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# Assessment of Service Provision by Centres for Social Work for Survivors of Domestic Violence

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## Introduction

As part of the regional project “Institutionalizing Quality Rehabilitation and Integration Services for violence survivors” supported by Austrian Development Agency, the Kosovo Women’s Network (KWN) conducted this end-line study. It follows the baseline study conducted in 2020 that aimed to assess the satisfaction of women victims of violence and users of services in Centres for Social Work (CSWs), drawing from the experiences of women in shelters for victims of domestic violence. The purpose of this assessment was to compare data to see if there were improvements in service provision provided by CSWs. Each partner<sup>2</sup> in the aforementioned project conducted the same study in their respective country, using the same methodology, adapted to local contexts, primarily to local legislation mainly.

In September 2020, the Kosovo Parliament voted to include the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention (IC) in the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo.<sup>3</sup> The government and now parliament have continued the process of amending the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence to align it with the IC.<sup>4</sup> The National Strategy on Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women 2022-2026 was developed based on IC requirements.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the Law on Social and Family Services also has continued to be in the process of amendment, and KWN has provided comments on this Law as well, mainly focused on aligning it with IC requirements. Both laws are important for clarifying further the roles and responsibilities for ministries, municipalities, CSWs, coordination mechanisms, and other actors for designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating social services for survivors of violence.

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<sup>1</sup> The views herein are those of the Kosovo Women’s Network and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Austrian Development Agency.

<sup>2</sup> Partners in the project include Albania Women Empowerment Network and Gender Alliance for Development Centre from Albania, Udruzene Zene from Bosnia and Hercegovina, National Network to end Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence from North Macedonia, Women’s Rights Center from Montenegro, and Autonomous Women’s Centre from Serbia.

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of Kosovo, [Amendment of the Constitution of Republic of Kosovo 2020](#).

<sup>4</sup> Council of Europe, [Istanbul Convention](#).

<sup>5</sup> [National Strategy on Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women 2022- 2026](#).

Additionally, as part of this project, together with the government, KWN has developed and institutionalized two training curricula for social workers at the Centers for Social Work on “Working with victims of domestic violence: treatment and referral” and “Working with victims of sexual crimes and trafficking”, respectively. The curricula have been approved and adopted by the General Council of Social and Family Services in the Department for Social and Family Policy in the Ministry of Finance, Labour, and Transfers (MLFT) in 2022, and they have become mandatory for social workers at CSWs. KWN organized eight trainings involving representatives of municipal Coordination Mechanisms on domestic violence from 11 municipalities,<sup>6</sup> and four trainings of trainers (two-days per topic) who became certified by the Council to train social workers in the future. Supported by UN Women, KWN also drafted a State Protocol for treatment of sexual violence cases, developed curricula and trained 102 participants from coordination mechanisms on it, including social workers. These efforts have sought to enhance the capacities of social workers to provide services.

## Methodology

As this assessment sought to enable comparisons with the baseline study, it used the same methodology. Partners prepared the questionnaire together, adapting it to the local context. Questions pertained to the roles and responsibilities of CSWs. Qualified social workers and shelter personnel at eight shelters in Kosovo administered the surveys. Social workers were trained by KWN on the methodology and questionnaire, towards quality assurance and a standardized approach. The confidentiality of respondents has been ensured, and only women survivors of gender-based violence who were willing and provided full informed consent to participate in the assessment took part. Due to issues of access and to ensure protection of assessment participants, convenience sampling was used; only women in shelters and day centres who had received social services participated in the assessment. Moreover, the fact that women participants knew and trusted shelter staff who were conducting the assessment sought to create an environment where women felt free to express their thoughts regarding the work of CSWs, without fear that it could affect the services available to them. This also sought to ensure availability of professional psychological counselling services during and after interviews, based on how women felt and their needs. The assessment was conducted between July and December 2022. During this period, in total 80 surveys were completed with women from 19 municipalities. Thus, this study focuses only on the experiences of women with CSWs and does not draw from KWN’s other monitoring of the performance and needs of CSWs.<sup>7</sup>

## Legal and Policy Framework

CSWs are a “public institution of professional municipal level that is responsible for protecting citizens in need [sic]” and should be staffed by appropriately trained and qualified professional social service officers that are responsible for exercising the powers set out by the Law on Social and Family Services. According to the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) (now MFLT), in cooperation with other

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<sup>6</sup> South Mitrovica, Ferizaj, Prishtina, Peja, Prizren, Suhareka, Gjakova, Gjilan, Partes, Klllokot, and Graçanica.

<sup>7</sup> For further information regarding CSWs, including based on interviews with social workers, please see KWN, [From Laws to Action](#). KWN observes that the lack of financial resources and insufficient number of social service officers is a key factor affecting the service that they can provide, but that was not the focus of this brief (see: KWN, [“Advocacy Letter for Budget Line for Centres for Social Work”](#), 20 October 2022). Addressing these systematic issues, such as the lack of sufficient human resource, is necessary also for improving the quality of services.

ministries, must “support and raise ancillary structures and necessary infrastructure, which serves to support and meet the needs of persons against whom domestic violence is exercised, including social assistance and medical services, in accordance with applicable law.”<sup>8</sup> Related to domestic violence, the Law entitles CSWs to petition for all forms of protection orders which victims can request.<sup>9</sup> After execution by courts or responsible authorities, protection orders must be sent to CSWs, who are also entitled to make submissions at protection order review hearings where the victim is a child or lacks capacity.<sup>10</sup> CSWs’ roles and responsibilities are described in the Law on Social and Family Services,<sup>11</sup> which regulates the provision of social and family services to families and persons in need, including individuals who have experienced domestic violence, human trafficking, or are vulnerable to exploitation or abuse. According to this Law, MLSW is responsible to “develop and implement appropriate standards, policies and strategic planning”; must coordinate international and governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to promote “coherent development and implementation of social welfare policies”; determines who, how, and where social services will be delivered by service providers; ensures direct provision of services in cases where the municipality or other organizations “continually fail to meet the minimum standards”; and is responsible to allocate annual budget to enable municipalities and other organizations to provide social and family services on its behalf. Further, the Ministry is responsible to set out professional standards of social and family services that must be met by service providers and to establish mechanisms to ensure that these are being achieved, including by specifying the category and number of professional staff to be employed. In 2020, the government transferred these competencies to the Ministry of Finance, Labour, and Transfers (hereinafter the “Ministry”). According to the same Law, municipalities are responsible to ensure provision of social and family services within their territories to a standard specified by the Ministry, through CSWs or other specialized and licensed service providers, such as NGOs. Municipalities also are responsible for financing these services and must ensure that CSWs are resourced to the standards specified by the Ministry, including the category and number of professional staff to be employed. According to the IC, CSWs provide General Support Services, defined as “help offered by public authorities such as social services, health services, employment services, which provide long-term help and are not exclusively designed for the benefit of victims only but serve the public at large”.<sup>12</sup> The IC requires the state to take appropriate measure to provide these services to victims of all types of violence against women. In this regard, as mentioned, Kosovo still is in the process of amending its legislation in line with these requirements.

## Findings

As part of the regional project, KWN and its member organizations, namely shelters that work with women who have suffered violence, monitored the work of CSWs to assess the extent to which they are implementing their legal responsibilities, including as relevant to the Istanbul Convention. From 31 July to 31 December 2022, eight shelters helped their clients, when willing, to complete questionnaires regarding their experiences with CSWs. In total, 80 questionnaires were completed by women ages 15 to 60.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Article 27.

<sup>9</sup> Law No. [03/L-182](#) on Protection against Domestic Violence.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Law No. [02/L-17](#) on Social and Family Services.

<sup>12</sup> [Explanatory Report](#) to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

## Demographics of the sample

The sample included women sheltered in shelters in the regions of: Ferizaj, Gjakova, Gjiilan, Peja, Prishtina, Prizren, South Mitrovica, and Novobrd. Regarding their ethnicity, 49 (61%) were Albanian, 10 (13%) were Serbian, 13 (16%) were Ashkali or Roma, and eight (10%) were not citizens of Kosovo. Regarding their ages, 5% of women who completed the questionnaire were less than 18 years old, 15% were 18-25 years old, 31% were 26-35 years old, 34% were 36-45 years old, 14% were 46-55 years old and 1% were 56-65 years old.

## Forms of violence suffered

Most women participating in the assessment had experienced physical and psychological/emotional violence; 68% had experienced physical violence, while 83% had experienced psychological or emotional violence. Meanwhile, 45% said they had suffered economic violence, and 9% reported experiencing sexual violence. The timeframe during which they had suffered various forms of abuse ranged from one year to 25 years. From surveyed women, 69% experienced violence multiple times in the past 12 months, while 23% experienced violence once in the past 12 months.

## Protection Orders

Most women (88%) had reported at least one instance of violence to the police. Of these women, only 23% received a protection order, 2% received an emergency protection order, and 23% received a Temporary Emergency Protection Order. Of 80 cases, only four cases currently were involved in a criminal proceeding.

## Security

At the time of participating in the assessment, most women felt somewhat secure or extremely secure (77%), but 5% felt insecure or very insecure. More than half of the women (53%) said that they felt more secure with help from institutions like CSWs and shelters, while 10% said that their security situation had remained the same. Participating women tended to comment positively on the services received, stating that after suffering abuse, the kindness, and resources they received from the shelter was wonderful and that they were very grateful.

**“Nobody is yelling at me or making me sad.”**

- 29-year-old woman, Prizren

**“I feel much more secure here, at the shelter, physically and psychologically.”**

- Women, Gjakova

## Assessment of CSW services

This section examines the performance of CSWs based on their existing duties and responsibilities, as well as the IC guidance regarding the services that should be provided. As per Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, after the case of domestic violence is reported to the police, the CSW must be informed about the incidents of domestic violence where the victim is a child, lacks capacity, or the violence is “so grave as to impact the safety or security of a person under the age of eighteen”. More than half of women surveyed (51%) had received assistance from a CSW in the past 12 months.

Related to CSW responsibilities on protection orders and the rights of the child, from 80 women surveyed, 19 had protection orders for their children, about which CSWs were



informed, and 24 women said that their children had received psychological or social support from CSWs.

As per Standard Operating Procedures on Protection from Domestic Violence, CSWs must **assign a case manager** responsible for assisting the victim to identify and coordinate other services, as needed, as well as to support and empower the victim to make decisions in a responsible and independent manner. From surveyed women, 81% stated that they were appointed a case manager. Meanwhile, all victims must complete 48 hours of reflection prior to participating in the security and needs assessment with the case manager, except in exceptional cases. Of the women who used CSW services, 76% said that they indeed had the 48-hour reflection period prior to undergoing the assessment.

As per the IC, CSW case managers should assess women's needs and assist women in creating a plan. Based on SOP's<sup>13</sup> the case manager should assess the victim's condition and situation, meaning they must assess the social and economic position of the domestic violence victim and identify the victim's needs, conduct home visits to assess the living situation of the victim and develop an individual plan with the victim. The CSW also should coordinate required services, which means that they should ensure that the victim is informed about services available from institutions and NGOs, including the terms and conditions that they must meet to be eligible for relevant services. These may include counselling, short-term accommodation, social assistance, applying for a protection order, and/or support in obtaining personal documents or to access other administrative services. In cases when a child is involved, a legal custodian must be appointed to ensure protection of the rights of the child.<sup>14</sup>

Most women (81%) said that the CSW case worker assessed their situation and conditions while nearly half of the women (48%) responded that the CSW case manager developed an individual plan. This shows an improvement compared to baseline study in 2020, where 60% of women surveyed stated that case manager assessed their situation, while 27% of respondents had reported that the case manager developed an individual plan.

However, in 2022 eight women (10%) said that they did not have an individual plan, while 18% were not sure or did not answer. Of the women that did receive a plan, 84% agreed with their plan. Concerningly, only 19% received a copy of their plan. Most women (76%) respondents said that the CSW case manager informed them of their rights, told them about the types of services available to them 81%, and asked about their actual needs (78%).

Municipal Coordination Mechanisms discuss cases and how to best support them, using a coordinated approach and ideally in line with the case management plans CSW case managers have drafted together with victims. Coordination Mechanism have members including the Gender Equality Officer (GEO), Kosovo Police, judges, CSWs, Victim Advocates, the municipal Department of Education, Employment Office, CSOs including shelters, and, in some municipalities, women municipal assembly members. As per the legal framework, a victim has the right to attend Coordination Mechanism meetings to discuss her case. However, only four women were informed of their right to attend Coordination Mechanism meetings. Indeed, KWN's experience suggests that in some municipalities the Coordination Mechanisms also are not meeting regularly or functioning actively.

Regarding the services available to them in accordance with SOPs, 59% of all women reported that they could have benefitted from psychological support. Meanwhile, 73% of respondents said that they were informed by the CSW about psychological support options, while 66% have used this service. Of the women who received psychological help, 92% received

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<sup>13</sup> Standard Operation Procedures for Protection from Domestic Violence in Kosovo, [2013](#).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

it from a shelter, while only 9% received support from psychological professionals at the CSW. Only four women received help from medical professionals at a medical centre. This suggests shortcomings in the state's provision of psychological counselling to women and girls who have suffered violence and minimal engagement of CSW social workers in ensuring that women have access to these free, state services.

Of the women who met with CSWs, 69% needed a temporary place to reside. Of them, 99% said that the CSW informed them of a secure place. Of the women who responded that they were informed, all said that they used the safe place to reside. Most of these women (69%) used shelter services for housing (none of which are long-term) and 33% used temporary housing from the state. Municipalities provided temporary housing supported by the state in 18 cases (eight in Peja, six in Prishtina, two in Prizren, one case in Prizren, and one in Novobrd). This shows improvement compared to the baseline study, when only six women benefited from temporary housing provided by the state.

All women who had children under 12 had their children with them in the shelter. Boys over age 12 typically are not allowed in women's shelters. Therefore, women who had sons over age 12, in four cases still had the boys with them in the same shelter, while in two cases the child resided with the alleged perpetrator or his family. In four cases, they were sent to another shelter for children.

Of the respondents, 42% needed financial assistance when they met with their case manager, while 40% did not. In only 36% of cases did the social work ensure that women were aware of financial assistance services provided by the CSW. Of the women who used financial services, only 18% used state social support, while the rest relied on help and care provided by someone else.

When meeting with their case manager, 30% of women needed to find employment. From all respondents in 2022, only 25% of them were informed about employment resources available to them. Related, only 9% of all women said that they used the services of employment offices, while only 10% of all respondents were informed about Vocational Training Centres.

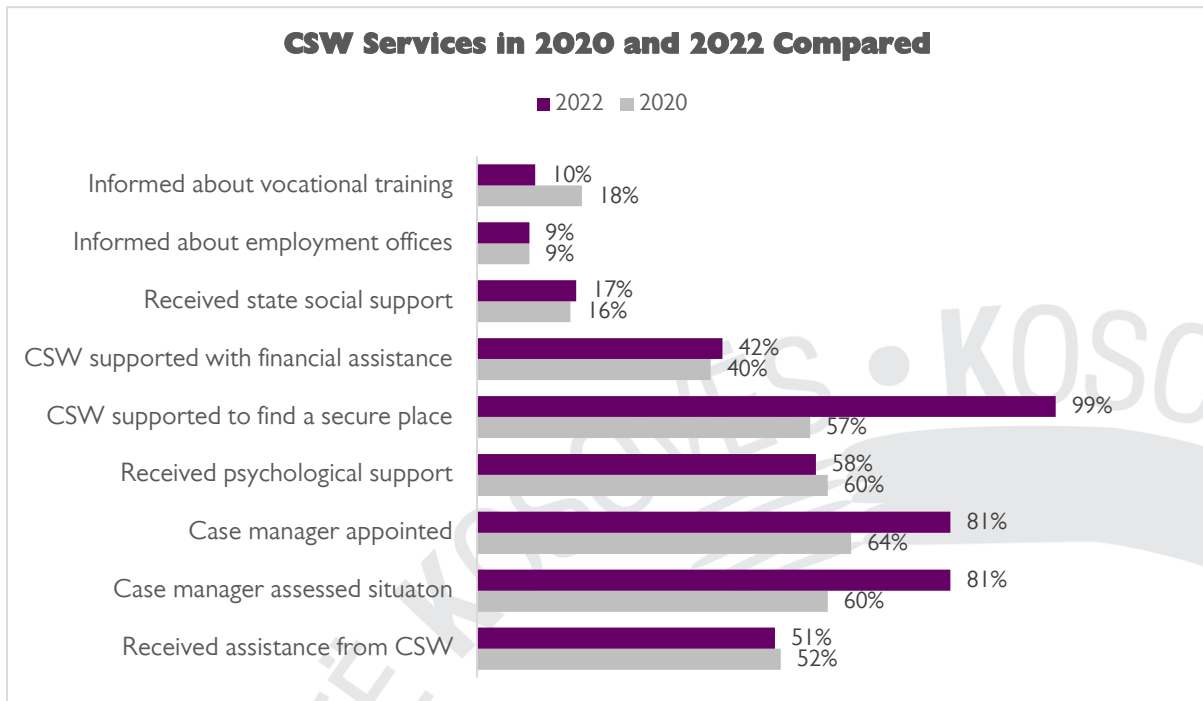
Regarding the satisfaction of respondents on reaction of CSW, 6% of the respondents consider very unsatisfactory; 5% unsatisfactory; 24% somewhat satisfactory; 31% satisfactory, 15% highly satisfactory, and 19% didn't have an opinion.

## **Conclusions**

It is concerning that several women who have suffered violence have not received case management plans based on a clear assessment of their security situation and needs. Women's insufficient information regarding the existence of Coordination Mechanisms and their right to attend these meetings may undermine the coordination of services and inter-institutional collaboration in supporting victims in implementing their case management plans. It is also concerning that not all women were informed about their right to psychological support, crucial for their recovery, and notable that those women who do receive such services receive them primarily from NGO shelters. Global experience suggests that women may have more trust in NGOs' psychologists, including in terms of confidently, making NGOs important actors in ensuring access to quality services, as foreseen by the IC. Clearly social workers still do not share adequate information about employment and vocational education services available to women, though such information can be essential parts of their case management plans and for them to become autonomous.

A comparison of the results of this endline assessment with the baseline assessment reveals that a few CSW services have improved over time. According to the women interviewed, substantially more had a case manager appointed than in 2020, more had an

assessment of their needs undertaken, more were supported in finding a safe place to stay, and slightly more were supported in finding financial assistance. Meanwhile, in some areas, a smaller percentage of women reportedly received services than in 2020, such as related to psychological support and vocational training.



KWN hypothesizes that minimal progress, or even regress, can be attributed to the changes in government that occurred during this time, which slowed progress in finalising and approving key laws and secondary legislation in line with the IC that would contribute to clarifying the roles and responsibilities of: 1) social workers for implementing key services, including minimum qualifications and obligatory training on case management for cases of gender-based violence based on the IC; 2) municipal directorates of social welfare for allocating sufficient human and financial resources so that social workers have sufficient time and resources to carry out their work; 3) municipal coordination mechanisms in improving a victim-centred interinstitutional cooperation in case management and service provision; and the relevant ministry for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of this legislation. While KWN has advocated for these changes to the legal framework, including by commenting directly on draft laws since 2019, the laws still have not been adopted and thus the legal framework remains insufficient for holding all relevant actors accountable for ensuring adequate social services based on the IC.

## Recommendations

Based on these findings, towards implementing the IC and the relevant legal framework in Kosovo, KWN recommends the following:

1. The responsible ministry<sup>15</sup> within the Government of Kosovo should further clarify the legal framework, including recommendations provided by KWN on the draft-law on Social and Family Services and the draft-law on gender-based violence, as well as the secondary legislation, regarding the roles and responsibilities of social workers and coordination mechanisms. This includes establishing minimum qualifications for social workers and obligatory training in case management specific to handling cases of gender-based violence.
2. Ensure that CSW social workers inform victims, clearly and simply, regarding what an individual plan is and which services are available to them. They must design the plan together with the victim and ensure that the victim has a copy of the plan. This responsibility should be clearly stated in the revised secondary legislation and SOPs, and its implementation should be monitored by both the responsible municipal directorate and periodically by the responsible ministry.
3. Through the legal framework and municipal budgets, ensure that all CSWs have enough staff to provide quality services by increasing the number of social workers and psychologists in CSWs, as previously recommended by KWN.<sup>16</sup>
4. Ensure that all women are informed about employment opportunities and vocational training available to them, as part of needs assessment and creation of the plan.
5. Continue to increase the availability of temporary state housing or social housing for victims after they leave shelters, including by amending the draft-law on Social Housing to explicitly refer to persons who have suffered gender-based violence and their children as a priority category; by establishing clearer criteria and linking these with case management plans as part of the rehabilitation processes; and, through the amended draft-law, by requiring municipalities to budget adequately for providing sufficient social housing to those most in need.

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<sup>15</sup> Given that the government's recent reforms, the ministry is not specified here, but the government should specify which ministry is responsible for this as well as for adequate monitoring of the implementation of the existing legal framework.

<sup>16</sup> KWN, "[Advocacy Letter](#) for Budget Line for Centres for Social Work", 20 October 2022.