. When women were largely excluded from official peace processes, like negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia, women’s rights organisations were instrumental in furthering peace and security through networking across diverse borders, peaceful protest, alternative negotiations, letter-writing, and media engagement to make women’s voices and priorities heard.

The third chapter discusses key challenges to women’s participation in peace processes, including continuing interethnic conflict and threats to women human rights defenders engaged in peacebuilding; international actors’ assumptions that Kosovo was a patriarchal society, which meant they ostracised women from decision-making processes immediately after the war; men political leaders’ approaches and poor democratisation with political parties; and patriarchy in general.

The report contains recommendations for various actors towards furthering peace and security in Kosovo, as well as enhancing women’s participation in peace processes, especially young women’s engagement. An annex summarises the relevant legal framework.

Introduction

United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security,¹ and its “sister” resolutions that followed,² have called for women’s increased participation in decision-making processes related to peace and security. UNSCR 1325 expresses concern that women are among those most affected by the consequences of armed conflict. Thus, it emphasises the importance of recognising women’s role in the prevention and resolution of conflict, as well as in the consolidation of peace. The resolution urges states to increase women’s representation in all spheres of decision-making, from the local to the international level. It also emphasises the need for peace operations and peace negotiations to adopt a gender perspective and for women to be adequately represented in these. Several of UNSCR 1325’s “sister” resolutions have emphasised explicitly the role of women’s rights civil society organisations (WCOSOs) in furthering peace and security, and thus the importance of engaging and supporting them. Meanwhile, through UNSCR 2535 (2020), the UN recently has recognised the key roles that youth, specifically young women, can play in conflict resolution, prevention, and peacebuilding, calling for their enhanced engagement in these processes.³

Despite the passage of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent UN resolutions on women, peace, and security (WPS), as well as international acknowledgment of the roles, contributions, and special needs of women and youth in conflict,⁴ both women and youth remain largely excluded from peace-making and peacebuilding processes globally.⁵ On average globally, women have accounted for only 13% of negotiators and 6% of signatories in key peace processes between 1990 and 2019.⁶ Meanwhile despite recognition of the important role that WCOSOs can play in furthering peace, historically, when peace negotiations have included CSOs, seldom have they involved local WCOSOs or addressed their constituents’ needs.

Scholars have identified several reasons for including women in peace processes.⁷ Their studies confirm that there is a positive correlation between gender equality in peace processes and the durability of peace; the success of peace operations may be greater when women can express their voices and experiences.⁸ Although women are not a homogeneous group and there are different agendas and interpretations of peace, they can serve as a link between the local level and negotiation processes.⁹ Given the variety of experiences that women have had in conflict and post-conflict situations, involving women can contribute to better understanding of factors leading to conflict and ways to reach accountability for crimes.¹⁰ Their insight on the impact of war on individual lives and children can identify priority needs, towards supporting “security for all citizens”.¹¹ Women signatories can strengthen linkages with WCOSOs that have strong connections to the grassroots level.¹² Linkages between women in negotiations and diverse WCOSOs not only broadens societal support for peace processes, but can inform negotiations on specific issues.¹³ Women in negotiations also may have backing of WCOSOs, which can strengthen the

¹ UNSCR 1325, 31 October 2000.

² The nine additional resolutions of the WPS Agenda are 1820 (2009), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2010), 1960 (2011), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019). For descriptions, please see Annex 5.

³ UNSCR 2535, 14 July 2020.

⁴ See Annex 5.

⁵ UN Women, *Young Women in Peace and Security: At the Intersection of the YPS and WPS Agendas*, 2018; and Norville, V., “*The Role of Women in Global Security*”, 2011, p. 2.

⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, *Women’s Participation in Peace Processes*, n.d.

⁷ Krause, J., Krause, W., and Bränfors, P., “*Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace*”, International Interactions, 2018; and Gizelis, T-I., *Gender Empowerment and United Nations Peacebuilding*, 2009.

⁸ Gizelis, 2009, quoted by Krause et al., p. 6.

⁹ Krause et al., p. 6.

¹⁰ Kvinna till Kvinna, *A Right, Not A Gift*, 2020, p. 58.

¹¹ Hunt, Swanee and Cristina Posa, “Women Waging Peace”, *Foreign Policy*, No. 124 (May-Jun., 2001) pp. 38-47.

¹² Krause et al., p. 7.

¹³ Ibid.

position of women in negotiations.

Women's absence from peace processes reduces the chances of including provisions for gender equality and socio-economic development, issues important for human security that women usually champion.¹⁴ Agreements that do not include women focus mostly on military reforms, while those signed by women tend to have more provisions related to social peace, including "political, social and economic reform".¹⁵ Indeed, in processes of demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration, closely related to rule of law, security, and justice reform, the needs of women and girls must be considered.¹⁶

Both women and youth have a fundamental role to play in promoting peace and security; if they are not included in accepting peace agreements, such processes lack legitimacy and sustainability.¹⁷ Agreements that contain a higher representation of women negotiators have a higher implementation rate. There is a strong relationship between the inclusion of women in peace agreements and their durability.¹⁸ For example, research by Krause et al. has shown that in the Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, and Northern Ireland, the engagement of more women in peace agreements corresponds with "a longer durability and quality of peace agreements".¹⁹

Related, while often homogenised as victims of conflicts, young women and men have played key roles in actions to achieve peace. Worldwide, several examples exist, such as: the Amman Youth Declaration, expressing youth commitment and agency to live in a peaceful global society, using a gender-sensitive approach;²⁰ Pacific Regional Action Plan, enhancing women and young women's leadership in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, mainstreaming gender in security policy-making, and ensuring women and girls' rights are protected;²¹ and the African Youth Charter, which provided a framework for youth participation in all spheres of society, as well as recognised their agency for peace.²² All of these preceded UNSCR 2250 and informed its adoption, as they evidenced the potential contribution of youth, including young women, to peace and security processes.²³ Despite these contributions and young women's potential, few young women are engaged in peace processes, decision-making, or politics.²⁴

Considering the established importance of engaging women, including young women, in peace processes, this report examines the roles, contributions, and needs of women related to peace and security processes in Kosovo. Indeed, UNSCR 1325's adoption nearly coincided with the end of the war in Kosovo (1999). Thus, as the 20th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325 was commemorated, 2020 dually marked the 20th Anniversary of women's rights activists in Kosovo utilising UNSCR 1325 to make their voices heard, calling for a seat at the decision-making table during Kosovo's peacebuilding processes. Documenting their work can provide insight for women's rights activists elsewhere in the world, while also evidencing the important contributions that women can and have made to peace and security in Kosovo in the last three decades. Such history and context is important for recognising their work and potential to contribute in the future, particularly in the context of the continuing Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, as well as ongoing peace processes.

¹⁴ El Jack, A., *Gender and Armed Conflict: Overview Report*, 2003, p. 8.

¹⁵ Krause et al.

¹⁶ Norville, V., p. 4.

¹⁷ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), "*The Missing Peace*", 2018, p. 70.

¹⁸ Krause et al.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Amman Youth Declaration, "*On Youth, Peace, and Security*", 2015.

²¹ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Pacific Regional Action Plan 2012-2015*, 2015.

²² African Union Commission, *African Youth Charter*, 2006.

²³ UN Women, "*Young Women in Peace and Security: At the Intersection of the YPS and WPS Agendas*", pp. 5-6.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 5.

Methodology

As in all social research, the authors consider it useful to begin by providing readers with definitions of the key concepts and terms used. The report includes particular attention to young women, with “youth” defined as persons ages 15 to 29 years old.²⁵ The term “young woman” thus refers to women ages 15 to 29. The term “young woman” thus refers to women ages 15 to 29. The term “diverse” is used to point to the differences among women, including intersections of age, ethnicity, geographic location (including rural and urban locations), ability, gender identity, sexuality, and socioeconomic status, among others, which may mean that women have different experiences, access to resources, and thus needs. For this research, the “conflict” period was defined as 1989-1998; the war occurred in 1998-1999; and the “post-war” period from 1999 onwards. The team acknowledges that conflict existed much earlier, and that, for some, various forms of conflict continue today.²⁶ All references to “Albanian” or “Serb” refer to the ethnicity of persons living in the geographic area of Kosovo and not to citizenship of Albania or Serbia, unless otherwise stated. “Serbian” refers to the state of Serbia or Serbian citizens. “Patriarchy”, according to Lerner, means “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power.”²⁷

This research aimed to answer the overall research question: what have been the roles, contributions, and needs of women, particularly young women, related to peace and security during conflict, war and post-war processes in Kosovo? This included responding to the following sub-questions:

- What do “peace” and “security” mean to diverse women?
- What roles have WCSOs played in involving and enhancing young women’s participation in peace and security processes?
- What have been the challenges of involving (young) women in peace and security processes, including negotiations and dialogue?
- How has the involvement or non-involvement of (young) women in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue contributed to any results so far?
- How can young women be more engaged in dialogue and negotiations in the future?

The research involved mixed methods, including a review of existing data and literature; face-to-face interviews with diverse men and women from institutions, politics, and civil society; an online survey of women, particularly young women; focus groups with young women in six municipalities of Kosovo; and participant observation. In total, 266 young women (ages 15-29), 189 women (ages 30 and older), and five men participated in the research, totalling 483 research participants.²⁸

First, the team reviewed the most relevant UNSC resolutions on WPS and youth, peace, and security (YPS), as well as Kosovo laws relating to gender equality, peace, and security. The team also reviewed the academic literature available online related to WPS and YPS agendas. The literature review and desk research included examination of government documents, historical archives, books, academic articles, media coverage, oral history archives, and other digital sources. For women’s stories of their contributions to peace and security, the team drew substantially from the existing work of the Kosovar Gender Studies Centre (KGSC) in *History is Herstory, too*, which used a feminist oral history methodology to document the stories of women’s contributions to politics, society, and the economy. Researchers also drew from the archives of Oral History Kosovo.

Second, the team used variation sampling to select 53 diverse key respondents for semi-structured inter-

²⁵ Eurostat, “Youth - Overview”. The concept of youth relates to the transition from childhood to adulthood, so it is difficult to determine a specific age. This process varies based on cultural, psychosocial, political, economic, and development factors (Singerman, 2007, Navtej and Yousef, 2009, cited in UN Women, “Young Women in Peace and Security: At the Intersection of the YPS and WPS Agendas”, pp. 10-11.

²⁶ See, for example, Malcolm, N., *Kosovo: A Short History*, 1998.

²⁷ Lerner, G., *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Vol. 1, USA: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 239.

²⁸ 23 participants refused to share their age. Annex 1 contains additional demographic information about research participants.

views.²⁹ Diverse men and women of different ages and ethnicities were interviewed. Research participants included women's rights activists, women in politics, women affected by conflict, and representatives of the Agency for Gender Equality (AGE), international organisations in Kosovo, and CSOs. The sample included women living in regions most affected by conflict. Two research team members conducted each interview, in which one researcher led the interview and the other took notes. Interviews were recorded with the oral consent of respondents. Interviews in the Serbian language were conducted by a native Serbian speaker.

Third, researchers used Survey Monkey to administer an electronic survey in Albanian and Serbian languages. It sought to gather the perspectives of diverse women from all ethnic groups regarding peace and security, as well as their needs and expectations from the continuing Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia.³⁰ The survey was promoted broadly, including through social media and email. It was open from 6 February through 3 March 2020. It had 221 women respondents. As an online survey, findings are not statistically significant or representative of the views of the population. Therefore, these findings are incorporated as qualitative data.

Fourth, researchers organised focus groups with 130 diverse young women in nine municipalities: Prishtinë/Priština, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Deçan/Dečane, Skënderaj/Srbica, Prizren, Graçanicë/Gračanica, North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, and South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. Focus groups sought to better understand young women's perspectives on peace; how they can contribute to peace; and their expectations from peace processes.³¹ Focus groups included young women of different ethnicities: Albanian, Serb, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian. The Serbian language focus groups were led by a native Serbian speaker.

Fifth, KWN member organisations conducted 79 short interviews with at women (>50) and young women (>10) with whom they work.³² These interviews sought to gather women's input on the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. They were asked: To what extent do you think your needs have been addressed in the negotiations and Dialogue; and if you would have sat at the Dialogue table, what would you want to be discussed?

Sixth, given that KWN activists and researchers have been working in this field since the passage of UNSCR 1325, including attending a plethora of meetings, conferences, and events on various topics related to the WPS and YPS agendas over the years, the authors have drawn from their own personal experiences and participant observation, where relevant.

The research team analysed the data gathered in reference to the research questions. Qualitative data was coded for analysis, towards identifying trends and differences. Quantitative data from the online survey was analysed using Survey Monkey and Microsoft Excel, but presented as qualitative data. As with grounded research, the sub-sections within chapters focus on key themes and dimensions that emerged from the research.

The research team sought to enhance the validity of the findings through triangulation of methods, data sources, and researchers. The fact that research team members included women's rights activists, as well as young women and men, the team brought diverse experiences, knowledge, and understanding to the research. This included first-hand knowledge of the experiences and needs of (young) women, which potentially enhanced validity. Differences in perceptions or experiences, as well as potential for error is reported. Participant checks also sought to identify and correct any potential error prior to publishing.

Regarding research limitations, as per the research questions, this research focused on women, their roles, contributions, and needs, and so the team primarily spoke with women. Men's views on this theme also are important, and some key interviews were conducted with men engaged in these processes to gather their impressions; information regarding men's views also was gleaned from the already-existing literature. Given resource limitations and the fact that women's contributions during the 1990s already have been documented elsewhere,³³ the research summarises but does not elaborate key contributions during the 1990s. While efforts were made to mention by

²⁹ See Annex 2 for a general template of the Interview Guide.

³⁰ See Annex 3 for the Survey.

³¹ See Annex 4 for the Focus Group Guide.

³² An additional 19 respondents preferred not to share their age.

³³ For a rather comprehensive history of women's contributions, see Kosovar Gender Studies Centre (KGSC), *History is Herstory Too: The History of Women in Civil Society in Kosovo 1980-2004*, 2008.

name the contributions of diverse women to peace and security, the authors acknowledge that many additional women may have contributed whose names were not identified through this research. To them, the authors offer heartfelt apologies. Despite efforts, some events that have occurred also may not be included due to lack of information.

An Overview of the Report's Content

The first chapter examines how diverse women define and experience peace and security. The second chapter presents women's roles and contributions to peace and security. The sub-sections therein refer to key dimensions of their contributions that emerged from the research. The third chapter discusses challenges to women's participation in peace processes, with sub-sections also corresponding with the main issues that arose from the research. The report concludes with specific recommendations for relevant actors towards increasing women's, and particularly young women's, participation in peace processes. Annexes 1-4 provide further information related to the methodology, while Annex 5 describes the relevant international and national legal framework pertaining to women's participation in peace and security processes in Kosovo.

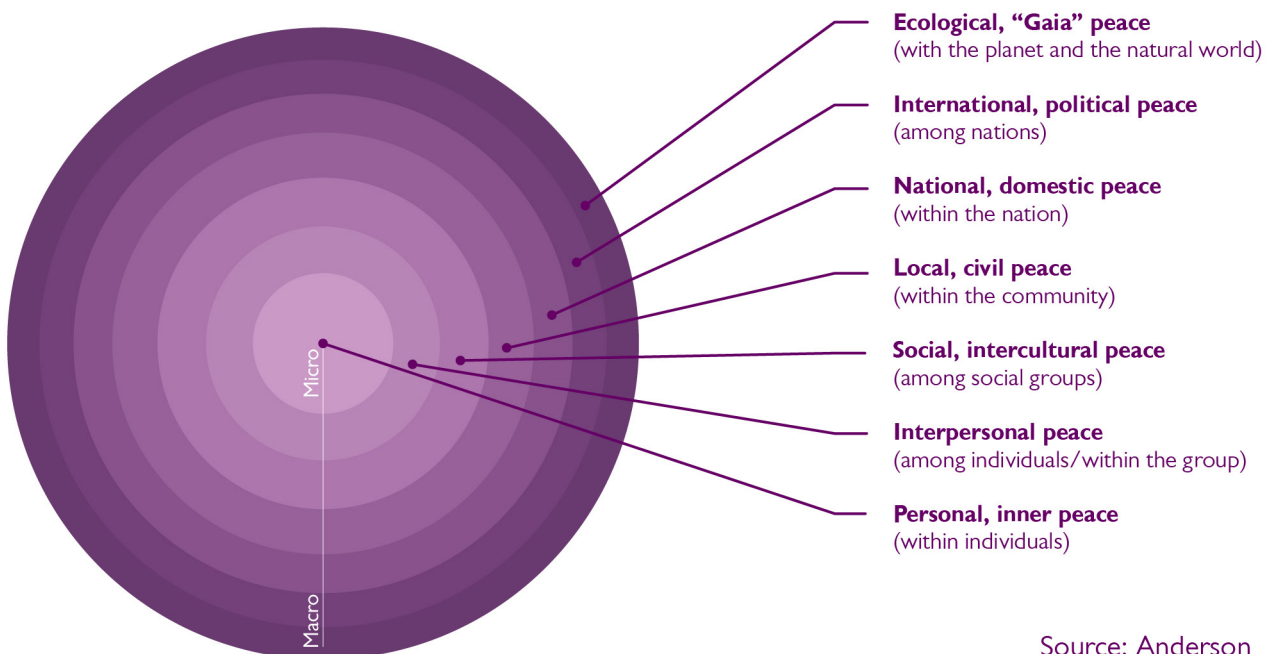
Chapter I. How Do Women in Kosovo Define Peace and Security?

This chapter responds to the sub-research question: what do “peace” and “security” mean to diverse women? Conceptualisations and interpretations of “peace” and “security” differ. Depending on the context and person, these terms can have a variety of meanings. It is important to understand what these terms mean to people affected by peace processes, particularly when discussing the steps required to establish lasting peace and security. Thus, this chapter reviews the existing literature related to these key concepts, and then discusses what peace and security mean to diverse women in Kosovo, including young women specifically. The first section discusses peace, the second section security, and the third section diverse women’s opinions regarding what would make Kosovo more peaceful and secure.

Defining Peace

This section discusses diverse women’s definitions of peace in Kosovo, contextualising this within the framework of broader research and thinking on this term, including feminist views on peace. Peace is experienced by people and therefore can be experienced differently and subjectively. Individuals, families, groups, communities, and nations experience and create peace in various ways, with different intersectional relationships. In a social system, according to Anderson, this phenomenon ranges from an ecological peace at the macro-level to personal, inner peace at the individual micro-level (Figure 1).³⁴

Figure 1. Contexts of Peace



According to Galtung and Fischer, the concept of peace includes the absence of all dimensions of violence, including direct, structural, and cultural violence.³⁵ They refer to the absence of these forms of violence as “nega-

³⁴ Anderson, R., “A Definition of Peace”, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 10(2), 2004, pp. 101–116.

³⁵ Galtung, J., and Fischer, D., “Positive and Negative Peace”, *SpringerBriefs on Pioneers in Science and Practice*, Vol. 5, Berlin, Heidelberg: 2013, p. 173.

tive peace”, a situation in which neither violence nor “positive peace” exists. The concept of negative peace implies the absence of direct violence, such as mass killings; structural violence, such as violence resulting from inequalities; and cultural violence, such as the justification of other forms of violence.³⁶ Meanwhile, according to Galtung and Fischer, “positive peace” requires the “presence of cooperation, equity, equality, culture of peace, and dialogue”. Therefore, the concept of peace could be understood as the sum of both negative and positive peace.³⁷ Confortini has linked these concepts of cultural and direct violence with patriarchy and sexism; in many cultures, the domination of men over women is legitimised, including via direct violence, and “men, rather than women, commit the vast majority of directly violent acts”.³⁸ Indeed, some acts of violence, like domestic violence that is perpetrated primarily by men, occur even in situations that some people may consider peaceful, if they define peace merely as the absence of war.

Thus, feminist theorists have critiqued traditional notions of peace as the absence of armed conflict or war, arguing that this definition derives from a masculine perspective of peace.³⁹ Chinkin and Charlesworth have observed that the so-called peace following war may not necessarily involve peace for women; even amid ceasefires, violence against women continues.⁴⁰ Fanon’s term “peaceful violations”, according to Shroff, “can be understood as the regulation and normalisation of violence”, rather than the absence of violence.⁴¹ Thus, peacetime does not necessarily involve an end to violence, but rather better control of it through laws, regulations, and programs that seek to address violence.⁴² Moreover, conflict arguably exists in every society and occurs when people or social groups seek or perceive opposing goals, assert conflicting values, or have differing interests.⁴³ Thus, the end of a particular conflict or war does not necessarily mean the arrival of peace; a lack of political consensus and trust often remain and the root causes of the conflict may persist. There also may be increased tensions as people return to destroyed or occupied homes.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (“Kvinna till Kvinna”, or Woman to Woman in English), a Swedish feminist peace organisation, found in its recent report on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 that participants generally understood peace in line with these broader concepts of peace, and the WPS Agenda. They felt that peace included having multiple freedoms, such as freedom of choice, communication, and movement.⁴⁴ In a UNFPA and PBSO global study, beyond the absence of violence, the definition of peace included resolving underlying potential causes of violence, as well, such as corruption, inequality, and lack of justice.⁴⁵

In Kosovo, as illustrated below “Women’s Reflections on Peace”, the concept of peace differed for those who had experienced war and mass violence personally, and those who had not, particularly younger women born after the war. Women who had experienced the war personally were more likely to define peace as the absence of war. They spoke of peace in Anderson’s context of international and national, domestic peace, as peace between Kosovo and Serbia. Young women tended to define peace more broadly and similar to the aforementioned, feminist definitions of peace as personal, inner peace and peace among individuals. Women of all generations linked peace with respecting human rights, freedom of movement, freedom of speech, and language rights, among others, which relate to Anderson’s social, intercultural peace, among others.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 173-174.

³⁸ Confortini, C. C., “[Galtung, Violence, and Gender: The case of a Peace Studies/Feminism Alliance](#)”, *Peace & Change*, 31(3), 2006, p. 340.

³⁹ Reardon, B.A. & Snauwaert, D.T., “[Betty A. Reardon: Key Texts in Gender and Peace](#)”, 2015, p. 65.

⁴⁰ Chinkin, C., and Charlesworth, H., “Building Women into Peace: the international legal framework”, *Third World Quarterly*, Volume 27, Number 5, July 2006, p. 941.

⁴¹ Shroff, S., cites Fanon, *The Wretched on Earth* in “The Peace Professor, Decolonial, Feminist, and Queer Futurities” in Groarke, E.B.M., and Welty, E., *Peace and Justice Studies: Critical Pedagogy* (1st ed.), 2018.

⁴² For example, see KWN [reports](#) relating to violence against women in Kosovo.

⁴³ Mesa, M., CEIPAZ, Culture of Peace Foundation, “[Peace and security](#)”, n.d., p. 1.

⁴⁴ Kvinna till Kvinna, [A Right Not A Gift](#), 2020, p. 23.

⁴⁵ UNFPA and PBSO, “[The Missing Peace](#)”, 2018, pp. 35-36.

Women's Reflections on Peace

"I was a child when we were part of Yugoslavia. Later, I felt threatened all the time just because I was an Albanian woman. By the end of the war, I realised my life in Kosovo had never been peaceful because of police violence or politics."

Albanian woman, Prishtinë/Priština

"Peace to me is freedom of speech, freedom of movement, access to education. There can't be an advancement in society without these things."

Serb woman, Novobërdë/Novobrdó

"Peace for me is when everyone is able to speak freely, where all citizens have equal rights, regardless of gender."

Young Roma woman, Prizren

"Everything is related to freedom. If you are free you will have peace and security."

Young Albanian woman, Deçan/Deçane

"For a very long time it was the absence of war. I don't have the feeling it ended. We have Serbia, which doesn't recognise us, but also is lobbying against us."

Albanian woman, Prishtinë/Priština

"Peace is not just an absence of war. I would define peace as social peace; you cannot have peace without inclusion."

Young Albanian woman, Prishtinë/Priština

"When you don't have inner peace, you cannot seek international peace."

Young Albanian woman, Prishtinë/Priština

"Peace is a social condition of women and men who feel comfortable, undisciplined, and uncontrolled to express their opinion, to exist."

Albanian woman, Prishtinë/Priština

While all women research participants tended to relate peace to peace between Kosovo and Serbia, young women, particularly in multi-ethnic municipalities like North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica Graçanicë/Gračanica, and Prizren, discussed peace in terms of localised interethnic relationships. A young Serb woman in North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica commented, “We, the young people, interact with each other ... People are people”.⁴⁶ A young Albanian woman in Skënderaj/Srbica similarly commented, “Being aware of the fact that we live in a post-conflict country, we have already overcome the Serb-Albanian barriers. For me, the only barrier with the Serb community is their language, which I do not speak. However, we have all the other things in common.”⁴⁷ Thus, related to Anderson’s contexts of peace, beyond national and international peace, young women referred to local, civil peace within their community; social, intercultural peace among social groups as Serbs, Albanians, and other ethnic groups; and interpersonal peace among individuals.

Research participants tended not to define peace in an ecological context, such as in Anderson’s aforementioned concept of “Gaia peace” and the human relationship with nature. Exceptionally, a woman professor at the University of Prishtinë/Priština defined peace as an equilibrium and harmony between people and nature. According to her, peace relates with access to water, air, and basic living conditions. Peace is a philosophy to live in harmony with each other and nature, she said.⁴⁸

Considering that women’s definitions of what constitutes peace differed, women were asked whether peace exists in Kosovo today. While women had different perceptions, a recurring theme among research participants was that Kosovo is not peaceful. According to the illustrative albeit not generalizable survey findings, 24% of the 221 women surveyed did not feel that Kosovo is peaceful. Meanwhile, the absence of peace in Kosovo also was a recurring theme among focus group and interview participants (see “Does Peace Exist in Kosovo?”).

Among women, young Serb women tended not to feel that Kosovo is peaceful because of what they had been told to believe socially. A young woman survey respondent wrote: “I don’t feel very safe to go to Priština or further [south]. I still feel hatred for [what happened in] ‘99. There are exceptions of course, but I still wouldn’t risk leaving [the north].” Some Serb women, particularly from northern Kosovo and Graçanicë/Gračanica, feared for their safety in southern areas of Kosovo. Also, the political situation did not contribute to feelings of peace, they said, because everything they hear revolves around high politics but not their actual needs. “Politicians constantly alarm the public with their statements [...] especially statements that are incorrect on both the Serbian and Albanian sides,” another young woman wrote. The lack of rule of law also contributed to an unpeaceful atmosphere, respondents said. Some also mentioned poor access to education and insufficient freedom of movement as issues undermining peace.

Focus groups conversations confirmed the survey findings. Participants said that there was not peace in Kosovo because of: corruption; insecurity for Albanians to travel to and live in North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica; high rates of unemployment; the poor healthcare system; tenuous interethnic relations; and general ongoing tensions between Kosovo and Serbia. They also mentioned unequal rights to inheritance, sexual harassment in the streets, sexual harassment at work, drugs and alcohol at school, and bullying at school as reasons why they do not feel that peace exists in Kosovo. Young women in particular said that such everyday concerns undermined peace.

For young women, their lack of “inner peace” derived from the “patriarchal mindset” in Kosovo, which, they said, pushes women to make choices with which they disagree. Research participants stated that they have had to make choices based on social expectations, rather than based on their own personal priorities. This has led to emotional and mental health issues, they said. For these young women, without inner peace that derives from their own autonomy, Kosovo cannot be peaceful, they said.

⁴⁶ Focus group with young women in North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.

⁴⁷ Focus group with young women in Skënderaj/Srbica.

⁴⁸ KWN interview with woman professor at the University of Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

Does Peace Exist in Kosovo?

“We cannot say we are in peace, as we have a lack of implementation of laws. Public institutions are not providing peace.”

Visually impaired young Albanian woman, Prishtinë/Priština

“I think it’s not peaceful because I’m subjected to a patriarchal mentality where I face prejudices regarding my choices as they relate to my gender. I see no peace here, as Kosovo also is characterized by social inequality. There is no peace because there are not enough opportunities for young people to work. This leads to depression and serious mental health problems.”

Young Albanian woman, Prishtinë/Priština

“When I say peace, I think of tranquillity. I would love to wake up in the morning without wondering what's going to happen once I leave the house, not to worry about if there will be some kind of incident or something like that.”

Young Serb woman,
Graçanicë/Gračanica

In conclusion, women's definitions and experiences of peace differ, particularly related to their age, ethnicity, and personal experiences of conflict. In Kosovo, in relation to Anderson's conceptualisation of peace, women define peace in terms of personal, interpersonal, social, local, national, international, and, in one instance, ecological peace. The fact that their definitions of peace differ means that have differing opinions as to whether peace exists in Kosovo. Several examples of the absence of peace were enlisted.

Defining Security

This section examines women's definitions of security, contextualising these within broader international and feminist discussions on security. Different definitions of "security" exist. Traditionally, according to Tickner, "security" has been understood in "political/military terms, as the protection of boundaries and integrity of the state and its values against the dangers of a hostile international environment".⁴⁹ This "neoliberal" notion of security has focused on national security, including the military defence of the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity against external aggression.⁵⁰ Starting in the 1970s, this definition of security faced growing criticism. First, evidence mounted that security could not be defined solely in terms of state sovereignty; security threats unrelated to states existed within states and transnational security risks received growing attention, such as environmental threats, organised crime, and human rights violations.⁵¹ Second, a state-focused approach to security did not necessarily ensure security, or wellbeing, for all of a state's diverse citizens. By the end of the 1980s, feminist scholars were defining peace and security through a gender lens.⁵²

In 1994, drawing from the work of Amartya Sen, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) adopted the concept of "human security".⁵³ Beyond national security, human security includes job security, income security, health security, environmental security, and security from crimes.⁵⁴ Women's rights activists similarly have defined security in terms of human security, including gender justice.⁵⁵

In Kosovo, women's definitions of security differed, particularly when comparing women who experienced war and young women who had not experienced it directly. Differences also existed among young women with different abilities and women from diverse ethnic groups. Comparatively older women's rights activists in civil society and politics tended to define security as the absence of violence, linking security with freedom: freedom of speech and freedom of movement. In line with definitions of human security, they also spoke of financial security, food security, and control over natural resources like water and minerals. This, they said, would enhance women's security.

“True security cannot be achieved until unequal power structures of gender, race, and class are eliminated or at least diminished.”

Tickner, 1992

“Women would be more secure if they would be employed.”

Woman activist, Prishtinë/Priština

⁴⁹ Tickner, J. A., "You Just Don't Understand: Troubled Engagements between Feminists and IR Theorists", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 4., 1997, p. 624.

⁵⁰ Mesa, M., CEIPAZ, Culture of Peace Foundation, "Peace and security", n.d., pp. 2-3.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Tickner, J. A., "Peace and Security from a Feminist Perspective", *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*, 2018, p. 13.

⁵³ UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 1994.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Kvinna till Kvinna, *A Right, Not A Gift*, 2020, p. 23.

Beyond these, young women tended to relate security to physical security, as well.⁵⁶ “We don’t even have streetlights. It’s pitch-black both when we go to school and when we return home from school”, said multiple young women from Gjakovë/Đakovica, North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Prizren, and Graçanicë/Gračanica.⁵⁷ For them, security meant feeling safe when travelling home at night. They attributed sexual harassment to poor street lighting, stating that this prevented them from walking outside after dark. They said that catcalling, sexual harassment, and fear of rape if they go out at night have all made them feel insecure. A young Serb woman from Graçanicë/Gračanica commented:

We live in a society where it’s impossible to feel 100% safe. Albanian men are not the only problem. Many intoxicated Serb men catcall us, and we never know if they’ll rape us, because they can. So, we don’t only have that problem with Albanians, but also with people of our own religion and ethnicity.

This was a recurring concern among young women in Kosovo, regardless of their ethnicity or geographic location. Even when surrounded by sunlight, exposure to catcalling makes young women feel threatened on a daily basis, they said. “You cannot walk freely in the streets without being catcalled”, commented a young Roma woman from Prizren. Roma women in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje said they faced similar struggles: “[Men] stopped their car in front of me a couple times, trying to put me inside,” a young woman said. “I was afraid to tell my father about it as he would never let me go out again. And this happened during the day.” Such sexual harassment, as well as violence, contributed to multiple insecurities for young Roma women. If they face catcalls, they are usually blamed, rather than the perpetrators; this, in turn, can lead to early marriage instigated by their parents and denial of their right to receive an education, they said.⁵⁸ Although the Family Law prohibits the marriage of persons under age 18,⁵⁹ early marriage continues to present a security risk, particularly for young Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian women.

Some young women also related insecurity to language differences, whereby Kosovo Albanians and Serbs may not understand each other. “I don’t know what he is saying when he is catcalling me. I don’t understand the language,” a young Serb woman from Graçanicë/Gračanica said. This lack of understanding contributed to fear and insecurity, she continued: “Maybe he wants to drag me into his car and take me God knows where.” Thus, language differences, for some, were a source of insecurity, particularly when coupled with sexual harassment.

Meanwhile, women who defined security as freedom of movement tended to be Serb women living in villages with a majority Serb population. The lack of accessible public transportation affected young Serb women in particular, as they faced sexual harassment while walking several hours to and from school. This exposed them to danger from possible perpetrators. Discussions with young Serb women suggested that these and other phenomena that make them feel insecure are unrelated to the ethnicity of the perpetrator: “When it comes to kidnapping and rape, it can happen in Belgrade just as it can happen here,” a young Serb woman from Graçanicë/Gračanica said.

Young women with different abilities also discussed insecurities related to movement, particularly for people using wheelchairs. Sidewalks are uneven, missing pavement, or littered with trash, while the street is teeming with traffic, they said. Hindered movement presents an obstacle to their engagement in society and access to decision-making processes, contributing to insecurities. Poor implementation of existing laws and a lack of support from public institutions also contribute to insecurity, they said.

Also related to human security, young women referred to the high unemployment rate and the lack of opportunities for youth. Indeed, many youth are emigrating, particularly due to the poor living standards in Kosovo and the lack of opportunities for high-skilled workers.⁶⁰ In 2019, an estimated 34,911 persons from Kosovo emi-

⁵⁶ Focus groups with young women from Gjakovë/Đakovica, North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Prizren, and Graçanicë/Gračanica.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Focus group with young Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian women in Prizren.

⁵⁹ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, [Family Law No. 2004/32](#), Art. 15.2.

⁶⁰ UNDP, [Public Pulse Analysis: Correlation between labour market in Kosovo and out migration](#), 2020, p. 1.

grated legally or illegally.⁶¹ Some research participants expressed concern that people from Kosovo who have studied medicine are emigrating, which may jeopardise the future security of persons still living in Kosovo: “The high unemployment rate and the fact that people are leaving Kosovo makes me wonder whether we will have doctors 30 years from now. This makes me feel insecure,” a young Roma woman from Prizren said.

In response to the non-representative online survey, 39% of women did not feel that Kosovo is secure. Albanian respondents provided several political and social reasons as to why they felt insecure. Political reasons included: insufficient responsibility from public institutions; poor functioning of security bodies; weak implementation of existing laws; corruption and nepotism; and the judiciary’s poor performance. Albanian women expressed concern that Kosovo could be attacked by Serbia, which made them feel insecure. Respondents also described several social insecurities: poor quality education; economic insecurity; the dangers women face if they go outside their homes at night; violence against women, such as men murdering their wives (and the mishandling of these cases by institutions); and harassment and attacks on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and persons with other identities (LGBTQIA+).

Young women elaborated on the lack of protection from security institutions as undermining their security. Young women said they faced challenges reporting sexual harassment to police. When reporting a crime at the police station, young women said that they often were asked what they were wearing at the time. For example, a young woman from South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica said that when she reported a man who had been chasing her on the street for a long time, the police officer said: “Maybe he’s the person you could be with!” Moreover, police requested evidence of sexual harassment, and this is difficult to provide, they said. Young Serb women in North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica similarly said that police usually are slow to react to the cases they report, and they do not trust police will help them if something happens. Police, they said, may even witness catcalling or sexual harassment, but they ignore it. “If I were to be attacked in public tomorrow, the police would only observe it,” a young woman from North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica said. They felt that security institutions do not know how to deal with domestic violence or sexual harassment.

Young women throughout Kosovo raised concerns regarding nepotism in public institutions. Perpetrators can find someone they know in the institution and avert punishment, they said. “We don’t trust institutions”, a young woman from Graçanicë/Gračanica said. “Everything in institutions is based on personal connections. If we report [sexual harassment and sexual violence], they can make us look guilty. There are way too many unresolved cases for us to trust the institutions.” Thus, lack of trust in institutions contributed to additional insecurities for young women of all ethnicities across Kosovo; they did not believe that by reporting crimes or threats to their security they would receive any help.

In conclusion, while diverse women’s definitions of security differed, a tendency to discuss security in terms of human security existed, particularly among young women. Women elaborated several reasons as to why they do not believe that Kosovo is secure, several of which related to economic insecurities, gender-based violence, weak institutions, and poor infrastructure.

What Would Make Kosovo More Peaceful and Secure?

This section presents findings as to what diverse women believe would make Kosovo more peaceful and secure. A recurring theme was dealing with the past, towards sustainable peace. Young women, particularly Albanian women, said they would raise this issue, among others, during the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia.⁶² Serb women wanted political stability, language rights, and to live a peaceful and secure life in Kosovo. They also wanted space to engage in the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, and a seat at the decision-making table. They hoped to

⁶¹ Kosovo Agency of Statistics, “[Estimation Kosovo Population in 2019](#)”, Prishtinë/Priština: June, 2020.

⁶² For further information about young women’s priorities for the dialogue, please see the Chapter 2 sub-section on “[Women’s Contributions to Negotiations and Dialogue, and Needs](#)”.

“It doesn’t feel like we belong in Kosovo, nor in Serbia. We are treated in Belgrade the same way we are treated in Kosovo, as a minority.”

Young Serb woman, North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica

Young women said that political parties needed to involve more women in decision-making within parties; this could lead to more women serving in higher positions in the government and other institutions, thereby better representing women’s needs towards peace and security, they said. Political parties should have greater focus in their political platforms on issues like employment, education, and equal participation in decision-making, they said. Young Serb women urged Albanian majority political parties to meet and address the needs of the Serb community in Kosovo, as the Serbian List political party does not tackle the problems they face, nor represent them, they said.⁶⁴

Freedom of movement internationally also would contribute to peace and security, young women of all ethnicities said. As Kosovo does not yet have visa liberalisation for travel to the Schengen area, young women cannot participate in many international trainings and conferences. They miss opportunities to learn more about other cultures and meet their peers. Although Serb women in Kosovo have Serbian passports, they are identified as living in Kosovo, which means that they need a visa to enter the Schengen area as well. Moreover, young women in Kosovo cannot meet easily with peers from other ethnic groups in Kosovo due to stigma and family pressure. Young women sought to learn each other’s languages, which they believed would help them establish a bridge that would connect different communities and help them understand each other’s needs.

Young women also asked for the installation of streetlights and more police patrols at night. They would feel more secure if they could trust police. Young women believed that involving more women in security institutions would improve their security. Women tended to trust policewomen more than policemen; they found it easier to talk to them.⁶⁵ A police woman also observed, “Every woman in Kosovo feels safer when she reports a case to the police and that case is taken on by a woman.”⁶⁶ Research participants agreed that women would report crimes more often if there were more women in the police. This could contribute to peace and security, since engaging more women in security sector would make women, particularly young women, feel more secure.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Diverse women’s definitions of peace and security differ, particularly related to their age, ethnicity, and personal experiences of conflict. Women who had experienced the war personally tended to define peace as the absence of war, particularly in the context of national and international peace. Young women tended to define peace more broadly and similarly to feminist definitions of peace, including personal peace and peace among individuals. Women of all generations linked peace with respecting human rights, freedom of movement, freedom of speech, and language rights, among others. In relation to Anderson’s conceptualisation of peace, women in Kosovo

⁶³ Interview with a young Albanian woman journalist, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁶⁴ KWN survey responses of young Serb women, 2020.

⁶⁵ Focus group with young women in North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.

⁶⁶ KWN interview with police official, Supervisor at the Office for Human Rights and Diversity, Prishtinë/Priština: 2020.

⁶⁷ For further discussion on women in the security sector, see the Chapter II sub-section on “[Women’s Contributions to Security through the Security Sector](#)”.

thus defined peace in terms of personal, interpersonal, social, local, national, international, and, in one instance, ecological peace. Women research participants tended to consider Kosovo moderately peaceful, though the absence of peace was a recurring theme.

Beyond the absence of war, women tended to define security broadly, as human security. Several insecurities were enlisted, including related to poor education, economic insecurities, gender-based violence, weak institutions, and poor infrastructure. Young women in particular tended not to trust that police or other institutions would ensure their security.

Shifting gender norms through educational curricula, addressing issues important to women in the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, guaranteeing diverse women a seat at the table, involving more women in decision-making and in the security sector, enhancing street security through lighting and safe sidewalks, improving freedom of movement within and outside Kosovo, and providing language classes could all contribute to peace and security for diverse women in Kosovo.

Chapter II. Women's Roles and Contributions to Peace and Security

Historically, women and children often have been homogenously portrayed as victims of war. According to Tickner, security has been associated with a strong form of militarized masculinity, and peace with a type of femininity, where women are seen only as victims needing protection.⁶⁸ Feminist authors have resisted the notion that women are merely victims of conflict, arguing that women also are agents of change. Mertus argues that women have not only been victims of war; they also have been “engines of resistance and key problem solvers in their communities”.⁶⁹ Paraphrasing Sara Ruddick, according to Tickner, “peacebuilding and nonviolence require courage, struggle, and resistance, and a refusal to accept victimization”, and these are “traits we see in women activists in conflict zones today”.⁷⁰ Indeed, a growing literature evidences that women can be agents of change, towards peace and security.

Women may have several different roles and identities in times of conflict. In some situations, the social construction of women as “mothers” and “guardians of the culture” within nationalist liberation movements has constrained women’s activism in conflict and post-conflict reconstruction processes.⁷¹ In some situations, women have been mobilised to provide support, labour, and services for the war effort, making them active participants in conflict, as occurred in Kosovo. Women have been directly involved in war, such as by joining armed groups; indeed, women did join the Kosovo Liberation Army. In contrast, some women have insisted on peaceful resolution to conflicts, which also occurred in Kosovo, as described in this chapter. Some women, including activists, have been victims of war, through loss of loved ones, destruction of property, and sexual violence. Given women’s many potential roles and identities, women’s position in relation to conflict cannot be homogenised, neither as peaceful nor as violent, as active or as passive. Meanwhile, the myriad of ways in which women may become more involved socially and politically in times of conflict can contribute to changes in the traditional social roles of women, sometimes improving their social status.⁷² However, once the conflict is over, women may lose the status that they have gained, as the society reverts to traditional socialised gender norms.

As per the main research question, this chapter examines the various roles and contributions of women, particularly young women, to peace and security during conflict (1989-1998), war (1998-1999), and post-war processes (1999-2020) in Kosovo.⁷³ and security during conflict (1989-1998), war (1998-1999), and post-war processes (1999-2020) in Kosovo. More specifically, as per the research sub-questions, it documents the roles WCSOs have played in contributing to peace, as well as in enhancing young women’s participation in peace and security processes; how has the involvement of (young) women in the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue contributed to any results so far? In examining best practices, it also provides examples that respond to the sub-question: how can young women be more engaged in dialogue and negotiations in the future? The chapter is divided in two sections, examining “conflict” and war, and “post-war” periods, respectively, due to the rather different circumstances of each time period. Nevertheless, as discussed in the last chapter, the authors recognise that conflict often occurs along a continuum and conflicts continue among people and particular social groups in Kosovo today. Each section has sub-sections that discuss the dimensions through which women contributed to peace and security, based on recurring themes that emerged from the research.

⁶⁸ Tickner, J. A., “[Peace and Security from a Feminist Perspective](#)”, *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*, 2018, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Mertus, *War's Offensive on Women*, 2000, p. 11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁷¹ El Jack, A., [Overview Report on Gender and Armed Conflict](#), 2003, p. 11.

⁷² In Kosovo, Julie Mertus reflects on such a change in social positioning, referring, for example, to the women of Krushe e Vogel village, who had to rebuild their lives after the war (Mertus, “Improving the Status of Women in the Wake of War: Overcoming Structural Obstacles”, *Columbia Journal of Transitional Law*, 2003, pp. 542-3).

⁷³ As explained in the [Introduction](#), the team acknowledges that conflict existed long before 1989, and, as the last chapter illustrated, for many women in Kosovo, the conflict continues today; they still feel an absence of peace and several insecurities.

Women's Roles and Contributions to Peace and Security during Conflict and War

While life in Kosovo can be characterised by decades, perhaps centuries, of ongoing conflict, this research examined the conflict that arguably intensified since 1989.⁷⁴ It was then that Slobodan Milošević, President of the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Serbia and President of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, substantially reduced Kosovo's autonomy within Yugoslavia and initiated a campaign of cultural and economic oppression against ethnic Albanians.⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch has described the violence perpetrated against Albanians in Kosovo during the 1990s and especially in 1998-1999 as systematic "ethnic cleansing".⁷⁶ During much of the 1990s, Albanians did not have the right to education, celebrations in their own language, or freedom of movement. Starting in 1990 and 1991, 90% of Albanians were ultimately dismissed from their state jobs in healthcare facilities, schools, media, and government.⁷⁷

In response, most Albanians became involved in a peaceful civil resistance movement, which included the organising of an underground, parallel educational system, healthcare system, and political system, largely funded through donations from the diaspora. The peaceful resistance movement had among its main aims to establish peace in Kosovo and security for people living there. In this context, as per the main research question, this section discusses different contributions that women in Kosovo made to peace and security during this time. The sub-sections examine women's contributions to peace and security related to each of the dimensions that emerged from the research: politics, education, healthcare, peace across borders, documentation of human rights abuses, peaceful demonstrations, diplomacy, and organising security for displaced persons. Given the nature of the situation and the research findings,⁷⁸ this section focuses on activities towards peace and security undertaken by Albanian women, especially young women. Nevertheless, activities towards peace and security by women of other ethnicities also are mentioned.

Women's Contributions to Peace and Security through Politics

This sub-section discusses women's roles and contributions to peace and security through politics during the 1990s. As Mertus wrote of the 1990s in Kosovo, although men held leadership positions in the Kosovo Albanian resistance, "women played an active role as well".⁷⁹ Albanian women's rights activists have reflected that, at the time, Albanian men were at risk of physical abuse or imprisonment from Serbian police forces if they entered the streets.⁸⁰ In contrast, Albanian women could travel more easily, activists said, particularly across the multiple Serbian police checkpoints that existed throughout Kosovo at the time. Women's rights activists have ob-

"Women joined immediately the movement through participation in political processes, in civil society, in protests, diplomacy, in peaceful processes. We have been engaged in these important fields to contribute to conflict resolution, stopping the war and genocide, and to bring peace and freedom to our people."

Edita Tahiri, Albanian woman politician

⁷⁴ For a full history, see: Malcolm, N., *Kosovo: A Short History* and Clark, H., *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*.

⁷⁵ Clark, H., *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*; Rogel, C., "Kosovo: Where It All Began", *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Sep. 2003: 167-182.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Humanitarian Law Violations in Kosovo*, U.S.A.: Human Rights Watch, 1998.

⁷⁷ Clark, pp. 74-77.

⁷⁸ A recurring theme among Serb women interviewed for this research was that they were not engaged directly in peacebuilding during this period, with the exception of one who mentioned delivery of humanitarian aid, elaborated later in the section.

⁷⁹ Mertus, *War's Offensive on Women*, 2000, p. 38.

⁸⁰ KWN interviews, 2020 and previous conversations with activists.

served that the very fact that they were “just women” meant that the Serbian police tended to perceive them as “harmless”. Given their ability to travel coupled with their own motivation, many Albanian women, including young women, became more engaged in public life. As activist Flora Macula reflected, “Sometimes the person creates opportunities and sometimes the context itself creates activists”.⁸¹

Women already were known for promoting peace among Albanian families, such as during the Blood Feuds Reconciliation Campaign. The rather politically natured Campaign began after resolving the first feud on 2 February 1990.⁸² In 1989, reportedly 15 people had died as a result of blood feuds, including students, and this led students to seek assistance in ending such feuds from the Council for Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms (CDHRF) in Prishtinë/Priština.⁸³ Two young women activists were among the students: Hava Shala and Myrvete Dreshaj.⁸⁴ Women were very engaged in the Campaign during the 1990s, as it sought to end conflicts and build peace among Albanian families, but also to improve the general public image of Albanians within the former Yugoslavia, towards inter-cultural peace.

Serbian media during the 1980s and 1990s portrayed Kosovo Albanian women as washing machines or breeders of “mice”, referring to Albanian babies as “biological bombs”.⁸⁵ International media also portrayed Albanian women as Muslim fundamentalists or helpless victims.⁸⁶ Generally, Reardon has suggested that such “othering”, as “those different from us, who threaten us” can contribute to the “notion of enemy, and ultimately the practice of war”.⁸⁷ It follows that finding peaceful ways to counter such images and assumptions may contribute to peace.

“For us it was nothing extra. It was very common that we said, ‘Wait a minute. Where are we? What happened with us? [...] Can’t we do it? We should do it. We can do it.’”

Sevdije Ahmeti, Albaniana woman human rights activist, Prishtinë/Priština⁸⁹

nationality, come together for the movement of independent women of Kosovo, outside the Communist Party of Kosovo”.⁹⁰ At least 25 women started meeting in October 1989 to further discuss and establish the Association,⁹¹ which would eventually become a political association.

Meanwhile, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) was founded on 23 December 1989.⁹² Most, albeit not all, Albanians would soon join this political party, which went on to lead the Kosovo Albanian peaceful resistance

Meanwhile, angered by Serbian media stories that portrayed Albanian women as barefoot “slaves and birthing machines, only able to reproduce like mice”,⁸⁸ academic women working at the National and University Library of Kosovo, including Sevdije Ahmeti, Lavdrije Domi, Violeta Selimi, and Batishahe Islami, also began discussing how they could improve the image of Albanian women. Also, amid the political parties of the time, they did not feel that women were sufficiently represented. Therefore, they drafted a declaration, establishing the first Independent Women’s Association in Kosovo, stating: “We women, no matter of race, religion, or

⁸¹ KWN interview with Flora Macula, 2020.

⁸² KGSC, *History is Herstory Too*, p. 43.

⁸³ Clark, p. 61

⁸⁴ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, pp. 42-43.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch, “[Gender-Based Violence Against Kosovar Albanian Women](#)”, *Kosovo: Rape as a Weapon of Ethnic Cleansing* 2000, citing Mertus, J., “Women in Kosovo: Contested Terrains”, in Ramet, ed., *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*, 2010, p. 178.

⁸⁶ KWN interviews and prior conversations with women activists.

⁸⁷ Reardon, B. & Snauwaert, D.T., *Betty A. Reardon: Key Texts in Gender and Peace*, p. 57.

⁸⁸ Sevdije Ahmeti, quoted in KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 59.

⁸⁹ Quoted in KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 61

⁹⁰ Quoted in KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, pp. 59-61.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61. The book includes the participating women’s names.

⁹² Clark, p. 56.

movement for most of the 1990s. Initially, the party involved few women, as woman politician Edita Tahiri recalled:

When the LDK was established, the initiating council was mainly intellectual men. There were few women. But after the establishment of LDK in Prishtina, and the expansion in other municipalities, the number of women [in LDK] started to increase. ... For example, in '90 to '91, I was the one who led the protest of 5,000 women in Prizren, where we declared that we join LDK for freedom and independence and oppose the Serbian occupation and communism.⁹³

Following much discussion and deliberation, the women members of the aforementioned Independent Women's Association voted to join LDK, becoming the Women's Forum within LDK.⁹⁴ Several women led this political party Forum during the nineties, including Luljeta Pula-Beqiri, Flora Brovina, Milajete Shala, Naxhije Buçinca, and Edi Shukriu. However, like the socialist women's forum that preceded it, the LDK Women's Forum did not give women a seat at the table; men political leaders within LDK took most decisions.⁹⁵

Nevertheless, women organised under and around the table, often behind the scenes, laying the foundation that underpinned and bolstered Albanians' parallel political structures. On 30 September 1991, Albanians in Kosovo organised an underground referendum to proclaim Kosovo a sovereign and independent state with the right to participate in any eventual association of sovereign states within Yugoslavia.⁹⁶ Since men constantly were watched by the Serbian police, as mentioned, women daringly distributed fliers about the referendum and transported the referendum around Kosovo to be signed. The next year women entered the streets again, advertising and orchestrating secret elections.⁹⁷ After the referendum and elections, Albanians established a government and services that would function "parallel to the Serb government".⁹⁸ This became known as the parallel system, which Albanians orchestrated as a form of peaceful resistance to what they considered as Serbian occupation for nearly a decade. Acknowledging that they did not have the resources to successfully fight the Serbian military for full autonomy, in the early 1990s Kosovo Albanians purposefully selected the approach of peaceful, non-violent resistance to resolve the conflict, hoping that their efforts would capture the attention of international actors that might intervene to support their cause.⁹⁹

Regarding Serb women's participation in politics and diplomacy in Kosovo during the 1990s, a Serb woman research participant reflected: "Men were the ones making all the decisions. We just sat quietly in fear, not only for our own lives, but more so for the lives of our children. There was no space for us to act".¹⁰⁰ Another Serb woman agreed: "Serbs did not play a big role; all families stayed inside, so as not to be affected by those problems. We left the men to deal with these things, which was our mistake".¹⁰¹ Generally, the Serb women interviewed agreed that Serb men dominated the political scene during this period, and, according to the distribution of labour within their families and society, women focused on humanitarian aid collection and distribution. As men took decisions during this period, Serb women said that they had little space to influence politics. Traditional gender roles and the division of labour within the family hampered Serb women's ability to engage politically.

A recurring observation in the existing literature about this period is that women also remained largely ostracised from the "official" decision-making structures of LDK. As Howard Clark wrote, "women and youth, each of which constituted more than half the population, were not only underrepresented but their perspectives

⁹³ KWN interview with Edita Tahiri, 2020.

⁹⁴ For a full discussion, see KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, pp. 62-68.

⁹⁵ See KGSC, *History is Herstory too*.

⁹⁶ Clark, p. 82; and KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 49.

⁹⁷ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 50.

⁹⁸ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 49.

⁹⁹ For a full description, see Clark.

¹⁰⁰ KWN interview with a Serbian women's rights activist, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

¹⁰¹ KWN interview with a Serbian women's rights activist, Gjilan/Gnjilane, 2020.

and concerns were not adequately reflected within the leadership”.¹⁰² One of the few women to participate in the party leadership was Edita Tahiri, who became a member of the LDK Presidency starting as of 1991. Notably, this would support her access to official peace processes later, where other women were not engaged.

Overall, women human rights activist, and post-war Ambassador, Vjosa Dobruna later reflected, writing in 1996:

At the start of the “alternative movement” or “parallel system”, women were very active and involved in large numbers but as the system grew to an entrenched way of living, women’s involvement in decision-making positions in the movement has declined. Women represent half the work in the education system, more than half of the alternative health system, and the majority of social services, but work more or less in subservient roles rather than having an active voice in the development of society.¹⁰³

Her writings, among others’, illustrate that women played several roles within the peaceful resistance movement in terms of safeguarding the security and wellbeing of people in Kosovo amid difficult circumstances, as described further in the sub-sections that follow. However, women of all ethnicities were less engaged than men in the political leadership and decision-making positions of the time.¹⁰⁴

Women’s Contributions to Education

This sub-section discusses women’s roles and contributions to peace and security through education during the 1990s. Education relates to security, in that without an education, children’s economic security may be limited later in life. Women played a vital role in furthering access to education during the 1990s.¹⁰⁵ As described by KGSC, “after the Serbian authorities closed Albanian schools, the Education Commission of the Women’s Forum of LDK helped organize two hours of education every day in an attempt to continue education”.¹⁰⁶ Hundreds of women and some men mobilised to teach in the underground Albanian language school system.¹⁰⁷ Several others opened their homes for classes. The very provision of schooling in this extremely difficult situation was a contribution to the future economic security of children. Young women students resisted insecurities affiliated with a life without education by undertaking risks to their physical wellbeing just to attend school:

“In times when teachers and professors were in danger, women played a crucial role in advancing the position of women in education.”

Albanian man, Prishtinë/Priština

“At that time, Serbia closed schools, universities of all levels. Women were the ones who first initiated the idea that mothers teach their children for two hours at home. This is how the attending of classes in home-schools started.”

Edita Tahiri

¹⁰² Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*, pp. 121-135.

¹⁰³ Cited in Clark, p. 146.

¹⁰⁴ This was a recurring theme in KWN interviews as well (2020).

¹⁰⁵ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 79

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 80.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 84.

At that time there were terrible moments. When you went to school, you didn't know if you would go back home alive. There were times when I had a [officer's] boot on my head, they knocked down my books, and so on. This has been a contribution of girls, who resisted with their bodies. Thanks to this resistance, we are here today.¹⁰⁸

The women's rights activists interviewed thus said that young women contributed to security by insisting on attending education and by "resisting" threats to their security, through their bodies and actions. Indeed, other feminist authors, such as Wendy Harcourt, have observed the body itself as "the first place for resistance":

Bodies are sites of both normalization and resistance, since social norms of gender and sexuality are inscribed on the body. ... Understanding the body as place underscores that bodies are not external to political processes but rather firmly enmeshed in them, even if they are not always the defining site for action. The lived experience of the body, and the identity and definitions attached to bodies, inform and are connected to all historically and geographically located political struggles.¹⁰⁹

Feminists worldwide have used their bodies as a political subject and site of resistance.¹¹⁰ According to Virginia Vargas, "this goes together with a resignification of public space by the appropriation of the streets as a place where identities are built and where embodied political struggle happens."¹¹¹ Specifically, in the Western Balkans, activists, such as those engaged in Women in Black, regularly have used their bodies in public demonstrations, as a form of peaceful protest and physical resistance to violence, as discussed in later sections.¹¹² Similarly, women research participants said that their very act of illegally attending education as young women, placing their bodies at physical risk due to the broader political processes at hand, was itself a form of active, peaceful resistance against violations of their right to education.

Meanwhile, earlier, in 1989, then young woman Igballe Rogova and her sister, actress Safete Rogova, supported by Safete's husband Nuredin Loxha, established the Motrat Qiriazhi Association to bring literacy to women, particularly rural women. A key motto of the Association was peaceful resistance and non-violence. As activist Nuredin Loxha would say in meetings with men and before crowds of thousands, "To Europe with a pen! Educate more girls and boys!". Soon after, in 1990, Sanije Gashi, editor of the popular *Kosovarja* underground Albanian language magazine, printed a story about their work. Several women learned about the initiative and started similar organisations to offer literacy courses to adult

“During the mid-90s, Women in Black activists were protesting with their bodies by just standing in silence, without even moving. The reactions of citizens were quite negative. I'll never forget one protest when one of them spat on the activist Lepa Mladenović's face. She continued her peaceful protest with her body and did not even move to clean her face. After the protest, I approached and asked her, 'How could you stand in silence and not move, even to clean your face?' She replied, 'My act of protest was not to move, as in that way I gave him the message: you do not exist'.”

Igballe Rogova

¹⁰⁸ KWN interview with Albanian woman, Prishtinë/Priština.

¹⁰⁹ Harcourt, W., *Bodies in Resistance. Gender and sexual politics in the age of neoliberalism*, 2017.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Vargas, V., "Some Thoughts on New Epistemologies in Latin America Feminism", in Harcourt, W., *Bodies in Resistance. Gender and sexual politics in the age of neoliberalism*, 2017, pp. 299-300.

¹¹² See the sub-section on [Women's Contributions to Peace Across Borders](#).

women in their communities.

On 24 May 1993, Naxhije Buçinca started the Women Artists and Veterans of Education in Vushtrri/Vučitrn, working closely with her daughter Xheraldina Buçinca-Vula and Shukrije Gashi, among other teachers, painters, poets, writers, and composers.¹¹³ They, together with several young women artists like Zake Prelvukaj and Miradije Ramiqi, organised art exhibitions, poetry readings, and other cultural events. Initially in Prishtinë/Priština, in 1997, Nazlije Bala started Elena, to protect human and especially women's rights, later moving the organisation to Gjilan/Gnjilane and renaming it Liria.¹¹⁴ In 1995, women formed Legjenda in Viti/Vitina, including Melihate Osmani, Habibe Neziri, Latife Neziri, Ganimete Haziri, Haxhere Ymeri, Drita Xheladini, and Barbara Ukaj. The youthful Marte Prenkpalaj became engaged with Motrat Qiriazhi in Has region, and young women activists Ilirjana Loxha and Nexhmije Fetahu supported literacy courses. In 1996, Sanije Grajçevci started Aureola in Obiliq/Obilić, together with Vlora Mjekiqi, Xhevahire Mjekiqi, and Xhevrije Restelica. The branch of Motrat Qiriazhi in Gjilan/Gnjilane, led by Gjylje Ramizi, functioned as an independent association also named Motrat Qiriazhi; in 1999 it would become Elena Peshkopia.¹¹⁵ All of these WCSOs, in which several young women participated, organised reading, writing, and other classes for adult women.¹¹⁶ While the illiteracy rate in rural areas was high (11.5%) women found ways to bring education to even the most isolated and mountainous areas of Kosovo.¹¹⁷ Together, five of these WCSOs established the Rural Women's Network in 1995 (Aureola, Motrat Qiriazhi in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Legjenda, Elena, and Motrat Qiriazhi in Has).¹¹⁸

Motrat Qiriazhi activists also mobilised communities and the diaspora, amid rather dire economic circumstances to fundraise to build high schools, such as in Has, so children could continue their education without having to travel to Prizren at great security risk; as a result, Has is one of the few rural areas with multiple primary and secondary schools.¹¹⁹ Similarly, Zahrije Podrimçaku worked to raise funds to construct schools in Gillogoc/Glogovac.¹²⁰ Motrat Qiriazhi activists Safete Rogova and Igballe Rogova also transported Albanian language books, illegal at the time, opening several underground libraries in Has during the 1990s.

Several young women engaged in the Media Project, opened by Afërdita Saraçini-Kelmendi and Xheraldina Buçinca-Vula in 1995 after they were inspired by the work of "guerilla journalists" while attending the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. They engaged approximately 200 young women in a program taught by local and international journalists, which focused on conflict resolution and journalism, as documented by KGSC:

Rather than using "in-your-face" journalism, young women were taught they had a responsibility to minimize confrontation and encourage education and cooperation with distributing information. Diminishing confrontation was especially important in Kosovo, where emotions among people were heightened due to the situation, they learned.¹²¹

The women leading Media Project eventually became the owner and manager of leading Kosovo media Radio Television 21 (RTV21), and several young women trained through the program worked for this media. Several young women recalled being empowered by the program; they went on to further their education and become among Kosovo's future leaders.

Young women also were involved in the Post-pessimists, one of the first youth-run organisations, which

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 78.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 76.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. 97.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid, pp. 76-77.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 87. For further information, see KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, pp. 87-89.

contributed to a form of alternative education in diplomacy.¹²² Founded on the initiative of youth from Kosovo, Serbia, and Croatia, it had the principle: “if they could not be friends, then at least they did not want to be enemies”.¹²³ They organised concerts, exhibitions, workshops, and the publishing of a monthly youth newsletter. As now renowned journalist Jeta Xharra recalled to KGSC:

We were meeting top diplomats at age fifteen and sixteen. We were lobbying for our country in English ... Then, we thought it was what normally happens. But that’s not what normally happens. As a fifteen-year-old you do not get to brief diplomats about how miserable life is in Kosovo and develop such communication skills. Afterward, lobbying public relations, talking, communicating came naturally to all of us. These were skills we weren’t prepared for at all in our education system. We weren’t taught to think critically, to question things, to communicate openly with people, or to argue our case. This was not something I learned in school. This was something I learned in civil society. Post-pessimists were part of it.¹²⁴

The members contributed to peace by presenting the stories and experiences of Kosovo youth at the time, collaborating with youth of diverse ethnicities across borders of the former Yugoslavia, and seeking international intervention for a peaceful resolve to the conflict. Jehona Gjurgjeala, another member, also recalled to KGSC the importance of the group for the security and wellbeing of youth:

In this period, it was very hard to be a young person in Kosovo with all the sports, cultural, and educational avenues of development closed to Albanians. Our only public spaces were bars, which worked degenerative magic on youth. In this context, the Post-Pessimists was valuable [and] represented a key stage in the lives of all of us who were directly involved, and we have proceeded to be very committed to Kosovo and the development of Kosovar society, regardless of which profession we chose since then.¹²⁵

Several young women engaged in the program went on to become journalists, doctors, architects, and activists.

Other young women were empowered through the Prishtina Youth Club, operated by the Open Society Foundation. The Club had messages of “peace” and “love” painted on its walls and was among few locations where Serb and Albanian children interacted. This and other educational opportunities for youth, education, culture, women, and civil society were organised by Luljeta Vuniqi.

Meanwhile, in 1997, Sazana Çapriqi established *Sfinga* (Sphinx), as an organisation to empower young women scholars in the arts and sciences.¹²⁷ The organisation engaged diverse young women in producing a feminist literary magazine, which included translations of prominent feminist authors worldwide, as well as original work by young Albanian women writers.

Thus, women made several contributions to education during the 1990s, which arguably have contributed to security, including economic security, for many children and youth.

“The war started outside Prishtina. Everything was very tense and Serbs and Albanians were divided completely. But we had a club where Albanians and Serbs were under one roof.”

Luljeta Vuniqi, Albanian woman activist, Prishtinë/Priština¹²⁶

¹²² Ibid, p. 85-87.

¹²³ Violeta Selimi, quoted in *History is Herstory too*, p. 86.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 86.

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

¹²⁶ Cited in KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, which contains further details about the centre (pp. 84-85).

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

Women's Contributions to Healthcare

This sub-section discusses women's roles and contributions to peace and security through the provision of healthcare knowledge and services during the 1990s. Like education, health is important for human security and wellbeing. Thousands of women served in the parallel health system, contributing to the security and wellbeing of Albanians who lacked access to healthcare during the 1990s. The Mother Teresa Association was established in 1990, initially to provide humanitarian aid to the most impoverished. From 1992, the Association administered the parallel health system. Diverse women were engaged in its work, delivering aid, providing healthcare, and promoting the importance of vaccinations.¹²⁹ Flora Brovina, Kimete Agaj, Fatime Boshnjaku, and other Mother Teresa Association staff travelled with other doctors and activists to deliver aid to conflict-affected areas, bypassing Serb military checkpoints. Brovina later founded the Centre for Recovery of Mother and Child, visiting women throughout Kosovo who could not access healthcare.¹³⁰ She was later imprisoned for her work.

Women with different abilities, such as Feride Dervishi, Drita Vukshinaj, and Myrvete Hasani, provided empowerment, education, and healthcare to women and children with different abilities, contributing positively to their physical and emotional security.¹³¹ At the time, the Association of Disabled People of Kosovo "Handikos" was the largest CSO offering services and support to people with special needs in Kosovo. The organization started in 1983 under the leadership of Halit Ferizi, and women played an active role within Handikos.¹³² Women engaged in door-to-door outreach to families, encouraging them to support their family members with different abilities in accessing healthcare, education, socialising, and becoming autonomous. When the war started, in addition to helping people with special needs, Handikos members also supported displaced people. For example, in spite of her own physical challenge, Sabrije Zeqaj found a wheelchair so she could distribute aid to five hundred families.¹³³ Dervishi facilitated communication between people with special needs and the broader community through programs at the Soros Centre, as well as delivered aid to displaced people.¹³⁴

In rural areas surrounding Prizren, Jëlldëze Gorani, as the area's only gynaecologist for many years, assisted hundreds of women and educated them about their reproductive health and rights, often together with Motrat Qiriazhi. Vjollca Çavolli and Mirlinda Bunjaku, and other International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) staff visited regions affected by the war, providing medicine, supplies, and transporting wounded or pregnant people to the hospital.¹³⁵ In a breach of the Geneva Convention, Serb forces often forbade ICRC staff from transporting people to the Prishtinë/Priština hospital for healthcare.¹³⁶ They removed wounded individuals and sent them back to their villages.¹³⁷ In such cases, ICRC informed their medical team, which would visit the individuals the next day to provide treatment.

"Most of those who provided medical help in the field and the most outrageous fighting zones were women. But their role remained really invisible. Still, [their work] did not reach the public domain as they should."

Albanian woman journalist, Prishtinë/Priština¹²⁸

¹²⁸ KWN interview with a journalist covering most of the conflict in Kosovo, 2020.

¹²⁹ See KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, pp. 47-49, 51-55.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ For further details, see *History is Herstory too*.

¹³² Ibid. pp. 313-314.

¹³³ Ibid. p. 315.

¹³⁴ Ibid. p. 313.

¹³⁵ Ibid. p. 135.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 135.

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 135.

In 1993, activist and writer Sevdije Ahmeti and paediatrician Vjosa Dobruna decided to establish a centre that would focus explicitly on the often-unique needs of women and children. They founded the Centre for the Protection of Women and Children (CPWC), which supplied gynaecological services and paediatric care.¹³⁸ Moreover, as the conflict intensified and civilians were displaced from their homes in Drenicë/Drenica and other regions, the centre provided emergency healthcare and shelter for women and children. Dobruna, Ahmeti, Samka Brovina, Fatlume Bujupi, Sanije Veseli, and Selime Nuraj risked their lives daily, travelling to war affected regions and helping civilians who had been ousted from their homes until even they were forced to evacuate or go hiding on 24 March 1999.¹³⁹ In the late 1990s, the CPWC basement became an organizing centre where women's rights activists met to plan demonstrations, discussed later.¹⁴⁰

Overall, as this sub-section illustrates, women made several contributions to human security through the provision of healthcare services during the 1990s.

Women's Contributions to Peace Across Borders

This sub-section discusses women's roles and contributions to peace and security through cross-border collaboration with women of different ethnic groups during the 1990s. The views of Serb women and men towards Kosovo Albanians cannot be homogenised. While Serbian state-controlled media and Serb political leaders during the 1990s tended to portray Kosovo Albanians negatively, as mentioned, there were Serbian women who disagreed with the portrayal and treatment of Kosovo Albanians. In fact, in terms of promoting peace, as an Albanian women's rights activists observed, women "broke the barrier, even at the international level. They found ways to cooperate with Serbia."¹⁴¹ For example, Kosovo Albanian women joined Serbian women and men in Belgrade to protest against Slobodan Milošević, calling for his resignation from power, particularly amid the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina; they also called for an international intervention to support them in their quest to oust Milošević from power, towards peace and security.¹⁴²

Specifically, Women in Black activists in Belgrade were always against the war and injustice.¹⁴³ As Staša Zajović, Co-founder and Coordinator of Women in Black in Belgrade, later reflected in a speech in 2006:

We used to live in an aggressor state ... The Serbian regime conducted a number of aggressive acts and committed innumerable crimes, the most atrocious of which being the Srebrenica genocide. We now live in a state in which neither the ruling elite nor the majority of the population have renounced ... the heritage of the former criminal regime. We [as Women in Black] have always been disobedient: starting from 1991, to the criminal regime, and following 2000, to the authorities that did not radically break ... with the belligerent policy and war crimes. We [activists] have always represented a tiny minority in Serbia: pushed to the margins, stigmatized, labelled and criminalized, we have always been "a shame for Serbia and the Serbian people", exclusively because of our relentless calls for accountability for the war and war crimes that were committed in our name.¹⁴⁴

Serbian women members of Women in Black renounced the violence perpetrated by the Serbian government, emphasising that it was "not in their name". They called for an end to violence and the establishment of peace.

¹³⁸ Additional women worked there including Melihate Juniku, Lumnije Luci, Teuta Hadri, Bojana Gojani, Sanije Hyseni-Veseli, Advije Gashi, Samka Brovina, and Teuta Mulliqi.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 137.

¹⁴⁰ See the sub-section on "[Women's Contributions to Peaceful Demonstrations](#)".

¹⁴¹ KWN interview with Albanian woman activist, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ From Women in Black in Belgrade, official [website](#). In contrast, one Serb woman in Kosovo said she did not feel Women in Black's work related to peace-building (KWN interview, 2020).

¹⁴⁴ Staša Zajović, [speech](#), Women's Peace Coalition conference, Struga, 2006.



“For Peace in Kosovo”, the banner reads, during a Women in Black demonstration in Belgrade. © Women in Black (archives)



Women in Black protest in Belgrade during the 1990s. © Women in Black (archives)

During the 1990s, Albanian and Serbian women united as part of international Women in Black meetings held in Serbia, which gathered women from around the world to bring attention to human rights violations initially in Bosnia and Herzegovina and later in Kosovo. Human rights activists from Kosovo including Igballe Rogova, Shukrije Gashi, Marte Prenkpalaj, Nazlije Balaj, and Rachel Wareham attended these meetings where Albanian and Serbian women stood side by side, calling for peace and security in the region. They stood together in the streets of Belgrade, protesting in silence with signs and their bodies as sites of resistance.¹⁴⁵ Passers-by often threatened them and even spat upon them, but they stood still, firm, and committed to their weekly, interethnic, and peaceful protests against violence throughout the 1990s. Even when Albanians were forced from their homes during the war, Albanian and Serbian women kept close relationships, holding true to their joint work across borders towards peace.

Meanwhile, during the 1990s and afterwards, Serb women in Serbia supported the documentation of human rights violations occurring in Kosovo. For example, the Humanitarian Law Centre (HLC) established in 1992 by well-known human rights activist Nataša Kandić, as a human rights non-governmental organisation, has documented war crimes and human rights violations since then. Over the years, the HLC has collected more than three million files related to the armed conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo.¹⁴⁶ In Kosovo, HLC was established in 1997 as a branch office of the HLC and continued working after the war, since 2011, as an independent organization, to document facts that will assist Kosovo in dealing with the past.¹⁴⁷

Another well-known human rights activist, Sonja Biserko, has served as founder and director of the Serbian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights. She has carried out extensive cross-border work in documenting human rights abuses in the wars of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo. For her work, she was nominated as part of the initiative “1000 Peacewomen” for the Nobel Prize in 2005.¹⁴⁸

Thus, several women contributed to peace through cross-border collaboration and solidarity, building peaceful relations among some Albanians and Serbs.

Women’s Contributions to Documenting Human Rights Abuses

This sub-section discusses women’s roles and contributions to peace and security through the documentation of human rights abuses during the 1990s. To gather international support for a peaceful intervention, documenting human rights violations was a key strategy for Kosovo Albanians. In this regard, several women, including young women, engaged in CSOs collecting evidence of human rights violations and disseminating this to the UN, international human rights organisations, foreign governments, and media outlets. One of the first CSOs founded in Kosovo existed almost solely for this purpose: the aforementioned Council for Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms (CDHRF). According to KGSC, “a group of lawyers and other intellectuals founded CDHRF on 14 December 1989 to advance human rights according to international standards and inform the international community about human rights

“We as women made a petition when a child was killed by Serbs at the beginning of the occupation, named Afrim Prebreza. In response to this murder and the crimes that were happening, I submitted the petition to the UN in Geneva in 1992, to the Commission for the Rights of Children, on behalf of Kosovo. This Commission had just been established.”

Edita Tahiri

¹⁴⁵ As observed more generally in Harcourt’s concept of the body as resistance (*Bodies in Resistance. Gender and sexual politics in the age of neoliberalism*, 2017).

¹⁴⁶ See: http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?page_id=14390&lang=de.

¹⁴⁷ See more at: <https://www.hlc-kosovo.org/en/about-us>.

¹⁴⁸ See more at: <http://rwlsee.org/members/sonja-biserko/>.

abuses in Kosovo.” More than 2,000 volunteers participated in the network, including many women.¹⁴⁹ According to KGSC, women working for CDHRF “braved especially risky situations to document human rights abuses.” For example, young human rights defender Zahrije Podrimçaku recalled to KGSC her work in 1998:

When the massacre of Poklek happened, I covered the event from some five hundred meters away. I saw how they were killed and later burned. After the Serb forces retreated, I wanted to see first-hand what happened. There were some twenty men there with me (including journalists) who I asked to come along. They declined. One of them told me, “They are dead now. Why do you want to go and have yourself killed too?” I decided to go anyway. Joining me was an activist from Drenas who later told me he thought to himself at that moment, “If this youngster feels like going, then I will join her”.¹⁵⁰

Podrimçaku transported detailed documentation of human rights violations in Drenicë/Drenica region, sometimes walking several kilometres by night to deliver evidence.

According to KGSC, “documenting massacres was extremely dangerous work involving constant police harassment.” KGSC documented the experience of the then youthful human rights activist Nazlije Balaj, who remembered:

... arriving at work to find Serbian police gathered around the CDHRF’s office. As the building was under siege and police would not allow employees to enter, Balaj told police: “You can keep the building surrounded, but I am going to finish my work.” The police were violent in their efforts to stop her, but she managed to enter the building. She immediately wrote a short report about the siege and sent it via email to various diplomatic offices in Prishtinë/Priština and Belgrade.¹⁵¹

“Young women who spoke English, like me, contributed to translate for different international media.”

Albanian woman journalist, Prishtinë/Priština

torture.¹⁵⁴

Several young women worked as translators for foreign media, also contributing to the documentation of human rights abuses, and often putting themselves at risk.¹⁵⁵ “Women did not sit around and watch”, said a woman journalist who reported on the Prekaz massacre.¹⁵⁶ “We were doing our job. We were reporting. We were following the complete situation, gathering information from the field and the cities and distributing it to our inter-

Podrimçaku, Balaj, and other (young) women working for CDHRF took great risks to transport documentation of crimes and rights violations, towards encouraging a peaceful intervention.¹⁵² “In the field of human rights, we [women] have had the main burden, as ambassadors, raising the issue of human rights violations in Kosovo,” Nazlije Balaj recalled.¹⁵³ Some of these women, like the young Podrimçaku, faced major consequences for their work, including imprisonment and

¹⁴⁹ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, pp. 38-39. To name a few: Lirije Osmani, Elfete Spahiu, Elmije Plakaj, Florina Duli, Flaka Surroi, Dr. Flora Brovina, Dr. Flora Doko, Nazlije Balaj, Nekibe Kelmendi, Sanije Bodjaku, Sevdije Ahmeti, Shqipe Ahmeti, Shukrije Gashi, Dr. Vjosa Dobruna, Xheraldina Vula, and Zahrije Podrimçaku.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 141.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid. pp. 92-93.

¹⁵³ KWN interview with Nazlije Balaj, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

¹⁵⁴ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, pp. 141-142.

¹⁵⁵ For example, this included Ilirijana Loxha, Nexhmije Fetahu, Vlora Nushi, Lirije Osmani, Nazlije Balaj, Shukrije Gashi, Zahrije Podrimçaku, Elfete Spahiu, Shqipe Ahmeti, and Elmije Plakaj, among others (KGSC, *History is Herstory too*).

¹⁵⁶ KWN interview with Albanian woman journalist, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

national agencies,” journalist Afërdita Saraçini-Kelmendi told KGSC.¹⁵⁷ Xheraldina Vula-Buçinca also recalled to KGSC the work done at RTV21 from October 1998 to early 1999:

The situation in Kosovo was terrifying. After three or four p.m. not a single soul was in the streets. It smelled of war, but we had to do what we had to do. At RTV21 we often worked till midnight and then went home by car. It was scary; in the streets you only saw Serbs with guns. We had radio broadcasts over the internet, a big tool for spreading the information about what was happening here.¹⁵⁸

In 1998, RTV21 was the first Kosovo Albanian radio broadcasting available over the internet,¹⁶⁰ and thus played a key role in sharing information internationally.

Thus, (young) women activists, journalists, and translators for foreign media sought to document human rights abuses and bring international attention to the violence occurring in Kosovo, including the plight of civilians, towards encouraging international support in peacefully resolving the situation.

“[Young women] were engaged in news agencies, print media, [working as] field journalists. At that time, 15 to 16-year-old girls in cities were engaged because there was a strong will among people to do something. They were inspired by the actions of activists and civil society [such as] Motrat Qiriazhi, the Centre for the Protection of Women and Children, Sanije Grajçevci. They followed women who worked in Ilegalja [who suffered] years in prison [for their activism].¹⁵⁹ ... Through such actions, men also have seen that women can perform [these] acts. ... Women acted collectively for the collective good.

Shukrije Gashi, activist, Executive Director, Partners Kosovo – Center for Conflict Management

Women’s Contributions to Peaceful Demonstrations

This sub-section discusses women’s roles and contributions to peace and security through their engagement in peaceful demonstrations during the 1990s. Women played a crucial role in organising peaceful protests. According to Clark, it was youth and women who led “active” peaceful resistance efforts, which went beyond the “passive” resistance led by LDK.¹⁶¹ While the LDK’s parallelly elected President of Kosovo Ibrahim Rugova strongly advised people not to take any direct public actions, for fear it could place them at risk of retaliation by Serbian forces, frustration among Albanians mounted with time, particularly as violence escalated and civilians were forced from their homes.¹⁶² Thus, youth and women began to disregard Rugova’s directions for passive resistance, organising active peaceful resistance via a series of demonstrations.¹⁶³

In 1996, women refused to remain passive towards the injustice that they were witnessing, especially after

¹⁵⁷ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 139.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ In her article, “Ilegalja: Women in the Albanian Underground Resistance Movement in Kosovo”, anthropologist Elife Krasniqi writes that “Ilegalja”, or Ilegalle, was “the Kosovo Albanian underground movement consisted of small, illegal groups which usually operated in the form of small cells, engaging in acts ranging from the distribution of illegal leaflets and books to organizing protests and carrying out various acts of subversion against the authorities.” While these groups started operating several decades earlier, and had different aims over time, during the 1980s, these groups aimed to promote Kosovo’s autonomy within Yugoslavia (KGSC, *History is Herstory too*). Women and young women played a key role within the Ilegalja movement, which involved organizing peaceful demonstrations and, generally, asking for equal rights, freedom from discrimination, and security.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 125.

¹⁶¹ Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*, pp. 40-41.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

a Serb civilian sniper shot and killed a young man.¹⁶⁴ They decided to break the passive resistance requested by Rugova and took to the streets. Women in politics and women activists, Edi Shukriu, Naxhije Buçinca, Sevdije Ahmeti, Vjosa Dobruna, and Flora Brovina led a protest of thousands of women who placed flowers and candles where the young man was killed.¹⁶⁵ Later, in April 1996, a smaller number of women called for international support to their peaceful resistance through a letter sent to the UN, Council of Europe, and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).¹⁶⁶

Students, including young women, also engaged in active peaceful resistance through demonstrations. After the 1981 student protest, according to Clark, Serbian authorities considered the University of Prishtinë/Priština a “nest of Albanian nationalism”, which led the regime to reduce the University’s staff and students.¹⁶⁷ Then, at the start of the 1991-1992 academic year, Serbian police blocked students’ entrance into the University.¹⁶⁸ As part of the parallel education system, Kosovo Albanians organised university courses underground, in 250 private premises, starting from 17 February 1992.¹⁶⁹ Years later, in 1996, students organised a protest to ask that the Serbian authorities reopen the University for the fall term.¹⁷⁰ The then young woman student, artist, and activist Ilirijana Loxha recalled:

We considered protests as a choice. Protests were the way how we, youth, were facing the evil. It was a fight coming from the inner world of young people, expressed through anger and determination, to not let anyone destroy our soul. The only alternative was peace. The vision of peace was clearer than ever before. We loved Kosovo without gunshots, without teargas. Our common vision was a Kosovo of peace, a Kosovo without walls. ... Undoubtedly the role of women was indisputable and very significant in all the events that occurred at that time. Women were a source of inspiration to move forward. They were the initiators of many protests, showing that we are strong and invincible.

It was usually our obligation, as women, to prepare anti-teargas patches before the protest. I remember preparing hundreds of anti-teargas patches with gauze and onions. We packed them with us so we could distribute them to protesters so their eyes wouldn’t hurt. They were very useful because the police would always throw teargas. I remember during the 1996 protest, the Serbian police put so much tear gas, and they were beating so many students. I was in high heels, and we had to run fast. We hid in some house that was then surrounded by the Serbian police. We couldn’t go out. We waited in hiding for an hour or two, and then we started running and running...¹⁷¹

In addition to the young women protesting as students, several women also were ready and available to help the students amid police violence.¹⁷²

Moreover, Ilirijana Loxha also explained that “Driven by this willingness to break down the walls, we [a young group of artists] established the Ghetto Art Association, to turn the art of resistance into resistance of art”. They had exhibitions and films, which also were used to raise international awareness about the situation in Kosovo, towards a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

In 1998, women organised a series of peaceful protests in Prishtinë/Priština to try to draw international attention to the situation in Kosovo. Women from politics and civil society organised these massive demonstra-

¹⁶⁴ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p.103

¹⁶⁵ See KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, pp. 104-105.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Clark, p. 101.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 125.

¹⁷¹ KWN communication with Ilirijana Loxha, 2021.

¹⁷² KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 106.

tions.¹⁷³ Women activists believed that the best way to safely mobilise people was to inform them about upcoming demonstrations via the media. Journalist Valentina Saraçini who worked for *Deutsche Welle* at the time, recalled to KGSC that she informed listeners just before a demonstration was scheduled to begin:

Sevdije [Ahmeti] called me and said, “Can you notify people on *Deutsche Welle*?” I said, “Of course”. I reported, and then I ran to my house to get my recorder because I wanted to be at the beginning of the protest. In my apartment building there were forty-two families, and as I was coming downstairs, I saw all my neighbours going out to protest. I saw a lot of women who went out to join the protest. At that moment I saw the power of media.¹⁷⁴

On 1 March, approximately 2,000 women demonstrated outside the United States Information Service Office (USIS), a precursor to the United States (U.S.) Embassy. The next day, over 100,000 people came to show support, with more demonstrations following the week after.¹⁷⁵ According to Clark, “On International Women’s Day, 8 March, women returned to the USIS holding aloft blank white papers to symbolise the lack of rights in Kosovo”.¹⁷⁶

The most renowned demonstration took place on 16 March: the “Bread for Drenicë/Drenica” march of women. Women organisers sent out an official message to several media and USIS, explaining the reasons for their march, as quoted by KGSC:

We the women of Kosovo will walk to Drenica to give solidarity to women and children who are now enclosed by Serbian police and army forces. In Drenica children and women, pregnant women, old people, and paralyzed people were killed. Mothers took children to save them, but their children died in the freezing cold. Terror continues, ethnic cleansing continues. No door of hope has opened. We are aware that it is not enough for the international commune just to speak, without any concrete steps for action. We decided that with bread in our hands we will be beside people of Drenica. The world should understand that considering the many victims, years of psychological war, and violent mechanisms above us, we are all in danger. All the Albanian community in Kosovo is in danger.¹⁷⁷

Some 12,000 women carrying loaves of bread began an intended 50-kilometre march from Prishtinë/Priština to the besieged area of Drenicë/Drenica.¹⁷⁸ The bread that women carried symbolised that people’s basic needs were unmet. Although the Serbian police turned them back to Prishtinë/Priština, the very visual demonstration succeeded in garnering international media attention.¹⁷⁹ Later, on 25 March 1998, women organised another

“Women had key roles when it came to resistance and pushing forward processes. Women were on the frontline in protests, to raise their voice against oppression. For example, women raised a movement to walk from Prishtina to Drenica, to provide them with bread. ... They showed their courage and it was covered by the media.”

Yllka Soba, Prishtinë/Priština

¹⁷³ Organisers included including Sevdije Ahmeti, Vjosa Dobruna, Igballe Rogova, Safete Rogova, Edita Tahiri, Melihate Tërmkolli, Flora Brovina, and Edi Shukriu (KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, pp. 114-115).

¹⁷⁴ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 110.

¹⁷⁵ Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*, p. 174.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 175.

¹⁷⁷ See KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 114.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ For example, see the Associated Press archive, “[Kosovo: Albanian Women Protestors Turned Back by Serbian Police](#)”, 16 March 1998.

demonstration calling for a “peaceful divorce” from Serbia.¹⁸⁰

Demonstrations aimed to bring international attention to the insecurities faced by Albanians in Kosovo, calling for an international intervention and peaceful solution to the escalating conflict. Indeed, activists observed that these demonstrations succeeded in bringing international attention to the security threats facing Albanians. Simultaneously, by showing themselves publicly, women activists leading the demonstrations believed they countered the aforementioned stereotypes appearing in Serbian and international media about Albanian women; as stated by KGSC, they illustrated that “they were as modern as the women of Europe.”¹⁸¹ Potentially, this could contribute to reducing “othering” and thus support relations and collaboration towards peace.

Some non-Albanian activists living in Kosovo showed solidarity amid the siege of Drenicë/Drenica, according to Hanimshahe Ilazi, who wrote in her diary: “Women raised their voice against the massacres in Drenicë/Drenica. From this day when thousands of candles were lit, Albanian, Turkish, and Egyptian women and young women from Prishtina continually provided solidarity to Drenica”.¹⁸² Meanwhile, this research did not reveal examples of Serb women in Kosovo joining demonstrations. A Serb woman explained:

You can’t expect young women (15-29) to contribute during the conflict and in the first period after the conflict. Firstly, that age range is divided into two groups: 1) those who were too young and needed protection by their parents; and 2) those who were already married and had their children to worry about. Some were at college. Maybe they did have an opportunity to get engaged in some form, perhaps some university activities. Young women were involved in humanitarian aid distribution, but not public protests.¹⁸³

A recurring response was that Serb women were not engaged in public protests for peace during that time because the general contextual conditions did not allow them to engage. The aforementioned fact that men dominated politics, coupled with women’s traditional gender roles, also hindered their engagement. Women needed to keep their families and children safe, refraining from engaging in political and potentially insecure activities, they said. Exceptions not identified through this research may have existed.

Overall, as this sub-section illustrates, Kosovo Albanian women, including young women, participated in several peaceful demonstrations that aimed to bring international attention to the plight of Albanians in Kosovo, towards an international intervention and a peaceful resolution to the escalating conflict. In a few instances, they succeeded in garnering international coverage.

Women’s Contributions to Diplomacy

This sub-section discusses women’s roles and contributions to peace and security through diplomacy during the 1990s. In 1995, 10 women from Kosovo attended the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. Edi Shukriu, Edita Tahiri, Shefkije Mullaademi, and Saranda Vidishiçi represented the parallel government of Kosovo, while Afërdita Saraçini-Kelmen-di, Alisa Maliqi, Naxhije Buçinca, Sevdije Ahmeti, Vjosa Dobruna, and Xheraldina Vula-Buçinca participated in the parallel non-governmental Women’s Forum in Huarriu. Through working groups, activists from Kosovo

“This conference was of a great importance as everything related to women, peace, and security started there. Women wanted some resolution inside the UN that gives rights to women’s rights organisations in post-conflict countries to be actors in peacebuilding. I couldn’t join other women from Kosovo as the Serbian regime had taken my passport away.”

Igballe Rogova

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 118.

¹⁸² Ibid. p. 110.

¹⁸³ KWN interview with a Serb woman, North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, 2020.

contributed to the Beijing Platform for Action, the global strategy that resulted from this conference.¹⁸⁴

The Kosovo delegation also prepared and presented a report highlighting human rights violations occurring in Kosovo at the time. They utilised the conference for diplomatic lobbying for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Kosovo. Participation in the conference supported women activists and politicians in building relationships with other women and learning from experiences elsewhere. Some knowledge gained, such as related to conflict resolution, would later be used by women activists in promoting peace in Kosovo.¹⁸⁵

As the conflict escalated and drew added international attention, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) brokered peace talks between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Kosovo Albanian leaders at Château de Rambouillet in France in early 1999. There, NATO proposed the “Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo”. In these so-called “Rambouillet negotiations”, the Kosovo team included one woman, Edita Tahiri, as a member of the political leadership of LDK and the appointed Foreign Minister for the Kosovo Albanian parallel government.¹⁸⁶ As she recalled, “The negotiation team consisted of 15 members. There were 14 men. I was the only woman participating in the peace negotiation.”¹⁸⁷ Her position as a member of the LDK political leadership provided her with a seat at the table.

“While all delegations brought reports on the situation of women, we brought a report on the situation of the occupation of Kosovo. Women’s rights were included in only one chapter of that report, and two women from the team were in charge of distributing the report to as many participants of the Conference as possible, as 50,000 women from around the world were taking part”.

Edita Tahiri



Source: KosovaPress

¹⁸⁴ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 95. See also, [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), 1995.

¹⁸⁵ For more on their attendance of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, see KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 95.

¹⁸⁶ Wille, T., “Representation and agency in diplomacy: How Kosovo came to agree to the Rambouillet accords”, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22.4 (2019): 808-831; Carson, K. et al. “Conflict Management Program Student Field Trip to Kosovo”, 2010.

¹⁸⁷ KWN interview with Edita Tahiri, former Chief Negotiator of the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

The Rambouillet agreement eventually led to the U.S. and NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999.¹⁸⁸ The agreement, signed by Kosovo Albanian delegates to Rambouillet, agreed for NATO to send an international protection force, the Kosovo Force (KFOR), for a three-year period of "self-government". Serbian officials rejected the Rambouillet agreement, particularly the proposal for the UN and KFOR troops to enter Kosovo and the possibility to decide a final settlement regarding Kosovo's status three years after signing the agreement.¹⁸⁹ According to Tahiri, the "Rambouillet conference showed results, thus ending the war indirectly, because Serbia did not sign the peace agreement. Thus, [the U.S. and NATO] decided that NATO ... start bombing Serbia, so to use the force to bring peace."¹⁹⁰

While the military intervention itself involved violence, Kosovo Albanians, who had tried for more than a decade for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, have said that the bombing represented a necessary action towards establishing peace; this would be in line with the neoliberal notion of security.¹⁹¹ Notably, amid the bombing, Serbian forces escalated massacres of civilians, used sexual violence against women, and increased the extensive forced deportation of Albanians from Kosovo.¹⁹² People in Serbia also experienced the violence of the NATO bombing.¹⁹³ Thus, the bombing also contributed to several insecurities, including for women of all ethnicities.

"In the U.S. I spoke the language that comes from the heart and told many people like senators, congressmen, and the first lady. We were the first on different television stations, and we were female. We were not using political language. We used women's language."

Afërdita Saraçini-Kelmendi¹⁹⁴

Madeline Albright. The same day they testified at the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary's Subcommittee on Immigration. During this session, Dobruna stated:

I want to make an important point here about the people who have left Kosovo. These people, myself included, are not refugees. We are deportees. We have been forced to leave our homes. We did not choose this. We did not run, even though conditions were very bad. We stayed until we were forced out. So I ask you to please refer to us as deportees, not refugees ... Deportees are treated like prisoners, live in the open, have no access to clean water, and international aid agencies and journalists are denied access to the camp. [...] I know this committee deals primarily with refugees, immigration, not with military matters. But immigration to Europe and the United States is not the answer for deportees from Kosovo. For us, there is only one answer—to go home in safety, to rebuild our lives, and to rebuild our homes.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁸ Clark, pp. 180-184.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, pp. 181-183.

¹⁹⁰ KWN interview with Edita Tahiri, 2020.

¹⁹¹ Author's conversations with Kosovo Albanians, including women's rights activists.

¹⁹² For example, see Human Rights Watch, *Kosovo: Rape as a Weapon of "Ethnic Cleansing"*, U.S.A.: HRW, 1998; Fitamant, S., "Assessment Report on Sexual Violence in Kosovo", New York: UNFPA, 2000; and several interviews.

¹⁹³ France24, *20 years on, Serbian victims of NATO bombings feel forgotten*.

¹⁹⁴ Cited by KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 150.

¹⁹⁵ U.S. Government Printing Office, "Hearing on Immigration of the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate", S. Hrg. [106-443](#), 2000.

Their efforts contributed to bringing international attention to the situation in Kosovo, towards establishing peace and security.

Thus, (young) women also served as diplomats during the 1990s, actively engaging in various forms of international diplomacy. “Women were very active in bringing awareness about injustice and oppression during the ‘80s and ‘90s,” a civil society representative observed.¹⁹⁶ Again, these efforts aimed to encourage an international intervention and peaceful resolution to conflict.

Women’s Organising for Security for Displaced Persons

This sub-section discusses women’s roles and contributions to peace and security through humanitarian aid and support to displaced persons and refugees in 1998 and 1999. Starting in 1998, women activists found refuge for women and children displaced from their homes in Drenicë/Drenica region. Meanwhile, Serb respondents highlighted women’s role in delivering humanitarian aid and providing medical service through the Red Cross and the Circle of Serbian Sisters CSO, both when refugees arrived in Kosovo from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, starting in 1991,¹⁹⁷ but also later when Serb women provided humanitarian aid during the war in Kosovo in 1998-1999. “Women were involved through humanitarian work, mainly the distribution of humanitarian aid ... There was solidarity within that work,” a Serb women’s rights activist recalled.¹⁹⁸

When thousands of Albanians were forced from their homes, including at gunpoint, women mobilised even though they were refugees themselves. In the “No Man’s Land” of Bllacë/Blace on the border between Kosovo and Macedonia, Igballe Rogova was instrumental in maintaining peace and preventing violence from Macedonian paramilitary troops against civilian refugees. A refugee herself at the time, she recalled how every morning began with the tragic news of newborn babies or old people dying during the night:

“At the time, many civilians were affected by the military operations. So when, for example, women and children from Bajgora came to Mitrovica due to the conflict, they were welcomed with food, water, and other necessary aid. So, although Serbian and Albanian sides were fighting, we didn’t distinguish ethnic differences when it comes to humanitarian assistance. When you see someone with a child in such a situation, their ethnicity is irrelevant, and all you want to do is help. ... I didn’t have any information regarding the Albanian CSOs, but from today’s perspective, I realize that Albanian women-led CSOs were a lot more advanced than Serbian ones. Unlike non-Albanian communities, Albanians had a developed civil society sector.”

Serb woman activist, North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica

We had to do something, we couldn’t sit there and do nothing while people were dying in those conditions. We had to do a protest. We set up an organizing committee to plan the protest. We agreed that the next day at 11 a.m. we would start packing our bags and make a line facing the Macedonian border. Exactly at noon we would start walking towards the border slowly, but loudly shouting, “HELP!” The next day, around 10 a.m., a phone call came from an American friend who was living in Macedonia, “Igo, you have to stop this protest. This will lead to a bigger war. The police might even shoot people!” He was right, we had to change our plan quickly. Instead of walking towards the border, we decided we would just stand in a line and shout: “Help!” We had a hard time convincing people to change our plan. At 11 a.m. they stood

¹⁹⁶ KWN interview with an Albanian woman activist and CSO representative.

¹⁹⁷ KWN interview with a Serb woman activist, North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, 2020.

¹⁹⁸ KWN interview, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

up and prepared the bags. I was shaking, afraid that people would start walking. But at 12, everyone stood in line in one place and for a half hour we all shouted, “HELP!” The police were angry but didn’t intervene because we didn’t walk towards the border. After the shouting people slowly unpacked their belongings and continued talking with each other. Then a phone call came. “You did it! It worked! Tonight they are going to let people in!”¹⁹⁹

Indeed, the same night as the protest, Macedonian forces allowed people to enter. Although international diplomacy contributed to Macedonia opening its border, actors would have lacked information about the situation in Bllacë/Blace if activists had not mobilised people to raise their voices and make the circumstances known to international media.

Amid the chaos, women activists tried to facilitate the beginnings of a healing process.²⁰⁰ CPWC, established by Vjosa Dobruna in Macedonia, provided basic health services to women staying with host families in Macedonia as refugees.²⁰¹ Since many families had been separated during the war by Serb troops in Kosovo, security forces in Macedonia, or amid their journeys, understandably people were very concerned about their missing family members, so activists organised to reunify families. In a program coordinated by Nora Shehu, CPWC reunited families by organizing meetings for women in Tetovë/Tetovo and Gostivar regions of Macedonia. Flora Macula cooperated with Adi, a Macedonian organization, to bring televisions and newspapers so people could see who was missing and find family members.²⁰² Florina Duli assisted with Save the Children’s reunification program, which made mobile phones available in camps so people could locate family members.²⁰³

In Macedonia, Motrat Qiriazhi set up a large tent as safe space for women and girls, towards psychological healing, supported politically and financially by Kvinna till Kvinna. They advocated for women’s most urgent needs to be met, such as healthcare, security from violence and trafficking in the camps, and supplies for menstruation. Activists resisted against UN agencies and foreign media when they asked women to cry, seeking to portray women in the homogenized role of victims. Rather, activists demanded that women had agency and should be involved in decision-making in the camps, as they knew best what steps should be taken to safeguard their own security. Women’s rights activists collaborated with artists to organise concerts and other events that would bolster morale in the refugee camps. As Safete Rogova, an actress and activist, recalled, “We, women activists organised shows in the camps. We were trying not to feel ourselves as refugees, in order to raise the morale of our fellow people. Our focus has been on helping others, especially women and children.”²⁰⁴

Further, in addition to humanitarian aid and better security, young women activists like Rreze Duli, Violeta Hoxha, Fitore Hajrullahu, and Eliza Hajrullahu organized education. Duli explained to KGSC:

We started a school outside the camp with one shift only for Kosovars. The director of the school in the village was very good, and UNICEF helped with negotiations. In the beginning, we had six hundred kids who went to kindergarten in the village. We had a kindergarten and a workshop classroom with many activities. I organized different trainings with teachers on how to deal with traumatized kids. We had mine awareness training for kids because there were a lot of mines in Kosovo, especially in villages. Theatres came to us. The children were so busy that sometimes they forgot they were refugees.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁹ Igballe Rogova, Personal Story, document provided to KWN.

²⁰⁰ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 132.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ KWN interview, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

²⁰⁵ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 153.



© Motrat Qiriazhi

In Cegrane refugee camp, Motrat Qiriazhi cooperated with actors, comedians and people to create a make-shift production of music and theatre.

Other young women activists became involved in helping people start to deal with psychological issues. For example, Emine Sherifi who started a program with French Doctors without Borders in Stankovic camp in Macedonia and Melihate Juniku through CPWC in Tetovë/Tetovo organised group therapy with children.²⁰⁶

Thus, even as refugees and forcibly displaced persons themselves, women, including young women, organised to further peace and security for women and girls, such as physical and psychological healthcare, education, supplies for basic needs, infrastructure like lighting, increased security patrols, and self-defence courses against gender-based violence.

Women's Roles and Contributions after the War

In 1999, UNSCR 1244 ended the war, stating that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia must end violence and repression in Kosovo.²⁰⁷ The UN deployed a civil administration to administer Kosovo politically until its status under international law could be decided, called the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). UNSCR 1244 mandated UNMIK with executive and legislative authority in Kosovo. It provided the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) with reserved responsibilities and executive authority,

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 155.

²⁰⁷ UNSCR [1244](#)

including over the security sector.²⁰⁸ NATO deployed an international security presence, KFOR, to establish a safe environment for all people in Kosovo and to facilitate the safe return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes. With time, UNMIK shrunk in size, as competencies were handed over to Kosovo's Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, and particularly after the February 2008 Declaration of Independence by the government of the Republic of Kosovo.²⁰⁹ While UNMIK's role has decreased, its mandate under international law continues in the absence of a UNSC resolution confirming Kosovo's political status after UNSCR 1244.

In response to the main research question, this section discusses diverse women's roles and contributions to peace and security in Kosovo during the post-war period. It is divided into sub-sections based on the different dimensions in which women contributed, which arose from the research. This includes women's roles in and contributions to peace and security through interethnic peacebuilding, networking, providing for human security, the security sector, politics, and negotiations and dialogue. The last sub-section also responds to the main research question by presenting women's needs and expectations from the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue.

Women's Contributions to Interethnic Peacebuilding

This sub-section discusses women's roles and contributions to peace and security through interethnic peacebuilding initiatives.

According to the Kosovo Memory Book Database, the period of 1 January 1998 to 31 December 2000 involved 13,535 human losses or disappearances, including 10,812 Albanians, 2,197 Serbs, and 526 persons of other ethnicities.²¹⁰ After the war, interethnic tensions among Albanians and Serbs were high, particularly as displaced persons and refugees returned to find their livelihoods lost and family members missing or dead. A Serb woman activist recalled:

After the war in 1999, Serbs couldn't buy groceries; Albanians wouldn't sell it to them. ... Even today, when I walk into a store where a young woman works, I can feel animosity towards me because I speak Serbian.²¹¹

While animosity tended to exist between Kosovo Serbs and Albanians, other ethnic groups also faced discrimination due to perceived alliances with Serbs or Albanians. According to Human Rights Watch, although Albanians that retaliated mainly targeted Serbs, Roma also faced risks and threats, as some Albanians believed they collaborated in Serbian-orchestrated crimes.²¹² Indeed, according to a report by the European Roma Rights Centre, amid the pre-war parallel structures, "they had to choose to live in one or the other society", which also contributed to later retaliation from both sides.²¹³

To better protect Serb and Roma people, KFOR established "enclaves", initially with checkpoints and security controls.²¹⁴ While enclaves enabled easier organising of protection, women's rights activists have argued that this further divided ethnic groups.²¹⁵ Moreover, it contributed to isolation and insecurities for Serb women in terms of human security. Serb women, particularly those in southern enclaves, lacked freedom of movement and access to public services, especially as inter-city public transport was unavailable.

In Mitrovicë/Mitrovica during the war, many Kosovo Albanians were forced out of their homes in the

²⁰⁸ Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), [Context Analysis of the Security Sector Reform in Kosovo 1999-2009](#), 2011.

²⁰⁹ KWN, [1325 Facts & Fables: A collection of stories about the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in Kosovo](#), 2011.

²¹⁰ Humanitarian Law Center, [31,600 documents undoubtedly confirm death or disappearance of 15,535 individuals during the war in Kosovo](#), 2015. For detailed information, see the Kosovo Memory Book.

²¹¹ KWN interview with a Serb woman, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020

²¹² Human Rights Watch, [Abuses Against Serbs and Roma in the New Kosovo](#), 1999.

²¹³ European Roma Rights Center, ["Abandoned Minority: Roma Rights History in Kosovo"](#), 2011, p. 14.

²¹⁴ Dahlman, C. T., and Williams, T., "Ethnic Enclavisation and State Formation in Kosovo", *Geopolitics*, 15(2), 2010, p. 406.

²¹⁵ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 228; and authors' conversations with women's rights activists.

northern part of the city, while Kosovo Serbs fleeing their homes in southern parts of Kosovo entered the North. Meanwhile, Serbs from the southern part of the city left their homes and assumed residences in the North, fearing for their own security. The town became ethnically divided. Albanian families still living in northern Kosovo, near the Serbian border, would not leave their houses or towns for fear of violence. Meanwhile, Serbs living in the North would not leave their homes for fear of retaliation. Thus, since June 1999, the Ibar river has served as a physical demarcation line, dividing northern and southern Kosovo as well as the interethnic city of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, where people of diverse ethnicities previously had lived together for decades.²¹⁶ The bridge over the river in the centre of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica became a symbol of the divided city and of the opportunity to build bridges towards intercultural peace, among social groups as well as local peace within the community.²¹⁷

From the outset, women's rights activists organised a demonstration in 1999 to protest the division of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica on an ethnic basis, calling for peace. As the then young woman activist Ilirijana Loxha recalled:

After the war, people throughout Kosovo marched to Mitrovica. We didn't want the city to be separated. Many, many women participated because we had the energy and the will not to allow a part of our soul to be torn and divided. I was together with many friends. Considering that Mitrovica is like 40 kilometres away from Prishtina, we walked from morning 'til evening. Even after this very difficult and long walk, in the end, at the entrance to the city, we were stopped and turned back. It was sad. We were living in a difficult time after the war, and, even so, with new energy, we held onto the hope and desire to restore Kosovo.²¹⁸

The demonstration did not succeed, and the city was divided, with a KFOR checkpoint placed on the bridge.

Soon after, local women were among the first to initiate interethnic dialogue in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and other areas of northern Kosovo. Young women from CSO Community Building Mitrovica (CBM) brought together youth and women from both sides of the river to dialogue and collaborate on joint initiatives. Valdete Idrizi, a young woman who co-founded CBM in early 2001, recalled:

Involvement in interethnic discussion led to a better understanding of each other's needs. In the beginning, I wanted only to talk, to share my story, our sufferings and not to listen. But then we started listening to what others had to say and to understand that it was not easy for them either. This is how we started building bridges.²¹⁹

In the beginning, they had two separate offices in North and South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, respectively. Idrizi was adamant about close collaboration, and activists eventually decided to establish a common workplace.²²⁰ CBM has continued building bridges towards collaboration among social groups, particularly Serbs and Albanians, through the years. Several other efforts to build interethnic relations also began in Kosovo during this time.

²¹⁶ Jaume Castan Pinos, "Mitrovica: A city (re)shaped by division", 2016, p. 12.

²¹⁷ To refer to Anderson's "[Defining Peace](#)" on page 12 contexts of peace.

²¹⁸ KWN communication with Ilirijana Loxha, January 2021.

²¹⁹ KWN interview with Valdete Idrizi, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

²²⁰ [Oral History Kosovo](#). Interview of Valdete Idrizi, 2017, pp. 25-26.

However, in March 2004, interethnic relations worsened following what became known as the “March 2004 events”. As described by Human Rights Watch:

On March 17, 2004, violent rioting by ethnic Albanian crowds broke out in Kosovo, a day after ethnic Albanian news agencies in Kosovo reported sensational and ultimately inaccurate reports that three young children had drowned after being chased into the river by Serbs. With lightning speed, the crowd violence spread all over Kosovo, with the Kosovo authorities counting thirty-three major riots involving an estimated 51,000 participants over the next two days. Large ethnic Albanian crowds targeted Serb and other non-Albanian communities, burning at least 550 homes and twenty-seven Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries, and leaving approximately 4,100 Serbs, Roma, Ashkali ... and other non-Albanian minorities displaced. Nineteen people – eight Kosovo Serbs and eleven Kosovo Albanians – were killed, and over a thousand wounded-including more than 120 KFOR soldiers and UNMIK police officers, and fifty-eight Kosovo Police Service (KPS) officers.²²¹

After the “March 2004 events”, ethnic tensions rose and some of the tender relationships established among Albanians and Serbs, including women activists, dissipated. The pressure against collaboration across socialised ethnic boundaries mounted.

Amid this difficult situation, CBM and other women’s rights activists decided to try to build peace among women and children of Serb, Albanian, and other ethnicities in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. Activist Vetone Velju offered her home in North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, which she had fled after the war from fear of violence, to serve as a community centre, “The Women’s Centre”. She recalled:

We opened it to take children out of their houses, but no [parent] would give you their child in that situation. This is why we decided to gather women and children in one place. Indeed, it was a very tense situation. Before opening it, there were lots of threats, but the very first day 103 Albanian and Serb women gathered there [in my house]. From that day there were no more conflicts [among us]. All we wanted was to make peace among women and children.²²²

Meetings continued two to three times per week, and they spent holidays together. Gatherings led to a better understanding of each other’s needs. Even when the Centre received threats that it would be bombed, women persevered, refusing to discontinue their activities. Moreover, they watched over the Centre at night to ensure its security.²²³ Later, in 2012, drawing from this experience, Vetone Velju founded the multi-ethnic Mitrovica Women’s Association for Human Rights (MWAHR).²²⁴ Since then, MWAHR has brought together youth and women municipal assembly members of diverse ethnicities from northern municipalities and South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica to discuss issues of concern in their communities and to collaborate in addressing local issues. MWAHR later expanded this collaboration, developing relations with Women’s Association Sandglass (*Peščanik* in Serbian), a women’s peace organisation in southern Serbia. Since 2017, they have brought women of different ethnicities together from Kosovo and Serbia to discuss issues, including the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue and European Union (EU) Accession process.²²⁵ These discussions also contributed to undermining prejudices, promoting understanding, and creating positive interethnic relations among Serb and Albanian women.²²⁶

²²¹ Human Rights Watch, [Failure to Protect: Anti-Minority Violence in Kosovo, March 2004](#), 2004.

²²² KWN interview with Vetone Velju, South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, 2020.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ KWN interview with women activists, 2020.

²²⁵ For more information, see the sub-section on [“Women’s Contributions to Negotiations and Dialogue, and Their Needs”](#)

²²⁶ Email correspondence with Vetone Velju, 2021.

Meanwhile, in 2000, women's rights activist Igballe Rogova heard from Kvinna till Kvinna that Serb women activists in southern Kosovo wanted to work with and learn from the experiences of Albanian women activists. Although movement between Albanian and Serb communities was not easy at the time, and she had faced persecution during the war by Serb forces and her Serb neighbours, Rogova decided to visit Serb women in enclaves, to better understand their situation and needs. She recalled:

Of course, I pretended like I was an international [organisation's] staff, and I went there with a car of Kvinna till Kvinna. This is how I met Nena [Nevenka Rikallo] and invited her to be part of the Network [KWN].²²⁷

She reflected on the importance of involving men, like Nevenka Rikallo's husband Bora, and working with the entire community to (re)build positive relations between Albanians and Serbs. Indeed, with her husband's support, Nevenka Rikallo started her own organisation, Hand to Hand (*Ruka Ruci*), to empower Serb women in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje and became a member of KWN. She has since cooperated with Albanian-led WCSOs, particularly Open Door (*Dera e Hapur*) led by Belgjizare Muharremi, to bring Albanian and Serb women together, towards peace.

Gradually other Serb women started cooperating with Albanian women as well. A Serb women's rights activist in Novobërdë/Novo Brdo recalled:

We were engaged in activities together with a Serb woman who was married with an Albanian man, who invited us to work with her. Then, we started going to villages and talking with Serb women to address their needs, especially related to health, as clinics were closed after the war and there was a risk of infection. ... With time, we expanded our multi-ethnic cooperation further. In 2008, we identified the need to inform people about decentralisation and to cooperate with them to problems such as infrastructure, emigration, etc. In 2007-2013, the mayor of Novoberde was Albanian and he did a lot for Serbs, even more than for Albanians. At this time, cooperation with Albanians started.²²⁸

Several other WCSOs have supported interethnic collaboration within local communities throughout Kosovo. Among the many examples, CSO Divine Women [*Gruaja Hyjnore*] empowered women from several ethnic groups in Gjilan/Gnjilane.²²⁹ In 2019, CSO Women's Rights [*Žensko Pravo*], with support from UNMIK, trained a multi-ethnic group of women in advocacy; they created gender equality action plans for four northern municipalities in Kosovo with shared priorities among diverse from Serb, Albanian, Roma, Gorani, and Egyptian women



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In solidarity, activists Sevdije Ahmeti and Igballe Rogova visit fellow activist Nevenka Rikallo and her husband at their home, after it sustained damage as a result of the March 2004 events. As Executive Director of the Centre for Protection of Women and Children, Ahmeti and the Centre raised funds from the Urgent Action Fund to support Serb women's rights activists and organisations affected by the events.

²²⁷ Igballe Rogova, speech during meeting with students from the University of Vienna and European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

²²⁸ KWN interview with a Serb woman, Novobërdë/Novo Brdo, 2020

²²⁹ KWN, website, "[OJO Gruaja Hyjnore](#)"

and men.²³⁰ This group also contributed to strengthening the role of women in peace and reconciliation processes through multi-ethnic trainings, discussions, and meetings.²³¹

Informally, individual young women also sought to foster dialogue and peace. “We didn’t have the chance to participate in decision-making, but it doesn’t mean that we didn’t do anything”, a young Albanian woman in Prishtinë/Priština said. “We were participating in [our own peacebuilding efforts] in school. We had the opportunity to meet women from Serbia.” During focus groups, additional young women mentioned examples of their personal involvement in bringing about social peace.

Young women have continued to engage in peace-making, as well as sought to make their voices heard in peace processes, when they lacked a seat at the table. In 2013, during the Regional Young Feminist Forum organised by KWN, approximately 40 young women from Kosovo and neighbouring countries came together in Kosovo to discuss feminism, women’s involvement in decision-making, and to develop a joint advocacy strategy, through which they sought to raise issues concerning young women in Kosovo and in the region.²³² In their advocacy strategy, they identified relevant officials to meet in order to convey their priorities. This included meeting then President Jahjaga to share their concerns with her.²³³

The Feminist Summer School continued the next year, organised by KWN, the Alternative Girl’s Centre from Krushevac/Kruševac, and Association Dea Dia from Kovacica/Kovačica, Serbia, as a feminist peacebuilding initiative for young women, supported by Kvinna till Kvinna.²³⁴ “This was the first time that I had the chance to sit and actually have a long conversation with an Albanian girl,” a young woman participant from Serbia said.²³⁵ Young women reflected on the importance of such personal conversations in building peace among young women in Kosovo and Serbia. Later, in 2015, as part of the Young Women’s Peace Academy, young women collaborated to make a joint declaration and advocacy strategies, once again, taking their recommendations to political leaders. Again, as part of their advocacy strategies, additional young women from Kosovo and Serbia met with then President Jahjaga, among other political leaders and government officials, raising issues of priority importance to young women, towards their peace and security. President Jahjaga offered her support and emphasised the importance of women in fostering peace and changing societies.²³⁶

The tradition of young women gathering across borders to build peace was carried on by Artpolis, a KWN member, and the Alternative Girl’s Centre from Serbia, bringing together young women from Kosovo and Serbia at the annual Young Feminist Spring School. As Zana Hoxha, founder and Director of Artpolis observed:

We created a space for women of diverse ethnicities to dialogue about feminism, peace, and security. Today, the majority of those young women are part of the movement! The knowledge they gained there contributes not only for themselves but also letting others know that young women can contribute to peace processes.²³⁷

²³⁰ UNMIK, “[Report of the Secretary-General](#)”, 2019.

²³¹ For more information, see Facebook page: “[Women for Equality and Peace in North Kosovo](#)”.

²³² See Regional [Young Feminist Forum](#) statement, 2013.

²³³ KWN, “[KWN organizes Regional Young Feminist Forum 2013](#)”, 2013.

²³⁴ KWN, “[Feminist Summer School Unites Girls from Kosova and Serbia](#)”, 2014.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ President Office, “[President Jahjaga met with girls from Kosovo and Serbia](#)”.

²³⁷ KWN interview, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.



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Following the feminist meeting, young women raised issues important to them by meeting with Kosovo officials, organising a street demonstration, and speaking to media. The main issues young women identified towards their security included access to education, school psychologists, and discrimination at work.

As a result, young women have been able to break down stereotypes and prejudices about people of other ethnicities, foster networking capabilities, begin interethnic friendships, and create a space for other women to grow.²³⁸ Using art as a tool towards social change, Artpolis also has organised several performances, workshops, and other activities, often engaging youth, in addressing stereotypes, disrupting prejudices, breaking barriers, and building peace.²³⁹

In 2014, Kvinna till Kvinna organised the Young Women's Peace Academy, a cross-regional initiative that brought together activists from five conflict-affected countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kosovo, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. During this event, 140 young women had the opportunity to enhance their leadership skills.²⁴⁰ Then, in 2015, as a part of the Academy, young women from Kosovo together with other young women from the Balkans, South Caucasus, and Sweden created a Young Women's Peace Charter, aiming to "build commitment and understanding of the challenges and obstacles faced by young women in conflict affected countries as well as in other societies".²⁴¹ In Kosovo, diverse young women also created a National Charter, supported by Kvinna till Kvinna, to bring decision-makers' and CSOs' attention to issues they considered priorities: assisting persons who had suffered sexual violence during the war, women's economic empowerment, and young women's participation in decision-making processes.²⁴²

Since 2015, several young women have participated in the OSCE annual Dialogue Academy for Young Women, which gathers young women from Belgrade and Prishtinë/Priština to enhance women's participation in dialogue, conflict resolution, and decision-making processes.²⁴³ An OSCE representative explained:

In 2015, we established the Dialogue Academy because there was a need to include young women 20-27 years old in Dialogue. They didn't have good memories from the past, but they realised that they have lots of things in common.²⁴⁴

Young women said their participation contributed to knowledge and cooperation among women, as well as to establishing a network of young women in Kosovo and Serbia. The Academy empowered young women to volunteer, participate in CSOs working on peacebuilding, and raise awareness about gender equality with their male peers, towards interpersonal peace. Dialogue Academy alumnae launched "WOmentorship", which aims to connect young Serb and Albanian women so they may share knowledge and experiences.²⁴⁵

Also at the regional level, young people have actively participated in CSOs promoting peace, reconciliation, and respect for human rights, such as the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR). YIHR has network member organisations in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Hercegovina, and Kosovo. Since 2003, its values have included truth, justice, accountability, equality, freedom, democracy, and peace through dialogue and education. To this end, youth have organised several activities, such as exchange programs, festivals, summits, and litigation.²⁴⁶ In Kosovo, YIHR focuses on monitoring, documenting, and reporting human rights violations; dealing with the past, towards collective memory and peace in Kosovo and the region, such as through its Virtual Museum of Refugees;²⁴⁷

²³⁸ KWN interview with Albanian woman activist, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

²³⁹ For more information about their activities, see [Artpolis](#).

²⁴⁰ Kvinna till Kvinna, "[#FEMDEFENDERS Young women who tears down barriers](#)", 2015.

²⁴¹ Kvinna till Kvinna, "[Young Women's Peace Charter](#)", 2015.

²⁴² Document provided to KWN from Kvinna till Kvinna: Kvinna till Kvinna, *Young Women's Peace Academy Kosovo National Charter*.

²⁴³ OSCE, "[Fourth OSCE Dialogue Academy for Young Women Concludes in Austria](#)", 2018.

²⁴⁴ KWN interview with a young woman representative of OSCE, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

²⁴⁵ KWN interview with a young Serb woman, 2020.

²⁴⁶ For more detailed information about YIHR in Kosovo, visit [Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Kosovo](#).

²⁴⁷ It documents the stories of people who had to flee their homes during the war in Kosovo. See: [Virtual Museum of Refugees](#).

and empowering young people's engagement in political and social life.²⁴⁸ YIHR has worked on "people to people dialogue" among youth, including young women from different communities. YIHR Kosovo has observed the importance of including women's voices to build sustainable peace, and they thus seek to ensure a gender perspective in their work.²⁴⁹ Overall, YIHR has sought to engage youth, including young women, in building peace.

In 2006, women's rights activists of diverse ages from Kosovo and Serbia gathered to form the Women's Peace Coalition, initiated by Women in Black Network Serbia and KWN with support from Kvinna till Kvinna and the then United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, later UN Women). Sharing their pain and experiences of war established a crucial foundation for building cooperation and peace. They wrote a landmark statement, quite risky for Serbian women, which stated: "The future status of Kosovo should be independence." An activist reflected, "We recognised each other's state. This is how peace is built". During their meeting, Serbian activists made one of the first ever public apologies for the crimes committed by the Serbian government. This had a significant effect on Albanians in Kosovo who watched the public apology on television; it contributed to dealing with the past, towards building peace.²⁵⁰ The Women's Peace Coalition also engaged advocacy related to Kosovo-Serbia negotiations, discussed [later](#).

In 2006, women from all Western Balkans countries also established the Regional Women's Lobby in South East Europe (RWLSEE) for Peace, Security, and Justice, supported by UNIFEM. It brought together women politicians and women in civil society from countries throughout the former Yugoslavia, to collaborate towards peace and security in the region.²⁵¹ Then head of the UNIFEM Office in Kosovo, Flora Macula, recalled:

In the first meeting I invited women in politics with a focus on those from Serbia and Kosovo. However, women from other parts of the Balkans also joined us. There was only one woman from civil society, Igballe Rogova, whom I invited because of her leadership and her hard work in peace and security. Nekibe Kelmendi was there, as well, and it was not easy for her after her husband and two [civilian] sons had been killed [by Serbian police] to sit at the same table with women working for gender equality in the Government of Serbia. Immediately after six months, in a meeting in Zagreb, it was decided to establish a Lobby for Peace and Security for Women from South East Europe.²⁵²

The Lobby engaged powerful women holding leadership positions in their political parties or governments. In Kosovo, this included Nekibe Kelmendi, Edita Tahiri, and Teuta Sahatqija, as well as strong women's rights activists, such as Igballe Rogova, Luljeta Vuniqi, Sonja Biserko, and Staša Zajović. In addition to contributing to peace-building among women in the region, the RWLSEE also would provide input on the Kosovo-Serbia negotiations, discussed later.

Via regional cooperation, RWLSEE also has contributed to "empower women's leadership and equal participation in politics, decision-making, peace, security and justice processes". For example, the new Regional Academy for Women in Leadership and Mediation targets young women, towards strengthening their voices and capacities; it also provides spaces for them to become involved.²⁵³ In 2019, UNMIK SRSG Zahin Tanin recognised the strong influence of women's networks such as RWLSEE in peace processes.²⁵⁴ Soon after, the Mediterranean Women's Mediators Network (MWMN), which aims at "fulfilling the need to increase the number of women involved in peace-making efforts and at facilitating the appointment of high-level women mediators at local and inter-

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ KWN interview with YIHR Kosovo representative, 2020.

²⁵⁰ Women's Peace Coalition, *Through Women's Solidarity to a Just Peace: A Report Based on the Women's Peace Coalition Second Annual Conference*, Struga, 2007.

²⁵¹ Read more: [RWLSEE establishment announcement](#) signed by members: Marieta Zaqe, Memnuna Zvezdić, Gordana Sobol, Morana Paliković, Nekibe Kelmendi, Edita Tahiri, Teuta Sahatqija, Igballe Rogova, Irina Pockova, Nada Drobnjak, Sonja Biserko, Nataša Kandić, Slavica Stojanović.

²⁵² KWN interview with Flora Macula, 2020

²⁵³ Regional Women's Lobby in South East Europe, "[Regional Academy for Women in Leadership and Mediation](#)".

²⁵⁴ UNMIK, [SRSG Tanin highlights importance of gender-responsive and inclusive peace processes at high-level seminar in Rome](#), 2019.

national level”, launched in November 2020 its Kosovo Antenna. So far, this interethnic network has approximately 40 mediators from 27 different countries. From Kosovo, women mediators include Edita Tahiri, Jeta Krasniqi, and Linda Gusia.²⁵⁵ MWMN aims to make the world more secure.²⁵⁶ During the launching event, Vjosa Osmani, the acting President of Kosovo, added:

We need to understand that the participation of women in the process of dialogue is not only a necessary but also a smart decision and above all proof of commitment to respect the objectives of UNSCR 1325 ... WPS agenda will be sustainable only when women are present through academia, media, civil society or platforms such as the Kosovo Antenna.²⁵⁷

Another regional effort recognised the need for justice, towards peace, after the wars in the former Yugoslavia, where neither international nor domestic trials adequately addressed different forms of violence against women. In response, WCSOs decided to organise a Women’s Court. The Mothers’ Movement of the enclaves of Srebrenica and Žepa from Bosnia and Herzegovina, KWN from Kosovo, Women in Black from Serbia and other WCSOs from Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Slovenia created the Women’s Court.²⁵⁸ The Court involved neither perpetrators nor judges. It offered a feminist, rather than a legal, approach to justice. The Court sought to create a safe space that would empower women from across the former Yugoslavia to tell their stories of suffering, courage, and resistance.²⁵⁹ As an example, in May 2015, approximately 500 women from the region, including women from Kosovo, met in Sarajevo to share personal stories from the 1990s. During these four days, women shared harsh testimonies about rape, torture, and the loss of their loved ones.²⁶⁰ Despite their experiences, according to *Kvinna till Kvinna*, women showed a “determination for peace and justice, not vengeance. For reparation, safety, for good future of them and their children, and for solidarity with all women, across all possible borders”.²⁶¹ The Women’s Court thus contributed to peace and security through recognising the past, towards building a peaceful future.

Following debates at the First Regional Forum for Transitional Justice, in 2008, CSOs from the Balkans also started an initiative to establish the Regional Commission for the Establishment of the Facts about the War Crimes and other Violations of Human Rights Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia between 1 January 1991 and 31 December 2001 (RECOM).²⁶² Through this initiative, RECOM was constituted as an extra-judicial body with tasks including:

Investigating all allegations of war crimes and other serious human rights violations in connection with the war; listing the names of all war victims and victims of crimes pertaining to the war; and collecting information about the camps and other centres of forced detention.²⁶³

RECOM has held consultative processes at regional, national, and local levels with students, minorities,

²⁵⁵ For detailed information about this network, see: [Mediterranean Women Mediators Network](#).

²⁵⁶ Speech of one of the mediators of MWMN in the online conference, “Reclaiming Time: Women, Peace, Security and Justice Agenda in Kosovo and Beyond”, 2020.

²⁵⁷ Speech of the acting president, Vjosa Osmani in the online conference, “Reclaiming Time: Women, Peace, Security and Justice Agenda in Kosovo and Beyond”, 2020.

²⁵⁸ KWN, “[Women’s Court for the Former Yugoslavia: Seek for Justice, Truth and Active Remembrance](#)”, 2015.

²⁵⁹ Clark, J. N., “Transitional Justice as Recognition: An Analysis of the Women’s Court in Sarajevo”, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 10(1), 2015, p. 2.

²⁶⁰ *Kvinna till Kvinna*, [Unforgettable testimonies at court for women survivors](#), 2015.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² See the RECOM Reconciliation Network [website](#).

²⁶³ RECOM Reconciliation Network [website](#).

veterans, and women.²⁶⁴ In 2010, the Centre for Research, Documentation and Publication, a RECOM coalition member, organised a consultation among Albanian, Serb, and Roma women victims of war in the Municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac, from the heavily affected villages of Hocha e madhe/Velika Hoča and Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša. Women's testimonies were diverse, and while some called for peace others sought revenge, stating there was "no room for forgiveness".²⁶⁵ Despite the mixed views expressed by women, the consultation arguably contributed to establishing a foundation for dealing with the past by providing space for women to share and discuss their experiences, towards eventually building peace. Indeed, after the event, 27 of the participating women signed a statement expressing their willingness to participate in similar discussions in the future, as well as to seek truth and justice.²⁶⁶

RECOM also has held several activities targeting youth, such as public debates on the role of youth in reconciliation and the "one million signatures for RECOM" in 2011. This was organised by YIHR in collaboration with several other youth CSOs in the region, including Integra from Kosovo. Together, they eventually collected 542,660 signatures for the establishment of the RECOM commission. In 2012, "RECOM for the future of the Young" also targeted youth, including panel discussions and collecting signatures in several cities.²⁶⁷ In 2017, RECOM gathered in Belgrade 20 young women from the Western Balkans to discuss ways to achieve positive peace in their countries and the importance of regional networking.²⁶⁸ Several (young) women have been engaged in RECOM though no other specific information was available online.

Meanwhile, the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) was established in 2016 with the signature of the six Western Balkans Prime Ministers from Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Its main mission is promoting reconciliation among youth in the Western Balkans through youth exchanges and support to youth projects in the region. Through their different projects supported by UN agencies, the EU, and Western Balkan governments, RYCO strives to create connections between youth in different countries, including the most vulnerable, related to peacebuilding, dealing with the past, intercultural learning and dialogue, decision-making, volunteering, and reconciliation through social entrepreneurship.²⁶⁹ Their strategic document for 2019-2021 briefly mentions a commitment to gender equality, but further details on young women's engagement and contributions to peace and security through RYCO was unavailable online.

As of 2020, towards cross-border peace and security, WCSOs in Kosovo remained part of several regional and international coalitions working to address gender-based violence, institutionalise gender-responsive budgeting, address gender-based discrimination at work, advocate for improved resourcing for WCSOs, and integrate a gender perspective in the EU Accession process. These coalitions bring together diverse women, across borders, establishing relationships of joint interests towards safeguarding various dimensions of women's security in the region and furthering peace.

In conclusion, focus groups, interviews, and archival research all suggest that women, including young women, have contributed directly to building peace among various ethnic groups in Kosovo, particularly Albanians and Serbs; between women in Kosovo and Serbia; and among women (and men) in South East Europe. The Women's Peace Coalition, RECOM, young feminist meetings, and Women's Court, among other efforts, illustrate the importance of dealing with the past to build a foundation for interethnic peacebuilding. As the examples in this sub-section illustrate, both WCSOs and international actors have played a role in supporting peacebuilding efforts. Local women led CSOs like CBM, the Mitrovica Women's Association for Human Rights, KWN, and Hand to Hand were among the first to "build bridges" in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and other areas. As a young woman concluded

²⁶⁴ For more information about the consultative process, see [RECOM archives](#).

²⁶⁵ For information on their testimonies, see the [transcript](#) of the "Consultation with Women Victims of the War from Rahovec/Orahovac, Hoqa e Madhe/Velika Hoča and Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša on Initiative for RECOM".

²⁶⁶ For more information, see [Consultations with female victims of the war for the establishment of RECOM](#), 2010.

²⁶⁷ For more information, see: <https://www.recom.link/en/recom-for-the-future-of-the-youth-2/>.

²⁶⁸ RECOM Reconciliation Network, "[Importance of regional networking for reconciliation](#)", 2017.

²⁶⁹ For more information about this initiative, visit [Regional Youth Cooperation Office](#).

during a focus group in North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica: “If it weren’t for multi-ethnic CSO activities, we [youth from Serb and Albanian communities] wouldn’t have any interaction.”

As per the research sub-question, the examples in this sub-section also illustrate that WCOSs have played several roles in involving and enhancing young women’s participation in peace and security processes, such as through the Regional Young Feminist Forum, Feminist Summer School, Young Women’s Peace Academy, and RWLSEE. These and the Young Women’s Peace Charter effort, OSCE Dialogue Academy, YIHR, and RYCO all can serve as examples of ways to promote young women’s engagement in peace processes, by spiking their interest, empowering them to engage, furthering their skills, expanding their networks, and providing them with a seat at the table to dialogue directly with decision-makers about their priorities and needs.²⁷⁰

Women’s Contributions towards Peace and Security through Networking

Immediately after the war, women faced challenges in securing a seat at Kosovo’s post-war decision-making table,²⁷¹ as discussed in the next chapter. Ostracised from decision-making, as women have been in post-war situations elsewhere in the world,²⁷² women responded by creating networks as an alternative way to engage and advocate women’s priorities. In addition to the examples provided in the prior sub-section, this sub-section discusses women’s roles and contributions to peace and security through networking, as an effective strategy.

Immediately in October 2000, while the war was still fresh in people’s memories and lived experiences, an informal coalition of women’s rights activists and the Department of Democratisation within OSCE, led by activist and former UK parliamentarian Lesley Abdela, organised a conference in Prishtinë/Priština entitled “Women in Politics: An Agenda for Kosovo Communities” about women in decision-making, including their role in peace and justice processes.²⁷³ Women from throughout the region joined the meeting, despite the difficulties of cross-border travel, including women from Serbia. Women of diverse ethnicities and nationalities expressed joint concerns. Key issues included missing persons and the crimes perpetrated by the government of Serbia in Kosovo. Women participants advocated address of these issues in regional and international fora.

Several of the participating organisations, including those active before the war in the informal Rural Women’s Network, decided to establish an informal network. Initially, the network was a local effort, supported entirely “from the bottom up” with voluntary donations made by its members, such as for water and translation at meetings.²⁷⁴ Given the plethora of foreign aid entering Kosovo after the war, several new international actors and WCOSs had opened to distribute aid and to address needs within their communities.²⁷⁵ Thus, in the beginning the network focused on coordination towards better distributing humanitarian aid so that it would meet the security needs of women and girls. They wanted to ensure diverse women and girls had access to healthcare, education, humanitarian aid, psychological and support. Moreover, they wanted to ensure that women’s voices would be heard in decision-making processes related to Kosovo’s post-war reconstruction, particularly by UNMIK as Kosovo’s political administrator.

By 2003 activists realised that they needed a more formal network to muster sufficient political influence so that they would be taken seriously, including by the UNMIK administration.²⁷⁶ “This is when we got an office, business cards, and I bought my first suit,” Igballe Rogova, KWN Executive Director recalled.²⁷⁷ The network received support from Kvinna till Kvinna and STAR Network of World Learning to officially register the Kosovo Women’s

²⁷⁰ As per the last research sub-question.

²⁷¹ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 184.

²⁷² Kvinna till Kvinna, *A Right, Not A Gift*, 2020, pp. 30-31.

²⁷³ OSCE, *Conference on women in politics in Kosovo, 2000*.

²⁷⁴ KWN interview with Igballe Rogova, 2020.

²⁷⁵ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

Network (KWN) on 12 November 2003. KWN's membership, reaching 158 members in 2020, includes diverse WCSOs representing the interests of women and girls of all ethnicities, geographic locations, abilities, and ages. The network's underlying principle is that despite their diversity, together WCSOs are stronger together and can have a more influence over decision-making processes, including those related to peace and security. Its mission is to:

[S]upport, protect and promote the rights and the interests of women and girls throughout Kosovo, regardless of their political beliefs, religion, age, level of education, sexual orientation and ability. KWN fulfils its mission through the exchange of experience and information, partnership and networking, research, advocacy, and service.²⁷⁸

Towards realising this mission, KWN members cocreate and adopt four-year strategies, based on gender analysis, towards addressing the main (human security) issues facing women and girls in Kosovo.²⁷⁹ Then, KWN members collaborate to implement strategies. Since 2012, the KWN Kosovo Women's Fund has provided funding to KWN members to support their joint efforts in implementing KWN strategies. The Fund and KWN's work includes tailored support for its members.

KWN staff report to the Assembly of member organisations, as the highest decision-making body, at semester and annual meetings on progress made towards implementing the strategy. Since its inception, KWN continuously has held monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly meetings, based on the level of need. The regular networking meetings have sought to build relations among its diverse members through dialogue and discussion. Moreover, as Igballe Rogova emphasised, "We always included men in the network meetings. You cannot empower women's life if you don't include men."²⁸⁰ Thus, the KWN Board of Directors, elected by KWN members to represent their interests has included three men gender equality advocates over the years: Behar Selimi, Besim M. Kajtazi, and Besnik Leka.

Some interview respondents observed that KWN, as a multi-ethnic network, contributes to peace and security by bringing together diverse women in collaborating towards common goals under united strategies. KWN strategies continually have involved objectives towards peacebuilding. Thus, KWN also has provided support through the Kosovo Women's Fund to Albanian and Serb women working together at the local level. For example, KWN members Open Door [*Dera e Hapur*] and Hand to Hand [*Ruka Ruci*] have undertaken several joint initiatives to bring Serb and Albanian women together within their communities, jointly raising issues of importance to them.

As prior sections have illustrated, KWN has contributed to peace and security in Kosovo and the region in several ways, including by bringing together Albanian and Serb women in Kosovo as part of the network; supporting their joint inter-ethnic efforts through the Kosovo Women's Fund; co-establishing the Women's Peace Coalition, RWLSEE, and Women's Court; raising women's voice in peace processes, including negotiations and dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia;

"I see networking as a very efficient way to contribute to peace and security, deal with the past, hear and recognise each other's pain, suffer and overcome it, and see the future in a different way."

Albanian woman activist, Prishtinë/Priština

"After the war we started working with women to make them know and claim their rights. Moreover, women activists were the ones who worked after the war to include women's needs in Kosovo's legislation."

Shpresa Agushi, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian women's rights activist, Prishtinë/Priština

²⁷⁸ KWN website, "About Us".

²⁷⁹ KWN's strategies over time are available [online](#).

²⁸⁰ KWN interview with Igballe Rogova, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

advocating implementation of UNSCR 1325; and several other efforts related to women's human security, as described later. As KWN staff and members include several young women, they have been engaged in all of these efforts.

KWN also has served as a space for networking and experience sharing. While some Albanian women activists had started CSOs during the 1990s, only one non-Albanian women led WCSO seems to have existed then: the Circle of Serbian Sisters. All other Serb, Bosnian, Turkish, Gorani, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian women's CSOs started after the war. Immediately after the war, Albanian women activists drew from their experience organising during the 1990s to support other women's rights activists in establishing organisations. Based on the experience of establishing KWN, Igballe Rogova, working with Flora Macula and Luljeta Vuniqi, initially supported the creation of a Serbian Women's Network, though this network encountered challenges after the "March 2004 Events", whereby Serb WCSOs did not agree to continue with the network. The three activists also supported the establishment of the Network of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian Women Organisations of Kosovo. After starting as an informal group in 2000, it was officially registered in 2007.²⁸¹ In 2019, Shpresa Agushi, the Executive Director, received an EU "Unknown Heroes" Award for her work towards Roma integration in the Western Balkans.

As this sub-section and examples in other sub-sections suggest, networking can be and has been an important strategy through which women, including young women, have contributed to furthering peace and security in Kosovo and the region.²⁸²

Women's Contributions to Human Security

Related to human security, women suffer substantial social, economic, physical, and psychological consequences from the war. In many cases, women have not only witnessed violence against their families and acquaintances, but also have been exposed to greater risk of disease, including sexually transmitted diseases as a result of sexual abuse.²⁸³ Impunity for serious crimes and atrocities, including sexual and gender-based violence, which may have occurred before, during, and/or after the war, can jeopardize peacebuilding efforts.²⁸⁴ Overall, as diverse women's definitions and statements in Chapter I attest, they will only feel peace and security once several aspects of their human security are addressed, including their economic security, security from gender-based violence, and other forms of personal and social security, particularly for potentially marginalised groups. Therefore, this sub-section discusses women's roles and contributions to peace and security specifically related to furthering each of these forms of human security.

Contributions towards Economic Security

In terms of human security, several WCSOs have led a myriad of efforts towards furthering the economic security of women. Immediately after the war, this included fundraising for and delivering aid to women who had lost their livelihoods during the war, providing seeds, tractors, cows, bees, and equipment for food processing.²⁸⁵

Often these crucial interventions were interlaced with psychosocial support groups, such as in the effective approach of Medica Kosova; this WCSO used a psychosomatic approach and built alliances among women, which dually served as a social safety net when women faced psychological and economic challenges. Women in their collectives would step in to help each other when needed.

In another example, one of the most horrible war-related massacres took place in Krushë e Vogël/Mala

²⁸¹ KWN Email correspondence with Shpresa Agushi, 2021.

²⁸² For more information, see: EU Award for Roma Integration in the Western Balkans and Turkey, 2019.

²⁸³ Aragon J. and Miller, M., *Global Women's Issues: Women in the World Today, extended version*, Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State, 2017, pp. 83-84.

²⁸⁴ UN, "Report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict", 2009, p. 4.

²⁸⁵ For further details about such efforts, see also, KGSC, *History is Herstory too*.

Kruša, where Serb police, paramilitaries, and civilians murdered 114 men in the village, mostly civilians.²⁸⁶ The women and children were forced at gun point to enter the river or walk to Albania. When they returned after the war, they found a ghost town. They made makeshift homes for themselves in the ashes of their old village and learned to perform the farming tasks normally undertaken by men.²⁸⁷ While beginning a new life was hard, women persevered with support from Motrat Qiriazhi activists. Initially this involved, talking, listening, and healing, but then economic support became important. “We distributed cows to each family to empower them economically”, an activist recalled.²⁸⁸ “They treated a cow as a family member. This helped them not only economically, but also contributed to their wellbeing”. Motrat Qiriazhi started a driving school so that women could learn to drive their own tractors and take their products to market, tasks previously undertaken by men. Women who had lost their livelihoods and their husbands eventually became economically independent. Women became increasingly empowered as leaders within their community and eventually started the *Krushë e Vogël/Mala Kruša Women Farmers’ Association*, one of the first women farmers’ associations in Kosovo.

© KWN



WCOSOs have supported women’s financial security, such as through grants to develop microbusinesses like beekeeping. Here, this was done through support from UN Women, via the KWN Kosovo Women’s Fund.

Several other examples exist of rural WCOSOs contributing to women’s economic security. The Beekeeping Women’s Association “Ocarina of Runik” in Skënderaj/Srbica contributed to empowering women economically by offering training in beekeeping and marketing honey at fairs.²⁸⁹ Women’s Association “Lulishtja” has helped women farmers and agricultural producers in five villages to start new businesses and sell their products, as well as to advocate for receiving state agricultural subsidies,²⁹⁰ considering women’s underrepresentation in this sector and among subsidy recipients.²⁹¹ The Women’s Centre for Rural Development in Gjakovë/Đakovica, has worked to improve the conditions for women and their families.²⁹² In Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, EMINA – Bosnian Women’s Group

²⁸⁶ OSCE, *Kosovo/Kosova As Seen, As Told*, 1999; Washington Post, “Kosovo’s Killing Fields”, 1999; New York Times, “Crisis in the Balkans: The Refugees: Countless Refugee Accounts Give Details of Mass Killings”, 1999; KWN, “KWN Stands with Women of Krushe, Demanding Justice for War Crimes”, 2020.

²⁸⁷ Mertus, J., *Improving the Status of Women in the Wake of War: Overcoming Structural Obstacles*, 2003, pp. 542-543.

²⁸⁸ KWN interview with Albanian woman activist Prizren, 2020.

²⁸⁹ KWN, website, “Beekeeping Women’s Association “Ocarina of Runik”.

²⁹⁰ KWN, website, “Lulishtja” advocates for the economic empowerment of farmers in the villages of Highlands of Gollak, 2020.

²⁹¹ See KWN, *Kosovo Gender Analysis*, 2018.

²⁹² KWN, website, *Women’s Center for Rural Development*.

has helped widows and mothers sell their handmade products,²⁹³ and Association of Women SABOR assists Serb displaced persons, refugees, single mothers, and other vulnerable women by empowering them economically and socially related to entrepreneurship and leadership.²⁹⁴ Women’s Association GORA helps Gorani and Bosnian women in rural areas.²⁹⁵

In recent years, WCSOs and individual women’s rights activists, particularly young women, have advocated for women’s labour rights, particularly a workplace free from gender-based discrimination. Their research has documented the extensive rights abuses and insecurities facing women at work.²⁹⁶ WCSOs in Kosovo have collaborated as part of a regional coalition of diverse activists to raise awareness about women’s rights at work, the right to a secure workplace, and how to report rights violations. Moreover, they have cooperated with other CSOs to provide legal aid to women whose rights have been violated, as well as to advocate for an improved legal framework in line with international best practices. Young women activists have been at the forefront of now annual demonstrations on International Women’s Day, 8 March, like “*Marshojme! S’festojme!*” [“March! Don’t celebrate!”] demanding attention to a myriad of security issues, including economic security. These marches are planned and organised by young women and draw substantial media and public attention towards addressing security issues faced by women in Kosovo.



© KWN

A young activist holds a sign, “I want work”, as activists chanted this and other slogans during an International Women’s Day demonstration in Prishtinë/Priština.

© KWN

Hundreds of diverse women, and men, mark International Women’s Day, 8 March (2020), by marching through Prishtinë/Priština with the



motto, “March, Don’t Celebrate”, carrying signs with messages against violence, and for women workers’ rights, among other rights.

As part of the enabling environment for women’s economic security, AGE and several WCSOs have supported efforts to increase women’s property ownership. After AGE and the Kosovo Cadastral Agency put in

²⁹³ KWN, website, [EMINA – Bosnian Women’s Group](#).

²⁹⁴ For more information about this organization, see [Association of Women SABOR](#).

²⁹⁵ KWN, website, [Women’s Association GORA](#).

²⁹⁶ KWN, [Gender-based Discrimination and Labour in Kosovo](#), 2019. Young women researchers working at Riinvest and D4D have also published on these issues.

place the Administrative Instruction for the Registration of Joint Immovable Property on Behalf of both Spouses to support more women in becoming joint owners of property,²⁹⁷ WCSOs supported the promotion of this important affirmative measure. Numerous WCSOs have worked to inform women of their right to inheritance and property ownership, as well as to support women directly in claiming this right, towards women's enhanced economic security.

Contributions to Addressing Domestic Violence and Sexual Harassment

In post-war contexts, particularly amid the dearth of state services, WCSOs can be important actors in supporting victims of violence.²⁹⁸ Gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence and sexual harassment, remains among the most serious threats to women's security in Kosovo, as women observed in Chapter I.²⁹⁹ In their lifetimes, an estimated 62% of people in Kosovo (56% of men and 68% of women) have experienced domestic violence, while 20% of men and 41% of women said they experienced some form of domestic violence in 2014 alone.³⁰⁰

Moreover, several cases of femicide have been reported in recent years.³⁰¹ Beyond undermining women's human security, interview respondents reflected that gender-based violence also hinders women's participation in decision-making, including related to peace and security processes. "Kosovo is secure ... but I don't think it is secure for women", a research participant said. "Women are not safe because they are subjected to different violence. Therefore, they are not involved as they should be."³⁰² As Igballe Rogova stated in a conference organized by KFOR on the eve of 20th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325: "Security begins at home; therefore, we have to provide security for women at home."³⁰³



© KWN

Through annual events such as One Billion Rising, WCSOs like Art-polis and KWN have engaged men in efforts to end violence against women. In this 2014 demonstration, young men hold a banner that says, "Say No to Violence".

²⁹⁷ Administrative Instruction - No. 08/2015 [On Special Measures for Registration of Joint Immovable Property on Behalf of Both Spouses](#), 2015. Article 2 obliged public institutions to apply special measures to increase the number of women registered as joint owners. Spouses registering their property jointly were exempted from the administrative fee. In 2017, [KWN with its member organizations and AGE](#) advocated to extend the initially one-year period of application, which was approved by the Government.

²⁹⁸ Bastick, M. and Whitman, T., *A Women's Guide to Security Sector Reform*, 2015, p. 8.

²⁹⁹ Concern over domestic violence was a recurring theme among respondents.

³⁰⁰ KWN, [No More Excuses](#), 2015.

³⁰¹ See the KWN [website](#) for statements and examples.

³⁰² KWN interview with woman, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

³⁰³ KWN, ["Security Begins at Home: No Peace without Justice"](#), 2020.



© KWN

Women's rights activists, particularly through KWN, have organised dozens demonstrations to call for justice and security for women, particularly from domestic violence.

Towards enhancing women's security at home, women's rights activists and women in several institutions, particularly AGE, have contributed to addressing domestic violence in Kosovo.³⁰⁴ AGE and KWN have collaborated to research and inform the adoption of several laws and policies to address gender-based violence in Kosovo. AGE contracted KWN to research and write the report *Security Begins at Home* in 2008, supported by UNDP, which AGE used to draft the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence. In 2013, AGE initiated the establishment of Standard Operating Procedures to guide responsible institutions in addressing domestic violence.³⁰⁵ Moreover, AGE contracted a Commentary on the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence in 2015. Also in 2015 and 2020, AGE and KWN's collaboration resulted in two other monitoring reports on domestic violence, that informed and contributed the drafting of two national strategies and action plans on preventing domestic violence, led by AGE.³⁰⁶ AGE also proposed the establishment of the National Coordinator for Protection against Domestic Violence, which served as a monitoring and coordination mechanism.

As of 2019, KWN and KGSC recommendations also have been incorporated in Criminal Code amendments to include sexual harassment and domestic violence as criminal offences, as per the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (known as the "Istanbul Convention").³⁰⁷ Moreover in 2020, following KWN and KGSC's advocacy, among others', the Istanbul Convention was included explicitly within Kosovo's Constitution. KWN, KGSC, and women's shelters, among other WC-SOs, contributed to drafting the National Strategy and Action Plan against Domestic Violence 2016-2020, which included 70% of KWN's recommendations for this Strategy. KWN and shelters' advocacy has contributed to the

³⁰⁴ For example, see KWN's publications on gender-based violence.

³⁰⁵ AGE, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), 2013.

³⁰⁶ See more at: Kosovo Program against Domestic Violence and Action Plan 2011-2014; and [National Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo on Protection from Domestic Violence and Action Plan 2016-2020](#);

³⁰⁷ See, KWN, "Kosovo Criminal Code Criminalizes Domestic Violence, Sexual Harassment", 2019. Council of Europe, Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, Istanbul, 11.V.2011.

adoption of a state budget line for financing shelters' core running costs in 2019 and 2020.³⁰⁸ While this research focused on WCSOs' work, these contributions resulted from joint advocacy with UN Women and members of the Security and Gender Group.³⁰⁹

WCSOs have worked tirelessly to increase physical, psychological, and economic security of women and children who have suffered violence. For nearly two decades, WCSO-run shelters and day centres have provided crucial services for women and children suffering violence, including safe spaces, healthcare, psychological counselling, education, vocational training, social services, legal aid, and for other basic needs.

Also for two decades, an extensive list of WCSOs has worked in diverse communities to raise awareness about domestic violence towards preventing it and enhancing women's security, including through work with men.³¹⁰ WCSOs have organised a plethora of awareness campaigns and demonstrations at municipal and central levels towards bringing public attention to the issue and holding institutions accountable for ensuring justice, including in relation to specific cases. Through banners, public statements, and media appearances they have emphasised that women cannot be secure if they are not secure within their own homes. KWN and shelters, among others, consistently have advocated to relevant institutions for improved response and access to justice for women who have suffered gender-based violence, as well as provided legal aid and monitored domestic violence cases.

Women's rights activists and WCSOs were the first to bring public attention to sexual harassment in the streets and to demand government action, including through research on this topic.³¹¹ Young women activists produced and promoted a short film documenting one day in the life of a young woman in Prishtinë/Priština, during which she was harassed approximately 50 times.³¹² Receiving thousands of views, the film brought the issue out of the shadows and into the forefront of public discussion, contributing to public reactions against street harassment. Some officials, police, and men who had denied that sexual harassment existed or was an issue could no longer easily deny the insecurities faced by young women in Kosovo each day.



Through posters and online campaigns, WCSOs and young women artists have sought to raise awareness about gender-based violence and how to report it.

³⁰⁸ KWN [letter to Members of Parliament](#), December 2018; [Law No. 06/L-133 On the Budget Appropriations for the Budget of the Republic of Kosovo for Year 2019](#), p. 46; KWN, [letter to the National Coordinator against Domestic Violence](#), December 2019, [Albanian only]; [Law No. 07L-001 On the Budget Appropriations of the Republic of Kosovo for Year 2020](#), p. 51.

³⁰⁹ The Security and Gender Group is a multi-stakeholder group established in 2007. It consists of CSOs like Kvinna till Kvinna, KGSC, Association of Women in the Kosovo Police; Kosovo institutions like AGE, Women's Caucus, Kosovo Police, Kosovo Security Forces, Victim Advocates, National Coordinator against Domestic Violence; and international organisations and actors like UN Women, UNDP, UNICEF, UN-HABITAT, OHCHR, UNFPA, WHO, UNOPS, UNHCR, UNMIK, the EU Office, EULEX, OSCE, and KFOR.

³¹⁰ For example, see the KWN website, "[Members](#)" with expertise on gender-based violence.

³¹¹ KWN, [Sexual Harassment in Kosovo](#), 2016.

³¹² See the KWN "Take Back the Night" [video](#).



A catchy film created by young women activists brought sexual harassment out of the shadows and into public discussions.

Also, in reaction to sexual harassment, young women computer coders from Girls Coding Kosovo joined forces with Open Data Kosovo and KWN to create a mobile application through which women could report sexual harassment: “Walk Freely”.³¹³ Dialogues between young women and police aimed to increase police investigations of sexual harassment cases. Moreover, the application sought to inform city planning and policing by identifying unsafe areas where municipalities could install streetlights, cameras, and undertake efforts to increase policing, towards enhancing security, particularly for young women.

Contributions to Security through Recognition of Survivors of Sexual Violence

While sexual violence was recognised as war crime earlier,³¹⁴ in 2008, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1820, which recognised sexual violence against women as a tactic of war.³¹⁵ In Kosovo, substantial evidence exists that women were used as a weapon of war; police, soldiers, and paramilitaries raped women in their homes, detention centres, and during their flight or forced emigration from Kosovo.³¹⁶ Given the very private, sensitive, and often socially taboo nature of this crime, the precise number of women and men who suffered sexual violence remains unknown. Estimates suggest that 10 to 30 thousand persons experienced such violence, primarily Albanian women under age 25.³¹⁷ Women of other ethnicities also suffered sexual violence, particularly immediately after the war.³¹⁸

By documenting sexual violence crimes, WCSOs have sought to bring justice for these crimes. They have argued consistently that without justice, there can be no peace. Since immediately after the war, WCSOs have assisted women in documenting evidence and preparing testimonies for the International Criminal Tribunal for the



© KWN, Women activists asking for justice for women raped during the war, on 8 March 2012, International Women’s Day.

Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). They also coordinated with WCSOs elsewhere to find safe havens for women witnesses when their lives were threatened, given the lack of adequate witness protection provided. Documenting such crimes came at significant risk to activists, as well, some of whom were threatened for their work.³¹⁹

Few women who suffered sexual violence felt peaceful or secure. They still faced stigmatisation from their families and communities, trauma that contributed to psychological and physical ailments, and economic hardships. Thus, WCSOs also provided services to women who had suffered sexual violence, including psychological counselling, medical care, and economic support. As several survivors lived in dire economic sit-

³¹³ See Open Data Kosovo, “Walk Freely”.

³¹⁴ UN, [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court approved in Rome in 1998 and entered into force in 2002](#); Article 7 recognizes sexual violence as war against humanity and Article 8 as a war crime.

³¹⁵ [Resolution 1820](#).

³¹⁶ See Human Rights Watch, *Kosovo: Rape as a Weapon of “Ethnic Cleansing”*, U.S.A.: HRW, 1998.

³¹⁷ Fitamant, S., “Assessment Report on Sexual Violence in Kosovo”, New York: UNFPA, 2000; Corrin, “Post-Conflict Situation in Kosovo”, 2001.

³¹⁸ Amnesty International, “[Wounds that Burn Our Souls](#)” *Compensation for Kosovo’s Wartime Rape Survivors, But Still No Justice*, 2017, p. 18.

³¹⁹ KWN conversations with women’s rights activists.

uations, lacking financial security, WCSOs fundraised to support women in developing their livelihoods.

Further, WCSOs brought public attention to the need for government response and recognition of sexual violence perpetrated during the war. WCSOs brought the issue out of the shadows and into the spotlight for the first time during a demonstration organised on 8 March 2012, International Women's Day. To the tune of "We Shall Overcome", they sang revised lyrics relating to justice for survivors of sexual violence during the war. "We call for justice for women," they sang together. The demonstration moved several government officials to tears, and immediately, the next day, the issue was discussed in the Assembly of Kosovo. Aida Dërguti, former Member of Parliament (MP) and former deputy leader of *Vetëvendosje* (Self-Determination) political party recalled:

Everything started within *Vetëvendosje*, as a discussion between me, as deputy leader of the party, and Nazlie Balaj. After this idea was approved by the party chairmanship and we were on the eve of 8th March 2012, we met with Igballe Rogova and together we started to make the plan for the future steps. We organised public discussions to inform the public on this topic. The chances of supporting an initiative coming from a small and very polarising opposition party were quite low. Therefore, Igo Rogova together with KWN took on the role of mediator between women MPs. The closed-door roundtables between women in politics and civil society, organised by KWN, aimed to secure votes for this law through women MPs from other parties in the parliament.³²⁰

Following years of tireless advocacy by WCSOs and women in politics, including the pressuring of political party leaders that initially resisted, in 2014 the Assembly of Kosovo approved amendments that recognised sexual violence survivors of war and provided them with benefits like those of other veterans.³²¹

Survivors had to wait until January 2018, 18 years after the war, to finally apply for the status of survivor of war-time sexual violence and receive compensation in the form of a monthly payment, as well as some other limited forms of support.³²² Beyond bolstering their economic security, survivors said that official recognition of them and their plight contributed substantially to their broader psychological wellbeing. Moreover, interviewees agreed that the recognition of survivors' status and the fact that they receive monthly monetary support contributed to their empowerment. "Survivors have shared with us that they have never had a salary ... This pension gives them not only economic independence but also self-satisfaction, making them more open-minded. However, there is still a lot of work to be done", a representative of Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT) commented.³²³ WCSOs like KRCT, Medica Kosova, Medica Gjakova, and the Centre for Promotion of Women's Rights in Glllogoc/Glogovac have supported women in applying for state benefits, monitored the delivery of benefits, and helped women economically, supported by UN Women. As the KRCT representative explained:

Indirectly, any empowerment of women and girls contributes to peace and security. I say, without modesty, that we managed to get a woman out of the ashes to fight for their rights to have a "normal" life.³²⁴

In 2014, RWLSEE, led by Edita Tahiri, initiated a petition, seeking international justice for women raped during the wars in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia.³²⁵ More than 110,000 people in Kosovo, men and women, signed this petition, which was addressed to the UN Secretary-General António Guterres. In 2019, Edita Tahiri submitted the petition to the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the topic of the victims of sexual violence during conflict, Pramila Patten.

As of this writing, no one has been convicted of sexual violence perpetrated during the war in Kosovo.

³²⁰ KWN interview with Aida Dërguti, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

³²¹ The amended [Kosovo Law on the Rights of Combatants and other Civilian Victims of War](#), Article 6.

³²² Amnesty International, ["Wounds That Burn Our Souls" Compensation for Kosovo's Wartime Rape Survivors, But Still No Justice](#), p. 8.

³²³ KWN interview with a woman representative of KRCT, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ KWN interview with Edita Tahiri, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

Therefore, WCSOs have continued their advocacy towards justice for women and men who suffered sexual violence, as well as for survivors of massacres and families of missing people. As Igballe Rogova has emphasised, “There is no peace without justice”.³²⁶ Thus, WCSOs, as well as women politicians, have sought to contribute to peace and security by insisting on acknowledgment of the crimes perpetrated in Kosovo, justice, and reparations for women who have suffered sexual violence.³²⁷

Contributions to Security for Marginalised Groups

WCSOs and individual women’s rights activists also have contributed to defending the rights of potentially marginalised and/or vulnerable women. In the post-war period Handikos continued assisting people with different abilities. Although Kosovo’s Anti-Discrimination Law was adopted in 2004, social norms still contributed to discrimination against people with different abilities.³²⁸ Handikos continuously advocated for this law to be implemented and for people with different abilities to have equal access to employment, education, and public places.³²⁹ Handikos branch offices pressed the government to involve people with different needs in decision-making. For example, Handikos and other local CSOs lobbied the Prizren municipal government to establish a committee for people with special needs. In this committee, established in June 2005, Drita Vukshinaj the Handikos Prizren Manager served as vice president.³³⁰ Several other women were engaged directly in the work of Handikos.

Handikos also continued to identify and register people with special needs. Myrvete Hasani, Manager of Handikos Mitrovica, described to KGSC the challenges they faced in finding people with different abilities, so that they could ensure their human security:

When we told two parents that we knew they had a child with special needs, they refused to admit it. We convinced them to show us their child. When they opened the door, we saw the girl was crying because she thought that she was the only person in the world with special needs. She was twenty years old, and she started crying because she saw me with crutches and how proud I was, that I was not ashamed to go out. She started hugging me and asking me, “Do you go out? And your family knows that you are going out?” She was totally surprised.³³¹

Several CSOs, including WCSOs, thus worked to support people with different abilities in accessing their rights. WCSOs seeking to further the human security of women with different abilities included the Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired People, the Committee of Blind Women of Kosova, the Association of Deaf Women, the Association of Women for Women with Disabilities, Down Syndrome Kosova, Hendifer, Svet Andje-la, and the Association for Autism, as well as branches of larger organisations like Handikos located at the municipal level.³³²

WCSOs have undertaken several actions to support women with different abilities. For example, in Prizren, the Organisation for Persons with Muscular Dystrophy has advocated for improved sidewalks and access to public spaces for people in wheelchairs. In Prishtinë/Priština, the Blind Women’s Association has called for better availability of braille in schools and equal access to state pensions for all blind persons. Several WCSOs have taught

³²⁶ RWLSEE, website, “[Edita Tahiri Handed to UN the letter of RWLSEE Demanding International Justice for Women Raped during the Wars in Kosovo](#)”, 2019.

³²⁷ Igballe Rogova, speech, KFOR conference on the eve of 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

³²⁸ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, Kosovo, p. 315.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² USAID, *Gender, LGBTI, And Persons with Disabilities Assessment*, 2018; KWN [website](#).

women with different abilities vocational skills, job application strategies, and other information to support them in securing employment, as well as living autonomously.

In Serb and rural communities, WCSOs have advocated for public transportation to enable young women's access to education and employment. They have worked to stave off early marriage and empower young rural, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian women to continue their education. Individual women's rights activists and WCSOs have supported public actions in support of LGBTQIA+ persons' rights, as well as united with LGBTQIA+ organisations in demanding equal rights, including by contributing to the formulation of phrasing that would allow the right to same-sex marriage in the Constitution of Kosovo. Through these diverse efforts, activists and WCSOs have sought to contribute to enhanced security for women who often face multiple forms of discrimination.

In summary, WCSOs and women's rights activists, including young women, have contributed peace and human security, including by implementing UNSCR 1325 in terms of Relief and Recovery: they have provided social, economic, physical, and psychological support to women. Knowing that "security begins at home" and there "cannot be peace without justice", WCSOs and women's rights activists in collaboration with AGE, UN Women, the Security Gender Group and other actors have contributed to improving the legal framework for addressing gender-based violence. WCSOs have contributed to human security by enhancing women's economic security, supporting persons who suffered gender-based violence, and promoting as well as protecting the rights of people with different abilities and LGBTQIA+ persons.



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Women's rights activists have supported annual LGBTQIA+ Pride events since they first began in Prishtinë/Priština.

Women's Contributions to Security through the Security Sector

UNSCR 1325 foresees enhancing women's participation in the security sector and ensuring a more gender sensitive approach in this sector. Employing women in the security sector can prove invaluable for responding to the specific security needs of women and girls, ensuring fair treatment, and enabling victims of crime to communicate more comfortably with police.³³³ Yet, although women often have good de-escalation and communication skills, they tend to be underrepresented in security forces in post-war societies, due to recruitment barriers and the internal culture of security institutions; this contributes to a lack of public trust in these institutions and undermines their legitimacy.³³⁴

This sub-section discusses women's roles and contributions to peace and security through the security sector in Kosovo, including efforts to increase women's engagement in the security sector. It also describes the efforts of WCSOs and women's rights activists to integrate a gender responsive approach in the work of new security institutions and international security actors in Kosovo.

After the war, NATO had the responsibility to provide security in Kosovo with 45,000 troops in the Kosovo Force (KFOR).³³⁵ According to women's rights activists, they had to "push" for international security missions

³³³ Bastick, M., "Integrating Gender in Post-Conflict Security Sector Reform", 2008, p. 14. Research participants in Kosovo confirmed this.

³³⁴ Ibid. See also Bastick, M. and Whitman, T., *A women's Guide to Security Sector Reform*, 2015.

³³⁵ UNSCR 1244; KWN, *1325 Facts and Fables*, p. 12.

to mainstream gender in their work and to “educate” them in implementing UNSCR 1325.³³⁶ For example, KFOR published billboards of a muscular, shirtless man with the message, “KFOR is strong”. Igballe Rogova recalled:

We reacted! We wrote in the media, criticising them, and soon after we were invited to meet the Head of KFOR. He said, “I don’t understand why you had to go to the media. You could come to me”. I answered, “Because you would not invite us, and I know this from my experience”. He was really honest and said, “Okay, tell me what to do”. I said: “Number one: have a gender advisor in your mission”. ... Not long after that meeting a gender advisor was appointed in the mission. Then, I said, “Number two: consult us before you publish”. After that, KFOR almost always consulted us.³³⁷

After that, KWN, among others, kept ongoing relations with KFOR, towards integrating a gender perspective in its work. This included training incoming troops, as foreseen by UNSCR 1325, on the women’s movement in Kosovo, main gender inequalities, sexual violence, and potential linkages between prostitution and sex trafficking.

In 1999, the process of disarming and transforming the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) into the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) began.³³⁸ Following Kosovo’s declaration of independence in 2008, several security institutions changed their structure; KPC was dissolved and became the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) on 14 June 2009.³³⁹ The Ministry of Security Force was reorganised into the Ministry of Defense.³⁴⁰ Meanwhile, women who were part of the Ministry’s civil staff since 2008 collaborated with WCSOs and women’s rights activists towards establishing internal mechanisms and training curricula in line with UNSCR 1325.³⁴¹ Women in the Ministry of Defense, such as Halime Morina, Chief of the Human Rights and Gender Unit who brought prior experience from civil society to this position, have contributed to improvements in implementing the Kosovo Law on Gender Equality and UNSCR 1325 within this institution. Social norms continue to undermine women’s involvement in KSF, particularly the prevalent socialised perception that the military is only for men.³⁴² However, Morina observed that “the notion that the military is only for men has begun to fade.”³⁴³ A sign of the changing times, in 2020, the Ministry’s appointed General Secretary was a woman, Rozafa Ukimeraj.³⁴⁴

Meanwhile, on 6 September 1999, UNMIK started establishing the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) with the 200 initial cadets, drawn from 19,500 applicants. The OSCE, assisted by the U.S.-supported International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), trained cadets.³⁴⁵ Early on, police training curricula included a gender-sensitive approach to policing and response to domestic violence. From the beginning, OSCE sought to involve women in the police.³⁴⁶ In 1999, UNMIK’s recruitment and selection process targeted ensuring that 15% of officers would be women.³⁴⁷ In the first generation, they surpassed this target; 23% of the 173 officers that graduated were women (39), and 17 persons came from minority ethnic groups (10%).³⁴⁸ They used outreach campaigns

³³⁶ KWN interviews with women activists, 2020.

³³⁷ KWN interview with Igballe Rogova, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

³³⁸ Skeppström, E., and Weibull, A., *Security Force in the Making: Capacity Building in Kosovo*, 2011, p. 15.

³³⁹ Ibid, p. 22.

³⁴⁰ Law on [Ministry of Defense](#).

³⁴¹ KWN interview with Halime Morina, Chief of the Human Rights and Gender Equality Unit, Ministry of Defence and KSF, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

³⁴² Ministry of Defense, *Policy on Human Rights and Gender Parity in Ministry of Defense and Kosovo Security Force*, 2019, p. 13. For further information about this and other challenges to women’s participation in the security sector, see the next [chapter](#).

³⁴³ KWN interview with Halime Morina, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

³⁴⁴ Ministry of Defense, [website](#).

³⁴⁵ Greene, M., Friedman, J., and Bennet, R., *Building the Police Service in a Security Vacuum: International Efforts in Kosovo, 1999-2011*, 2012.

³⁴⁶ KWN interview with a woman representative of OSCE, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

³⁴⁷ Greene, M., Friedman, J., and Bennet R.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

and grassroots level work to attract women and minority ethnic groups to participate.³⁴⁹ Transfer of authority from UNMIK to the Kosovo Police (KP) started in 2001. With the establishment of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2006, preparations began for transferring command, including at the highest level.³⁵⁰

During these processes, KP sought assistance from WCSOs and women's rights activists, as well as UNIFEM, in identifying ways to challenge gender norms and encouraging women's participation in security institutions. These women were ready to contribute, delivering training to inform new KP staff, mostly men, about UNSCR 1325. During training, Behar Selimi, former KP General Director, was among the most active participants, becoming an outspoken advocate for gender equality.³⁵¹ Hysni Shala also recalled that when he took over the Human Rights Office in 2004, he sought their advice on how to better mainstream gender in KP:

I needed to know more about resolution 1325 because there were challenges... and I sought help from international and local organisations. Since then, I had weekly meetings with Igballe Rogova and KWN who were a great support to me and the Office, and Flora Macula from UNIFEM who supported us also financially. Back then, in 2005-2006, it was Igo and Flora's idea to establish the Women's Association in the Kosovo Police.³⁵²

Flora Macula similarly recalled:

I worked with the police and helped to integrate resolution 1325 in the Police. As a result, the Gender Equality Board was formed, the Office for Gender Equality was established, and we created a network of the police, UNIFEM, KWN, and other organisations. Back then, we aimed to increase the number of women in the police because women would feel safer in Kosovo. In the end, I helped the establishment of the Association of Women Police in Kosovo. Within a year and a half, they were already independent. Today, they are very active, and they are a great example.³⁵³

Before becoming President of Kosovo in 2011, Atifete Jahjaga co-founded the Women Police Association. She, herself, was a rare example of a woman rising through the ranks to become Deputy General Director of KP in 2009, supported by key male colleagues, such as Behar Selimi. Using her own experience and position of leadership, she was among the first policewomen to empower other women within KP. She recalled:

The Women's Association within the police started with the main aim to empower women in the Kosovo Police ... as we were aware of the problems they were facing. Everything started in 2001-2002, and in 2006-2007, the Association of Women in the Police was established.³⁵⁴

This was not an effortless process, however. They encountered difficulties, Jahjaga said, as several policemen did not support the idea of a women's association within KP. "They knew that this Association would guarantee empowerment and sustainability of women in decision-making within the Kosovo Police", Jahjaga continued.³⁵⁵ "Back then one could have counted on fingers the number of women in leadership and decision-making positions in the Kosovo Police", she said.

³⁴⁹ KCSS, *Context Analysis of the Security Sector Reform in Kosovo 1999-2009*, 2011, p. 19.

³⁵⁰ Greene, M., Friedman, J., and Bennet R.

³⁵¹ KWN interviews, 2020. He later served as a KWN board member.

³⁵² KWN interview with Hysni Shala, former head of the Office, 2020.

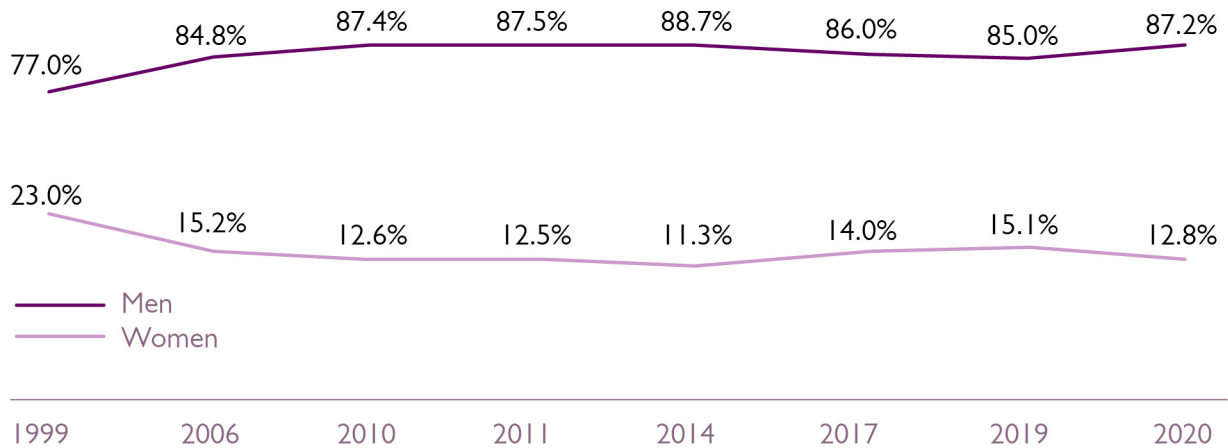
³⁵³ KWN interview, 2020.

³⁵⁴ KWN interview, 2020.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

Indeed, when Kosovo institutions had assumed leadership of KP in 2006, women’s participation already had started to decline (see Graph 1).³⁵⁶

Graph 1. Percentage of Women and Men in the Kosovo Police



A Ministry of Internal Affairs report in 2011 observed that “the decreasing number of KP policewomen over the years demonstrates that the opportunities provided to policewomen in KP are not satisfactory.”³⁵⁷ Identified factors affecting women’s resignation from the KP included: insufficient income/low salaries, change of marital status, poor advancement opportunities, and the working environment.³⁵⁸

According to Shala, after an increasing number of women resigned from KP, the Human Rights Office “started gathering data and contacting them as to why they resigned”.³⁵⁹ The Office learned that many women also lacked information regarding their rights and relevant legislation that would support them. “For example, one of them said that she moved to Mitrovica from Prishtinë after she was married, and she faced difficulties travelling every day [to Prishtinë], and that’s why she resigned”, he said. “She wasn’t informed that she could have made a simple request to transfer to Mitrovica, and she would be granted this right.”

Although KP did not have clear policies for recruiting and promoting women,³⁶⁰ including minority women, KP representatives undertook other efforts to encourage women’s engagement. The Human Rights Office sought to better inform women about their rights. In 2010, the Office created a manual, as a comprehensive guide with all laws, regulations, and administrative rules, in order to provide policewomen with information about their rights and opportunities within KP. “Now, all this information is in this document”, Shala said.³⁶¹ As of 2020, the institution was working to develop a new strategy entitled “Gender Agenda”, focusing on hiring, retention, promotion, and capacity-building of women.³⁶²

The work of women activists and police officers within KP, as well as a few men in decision-making positions, like Selimi and Shala, contributed to changes in perceptions over time. A police officer observed that by the time she joined KP, she did not feel that women faced many gender stereotypes anymore. “In my opinion, they had

³⁵⁶ Data for 1999 from Greene, M., Friedman, J., and Bennet R., p. 5; for 2006 from the report of Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2011, p. 14; for 2010 from Jones, J., *Women in the Kosovo Police*, p. 5; for 2017 from the *Report on the Inspection of Human Resources within the Kosovo Police*, 2017, p. 13, (Albanian only); for 2019 from KP, *The Annual Report 2019 of Kosovo Police*; and for 2020 from correspondence with KP, 2020.

³⁵⁷ Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Report on the position of women in Kosovo Police*, 2011.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ KWN interview, 2020.

³⁶⁰ See Annex 5 for an explanation of the relevant policies and the next chapter regarding challenges.

³⁶¹ KWN interview, 2020.

³⁶² Jones, J., *Women in the Kosovo Police*, 2020, p. 20.

already been broken by the time I joined the KP”, she said.³⁶³ Other policewomen agreed that although they faced discrimination from their colleagues and people in general in the beginning, this changed as they proved their capacities and were promoted to higher positions.³⁶⁴ Nowadays, the policewomen interviewed by KWN did not identify any challenges. However, they said that KP does need more women, which can contribute directly to people’s trust in the institution and to increased reporting of cases.

Rosenberg and Mertus concluded that women in KP have challenged “patriarchal perceptions of women while transforming the image and behavior of the police from an autocratic human right abusing force to a democratic community-centered service”.³⁶⁵ Women in KP, as well as WCOSOs and women’s rights activist supporting KP, thus have contributed to peace and security through their work.

Women’s Contributions towards Peace and Security through Politics

This sub-section discusses women’s roles and contributions to peace and security through their engagement in politics in Kosovo. It examines three dimensions of women’s contributions: increasing and improving women’s participation in politics, towards enabling women to make theirs and other women’s voices heard; establishing legislation and mechanisms towards gender equality, and thus, peace and security; and women politicians’ contributions to peace and security through their work. It does not include women’s contributions specifically to negotiations and dialogue, which are discussed, specifically, in the next sub-section. Nor does it discuss the challenges that women faced in accessing decision-making processes, which are in the next [chapter](#).

Increasing and Improving Women’s Participation in Politics

UNSCR 1325 calls for women’s equal participation in conflict and post-conflict decision-making processes, towards ensuring that women’s needs and priorities are addressed. Phillips considers gender parity in politics a “minimal condition for transforming the political agenda”, arguing that the gender quota “challenges the social arrangements which have systematically placed women in a subordinate position”³⁶⁶. Quotas can help otherwise marginalised groups, like women, establish a “critical mass” that enables women to represent their interests in decision-making processes.³⁶⁸ Without equal representation, women are more likely to be over-powered by men in leadership and thus lack influence in decision-making processes. According to Dahlerup, when women comprise 15% of high political ranks, they can change the political agenda, but they must hold at least 40% of positions to introduce “wom-

“When UNMIK came, I thought it [UNSCR 1325] would be implemented, but it wasn’t. They sent men who were conservative and didn’t believe in women. I had expected them to listen to us ... When we realised that UNMIK was pushing us away, we organised ourselves and we advocated for everything to change.”

Igballe Rogova, Executive Director, KWN³⁶⁷

³⁶³ KWN interview with Albanian woman in KP, Prishtinë/Priština.

³⁶⁴ KWN interviews.

³⁶⁵ Rosenberger, L. and Mertus, J., “When Adding Women Matters: Making Lieutenant Ahmeti”, Gender and Nation in South Eastern Europe, Karl Kaser, Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch (ed.), 2005.

³⁶⁶ Phillips, A., *The Politics of Presence: The Political Representation of Gender, Ethnicity and Race*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, cited in Brown, J., “The Critical Mass Marker Approach: Female Quotas and Social Justice”, *Political Studies*, 62(4), 2013, p. 865.

³⁶⁷ KWN interview, 2020.

³⁶⁸ Dahlerup, D., Hilal, Z., Kalandadze, N., and Kandawasvika-Nhundu, R., *Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas*, 2013.

en-friendly policies”.³⁶⁹ Thus, increasing women’s participation in politics may contribute to women being able to bring forth their needs in post-war settings. Meanwhile, the precise size of the critical mass needed for women to influence policy may differ depending on the country. Dahlerup suggested a point of at least 30%. Moreover, she noted that a minimum representation of women in politics, a “critical mass”, does not necessarily mean that women will be represented substantially; this, she says, “depends on many factors such as gender identity, political affiliation and the legislative role of women”.³⁷⁰ Thus, women in politics also must be empowered and have space to represent issues faced by diverse women.

Immediately after the war, the UNMIK administration responsible for governing Kosovo did not include any women in the initial Joint Interim Administrative Council created to advise on Kosovo’s governance until elections could be organised. Women felt ostracised from these decision-making processes.³⁷¹ Therefore, after the UN Security Council adopted UNSCR 1325 on 31 October 2000, women rights activists immediately started using the resolution to advocate for their right to participate in Kosovo’s post-war decision-making and peacebuilding processes. Igballe Rogova recalled: “From day one we started using the resolution. We were writing letters to UNMIK, to the UN in New York even saying, ‘You have to implement the resolution’.”³⁷² Their advocacy reached the ears of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and eventually a few women were included in the Provisional Institutions of Self-Governance.³⁷³

On 7-9 June 2000, the “Union of Kosovar Women” organised a conference entitled, “Women for Albanian Women”³⁷⁴, uniting women in politics and civil society to advocate for the quota. Igballe Rogova recalled:

We knew from the past experiences of the UN that they tended to bring leaders of the conflict as the main political leaders after the conflict. They continued to do the same thing in Kosovo, so we, together with women in politics, pushed for the quota. We were supported and criticised, but ... if we didn’t have a quota, women would never come even close to the parliament.³⁷⁵

Edita Tahiri similarly recalled:

In this conference, we, women in politics and women from civil society agreed on the need for a quota. Our cooperation convinced the then head of UNMIK, [SRSG] Kushner, but also the [political] leaders [Ibrahim] Rugova and [Hashim] Thaçi, to approve the 30% quota for the first local elections in 2000.³⁷⁶

Women’s rights activists observed that there have been attempts to give credit to international actors for establishing the quota, but that it was mainly a result of the initiative and pressure coming from women’s rights activists in civil society and politics.³⁷⁷ Their efforts succeeded, and the first municipal elections involved a 30% quota for women’s participation on political party lists. However, the way in which this open list electoral system functioned, in which voters chose individual candidates without assurances that a quota of women would enter the assemblies, contributed to women holding only 8% of the seats in municipal assemblies.³⁷⁸

³⁶⁹ Dahlerup, D., *The Story of the Theory of Critical Mass. Politics & Gender*, 2006, p. 494. For example, she mentions the example of New Zealand, where “many women-friendly policies were passed almost 20 years after women first occupied 15% of the seats in the national legislature” (p. 496).

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 509.

³⁷¹ KWN, *1325 Facts & Fables*, 2011.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁷³ For a full description of events, see KWN, *1325 Facts & Fables*, pp. 20-21.

³⁷⁴ KGSC, *History is Herstory Too*, p. 192.

³⁷⁵ KWN interview, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

³⁷⁶ KWN interview, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

³⁷⁷ KWN interviews, 2020

³⁷⁸ KGSC, *History is Herstory Too*, p. 192.

This issue was addressed with the first general elections in 2001, which established the Assembly of Kosovo; it involved both a quota and a closed list electoral system.³⁷⁹ In a closed list electoral system, people vote for a political party rather than individual candidates, and political parties select candidates rather than people.³⁸⁰ CSOs, however, felt that a closed list system undermined the extent to which voters could hold individual MPs accountable for their work.³⁸¹ Therefore, prior to the second general elections in 2004, they advocated to the OSCE for this among other electoral system changes. OSCE was responsible under UNMIK for democratisation and organising elections; it had proposed to use a closed-list electoral system in the upcoming elections.³⁸²

Meanwhile, in 2002, women from politics and civil society established the Kosovo Women's Lobby (KWL), to support women's qualitative participation in politics, also demanding an open list system.³⁸³ Amid fervent divisions among the leading political parties, the unique, informal, and unaffiliated nature of this group allowed its members to participate in a number of lobbying efforts that they may not have been able to address within their organisations, institutions, or parties.³⁸⁴ This was particularly true when it came to advocacy for the gender quota, a proposition that several male political party leaders opposed. Later, KWL also would advocate for women's involvement in negotiations regarding Kosovo's political status.³⁸⁵

Considering that one of OSCE's reasons for proposing the closed list system was the need for a gender quota, KWL members' voices, as women leaders, were crucial in arguing for a different, more representative electoral system. "After we achieved to have the quota, we, women in politics and civil society, wanted also quality", Edita Tahiri said.³⁸⁶ Thus, women and men representing 300 CSOs throughout Kosovo formed the Coalition for Electoral Law Reform, "Reforma 2004", to advocate for an open list electoral system. In 2003, the Reforma 2004 Coalition presented to the OSCE Election Working Group, their proposal for an open list system.³⁸⁷ As the Coalition's advocacy intensified in March and April 2004, activists in KWN and KWL led Reforma 2004 efforts and were described as the "driving force" behind the campaign.³⁸⁸ This involved writing letters to and meeting with local and international decision-makers, including UN Secretary-General Annan, SRSB Holkeri, and OSCE Mission in Kosovo



© KWN Women hold signs such as "The gender quota is no excuse" during a demonstration outside UNMIK and OSCE headquarters, asking for an open list electoral system.

³⁷⁹ KIPRED, *Reforming the Electoral System of Kosovo*, 2005.

³⁸⁰ Central Election Commission, *Election in Kosovo 2000 - 2014*, 2017, p. 12.

³⁸¹ Farnsworth, N., "Kosovo: Pressure Grows for Reform", Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 2005.

³⁸² KIPRED, *Reforming the Electoral System of Kosovo*, 2005, p. 8.

³⁸³ KWN interview with Edita Tahiri, 2020.

³⁸⁴ KGSC, *History is Herstory Too*, p. 195.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ KWN interview with Edita Tahiri, 2020.

³⁸⁷ KGSC, *History is Herstory Too*, p. 199.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

head Paschal Fieschi, as well as a media campaign. Moreover, activists organised peaceful demonstrations in five regions where people called for an open list electoral system.

In response, the OSCE stated that they lacked time to reorganise the election system. They also argued that people could be confused on how to fill out open list ballots. Although women activists had lobbied for an open list electoral system since 2002, the system would not change to an open list system inclusive of a 30% quota until the general elections in 2007.³⁸⁹ Nevertheless, women activists contributed to bringing the issue of electoral law reform to the forefront of political discussions in Kosovo early on, as well as helped voters understand that an open list system would enable them hold elected representatives more accountable.³⁹⁰ This arguably created an enabling environment for the eventual adoption of the open list electoral system.

In the months leading up to the 2004 elections, KWN led two campaigns to bring women's voices into discussions. The first, in cooperation with the OSCE Democratisation Department, was "Women Propose", which collected and promoted women's ideas for political parties' electoral platforms for the 2004 elections. Organising meetings across Kosovo, KWN brought together ethnically diverse women from politics and civil society to deliberate on women's priorities.³⁹¹ Second, KWN led a campaign entitled "Political Parties Work for Women" in cooperation with OSCE. It introduced women candidates from all political parties to men and women voters prior to the fall 2004 elections. Through the campaign, Turkish, Roma, and other minority parties also promoted their platforms to voters in their own language, while KWN translated.³⁹² Both campaigns received media coverage, especially from RTV21, so debates between voters and women candidates reached a broad audience. Violeta Selimi, the Campaign Coordinator, later recalled to KGSC: "We wanted to promote women candidates and to show women in Kosovo that not only men work in the assembly."³⁹³

A third effort to increase women's participation in politics was "Women Can Do It", named after the Norwegian Labour Party Women's Movement's motto in the 1980s. The Gender Training and Research Centre, Circle of Serbian Sisters, and Kosovar Women's Coalition led this effort, which aimed to provide women with the skills and support needed for them to participate in politics and represent women's priorities.³⁹⁴ During seminars, diverse women learned about gender concepts, politics, local and international legislation, public speaking, debate, moderation, and interacting with media.³⁹⁵

After the second elections, in 2005 women MPs established the Women's Caucus, an informal group in the Assembly of Kosovo.³⁹⁶ It joined women from different political parties and of diverse ethnicities in advocating on issues that they agreed were in women's interests. For instance, in 2011, its members protested and successfully blocked a voting session in the Assembly because their perspectives as women were not included in discussions. They tried to influence processes by participating as observers in committees where no women were engaged officially.³⁹⁷ Thus, through their lobbying, the Women's Caucus has helped to improve women's representation in decision-making. Under this same dynamic, some Women's Assembly Groups and women's informal groups also have been established in municipalities.³⁹⁸

WCOSOs, particularly KWN and its members, have continued their work to empower more women to enter politics, as well as to strengthen the position of women already in politics. In 2014, KWN established the Kosovo Lobby for Gender Equality, which united WCOSOs and women in politics in several municipalities in advo-

³⁸⁹ See the table at Central Election Commission, *Election in Kosovo 2000 - 2014*, 2017, p. 16.

³⁹⁰ KGSC, *History is Herstory Too*, p. 200.

³⁹¹ KGSC, *History is Herstory Too*.

³⁹² *Ibid.* p. 201.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 202.

³⁹⁵ For more, see KGSC, *History is Herstory Too*, p. 202.

³⁹⁶ KWN, *1325 Facts & Fables*, 2011, pp. 62-63.

³⁹⁷ UNDP, *Strengthening Women's Political Participation. An analysis of the impact of women's parliamentary networks in Europe and Central Asia*, 2016, p. 13.

³⁹⁸ OSCE, *A comparative study of structures for women MPs in the OSCE region*, 2013, pp. 35-36.

cating for issues of joint concern. A key purpose and attribute of the Lobby is its aim to build unity and solidarity among diverse women, across political party, ethnic, age, and other differences. The Lobby brings diverse women together towards achieving shared aims. At least twice per year Lobby members from throughout Kosovo meet to discuss their advocacy strategies, share experiences, and compile new strategies, learning from each other. KWN then supports Lobby members in achieving their advocacy aims at the municipal level. Taken together, Lobby groups have achieved hundreds of changes towards gender equality at the municipal level.³⁹⁹ Moreover, through individualised mentoring and support, the Lobby has empowered many women, including young women, to become political active locally; several later ran for positions as MPs.

In 2018, Lobby members agreed that they wanted to expand their efforts and collaborate more with women MPs towards shared aims. Thus, the Coalition for Equality was established, uniting WCSOs and women politicians at all levels in strategizing to further women's engagement in politics as well as to achieve common aims, across party and ethnic lines.⁴⁰⁰ Thus, KWN has sought to empower women to enter politics through the Lobby, Coalition, their meetings, networking, empowerment, and individualised, tailored mentoring of women politicians in overcoming various challenges faced from political party leaders and media, among others.⁴⁰¹ KWN's empowerment of women's participation in decision-making processes also took place through grants made to diverse women's rights groups via the Kosovo Women's Fund. Almost all Kosovo Women's Fund grants have included a component for furthering women's participation in politics and decision-making, through which WCSOs have engaged 4,510 diverse women and girls in political processes since 2012, some for the first time.

Also since 2012, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has organised its annual "Week of Women", supported by USAID. The initiative began as a response to women's low engagement in political processes. The large event gathers a wide range of prominent women, young women, and men from politics, civil society, and academia, among other specialists, from Kosovo and abroad to discuss different themes each year.⁴⁰² Prominent women politicians speak, empowering other women, particularly young women, to engage, as illustrated by Box I. As a follow-up to the Week of Women, NDI hosts a six-month Women's Leadership Academy during which women attend skills-building and networking activities. According to NDI, this supports participants to "create sustainable coalitions to advance issues of common interest to them and their communities".⁴⁰³ In 2018, for the first time women participated from all ethnic groups living in Kosovo.⁴⁰⁴

Box 3. Excerpt from Vjosa Osmani's Speech at NDI Week of Women 2020

"Throughout your political career you will face with so many insults that you have never imagined you would receive, in order to make you less empowered, in order to stop your voice for which you as young women and women have worked throughout your life. But, keep in mind one thing, if you give up, you are not only giving up for yourself but also for all the young women who come after you and for all the little girls who look at you today and every day with the hope that you will win this war in relation to the misinformation and attacks that are made⁴⁰⁵ precisely to make the voice of women weaker in politics and decision-making."

³⁹⁹ For a few examples, see Table 3 in the [sub-section](#) that follows.

⁴⁰⁰ KWN, "Women Unite: The Coalition for Equality is Established", 2018.

⁴⁰¹ For example, see KWN annual reports, and KWN, "Kosovo Lobby for Gender Equality: An Incentive to Unite Women in Dragash", 2020.

⁴⁰² For more information about the Week of Women, see: <http://www.weekofwomen.org/>.

⁴⁰³ NDI, *Gender (In) Equality in Local Level Decision-making*, 2018, p. 43.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ Vjosa Osmani, speech, Week of Women conference 2020 organized by NDI.

OSCE also has had activities to further women’s participation in politics, both centrally and locally, such as through support to women’s informal groups and caucuses at the municipal level.⁴⁰⁶

Since 2016, KGSC also has led an initiative seeking to encourage young women’s engagement in politics. According to KGSC, the “Young Women Engaged in Political Parties and Political Processes” Action, supported by the EU, has “promoted the full implementation of Gender Equality Law and Anti-Discrimination of Women through improving their participation in politics and decision-making positions in public institutions”.⁴⁰⁷

In 2017, UNMIK hosted the first UN Youth Assembly in Kosovo, where the recommendations of 140 diverse young people contributed to establishing the Kosovo Roadmap on Youth, Peace and Security.⁴⁰⁸ In 2020, the main conclusions were presented to the UN Security Council via a virtual meeting, in which two young women from Kosovo shared their views and experiences on peacebuilding and resilience.

Since 2019, KWN has partnered with Ruka Ruci and the Organization of Persons with Muscular Dystrophy of Kosovo in the “Strengthening Women’s Participation in Politics” Action, supported by the EU, towards empowering women, particularly ethnic minority women and women with different abilities, to participate in politics. KWN members orchestrated an extensive outreach campaign just before the 2019 elections with street and door-to-door canvassing, as well as a media campaign, to convince voters to vote for women. KWN and the EU also have collaborated to support women’s engagement in politics in other ways. Starting in 2019, the EU Special Representative in Kosovo supported a women in leadership program that provided training and mentoring for diverse women.⁴⁰⁹



During the 2019 election campaign, KWN activists canvassed streets throughout Kosovo, encouraging voters, “No matter which political party list you choose, vote for more women in parliament”.

The Forum for Leadership and Diplomacy also held an Academy of Leadership in 2020, supported by GIZ Kosovo, through which 40 women, including young women, were empowered to engage in decision-making processes; this included skills-building in multi-ethnic cooperation and nonviolence.⁴¹⁰

All of these efforts began to show results following the 2019 elections. As of 2015, the new Law on

⁴⁰⁶ OSCE, “Mission’s activities and programmatic priorities on gender equality”, 2018. See also the [OSCE website](#). See also, OSCE, “OSCE Mission in Kosovo promotes empowerment of women in political decision making”, 2012.

⁴⁰⁷ KGSC, “Young Women Engaged in Political Parties and Political Processes”.

⁴⁰⁸ UNMIK, [Kosovo Roadmap on Youth, Peace and Security](#), 2017.

⁴⁰⁹ KWN communication with EU, 2020.

⁴¹⁰ UN Kosovo Team, “[Overcoming Barriers to Empowering Women in Public Sphere](#)”, 2020.

Gender Equality (LGE) stated that gender equality involved equal participation of women and men in all levels of government, defined as 50% participation of each gender. However, Kosovo's two electoral laws include a quota for 30% participation of each gender on political parties' electoral lists. In the general elections of 2019 (the seventh legislature), political parties followed the electoral laws and not the LGE. This occurred even amid strong encouragement from AGE and the Ombudsperson Institution to implement the LGE by including 50% participation of each gender on party lists.⁴¹¹ As political parties disregarded the LGE, 39 (33%) of the 120 elected MPs were women.

As discussed, women's underrepresentation in the Assembly can undermine the extent to which diverse women's priorities are considered in governmental laws, policies, and programmes.⁴¹² As a man participating in the research commented:

Where there are more women it is different, but they are very few in quantity. For example, there are 39 in the Assembly currently, but when they are distributed in the committees, they usually are less visible as they are fewer in number. For example, parties usually appoint strong men as chairmen of the committees. But it is another matter if they would be represented equally in the committee...⁴¹³

In this sense, major improvements occurred in the seventh legislature as women led eight of 17 committees.⁴¹⁴ Moreover, the Committee on Security and Defence Affairs was led by a woman, Fatmire Kollçaku from Vetëvendosje.⁴¹⁵ In 2017, no committee was chaired by a woman, though women led three committees in 2010 and one in 2013. This shows slight improvement over time in women's leadership within parliamentary committees.

While the quota may help more women get a seat at the table, it does not guarantee quality representation of issues affecting diverse women or that women will take efforts to further gender equality, as Dahlerup observed.⁴¹⁶ In this context, the Acting President of Kosovo, Vjosa Osmani, said in 2020:

We as women have to understand that all of us having these seats in decision making is not enough. It is not about just being present. It is about making sure that our voice is heard, so we are not just a number somewhere. It is very important that we use that opportunity to resolve the problems that our citizens are dealing with. And I think women in Kosovo, in the Parliament and elsewhere and in the office of the President are showing exactly that, that we bring quality, we resolve problems, we contribute to resolving issues that deal with everyday life of the citizens in much higher quality than many other men in politics. This needs to be recognised and we need to say it out loud, because only this way we build the path for other women that will come to leadership positions in the future and do extraordinary work.⁴¹⁷

Evidence suggests that women first must "be seen" in political arenas so that they can "prove" themselves as leaders. Once they have their seat in politics, women must demonstrate their leadership, enabling them to be re-elected.

⁴¹¹ AGE, website, "[The Law on Gender Equality shall be adhered to in terms of equal representation of 50% during the 6 October 2019 parliamentary elections](#)"; and Klan Kosova, "[Ombudsperson calls for gender equality in 6 October elections](#)" [Albanian], 2019.

⁴¹² See the introduction to this [sub-section](#).

⁴¹³ KWN interview with a man activist, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁴¹⁴ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, "[Parliamentary Committees](#)", accessed 2020.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, "[Committee on Security and Defense Affairs](#)", accessed 2020.

⁴¹⁶ See the introduction to this [sub-section](#).

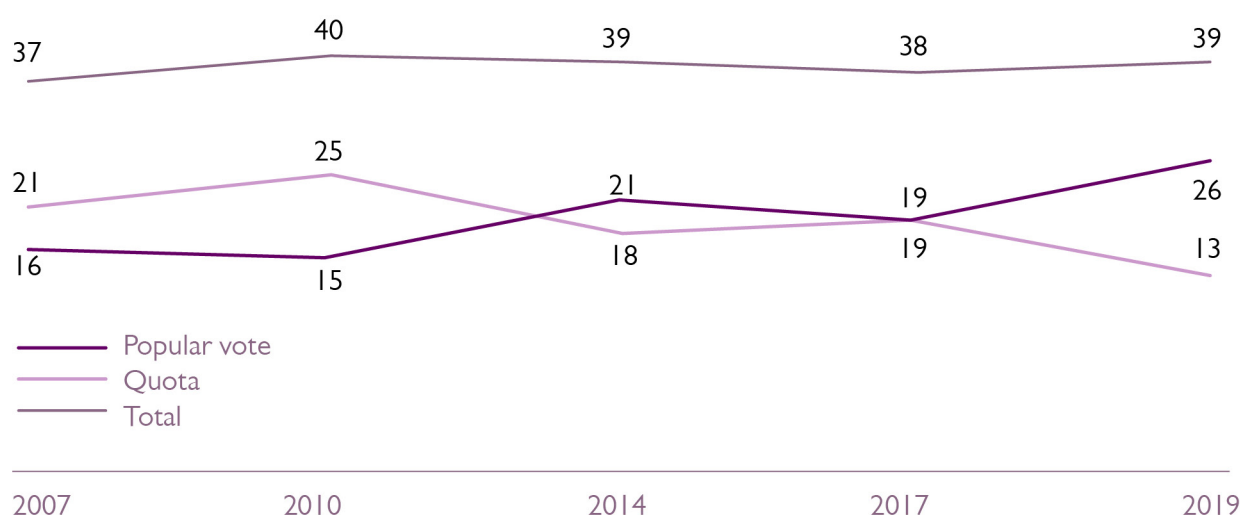
⁴¹⁷ Vjosa Osmani, Speech, NDI, "Week of Women Conference 2020".

Table 1. Women Politicians Initially Elected with Quota and Later by Popular Vote

Politician	Party	Quota	Popular Vote
Donika Kadaj-Bujupi	AAK	2007	2010
Jelena Bontic	SL	2010	2014
Duda Balje	VAKAT	2010	2014
Albulena Haxhiu	VV	2010	2014
Time Kadrijaj	AAK	2010	2014
Duda Balje	VAKAT	2010	2014
Sala Berisha Shala	PDK	2010	2014
Jasmina Zivković	SL	2010	2014
Teuta Haxhiu	AAK	2010	2017
Ganimete Musliu	PDK	2010	2017
Doruntinë Maloku Kastrati	LDK	2014	2019
Besa Baftija	VV	2014	2017
Saranda Bogujevci	VV	2017	2019
Fitore Pacolli Dalipi	VV	2017	2019

Thus, according to NDI, the quota has contributed to a minimum representation of women in the Assembly of Kosovo, but also created a space in which women can become “public role models” and shift public opinion on women’s role in politics.⁴¹⁸ Women’s rights activists similarly stated that the quota has brought women’s faces into the public eye and given women a chance to show their ability to lead, which probably would not have happened without the quota.⁴¹⁹ Indeed, 13 women who initially received seats thanks to the quota were later elected by popular vote (see Table 1). Their election may not have been possible without the quota. The quota enabled them to gain public prominence, so that they could be elected by popular vote. In the most recent general election of 2019, 26 of 39 women MPs were elected without a quota, more than ever before, illustrating growing public support for individual women politicians (see Graph 2).⁴²⁰

Graph 2. Number of women with seats due to the popular vote and to the quota



⁴¹⁸ NDI, *Kosovo: Overcoming Barriers to Women’s Political Participation*, 2015, p. 8.

⁴¹⁹ KGSC, *History is Herstory Too*, pp. 198-199.

⁴²⁰ From the data of Central Election Commission, at: [Elections for the Assembly of Kosovo: final results](#), 2019. See also, AGE, *Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024*, p. 47.

Altogether, through the aforementioned efforts to include a gender quota with an open list electoral system, engage voters, voice women's priorities related to political party platforms, and empower women to enter politics, particularly young women, WCSOs and women's rights activists in civil society and politics made contributions to positioning women so they could make women's voices heard in post-war decision-making processes, including related to peace and security.

Establishing Legislation and Gender Equality Mechanisms

WCSOs and women's rights activists in politics and civil society also have advocated for the establishment of several laws, policies, and gender equality mechanisms in Kosovo. The term "gender equality mechanisms" refers to legislation, institutions, official posts, offices, commissions, and other government bodies established to foster equal rights and to institutionalise gender equality in Kosovo.⁴²¹ One particularly inclusive and important effort was establishing the first National Action Plan for the Achievement of Gender Equality in 2003, developed by a diverse array of women of all ages from politics, civil society, government, media, and businesses, supported by UNIFEM.⁴²² After two years of committed, voluntary work, the Assembly of Kosovo adopted the first Plan in 2004.⁴²³ The inclusive process and adoption of this Plan led to numerous other accomplishments, many related to implementing objectives within the Plan.

As a result, the Inter-ministerial Group for Achieving Gender Equality and gender committees were formed and used the Plan to inform their work. The OSCE Democratisation Department, many municipal governments, and the Prime Minister's Office for Good Governance, Human Rights, Equal Opportunities, and Gender Issues all used the Plan as a basis for establishing their own strategies.⁴²⁴ Moreover, a recommendation within the Plan led to the creation of the first LGE and several institutional mechanisms with the mandate to further gender equality in Kosovo.⁴²⁵ Gender equality mechanisms included municipal gender equality officers; municipal gender equality committees; the Office for Gender Equality within the Prime Minister's Office (later AGE); the Sub-Committee for Gender Equality within the Committee for Judicial, Legislative Matters, and Constitutional Framework in the Kosovo Assembly; the Inter-ministerial Group for Achieving Gender Equality; Gender Officers or Focal Points in the ministries; and the Gender Unit within Ombudsperson Institution.⁴²⁶ Igballe Rogova recalled:

We fought hard to establish AGE, which was first called the Office for Gender Equality, and to put it where it belongs, at the highest governmental level. In the beginning, there were intentions to put it in the Ministry of Public Administration. However, due to the continuous advocacy of women in civil society and women in politics, we succeeded in placing AGE at the highest decision-making level, within the Office of the Prime Minister, so that it could impact the work of other ministries as well. There were also men involved in these efforts, like Besim Kajtazi and Behar Selimi, among others.⁴²⁷

Thus, diverse women and men pushed for the establishment of AGE in the Office of the Prime Minister, at the highest decision-making level, as a crucial institutional mechanism for gender equality in Kosovo.⁴²⁸

The Law on Gender Equality (LGE) was adopted in 2004, inclusive of AGE's mandate, and AGE was es-

⁴²¹ KWN interviews with activists and representatives of WCSOs, 2020.

⁴²² KWN interview with Flora Macula, 2020.

⁴²³ KGSC, *History is Herstory Too*, p. 194.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ KWN interview, 2020.

⁴²⁸ KWN interview, 2020, and KWN, *1325 Facts and Fables*, pp. 149-150.

tablished in 2005. Since then, AGE has partnered with women’s rights activists and WCSOs, among other actors, towards achieving gender equality and furthering human security in a variety of ways. In addition to the aforementioned actions AGE has taken to address gender-based violence, in 2014 AGE led the drafting of the Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security in Kosovo.⁴²⁹ AGE also published a report on the participation, roles, and positions of women in Kosovo institutions, supported by UN Women and UNDP.⁴³⁰ In it, they identified key obstacles and provided recommendations for enhancing women’s participation in decision-making.

Later, AGE led the process of amending LGE to enhance it, in close cooperation with WCSOs and other actors; this included redefining gender equality from 40% in the first LGE to 50% representation of each gender in the 2015 LGE, among other important revisions. AGE also led consultative processes towards establishing two, respective programs and action plans for gender equality as per the requirements of the LGE.⁴³¹

Women in civil society and women politicians also provided expertise to inform several important laws, programs, and policies towards enhancing women’s security and wellbeing.⁴³² As Edi Gusia, AGE Chief Executive Officer summarised, “As a result of all this organising, the first steps have been taken towards drafting laws; creating mechanisms towards gender equality; all the way up to the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, which, for the first time, includes CEDAW”, the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.⁴³³ Women rights activists and WCSOs were vital to informing all of these processes, laws, and mechanisms, which, directly or indirectly, have served to establish the legal and institutional basis for furthering peace and security in Kosovo. Moreover, they supported several other laws and policies that relate to peace and security not enlisted here.

Examples of Women Politicians Furthering Peace and Security

The list of women in politics who have contributed to peace and security after the war is long and would require an additional piece of research focused solely on this. Nevertheless, this sub-section presents a few examples of notable contributions of women politicians to peace and security in Kosovo. Table 2 provides a non-exhaustive list of a few women politicians’ contributions at the Kosovo level (in alphabetical order by name). Table 3 includes examples of women’s contributions at the municipal level.

Table 2. Examples of Women in Politics’ Contributions to Peace and Security
AGE and its civil servant staff members contributed to a myriad policies and programs towards peace and security, particularly for women. ⁴³⁴
In 2012-2013, 40 women MPs of different ethnic groups and political parties advocated successfully for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to implement LGE and UNSCR 1325, given women’s underrepresentation in diplomatic missions; as of 2020, women comprised 40% of Kosovo’s career diplomats and ambassadors, who are positioned to engage in peace and security processes related to foreign affairs. ⁴³⁵
Former MP Aida Derguti initially pushed for and built coalitions for supporting women survivors of sexual violence during the war and for including the Istanbul Convention in Kosovo’s Constitution.

⁴²⁹ Government of Kosovo, AGE, Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 ‘Women, Peace and Security’ in Kosovo 2013-2015’, 2014.

⁴³⁰ AGE, Research report, [Participation, the role and position of women in central and local institutions and political parties in Kosovo](#), 2014.

⁴³¹ Government of the Republic of Kosovo, “[Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2008-2013](#)”; “[Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024](#)”, 2020.

⁴³² For a partial list of laws to which WCSOs have contributed, see KWN [annual reports, strategies](#), and KWN, *Where’s the Money for Women’s Rights? Funding Trends*, 2020, p. 26.

⁴³³ KWN interview, 2020.

⁴³⁴ See AGE, website.

⁴³⁵ Osmani prepared the legal argumentation sent to then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel, and other leaders. Afterward, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo agreed to increase women’s representation (KWN interview with Vjosa Osmani, 2020).

President Atifete Jahjaga championed the cause of securing recognition and support for women and men who suffered sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. By presidential decree and in close cooperation with women's rights groups, Jahjaga established the National Council for Survivors of Sexual Violence during the War, which contributed to the eventual adoption of the law recognising and allocating state benefits for survivors. In close cooperation with experienced WCSOs, she also led the establishment of the National Commission for Verification and Recognition of the Status of the Victims of the Sexual Violence during Wartime, comprised of carefully selected experts who use a sensitive approach and process in reviewing applications for state benefits for survivors.

As a Chief Negotiator, Edita Tahiri signed the first technical agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. She is among few women in the world who have signed a peace agreement and the first in the Balkans. As a member and leader of RWL-SEE, she contributed to peace and security in the region.

Minister of Economy Hykmete Bajrami ensured allocation of state resources to AGE for supporting women amid the COVID-19 pandemic, such as through funding to crucial day care centres.

MP Mimoza Kusari-Lila contributed to economic empowerment of women, among others. She pushed for a quota of 40% women's participation in joint stock companies' Board of Directors⁴³⁶ and supported forthcoming amendments to the Labour Law related to maternity and paternity leave provisions.

MP Saranda Bogujevci also advocated for survivors of sexual violence, return of missing persons, and justice for victims of war. She entered a proposal to consider 14 April as a Remembrance Day for survivors of war rape.

MP Teuta Saraçini mobilised the Women's Caucus and fundraised internationally to purchase equipment for making breast cancer exams more available, contributing to women's health (human security).

As an MP, Vjosa Osmani supported recognition of sexual violence victims, attention to femicide, and address of gender-based violence.⁴³⁷ As Speaker of the Assembly, she continued raising the issue of justice for victims of the war in Kosovo.⁴³⁸ She continued what MP Aida Derguti initiated, to include the Istanbul Convention in the Constitution. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and Kosovo's 2020 political crisis, she pushed for parties to unite to meet the needs of people and to adopt the Law on Economic Recovery, towards human security.⁴³⁹ As Acting President, she has been vocal about recognising crimes committed in Kosovo during the war,⁴⁴⁰ emphasising in meetings in Kosovo and abroad that the Western Balkans "will move forward when there is justice, because justice is a precondition for peace and reconciliation".⁴⁴¹

As the Kosovo Ambassador to the U.S., Vlora Çitaku raised in UN Security Council meetings, and beyond, the issue of war-crimes committed by Serbia, including sexual violence, calling for truth and justice. As Minister of European Integration, she supported survivors of sexual violence and was vocal regarding the injustices they faced.

⁴³⁶ [Law on Business Organizations](#), 2018, p. 35.

⁴³⁷ Vjosa Osmani [speech](#), 2017.

⁴³⁸ Vjosa Osmani, "[Osmani: No Lasting Peace without Justice for Victims](#)", Telegrafi, 2020.

⁴³⁹ Kallxo.com, "The Draft Law on Economic Recovery has been adopted after six failed attempts" (in Albanian), 2020.

⁴⁴⁰ Office of the President of Kosovo, "The speech of the Acting President Vjosa Osmani at the Albanian Parliament", 2020.

⁴⁴¹ Statement during meeting with David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament, Brussels, 12 January 2021, covered by Kosovo media.

Table 3. Examples of Women in Politics' Contributions to Peace and Security at the Municipal level

<p>The Kosovo Lobby for Gender Equality in Dragash/Dragaš advocated successfully to re-vitalise day care centres, towards enabling women to work; for more participatory and gender-responsive budgeting; and for municipal investments in rural women's economic security, in collaboration with local businesses.⁴⁴²</p>
<p>In Malishevë/Mališevo, they advocated for the municipality to fund health services for women and for amending subsidy policies for agriculture and scholarships for students.⁴⁴³</p>
<p>In Gillogoc/Glogovac, they advocated for addressing gender-based violence that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, women's involvement in businesses and politics, reproductive health awareness, and gender equality.⁴⁴⁴</p>
<p>In Gjakovë/Đakovica, they advocated for mental healthcare during the pandemic and for sexual harassment awareness.⁴⁴⁵</p>
<p>In Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, they advocated for shelter for women, children, and people with different abilities; and, successfully, for the Directorate of Agriculture and Economic Development to allocate 80% of subsidies to women.⁴⁴⁶</p>
<p>In Prishtinë/Priština, they advocated for women's involvement in decision-making positions, the representation of people with different abilities, implementation of the Law on Gender Equality, and raised awareness about trafficking.⁴⁴⁷</p>
<p>In Shtime/Štimlje, they advocated for a local strategy on domestic violence,⁴⁴⁸ and tax relief for women opening new businesses.⁴⁴⁹</p>
<p>In Istog/Istok, they advocated for women's employment, self-employment,⁴⁵⁰ including rural women,⁴⁵¹ and inheritance rights.⁴⁵²</p>
<p>In Viti/Vitina, they advocated for women's economic empowerment and women's involvement in local councils.⁴⁵³ In 2019, the municipality approved the Strategy against Domestic Violence and the Action Plan 2019-2023. The also advocated for harmonization of municipal regulations with the Law on Gender Equality, including establishing affirmative measures, exemption from municipal taxes for women entrepreneurs, farmers, single mothers, and their children under age 18, exemption from healthcare fees for domestic violence and trafficking victims, and affirmative measures for scholarships for students. Now, the Chair of the Council of Viti/Vitina is a woman.⁴⁵⁴</p>
<p>In Mamushë/Mamuša/Mamuša, they supported women in forming businesses and raised awareness about domestic violence.⁴⁵⁵</p>

⁴⁴² KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2019, p. 109.

⁴⁴³ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2017, p. 141.

⁴⁴⁴ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2019, p. 148.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁴⁴⁶ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2018, p. 102.

⁴⁴⁷ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2019, p. 111.

⁴⁴⁸ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2020 (forthcoming), p. 128.

⁴⁴⁹ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2017, p. 140.

⁴⁵⁰ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2019, p. 112.

⁴⁵¹ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2018, p. 103.

⁴⁵² KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2017, p. 137.

⁴⁵³ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2020 (forthcoming), p. 129.

⁴⁵⁴ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2019, p. 110.

⁴⁵⁵ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2020 (forthcoming), p. 131.

In Kllokot/Klokot, they advocated for women's inheritance and property rights and raised awareness about health issues during the pandemic. ⁴⁵⁶
In Suharekë/Suva Reka, they raised awareness about the importance of building children's daycare centres, ⁴⁵⁷ and advocated to include accessibility ramps in public spaces for mothers with children and people in wheelchairs in their municipal budget planning. ⁴⁵⁸
In Prizren, they advocated to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions, appealing for at least 30% representation of women in municipal directorates. ⁴⁵⁹
In Deçan/Deçane, they raised awareness about women's labour rights. ⁴⁶⁰
In Pejë/Peć, they advocated for women's rights and gender equality. ⁴⁶¹ They also raised awareness among women regarding property and inheritance rights. ⁴⁶²
In Skënderaj/Srbica, they advocated for establishing social housing for persons surviving domestic violence, increasing women's employment rate, and helping women in agriculture. ⁴⁶³ In 2017, the municipality accommodated three women who had suffered domestic violence in social housing. ⁴⁶⁴
In Ferizaj/Uroševac, they advocated for quality healthcare services for single mothers. ⁴⁶⁵ In 2018, the municipality also advocated for amending municipal regulations related to the gender gap. ⁴⁶⁶
In Novobërdë/Novo Brdo, they advocated for women's employment. ⁴⁶⁷
In Obiliq/Obilić, there were awareness activities on human rights and women's economic development. ⁴⁶⁸
In Kamenicë/Kamenica, they financially assisted women with cancer. ⁴⁶⁹
In Gjiilan/Gnjilane, they advocated for the Education Department to integrate gender related topics in the curricula and raised awareness about inheritance and property rights. ⁴⁷⁰
In Podujevë/Podujevo, they advocated for the distribution of €100 in maternity-related benefits. ⁴⁷¹

In conclusion, women WCSOs and women activists from politics and civil society, supported by UNIFEM, OSCE, and the EU, among others, have contributed to increasing women's participation in politics through the quota, women's empowerment, capacity-building, networking, support for solidarity among women, and advocacy for important laws, policies, and mechanisms towards gender equality. A few men in key positions have supported their efforts. Their work has contributed to increasing women's participation in politics and decision-making in Kosovo. Women in politics, often in collaboration with WCSOs, have used politics as a platform for furthering

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2018, p. 105.

⁴⁵⁹ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2019, p. 108.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴⁶¹ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2019, p. 109.

⁴⁶² KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2017, p. 141.

⁴⁶³ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2019, p. 110.

⁴⁶⁴ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2017, p. 143.

⁴⁶⁵ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2019, p. 114.

⁴⁶⁶ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2018, p. 105.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 104.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 105.

⁴⁶⁹ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2017, p. 137.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 136.

⁴⁷¹ KWN, [Annual Report](#), 2019, p. 112.

peace and security for women in Kosovo, particularly related to supporting women who suffered sexual violence during the war, addressing gender-based violence, improving women's economic security, and furthering women's access to healthcare, among other areas.



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On 8 March 2006, women's rights activists hang a banner recalling their right to participate in negotiations, as per UNSCR 1325, outside the Assembly and government building in Prishtinë/Priština. It remained there for several months, a constant reminder of women's right to be part of the negotiations.

Women's Contributions to Negotiations and Dialogue, and Their Needs

As elaborated in the [“Introduction”](#), UNSCR 1325 foresees women's participation in peace processes, such as negotiations and dialogue,⁴⁷² particularly given evidence that women's involvement can contribute to the durability of peace. Therefore, this sub-section focuses on women's roles and contributions to peace and security through their engagement in the negotiations and Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia after the war.⁴⁷³ In the end, it summarises findings regarding the main issues that women would like to see discussed during the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue.

In post-war Kosovo, initially no women were engaged in negotiations. The UN Secretary-General appointed Martti Ahtisaari as his Special Envoy in November 2005 to lead discussions surrounding the future status of Kosovo, as envisioned in UNSCR 1244.⁴⁷⁴ After 15 months of UN-sponsored negotiations, the parties could not reach an agreement.⁴⁷⁵ Thus, the Contact Group (France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the

⁴⁷² UNSCR 1325, 31 October 2000.

⁴⁷³ Herein “Dialogue” refers specifically to the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, while dialogue refers to participation in dialogues more generally.

⁴⁷⁴ UNSCR, [“Report of the European Union, United States, Russian Federation Troika on Kosovo”](#), 2007.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

U.S.) decided to undertake another period of negotiations towards reaching an agreement. In these first post-war peace talks, both negotiation teams consisted of men. Serbia was represented by President Boris Tadić, Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica, Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić, and Minister for Kosovo Slobodan Samardžić, while Kosovo was represented by the “Team of Unity” including President Fatmir Sejdiu, Prime Minister Agim Çeku, President of the Assembly Kolë Berisha, Hashim Thaçi, and Veton Surroi.⁴⁷⁶

Following the failure of both governments to include women on their negotiation teams, women from



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Several young women participated in KWN’s demonstration on 8 March 2006, calling for women’s voices to be heard in negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia.



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Women’s rights activists engaged men in advocating for women’s participation in the negotiations.

Kosovo and Serbia took action. “Women did not remain silent”, an activist recalled. “They started asking for resolution 1325 to be implemented, as it provided women with the right to a seat at the negotiations”.⁴⁷⁷ Activists immediately called for women’s participation in the negotiations.⁴⁷⁸ KWN members mobilised, together with other

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ KWN interview with a woman activist, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁴⁷⁸ KWN, *1325 Facts & Fables*, pp. 149-150.

activists, taking to the streets to call for women’s participation. They utilised International Women’s Day, 8 March, to call for the government to engage women in the negotiations. Their signature motto appeared annually in protests in the years that followed: “We don’t want flowers, we want power”.⁴⁷⁹ Moreover, they put forth a concrete proposal regarding which woman should participate in the negotiation team: Edita Tahiri had education and experience in foreign policy and diplomacy, including her previous participation in negotiations at Rambouillet.⁴⁸⁰

“In that period, we didn’t say to young generations ‘Stop there! You have nothing to say!’ Women’s Peace Coalition gave space to all generations to be involved.”

Albanian woman, activist, Prishtinë/Priština

discussing the past was essential to even start speaking about the future. They shared personal stories of war, respecting each other’s experiences and mourning together. Only then could they begin to speak about the future and what they expected to see from the negotiations. They drafted a series of joint statements, sent to political leaders in both countries as well as international mediators, asking that negotiations address issues that women considered priorities.

Meanwhile, women’s rights activists mobilised to make women’s priorities heard in the ongoing negotiations. KWN and Women in Black Network Serbia, a feminist antimilitarist peace organisation, established the Women’s Peace Coalition in 2006.⁴⁸¹ They brought together diverse women from Kosovo and Serbia to discuss key issues affecting them, holding an alternative dialogue during to the ongoing official negotiations between their states. First, activists discussed their experiences of war and their personal needs; for them,



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Women rights activists Igballe Rogova (KWN), Xheraldina Vula-Buçinca (RTV21), Osnat Lubrani (UNIFEM) and Staša Zajović (Women in Black) discuss peace and security in the context of the negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia at a Women’s Peace Coalition meeting in Struga, Macedonia in 2006.

⁴⁷⁹ Kosovo 2.0, “*Three decades of protest: A history of women led activism on March 8*”, 2018.

⁴⁸⁰ KWN, *1325 Facts & Fables*, p. 52.

⁴⁸¹ KWN, “*Women in Black Network Serbia. KWN Form Women’s Peace Coalition*”, 2013.



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Women's rights activists from Kosovo and Serbia call for justice and peace, including replacing funding for militarism with funding in support of human security needs, such as food and medicine, during a demonstration organised by the Women's Peace Coalition in Struga, Macedonia in 2007.

The Women's Peace Coalition met again in 2007, preparing another series of joint statements to inform the negotiations.⁴⁸² The Coalition's first statement addressed the failure of decision-makers from Kosovo and Serbia to include women in the negotiations process. The second statement sought to inform negotiators, as well as people in Kosovo and Serbia, regarding the Coalition's stance on the protection and preservation of cultural heritage, which was, at the time, the issue being discussed by negotiators in Vienna.⁴⁸³ With support from UNIFEM, representatives expressed the Coalition's views during a meeting with Martti Ahtisaari, Special Envoy for the Kosovo Future Status Process.⁴⁸⁴ According to a women's rights activist, Ahtisaari said: "I didn't believe that much in gender equality; I was guided to do so by the women of the region."⁴⁸⁵ Serbian and Albanian women also organised street demonstrations that called for peace and an end to militarism. Symbolically, they emphasised the importance of states' greater attention to human security, by replacing military spending with spending that would better address women and men's human security needs.

RWLSEE also sent joint statements to inform the official negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia, raising issues of importance to women. For example, a joint statement by leading women politicians and WCSOs in the region called for "a Just and Sustainable Settlement for Kosovo" in 2006.⁴⁸⁶ The statements received broad media

⁴⁸² KWN, *Through Women's Solidarity to a Just Peace: A Report Based on the Women's Peace Coalition Second Annual Conference*, Struga, 2007.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ KWN interview with Albanian woman activist, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁴⁸⁶ RWLSEE, "Women's Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice in South East Europe wholeheartedly supports a Just and Sustainable Settlement for Kosovo", Zagreb, 19 July 2006.

coverage. There was no response to the demands made in RWLSEE or Women’s Peace Coalition letters in 2006 or 2007.

In 2011, Atifete Jahjaga became President of Kosovo. Although Jahjaga held one of the highest leadership positions in the country, she said that she was not consulted regarding negotiations with Serbia. “During that time I was consulted to the minimum amount possible”, she recalled. “The message given by them [political leaders responsible for the negotiations] has been, ‘We are here. We know best.’”⁴⁸⁷

Also, in 2011, Edita Tahiri became the Head of the Technical Dialogue with Serbia, often referred to as the “Brussels Dialogue”, a post which lasted until 2017.⁴⁸⁸ Arguably, her pre-existing position in politics, coupled with years of experience in politics and diplomacy, contributed to her ability to secure a seat at the table. WCSOs’ advocacy for her to have this position also may have been a contributing factor.⁴⁸⁹

“We lack women in leadership positions within public institutions. That is why women remain out of the decision-making table.”

Woman politician, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020

The advisory team of Edita Tahiri included 50% (3) women and 50% (3) men. Women also served in the “political part of the Dialogue as coordinators”, Edita Tahiri said. “As per the composition of the group of experts, all I was interested in was having experts of a certain field, and these experts were proposed by ministers of particular ministries. But they brought mainly men, as there is a lack of women in decision-making positions in public institutions”.⁴⁹⁰ Thus, women’s general underrepresentation in politics contributed to their underrepresentation as experts in the Dialogue.

Women’s rights activists expressed concern that the overall process of the Technical Dialogue lacked transparency; thus, people had limited information about the process and its outcomes.⁴⁹¹ The EU Office that mediated the Dialogue was reportedly inaccessible and unwelcoming of journalists; nor did the representatives of the negotiation teams from either country provide much information.⁴⁹² Public media statements made by each government often contradicted.⁴⁹³ As a woman representative of an WCSO in North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica said:

The general population has no idea what they are talking about over there. People know that the talks exist, but they only get partial information from the politicians and media. There are also different interpretations. Belgrade says one thing, Prishtina, another. Brussels, on the other hand, something entirely different. Such confusion creates issues in interethnic relationships among people.⁴⁹⁴

The confusion and poor transparency surrounding the negotiations and dialogue thus undermined this process’ potential to contribute to peace and security, activists said.

⁴⁸⁷ KWN interview with Atifete Jahjaga, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁴⁸⁸ KWN, *1325 Facts & Fables*, p. 52.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ KWN interview, 2020.

⁴⁹¹ Kosovo-Serbia Policy Advocacy Group, “KOSOVO – SERBIA DIALOGUE, Prishtinë/Priština – Belgrade Technical Dialogue Agreements: Perceptions on the Ground Prishtinë/Priština, North Mitrovicë/a, Belgrade”, February 2020. During the conference, an Editor in Chief of a media outlet in Kosovo said that the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia was the most untransparent one observed since he started working as a journalist in the 1990s.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Conference on the Final Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, 18 December 2019, Prishtinë/Priština.

⁴⁹⁴ KWN interview with a Serb women’s rights activist, North Mitrovica, 2020.

Women's Reflections on Negotiations and Dialogue

“What do they even talk about at the Brussels negotiations? I’m asking because what we hear about here is nonsense. They show all kinds of stuff on the news. They make it look like we [Serbs in Kosovo] are chained up here. We live much better than what they show it on the news. But, whenever we go to Serbia, they feel bad for us over there because we are from Kosovo.”

Young Serb Woman, focus group Graçanicë/Gračanica

“Women were part of the negotiation, but not as it was expected. They were not much engaged because they were not invited.”

Albanian woman, activist, Prishtinë/Priština

“Women with disabilities have been most affected during the war, even before. Thus, we also have the right to participate in these processes. Our voice must be raised in these processes. People with disabilities have never complained but their requirements have not been taken into account. If I would be part of the negotiation team, I would ask for justice to be served.”

Young woman with different abilities, Prizren

“Yes, we had Edita Tahiri, but, for example, her role there was really questionable.”

Young Serb woman, journalist, Belgrade

“They should give us a chance to be involved, especially women and women with disabilities, because the most important thing for us is to realise rights to equality ... and participation in all fields.”

Bosnian woman with different abilities, survey response, Prizren

Despite some progress, women's rights activists in Kosovo felt that women remained underrepresented in the Dialogue, in terms of direct participation, public consultation, and the prioritisation of issues discussed (see also Women's Reflections on Negotiations and Dialogue). A WCSO representative said:

We had Edita Tahiri, but ... it's not enough only to have a woman [engaged], but to be able to bring women's issues. We never saw a case where women's organisations were called to be consulted on what topics should be included [such as] sexual violence, reparations, [or] how the agreement would affect women and men.⁴⁹⁵

Related, some research participants felt that Edita Tahiri did not raise issues of importance for women in Kosovo during the Dialogue.

However, the Agenda prepared for the first Dialogue, which officially started on 8 March 2011,⁴⁹⁶ included the issue of finding missing persons and reparation for war damages caused by Serbia, among other technical requirements.⁴⁹⁷ The issue of victims of sexual violence during the war was incorporated into reparations, as detailed later in 2014 in the platform of the Brussels Dialogue.⁴⁹⁸ The Agenda was presented to the EU and at the negotiation table with Serbia. For a point to become part of the Agenda, it had to be accepted by both parties to the negotiation, and Serbia did not accept to discuss certain points, including reparations. The issue of missing people was part of the Dialogue, but only discussed once.⁴⁹⁹

Thus, some research participants observed that the fact that several issues raised by women were not addressed in the Dialogue related to the nature of the Dialogue itself: "For example, from our side, we had Edita Tahiri, but [the Dialogue] was considered at a technical level. At a technical level, it was a bit difficult to include women's interests".⁵⁰⁰ Some respondents said that Edita Tahiri could not raise issues important to women because the Dialogue only involved "technical" issues. They praised her for her expertise, demonstrated in the Dialogue. Similarly,

while some WCSOs expressed frustration that the EU as the mediator did not ensure women's participation and discussion of points important to women, due to the Dialogue format, the EU could not revise the Agenda without both parties' consent.

Some research participants attributed women's underrepresentation in the negotiations and Dialogue not only to Kosovo's political leaders, who did not appoint women to participate, but also to international actors facilitating the Dialogue, who did not or could not ensure that the parties implemented UNSCR 1325. As the quotation illustrates, research participants believed that such failures were due in part to the homogenization of women in traditional gender roles, as mothers and victims and violence, which ignored women's agency and long history of activism. Meanwhile, EU representatives have emphasised that the participants

“Although we had Edita Tahiri, CSOs didn't have any women [representing them] for the Dialogue. They proposed men in Rambouillet. This trend continues today; even international experts are guilty of this. Half of the population has not been involved in the Dialogue. There were only men. There was no political willingness. They [women] are only seen as mothers, but they did as much as men.”

Young, Albanian woman, focus group, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020

⁴⁹⁵ KWN interview with a woman WCSO representative, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁴⁹⁶ Balkans Policy Research Group, *The Brussels Dialogue Between Kosovo and Serbia - Achievements and Challenges*, 2020, p. 12.

⁴⁹⁷ Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, "[Platform of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo on an Inter-State Technical Dialogue between the Republic of Kosovo and Republic of Serbia](#)", Dialogue Agenda. Prishtinë/Priština, 2011, p. 7.

⁴⁹⁸ Cabinet of Deputy Prime Minister Edita Tahiri, "Brussels Dialogue – Topics for Next Phase", Prishtinë/Priština, 29 March 2014, pp. 7 and 16.

⁴⁹⁹ KWN interview with Edita Tahiri, 2020.

⁵⁰⁰ KWN interview with a woman WCSO representative, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

in the Dialogue, like the Agenda, are proposed by the respective governments, and the EU cannot interfere.⁵⁰¹

Research participants observed that one of the main consequences of not including women in the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia was the lack of diverse perspectives in the Dialogue. They mentioned that women's involvement in this process would have contributed to the inclusion of issues important to women, such as sexual violence perpetrated during war or women's shelters. They also said women's engagement would contribute to more sustainable peace, as they are more persistent than men. Research participants of different ethnic groups said women would only sign an agreement they could implement it and thus would follow through. A Serbian woman activist said:

If women sign something, they make sure it is implemented. Rare are the men who are responsible and watch what they are signing. A woman does not sign something she can no longer implement. The results of the Dialogue so far have not improved the life of the citizen. Women would have an effect if they had space.⁵⁰²

Indeed, a review of all agreements made regarding Kosovo since the end of the war, including at the Rambouillet negotiations, suggests none of these agreements included issues that women have raised or considered priorities.

Thus, some women felt disenfranchised and that engaging in the Dialogue was useless. A Serb woman who was part of the preparation team for the Vienna negotiation, commented:

I was part of the ICO's [International Civilian Office] negotiation preparation team. I wanted to be involved because the Serb community boycotted the negotiations. However, I realised that it was all global politics, and those who negotiate are only the marionettes. Therefore, young women didn't miss much by not being involved.⁵⁰³

Feeling that their voices were unheard in the negotiations and Dialogue, women continued to raise issues of importance to them through advocacy letters, press statements, and demonstrations, calling for attention to their priorities.⁵⁰⁴ Key issues included recognition and a public apology for crimes committed; justice for survivors of sexual violence; reparations for civilian property destroyed; and the location of missing persons. The following photographs and captions illustrate some of their efforts.



Women's rights organisations like Mother's Call, supported by KWN and its members, have continuously brought forward the issue of missing persons through various demonstrations, such as this in 2014. They have demanded that governments address the issue of missing persons, as people must deal with the past before they can establish sustainable peace.

⁵⁰¹ Statements made in public meetings in which KWN participated and in letters received from EU officials.

⁵⁰² KWN interview with Serb woman activist, Stanishor/Stanišor, Gjiilan/Gnjilane, 2020.

⁵⁰³ KWN interview, North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, 2020.

⁵⁰⁴ For example, see: KWN, "[Kosovo Women's Lobby letter to Soren Jesen Petersen](#)" to demand women's representation in talks for a peaceful solution, 2005; "[Women's Peace Coalition letter to Martti Ahtisaari](#)" for protection of cultural heritage in the negotiation process, 2006; "[Women's Peace Coalition letter to Martti Ahtisaari](#)" for protection of cultural heritage in the negotiation process, 2006; "[RWLSEE letter to Martti Ahtisaari](#)" on the final status of Kosovo, 2006; "[Women's Peace Coalition letter to Martti Ahtisaari](#)" calling for independence, protection of cultural sites, equal guaranteeing full rights to minority groups, and equal participation of women in the negotiation process, 2007.



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Women's rights activists have continued to bring issues important to women into public space when women were denied access to the official dialogue. Through a public demonstration in 2014, they insist that sustainable peace cannot be realised without acknowledgement of the past and justice for crimes committed.



© KWN

During a massive demonstration in November 2012, women, joined by some men, demanded “Justice and Dignity before Negotiations”. This was accompanied by a letter with their demands for an official apology from Serbia for crimes committed; return of pensions; justice for persons who suffered violence during the war, and moral and economic compensation.

Additionally, MWAHR and Sandglass wrote a joint report summarising women's concerns surrounding the Dialogue, drawing from meetings with women of different ethnicities from Kosovo and Serbia.⁵⁰⁵ Women identified issues, such as: the EU, national, and local officials' weak collaboration with WCSOs; poor access to information about the EU accession process and the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue; hate speech used by politicians on both sides during and after negotiations, which affected public perceptions and interethnic relations; and women's underrepresentation in the Dialogue process.

In conclusion, initially women did not have a seat at the negotiations table in the UN-brokered peace talks. Women activists, WCSOs, and networks thus organised parallel negotiations and raised publicly issues important to women. Following WCSOs' advocacy and based on her own political positioning and experience, from 2011, Edita Tahiri, participated directly as the Chief Negotiator of the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. She had a more gender-balanced team that put forth some of the issues important to women for the Agenda. However, Serbia did not agree to discuss these issues, and the Dialogue focused instead on technical issues. WCSOs and women's rights activists thus continued to raise issues important to women in public spheres, asking for the Dialogue to attend to these issues.

Women's Priorities for the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue

Given that most women were left out of negotiations and the Dialogue, KWN asked diverse women what their priorities would have been, if they had a seat at the table. Drawing from the findings from the KWN online survey, KWN members' phone interviews, face-to-face interviews, and focus groups conducted with women of diverse ages, abilities, and ethnicities across Kosovo, KWN has identified some of the main priorities that women have for the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia. Women said that they would raise the following key issues:

- Ensure the meaningful participation of women in decision-making related to the negotiations and Dialogue, both through participation in the official negotiation teams and through public consultations.
- Engage diverse women, including women with different abilities and young women.
- Address within the Dialogue the needs raised by diverse women during these consultations.
- Request that Serbia recognise publicly and apologise for crimes and violence committed against civilians by the state.
- Ensure the return of missing persons of all ethnicities.
- Prosecute all persons who committed war crimes, including sexual violence perpetrated during the war, thereby ensuring justice.
- Secure compensation and reparations for the destruction of civilians' livelihoods,
- For people in Kosovo, return their pensions.
- Clarify which laws to respect, particularly for Serbs in Kosovo.
- Resolve issues related to freedom of movement, including related to the different type of passports issued for Serbs in Kosovo.
- Ensure protection of all cultural heritage sites, media, and religions, including mosques, monasteries, churches, and graveyards.

In addition, some Albanian women also requested that the Dialogue seek to ensure that Albanians living in Preshevë/Preševo, Medvegjë/Medveđa, and Bujanoci/Bujanovac in Serbia have the same rights as Serbs living in Kosovo. Interviewees tended to state that addressing the above-mentioned issues was the only way to establish a sustainable peace in Kosovo and in the region, including for women.

⁵⁰⁵ Kvinna till Kvinna, "Negotiations between Belgrade and Prishtinë/Priština from women's perspective", 2018

Conclusion

As the findings in this chapter illustrate, women, including young women, have made several contributions to peace and security in Kosovo. During the conflict and war, women contributed to peace and security related to politics, education, healthcare, peace across borders, documentation of human rights abuses, peaceful demonstrations, diplomacy, and organising security for displaced persons and refugees.

After the war, their prior roles and contributions were largely forgotten, as international and local decision-makers, relegated women into traditional gender roles. Nevertheless, women resisted and continued to contribute to peace and security after the war through interethnic peacebuilding, networking, providing for human security, the security sector, and politics. While women have been largely ostracised from negotiations and the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, they have made their voices heard through alternative interethnic dialogues, public demonstrations, official letters, and press releases. Women, including young women, have identified some of their key needs and expectations from the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, summarised here and reflected in the recommendations.

III. Challenges to Involving Women in Peace Processes

Despite the passage of UNSCR 1325 two decades ago, and subsequent resolutions on WPS, women continue to be largely excluded from peace-making and peacebuilding processes. Globally, women have encountered several obstacles to participating in peace processes, including patriarchy, weak political will, poor international accountability, agendas that do not include women's needs, gender-based violence, and state-building processes that lack a gender-sensitive approach or attention to security-related issues.⁵⁰⁶ Structural inequalities that women face in conflict and post-war societies can undermine their participation in public life and therefore peacebuilding processes.⁵⁰⁷ For example, financial insecurities may place women at a disadvantage because they do not have funds to travel to political meetings, have to work instead of participating. Women's lack of participation, in turn, can contribute to further marginalisation and poverty because their priorities and needs are not represented in policy-making processes.⁵⁰⁸

This chapter responds to the sub-research question: what have been the challenges of involving (young) women in peace and security processes, including negotiations and dialogue? The key challenges that emerged from the research as recurring trends are discussed in the four sections that follow: interethnic conflict and threats; international actors initially bolstering gender inequalities; continuation of the *Oda* and poorly democratised political parties; and patriarchy.

Interethnic Conflict and Threats

This section discusses the challenge that interethnic conflict has presented for women's participation in peace and security processes, particularly for Serb women. While Albanian women generally had a history of socially accepted political organising during the 1990s, Serb women tended not to have such experiences engaging politically. Instead, society generally tended to frown upon their political participation, research participants indicated. According to traditional social norms, women's "place" was the private sphere. Such traditional gender norms were interrelated with interethnic conflict in that Serb women were told that it was not "safe" for them to be engaged publicly and that they should remain home, for their own safety and that of their children.⁵⁰⁹ Thus, interethnic conflict intersected with traditional gender norms to undermine Serb women's participation in decision-making or peace processes during the 1990s.

After the war, insecurities continued and, in some instances, worsened. As a Serb women's rights activist recalled:

After '99, women remained in isolation. Serbs lived in the enclaves at the time. There was no access to services, and there was a significant increase in criminal activities. Therefore, women stayed focused on the house and children, as well as on education and health, since there were no such [public] services back then. Men were the ones responsible for politics. Women also didn't have contact with women from other [ethnic] communities. So, they couldn't get involved in peace processes. Even if a woman were offered to go to Priština, she would ask, "Why me first? Why should I be judged for getting involved in peace processes if the politicians didn't make the first step yet?"⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁶ Kvinna till Kvinna, [A Right, Not a Gift](#), pp. 33-36.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 27.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 41.

⁵⁰⁹ KWN interviews, 2020.

⁵¹⁰ KWN interview with a Serb woman, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

Indeed, several examples exist of Serbian women being “judged” publicly when they did attempt to get involved in peace processes. For example, after supporting Kosovo’s declaration of independence in February 2008, women human rights activists like Nataša Kandić, among others, faced threats, including from the Socialist Party of Serbia.⁵¹¹ Serbia’s Ministry of Interior Anti-terrorist police has labelled Women in Black as “anti-Serbian”.⁵¹² Women in Black activists in Serbia have faced ongoing threats,⁵¹³ been called “whores”, found “dead cats hanging on their doorknobs”, and encountered “unknown men with batons and smoke bombs” at the door of their headquarters, according to a *Telegraf* interview.⁵¹⁴ According to Amnesty International’s briefing submitted to the UN Committee against Torture in 2015, social media appeals from right-wing groups called for lynchings, protests, insults, and attacks on Women in Black.⁵¹⁵

In 2020, Serbian online media portals *Prismotra* and *Istraga* published inappropriate, private information about women journalists, stating that they “made films against Serbia”,⁵¹⁶ and “embarrassed Serbia”, alluding to their engagement in a film entitled *Albanians are our Sisters*.⁵¹⁷ Also in 2020, during a trial against him, the *Informator* editor-in-chief Dragan J. Vučićević “attacked” and “insulted” a Youth Initiative for Human Rights activist, Anita Mitić, by stating that she was a “*Šiptar*”⁵¹⁸ whore and was paid by Serb-murderers”.⁵¹⁹

In September 2020, an activist from Sandglass, a women’s rights peace organisation in southern Serbia, that cooperates with Kosovo Albanian women, also experienced violence. A Molotov cocktail was thrown in her front yard. The police could not identify specifically the motive, and it theoretically could have been a random act of violence. However, the activist affected believed that it was likely motivated by the fact that the perpetrator knew who lived there, where she worked, and on what she was working, which involved collaboration with Kosovo Albanians.⁵²⁰

Overall, the Helsinki Committee in Serbia has observed that the topic “Kosovo” creates fear that triggers the creation of “internal enemies”, which socially legitimises humiliation and violence.⁵²¹ Publicized threats, violence, and public shaming of activists who cooperate with Albanians, like the aforementioned incidents, among others, potentially instilled fear in would-be activists and dissuaded Serb women from taking the risk of collaborating with Albanian women towards peace. Some Serb women in Kosovo also faced threats for their cooperation with Albanians.⁵²²

Given the social pressure against collaborating with Kosovo Albanians, particularly immediately after the war, Serb women had to be cautious in how they engaged.⁵²³ In the beginning, they could not collaborate directly with Albanian women’s rights activists. Therefore, Serb women activists in Kosovo tended to focus initially on

⁵¹¹ Amnesty International, “[Calls for calm as Serbs rally](#)”, 2008.

⁵¹² Dragojlo, S., “[Serbian Policeman ‘Inspired Threats’ to Peace Women](#)”, BIRN, 2016. The article cited activist Violeta Djikanović who mentioned that the organisation faced such threats since it was founded in 1993.

⁵¹³ For further information about attacks against Women in Black, see their dossiers. In 2014, KWN sent a letter calling on the Government of Serbia to “immediately publicly condemn the harassment, hate speech, and violence targeting women peace activists (KWN, [Letter of Support for Activists in Serbia](#), 2014).

⁵¹⁴ *Telegraf*, [“WOMEN IN BLACK: They call us whores, they threaten to slaughter us!”] “ŽENE U CRNOM: Nazivaju nas kurvama, prete da će nas zaklati!”, 2014.

⁵¹⁵ Amnesty International, “Serbia: Submission to the UN Committee against Torture”, 2015, pp. 43-45.

⁵¹⁶ Građanske Inicijative, [“Three Freedoms under Magnifying Glass. Review of Cases of Violation of Freedoms of Association, Assembly and Expression in Serbia 16-28 February 2020”] *Tri Slobode Pod Lupom: Prikaz Slučajeva Kršenja Sloboda Udruživanja*. Okupljanja i Izražavanja u Srbiji 16-28. Februar 2020. Godine [in Serbian], cited by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, [Women’s Rights in the Western Balkans](#), 2020, pp. 83-84.

⁵¹⁷ Popović, D., et al., [“Citizens Associations: Narrowing the Space for Action”] “*Udruženje Građana: Sužavanje Prostora za Delovanje*” [in Serbian], Građanske Inicijative, Open Society Foundation, 2020, cited by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, [Women’s Rights in the Western Balkans](#), 2020, pp. 83-84.

⁵¹⁸ “*Šiptar*” is an ethnic slur in the Serbian language that refers to Albanians in a derogatory fashion.

⁵¹⁹ *Direktno*, [“Vučićević told me that I was a Šiptar whore!?”] “[Vučićević mi govorio da sam šiptarska kurva!](#)”, 2 June 2020 [in Serbian], cited by the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, [Women’s Rights in the Western Balkans](#), 2020, p. 84.

⁵²⁰ KWN email correspondence with Snežana Jakovljević from Sandglass, 2021.

⁵²¹ Helsinkiške SVESKE, [“Towards Building a sustainable Kosovo”] “[Ka izgradnji održivog kosovskog društva](#)”, [in Serbian] 2007, p. 27.

⁵²² KWN interviews and observations based on direct experiences with Serb women activists.

⁵²³ KWN interviews with women’s rights activists.

meeting isolated women in different villages, distributing aid, and organising smaller gatherings that could go undetected. Serb women began looking for ways fulfil the basic needs of their families and to support other women and families in their communities, such as with food, shelter, healthcare services, and education. Indeed, similar to the work of Albanian women in the 1990s, the fact that they were women doing “women’s things”, such as distributing humanitarian aid, perhaps made their work unthreatening to potential critics. They tended to keep a low profile and refrained from engaging directly in politics, which, they said, was controlled by men.⁵²⁴

While a few Serb women started building relations with Albanian women, as described previously,⁵²⁵ this was particularly difficult for Serb women activists living in the North, who seem to have faced stronger social pressure against such cooperation. Due to threats from within their own communities, they could not cooperate easily with Albanians. For example, some said they could not become official members of the Kosovo Women’s Network, because of its name, which could be misinterpreted as their recognition of a Kosovo state and lead to threats or violence.⁵²⁶ This was compounded following the “March 2004 events”.⁵²⁷ Afterward, few Serbs were willing to collaborate with Albanians. Remarkably, some brave Serb women did forge alliances, usually when they had support from their families, as discussed in the prior section on interethnic collaboration. For others, healing took time, and it was not until the situation had become more stable that a few more Serb women’s rights organisations began collaborating with Albanians; some from northern Kosovo even became KWN members in 2020.

Another challenge related to interethnic conflict, according to activists, was that initially after the war some UNMIK and OSCE personnel told women not to collaborate with each other, particularly in North and South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.⁵²⁸ As Igballe Rogova recalled:

The staff of Community Building Mitrovica were all young, and they did a lot of things at the local level. After the war, UNMIK and OSCE told them: “You cannot do this!” UNMIK told them, “You cannot work with North Mitrovica.” But they did it because they believed in their work, so they were connecting with young Serbs there. ... organisations were not listening to UNMIK and OSCE, saying “No, this is not your area”. For me that is brave.⁵²⁹

She explained that women’s rights organisations and activists “disobeyed” the recommendations made by UNMIK and OSCE, even if in some cases, as a result of their disobedience, organisations lacked resources or put themselves at risk by travelling without protected vehicles immediately after the war.

During focus groups, young women reflected on the challenges and opportunities for engaging in peacebuilding today. For example, young Serb women said: “We did bad things to them [Albanians], but they also did things to us in the past 20 years”; “I know what my parents told me about the war”; and “I don’t feel safe to take a walk with my family in downtown Priština and to freely speak Serbian.” Young Albanian women, especially those from multi-ethnic regions, said: “They [Serbs] consider us like the enemy; they don’t accept that they were the aggressor”; “If something happens to a Serb everyone is alarmed, but if the same thing happens to an Albanian, no one considers it a big issue.” Although present-day young women did not personally experience war, their perceptions and thus abilities to make peace perhaps were hindered by the values and beliefs they were exposed to at home, via the media, and in their communities.

Young Serb women also observed that violations of their language rights hindered their participation in political processes. “When we go to any ministry in Prishtinë/Priština, all the labels on the doors are only in Albanian. So, I knock on every door to eventually get the right one,” a young woman said. This and other statements

⁵²⁴ KWN interviews with Serb women rights activists.

⁵²⁵ See the section on “[Women’s Contributions to Interethnic Peacebuilding](#)”.

⁵²⁶ KWN participant observation and discussions with Serb women activists.

⁵²⁷ For further information, see the section “[Women’s Contributions to Interethnic Peacebuilding](#)”.

⁵²⁸ KWN conversations with activists.

⁵²⁹ KWN interview, 2020.

indicated that young Serb women did not feel included or have access to political bodies, which dissuaded them from seeking to engage in political processes, including related to peacebuilding.

Nevertheless, during focus groups with young women, a noticeable pattern emerged of their acceptance of diversity and life in a multicultural environment. Such attitudes were expressed through statements like: “We get along when we get together”; “we play sports together in the village”; “we overcame the barriers of being a Serb or Albanian; for me the only barrier is the language”; and “I think we (young women from Serb and Albanian communities) should organize a protest together”. These statements, based on their experiences and opinions, suggest that opportunities exist for interethnic cooperation in peacebuilding, particularly among young women.

In conclusion, social pressure against collaborating with Albanians seems to have discouraged many Serb women from becoming involved in peace processes both before and after the war. Women who did collaborate sometimes faced negative media and social media coverage, which contributed to threats and violence. This potentially dissuaded other Serb women from becoming engaged in peace processes involving collaboration with Albanians. While young women’s perceptions and experiences are reflective of their families and communities, a recurring trend among some young women was their common interests, particularly in engaging more in peace processes.

International Actors Initially Bolstering Gender Inequalities

This section discusses the challenges that women faced in engaging in peace and security processes due to UNMIK’s initial approach to governing Kosovo, through which UNMIK reinforced rather than challenged traditional gender roles. After the war, UNSCR 1244 provided UNMIK with the responsibility for administering Kosovo until its political status could be decided. As a duty-bearer, the UN’s role and obligation included ensuring implementation of UNSCR 1325.

Given that the UN operated UNMIK, women’s rights activists and politicians were optimistic that UNMIK would use its power to enhance women’s role in decision-making processes, including related to peace and security, as per UNSCR 1325.⁵³⁰ “We greeted joyfully the decision that put Kosovo under a UN administration”, Igballe Rogova recalled. Vepror Shehu similarly commented:

When the internationals came, I thought that they would not have the social attitudes and stereotypes we have here about women. I had a lot of hopes and expectations. There were achievements, but the hopes and expectations that I had really were not met.⁵³¹

Activists’ initial hopes quickly dissipated. Instead of supporting women’s engagement in peace processes, Igballe Rogova said that the first UN SRSG Bernard Kouchner “looked at women as objects”.⁵³² In her view, international actors tended to homogenise women solely as victims, ignoring their role as agents of change. Women human rights activist Sevdije Ahmeti similarly recalled: “The international community wanted to say and said that there was no feminist movement here; there was no women’s rights movement here; women were not articulate. We were dumb, illiterate women”.⁵³³ Thus, as Igballe Rogova told KGSC:

Instead of dedicating all our energy to helping women and their families put together lives shattered by war, we expended effort in fighting to be heard and in providing to UNMIK that we knew what was best for us, that women in Kosovo were not just victims waiting to be helped - they could help themselves, as they did

⁵³⁰ KWN interview with Igballe Rogova, 2020; *KWN, 1325 Facts & Fables*, pp. 19-20.

⁵³¹ KWN, *1325 Facts & Fables*, pp. 19-20.

⁵³² More in *1325 Facts & Fables*, pp. 19-20.

⁵³³ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 184.

in the past, and they could be key and effective actors in building their own future.⁵³⁴

Drawing from the example of Kosovo, among other places, Jill Benderly similarly observed that in times of political crisis: “Women are viewed as victims who need rescue and humanitarian aid, not as civil society leaders, peace negotiators, or political decision-makers who can bring strength and experience to the peace table”.⁵³⁵

Women’s rights activists in Kosovo recalled international actors stating often and publicly: “This is a patriarchal society”. Activists felt that such statements not only reinforced patriarchy, but also were used by international actors, including UNMIK representatives, to justify their own choices to side-line women from decision-making processes.⁵³⁶ Activists said that due to such views, UNMIK did not include women in decision-making positions or processes immediately after the war.

When the UNMIK SRSG appointed the Joint Interim Administrative Council to advise him, he hand-picked particular male Albanian political leaders who had been engaged in the conflict, peaceful resistance, and negotiations at Rambouillet: Ibrahim Rugova, President of LDK and the pre-war parallelly elected President of Kosovo; Hashim Thaçi, KLA leader; and Rexhep Qosja, founder and president of the Forum of Albanian Intellectuals.⁵³⁷ Rada Trajković sat on the Council on behalf of the Serb National Council (SNC), but only in an observational role.

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By selecting them and putting them in positions of power, UNMIK further legitimised these men’s positions as political leaders. Participation in this Council, as Kosovo’s first governing body, also provided them with added public visibility, activists said. Without the same amount of political space and visibility, women political leaders had to struggle, more than men, to demonstrate their abilities as political leaders to voters. While UNMIK has undertaken several steps towards furthering gender equality since the immediate post-war period,⁵³⁹ the legacy of this selection of political leaders immediately after the war has had repercussions for women’s leadership in Kosovo today, women activists and politicians said, as the same persons and parties placed in positions of power in 1999 remained in power for nearly two decades. Women and particularly young women have struggled to secure a seat at the table.

In conclusion, the approach of UNMIK immediately after the war in appointing and thus promoting men leaders, and not women leaders, was among the key challenges to women’s participation in peace processes, according to research participants. Although UNMIK’s approach changed with time, the initial appointments made a difference; UNMIK did not give women a seat at the table initially, and this has contributed to their lack of political power even today, interviews suggested.

“It was a tendency of UNMIK at that time, in the name of stability, to talk to specific [male] leaders only because they had influence to keep Kosovo under control. Democracy during that time was sacrificed, and it continues today.”

Albanian woman activist, Prishtinë/Priština

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Benderly, Jill, “A Women’s Place Is at the Peace Table”, SAIS Review, Volume 20, Number 2, Summer-Fall 2000, pp. 79-83. See also [Chapter I](#).

⁵³⁶ KWN, *1325 Facts & Fables*. This book contains additional examples of women not being included in various post-war decision-making processes.

⁵³⁷ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 187. They held these positions before 1999 (Clark, p. 222).

⁵³⁸ KGSC, *History is Herstory too*, p. 187.

⁵³⁹ For several examples, see other sections of this publication and KWN’s *1325 Facts & Fables*, second edition (forthcoming, 2021).

Continuation of the Oda and Poorly Democratised Political Parties

This section discusses the challenges women faced in participating in peace and security processes due to the *Oda* and poor democratisation of political parties. In traditional Albanian culture, a room exists within a house called the “*Oda e Burrave*” or “Men’s Room”. It was a room reserved only for men, save the sporadic scurrying of women in and out of the room to serve tea, coffee, raki, and/or food. In the *Oda*, men discussed the political situation, economy, and other issues. Decisions affecting the lives of their families and communities were taken.⁵⁴⁰

“All we have seen in the government consist of *Oda*-style conversations. Something has to change.”

Albanian woman activist, Prishtinë/Priština

“There are challenges; we are seven women in the party leadership. ... As the minimum is 30%, we still need to aim for more. We need to push from within the party to make them [men] trust women more.”

Albanian woman politician, Prishtinë/Priština

Male-dominated political elites have neither the will nor the interest to increase the number of women in decision-making. The best evidence for this is the electoral lists where women make up only 30% of the list, as much as the minimum defined by law.⁵⁴¹

Although political parties could ensure equal inclusion of women and men, particularly in accordance with the LGE, they have chosen not to do so.

Generally, despite the electoral quota, LGE requirements for equal participation, several efforts, and some progress,⁵⁴² women’s participation in politics in Kosovo has remained minimal in comparison to men’s participation. According to the 2020 European Commission Report on Kosovo, “women remain underrepresented at all levels of participation and decision-making in political parties, electoral administration, and central and local assemblies”.⁵⁴³ Additionally, men have held most senior government leadership positions at both municipal and national levels.⁵⁴⁴

Research participants likened political parties to a continuation of the *Oda*. In the last 20 years, few, if any, women have sat among the leadership of Kosovo’s main political parties. The party leadership tends to take key decisions regarding the party’s approach to various policy issues. Then, these decisions are carried over and into Kosovo politics, where political parties hold significant weight. With few women’s views represented, parties have tended to focus on issues that are priorities for men, but not necessarily for women. Further, with women largely ostracised from decision-making within political parties, they have had little voice related to peace processes.

Although a few women politicians have worked within their parties to convince their colleagues that women can be capable leaders, women have remained underrepresented within party leadership. As woman politician Aida Dërguti reflected:

⁵⁴⁰ Krasniqi, Gëzim, “Socialism, National Utopia, and Rock Music: Inside the Albanian Rock Scene of Yugoslavia, 1970–1989”, *East Central Europe*, 2011.

⁵⁴¹ KWN interview with Aida Dërguti, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁵⁴² See the prior chapter section on “Women’s Contributions to Peace and Security through Politics”.

⁵⁴³ European Commission, *Kosovo* 2020 Report*, p. 9.

⁵⁴⁴ See KWN, *Kosovo Gender Analysis*, 2018. Kosovo has only had one, woman mayor, Mimoza Kusari-Lila, who served as the mayor of Gjakova/Đakovica from 2013 to 2017. Eight women ran for this post in the last municipal elections, comprising 4% of mayoral candidates (data from the [Election Commission](#), 2017). Only three municipalities implemented LGE requirements for the equal appointment of women and men as directors of directorates: Gillogc/Glogovac, Kamenicë/Kamenica, and Kllokot/Klokot (Ministry of Local Governance, [Report on Human Rights in Municipalities, January – June 2020](#), 2020).

Research participants tended to agree that women's underrepresentation in politics derived from poor democratisation of political parties, the lack of a gender perspective within political party structures, and political leaders' unwillingness to involve more women in decision making. According to the European Commission's Report for Kosovo in 2020, women candidates in the 2019 elections "did not receive equal financial or logistical support from their political entities for their campaigns, and they rarely spoke at rallies. Moreover, media gave priority coverage to male candidates".⁵⁴⁵ Unequal access to party funding and media coverage undermined women's chances of election.

Women's general underrepresentation in politics and decision-making has hindered their participation in official peace processes and decision-making. The fact that women held few positions within political parties or politics contributed to women's underrepresentation in the negotiations and dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia.

In the period 2011-2017, of 90 individuals engaged in working groups in the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, only 14 were women (16%) and 76 men.⁵⁴⁶ "The negotiation process was ruled by men", said KGSC Executive Director Luljeta Demolli.⁵⁴⁷ "They do not allow women to participate in such processes because they (men) want to be the ones who write the history because this is the only way they can portray themselves, exclusively, as heroes, state builders, and peacemakers. Because men have always more privileges and resources they don't let women to be part of history. Instead, they invite their friends, as happened during the negotiation process with Serbia", she said.⁵⁴⁸ Some research participants had the perception that the few women who did participate in negotiations received pressure from high-ranking men in their political parties, which influenced their decisions.

In 2019, the Kosovo delegation to the EU in Brussels, to discuss normalising relations with Serbia, did not have any women. Moreover, this occurred at a time when two of Kosovo's highest-ranking officials dealing with the EU were women: Minister of European Integration Dhurata Hoxha,⁵⁴⁹ responsible for coordinating government affairs with the EU, and Blerta Deliu-Kodra, Head of the Parliamentary Commission for European Integration.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁵ European Commission, *Kosovo* 2020 Report*, p. 9.

⁵⁴⁶ Balkan Policy Research Group, *The Brussels Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia: Achievements and Challenges*, p. 18, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁵⁴⁷ KWN interview, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁵⁴⁸ Email correspondence with Luljeta Demolli, 2021.

⁵⁴⁹ Dhurata Hoxhaj and Albena Reshitaj were the only two women ministers in the 21-member government cabinet.

⁵⁵⁰ Begisholli, B., "For Kosovo, Talking with Serbia is Men's Work", *Prishtina Insight*, 23 January 2019.

“Women’s empowerment in politics should start in political parties. In negotiations we see leaders of political parties who are mostly men. More needs to be done to empower women in political parties. I firmly believe in the potential of young women, and they need to be empowered. They are making valuable contributions inside their political parties, but this is not reflected to the public. ...

Media has an important role to play in women’s empowerment: it can change social norms and mobilise citizens to take progressive actions. I always say this to representatives of media: ‘As viewers we should become familiar with seeing more women.’ Especially during elections, we must see more women represented in the media, in the news, and in political debates. We have many educated women who are experts in their fields. They should be seen and heard by the public. This way political parties will not be able to say that they have only male candidates who are capable of doing politics, and the public will learn that there are women who are experts in different fields.”

Vlora Tuzi Nushi, UN Women Head of Office

“Women [in politics] are usually puppets, behind whom usually stand the men of the party.”

Young Serb woman

After this, the UN Secretary General highlighted in his 2019 report on Kosovo the need for greater inclusion of women in the Dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtinë/Priština, urging political leaders to take specific measures to ensure a gender responsive political process.⁵⁵¹



© European Union, 1995-2021 (image was modified to black and white and cropped by KWN)

Kosovo’s State Delegation to Brussels meets Federica Mogherini, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, on 8 January 2019 to discuss normalising relations with Serbia. The team consisted of: Fatmir Limaj, Shpend Ahmeti, Blerim Shala, Avni Arifi, Behgjet Pacolli, Enver Hoxhaj, Mahir Yağcılar, Bernard Nikaj, Dardan Gashi, Visar Ymeri, and Dukagjin Gorani.

In conclusion, political parties in Kosovo remain similar to a traditional “Oda”, a men’s room in which women lack a seat at the table. Weak political party support of women within their party structures, as electoral candidates, and when nominating government officials has contributed to women’s underrepresentation in politics generally. The dearth of women in decision-making positions, due in part to decisions made by men political leaders, has contributed directly to women’s weak representation in peace processes.

Patriarchy

This section discusses the challenges women faced in participating in peace and security processes due to patriarchy, a recurring research finding. Lerner has defined patriarchy as “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power.”⁵⁵² Related to patriarchal structures, Hunt and Posa have argued that the hesi-

⁵⁵¹ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General*, June 2019.

⁵⁵² Lerner, G., *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Vol. 1, USA: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 239.

tancy to involve women in peace processes derives from structural and psychological issues, as war is considered a “man’s job”, so ending war must be their job too.⁵⁵³ Thus, it is assumed that the persons who engage in war must end the war, and that these are men.

In Kosovo, the UN Secretary-General has identified patriarchal norms and stereotypes as the main barrier hampering women’s role in politics.⁵⁵⁴ As illustrated by the prior sections in this chapter, ultimately, research participants also identified patriarchy as the main issue underpinning women’s underrepresentation in decision-making and thus peace processes. Traditional, socialised gender roles contribute to the homogenisation of women as mothers and housewives, relegating them to the private sphere. This challenge is compounded for young women who, according to traditional family norms, are responsible for the bulk of housework. Meanwhile, amid such social norms, with men taking decisions in the public sphere, few state resources are allocated to care services. The lack of kindergartens and eldercare centres further inhibits women’s participation in politics, including peace processes, because they do not have time to participate given their unpaid caretaker roles.⁵⁵⁵ For some women, their families and communities do not support their engagement in public life due to such gender norms.

Patriarchy also influences the ways in which women who do enter politics are portrayed and seen.

Some women and men research participants reflected that for a woman to succeed, she would have to behave “like a man”; otherwise, she would not be able to gain a seat at the table amid political party leaders.⁵⁵⁶ Yet, at the same time, women faced criticism for “acting like men”. As Mimoza Kusari-Lila, former deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Trade and Industry, and Major of Gjakovë/Đakovica reflected:

They expect women to be in an inferior position, and when a woman is outspoken, has self-confidence, she is considered arrogant and excessive. Whereas, if a man has the same approach, then he is considered successful, ambitious.⁵⁵⁷

This double standard, underpinned by patriarchy and social norms on the perceived roles of women

and men in society, posed challenges for women both in securing votes to get elected and in influencing political decisions once they entered politics. As former President Atifete Jahjaga recalled:

“A woman is supposed to take care of children, and a man doesn’t care whether they have a kindergarten or not because ‘woman’s place is in the kitchen’ and to take care of children.”

Serb woman, activist, Novobërdë/Novo Brdo

“People from the Balkans are still very conservative; it is changing but not enough. I do think as a Balkan society [we] are seeing women as housewives. Their role is still questionable, they are not taking high-level positions.”

Young Serbian woman, journalist, Leposaviq/Leposavić

“Young women’s purpose in Novobrdë was getting married and moving out of Kosovo. They didn’t have the support of their families to contribute to society.”

Serb woman, activist, Novobërdë/Novo Brdo

⁵⁵³ Hunt, Swanee and Posa, Cristina, “Women Waging Peace”, *Foreign Policy*, No. 124, 2001, pp. 38-47.

⁵⁵⁴ NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, “[Mapping Women, Peace and Security in the UN Security Council](#)”, 2019, p. 13.

⁵⁵⁵ KWN interviews, 2020.

⁵⁵⁶ KWN interviews with a man working in civil society and a Serb woman activist, 2020.

⁵⁵⁷ KWN interview with Mimoza Kusari-Lila, 2020.

The approach and treatment were sexist from the time I took the oath until I handed over the mandate. No one asked what decisions I was making or how that decision would affect our lives. Media focused on the way I was walking, my hair, my heels, my nail polish, or the way I was giving statements. My legal and constitutional duties were a piece of cake for me, while 80% of my time I had to deal with what others were saying [about me].⁵⁵⁸

Socialised gender norms regarding how women should look and behave in public space took time and attention away from her role as a political leader. Such stereotypes and sexism were recurring themes among the women politicians interviewed. During the NDI Week of Women in 2020, Vjosa Osmani, then acting President, also said that she faced discrimination and sexism:

Most of the comments, especially on social media, have to do with the way you look, with your weight, your face, with the fact that you're a woman. But not even 10% of them ... speak about your actual work. Thus, focus on the 10% that can be genuine criticism of our work, because that 10% can help you improve your work and focus it in the interest of citizens.⁵⁵⁹

Drawing from her own experiences, Mimoza Kusari-Lila said that derogatory terms are used against women in politics, and women politicians are judged based on their gender, rather than on their values and capacities. She reflected on the challenges that sexism and patriarchy pose for women's engagement in politics:

Even today the stereotypes and prejudice are very common toward women and young women in politics. This is very worrying because not everyone has the patience and the will to continue to be involved after being openly and publicly criticised ... This misogynistic language is very common in Kosovo and in the institutions in general, making it one of the factors that hinders the participation of women in politics.⁵⁶⁰

The added challenges that women politicians face *because they are women*, as a direct result of patriarchal norms, often well-documented in the media, potentially dissuaded young women from wanting to enter politics. The women who have succeeded in becoming political leaders emphasised that they had to overcome insults, work harder, and try to focus on critiques of their work, rather than on negative attention based on their gender.

Socialised gender norms posed additional challenges for young women's participation in decision-making and thus peace processes. "Older people don't take youth seriously", a young Serb woman said. For example, "We invited inhabitants and institutions to the protest. No one showed up. They believed that children organised the protest and [that we] won't achieve anything." Young women of all ethnicities felt that their voices often were dismissed due to their age. Such ageism, involving views that young women are "young" and thus do not have anything to contribute undermined young women's engagement, research participants said.

Even interviews with some, comparatively older, women's rights activists indicated such attitudes. During interviews some stated that a person needs maturity and knowledge that come with age. One respondent said that women ages 15 to 29 should not be engaged in serious matters such as conflict resolution or politics:

For example, a 15-year-old girl is a child. My daughter is 15, and she is a child to me. She is still immature to be allowed by me to get engaged in political activism. I try to involve her in NGO activities at a slow pace, but it would be irresponsible to engage her in things that are inappropriate for her. If you add interethnic violence as a factor, then I'm worried about her safety as well. A woman was never a warrior in our com-

⁵⁵⁸ KWN interview, 2020.

⁵⁵⁹ Vjosa Osmani, speech, NDI Week of Women, 2020.

⁵⁶⁰ KWN interview, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

munity. She is a humanitarian and takes care of the children.⁵⁶¹

Comparatively older persons lacked understanding regarding the roles that youth can play in peacebuilding efforts, young women said. Such social norms are deeply rooted in the society, starting in the family and reinforced in the educational system. Culturally, their families, institutions, and society dismiss young women's opinions as irrelevant and incompetent, young women research participants said. Therefore, youth become voiceless. Thus, young women faced intersectional discrimination by being both women and young, which undermined their participation in decision-making processes, including related to peace. Diverse young women expressed their desire to get involved but said that they lacked the support to do so.

Meanwhile, a recurring theme among prominent women politicians was that they saw their role as important in "paving the way" for other women to follow as leaders.⁵⁶² Vjosa Osmani has emphasised the importance of women coming together to remove the remaining barriers, "so that tomorrow the young women in Kosovo will not face what we face today".⁵⁶³ Solidarity among women also has been a main focal area of KWN, which has sought to bring women together across political party, age, ethnic, and other boundaries, towards supporting each other, as discussed in prior chapters.

Meanwhile, patriarchy also has hindered women's participation in the security sector, in terms of women's participation in establishing and maintaining peace and security. Particularly in the beginning, Serb women may have faced greater challenges in becoming involved in the police force. According to Rosenberg and Mertus, their communities tended to feel that by participating in the Kosovo Police, Serb women and men betrayed their nation; and some women were even threatened.⁵⁶⁴

In the Kosovo Police, women's participation decreased from 23% in 1999⁵⁶⁵ to 14% in 2016,⁵⁶⁶ increasing to 15% in 2020.⁵⁶⁷ Despite some efforts to increase women's participation in the police, discussed previously,⁵⁶⁸ policewomen have faced several social barriers, including from fellow police officers. According to a former police-

"The stereotypes are something that they learn in the system. Nobody teaches us when we enter the first year of education that we should have equal participation in every sphere of society, as there is no gender-responsive education."

Woman, OSCE representative

"The problem is that now young women are not really considered that they are 'the present'. Young women are considered as 'the future', and that is the wrong approach, even to issues like Dialogue. ... So that is why young generations today say: 'I don't care. Nobody wants to know what I think.' Because they are told that they are the future, and THAT IS WRONG! In '98-'99 we didn't tell anyone, 'You are the future'. We said, 'Join us!'"

Albanian woman activist, Prishtinë/Priština

⁵⁶¹ KWN interview with a Serb woman activist, North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, 2020.

⁵⁶² KWN interviews with women politicians, 2020.

⁵⁶³ Vjosa Osmani, speech, NDI Week of Women, 2020.

⁵⁶⁴ Rosenberger, L. and Mertus, J., "When Adding Women Matters: Making Lieutenant Ahmeti", *Gender and Nation in South Eastern Europe*, Karl Kaser, Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch (ed.), 2005, p. 183.

⁵⁶⁵ KWN calculation, drawing from Greene, M., Friedman, J., and Bennet R., *Building the Police Service in a Security Vacuum: International Efforts in Kosovo, 1999 - 2011*, p. 5.

⁵⁶⁶ AGE, *Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024 Action Plan*, p. 48.

⁵⁶⁷ KWN interview with a woman Sergeant in the Kosovo Police, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁵⁶⁸ See the section on "[Women's Contributions to Interethnic Peacebuilding](#)".

woman, to gain the respect of her male colleagues, she had to work three times as hard as they did.⁵⁶⁹ Interviews with women in the police also revealed that some policewomen had to quit their jobs when they married, due to social norms and unsupportive legislation, such as the prior UNMIK Regulation on Labour.⁵⁷⁰ A women's rights activist reflected, "Women could provide security especially by being involved in the police, but because women are not guaranteed rights in this sector ... they don't join."⁵⁷¹ Patriarchy and traditional socialised gender roles mean that women are expected to remain home and to serve as caregivers. Some women said their families or husbands would not let them work in security institutions.⁵⁷²

Similarly, women's involvement in the Kosovo Security Force was hindered by social norms that consider security a "man's job", but also because of the lack of implementation of the LGE. As of 2018, women held 36 positions among the overall Ministry of Defence staff (28%).⁵⁷³ Nine women served in decision-making positions (7%), and there were only four women in uniform in the Ministry of Defence (6% of all staff).⁵⁷⁴ "We are still not satisfied with the number of women, which is not nearly equal with men in the Ministry of Defence and KSF," said Halime Morina, Chief of the Human Rights and Gender Equality Unit.⁵⁷⁵

Overall, women's minimal involvement in decision-making related to peace and security processes has contributed to a lack of trust in these processes, which further undermines women's participation. Without hope or trust in the process, women may not see a reason to participate. A young Serb woman said: "there is no belief that you can actually change something from the bottom-up; people think that all decisions come from the top levels." A young Serb woman from Graçanicë/Gračanica agreed: "Women will never get their rights. It was always like that, and it always will be. It doesn't exist anywhere that men and women have the same rights."⁵⁷⁶ Hopelessness and disenfranchisement thus also dissuaded women from engaging in decision-making or peace processes.

In conclusion, patriarchy has contributed to undermining women's participation in decision-making processes and thus hindered their participation in peace processes. Socialised gender norms that suggest that women should remain at home, in the private sphere, and men should take decisions, weaken support for women's engagement in politics, from both political party leaders and the public. These traditional gender roles are reinforced by media portrayals of women politicians. Such portrayals may further demoralise women, dissuading them from entering politics for fear of how the media and society may treat them. Young women face additional challenges to engaging in peace processes due to ageism, as do Serb women due to continuing ethnic conflicts.

Conclusion

Despite some progress in the implementation of UNSCR 1325, women have continued to face obstacles to their full and equal participation in decision-making, including in peace processes. Particularly in prior years, but somewhat still today, continuing conflicts among Serbs and Albanians have posed a challenge particularly for Serb women to engage, as decision-making has been considered "for men" and an insecure, unnecessary risk for women. The social pressure, threats, and attacks that some Serb women faced when they cooperated with Albanians may have dissuaded other Serb women from engaging. Generally, for women of all ethnicities, traditional, patriarchal norms upheld by international decision-makers, political party leaders, and the society in general homogenise

⁵⁶⁹ Speech of a former policewoman in conference, "Women in Police", Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁵⁷⁰ KWN interviews with women in police, 2020. Until 2010, maternity leave was regulated by UNMIK Regulation No. 2001/27 on Fundamental Labour Law in Kosovo, which entitled employed women to 12 weeks of maternity leave. This made it difficult for women to work given the dearth of childcare facilities taking children under one year old. In 2010, [the Law on Labour](#) was adopted, providing employed women with up to 12 months of maternity leave (Article 49).

⁵⁷¹ KWN interview with a woman CSO representative.

⁵⁷² Bastick, M. "Integrating Gender in Post-Conflict Security Sector Reform", 2007, p. 164.

⁵⁷³ [Policy on Human Rights and Gender Parity in Ministry of Defense and Kosovo Security Force](#), 2019, p. 13.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ KWN interview, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁵⁷⁶ KWN focus group with young Serb women in Graçanicë/Gračanica, 2020.

women as victims and/or caregivers, ignoring women's agency. These social norms and women's socialised gender roles as caretakers leave women with little time or space to engage in political processes. Moreover, patriarchy leads families and communities to limit women's engagement in politics through direct or indirect social pressure. Patriarchy also contributes to intersecting, double discrimination for young women, who are side-lined from decision-making due to their age and gender. These obstacles have fuelled hopelessness and a lack of confidence among women, which further deters them from seeking to engage. Nevertheless, young women of all ethnicities tended to express their interest in collaboration and participation in future peace processes.

Recommendations

The following recommendations arose from the research findings. They propose ways to increase peace and security for diverse women, drawing from women's own recommendations. The recommendations also respond to the final research sub-question: how can young women be more engaged in dialogue and negotiations in the future? While perhaps unorthodox to present findings within a recommendations section, the findings do constitute recommendations.

For the Government of Kosovo

- Ensure women's equal participation and representation in peace processes, in accordance with CEDAW, UN-SCR 1325, and the Law on Gender Equality. More specifically, increase women's representation in all elected and appointed decision-making positions at national and municipal levels, thereby implementing the Law on Gender Equality's definition of gender equality as the 50% participation of each gender at all levels of decision-making.
- Create opportunities for women, including young women, to meaningfully engage in and inform decision-making processes. Meet with young women of diverse ethnicities to better understand and address their needs.
- Enhance government focus on human security, including by investing more state resources in quality education, healthcare, women's economic empowerment, and security for women in their homes, the streets, and institutions.

For the Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia

- Better inform the public about the process, of the topics to be discussed, and on the agreements reached.
- Ensure the meaningful participation of women in decision-making related to the negotiations and Dialogue, both through women's equal participation in the official negotiation teams (a seat at the table) and through public consultations with diverse women and men regarding their priorities for the Dialogue.
- Include at least one woman civil society representative in all future negotiations and dialogues. She should be selected through a democratic process by civil society, be accountable to other civil society groups, and ensure that she consults with and brings into the process the views and priorities of diverse women in Kosovo.
- Include in the Dialogue agenda key points towards dealing with the past and transitional justice, including those that women consider priorities:
 - Return missing persons of all ethnicities or make clear their fate;
 - Ensure justice for victims of sexual violence of all ethnicities and payment of reparations for the violence perpetrated;
 - That the Government of Serbia make a public apology for crimes committed by the state, towards acknowledgement of these crimes and progress in dealing with the past;
 - Ensure protection of all cultural heritage sites, media, and religions, including mosques, monasteries, churches, and graveyards;
 - Compensate civilians' lost property and return lost pensions; and
 - Resolve issues related to the freedom of movement, including the different passports issued for Serbs in Kosovo.
- Consider conducting referenda on issues of political significance, so that people can be part of choosing their future and have ownership over the process, towards lasting peace.

For the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Police

- Institutionalise additional, obligatory training for all police officers in treating appropriately all forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, with care and empathy. Consider appointing trained, specialised policewomen in each station as the only officers responsible for interviewing persons who have suffered gen-

der-based violence.

- Increase the police presence in areas where young women are returning long distances from school, particularly at night and in locations where there are no lights or cameras.
- Conduct active outreach based on earlier best practices to recruit more, diverse women into the force and use affirmative measures, as needed, to promote more women officers to higher ranks.
- Enforce a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination within the force with penalties.
- Install work-life balance policies, such as flexible working hours.

For the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

- Undertake additional efforts to improve women's access to the labour market, in line with the National Development Strategy.⁵⁷⁷
- Through Vocational Training Centres, conduct additional outreach to schools and communities, targeting young women with support for career orientation and vocational training.
- Monitor and ensure implementation of the Family Law during the provision of social services and assistance, particularly regarding early marriages among Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian girls.

For the Ministry of Education and Science

- Integrate education on gender roles, stereotypes, and relations in school curricula, towards transforming traditional gender norms. Ensure teachers are well-trained so that they do not reinforce existing gender norms.
- Establish more, publicly funded childcare centres, kindergartens, and elderly day centres, in line with the National Development Strategy and towards achieving the EU Barcelona Objectives.⁵⁷⁸
- Initiate collaboration between public universities, WCSOs, women politicians, media, and institutions for learning, experience sharing, and the empowerment of young women related to peace processes. Provide more opportunities for non-formal education to increase youth interest in participating in decision-making.
- Ensure and promote access to quality education for persons of all ethnicities and in all regions of Kosovo, particularly for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian girls.⁵⁷⁹
- Offer free classes in Serbian and Albanian languages throughout the country as part of the educational system and continuing education.
- For Municipalities
- Ensure that public spaces, including sidewalks, are accessible for persons with different abilities. Improve street paving, cleaning, and control of stray dogs, which undermine security, particularly for persons with different abilities.
- Enhance security in the streets by installing cameras and lights. Collaborate with young women to identify locations that present security concerns and should be prioritised for such investments.
- Ensure the availability of public transportation to rural and Serb majority areas, which can increase physical security for young women commuting to and from school, as well as enable Serb women's participation decision-making processes.
- Implement gender responsive budgeting in accordance with the Law on Gender Equality, using gender analysis to inform budgets based on the needs of diverse women.
- Increase women's representation in decision-making at the local level, towards ensuring that women's voices are better heard and security needs adequately addressed by the municipality. To this end, conduct more consulta-

⁵⁷⁷ [National Development Strategy 2016 – 2021](#), Prishtinë/Priština, January 2016, p. 11.

⁵⁷⁸ See more about the [Barcelona Objectives](#).

⁵⁷⁹ According to the Law, primary and secondary education in Kosovo is free, financed by the budget of Kosovo. Also, it is mandatory for all children ages 6 to 15 ([State portal of the Republic of Kosovo](#)).

tions with diverse women, including young women, to hear and then address their needs.

For Political Parties

- Improve the democratisation of parties and engage more women in decision-making positions, toward better reflecting women's priorities in peace and security processes.
- Actively recruit and engage more, diverse young women to participate in political parties, including in decision-making positions.
- Provide more opportunities for women in the party to represent the party in the media.
- Ensure that electoral lists have an equal representation of women and men, as defined by the Law on Gender Equality (50%).
- Allocate equal resources for women and men candidates during electoral campaigns.
- Include in political party platforms attention to key issues of importance to women, including access to quality education and employment, as well as address of gender-based violence.

For International Bodies and Organisations, including the UN and EU

- Communicate regularly with WCSOs, including on key political and peace processes, as per the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.
- Strongly encourage via political dialogue and, where feasible, ensure the meaningful participation of women in negotiations and dialogue, both through participation in the official negotiation teams and through public consultations.
- Strongly encourage negotiating parties to include on the agenda issues that women consider priorities.
- Request that Serbia recognise publicly and apologise for crimes committed against civilians by the state, towards reconciliation and lasting peace.
- Support efforts to ensure the return of missing persons.
- Strongly encourage prosecution of people who committed war crimes, including sexual violence, towards justice.
- Support politically compensation and reparations for sexual violence, the destruction of properties and livelihoods, and the return of pensions.
- Continue allocating financing to support the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, including the empowerment of women in politics.
- For the EU, urgently provide visa liberalisation for Kosovo, enabling youth of all ethnicities to travel, learn, communicate with, and build relations with their peers, towards peace and security.

For CSOs

- Continue organising workshops, discussions, and capacity development opportunities with diverse young women on politics, peace and security. If they become familiar with their rights and empowered at an early age, they may be more interested to be part of these processes in the future.
- Continue peer-to-peer interethnic workshops for young women of different ethnicities to discuss concepts of peace and security, towards better understanding each others' needs. Then, support them in joint mobilising to realise their identified needs through meetings with officials, enhancing their capacities in advocacy, public speaking, and diplomacy.
- Continue pressuring political parties and government officials to include more women in decision-making positions within parties, government positions, and peace processes.
- Continue advocacy for the government to appoint a woman representative of civil society to participate in the Dialogue, in accordance with UNSCR 1325. Ensure the person is democratically elected and then communicates with and represents the interests of diverse women in the Dialogue.
- Identify women experts in different fields, advocating for them to be part of the Dialogue, when the time comes.

- When women are not included in official peace processes, continue organising parallel dialogues, including through street activism, to make women's voices heard. Engage more, diverse women in these activities, ensuring visibility of the needs of all women from diverse ethnic groups.
- Continue organising activities with men, particularly young men, to address gender roles and to establish new understandings of masculinities.
- Organise discussions with diverse women, particularly young women in rural areas, to better inform them about the property rights, towards their economic security.
- Further disseminate information about CSO activities, towards gaining a wider audience and more, active, and diverse participants in activities.

For the Media

- Shift public opinion regarding women's roles and contributions to decision-making processes by ensuring more coverage of the work of women in politics, including in peace and security processes. Include special attention to the work of young women.
- Refrain from sexist, bombastic, and other coverage that reinforces gender norms and stereotypes. Avoid coverage of women that focuses on their appearance while drawing attention away from their work and policy decisions.
- Invite more, diverse women to participate in debates on topics relating to peace and security, including young women.
- Invite an equal number of women and men of different ages to speak during election campaign discussions, including from politics, civil society, as experts, and commentators.
- As a public service, share awareness campaigns that aim to prevent violence and promote rights, including information on where people who have suffered violence can receive support. For campaigns, collaborate closely with police and WCSOs.
- Produce content that fosters peace and security.
- Train journalists to improve their reporting on women, peace, and security issues, including gender-based violence, ensuring a sensitive approach.

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Annexes

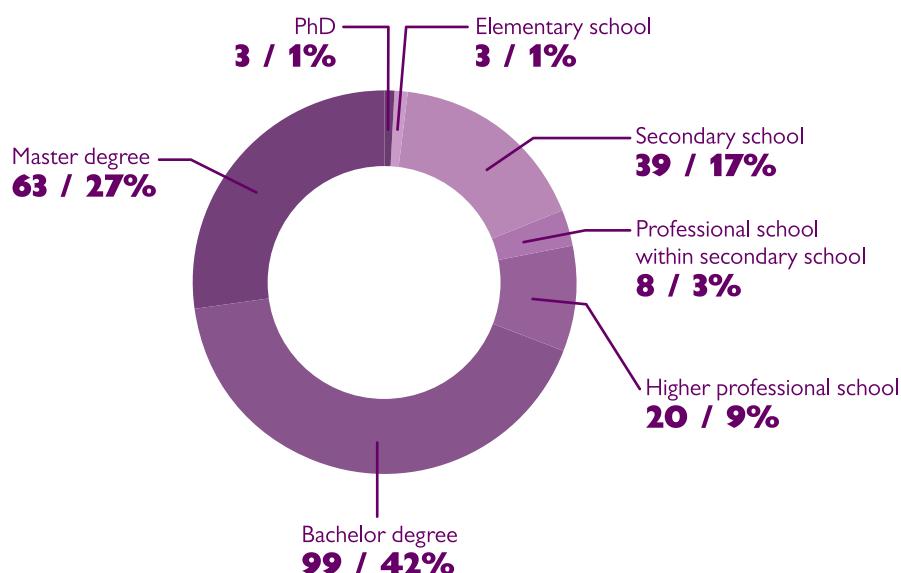
Annex 1. Methodological Details

This annex provides further details about the research methodology in addition to the prior description in the Introduction. The research team began by defining the key concepts related to this research. “Conflict” was defined broadly as situations in which people or social groups have or perceive that they have opposing goals, values, or interests. “Peace” was defined similarly broadly to include the absence of all dimensions of violence, including direct, structural, and cultural forms of violence. “Security” was defined broadly in terms of human security. “Youth” was defined using the EU’s definition of persons ages 15 to 29 years old.⁵⁸⁰

The following table summarises the number of research participants by age and ethnicity. In total, 266 young women participated.

Method	Albanian		Serb		Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian		Bosnian		Gorani		Other		Refused to share		Total	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
Interviews	39	4	5	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	48	5
Survey	176	0	36	0	3	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	221	0	
KWN members' short interviews	53	0	0	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	18	79	0	
Focus groups	71	0	24	0	34	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	130	0	
Total	339	4	65	1	42	0	9	0	1	0	3	0	18	478	5	

Graph 3. Survey Respondents by Level of Education

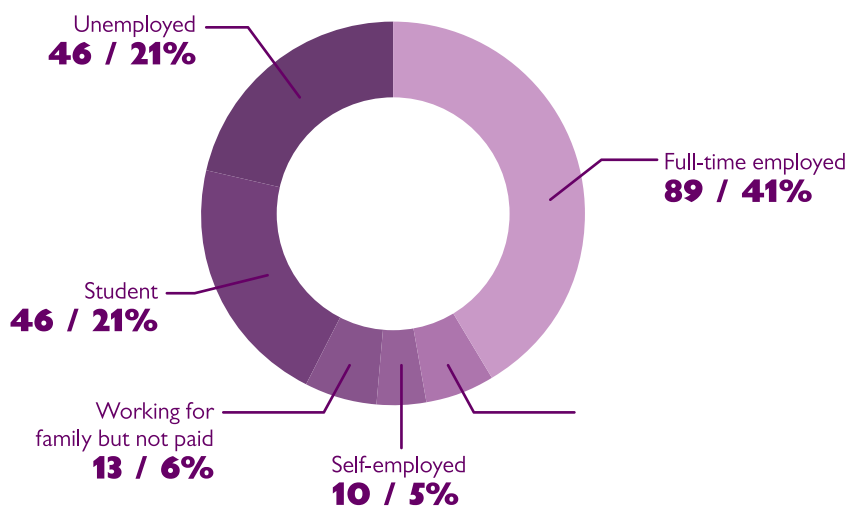


⁵⁸⁰ Notably, after this methodology was finalized, the UN adopted UNSCR 2535 in July 2020, which states: “Noting that the term youth is defined in the context of this resolution as persons of the age of 18–29 years old, and further noting the variations of definition of the term that may exist on the national and international levels, including the definition of youth in the General Assembly Resolutions”.

Regarding the survey respondents, as Graph 3 illustrates, most held a Bachelor's degree (42%), while 27% held a Master's degree, and 1% a PhD. Meanwhile, 17% had finished secondary education, 9% higher vocational education, 3% vocational education based on secondary education, and 1% elementary education.

More than a third of the respondents were working full-time (41%), 6% worked part-time, 21% were students, 21% were unemployed, 5% were self-employed, and 6% worked for their family but did not get paid (Graph 4).

Graph 4. Employment Status of Survey Respondents



Altogether, Kosovo Albanian respondents were geographically distributed in the following cities: Prishtinë/Priština, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Pejë/Peć, Podujevë/Podujevo, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Prizren, Vushtrri/Vučitrn, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Lipjan/Lipljan, Suharekë/Suva Reka, South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Deçan/Dečane, Skënderaj/Srbica, Dragash/Dragaš, Istog/Istok, Obiliq/Obilić, Viti/Vitina, and Shtime/Štimlje. Kosovo Serb respondents were based in: North Mitrovica/Mitrovicë, Viti/Vitina, Ranilug/Ranillug, Leposaviq/Leposavić, Zveçan/Zvečan, Obiliq/Obilić, Prishtinë/Priština, Graçanicë/Gračanica, Vushtrri/Vučitrn, Çagllavicë/Čaglavica, Zubin Potok, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, and Prizren. Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians were in Prishtinë/Priština, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Prizren, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, and Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje. Gorani and Turks were in Prizren, and Bosnians were in Prishtinë/Priština and Prizren. With regard to efforts to ensure an intersectional perspective, research participants also included persons from the following groups:

- 1 LGBTIQIA+ person/organisation
- 266 young women, under age 30 (16 interviewed, 130 in focus groups, 120 surveyed)
- 11 women with different abilities
- 5 women politicians
- 30 civil society activists
- 2 journalists
- 3 women in academia
- 7 international organisations
- 3 police officers
- 1 woman representative of the Kosovo Security Force

Additionally, KWN drew from existing oral history archives and documentation based on interviews with many other diverse women and men, as cited within the publication.

Annex 2. Interview Guide

Definitions

First, we would like to better understand what some key terms used in our research mean to you.

1. What does peace mean to you?
2. What does security mean to you?

Roles and Contributions of Women to Peace and Security

Now, we'd like to ask some questions regarding your opinion on the roles and contributions of women to peace and security.

3. In your opinion, how important do you think it is to involve women, particularly young women, in peace and security processes, if at all?
4. In your view, what role, if any, have women played in peace and negotiation processes during Kosovo's most recent conflict?
 - What role, if any, did young women play during the conflict, so women ages 15-29? [Probe for examples]
 - What have been the contributions, such as to changes, that women made during the conflict?
 - What have been the contributions that young women made during the conflict?
 - For what reasons do you think that women or young women had or did not have roles/contributions?
5. What have been the roles of women in peace and security processes after the conflict, so from 1999 forward?
 - What have been the roles of young women, if any?
 - What have been the contributions of women during this period, if any?
 - What have been the contributions of young women, if any? [Probe for examples]
6. Speaking specifically about the official negotiations and the later dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, how have women, including young women, been involved, if at all?
7. To what extent do you think that women's civil society organisations have played an important role in advocating for the inclusion of women in peace and security processes, such as negotiations and dialogue?
 - What issues have they raised, for example?
 - To what extent do you believe that their demands have been taken into account in peace and security processes?
8. For what reasons do you think women, including particularly young women, [have or have not] been engaged in peace and security processes during the post-conflict period?
9. What have been the challenges of involving women, particularly young women, in peace and security processes, if any?
10. What effects has the [involvement/non-involvement] of women, particularly young women, during the negotiations/dialogue processes between Kosovo and Serbia had?

Peace, Security, and Needs Today

11. Do you think we have peace and security in Kosovo today?
12. In your opinion what are the needs of women related to peace and security in Kosovo today?
 - How have you collected information about women's needs, in particular young women? For example, your work with women, consultations with them, etc.?
13. Which issues/needs should be better reflected in the future dialogue?

Recommendations

14. What ideas do you have for better involving young women in peace and negotiations/ dialogue processes?
15. More specifically, how do you think the government could better involve women in peace and security processes?
16. What roles could international organisations play in engaging women, especially young women in peace and security processes?
17. What about civil society organisations, particularly women's rights organisations, what role can they play in including more women in peace processes?
18. What can be the role of media?

Closing questions

19. What else should I have asked that I did not?
20. What other comments do you have?

Questions for Specific Respondents

For officials:

1. How have you sought to consult women regarding their needs related to security and peace, to inform negotiation/ dialogue processes?
 - What about diverse women? (ethnicity, age, geographic area, employment status, religion, ability, sexuality)
 - For what reasons have you not consulted much with women/diverse women?
2. How have you represented women's priorities in peace and security processes?

For women in decision-making:

1. As a woman in a decision-making position and who is surrounded by men, what challenges have you encountered in your work? To what extent do these challenges limit your engagement and/or the engagement of other women in peace processes.
2. What challenges have you faced involving women in peace processes, if any?
3. As a woman in a decision-making position, have you ever felt discriminated against, either in your position or in the process to acquire that position?

Annex 3. Survey

The Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) is conducting research about the role of women in peace and security in Kosovo, with support from UN Women. Through this survey, we want to hear your opinions! It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your contribution is very important for better informing the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue with your priorities, as well as other peace processes.

*All of the information you provide will be confidential.

1. Your gender

Woman

Man

Prefer not to say

Other (please specify): _____

2. In which year were you born?

3. In which city do you live?

4. With which ethnic group do you identify? If more than one, please mark all that apply.

Albanian

Serb

Roma

Ashkali

Egyptian

Turkish

Bosnian

Gorani

Croat

Other (please specify):

Do not wish to say

5. What is the highest educational level you have completed?

Elementary school

Secondary school

Professional school within secondary school

Higher professional school

Bachelor degree

Master degree

PhD

6. Which best describes your employment status?

Part-time employee

Full time employee

Self-employed

Working for family but not paid

Student

Unemployed

7. Currently, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 0 being not at all peaceful and 5 being totally peaceful, how peaceful would you consider the current situation in Kosovo?
8. Please tell us more: why you feel it is peaceful/not peaceful?
9. According to the same scale, from 1 to 5, how secure would you consider the situation in Kosovo today?
10. Please tell us more: why you feel Kosovo is secure/not secure?
11. What could the government do to make you feel more secure?
12. What are your expectations for the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue? What issues would you most like to see discussed there?
13. In your opinion, what could political parties and civil society organisations do to enhance your and other women's involvement in peace and security processes, including the dialogue?

Annex 4. Focus Group Guide

The Kosovo Women's Network is conducting research about the role of young women in peace and security in Kosovo, with support from UN Women. We want to understand better the role and contributions of young women to peace and security in Kosovo. More specifically, we want to hear more from you regarding your needs, how officials can better meet your needs such as through the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, and how young women can be more engaged in peace and security processes. These are the themes that we will discuss, one by one, today.

1. What do the words peace and security mean to you?
2. To what extent do you find Kosovo peaceful or secure today? Why?
3. To what extent do you believe that women, particularly young women, have been involved in peace processes in Kosovo? What examples would you give?
4. How have you personally been involved in contributing to peace and security, if at all?
5. What do you think young women can bring to peacebuilding and security processes?
6. In your opinion, what could be done, by whom, to involve more women, particularly young women, in peacebuilding and security processes, if at all?
7. If you were part of the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, what issues would you want to ensure were discussed there?

Annex 5. The Legal and Policy Framework on Women, Youth, Peace, and Security

This annex briefly summarises the relevant legal and policy framework globally and in Kosovo, which has shaped the WPS agenda for the last 20 years. It includes three resolutions related to the YPS agenda. It discusses the relevant intersections of the WPS and YPS agendas. It provides relevant context for the rest of the report, regarding existing commitments and obligations of various actors towards implementing the WPS and YPS agendas in Kosovo.

Women, Peace and Security Pillars

The provisions and principles of the WPS agenda are usually grouped in four “pillars”, as outlined by UN Women:

- “ **1)** The **participation** of women in peace and security governance, which covers many dimensions of women’s involvement in conflict and post-conflict settings;
- 2)** The **protection** of women’s human rights in conflict and post-conflict settings;
- 3)** The **prevention** of violence, including both the prevention of violent conflict, and the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV); and
- 4)** **Relief and recovery**, which demands gender-sensitive humanitarian programming in the wake of disasters and complex emergencies, as well as the inclusion of women in post-conflict reconstruction and peace building-related activities”.⁵⁸¹

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979) declares that discrimination against women violates equal rights and human dignity.⁵⁸² Although CEDAW does not offer direct provisions on WPS, it does include legally binding general recommendations on non-discrimination and equality.⁵⁸³ It recognises situations in which women suffer discrimination and calls on states to take the measures necessary for achieving gender equality. It specifically states that progress in international peace and security will contribute to equality. It recognises that “the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields”.⁵⁸⁴ The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo explicitly mentions CEDAW in Article 22, rendering it applicable in Kosovo and with “priority over provisions of laws

⁵⁸¹ UN Women, *Gender Mainstreaming Principles, Dimensions and Priorities For PVE*, 2019, p. 11.

⁵⁸² UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, adopted December 1979.

⁵⁸³ Manjoo, R., “Women, Peace and Security – Negotiating in Women’s Best Interests”, 2016, p. 268.

⁵⁸⁴ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, 1979.

and other acts of public institutions”.⁵⁸⁵

UNSCR on Women, Peace and Security

UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (2000) remains among the main and most important resolutions on WPS. UNSCR 1325 has four pillars: prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery.⁵⁸⁶ It expresses concern that the vast majority of persons affected by armed conflict are women. Thus, the resolution stresses the importance of recognising women’s role in the prevention, solution, and consolidation of peace. Women need to be able to participate fully in all decision-making processes, from the local to the international level, it states. It also emphasises the need for peace operations and negotiations to adopt a gender perspective.⁵⁸⁷ UNSCR 1325 mentions that all states are responsible to “put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes” particularly those of a sexual nature against women and girls. It emphasises that such crimes should be excluded from amnesties where possible.⁵⁸⁸ UNSCR 1325 has served as the basis for later resolutions on WPS, which have continued to refine the agenda.

UNSCR Condemning the Use of Sexual Violence as a Tool of War

UNSCR 1820 (2008) was the first resolution that recognised and condemned the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war.⁵⁸⁹ This resolution reaffirms the importance of women’s equal participation in peace and security processes. It expresses concern regarding the obstacles that women and young women face related to reparations. The resolution focuses on prevention and protection of women. Importantly, it calls for excluding sexual violence crimes from amnesties. It requests that relevant UN agencies develop effective protective measures to avoid all forms of violence against women, particularly sexual violence. It also calls for communication with CSOs through consultations.

UNSCR Establishing the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict

UNSCR 1888 (2009) concerns acts of sexual violence.⁵⁹⁰ It calls for measures to protect all civilians, particularly women and children. It also calls for greater protection and inclusion of women in peace missions. Special attention is paid to the need to advocate and legislate in accordance with international standards, as well as to greater investigation of crimes related to sexual violence. It serves to strengthen “zero tolerance” policies on sexual exploitation and abuse in UN peace missions. States are encouraged to include more women in UN peacekeeping operations. UN entities are asked to have more contact with CSOs, especially those led by women.

UNSCR Enhancing the Involvement of Women and Young Women in Peacebuilding

UNSCR 1889 (2009) emphasises the role that women play in all stages of peace processes, expressing concern regarding women’s lack of participation such processes, particularly during the early stages of post-conflict peacebuilding.⁵⁹¹ It observes that stigmatisation and cultural discrimination pose obstacles to women’s participation in decision-making. The resolution calls for the Secretary-General to cooperate more with states and civil society to collect and analyse the special needs of women and young women. It also provides for the promotion of gender

⁵⁸⁵ Republic of Kosovo, *Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo*, 2008.

⁵⁸⁶ [UNSCR 1325](#), 31 October 2000.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁸ Manjoo, R., “Women, Peace and Security – Negotiating in Women’s Best Interests”, 2016, p. 268.

⁵⁸⁹ [UNSCR 1820](#), 19 June 2008.

⁵⁹⁰ [UNSCR 1888](#), 30 September 2009.

⁵⁹¹ [UNSCR 1889](#), 5 October 2009.

equality in conflict situations through the appointment of gender advisors in UN missions.

UNSCR Combating Impunity for Sexual Violence Crimes

UNSCR 1960 (2010) expresses concern regarding sexual violence against women and children.⁵⁹² It reiterates “the necessity for all States and non-State parties to conflicts to comply fully with their obligations under applicable international law, including the prohibition on all forms of sexual violence”, as well as the need to show commitment and political will for prevention and to end impunity. It observes the efforts of the UN Secretary-General to include women in “formal peace processes” and his recognition of women’s potential to address sexual violence. Therefore, it calls for women’s increased participation in peace negotiations and peacekeeping operations. In addition, the resolution encourages the Secretary-General to include in his annual reports information on various parties’ compliance with resolutions 1820 and 1888 and implementation progress in conflict situations. Similarly, it aims to further strengthen “zero tolerance” policies and implement other measures, such as training on sexual exploitation and abuse.

UNSCR Strengthening Efforts to Combat Sexual Violence

UNSCR 2106 (2013) reaffirms the importance of implementing all other resolutions relating to sexual violence, but also expresses profound concern regarding the limited progress towards addressing sexual violence and the poor implementation of resolution 1960.⁵⁹³ Further, it emphasises recognising national responsibility in addressing root causes of sexual violence in armed conflict. It stresses the importance of political, social, economic, and political empowerment of women, as well as men and boys, to “combat all forms of violence against women” and to “prevent sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations”.⁵⁹⁴ As in UNSCR 1820, it states that sexual violence has been used systematically or as a tactic of war against the civilian population. Therefore, it calls for measures in which women are included, thus contributing to peacekeeping and international security. The resolution also recognises investigation and documentation as ways to prosecute perpetrators of sexual violence and to ensure justice for victims.

Regarding UN missions, it calls for “the further deployment of Women Protection Advisors” as envisaged in UNSCR 1888. The important role of gender advisors is recognised. The Secretary-General and other UN agencies are required to “assist national authorities, with the effective participation of women, in addressing sexual violence concerns” in the fields of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration processes, as well as security and justice sector initiatives. Lastly, it alludes to the need to strengthen health systems, recognising the link between sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations and sexually transmitted diseases, which disproportionately affect women and girls.⁵⁹⁵

UNSCR Expanding Women’s Leadership in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

UNSCR 2122 (2013) reaffirms all previous resolutions on WPS and recognises progress in monitoring, prevention, protection, and prosecution of violence.⁵⁹⁶ Despite this progress, it notes that the WPS agenda lacks implementation in several other aspects such as “protection of human rights abuses and violations” or ensuring women’s participation in leadership positions, as well as different stakeholders’ general commitment to implement UNSCR 1325. Thus, this resolution focuses on expanding “women’s leadership and participation in conflict

⁵⁹² [UNSCR 1960](#), 16 December 2010.

⁵⁹³ [UNSCR 2106](#), 24 June 2013.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁶ [UNSCR 2122](#), 18 October 2013.

resolution and peacebuilding”,⁵⁹⁷ as well as monitoring progress in implementing the WPS agenda and information analysis. For this purpose, the resolution requests that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, the Secretary-General, Special Representatives to UN Missions, and other senior officials “update the Council on progress in inviting women to participate, including through consultations with civil society, including women’s organizations, in discussions pertinent to the prevention and resolution of conflict, the maintenance of peace and security and post-conflict peacebuilding”.⁵⁹⁸

UNSCR Increasing Efforts for Women’s Representation and Countering Extremism

UNSCR 2242 (2015) reaffirms all previous resolutions on WPS and welcomes the inclusion of gender equality in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,⁵⁹⁹ which aims to contribute to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and international security. It mentions the Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, observing a need to invest more in conflict prevention and women’s empowerment.⁶⁰⁰ Despite progress, the Security Council expresses deep concern about the “under-representation of women in senior positions in many formal processes and bodies related to the maintenance of international peace and security”. Hence, this resolution reiterates the need for women’s greater representation at all levels of decision-making, the provision of financial and technical support, and the participation of CSOs. Also, it calls for a doubling of efforts to integrate gender in different UN departments and their work, as stated in UNSCR 2122, as well as for ensuring gender analysis and technical expertise “throughout all stages of mission planning”.⁶⁰¹ It calls for incorporating aspects of the WPS agenda in specific country situations, while considering their unique contexts. To this end, the interests of women must be considered, particularly in situations of armed conflict, through consultations with local and international women’s groups. Also, it expresses concern regarding allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by UN peacekeepers, calling for pre-deployment training on this matter, investigations, and prosecution, when needed. Other relevant issues are mentioned, such as the participation of women in “strategies for countering terrorism and violent extremism”, reinforcing access to justice for women, the impact and risks of small arms and light weapons on women’s security, and integrating gender in humanitarian frameworks.⁶⁰²

UNSCR on Youth, Peace and Security

UNSCR 2250 (2015) reaffirms previous resolutions on WPS, including UNSCR 1325. It is considered the main resolution on YPS.⁶⁰³ Given that young people now make up the largest generation in history, as well as a generation that has lived through several armed conflicts, it states the need to recognise the agency and contributions of young people to the consolidation of lasting peace. It raises concerns about the radicalisation of youth and observes that involving youth in peace processes can help reduce this phenomenon. To achieve this, five categories are established: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships and disengagement, and reintegration. Relating to these pillars, member states are expected to implement policies that consider the needs of young people, as well as foster cooperation with local communities, CSOs, and youth organisations; they also should facilitate an inclusive environment through employment, education, and training, preventing marginalisation. The resolution recognises that establishing and maintaining international peace and security necessitates protecting and including

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an action plan adopted by all the UN state members, which “seeks to strengthen universal peace”, and which is intended to be fully implemented by 2030. It includes Goal 5, which aims to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. For more information, see “[Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)”.

⁶⁰⁰ [UNSCR 2242](#), 13 October 2015.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ [UNSCR 2250](#), 9 December 2015.

youth in conflict and post-conflict peace processes. Towards increasing their participation, it proposes supporting local initiatives. It also recommends drafting policies for youth, fostering their education, and promoting a “culture of peace, tolerance, intercultural and interreligious dialogue”.⁶⁰⁴ Towards addressing radicalisation, it calls on states to develop strategies. It recommends rehabilitating youth through labour policies, as well as greater support to youth-led organisations. The need for a gender-inclusive approach is briefly mentioned.

UNSCR on Increasing the Role of Youth in Negotiating, Implementing Peace Agreements

UNSCR 2419 (2018) recognises the positive role that young people can play in peacebuilding processes, reaffirming UNSCR 2250.⁶⁰⁵ It emphasises attending to the special risks faced by young women, affirming the UN’s commitment to empowering young people and women due to their agency and towards consolidating peace. This resolution pays particular attention to youth-led civil society groups.

UNSCR for a Survivor-centred Approach in Post-conflict Areas

UNSCR 2467 (2019) recognises the disproportionate risks that women and girls face in conflict and post-conflict areas due to sexual violence.⁶⁰⁶ It observes that almost 20 years after the passage of UNSCR 1325, discriminatory laws, the lack of a gender-sensitive humanitarian response, and lack of representation in decision-making bodies continue. It recognises the lack of services for survivors, emphasising the importance of focusing on their needs and including them in transitional justice processes and decision-making bodies. States are called upon to implement procedures that enforce the law and ensure accountability, as well as strengthen legislation and access to justice for victims of sexual violence, including appropriate investigation and prosecution of cases. It also stresses the need for documenting and monitoring sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict areas, including maintaining sex-disaggregated data. UNSCR 2467 notes that sexually transmitted diseases that result from sexual violence in armed conflict could be a persistent obstacle and challenge to gender equality. It also highlights the specific needs of women who become pregnant due to sexual violence, calling on states to include them and their children in national legislation consistent with international mechanisms.

The resolution acknowledges the work of civil society and women’s organisations in conflict prevention and resolution. It observes the importance of grassroots initiatives and local organisations for prevention. Meanwhile, it recognises the problems that these organisations experience as a result of discrimination, harassment, and violence against civil society. It points to a correlation between gender equality and women’s political, social, and economic empowerment, particularly related to the prevention of and response to sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.

The resolution emphasises that the needs of survivors must be considered by relevant UN bodies and that sexual violence must be documented with confidentiality. It requests that the Secretary-General deploy advisers for women’s protection in peace operations, as well as establish gender mainstreaming in these operations. Lastly, it recognises the role of women not only as victims, but as active participants in armed groups and conflict, mentioning the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of female combatants.

UNSCR on “Full Implementation” of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

UNSCR 2493 (2019) acknowledges progress made by UNSCR 1325, but also refers to shortcomings in its implementation.⁶⁰⁷ It expresses the important role and responsibility that member states and UN agencies have in

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ [UNSCR 2419](#), 6 June 2018.

⁶⁰⁶ [UNSCR 2467](#), 23 April 2019.

⁶⁰⁷ [UNSCR 2493](#), 29 October 2019.

ensuring human rights. It calls for increased funding in the area of WPS, including increased support and protection to CSOs, such as through development cooperation related to women's empowerment and gender equality.

UNSCR 2535 on the Role of Youth in Conflict Resolution, Prevention and Peacebuilding

UNSCR 2535 (2020) reaffirms and recalls all previous resolutions on WPS and YPS agendas.⁶⁰⁸ The term “youth” is defined as persons between the ages of 18 and 29 years old, though variations on this definition are observed. Considering that young people make up the vast majority of the world's population, including in conflict-affected countries, the resolution emphasises the potential of youth to “contribute to lasting peace and economic prosperity if inclusive policies are in place”.⁶⁰⁹ For this reason, it requests that the Secretary-General and his special envoys include the voice of youth in relevant discussions. Although this resolution focuses on the active role of youth in achieving sustainable peace or countering violence, such as terrorism, it also observes how conflict affects young people, especially women. The role of young women is highlighted as key “at all stages of peace processes”.⁶¹⁰

Given young people's potential, it calls for increasing their participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding, as well as to protect them and respect their human rights and individual freedoms. In fact, it gives special attention to cases of sexual violence, gender-based violence, and human trafficking, urging states to protect youth. It also highlights the need to give opportunities to young people in peacebuilding, entrepreneurship, education, and political involvement. The resolution notes digital spaces and their capability for enabling participation, but also inequalities and risks. Lastly, the resolution requests that the Secretary-General report every two years on progress in the implementation of resolutions 2250 and 2419.⁶¹¹

UN Sustainable Development Goals

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 state that women should have equal participation in decision-making.⁶¹² Target 5.5 of the goal on Gender Equality calls for women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life. The UN observes that discrimination against women at work contributes to women's underrepresentation in politics and decision-making. The Government of Kosovo has shown its commitment to working towards implementing SDGs by adopting unanimously the resolution on SDGs in 2018.⁶¹³

UN Western Balkans Action Plan

The United Nations Western Balkans Action Plan was developed under the Secretary-General's prevention platform. It commits that UN agencies will support the region in areas such as dialogue, trust-building, and reconciliation. This action plan identifies four areas in which the UN can engage:

- 1) Working with authorities and partners on dialogue, trust-building and reconciliation in the region through consultations and identifying areas where UN can provide an added value.
- 2) Exploring strengthened programmatic support to help empower positive agents of change, particularly women and youth, that work towards building greater trust and achieving reconciliation at all levels. This would include an examination of existing transitional justice initiatives in the broader sense and their learned lessons.

⁶⁰⁸ UNSCR 2535, 14 July 2020.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² UN General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015.

⁶¹³ UNKT, *Kosovo Parliament Unanimously Adopts SDG Resolution*, 2018.

- 3) Strengthening strategic coherence and effectiveness among UN actors working in support of trust-building, dialogue, reconciliation in the Western Balkans, in order to create greater synergies and more effective and strategic support from a regional perspective.
- 4) Ensuring strong coordination and cooperation with international partners in the region in the areas of support for trust-building, dialogue, and reconciliation, particularly the European Union and the OSCE.⁶¹⁴

The European Union's Comprehensive Approach to WPS

In 2008, the European Union (EU) adopted its “Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security”.⁶¹⁵ Notably, this document preceded eight of the 10 current resolutions relating to the WPS agenda, the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, and the creation of the European External Action Service.⁶¹⁶ This document provided guidance towards shaping the EU's external actions to protect women from violence and to contribute to increased equality between women and men during and after armed conflict and in situations of fragility. In it, the EU observes the need to promote the participation and protection of women in conflict situations and peacebuilding, as well as to ensure that such actions receive support through broader development considerations, such as the promotion of women's economic security, access to health services, and education. The indicators measuring progress in implementing the comprehensive approach were updated in 2016.⁶¹⁷ The document calls on CSOs, women's groups, and grassroots organisations to collaborate in implementing and evaluating the WPS agenda. While not directly applicable in Kosovo, it has guided the work of EU institutions in Kosovo.

The EU Strategic Approach to WPS

In 2018, the EU approved the EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace, and Security.⁶¹⁸ The document highlights the universality of the WPS Agenda, and its binding character for all EU actors and Member States, as well as in all interactions with non-EU countries. It also identifies the specific areas where enhanced implementation of the WPS Agenda is required. The Approach is relevant for EU institutions working in Kosovo.

EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

In 2020, the EU affirmed that gender equality is one of its core values, recognising that no country has reached equality between men and women. Its Gender Equality Strategy aims to achieve gender equality, to strengthen gender mainstreaming, and to use an intersectional approach regarding unique experiences of discrimination. The Strategy establishes four areas of work: ending violence and stereotypes against women, reaching economic equality, establishing equality in decision-making, and using gender mainstreaming and an intersectional approach in EU policies, including funding actions to make progress towards gender equality and addressing gender equality and empowerment across the world. As part of this Strategy, the EU seeks to continue implementing its strategic approach to WPS.⁶¹⁹ The Strategy references UN SDG Goal 5 for gender equality and calls for disaggregating data by age and other factors. It has applicability for the EU's internal and external policies and financing, and

⁶¹⁴ KWN email correspondence with Cornelia Schneider, UN Senior Development Coordination Officer, 2020.

⁶¹⁵ Council of the European Union, *Comprehensive Approach to the EU Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace and Security*, 2008.

⁶¹⁶ Guerrina, R. and Wright, R.K.M., “Gendering Normative Power in Europe: Lessons of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda”, *International Affairs*, 92, 2016, p. 306.

⁶¹⁷ Council of the European Union, *Revised indicators for the Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security*, 2016.

⁶¹⁸ European External Action Service, *EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security*, 2018.

⁶¹⁹ European Commission's Communication, *A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, 5 March 2020.

therefore has relevance to the work of the EU in Kosovo.

EU Gender Action Plan II and III

During the period of 2016 to 2020, the EU had its second Gender Action Plan (GAP II), which focused on “ending violence against women and girls, promoting women’s economic and social empowerment and ensuring the fulfil of human, political and civil rights”.⁶²⁰ This included requirements for EU delegations and member states to report annually on its implementation, including intersections between it and the EU WPS agenda. On 25 November 2020, the EU launched GAP III, which offers a comprehensive approach linked to the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.⁶²¹ One of the five pillars of GAP III focuses on implementing the WPS agenda, and monitoring and reporting on WPS will be aligned with GAP III reporting.⁶²² The EU and its member states must implement GAP III in their external relations, including in their work in Kosovo.

The Constitution of Kosovo

The Constitution of Kosovo foresees international cooperation in the promotion and protection of peace, security, and human rights.⁶²³ Specifically, through Article 22, the Constitution adopts international agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and CEDAW, among others. The government could not fully ratify CEDAW because Kosovo is not a member of the UN due to its still unresolved political status internationally. Although Kosovo has integrated in its Constitution sufficient guarantees for gender equality and human rights, the fact that Kosovo is not a member of the UN or the Council of Europe hampers the enforceability of these provisions, such as state monitoring by UN bodies and the application of supervisory and judicial mechanisms.

According to the Constitution, the Assembly of Kosovo, civil service, Kosovo Judicial Council, State Prosecutor, and Constitutional Court shall respect internationally recognised principles of gender equality. Article 7.2 of the Constitution guarantees equal opportunities for participation of women and men in political life. These provisions hold relevance for women’s equal participation in peace processes, including negotiations and dialogue with Serbia.

Meanwhile, regarding enforceability, Article 53 states that “Human rights and fundamental freedoms guaranteed by this Constitution shall be interpreted consistent with the court decisions of the European Court of Human Rights”. However, again, given its political status, Kosovo also does not yet have access to this Court directly. Thus, as Istrefi and Morina have observed, “the decisions of the Kosovo Constitutional Court are not subject to the European Court of Human Rights”.⁶²⁴

Since Kosovo declared its independence in 2008, the Constitution also has regulated the security sector. It defines security institutions as the Kosovo Security Force (KSF), Kosovo Security Council, Kosovo Police (KP), Kosovo Intelligence Agency, and Civilian Aviation Authority.⁶²⁵ According to the Constitution, these security institutions shall reflect the ethnic diversity of the population of Kosovo.⁶²⁶ However, in the specific context of security institutions, the Constitution as the highest legal and regulatory act in Kosovo does not explicitly require gender diversity in the security sector.

⁶²⁰ Ibid. See also the [Joint Staff Working Document on Gender Equality and women’s Empowerment: Transforming the lives of girls and women through EU external relations 2016-2020](#).

⁶²¹ European Commission’s Communication, [A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#), 5 March 2020.

⁶²² European Commission, [EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP\) III – An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in EU External Action](#), 2020.

⁶²³ Republic of Kosovo, [Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo](#), 2008.

⁶²⁴ Istrefi, K., and Morina, V., “Judicial Application of International Law in Kosovo”, in Rodin, S. & Perišin, T., [Judicial Application of International Law in Southeast Europe](#), Springer, 2015, pp. 169-170.

⁶²⁵ [Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo](#), Articles 126, 127, 128, 129, 130.

⁶²⁶ Ibid. Article 125.

Law on Kosovo Security Force, Relevant Regulations and Strategies

The Kosovo Security Force (KSF) is regulated with Law No. 06/L-123, approved in the Assembly in March 2008.⁶²⁷ Article 18 mandates the Government to adopt the Defence Strategy according to the recommendations of the Minister of Defence. The Law gives competences to the Security Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, which in cooperation with the President and the Government, prepares the Security Strategy for Kosovo.⁶²⁸ In 2010, the Assembly of Kosovo adopted the first Security Strategy, which did not state explicitly its period of implementation.⁶²⁹ The Security Strategy identified the objectives, challenges, and means to address challenges, but; lacked sufficient considerations relating to gender equality. It only referred to gender with regard to recruitment, retention, and promotion policies in the security sector.⁶³⁰ According to the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), this Strategy was imposed on Kosovo institutions by internationals, “failing to address the realistic security challenges faced by Kosovo.”⁶³¹ Moreover, according to the GAP Institute, the drafting process lacked transparency and inclusiveness, as relevant security institutions were not consulted in this process.⁶³² The Security Strategy 2021-2030 was under public consultation in 2020. The version provided for public consultation also lacked a gender perspective.

According to regulation No. 09/2019 for Planning on the Ministry of Defence and Kosovo Security Force, the Defence Strategy shall be the highest strategic document in the hierarchy of Ministry of Defence documents, defining the main principles, directions, and defence capabilities.⁶³³ In December 2020, the Ministry of Defence drafted this Strategy, but the Assembly had not approved it yet at the time of writing. In the section on human resources, the draft Strategy states that they will apply non-discriminatory policies: “the Kosovo Security Force is a multiethnic force, so in this regard priority will be given to gender representation, integration and representation of all communities without distinction, as well as equal opportunities for career development.”⁶³⁴

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defence has two documents related to mainstreaming gender in the Kosovo Security Force and within the Ministry of Defence. First, the policy on Human Rights and Gender Equality in Ministry of the Kosovo Security Force (MKSF) and KSF was approved in 2011, serving as a guideline for respecting and promoting human rights and gender equality, respecting UNSCR 1325, and the applicable legislation.⁶³⁵ Through this policy, KSF and MKSF (now the Ministry of Defence) commits to provide open, transparent, and encouraging procedures during recruitment; equal working conditions; equal pay for men and women for the same job and rank; a safe and harassment-free work environment; and gender awareness among all staff. It also foresees equal opportunities for promotion in decision-making and management in MKSF and KSF, as well as open and transparent processes.⁶³⁶

In 2019, the Ministry of Defence approved the second policy on Human Rights and Gender Parity in the Ministry of Defence and Kosovo Security Force.⁶³⁷ This policy highlights the achievements made so far in the Security Force and in the Ministry of Defence, providing data on women in uniform and other decision-making positions as of 2018.⁶³⁸

⁶²⁷ Law No. 06/L-123 on [Kosovo Security Force](#), Article 18, 19.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid*, Article 19 and [The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo](#), Article 127.

⁶²⁹ [The Security Strategy of Kosovo](#), 2010.

⁶³⁰ Ministry of Security Force, [Security Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo](#), 2010, Article 2.3, p. 6.

⁶³¹ KCSS, Policy Brief, [The Development Context of the Strategic Security Sector Review - Civil society perspective](#), 2013, p. 4.

⁶³² GAP Institute, [The new Kosovo Security Strategy formulation process - Inclusiveness and transparency](#), Prishtinë/Priština, May 2013.

⁶³³ Ministry of Defence, regulation no. 09/2019 for [Planning on the Ministry of Defense and Kosovo Security Force](#), 2019.

⁶³⁴ [Draft Security Strategy of Republic of Kosovo](#), official website of MoD.

⁶³⁵ MKSF and KSF, [Policy on Human Rights and Gender Equality in MKSF and KSF](#), 2011.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid*.

⁶³⁷ [Policy on Human Rights and Gender Parity in Ministry of Defense and Kosovo Security Force](#), 2019.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8.

Law on Police and Relevant Secondary Legislation

Since 2012, Law No. 04/L-076 on Police has regulated the work of the Kosovo Police (KP).⁶³⁹ According to Article I, KP shall respect principles of gender equality and human rights as foreseen by the Constitution in the employment, advancement, and assignment of duties. It emphasises the use of a merit-based and non-discriminatory processes for recruitment and promotion, but does not refer explicitly to the possibility of using affirmative measures to recruit or promote women, including those from minority ethnic groups, as foreseen by the Law on Gender Equality.

Regulation No. 02/2017 on the Internal Organization and Systematization of Working Positions of the Kosovo Police determines the internal organisation of the police at central and local levels. Human resources also are regulated with bylaws, such as the Regulation on Personnel and Administration in Kosovo Police.⁶⁴⁰ Chapter VII of this Regulation on Human Rights, Diversity, and Gender Equality describes the scope of the Human Rights Office in the KP, which includes implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the internal legal provisions of police relating to human rights, gender equality, and diversity. The Office should undertake programs, strategies, and projects, as well as further implementation of International Conventions.⁶⁴¹ This chapter also requires cooperation with governmental and non-governmental institutions and organisations.⁶⁴² Since the establishment of AGE, KP also applies strategies and programs initiated by AGE.⁶⁴³

Administrative Instruction No. 02/2019 for the Promotion Procedure for Police Officers states that the promotion process is based on KP needs (vacancies), as well as selection of the most qualified persons through a fair and competitive process.⁶⁴⁴ The document does not include reference to any affirmative measures for furthering gender equality, as foreseen as possible by LGE,⁶⁴⁵ but rather foresees promotion solely based on merit. Thus, the KP does not have a clear, written strategic approach to promoting women within the force. Meanwhile, members of the Women's Association in KP have met with and tried to encourage women to seek promotions.⁶⁴⁶

Law on Gender Equality

The Law on Gender Equality (LGE), adopted in 2015, repealed the prior Law on Gender Equality.⁶⁴⁷ It ensures gender equality as a “fundamental value for the democratic development of the society, providing equal opportunities for both female and male participation in the political, economic, social, cultural and other areas of societal life”.⁶⁴⁸ According to LGE, equal participation and representation is achieved when a minimum of 50% of each gender is ensured in governing and decision-making bodies of all legislative, executive, judicial, and other public institutions. Article 6 also provides for institutions to take temporary special measures to accelerate gender equality. These measures may include quotas for the equal representation of women and men, supporting programs to increase the participation of the less represented sex in decision-making and public life, economic empowerment of women and men, and measures to address inequalities in other areas.⁶⁴⁹

Notably, the Law on General Elections (2008) and Law on Local Elections (2008) do not comply with the

⁶³⁹ Law No. 04/L-076 [on Police](#).

⁶⁴⁰ KCSS, *State of Play of Integrity Policies in the Kosovo Police*, 2020, p. 15.

⁶⁴¹ [Regulation on Personnel and Administration in Kosovo Police](#).

⁶⁴² *Ibid*, p. 37.

⁶⁴³ KWN interview with Hysni Shala, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁶⁴⁴ [Administrative Instruction No. 02/2019 for the Promotion Procedure of Police Officers](#).

⁶⁴⁵ [Law on Gender Equality](#), Article 6, 2.4.

⁶⁴⁶ KWN interview with a woman Captain in the Police, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

⁶⁴⁷ The [Law on Gender Equality no. 05/L-020](#) repealed the prior [Law on Gender Equality 2004/2](#).

⁶⁴⁸ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, [Law on Gender Equality No. 05/L-020](#).

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

LGE, partially because they were adopted before the Law on Gender Equality (2015).⁶⁵⁰ Both election laws require a gender quota of 30% of each gender on the candidate lists of political parties, whereas the LGE defines equal participation as 50% participation of each gender in all decision-making positions in political and public life. As LGE was adopted after the election laws, it should take precedence over them. Prior to the 2019 general elections, the Ombudsperson called on all political parties “to enforce the provisions of the Law on Gender Equality in the lists of candidates for members of parliament”, reminding them of this obligation.⁶⁵¹

Nevertheless, the 50% participation of women and men has not been implemented in practice in the Assembly or in the government. Rather, political parties tend to implement only the electoral laws by ensuring that they bear minimum of at least 30% of their electoral lists are women (and men). If electoral laws would be amended to require women and men’s 50% representation in electoral lists, this would contribute to the implementation of the LGE, as well as directly to women’s equal participation in national and municipal assemblies. This could contribute to their more equal participation related to peace processes, oversight of security institutions, and the allocation of state financing for programming towards peace and security. Women’s 50% participation in government has not been implemented either, as discussed in prior sections of this report.

The LGE also established the Agency for Gender Equality within the Office of the Prime Minister, as the key institution for furthering gender equality in Kosovo. Its main responsibilities relate to implementing the LGE, including identifying and monitoring policies that promote gender equality. Related to WPS, AGE is responsible for ensuring full implementation of CEDAW, which provides the basis for realising equality among women and men by ensuring women’s equal access to, and equal opportunities in political and public life.⁶⁵² LGE also establishes gender equality officers in ministries and municipalities, among other institutions. These gender equality mechanisms have an important role in reviewing governmental policies and programs at all levels to ensure the needs of diverse women and men are addressed.

Kosovo National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security

Kosovo adopted its first National Action Plan (NAP) for Women, Peace, and Security in 2014, covering the years 2013-2015.⁶⁵³ The NAP aimed to enhance capacities to implement UNSCR 1325; increase women’s participation in the foreign service, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping operations; increase women’s roles in security forces at all levels and recognise the deep links between peace and security; build capacities for the promotion and leadership of women in the sector; and reduce obstacles to women’s participation within security structures. The plan also included activities towards creating a legal framework for “the treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration of civil survivors of conflict/war sexual violence, torture or other forms of violence”.⁶⁵⁴ It also foresaw the identification and documentation of cases, access to justice, psychological support, health rehabilitation, and economic empowerment.

According to AGE, “79% of the activities of this strategic document were implemented, showing a commitment of institutions to advance in the field of gender equality. Also, in the region it has been taken as an example as one of the most implemented action plans.”⁶⁵⁵ After the NAP expired in 2015, no new NAP was drafted to replace it, as its objectives have been incorporated into the new Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024.

⁶⁵⁰ The [Law on General Elections in Kosovo](#), [The Law on Local Elections in Kosovo](#).

⁶⁵¹ Ombudsperson Institution of Kosovo, [Ombudsperson’s statement with regard to early elections process for the Assembly of Kosovo](#), 2021 and [Klan Kosova, Avokati i Popullit bën thirrje për barazi gjinore në zgjedhjet e 6 tetorit](#), 2019.

⁶⁵² UN, [CEDAW](#), New York, 18 December 1979.

⁶⁵³ Government of Kosovo, [Action Plan in Implementation of Resolution 1325, “Women, Peace and Security”, Kosovo 2013-2015](#).

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁵ KWN interview with AGE, Prishtinë/Priština, 2020.

Kosovo Program for Gender Equality

The new Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024 mentions that despite the quota, women's political representation is still a major challenge in legislative assemblies, decision-making positions, and within the executive at both central and municipal levels.⁶⁵⁶ While the Program deals with various issues that will contribute to security for women, such as the inclusion of women in security institutions, negotiations, and peace and reconciliation processes, it does not refer explicitly to the WPS agenda. Nevertheless, some sections do relate to the WPS agenda. For example, strategic objective 3 aims to ensure and enhance access to justice, decision-making, peace, and security by promoting specifically gender equality in the justice and security sector.⁶⁵⁷

The program also acknowledges women's underrepresentation within KP and KSF, aiming to increase women's engagement in the security sector. This is foreseen to be achieved through: research on discrimination and the security sector environment; establishment of an Advisory Board for Women, Peace, and Security within security institutions; review and advancement of the curricula of security institutions from a gender perspective and in line with LGE; and organizing awareness-raising campaigns to encourage women to join the security sector.

An Intersectional Approach to Women, Youth, Peace, and Security

Generally, as this annex illustrates, concepts related to gender, peace, youth, and security, historically have been treated separately within UN resolutions. UNSCR 1325 and 2250 seem synchronised, but they lack an intersectional perspective; gender is not integrated in UNSCR 2250, and UNSCR 1325 does not call for an age-attentive approach. Gender is mentioned in UNSCR 2250 only twice: reinforcing the importance of engaging women in countering violent extremism and regarding employment opportunities.⁶⁵⁸ While UNSCR 2250 explores the transformative role of youth and their relevant role in decision-making processes, it disregards how gender shapes youth and the different roles, positions, and needs of young women and men.

Other UN Security Council resolutions reinforce and address UNSCR 1325 and 2250. For instance, UNSCR 2419 underlines UNSCR 1325 and 2250, reaffirming the need to include young people, especially young women, as agents of peace, in decision-making, and in negotiation processes. Indeed, engaging young women could lead to better understanding of their needs, bring diverse experiences into the conversation, and usher in a new generation of peace-makers.

During the finalisation of this report, the Security Council adopted UNSCR 2535 in 2020; it recognises the role of youth in different areas, such as conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding, digital spaces, and education, as well as emphasises the need to achieve gender equality.⁶⁵⁹ It also acknowledges particular security threats faced by young women. Thus, UNSCR 2535 provides the strongest connection to date between WPS and YPS agendas by acknowledging the different experiences of young women when they face violence and discrimination, but also their role as agents of peace.

Initially, the EU's Comprehensive Approach differentiated between the needs of women and young women, especially in cases of sexual violence. However, it did not fully integrate the WPS and YPS agendas. Young women were primarily considered victims and little attention was paid to their agency, such as in contributing to peace. The more recent EU Strategic Approach to WPS does not only attend to women as victims, particularly young women; it also recognises their roles as agents of change who can prevent conflict and contribute to sustainable peace. In this sense, the EU Strategic Approach has ameliorated some oversights in the earlier Comprehensive Approach.

As for Kosovo's legal framework related to WPS and YPS agendas, the Constitution and LGE provide a

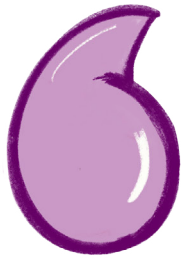
⁶⁵⁶ Government of the Republic of Kosovo, "Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024", 2020.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 60.

⁶⁵⁸ Weldeab Sebhata, R., "(En)gendering youth for gender-just peace with UN Security Council Resolution 2250" Gender-Just Peace and Transitional Justice, 3, 2017, p. 11.

⁶⁵⁹ UNSCR 2535, 14 July 2020.

general framework for furthering gender equality. However, only the Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024 addresses the security needs of both women and young women, such as in relation to access to education, healthcare, employment, and ending gender-based violence. Kosovo legislation does not contain specific references to young women in relation to decision-making or within peace and security processes.



“If they don't
give you a seat
at the table, bring
a folding chair.”

– Shirley Chisholm