



# Kosovo Women's Network

Serving, Protecting and Promoting the Rights of Women and Girls

**STRATEGY**

**2023-2026**

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# Contents

Introduction .....	5
Improving Gender Equality through the Rule of Law .....	9
Laws, Policies, and Institutional Mechanisms .....	9
The Situation .....	13
Key Achievements .....	21
Key Challenges.....	22
KWN’s Strategy.....	26
Interest Groups .....	33
A Life Free from Gender-Based Violence .....	36
Laws, Policies, and Institutional Mechanisms .....	36
The Situation.....	40
Key Challenges.....	49
KWN’s Strategy.....	52
Interest Groups .....	55
Women’s Economic Empowerment.....	57
Laws, Policies, and Institutional Mechanisms .....	57
The Situation.....	59
Key Challenges.....	64
KWN’s Strategy.....	65
Interest Groups .....	68
Gender Transformative Education .....	70
Laws, Policies, and Institutional Mechanisms .....	70
The Situation.....	73
Key Challenges.....	76
KWN’s Strategy.....	78
Interest Groups .....	79
Crosscutting Aim: Strengthening the Feminist Movement .....	81
The Situation.....	81

Key Challenges.....	83
KWN's Strategy.....	86
Interest Groups .....	89
Crosscutting Aim: Environmental Protection .....	90
Laws, Policies, and Institutional Mechanisms .....	90
Situational Analysis .....	91
Key Challenges.....	91
KWN's Strategy.....	92
Inclusiveness.....	94
Monitoring and Evaluation.....	96

# Introduction

Initially, the network of rural women's rights organizations was formed in 1996. Later, members of this network together with other women's rights organizations established the Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) in 2000, as an informal network of women and organizations operating in different regions of Kosovo. Since then, KWN has developed into a network advocating on behalf of Kosovar women and girls at local, regional, and international levels. Since registering as a formal organization in 2003, KWN has increased its membership from 42 to 192 member organizations, operating in 23 municipalities in Kosovo.<sup>1</sup> Representing the interests of its member organizations, including women's organizations of all ethnic groups throughout Kosovo, KWN is recognized as a leading network in Kosovo and the region. KWN regularly cooperates with other formal and informal groups in the region and internationally.

KWN has articulated and represented the interests of women and girls at several meetings in Kosovo and abroad. This has influenced decisions at the international level, including related to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. KWN has supported international initiatives for peace-making, advancing the feminist movement, increasing women's participation in politics and the EU accession process and improving the access of women's rights organizations to funding. KWN has consistently joined forces with other women's rights groups to advocate for issues of mutual interest.

In 2006, KWN became the first network of nongovernmental and non-profit organizations (NGOs) in

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<sup>1</sup> The number of KWN members constantly changes. KWN regularly updates the number of member organizations on its website.

Kosovo to adopt a Code of Conduct, setting an example of transparency and accountability. Since then, the capacity of KWN member organizations has improved. The Code of Conduct requests that KWN members have: a clearly defined mission; a voluntary and effective steering board; human resources that contribute to achieving the mission; financial accountability and transparency; responsibilities and duties in service to citizens; and partnerships and networking with other organizations and non-partisan government bodies.<sup>2</sup>

Continuous individual mentoring has contributed greatly to the capacity of KWN members by facilitating better planning and drafting of project proposals, project cycle management, monitoring and evaluation systems, and advocacy through a “learn by doing approach”.



The **mission** of KWN is to support, protect and promote the rights and interests of women and girls throughout Kosovo, regardless of their political beliefs, religion, age, level of education, sexual orientation, and abilities. KWN fulfills its mission through the exchange of experiences and information, partnerships and networking, research, advocacy, and services. KWN **has a vision** of a Kosovo in which women and men are

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<sup>2</sup> KWN, *Ethical and Accountability Code*, Prishtina, KWN, 2007.

equal and have equal opportunities for education, employment, political participation, health care, and a life free from violence.

Towards achieving its vision and mission, KWN has created this Strategy for 2023-2026 to guide KWN's work during this period. KWN members, the Board of Directors, partners, and other stakeholders contributed to creating this Strategy through several strategic planning sessions in 2022. The KWN Strategy includes four programs: 1. Improving gender equality through the rule of law, 2. Life free from gender-based violence, 3. Women's economic empowerment, and 4. Gender transformative education. The strategy also includes two crosscutting themes: Feminism and Environmental Protection.

KWN members identified these programs as the main areas on which KWN needs to focus during the next four years. For each program, this Strategy provides a brief overview of the current situation; KWN's main achievements to date; the main challenges remaining to be addressed; KWN's long-term goal for the program; the objectives KWN will seek to achieve during 2023-2026; and the expected results. All references to "diversity" in the Strategy indicate KWN's intersectional approach, which recognizes that gender "intersects" with various social and demographic factors, such as age, rural/urban location, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and gender identity, among others, to affect diverse women and girls' positions, access to resources, and lives. KWN seeks to the situations of diverse women through this Strategy and its work. KWN also has identified other actors working in these areas, towards encouraging coordination and cooperation in efficient and effective actions.

Within the framework of its Strategy for 2023-2026, KWN has included its pre-existing strategies for Integrating a Gender Perspective in the European Union (EU) Accession Process and for Empowering of the Feminist Movement, respectively. These strategies also were created by KWN in close consultation with

its members, women-led civil society organizations (CSOs), partners, and other stakeholders. The first Strategy aims to guide the advocacy of KWN and its partners towards advancing a gender perspective in the EU Accession process. While the Strategy focuses on Kosovo, it also includes a regional perspective, considering potential areas for cooperation and joint advocacy with partner CSOs in other Western Balkan (WB) countries. This Strategy is a “living document”, regularly revised based on new developments and needs.

The KWN Strategy is based on the Kosovo Program for Gender Equality (KPGE). As a strategic document of the Government of Kosovo, KPGE defines the goals, measures, and main actors responsible for achieving gender equality in all areas of social, economic, political, educational, health, and cultural life for women and men in Kosovo. The KWN Strategy contributes to all pillars of the Program, including Pillar I: “Economic Empowerment and Social Well-Being”, Pillar II: Human Development, Roles, and Gender Relations”, and Pillar III: “Women’s Rights, Access to Justice and Security”. The KWN Strategy also seeks to contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III), “An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external”.



# Improving Gender Equality through the Rule of Law

## Laws, Policies, and Institutional Mechanisms

The first Program focuses on improving gender equality in Kosovo through furthering the rule of law. Using a rights-based approach, KWN's focus on the rule of law assumes that ensuring laws are aligned with best international practices towards furthering gender equality, as well as furthering the implementation of these laws, will contribute to furthering the legally guaranteed human rights of women and girls. KWN is committed to improving attention to gender equality within all laws and to the gender-responsive implementation of laws. Meanwhile, this Program will focus on some laws and policies that, based on gender analysis, KWN and its members have determined are particularly relevant as priority areas within the KWN Strategy. These include:

- The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>4</sup> provides that States take all appropriate measures “to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country, and in particular to provide women, under the same conditions as men, with the right: (a) To vote in all elections and public referendums as well as to be elected, in all publicly elected bodies; (b) To participate in the elaboration of state policy and its implementation; to hold public office and to exercise all public functions at all levels of government; (c) To participate in nongovernmental organizations and associations dealing with the public and political life of the country”.

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<sup>4</sup> [CEDAW](#).

CEDAW is directly applicable in Kosovo under the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo.

- United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security calls for women’s participation in decision-making at national, regional, and international institutions in post-conflict countries, including conflict resolution and peace processes.<sup>5</sup>
- The European Council adopted the proposal for [Stabilization Association Agreement](#) (SAA) for Kosovo, which entered into effect in April 2016. Initially, this document had very minimal involvement of women, with no known gender analysis to inform it. However, progress has been made to integrating attention to gender equality in this document’s action plan, updated over the years.
- The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 7.2 states: “The Republic of Kosovo ensures gender equality as a fundamental value for the democratic development of society, equal opportunities for participation of women and men in political, economic, social, cultural, and other areas of social life”.
- The Law on Gender Equality in Kosovo (2015) supports the Constitution and forbids all forms of direct and indirect gender discrimination.<sup>6</sup> It calls for equal representation (50/50) of women and men in all political and public bodies at local and central levels. Also, the Law calls for the inclusion of gender responsive budgeting, as a necessary instrument to ensure that the principle of gender equality is respected in the collection, delivery, and allocation of resources.<sup>7</sup> Based on this Law, in 2005, the Agency for Gender Equality

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations Security Council [Resolution](#) (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, [Law on Gender Equality in Kosovo](#), Law no. 05-L-020, Prishtina: 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

(AGE) was established as a separate governmental institution. Officers for Gender Equality have been appointed in municipalities and ministries.

- The Law on General Elections in the Republic of Kosovo<sup>8</sup> and the Law on Local Elections in Kosovo<sup>9</sup> both include a 30% quota for the participation of women and men in national and municipal assemblies, respectively. These two laws are still not in line with the requirements of the Law on Gender Equality, which calls for the participation of 50% of women and men at all levels of decision-making.
- The Strategy for the Rule of Law 2021-2026 states that it will contribute towards respecting human rights guaranteed by the Constitution and international conventions and achieving gender equality. Specifically, the third measure of this objective aims to improve access to justice for vulnerable persons and groups, in accordance with the Kosovo Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which is now part of the Constitution of Kosovo.
- The Anti-Discrimination Law prohibits discrimination in many forms, including based on sex, gender, age, marital status or sexual orientation.<sup>10</sup>
- Based on the obligations arising from the SAA, the Ministry of European Integration (MEI) developed [the National Programme for Implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement](#) (NPISAA). The NPISAA replaces all existing documents and strategies relating to EU accession, informing Kosovo's accession process until eventual

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<sup>8</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Law on General Elections in the Republic of Kosovo, Law no. 2008/03-L-073.

<sup>9</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Law on Local Elections in the Republic of Kosovo, Law no. 2008/03-L072.

<sup>10</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Law No. 05/L-021 on Protection from Discrimination.

membership.<sup>11</sup> Initially, the NPISAA did not have a gender perspective. However, through KWN's cooperation with the Office of the Prime Minister via SAA structure meetings, and through the Office of European Integration (formerly the Ministry of European Integration [MEI]), attention to furthering gender equality has improved significantly within this document.

- To prioritize actions taken in Kosovo towards EU Accession, the EU and MEI introduced the [European Reform Agenda](#) (ERA) in 2016.<sup>12</sup> This document sets short-term priorities in the areas of (I) good governance and rule of law, (II) competitiveness and investment climate, and (III) education and employment. After EU consultations with civil society, attention to gender equality was somewhat improved in this document. Improvements are best reflected in the last version of ERA (II).<sup>13</sup>
- Within the framework of the Better Regulation Strategy 2.0, Kosovo institutions committed themselves to conducting Gender Impact Assessments to inform public policies.<sup>14</sup> This commitment has been supported by a manual compiled by AGE, which guides institutions, step by step, towards including attention to gender equality in public policies.<sup>15</sup>

More specifically, regarding women's right to healthcare, the following laws and policies are relevant to this Program:

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<sup>11</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Government, the [National Programme for Implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement](#) (NPISAAA), 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Kosovo - EU High Level Dialogue on Key Priorities - [European Reform Agenda](#) (ERA), Prishtina, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Republic of Kosovo, European Integration, ERA II, [Action plan on the implementation of the second phase of priorities](#).

<sup>14</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Government, Prime Minister's Office, [Better Regulation Strategy 2.0 for Kosovo 2017-2021](#).

<sup>15</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Government of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister, AGE, [Gender Equality Impact Assessment Manual](#).

- Law on Health,<sup>16</sup> which includes equality, inclusiveness, and non-discrimination. The Law provides for equal standards of healthcare for all citizens and residents at all levels, as well as healthcare without discrimination “on the basis of gender or sexual orientation”.
- The Law on Reproductive Health<sup>17</sup> regulates all activities in the field of reproductive health and protects the reproductive rights of individuals. It covers a range of issues, including sexually transmitted infections, family planning, access to information, assisted reproduction, and safe maternity.
- The Law on Health Insurance<sup>18</sup> decrees that health services be provided on an equal basis to all insured persons. Regardless of the status of insurance. Children have access to healthcare services from the list of basic services. Pregnant women and mothers enjoy the right to essential healthcare services. This Law has not yet entered into force.
- The Law on Health Inspectorate<sup>19</sup> established the Inspectorate as “an administrative authority of the Ministry of Health exercising the external professional supervision of health institutions.”

## The Situation

Respecting and implementing the Rule of Law involves realizing the rights of men and women, in all areas of life, and thus contributes to the mission and vision of KWN. It also can advance access to justice and further gender equality. The

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<sup>16</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, [Law no. 04/L-125 on Health](#), 2012, Article 5.1.2.

<sup>17</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law no. 02/L-76 [on Reproductive Health](#), 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law no. 04/L-249 [on Health Insurance](#), 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Law on Health Inspectorate, no. 2006/02-L38, 2006.

European Commission's 2021 report on Kosovo states that justice in Kosovo continues to be slow and ineffective, with few cases being treated in court. This results from political influence, among other reasons.<sup>20</sup> Establishing the Rule of Law means realizing the rights of all women and men, in their diversity, in politics, education, health, labour, economy, social and family Services, and environmental issues. Equal inclusion of women and men in all these spheres contributes to the Rule of the Law, namely by implementing the Law on Gender Equality, which guarantees equal opportunities and treatment in public and private spheres of life, including in political and public life, employment, education, health, the economy, social benefits, sports, culture and other spheres.<sup>21</sup>

Women remain insufficiently represented in politics and decision-making at local and central levels in Kosovo. However, in the early 2021 general elections, Kosovo saw improvement in the election of more women to decision-making positions. Overall, 43 women became Members of Parliament (MPs), an increase from 32.5% to 35.8% of MPs since the last election.<sup>22</sup> Only nine women were elected because of the quota, while 34 won seats due to the popular vote.

Meanwhile, at the local level, women remain underrepresented. In the October 2021 municipal elections, of 165 candidates for mayors, only 13 were women. Of the 36 mayors elected, only two women were elected, both Serbian women. Of 5,239 candidates for municipal assembly, 1,943 were women candidates (37%). Meanwhile, 364 women were elected, two who were Ashkali or Egyptian and one woman had a disability. This marked an improvement in their representation compared to prior years.

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<sup>20</sup> European Commission, [Kosovo Report](#), Strasbourg, 19.10.2021.

<sup>21</sup> [Law on Gender Equality](#), Article 2 – Scope, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> [Central Election Commission](#).

In the government cabinet, two women have been appointed as deputy prime ministers and five of 15 ministries are led by women (an increase from 18.8% in the last elections to 33.3% in 2021).

Women MPs continue to be included in the Group of Women MPs.<sup>23</sup> This group has a strategic plan, as well as a seven-member board with one representative from each political party. KWN has supported their work and cooperated in matters of common interest.

Given that policy making in Kosovo is largely controlled by political parties, they should work to empower women and respect the Law on Gender Equality. The lack of democratization within most political parties and the insufficient participation of women in decision-making within parties has historically meant that women have had little influence on decisions in local and central assemblies.

With decentralization, further work is needed to build human capacities at the municipal level, as well as to educate citizens about municipal responsibilities, so that they can demand accountability from institutions. Given that women have historically had little responsibility in decision-making at the municipal level, their empowerment continues to be crucial to ensure that women have equal opportunities and can realize their rights to public services.

KWN, together with other actors, has successfully advocated for the AGE to be placed at the highest decision-making level (within the Office of the Prime Minister), so that it is positioned to further gender equality throughout the entire government and in all laws and policies. However, AGE, gender equality officials in ministries, as well as municipal gender equality officials, continue to face challenges. They lack sufficient financial and human resources to carry out their responsibilities.

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<sup>23</sup> Kosovo Parliamentary Groups, *Women Groups*.

Moreover, the political will for their involvement in decision-making processes is minimal.

To strengthen the position of women in politics and decision-making and to address the above-mentioned issues, KWN has undertaken several initiatives through the Lobby for Gender Equality in Kosovo (Lobby) and through the Kosovo Women's Fund (KWF), including campaigns to elect as many women as possible to decision-making positions; collecting data on women in political party programs; involving voters in advocating with authorities to address their priorities at the local and central level; advocacy for policy changes; and reviews of laws and policies from a gender perspective. As a result of these activities, KWN has contributed to achievements enlisted later in this section.

Since 2000, KWN has gained better access to public institutions. In cooperation with other actors, KWN advocacy has contributed to several laws and policies in Kosovo, which are important towards furthering gender equality and women's rights. In addition, KWN has participated in drafting and/or amending laws and policies that affect women and gender equality, such as: the Law on Labour; National Strategy and Action Plan for the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings; Law on Protection from Domestic Violence; National Action Plan and Strategy for Protection against Domestic Violence; policies for the protection of women who have suffered sexual violence during the war; NPISAA; draft National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2017-2019; Draft Law on Amending and Supplementing Law No. 02/L-249 on Health Insurance; draft Regulation on the criteria, standards, and procedures of public financing of NGOs; Draft Law on Family and Social Services; Program for Economic Reforms; ERA; Draft Civil Code of Kosovo; Criminal Code of Kosovo; and the Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024, among others.



KWN has involved more women in advocating for their priorities, especially at the municipal level, through KWF and continuous support for the Lobby. This has resulted in several important policy changes at the municipal level, including: improved public transport for women to access school and work; improved access to public buildings for persons with disabilities; jobs for women in rural areas; public spaces for use by CSOs; reduction of CSOs' organizational expenses; budget allocations towards gender equality at the municipal level; and interpreting for deaf people so that they can follow political processes and access healthcare, among other things. Through the Lobby, KWN has improved relations between women from different political parties and has empowered them to advocate for issues of interest to women in their municipalities.

KWN gathered women in politics at the central and local levels, CSOs, and women activists, founding the Coalition for Equality. Its mission and vision are to strengthen and improve the position of women in politics and decision-making and to achieve gender equality in Kosovo, regardless of political preferences, gender, age, ethnicity, ability, religion, geographic location, level of education, or socio-economic status.

In addition to these efforts, KWN has worked closely with six ministries and four municipalities to support the institutionalization of gender responsive budgeting (GRB) in accordance with legal obligations in the Law on Gender Equality. GRB is important not only for increasing women's participation in decision-making but also for more efficient, transparent, and fair distribution of public funds. Despite KWN's work and some improvements, GRB is still not fully institutionalized, particularly legal obligations are not sufficiently clear for public finance officials and processes have not been adequately included within the public finance management system. Continued monitoring of institutions is needed.

To date, despite some improvements at the central level, the EU Accession process continues to lack sufficient participation of diverse women.<sup>24</sup> There is government willingness, especially in the Office of the Prime Minister, as well as in the EU Office in Kosovo. They also recognize the importance of including a gender perspective in this process. However, the meaningful inclusion of diverse women's organizations has been lacking, even though KWN has served as a bridge between the government and the organizations that have contributed to date. Discussions with diverse women across the country suggest that few people understand exactly what EU Accession entails and how it can affect their lives, including the EU *Acquis* on Gender Equality. Although CSOs are important actors within their communities, and experienced in reaching out to diverse women, few have information about the EU Accession process.<sup>25</sup> Despite KWN efforts to increase the knowledge of women and CSOs regarding the EU Accession process, only a few CSOs have been involved in commenting on draft laws and policies related to Kosovo's EU Accession process.

KWN's experience suggests that few CSOs have been consulted in planning Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) programs for different sectors (e.g., agriculture, energy, environment, human rights), except where KWN was involved directly in supporting the EU. The main causes include insufficient understanding of the role of institutions regarding what CSOs can add to the process, and insufficient time within these processes for adequate and participatory consultation. The fact

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<sup>24</sup> Nor have men been sufficiently involved. However, data on participation and the experience of KWN suggest that women in particular have been under-represented. This Strategy focuses on women, considering KWN's vision and mission.

<sup>25</sup> Discussion with KWN member organizations during the bimonthly meeting of members, November 2017.

that CSOs have minimal information about these processes contributes to their minimal involvement in the design, implementation, and monitoring of IPA programs.<sup>26</sup> Contractors implementing EU-funded programs have rarely seen the importance of women's involvement, as shown by their failures to involve diverse women. Limited human resources, namely time to engage in these processes, also hinder the involvement of diverse CSOs.

The insufficient involvement of women (and men) in the EU Accession process can later hinder efforts to implement reforms, as people are not aware of these reforms or do not understand how such reforms are relevant to their lives. Further, insufficient consideration of women's special interests and needs may contribute to a risk of changes related to the accession process failing to reach women or even causing harm.<sup>27</sup> If these policies ignore the needs and interests of diverse women, their rights are at risk of being violated and they may face discrimination, even if it is unintentional. On the other hand, the involvement of CSOs and women in these processes can better meet their needs and potentially contribute to the implementation of reforms, as different women and men become more informed and involved in supporting the implementation of reforms.

In accordance with UNSCR 1325 and the EU GAP III, EU officials visiting Kosovo must regularly consult with CSOs. However, only a few EU officials meet with women's rights activists during their visits to Kosovo. For example, related to the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, EU officials almost never meet

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<sup>26</sup> KWN discussion with CSOs, November 2017.

<sup>27</sup> For example, reforms that address the informal economy without a gender analysis may risk negatively affecting women if they are overrepresented in this sector. Amendments in labour laws without regard to women's traditional gender roles and related cultural challenges in Kosovo risk affecting women's labor force participation.

women's rights groups and activists. When they do meet, visiting officials often meet women's rights activists in informal meetings after regular working hours. This can support the view that women and their needs are unimportant, setting a poor example for government officials regarding the importance of consulting with women to hear their perspectives. Some major CSOs, mostly based in Prishtina, have been included, but few small and rural CSOs have been consulted.

Related to the health sector, legal rights to access basic, reproductive, and qualitative gynecological healthcare<sup>28</sup> remain limited in Kosovo. The minimal government budget allocated to health has resulted in a lack of medical equipment, a shortage of medical specialists, low quality healthcare providers, and poor infrastructure in healthcare facilities (such as no elevators or heating). Likewise, there is no budget for research and development services.

In general, 81% of Kosovars consider their health to be in good or very good condition, although women on average rate their health a little worse than men;<sup>29</sup> meanwhile 23% of women report obvious limitations in their daily life due to health reasons.

Limited access to family planning and free, low-cost contraceptives hinders women's right to make appropriate choices regarding their health.<sup>30</sup> Although abortion (including selective abortion based on the sex of the child)<sup>31</sup> is considered acceptable among many married women, premarital sex and abortion among unmarried women are taboo topics in many places. This has resulted in unsafe abortions and the abandonment of children by young mothers. While values and

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<sup>28</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Law No. 04/L-125 on Health.

<sup>29</sup> KWN, *Access to Healthcare in Kosovo*, Prishtina, 2016. More than 1,300 people were surveyed in 2016, and 109 healthcare workers and relevant experts were interviewed.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Discussions among KWN members, Durres, 2018.

attitudes regarding premarital sexual relations are slowly changing, especially in cities, more attention is needed on sexual education and family planning.

## **Key Achievements**

KWN has had the following key achievements in prior years, on which this Strategy builds:

- KWN has empowered more women to run for official positions and contributed to the election and appointment of more women to decision-making positions in 2021 than ever before. In the 2021 parliamentary elections, a woman candidate received the most votes of any candidate in the history of Kosovo, and over 60% of women participated in the elections. Further, 43 women were elected MPs, four more than in 2019, representing an increase from 32.5% to 35.8%. Only nine women received positions because of the gender quota, while 34 women won their mandate by popular vote.
- KWN has included over 2,058 different women in decision-making processes from 2019 to 2022.
- Since 2018, through advocacy initiatives, more than 30 public policies have been changed to better reflect women's priorities, as a direct result of KWN and its members' advocacy.
- Active in 27 municipalities, the Kosovo Lobby for Gender Equality unites diverse women from civil society and politics. They have collaborated to bring about policy changes at the municipal level.
- KWN has held more than 4,652 mentoring sessions with Lobby members throughout Kosovo. These sessions have empowered Lobby members in their advocacy for women's rights and gender equality at the municipal level.

- Through these and other groups, women in politics, CSOs, and women voters have communicated and collaborated more on issues that women consider priorities.
- The Coalition for Equality was founded, which unites women in politics at the central and local level, CSOs, and women activists towards empowering and improving the position of women in politics and decision-making and towards furthering gender equality in Kosovo.
- In the past four years, KWN reviewed from a gender perspective and/or provided input on more than 60 laws and other policy documents. In the main documents related to Kosovo's EU Accession process, the percentage of recommendations accepted by the government reached 75% (e.g., on the National Program for the Implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement - NPISAA, ERA II, European Commission Report for Kosovo, and Economic Reform Program).
- About 40 women's organizations were involved in EU and government consultations on documents related to Kosovo's EU Accession, within Sub-committees, and SAA structures.
- To date, KWN has built the capacities of more than 286 government officials and 12 CSOs to carry out GRB.
- With KWN support, approximately 1,999 women have been involved in advocating for their right to quality healthcare, officials have taken at least 26 actions to address issues that hinder women's access to quality healthcare, and 4,368 women have had access to care health since 2012.

## **Key Challenges**

KWN has identified the following key challenges, which this Strategy prioritizes addressing:

- Women remain underrepresented at central, municipal, and political party levels. Women do not make up 50% of decision-making positions in accordance with the Law on Gender Equality. Further, women are still largely dependent on the quota in securing 30% of seats in central and municipal assemblies. Women from minority ethnic groups and women with disabilities have been slightly more included, but generally remain underrepresented.
- Election laws are not harmonized with the new Law on Gender Equality, which calls for women and men to participate equally, defined as 50% of each gender.
- Advancing gender equality is not a political priority.
- The roots of this problem are social norms, according to which women are often seen as housewives and mothers, but not as political leaders. Social and cultural norms encourage women to remain at home while men work in the public sphere. Such standards discourage women from entering politics.<sup>32</sup>
- Most key decisions in Kosovo seem to be made from within the “men’s room” (the “*Oda*” in Albanian), leaving little space for women. The lack of democratization within political parties makes it difficult for women to push for issues they consider priorities.<sup>33</sup> Women lack decision-making positions within political parties and political parties continue to control decisions made at local and central levels.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, among established alliances between the parties, women sometimes face difficulties in advocating on issues affecting women, even though interparty advocacy has improved in recent years.

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<sup>32</sup> Kosovar Gender Studies Center (KGSC), *How Women Vote II*, Prishtina: KGSC, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Interviews with women and men in political parties, February 2014. See also IKS, *A Power Primer*, Prishtina: IKS, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> See IKS, *A Power Primer*.

- Women lack funding for their political campaigns.<sup>35</sup>
- Although the situation has improved, women, including those running for political office, still have limited and/or poor media coverage.
- The special needs of women have been largely ignored during the negotiations and Dialogue with Serbia, especially women who have experienced sexual violence, lost loved ones, and suffered significant financial losses. The issue of missing persons has been inadequately addressed.
- Although training has been held for GRB with public officials and women's rights activists, the institutionalization of GRB remains a challenge. GRB has not yet been institutionalized or integrated into the legal framework of Kosovo. Therefore, institutions do not apply it. There is still a lack of gender analysis, which would better inform the application of GRB in revenues and expenditures. Many women and men have no knowledge of how their taxes are spent and whether they are spent on issues that positively affect their lives.
- Although it has improved, CSOs still do not participate sufficiently in the EU Accession process, and this process is not always informed by gender analysis and an intersectional gender perspective.
- CSOs do not always understand how they can contribute to the EU Accession process and what role they can have in SAA structures.
- GAP III can serve as an important document for further integrating attention to gender equality as part of the EU Accession process. Indeed, together with stakeholders and EU member state delegations, the EU has drafted and published a Country-Level Implementation Plan for GAP III

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<sup>35</sup> Democracy for Development, *Cost of Inequality: Funding for Election Campaign of Women Candidates*, 2021.



for 2021-2025 (CLIP).<sup>36</sup> However, implementing GAP III has not always been a priority for the EU. For example, the EU can regularly raise issues related to gender equality during political dialogues,<sup>37</sup> but they do not always do that.

- For the most part, IPA III action documents have included attention to gender equality in their situational analyses and have targets and indicators towards gender equality. Some contain gender-disaggregated indicators, where relevant, although this could be improved. Contrary to GAP III objectives, KWN's experience suggests gender focal points, including AGE and gender equality officers in ministries, other central-level institutions, and municipalities were minimally consulted during IPA programming processes, if at all.
- Governments are not legally obliged to implement GAP III. Therefore, unless national legislation contains commitments to gender equality, like the Law on Gender Equality or KPGE, there are few other legal incentives to implement GAP III. The EU can strongly promote gender analysis and gender mainstreaming as part of their funding requirements. On the other hand, the Kosovo government has not published the IPA III Strategic Response, and thus the gender-responsiveness of government priorities under the thematic windows remains unclear.
- Perhaps the biggest challenge to women's access to healthcare is the poorly financed health sector in Kosovo. This is because healthcare is not considered a priority in the budget of Kosovo. Inadequate funding leads to poor resources and services.

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<sup>36</sup> European External Action Service (EEAS), [Country Level Implementation Plan, GAP III](#), Kosovo.

<sup>37</sup> GAP III, Objective 7.1. "Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women empowerment".

- Still in 2022, public health insurance did not exist. The poor cannot afford quality healthcare. Corruption and control of services also continue.<sup>38</sup> Given women’s relatively limited access to work and family resources, they are more affected by this (although further research is needed).
- Women with disabilities often face additional challenges in accessing healthcare due to limited mobility, limited access to public spaces, insufficient financial resources, and inadequate understanding of their specific needs. This has involved rights violations.
- Rural and minority women often have particularly limited access to realizing their right to accessing healthcare.<sup>39</sup>

## **KWN’s Strategy**

To address the aforementioned challenges and to contribute to the overall objective of **improving gender equality through the rule of law**, KWN has identified the following midterm objectives and immediate expected results (or outputs) towards their achievement:

**Specific Objective 1.1. Increase and improve the participation of women in politics and decision-making at local and central levels according to the Law on Gender Equality (50%) and UNSCR 1325<sup>40</sup>**

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<sup>38</sup> UNDP, *Public Pulse Action Document on Health in Kosovo: Satisfaction with health care services and Perception of the Presence of Corruption*, Pristina: UNDP, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> KWN, *Access to Healthcare in Kosovo*, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> These objectives contribute to the implementation of Objective 3.2 of the KPGE, which states: “Specific Objective 3.2 Increase participation and equal representation in the decision-making process in accordance with the requirements of the Law on Gender Equality”. The objective is also in line with the Specific Objective of the EU’s GAP III, “Men and women participate

Increasing and improving women's participation in politics and decision-making contributes directly to the rule of law, including implementation of the Constitution of Kosovo and the Law on Gender Equality, which foresee equal participation of women and men in all areas of society, including decision-making. Further, increasing women's participation in politics can affect the potential prioritization and handling of needs or issues that women consider as priorities, thus reflecting gender equality and contributing to more gender-responsive decision-making. KWN will work towards this objective by achieving the following results:

**Expected result 1.1.1. Enhance the capacities of women in politics to advocate for women's priorities.** KWN will continue empowering women in politics at local and central levels through the Lobby, Coalition for Gender Equality, and/or Gender Policy Strategic Network, in close cooperation with other key actors like the National Democratic Institute, via training, mentoring, networking, and advocacy support.

**Expected result 1.1.2. Increase public officials' awareness of the importance of harmonizing the Law on Gender Equality with election laws.** Election laws must be harmonized with the Law on Gender Equality, which considers equal gender representation as 50% inclusion of each gender. KWN will continue advocating for the harmonization of these laws through public meetings and awareness campaigns regarding the importance of equal representation towards balanced and democratic governance.

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equally in decision-making processes, in all spheres and at all levels of political and public life, including online". The target also coincides with SDG 5, specifically Target 5.5: "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life".

**Expected result 1.1.3. Increase officials' awareness of the need to improve attention to gender equality in laws, policies, and programs.** KWN will continue to prepare comments and recommendations on laws, policies, and programs from a gender perspective, sending input to responsible officials. This can improve public officials' knowledge regarding the need to integrate a gender perspective in public policies, as well as contribute to increasing women's participation in decision-making processes on legislation, towards law and rule of law, which contribute to gender equality. KWN will seek to integrate a gender perspective in laws and policies in different sectors, including but not limited to those elsewhere in this Strategy, accessible transport, the Green Agenda, energy, and digitalization, among others.

**Expected result 1.1.4. Increase the awareness of government officials, the EU, UN, and other actors about the importance of engaging diverse women in peace processes with Serbia and addressing women's priorities in these processes, according to UNSCR 1325.** KWN will continue to advocate for the engagement of women in peace and Dialogue processes through advocacy, meetings with public officials, EU and UN officials, and awareness campaigns.

**Expected result 1.1.5. Improve the participation of diverse women and girls in decision-making processes on environmental issues and climate change.**<sup>41</sup> Specifically, KWN will draft a gender analysis with the engagement of diverse women, organize meetings with women and girls, and advocate to relevant institutions for integrating attention to furthering gender equality

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<sup>41</sup> As per the EU GAP III Specific Objective in the Thematic Area: Green Transition.

as part of efforts to address climate change and address environmental issues.

### **Specific Objective 1.2. Improve implementation of the EU GAP III and a gender perspective in the EU Accession process.**

GAP III is an EU policy, namely a staff working document, which contains objectives towards improving justice and the rule of law, among others. Improving its implementation can contribute to advancing the rule of law in Kosovo. Meanwhile, KWN will use the EU Accession process through which new laws and policies must be approved and implemented to join the EU. In this process, KWN will seek to include a gender perspective in new laws and monitor the implementation of laws related to the EU Accession process from a gender perspective, towards increasing gender equality through the rule of law. KWN will work towards this objective by achieving the following results.

**Expected result 1.2.1. Further increase the awareness and capacities of EU officials on how to implement GAP III, especially by including, as well as financially and politically supporting diverse women's rights CSOs.** KWN will continue providing training, mentoring, and information resources for the EU and EU member states, towards implementing GAP III. This includes regular monitoring of the implementation of GAP III and advocating that recommendations resulting from monitoring are implemented. Where relevant, KWN will also undertake advocacy through meetings, letters, and statements.

**Expected result 1.2.2. Improve inclusion of a gender perspective in documents related to Kosovo's EU Accession and their implementation.** KWN will continuously review relevant documents related to Kosovo's EU Accession process from a gender perspective and will send recommendations to relevant

officials. KWN will advocate for the implementation of these recommendations.

**Expected result 1.2.3. Improve the knowledge and capacities of EU officials, National Gender Equality Mechanisms (NGEMs), and line ministries regarding integration of a gender perspective in documents related to EU Accession and to the importance of including CSOs in the EU Accession process.** Based on request, KWN will continue providing training and mentoring to these key actors on how to include a gender perspective in documents related to Kosovo's EU Accession. Where relevant, KWN will undertake advocacy towards better reflecting a gender perspective in the EU Accession process.

**Expected result 1.2.4. Improve and increase the participation of CSOs in the EU Accession process, including monitoring this process from a gender perspective.** Through regular KWN meetings, as well as through the aforementioned meetings with the Lobby, KWN will inform women about the EU Accession process and how they can be involved. Social media posts and articles in KWN's e-newsletter also will seek to raise awareness. When relevant to their work, KWN will invite CSOs to be involved in specific processes and mentor them, as needed. Also, through meetings and advocacy, SAA structures, and similar consultative structures, KWN will seek to better inform ministries, contractors, and EU officials regarding the important role of CSOs in the EU Accession process. encouraging them to better involve CSOs.

### **Specific Objective 1.3. Improve the institutionalization of gender-responsive budgeting in Kosovo, towards improving implementation of the Law on Gender Equality.<sup>42</sup>**

GRB is important not only for increasing and improving the participation of women in decision-making, but also for the efficient, transparent, and fair distribution of public funds. Therefore, KWN will continue to monitor institutions' efforts to institutionalize GRB. This will contribute to the rule of law because implementing GRB is a legal obligation arising from the Law on Gender Equality. Further, GRB should become part of public finance management systems so that this Law can be properly implemented. In addition to contributing to SDG5, indicator 5.c.a., this objective will contribute to Kosovo making progress towards implementing the [Gender Framework](#) of the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Performance Measurement Framework, as an internationally accepted good practice in public financial management.

**Expected result 1.3.1. Fiscal policies are more informed by gender analysis.** KWN will conduct gender analyses of fiscal policies, including, among others, the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, Medium-Term Budget Frameworks, Annual Budgets, and Budget Circulars, proposing ways that the Government can better reflect attention to gender and uphold GRB principles. KWN also will produce policy briefs and provide evidence-based recommendations to the government related to fiscal policies.

**Expected result 1.3.2. Increase the capacities of CSOs to advocate for implementing GRB.** KWN will continue to provide training, mentoring, grants, and other forms of capacity building

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<sup>42</sup> The target also coincides with SDG 5, specifically [Target 5.c.1](#), "Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment".

for all interested CSOs. This will include enhancing their skills for advocacy related to GRB and climate change.

**Expected result 1.3.3. Increase officials' knowledge about GRB.**

KWN will continue providing training, mentoring, and other forms of capacity-building to all relevant officials, including budget and finance officials, gender equality officials, and other officials.

**Expected result 1.3.4. Increase the participation of women in public consultations on the budget.**

Through awareness campaigns, grants, and information activities, KWN will work towards increasing the participation of women in public budget consultations at local, municipal, and national levels.

**Expected result 1.3.5. Improve CSOs' participation in gender mainstreaming climate change financing.**

Based on gender analysis, KWN will collaborate with its members and partners, including the Gender Budget Watchdog Network, to advocate for evidence-based improvements to mainstream a gender perspective in climate change financing.

**Specific Objective 1.4. Improve women's and men's access to and realization of their rights to health services, based on the legal framework.**

This objective aims to contribute to improving access to quality health care services, without discrimination, as a legal right, thereby contributing to the rule of law.

**Expected result 1.4.1. Increase women and girls' awareness of their right to healthcare and the importance of accessing healthcare.**

Awareness of the rights and importance of preventive care is a prerequisite for women to access quality healthcare. Therefore, through KWF, KWN will support CSOs



in raising awareness and advocating that more women have access to quality healthcare, based on their right to healthcare. Awareness-raising will focus on rights and legal protections for women to access healthcare and how to report violations of their rights, including any discrimination in access to healthcare based on gender, ethnicity, ability, or other social or economic status. KWN will target people who do not have access to such information, including especially women in rural areas, people with disabilities, and Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians.

**Expected result 1.4.2. More women advocate for their right to quality healthcare.** Through KWF, KWN will support the efforts of members to involve more women in advocating for their right to quality healthcare, especially when such rights have been violated, and/or to address institutions regarding issues that undermine women’s access to quality healthcare. Advocacy initiatives may include, for example, advocating for institutions to collect and store data better; for implementation of health insurance that is accessible to all, including women who work at home; to improve the quality of health services provided to women and men; for better state funding for healthcare; for better monitoring of private health clinics; against discrimination, if it occurs, within healthcare institutions; that health institutions prioritize preventive services; improved access and infrastructure for persons with disabilities, especially women; and against the privatization of public healthcare.

## **Interest Groups**

The target group and main beneficiaries will be women politicians at local and central levels who will participate more in policy and decision-making processes, especially through the Lobby and Coalition for Equality. CSOs and women voters will also be key target groups and beneficiaries. KWN will empower them to advocate for their priorities and play a more active role

in decision-making processes. Other beneficiaries will include people in politics who will learn more about women's priorities and how these affect society as a whole; and men and children, who may benefit from policy changes.

KWN member organizations will continue to be key partners towards realizing this long-term objective. This will help reduce potential for duplication of activities and strengthen women's advocacy efforts. KWN believes that its voice will continue to be stronger when several organizations advocate together. Thus, KWN also will continue to cooperate with other CSOs with similar interests.

Regarding access to healthcare, the target group and main beneficiaries also will be Kosovar women, especially those with limited access to quality healthcare services. Another target group and primary potential beneficiary will be officials within health institutions whose capacities can be enhanced by pursuing awareness-raising and advocacy efforts. Secondary beneficiaries will include all Kosovars, who will benefit from improvements in the healthcare system.

KWN will continue to communicate and coordinate its work in this Program with other actors who have similar goals. This includes the EU, Swedish International Development and Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), National Democratic Institute (NDI), UN Women, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Swiss Cooperation for Development, Helvetas Swiss Inter-cooperation, UNICEF and other actors who may work in this field in the future. Cooperation with institutions also will be essential: AGE, the Ombudsperson Institution, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Health, Kosovo Agency of Statistics, the Health Inspectorate, deputies, and Parliamentary Commissions.

Additionally, related to GRB, KWN will continue its cooperation with the Gender Budget Watchdog Network, EU, AGE, Kosovo Institute for Public Administration, Ministry responsible for finance, and UN Women.

KWN foresees that for this program it will receive support from ADA, Sida, the EU, and the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

# A Life Free from Gender-Based Violence

## Laws, Policies, and Institutional Mechanisms

- CEDAW Recommendation 19 on Violence against Women has established the principle of state responsibility to take adequate measures to combat all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual violence, psychological abuse, women's exploitation (particularly trafficking), sexual harassment and forced sterilization.
- The UN Declaration of Key Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse has set the basis for intervention and standards for authorities to respond to cases of domestic violence.<sup>43</sup> These measures provide to victims: judicial representation; information on judicial process; judicial compensation for violence experienced; psychological and medical support; shelter; and help.
- UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security calls for protection from sexual violence in war. It calls for justice for such crimes.
- The Convention on Prevention and Combating Domestic Violence and Violence against Women of the Council of Europe, also known as the "Istanbul Convention", has a broad definition of domestic violence.<sup>44</sup> Since 2020, the Istanbul Convention is part of the Constitution of Kosovo.

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<sup>43</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *UN Declaration on Basic Principles for the Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power*, A / RES / 40 / 34, 1985.

<sup>44</sup> Council of Europe, *Convention on the Prevention and Fight Against Violence on Women and Domestic Violence*, CETS No. 210, 2011.

- In the SDGs for 2015-2030, Goal 5 on Gender Equality, 5.2 calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including, trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; and 5.3 calls for the elimination of all harmful practices, such as early and forced child marriage and genital mutilation of girls.
- EU GAP III emphasizes that gender equality is a fundamental value of the EU and a universal human right. It is also a prerequisite for well-being, economic growth, prosperity, good governance, peace, and security. One of the thematic areas of GAP III is “Free of all forms of gender-based violence”.
- The Criminal Code of Kosovo<sup>45</sup> and the Criminal Procedure Code of Kosovo<sup>46</sup> include several criminal offenses that can be committed within a domestic relationship which can be considered domestic violence. They contain provisions related to other forms of violence against women and girls, such as sexual violence, trafficking, and other forms of sexual exploitation.
- The Law on Protection against Domestic Violence aims to prevent violence, protect victims, punish perpetrators, and mitigate the consequences of domestic violence.<sup>47</sup> It outlines the procedures and content of protection orders. In 2022, it was in the process of being amended.

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<sup>45</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, *Criminal Code of Kosovo*. 2019, No. 06/L-074.

<sup>46</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, *Criminal Procedure Code of Kosovo*. 2013. No. 04/L-123.

<sup>47</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, *Law on Protection from Domestic Violence*, Law No. 03 / L-182, 2010.

- The Law on Prevention and Combating Human Trafficking and the Protection of Trafficking Victims seeks to address this problem and its consequences.<sup>48</sup>
- The Law on the Status and Rights of Martyrs, Invalids, Veterans, Members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, Civilian War Victims, and their Families was amended in 2014 to include women victims of sexual violence as civilian war survivors.<sup>49</sup>
- The Law on the Protection from Discrimination prohibits discrimination and harassment, including unwanted sexual and psychological behavior that violates a person's dignity.<sup>50</sup>
- The Law on Gender Equality states that sexual harassment constitutes gender discrimination and forbids sexual harassment at work.<sup>51</sup>
- The Law on Social and Family Services includes provisions to assist people in need, such as persons who have suffered domestic violence or human trafficking.<sup>52</sup> In 2022, it was in the process of being amended.
- The State Protocol for Treatment of Sexual Violence Cases in the Republic of Kosovo aims to standardize necessary actions for the continuous, comprehensive, and responsible response needed for the identification, protection, treatment, documentation, referral, rehabilitation, and re-integration of victims/survivors of attacks and sexual

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<sup>48</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Law on Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protection of Trafficking Victims, 2013, Law no. 04 / L-218.

<sup>49</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, About the Status and Rights of Martyrs, Invalids, Veterans, Members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, Civilian War Victims and Their Families, Law no. 2011/4-L-061 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Assembly of Kosovo, Law No. 05/L-021 on Protection from Discrimination, 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Assembly of Kosovo, Law No. 05/L-020, [Law on Gender Equality](#).

<sup>52</sup> Assembly of Kosovo, Law on the amendment and completion of Law No. 02/L-17 on Social and Family Services, 2012.

violence, through immediate and professional interventions of the responsible institutions.

- The National Strategy and Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings 2015-2019 aims to coordinate the fight against trafficking.
- The National Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo for Protection from Domestic Violence and the Action Plan (2022-2026) <sup>53</sup> aims to “(a) strengthen the existing mechanisms and establish new mechanisms for rapid response for the protection and treatment of cases of domestic violence; (b) coordinate actions and ensure financial sustainability to prevent, protect, treat, rehabilitate and reintegrate victims who must be given the opportunity to live equally and with dignity like all other members of the family and society; (c) take adequate measures for punishment (prioritizing responsibility) and continuous rehabilitation of the perpetrators of violence, as well as (d) organize information activities and awareness campaigns for the engagement of the whole society against domestic violence”. <sup>54</sup>
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) provide a fairly comprehensive framework for 1) responding to reports of domestic violence; and 2) taking anti-trafficking measures. In 2022, they were in the process of being revised.
- Kosovo Police has Domestic Violence Investigation Units in each station with two domestic violence trained officers (one woman and one man) on standby 24/7.

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<sup>53</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Government, Ministry of Justice, National Strategy on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women [2022-2026](#).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

## The Situation

Any form of violence exercised by one person against another person because of his or her gender is called gender-based violence. Economic, physical, psychological, and sexual violence are some forms of gender-based violence. In Kosovo and worldwide, the most prominent form of violence is domestic violence, including violence by intimate partners. The OSCE report “[Survey on wellbeing and safety of women in Kosovo](#)” examined the prevalence of violence against women in Kosovo.<sup>55</sup> Conducted in 2019, it found that 58% of women in Kosovo had experienced violence in their lifetimes. In 2018 alone, 27% of women said they suffered some form of violence.

Although public perceptions suggest that domestic violence occurs mainly in poor, uneducated families, or in rural areas, the KWN survey conducted in 2015 has suggested the contrary. Based on this research, no correlation could be observed between geographical origin, education, or economic conditions and experiencing domestic violence. Women are more likely to experience violence at the hands of their parents and partners, whereas men who experienced violence are more likely to mention their parents as perpetrators. Women whose partners were employed were more likely to experience violence in 2014 than women whose partners were unemployed. Regarding citizens’ awareness of where domestic violence can be addressed, 73.6% responded that they would contact the police, while very few mentioned other institutions, such as the Centre for Social Work or Victim Advocates.

In 2017, KWN monitored the progress of the implementation of the legal framework for gender-based violence, as well as the Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo and the Action Plan for Protection from Domestic Violence 2016-2020. This 2018 KWN report, entitled “From Words to

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<sup>55</sup> OSCE, “[Survey on Safety and Wellbeing of Women in Kosovo](#)”, 2019.



Action”, illustrated that only 19% of the National Strategy had been implemented.<sup>56</sup> KWN monitoring of the performance of institutions has suggested that there have been some improvements in the implementation of the legal framework related to domestic violence. Nevertheless, several shortcomings remain regarding the institutional response to other forms of gender-based violence. For example, while the Kosovo Police, particularly Domestic Violence Investigation Units, are familiar with domestic violence, they lack knowledge about sexual harassment or how to treat rape cases, which require a sensitive approach that protects the dignity of persons who have suffered such crimes. The Basic Prosecution has appointed prosecutors who will deal with domestic violence cases. They have knowledge regarding domestic violence, but they lack knowledge about other forms of violence against women or the importance of understanding power relationships between men and women. While prosecutors know the legal framework for protecting victims of crime, their heavy caseload may affect their performance, KWN found. The Kosovo Judicial Council (KJC) also has appointed specialized judges to handle domestic violence cases, both in civil and criminal proceedings. While some have attended trainings, some judges still “blame the victim”.<sup>57</sup>

KJC data suggest that of the 5,024 gender-based violence related cases resolved from 2015 to 2017, 73% resulted in some form of punishment. In 1% of the cases, the charges were dropped; 2% were rejected by the court; 16% were closed as the statutory limitations expired; and 8% were solved in other ways. Of the 76 cases resolved that were related to sexual violence, 59% resulted in some form of punishment, 4% were acquitted, 5% were refused by the court, 8% were closed due to statutory limitations and 24% were solved in other ways. Regardless of the specific circumstances of each case, this implies

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<sup>56</sup>KWN, *From Words to Action*, Prishtina: KWN, 2018.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

that cases of sexual violence are less likely to be punished and more likely to be released from charges or rejected by courts. KWN also found that they are significantly more likely to be 'solved differently', than cases involving other crimes.<sup>58</sup>

In 2021, KWN repeated the research for monitoring the implementation of the legal framework regarding gender-based violence as well as monitoring the Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo and the Action Plan for Protection from Domestic Violence 2016-2020. In addition, through this research KWN identified the remaining gaps in the legal framework of Kosovo towards the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and to inform ongoing processes with an assessment of the knowledge, attitudes, and performance of institutions responsible for implementing the relevant legal framework. The KWN report *From Words to Action*, published in 2021, shows that only 52% of the National Strategy has been implemented.<sup>59</sup> KWN monitoring and interviews with representatives of institutions illustrated improvements related to addressing domestic violence. Officials have more knowledge about domestic violence but not about gender-based violence in general. Officials lack knowledge about sexual harassment, rape, genital mutilation and, in most cases, confuse sexual harassment with sexual assault. The prosecutors appointed by the Basic Prosecutor's Office to deal with cases of domestic violence have knowledge about domestic violence and other forms of violence but have uncertainty about how to use the new criminal offense of domestic violence, especially in combination with other offences. The appointment of judges in the civil and criminal department that deal with cases of domestic violence is lacking. Despite the extensive training they have undergone, judges often try to reconcile couples when domestic violence occurs, even though this is against their mandate, particularly when women

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>59</sup> KWN *From Words to Action*, Prishtina: KWN, 2021.

and children are at risk of violence. KWN monitoring shows that delays in sentencing continue, placing women at risk of further violence. The phenomenon of women “withdrawing” their testimonies and criminal charges seems to continue, despite clear legal obligations to continue prosecution *ex officio*. Sentences for domestic violence crimes remain low.

Another form of sexual violence is that committed against women during the war in Kosovo. Sexual violence, including rape, has been used as a weapon of war against civilians.<sup>60</sup> This included the violent rape of women by Serbian forces, which was used as a tactic of ethnic cleansing.<sup>61</sup> Various sources have estimated that between 10 and 45 thousand women were raped during the war.<sup>62</sup> Sexual violence also has been reported to have been perpetrated against men and boys, as well as against women of different ethnicities, although these cases are less publicly acknowledged. There was almost no justice for these crimes.<sup>63</sup> Women who have suffered sexual violence during the war face hardships such as isolation, untreated trauma, physical illness, and poverty.<sup>64</sup>

In December 2022, the first State Protocol for Handling Cases of Sexual Violence, in accordance with the Istanbul Convention, was launched in Prishtina. KWN supported the process of developing this Protocol in close cooperation with the Government and all relevant institutions, particularly the Institute of Forensic Medicine, the Ministry of Justice, and UN

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<sup>60</sup> See Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Human Rights Violations in Kosovo*, USA: HRW, 1998; HRW, *One Week of Horror in Drenica: Violations of Humanitarian Law in Kosovo*, USA: HRW, 1999; OSCE, *Kosovo: As Seen, As Told*, Part III; UNFPA, *Gender-based Violence in Kosovo*, Prishtina: UNFPA, 2005, p. 6; and Chris Corrin, “The post-conflict situation in Kosovo” in *If not now, when?*, 2001, p. 93.

<sup>61</sup> HRW, *Kosovo: Rape as a weapon of ethnic cleansing*, OSCE, *Kosovo: As Seen, As Told*, Coomaraswamy, para. 82; Corrin, “The Post-Conflict Situation in Kosovo”, p. 93; and UNIFEM, p. 62.

<sup>62</sup> See footnote 60.

<sup>63</sup> See KWN, *1325 Facts & Fables*, Prishtina: KWN, 2022.

<sup>64</sup> KWN members’ discussions with women.

Women. KWN participated in governmental working groups, contracted the expert who drafted the Protocol, supplemented the draft with data from KWN's research and experience, and organized consultations with 142 representatives of coordination mechanisms in nine municipalities/regions across Kosovo. Now that the Protocol has been approved, the government must allocate funds for its implementation and must reflect the responsibilities specified in the Protocol for the relevant institutions in the future Law on Protection from Gender-Based Violence. This should include allocating funds for the operationalization of referral centers for assisting cases of rape and sexual violence.

The large “peacekeeping” military force in Kosovo immediately after the war created demand for sexual services that resulted in increased trafficking, especially of women and girls.<sup>65</sup> In 2002, 22 victims were identified, 19 of which were victims of sex trafficking.<sup>66</sup> Trafficking for sexual exploitation has decreased since, with 17 victims identified in 2020. However, forced sexual services have not received sufficient public attention in Kosovo. Gender norms that support and potentially contribute to prostitution also have not been discussed sufficiently. Although KWN does not work directly with trafficking cases, KWN member organizations are directly involved in this field.

Sexual harassment occurs at work, schools, universities, and public institutions. The 2019 OSCE study showed that approximately 29% of Kosovar women have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetimes, compared to 13% in 2018.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, focus groups held at the University of Pristina (UP) have suggested that sexual harassment is apparently widespread, but not properly reported. Even when reported, historically it

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<sup>65</sup> KWN, *1325 Facts & Fables*.

<sup>66</sup> US Embassy, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2022 Kosovo* (Level 2).

<sup>67</sup> OSCE, “[Survey on Safety and wellbeing of Women in Kosovo](#)”, 2019.

has been ignored. To address the needs of students, as well as academic and administrative UP staff, KWN in cooperation with several member organizations, UP staff, and students, undertook initiatives to improve reporting and treatment of sexual harassment at UP. This includes supporting the drafting of a regulation on reporting sexual harassment, establishing reporting mechanisms, and creating an action plan for prevention and protection from sexual harassment.

Historically, the legal framework was confusing with regards to reporting sexual harassment.<sup>68</sup> In 2017 and 2018, KWN advocated for the introduction of sexual harassment as a separate criminal offense in the Criminal Code, a definition that was accepted by the Ministry of Justice and the Assembly of Kosovo, which entered into force in 2019.

Gender-based violence also affects Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, and differently identifying (LGBTI+) people. Although the Constitution and the Law on Protection from Discrimination address such discrimination, few people come forward, and the institutional response to reports has remained sluggish.<sup>69</sup> Many LGBTI+ people have been subject to verbal harassment and physical violence.<sup>70</sup> Negative public perceptions

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<sup>68</sup> KWN, *Sexual Harassment in Kosovo*, Prishtina: KWN, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> KWN interviews, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> See: Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) and Center for Social Development Group, *Freedom and Protection for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender in Kosovo*, Prishtina: YIHR, 2013; Savić, Marija for the Heartefact Fund, *Invisible LGBT: Report on the position of the LGBT community in Kosovo*, Belgrade: Heartefact Fund, January 2013; Huygens, Pierre, Eva Marn and Nenad Maksimović, *Situation and Response Analysis: LGBT Vulnerability in Kosovo in 2012: In the name of “tradition”*, 2013; Libertas, *Survey on the Attitudes of Kosovo Society on Homosexuality: Quantitative and Qualitative Survey of Opinions of Kosovo Citizens*, Prishtina: Libertas, 2012; the European Parliament also has expressed concern over discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in its resolution of 29 March 2012 On the European Integration Process of Kosovo, 2011/2885 (RSP), para. 38.

about LGBTI+ people suggest a need for further work to raise awareness regarding LGBTI+ rights.

Women with disabilities also may encounter increased challenges when attempting to access gender-based violence services, due to isolation, lack of accessible transportation, and lack of access to information about their rights.

The general safety of women and men raises other concerns. UNSCR 1325 calls for the security of women and girls in post-conflict situations. However, the poor infrastructure in Kosovo, such as insufficient public lighting at night, enables an environment for gender-based violence. Local Action Groups and Community Safety Councils have initiated projects to address such issues, including the addition of streetlights and the consideration of factors such as girls and women traveling to work and school. Women in northern Kosovo may face additional security concerns and lack access to justice because of weak rule of law and disagreements over institutional competencies between Kosovo and Serbia, along with the general state of insecurity there.<sup>71</sup>

KWN has organized national campaigns that have reduced prejudice against persons who have suffered from gender-based violence and has encouraged people to report violence by turning it from a private matter to a very public affair. KWN's work within this Program in previous years has led to the following results (see the box).

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<sup>71</sup> KWN, *A Seat at the Table: Women's contributions to and expectations from peacebuilding processes in Kosovo*, 2021.

## **KWN's Main Achievements**

- KWN has collaborated with experts and its members to research and inform the adoption of several of the aforementioned laws and policies to address gender-based violence in Kosovo. For example, KWN's recommendations have been taken in recent amendments to the Criminal Code to include sexual harassment and domestic violence as criminal offences, the Rule of Law Strategy, and the National Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024, among others.
- KWN's continuous monitoring of institutions, including periodic research and publication of findings, has helped to increase institutions' awareness and their accountability related to cases of gender-based violence.
- After KWN and its members' advocacy, 19 policies have been established to address sexual harassment across Kosovo.
- In December 2022, the first State Protocol for the Treatment of Sexual Violence Cases, in accordance with the Istanbul Convention, was adopted. KWN assisted with this process in close cooperation with the Government and all relevant stakeholders.
- KWN has worked closely with the Ministry of Justice and with municipal coordination mechanisms, training them to improve their treatment and management of cases of violence.
- KWN has supported shelters by successfully advocating for funding from the Government to support the provision of shelter services.
- KWN and its members have expanded the capacities of the police, as well as local and international peacekeeping forces, regarding appropriate ways to interact with women who have experienced gender-based violence.

## **KWN's Main Achievements**

- Through a demonstration on 8 March 2012, KWN drew public attention to the lack of recognition, services, and assistance for women who suffered sexual violence during the war. This resulted in new legal provisions for their protection. KWN also supported the creation of the President's National Council for survivors of sexual violence during the war. KWN and its member organizations have undertaken more than 30 initiatives to support women who have suffered sexual violence during the war.
- KWN supported improvements in coordination among various local and international actors working on issues of trafficking and domestic violence. This involved advocating for national coordinators for domestic violence and trafficking, respectively, who monitor and report on the implementation of existing laws and policies.
- Institutions have implemented more than 41 of KWN's recommendations for various laws, policies, and improved institutional performance.
- Specifically, KWN sent 122 recommendations for improving the National Strategy for Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women; 36 of them were approved.
- KWN sent 84 recommendations for improving the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence; the Law has not yet been adopted.
- At least 117 women who have suffered gender-based violence have received legal assistance from KWN and its partners.
- Through awareness campaigns online and physical, around 25,300 citizens became aware of their rights and the responsibilities of institutions.



## Key Challenges

The legal and institutional framework for addressing gender-based violence is comprehensive and coordination has increased among WCSOs and responsible institutions. However, some challenges remain linked to social norms and the implementation of the legal framework:

- In 2022, the legal framework was not fully harmonized with the Istanbul Convention. The law should deal with all forms of gender-based violence (and not only domestic violence); clarify the responsibilities of institutions, including improving coordination in case management; improve data management systems; involve capacity development for responsible institutions; and allocate an adequate budget. Rape Crisis Centers, Sexual Violence Referral Centers, and SOS telephone lines have yet to be established, as required by the Istanbul Convention.
- Individuals often attribute domestic violence to the difficult economic situation, unemployment, alcohol, war trauma and lack of education. This falsely justifies violence and discourages people from reporting violence to the police.<sup>72</sup>
- Marriages usually end with divorce if violence is reported, and many women lack sufficient financial resources to support themselves after divorce.<sup>73</sup> The relatively poor financial situation of women is a common reason that courts grant child custody to male abusers; the economic situation of men is prioritized over the physical and psychological well-being of the child. Providing child custody to a perpetrator may place

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<sup>72</sup> UNDP, *Public Pulse, Gender*, p. 39; KWN, *Security Begins at Home*, pp. 16-22.

<sup>73</sup> For more information, see KWN, *More Than “Words on Paper”? The Response of Justice Providers to Domestic Violence in Kosovo*, Prishtina: KWN, 2009.

children at great risk of violence and may mean that women do not report domestic violence.<sup>74</sup>

- Delays remain within the judicial system in delivering decisions and issuing protection orders within timeline foreseen by the legal framework.<sup>75</sup>
- Patriarchal perceptions embedded in society can adversely affect judicial opinions and the course of proceedings.<sup>76</sup> Courts and lawyers prefer reconciliation, but the return of victims to their previous environments often has been ineffective. It is estimated that 80% of people (mostly women) who suffer from violence have returned to their family after spending time in a shelter.<sup>77</sup> Insufficient access to justice, as well as ineffective and inefficient justice for the crimes committed contribute to recidivist violence.<sup>78</sup>
- Despite improved budget allocations, financial support for state-funded shelters has been inconsistent and insufficient to cover all costs, partly because it has been delivered late due to problematic procurement procedures. The quality of services provided by shelters requires further improvement. Further environmental precautions within shelters could improve health, reduce costs, and contribute to the wellbeing of women within them. Kosovo continues to lack sufficient rehabilitation and reintegration systems.
- There is insufficient communication between courts and police. Courts rarely intervene when protection orders are violated and/or food or alimony is not paid. The Kosovo Police does not properly monitor the implementation of protection orders. There is insufficient coordination between coordinating mechanisms for dealing with gender-based

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<sup>74</sup> KWN, *Security Begins at Home*, p. 85.

<sup>75</sup> Kosovo Gender Analysis, p. 18; *Security Begins at Home*, p. 82.

<sup>76</sup> KWN, *More Than "Words on Paper"?*, p. 29.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, KWN, p. 6.

violence, even though there are improvements in this aspect compared to previous years.<sup>79</sup> Often there are delays treating pending cases. Centers for social work continue to lack infrastructure, human resources, and profiling for cases of gender-based violence.

- Some prosecutors lack knowledge about domestic violence regulations. In addition, Kosovo does not have a functional witness protection system, which can prevent victims or witnesses from reporting cases of gender-based violence. Further, legal fees are often prohibitive and free legal aid is not always accessible.<sup>80</sup>
- Protection orders often are used instead of initiating criminal proceedings, though crimes committed within a family relationship should be prosecuted *ex officio* (automatically).<sup>81</sup>
- Services provided by police, judges, and prosecutors need further improvement, including more training through KJC and the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council.<sup>82</sup>
- Rape is not reported, especially in domestic relationships, which many people do not consider a crime, even though it is a criminal offense.
- Sexual harassment seems to be a serious issue in public institutions, UP, businesses, and society in general. Few efforts have been taken to address it. Few people report it, especially due to their economic situation and accompanying fear of losing their job.
- Justice has not been delivered for gender-based crimes committed during the Kosovo war. Women who have suffered gender-based violence need support towards rehabilitation.

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<sup>79</sup> KWN, *From Laws to Action: Monitoring the institutional response to gender-based violence in Kosovo*, 2021.

<sup>80</sup> Farnsworth et al. for KWN. *At What Cost?*, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> KWN, *More than “words on paper”?*, p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> KWN, *From Laws to Action*.

## **KWN's Strategy**

Considering these challenges, the long-term overall objective of this Program is to: **Improve the response to gender-based violence, towards its reduction.**<sup>83</sup> The objectives, expected results and activities towards achieving this goal are outlined below.

### **Specific Objective 2.1. Improve the quality and implementation of the legal framework for gender-based violence, including the institutional response to assisting victims of violence.**

Improving and implementing the legal framework related to gender-based violence will contribute to improving the response to gender-based violence by preventing violence, encouraging justice, preventing recidivism, and offering better treatment for people who have experienced violence. Improving the legal framework and its implementation will clarify the roles and responsibilities of institutions, their coordination, and the necessary budget allocations for improving case management. An improved institutional response can contribute to reducing violence by empowering and enabling women to live autonomously and by ensuring justice and financial support from abusers, as well as preventing recidivism through appropriate risk assessments, case management, and institutional coordination. The following results will contribute to achieving this objective.

#### **Expected result 2.1.1. Improve the accountability of institutions responsible for assisting gender-based violence cases.** Through

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<sup>83</sup> This objective is consistent with several objectives in the EU GAP III within the thematic area "Free from all forms of gender-based violence". The objective is also consistent with SDG 5, specifically goal 5.2: "Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation."

legal advice and strategic court proceedings, KWN will engage lawyers who will represent individuals and families to seek justice. The monitoring of ongoing court cases and the analysis of completed cases also will aim to increase the performance of local institutions in addressing gender-based violence.

**Expected result 2.1.2. Further knowledge regarding the extent to which the legal framework related to gender-based violence has been implemented, as well as the awareness and prevalence of domestic violence.**<sup>84</sup> Supported by ADA, KWN will continue monitoring the implementation of the legal framework and the National Strategy and Action Plan for Protection from Domestic Violence (2022-2026). The findings will be publicly promoted and discussed with institutions to increase their awareness of the situation and recommend improvements, based on KWN's experience with similar monitoring reports.

**Expected result 2.1.3. Improve awareness of more people about the legal framework and their rights.** This will clearly contribute to increasing public awareness, which can lead to increased reporting of violence and thus to improving the ability of institutions to handle cases (which are difficult to handle if not reported). It will include awareness campaigns at the national and municipal level, as well as involve member organizations through the support of KWF. Special focus will be placed on various forms of gender-based violence, including sexual

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<sup>84</sup> This will contribute directly to implementing Objective 2 of the National Strategy and Action Plan against Domestic Violence 2016-2020, Activity 2.3.7: "Increasing Resources and Staff, Office of National Coordinator against DV, who in their job descriptions should have specific responsibilities for supporting the implementation and monitoring of the National Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence". This also will contribute to monitoring Objective 3, Activity 3.3.2: "Effective implementation of protection orders, monitoring and punishment and raising awareness on their violations, including capacity building of Kosovo Probation Service to reduce the degree of recidivism".

harassment and rape. Efforts will be made to transform social norms towards preventing violence.

**Expected result 2.1.4. Continue engagement of KWN, KWN members, and CSOs in furthering the implementation of the legal framework for addressing gender-based violence.** KWN will cooperate with and support its member organizations and shelters, through KWF, in advocating for the implementation of the legal framework. This could include, for example, advocating for: securing, sustainable funding for service providers and improved services; improving the interinstitutional response, rehabilitation, and reintegration services for persons who have suffered gender-based violence; and advocacy for other recommendations resulting from KWN's research and monitoring.

**Expected result 2.1.5. Improve the performance and quality of services of shelters and other service providers working with victims of gender-based violence, especially rehabilitation and reintegration services.** KWN will cooperate more with its member organizations, especially shelters, and public institutions (namely the Department of Social Welfare), to increase the quality of services offered to people who have suffered domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence. KWN will continue providing support to social service officials and coordination mechanisms towards improving case management, coordination, and overall response to cases. This will include advocating for increased state funding to cover all costs related to services, housing, rehabilitation, and reintegration, as well as working with shelters to ensure sustainable funding. KWN will cooperate with the ministries responsible for prioritizing professional training and employment for women who have experienced gender-based violence towards their reintegration. KWN also can support shelters in establishing policies and practices towards environmental protection within shelters, that

also can decrease shelter costs and improve the health and wellbeing of women and children assisted.

**Expected result 2.1.6. Continue providing recommendations to improve laws and policies.** KWN will continue to review draft laws and other policies provided for public consultation, as well as participate in government working groups, using its expertise to provide input from a gender perspective on draft laws and policies. KWN will send advocacy letters to the government and parliament, as well as publish letters in the media, as needed, to advocate for its recommendations to be addressed in laws and policies.

## **Interest Groups**

The main beneficiaries of this Program will be women and girls who have experienced, are experiencing, or are at risk of suffering gender-based violence. Institutions responsible for implementing the existing legal framework on gender-based violence will be targeted, including the National Coordinator for Domestic Violence (or perhaps later for gender-based violence), AGE, coordination mechanisms, the Kosovo Police, Centers for Social Work, the justice system, shelters, the Victims Advocacy and Assistance Office, Legal Aid Offices, KJC, and the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council. In addition, citizens in general will be targeted with awareness-raising regarding the existing legal framework, ways of seeking help, and towards transforming social norms.

KWN will continue its close cooperation with its member organizations, especially with shelters and supporters of women who have suffered sexual violence during the war. KWN also will coordinate with other actors, including the Security Gender Group, UN Kosovo Team, UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, OSCE, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), the University Program for Gender Studies and Research at UP, Care International, Save the Children, the

European Centre for Minority Issues, and the Centre for Legal Aid and Regional Development. Regarding LGBTI+ rights, KWN will continue cooperating closely with other organizations focused on supporting LGBTI+ people.

KWN expects to receive support for this Program from ADA and UN Women.



# Women's Economic Empowerment

## Laws, Policies, and Institutional Mechanisms

- The EU Equal Treatment Directive calls for equal opportunities and treatment of men and women in employment and occupational matters.<sup>85</sup>
- The EU Directive on Pregnant Workers sets out guidelines for workers during and after pregnancy.<sup>86</sup> It covers topics such as: exposure to potentially dangerous activities, duration of maternity leave and free time to visit the doctor. This has not been fully included in the legal framework of Kosovo.
- The EU Directive on the Establishment of a general Framework for Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation establishes a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. The Directive has informed the Law on Protection from Discrimination.<sup>87</sup>
- The EU Parental Leave Directive establishes the right to a minimum of four months of leave for mothers and fathers.<sup>88</sup> Kosovo's legal framework has not yet been harmonized with this Directive.
- GAP III has a thematic area that focuses on women's economic empowerment: "Advancement of economic and social rights and empowerment of women and girls". This area has eight specific objectives that focus on women's economic empowerment.

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<sup>85</sup> EU, Equal Treatment Directive, 2006/54/EC, 2006.

<sup>86</sup> EU, Guidelines for Pregnant Workers, 92/85/EC, 1992.

<sup>87</sup> EU, Directive on the establishment of a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, 2000/78/EC, 2000.

<sup>88</sup> EU, Parental Leave Directive 2010/18/EU 2010.

- The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo calls for the government to ensure gender equality, including access to employment.
- The Law on Labour aims to regulate the rights and obligations arising from employment.<sup>89</sup> This applies to employees and employers in the public and private sector, and deals with issues such as maternity leave. An employed woman has the right to 12 months of maternity leave, with six months of compensation at 70% of the basic salary paid by the employer, three months paid by the government at 50% of the average salary in Kosovo, and three months without payment. It also provides for paternal leave after the baby is born, but only for two weeks and two paid days.
- The Law on Protection from Discrimination prohibits discrimination in many forms, including based on gender, age, marital status, or sexual orientation, and it applies to the workplace.<sup>90</sup>
- The Kosovo Inheritance Law stipulates that men and women have the same inheritance rights, although this is not necessarily applied in practice.<sup>91</sup>
- The Law on Property and Other Real Rights deals with the ownership of physical objects, including the abandonment and registration of property.<sup>92</sup> The Law treats all parties as gender-neutral and does not provide any specific provision regarding women's property rights.
- The Law on Gender Equality explicitly states that there must be equal protection and treatment based on gender in labour

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<sup>89</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Law on Labour No. 03/L-212.

<sup>90</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Law on Protection from Discrimination, Law No. 05/L-021.

<sup>91</sup> Assembly of Kosovo and UNMIK, Law on Inheritance in Kosovo, Law No. 2004/26.

<sup>92</sup> Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Law on Property and Other Real Rights, Law No. 03/L-154.

relations. This includes prohibition of gender-based discrimination in labour relations and social security schemes at work, unpaid work assessment, and in accessing and supplying goods and services.<sup>93</sup>

- The National Development Strategy 2016-2021 states that it is necessary to “increase the involvement of children in preschool institutions in order to increase women’s participation in the labour market”.<sup>94</sup> The new Strategy has not yet been adopted.

## The Situation

In Kosovo, only 22.7% of women are registered as active participants in the labour market, compared to 56% of men.<sup>95</sup> Regarding employment rates, only 17% of working age women are employed, while 47% of men are employed. In 2017, education, health, and trade sectors employed the most women (47% of all employed women).<sup>96</sup> For men, the main sectors of employment were production and trade (47% of all employed men). These percentages have not changed much over the years, indicating that the labour market in Kosovo is fragmented from a gender perspective.

A deeper gender gap can be found in inactivity rates, where 80% of working age women are inactive, while 34% of men are.<sup>97</sup> Age matters, especially for women. General unemployment among women is 37%. However, unemployment among young women is 64%, and 48% among young men (ages 15 to 24).<sup>98</sup> The difference between total unemployment and youth

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<sup>93</sup> Assembly of Republic of Kosovo, [Law on Gender Equality](#), Law No. 05-L020, Chapter III.

<sup>94</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister, *National Development Strategy 2016-2021*.

<sup>95</sup> Kosovo Agency of Statistics, [Labour Force Survey](#), quarter 4, 2021.

<sup>96</sup> KWN, [Kosovo Gender Analysis](#), Prishtina: 2018, p. 37.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

unemployment is 18.5%. The most prevalent reason for inactivity among men is attendance of school, education, or training (37%).<sup>99</sup> Meanwhile, for women, this is the second most common cause. The main reason why women are inactive is that they have care responsibilities at home, primarily for children (32%). Very few men mentioned this as a reason preventing their labour force participation: only 1%. KWN has long suggested that making economically affordable childcare available would enable more women to enter the labour market by creating new jobs and facilitating access to childcare. A time use survey found that men, on average, spend 400% more time (3.9 hours a day) at work than women (0.9 hours a day).<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, women spend 300% more time on housework and care for the family (7.1 hours and 2.3 hours respectively).

Kosovars have identified equal treatment of women and men at work (32%), equal pay (25%), availability of part time or flexible work (17%), and access to childcare (14%) as key issues for women to become more active in the labour market.<sup>101</sup>

Research conducted by the Riinvest Institute in 2017 showed that “in the public sector, a higher percentage of women, about 72 percent, have a contract with an indefinite duration, whereas about 28 percent have a fixed term contract, with an average duration of 14 months”.<sup>102</sup> Also, “in the public sector, contracts are generally extended, as the existence of fixed-term contracts is often a mere formality”. Meanwhile they found that “less than half of the women working in the private sector (48 percent) have a long-term contract and around 52

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>100</sup> Millennium Challenge Corporation, Kosovo Labor Force and Time Use Survey, Prishtina: 2017, p. 12.

<sup>101</sup> Democracy for Development, *Women's Inactivity in the Labor Market: Factors Hindering Women's Participation in the Labor Market*, 2017, p. 23.

<sup>102</sup> Riinvest Institute, *Women in the Labor Market: Analysis of Working Conditions for Women in Kosovo*, Prishtina: 2017, p. 39.

percent of them have a fixed term contract, lasting on average 10 months”.

In the private sector, about 30% of women work without a contract and about 50% have fixed-term contracts.<sup>103</sup> In the public sector, only 25% of women have fixed-term contracts.<sup>104</sup> Current, accurate information about women and men’s engagement in the informal economy is lacking. Work in the informal economy can have many negative consequences on women’s economic empowerment, including low wages, difficult working conditions, insufficient social protection, and minimal accumulated pensions.

According to cultural norms, men tend to manage family assets and wealth. Although laws guarantee women the right to property inheritance, many families continue to follow traditions according to which property is passed among men. Experience suggests that women give up their own right to inherit family wealth based on existing cultural norms and to maintain “good” relationships with family members. Without these assets, women have no guarantee to obtain loans and thus have no access to capital for the development of their businesses. Women heads of households face particularly difficult conditions, since they often have no access to assets for developing their businesses or markets for selling their products (a task previously done by their husbands). Women heads of households are among the poorest people in Kosovo.

Many women sell products such as processed vegetables and processed foods. They also often provide family services, care, and hairstyling. In rural areas, women contribute to unpaid services, such as caring for farm animals, unpaid work in family-owned shops, and agricultural work.<sup>105</sup> However, men

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Forthcoming KWN research on agriculture and rural livelihoods, conducted for FAO, describes additional challenges facing rural women. This research will be published in 2023.

traditionally trade products and manage family finances. Therefore, very few women reap the rewards of their hard work, and they have few rights to financial decisions taken in the family.<sup>106</sup>

Insufficient access to the labour market, property, and family finances puts women in an insecure position. Women lack decision-making power within their families. Women who experience domestic violence are unable to escape violent situations and fear losing custody of their children.<sup>107</sup> Without education and skills, women who have been victims of domestic violence struggle to find employment. Supporting women's access to education, employment, and capital is key to women's economic empowerment.



*With support from KWF, the Women's Initiative Association has supported young women with professional training and advocated to the mayor of Dragash for their employment. As a result, 24 women are now employed in the new factory.*

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<sup>106</sup> *Country Gender Profile*, p. 17.

<sup>107</sup> KWN, *Security Begins at Home and More Than "Words on Paper"?*.

## **KWN's Main Achievements**

- As a direct result of KWF support, more than 41 women, mostly from rural areas, have become employed.
- KWN has supported approximately 30 women's rights groups to help their members identify new markets for their products, increase productivity and outputs, and increase their profits. As a result, 223 women have been trained to develop and manage successful businesses, and 125 women have better access to markets.
- Following the publication its report "Striking a Balance" KWN joined the Women's Economic Forum, collaborating with other stakeholders to advocate for policy changes to address gender-based discrimination at work and to change current maternity, paternity, and parental leave provisions.
- KWN conducted and published a study on the demand, supply, and options for increasing the availability of childcare in Kosovo, titled "Who Cares?". It examines covered and uncovered demand for childcare services in Kosovo. It is informing advocacy for more childcare services.
- KWN raised awareness of the importance of women registering their property. As a result of this initiative 6,088 citizens in five municipalities (3,150 women and 2,938 men) are more aware of the importance of women registering their property, whereas 153 women initiated the process of registering their property.
- KWN advocated successfully for the government to extend the Administrative Instruction for the Joint Registration of Property.
- With support from FAO, KWN conducted the first comprehensive gender analysis on agriculture and rural livelihoods in Kosovo.

## Key Challenges

Key challenges to the economic empowerment of women in Kosovo derive primarily from cultural norms.

- The poor implementation of existing inheritance and property laws and low awareness among judges on how to safeguard women's property and inheritance rights prevent women from realizing their property rights.<sup>108</sup>
- Women face difficulties obtaining loans because they have no collateral, credit history, and relations. Only 3% of commercial bank loans go to women. This makes property purchase and business start-ups quite challenging.<sup>109</sup>
- Social norms encourage women to stay home as caregivers and men to work outside the home to provide for their families. This affects whether women choose to seek employment, whether spouses and family members allow or encourage them to work, and if employers (usually men) employ women. Moreover, women are poorly compensated for their work, although society relies on their unpaid work to function. The absence of affordable, quality kindergartens and day care centers also undermines women's ability to enter the labour force.
- Some employers seemingly discriminate against women in hiring and do not pay for maternity leave.<sup>110</sup> Men are discriminated against by legal provisions related to paternity leave, which allow fathers little time with their newborn children.
- The current Law on Labour contributes to discrimination against women and men, as well as reinforces traditional gender norms that hinder women's access to employment.

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<sup>108</sup> KGSC, *Women's Rights to Property in Kosovo*, 2011.

<sup>109</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report Kosovo*, 2012.

<sup>110</sup> KWN, *Striking a Balance*, Prishtina: 2016, pp. 7 and 30.



- The informal economy is widespread and poorly understood from a gender perspective, enabling violations of women's and men's labour rights and contributing to poverty in old age.

## **KWN's Strategy**

The long-term overall objective of this Program is: **Women and men have equal economic opportunities at home and in the public sphere.**

### **Objective 3.1. Improve conditions for women's participation in the labour force.**

For women and men to have more equal opportunities in the economy and at home, women's the participation in the labour force must be increased. KWN's Strategy is in synergy with the National Agenda for Economic Empowerment of Women by the Women's Economic Forum, which guides advocacy efforts towards women's economic empowerment in Kosovo.

**Expected Result 3.1.1. Increase the awareness of institutions and other actors regarding the need to harmonize labour legislation with the EU legal framework, among other needed improvements to the legal framework.** KWN will continue collaborating with the Women's Economic Forum, advocating for evidence-based legal and policy changes in line with the EU Gender Equality Acquis.

**Expected Result 3.1.2. Institutions and key actors are more aware of the extent of gender-based discrimination in labour in Kosovo and ways to address it.** This will help address obstacles to women's employment. KWN will advocate for changes to laws and policies and their implementation, based on KWN research conducted in 2018 and 2022 related to gender-based discrimination in labour. KWN will continue to work towards

empowering women's organizations to hold relevant institutions accountable for enforcing anti-discrimination legislation and women's labour rights. Advocacy also will contribute to improving women's access to justice related to gender-based discrimination in labour. In addition, using the aforementioned research, KWN will continue to advocate for the implementation of its recommendations, including for shared parental leave to provide women and men with equal opportunities for family care and employment. This will contribute to the approximation of Kosovo's legislation with the EU Directive on Parental Leave and the Pregnant Workers Directive.

**Expected result 3.1.3. Improve access to justice in cases of gender-based discrimination in labour and violations of women's rights at work.** KWN will collaborate with its partners in Kosovo and the region to support women in seeking justice for gender-based discrimination in labour, through legal advice and strategic litigation.

**Expected result 3.1.4. Increase awareness about the informal economy and how to address it using a gender-responsive approach.** KWN will conduct a gender analysis of the informal economy and publish recommendations to inform the government's strategy for treatment of informality with a gender-responsive and "do-no-harm" approach. KWN also will advocate for the implementation of these recommendations. KWN will advocate to institutions to collect and make publicly accessible better data related to the informal economy. Such information can support KWN, its members, and other actors to advocate for better policies and affirmative measures in addressing inequalities related to women's participation in the labour force, thereby, contributing to increasing their participation.

**Expected Result 3.1.5. More officials are aware of the need for more preschools and childcare centers, care for the elderly, and care for the disabled, especially in rural areas.** Providing care for children, the elderly, and the disabled is essential to enable more women to have paid employment. Therefore, KWN will cooperate with its member organizations and the Women's Economic Forum to continue advocating for opening more day care centers, nurseries, and alternative care options for children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

**Expected Result 3.1.6. Increase women's access to inheritance and ownership through legal reforms, awareness, and legal aid.** Equal opportunities for inheritance and ownership are crucial for women's economic empowerment. Increasing women's ownership will create a friendlier environment for women to start and expand their businesses. KWN will coordinate with other actors working on this issue towards efficiency and effectiveness in achieving common goals. KWN will advocate removing from the law the possibility for women to refuse their right to inheritance. KWN and its members, supported by KWF, will participate in campaigns undertaken in close cooperation with other actors, towards 1) raising awareness in the family, among women, men, boys, and girls, regarding the importance of women and men having equal rights to property and inheritance; and 2) for the registration of property in the name of women. This will include coordinated media campaigns, public meetings, and door-to-door visits by KWN members who have access within their communities.

**Expected Result 3.1.7. Improve awareness of officials on how to improve the living conditions of rural women and women with disabilities.** KWN will advocate for the implementation of recommendations arising from KWN's research on agriculture, rural livelihoods, the informal economy, and digitalization, especially including attention to the needs of rural women and

women with disabilities. This includes advocating for improved funding of personal assistants for people with disabilities, ensuring that their employment rights are protected.

**Expected Result 3.1.8. More officials of international funding institutions are informed about gender responsive policies.**

KWN will cooperate with partners in Kosovo, the region, and internationally to advocate that international financial institutions (e.g., the EU, World Bank, IMF) base their decisions on gender analysis and consult adequately with women's rights organizations. This may include sending advocacy letters to inform funding strategies, attending conferences and meetings, and writing advocacy letters, among other activities. KWN will continue encouraging international funders to undertake gender analysis, use it to inform their actions, and undertake gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation of their programs, using gender-responsive indicators and sex-disaggregated data as recommended by the OECD Gender Marker. This includes on the actions they fund related to the economy, agriculture, and climate change, among others.

## **Interest Groups**

Women will be the main beneficiaries of this Program, especially hitherto marginalized women and those facing gender-based discrimination in labour. Their families will be secondary beneficiaries and will be in a better economic position. Targeted institutions for capacity development and recommendations also can benefit, as they will improve their skills to further women's equal access to state-funded programs.

KWN will continue to cooperate with its member organizations, particularly those focused on economic empowerment, awareness-raising, monitoring, and legal aid.

KWN will cooperate with and support G7, the Women's Economic Forum, and Women for Women. KWN will closely

coordinate with other stakeholders involved in women's economic empowerment, including AGE, ministries responsible for work and social services, trade and industry, education, the Kosovo Cadastral Agency, the Chamber of Notaries of the Republic of Kosovo, USAID, the EU, GIZ, UNDP, UN Women, ILO, OSCE, and the World Bank, among other stakeholders.

KWN plans to receive support for this Program from the Austrian Development Agency and the EU.

# Gender Transformative Education

## Laws, Policies, and Institutional Mechanisms

There are many laws and institutional mechanisms to increase girls' and women's access to education:

- General Recommendation no. 3 of CEDAW encourages states to adopt programs for education and public information that will help to eliminate prejudices and practices that hinder the social equality of women.<sup>111</sup>
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>112</sup> recognizes the right of all children to education. This Convention is directly applicable in Kosovo through the Constitution.<sup>113</sup>
- The Recast Directive contains provisions for the implementation of the principle of equal treatment in vocational training and in ensuring equality in matters of profession and employment.<sup>114</sup> For the most part, the Directive has been transposed into the legislation of Kosovo, but implementation remains weak.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> UN, CEDAW, 1981.

<sup>112</sup> UN, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), 1990, Article 28.

<sup>113</sup> Constitution, Article 22.

<sup>114</sup> Official Journal of the European Union, L 204/23, [Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council](#) of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast), 26.7.2006.

<sup>115</sup> Sylvia Cleff le Divellec and Katharina Miller For the Kosovo Women's Network, Policy Paper, "[Kosovo's Progress in Aligning Its Laws with the European Union Gender Equality Acquis](#)", Prishtina: KWN, 2017.

- The fourth UN SDG aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo guarantees the right to free, basic education and obliges public institutions to ensure equal opportunities to education for everyone, in accordance with their abilities and needs.<sup>116</sup>
- The Law on Preschool Education foresees the inclusive participation of boys and girls in preschool education.<sup>117</sup>
- The Law on Education in the municipalities of Kosovo obliges MEST to promote a non-discriminatory educational system, where the rights of each person to education are respected and education opportunities are made available to everyone.<sup>118</sup>
- The Law on Pre-University Education ensures the participation of girls and boys in the education system. This Law guarantees access to pre-university education without any kind of discrimination, including based on gender and marital status, among others.<sup>119</sup> The Law also requires that pre-university education includes preparing the student for a responsible life, in the spirit of gender equality.<sup>120</sup> Further, it emphasizes that the promotion of gender equality must be considered at all stages: planning, management, and provision of pre-university education.<sup>121</sup>
- The Law on Higher Education describes the principles of equality, equal opportunities without discrimination, and

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<sup>116</sup> Article 47.

<sup>117</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law no. 02/L-52 on [preschool education](#), 2006, Article 1.

<sup>118</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law no. 03/L-068 on [education in the municipalities of Kosovo](#), 2008, Article 3(b).

<sup>119</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law no. 04/L-032 on [pre-university education in the Republic of Kosovo](#), 2011, Article 3.6.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 1.2.5.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 3.4.

diversity as fundamental principles of higher education.<sup>122</sup> It also ensures the participation of men and women, guaranteeing them the right to access education without discrimination.<sup>123</sup>

- The Law on Adult Education and Training<sup>124</sup> states that men and women can participate in adult education and training.
- The Law for Vocational Education and Training<sup>125</sup> is based on the principle of inclusiveness, ensuring that women and men can participate in education and vocational training.
- Law on Youth Empowerment and Participation<sup>126</sup> obliges institutions to ensure that young people are participating and having influence in important decision-making processes that affect their interests. The Law also details the areas in which youth participation is mandatory, including: education, employment, social affairs, and public health.
- The National Development Strategy (NDS) 2016-2021 gives priority to the inclusion of children aged 0-6 in preschool programs.<sup>127</sup> There, among other things, it is emphasized that this will have a positive effect on increasing the participation of women in the labour force. While the NDS has expired, a new one is not yet in place.
- The NPISAA aims to improve the standard of education, including the field of education and vocational training, as well as work in developing policies for young men and

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<sup>122</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law no. 04/L-37 on [higher education](#) in the Republic of Kosovo, 2011, Article 2.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., Article 5.

<sup>124</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law no. 04/L-143 on [adult education and training](#) in the Republic of Kosovo, 2013.

<sup>125</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law no. 04/L-138 for [vocational and education training](#), 2013, Article 3.1.

<sup>126</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law no. 03/L-145 on [empowerment and participation of youth](#), 2009.

<sup>127</sup> Republic of Kosovo, [Government, National Development Strategy: \(NDS\) 2016-2021](#), 2016.



women, without discrimination based on gender, race, religion, faith, affiliation ethnicity, disability, age, or sexual orientation.<sup>128</sup>

- The European Reform Agenda (ERA), among other things, states that it should be implemented in accordance with the LGE, including implementation related to educational policy reforms, increasing participation at the level of pre-school education and improving the quality of Vocational Education and Training and the transition from school to work.<sup>129</sup>

## The Situation

KWN's roots lie with the Rural Women's Network, which focused on expanding access to education for girls during the 1990s.<sup>130</sup> The activism of some of KWN's oldest member organizations has contributed to fundamental changes in girls' access to education. Partly due to their efforts, the percentage of young women attending education has increased significantly over the past two decades. Many KWN members continue their important work today, focusing on improving access to education for ethnic minority groups and children with disabilities.

Beyond the classical concept of education, KWN interprets this Program in such a way as to include informal education in relation to feminism.

In November 2013, KWN organized the Regional Forum of Young Feminists 2013, where 40 young feminists from Kosovo and neighboring countries (Serbia, Macedonia, Croatia) gathered in Prishtina and discussed advocacy strategies, feminism, and women's participation in decision-making. In the

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<sup>128</sup> NPISAA 2017-2021. The purpose has remained the same in newer versions of the NPISAA, which is updated annually.

<sup>129</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Government, [European Reform Agenda \(ERA\)](#), 2016. The action plan has been updated and still includes education as a priority.

<sup>130</sup> In April 2018, KWN members decided to add this Program to KWN's Strategy.

final Declaration of the Forum,<sup>131</sup> young women participants requested that the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST), Ministry of Finance and the Assembly to provide textbooks and transport for girls, especially if their families cannot afford their education due to financial limitations. The young feminists also requested that the Government implement the Law on Pre-University Education, which requires parents to send their children to school. They called for psychologists in schools to help young girls overcome challenges that may prevent them from continuing their education. KWN has continued to advocate for these issues and many of these young feminists have continued their advocacy work as part of the wider feminist movement.



*Regional Young Feminists Forum*

In 2013, KWN continued supporting girls' education by supporting the establishment of the "Buçinca Couple" Foundation for girls' education. For 60 years, Naxhije and Fahri Buçinca have worked for girls' formal and informal education, and they established this Foundation to continue enabling girls' access to education for years to come. KWN supported the fundraising event that gathered €23,969 for the Foundation,

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<sup>131</sup> KWN, [Declaration of the Regional Young Feminists Forum](#).

mainly from local businesses, organizations, and individuals. KWN also donated €1,000 to this Foundation. KWN has recognized the Buçinca's contribution with a certificate of gratitude.

In 2016, KWN published the report *Budgeting for Better Education*.<sup>132</sup> KWN collaborated with MEST towards institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting, which included a gender analysis of this Ministry's work. This identified several areas in which gender equality can be improved in relation to education in Kosovo.

Meanwhile, KWN has supported various advocacy initiatives towards increasing access to education for girls and women by supporting KWN member organizations through KWF.

For example, in 2017, supported by KWF, the Action for Mothers and Children (AMC) advocated to the University of Prishtina, Faculty of Medicine, to collaborate with AMC to engage students in AMC projects. AMC's advocacy to the Head of the Department of Maternal and Child Health at the Ministry of Health led them to integrate attention to postnatal depression into the educational curriculum for classes mothers.



*AMC trains nurses and midwives how to treat women with post-partum depression.*

<sup>132</sup> KWN, *Budgeting for Better Education*, Prishtinë: RrGK, 2016.

Also supported by KWF, Artpolis Art and Community Centre in partnership with the Centre for Promotion of Women's Rights used art to increase the awareness of 130 women and girls from the municipalities of Prishtina and Drenas about their rights to reproductive health and sexual education. KWN member organizations also advocated to MEST for introducing and implementing sexual education in secondary school curricula.

An important issue is insufficient sexual education in schools. While curriculum exists, students report that few teachers follow it. This is partly due to cultural norms that make it taboo to discuss such topics in public and insufficient training of teachers on how to answer questions posed by students. WCSOs have worked to raise awareness of sexually transmitted diseases among youth and marginalized groups. However, a more institutionalized approach is needed.

Challenging gender norms and relations through education remains key to transforming gender norms in everyday life. Investing in improving curricula and teaching methods is important for systematically addressing the root causes of gender inequalities.

## Key Challenges

- The attendance rate of pre-university education for girls and boys is similar (48.7% girls and 51.3% boys), apart from pre-school education, where boys' attendance is slightly higher (53.8%).<sup>133</sup> In general, pre-school education attendance is low due to the lack of affordable preschool institutions.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Donjeta Morina for the Council of Europe, *Intersectional Gender Analysis in pre-university education*, 2020.

<sup>134</sup> See, KWN, *Who Cares?* Prishtina: KWN, 2016.

Thus, Kosovo remains far from achieving the EU Barcelona Objectives.<sup>135</sup>

- Regarding ethnicity, the attendance rate of students in pre-university education is almost proportional to the demographics of Kosovo.<sup>136</sup> However, the educational system does not have sufficient data disaggregated by ethnicity and gender, which makes it difficult to understand any differences between boys and girls.<sup>137</sup>
- In Kosovo, there are five Resource Centres and two schools for children with special needs, and there are more boys (59%) than girls (41%) with special needs who attend compulsory education.<sup>138</sup> Although the Law contains provisions for children with special educational needs,<sup>139</sup> the budget has not been allocated for its implementation.
- In higher secondary education, 58.5% of teachers are men and 41.5% are women. At the pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary levels, 42.5% are men and 57.5% are women. Meanwhile, at the preschool level, 100% of teachers are women.<sup>140</sup> This can reinforce gender norms regarding women as caregivers while depriving young children of male role models who are caregivers.

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<sup>135</sup> The Barcelona Objectives were set in 2002 by EU leaders. They state that pre-school education should be offered to 90% of children between the age of three and compulsory school age, and to 33% of children under the age of three (EC, *Barcelona Objectives: Development of childcare institutions for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth*, p. 5).

<sup>136</sup> KWN, *Kosovo Gender Analysis*, 2018.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>138</sup> Donjeta Morina for the Council of Europe, *Intersectional Gender Analysis in pre-university education*.

<sup>139</sup> Law on pre-university education in the Republic of Kosovo, articles 39 and 40.

<sup>140</sup> Donjeta Morina for the Council of Europe, *Intersectional Gender Analysis in pre-university education*.

- Educational curricula at all levels often enforce gender stereotypes.<sup>141</sup> Transforming socially assigned gender roles in curricula could promote gender equality.
- Few youth learn about issues related to sexuality and sexual and reproductive health at school.<sup>142</sup> Nor do they learn about using contraceptives, as teachers evidently regularly bypass reproductive health education lectures.<sup>143</sup> This may result in incorrect information. Limited knowledge about contraceptives may affect the rate of abortions or increase the risk of sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>144</sup>

## **KWN's Strategy**

Considering these challenges, the long-term goal of this program is: **Improving access to quality education that challenges existing gender norms and power relations.** The objectives and expected results are detailed below.

### **Specific Objective 4.1. Improve textbooks and the way teachers teach curricula towards gender-transformative, feminist education.**

If curricula as well as teaching methods used by teachers are improved to include a gender transformative approach, then this will contribute to higher quality education that challenges norms and gender relations and power relations.

**Expected result 4.1.1. Recommendations exist and are sent to relevant actors for improving teaching by teachers and curricula.** KWN will monitor the curricula review process from a gender

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<sup>141</sup> Youth Initiative for Human Rights - Kosovo, "[Discriminatory language in school textbooks](#)", 2017.

<sup>142</sup> KWN, [Access to Healthcare in Kosovo](#).

<sup>143</sup> KWN members' observations.

<sup>144</sup> KWN, *Gender Analysis of Kosovo*, 2018, p. 56.

perspective. Based on this monitoring, KWN will offer recommendations for changing institutions' curricula towards reducing gender inequalities, transforming gender roles, and changing gender norms and power relations. University educational texts should aim to educate future lawyers, prosecutors, and judges of Kosovo on how to deal with cases of gender-based violence. KWN will collaborate with other actors to advocate for the review and revision of current texts, to better promote gender equality and access to justice for women. Where possible, this will include education related to climate change and environmental protection.

**Expected result 4.1.2. Institutions and teachers are more responsible for transforming gender norms while teaching sexual education in schools.** Textbooks should be among the main sources of accurate information on sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, as well as on the use of contraceptives. Accurate information reduces the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, as well as the rate of abortions. KWN will collaborate with its members to monitor the quality and distribution of this education, as well as to advocate for improving sex education in schools.

**Expected result 4.1.3. More girls, women, boys, and men aware of gender norms and feminism and reached through KWN PR materials.** KWN will continue formal and informal education through schools, outreach efforts, demonstrations, and social media campaigns, towards transforming gender norms, roles, and power relations.

## **Interest Groups**

The target group and primary beneficiary will be officials within educational institutions, whose capacities can be increased by pursuing awareness-raising and advocacy efforts.

The secondary beneficiaries will include all Kosovars, who will benefit from improvements in the education system.

KWN member organizations will be key partners in implementing these efforts. KWN will seek to cooperate and coordinate with other stakeholders in the sector, such as MEST, Kosovo municipalities including Education Departments, the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”, the University Program for Gender Studies and Research, AGE, the Kosovo Education Centre (KEC), Peer Education Network (PEN), EU Office in Kosovo, ADA, GIZ, USAID, UNICEF, Care International, Balkan Sunflowers, Kosovo Youth Council, and The Ideas Partnership.



# **Crosscutting Aim: Strengthening the Feminist Movement**

## **The Situation**

KWN is a feminist network with feminist goals. For this reason, each of the above programs will contribute to strengthening the Feminist Movement in Kosovo and beyond, as a crosscutting aim of this Strategy.

Historically, and until recently, few women in Kosovo wanted to use the word “feminism”. Recent developments can be attributed to the work of women’s rights organizations, the University Program for Gender Studies and Research at the University of Prishtina, which has educated many young people in feminist theory, and the information available on the Internet about feminism and feminist movements. Progress has been made thanks to actors from the university, organizations, and individual activists, whose combined efforts involved advocating for gender equality, including during events such as International Women’s Day and International Human Rights Day. The joint initiatives these days, organized by diverse collectives of activists and organizations, serve as an important basis for advancing the feminist movement in Kosovo.

Despite progress, there is still a lack of solidarity among women. Power relations among women can still undermine an inclusive and diverse feminist movement. Further, many people still do not know what “feminism” means, what it means to be a feminist in practice, and how feminism relates to activism.

KWN members, various activists for women’s rights, and the diverse women they support all contribute to advancing the feminist movement in Kosovo. In empowering organizations and

diverse activists, KWN supports the growth of a feminist movement in Kosovo. Therefore, much of KWN's previous work has focused on empowering KWN members.

### **KWN Key Achievements**

- Provided regular, continuous communication and cooperation among KWN members and other stakeholders through networking meetings. Meetings created a space for women activists to discuss issues, strategize, and build solidarity as a feminist movement.
- Involved at least 3,670 young activists in the movement in Kosovo through activities, internships, or voluntarism at KWN, empowering new leaders.
- Improved the institutional and advocacy capacities of KWN and its members, towards long-term sustainability. Stronger organisations contribute to a stronger movement.
- Increased cooperation among women in the region related to the feminist movement.
- Increased solidarity, support, and collaboration among member organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic through regular needs assessments, an empowerment retreat, KWF grants reaching 1,699 direct beneficiaries, and advocating for institutions and international delegations to address activists' needs during the pandemic.

## Key Challenges

While considering KWN's achievements in prior years, WCSOs and the feminist movement in Kosovo still face the following challenges:

- Fear of feminism remains widespread among many women and men in Kosovo, which can undermine the building of a feminist movement.
- Feminist values remain unclear to many in Kosovo, including how to apply them in practice within the movement (e.g., the need to challenge existing power structures that undermine equality and to ensure an intersectional approach).
- Anti-gender movements are spreading rapidly via the media and social media, reaching many people and undermining feminist goals. While prior door-to-door approaches that involved sitting with women and men to change traditional views have been effective, they are difficult to organize considering that they are time-consuming and resource-intensive, particularly amid a general decline in voluntarism compared to the 1990s.
- Insufficient communication and cooperation among feminists, coupled with competition for funding undermines solidarity and the building of an effective feminist movement. Personal issues, individual interests (including nepotism), rumors and gossip can impact negatively the building of a strong feminist movement.
- Little effort has been made to move feminism beyond theoretical discussions, to establish strategies that strengthen the feminist movement or to incorporate feminist principles into politics and decision-making. Feminists in Kosovo, the region, and beyond, do not have clear strategies on how to advance the feminist movement,

including forging intersectional, inclusive local and global feminist movements.

- The movement faces several human and financial resourcing challenges that undermine efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability.<sup>145</sup>
- Procurement processes during grant applications may result in resources going to companies that write strong proposals, but do not necessarily possess expertise to further advance women's equality and rights. Also, procurement processes may result in competition between WCSOs, rather than cooperation that can contribute to lasting change.
- Funds often are earmarked or "tied" to particular activities, preventing flexibility for WCSOs' activism.
- Donor constraints faced by KWN sometimes are transferred to KWN members, particularly grant durations and budget constraints. KWN has advocated since 2012 to raise donor awareness on the needs of WCSOs and that short deadlines and small grant amounts hinder long-term changes. Limitations on the duration and budget of KWF grants were useful during KWF's initial years, especially to manage potential risks. Now that KWF has been tested, such restrictions are no longer necessary.<sup>146</sup>
- KWN has minimal reserve funds (thus affecting the security of staff salaries), and KWN depends on external donor funds for the future as well. Other revenues like membership fees, consultancy services and individual donations remain limited, despite fundraising attempts.
- Kosovo does not have a legal framework that encourages individuals and businesses to donate to non-profit organizations.

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<sup>145</sup> KWN, *Where's the Money for Women's Rights*, 2020.

<sup>146</sup> Mainlevel Consulting AG, *External Assessment of the Kosovo Women's Network, its Strategy for 2015-2018 and Key Programs Contributing to the Strategy*, 2018.

- Given their advocacy and work, KWN and its members lacked sufficient human resources to explore philanthropy opportunities and alternative resources that could support them if foreign funds are reduced in the future. This risk was explicitly increased and present during the pandemic, as many WCOs were cut off from funds and their work was limited or discontinued completely.
- Since not all organizations have long-term, sustainable funding, many organizations have engaged volunteers instead of permanent staff. This can hamper their long-term stability and sustainability, contributing to irregularities in knowledge retention. While volunteering fosters pro-activity and avoids dependence on external donors, excessive volunteering may be counterproductive to sustainability, especially if the anticipated change is in the long-term.<sup>147</sup>
- Although WCSOs have increased their capacities through mentoring provided by KWN, some organizations still need to enhance their organizational, financial, and advocacy capacities.<sup>148</sup>
- Insufficient communication and coordination among organizations, donors, and other stakeholders may lead to duplication of efforts, overlap, and inefficiencies in work towards gender equality.
- While some WCSOs have extensive advocacy experience, others need additional support to lead their members and communities in advocating for their rights and holding officials accountable.
- According to patriarchal structures in Kosovo, women tend to be primary caregivers. This creates difficulties for women's rights activists, as they must balance care work with professional work and still be mindful of selfcare. Many

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

activists experience burnout, which contributes to staff turnover. KWN has provided psychotherapy to its staff. However, WCSOs still need to attend to self-care, which is important for sustaining the feminist movement.

## **KWN's Strategy**

To address these challenges and towards the long-term sustainability of KWN and its members, the long-term overall objective of this program is to: **strengthen the existing feminist movement in Kosovo, the region, and beyond.** Towards this goal, KWN will seek to achieve the following objectives under this Strategy.

### **Objective 5.1. Increase solidarity and wellbeing among women's organizations and activists.**

KWN's experience suggests that furthering and supporting solidarity among WCSOs is crucial to build a sustainable feminist movement. This objective will be realized through the achievement of the following expected results.

**Expected result 5.1.1. More women, men, girls, and boys involved in the feminist movement.** The feminist movement only can be sustained if it constantly recruits new members, especially girls and boys, who will keep the movement active in the future. Towards this result, KWN plans to continue holding regular networking meetings to bring diverse activists together; include girls, boys, women, and men in advocating for their priorities; provide internships for young women and men to work with KWN and its member organizations to gain experience and skills; offer opportunities for volunteerism; and to include them in awareness campaigns and other activities.

**Expected result 1.1.2. Enhance self-care and security of women's rights activists.** Based on lessons learned and experiences of the

Association of Women in Development (AWID), KWN will organize women’s forums on wellness, self-care, and security of women’s rights activists. These will provide spaces for activists to speak, reflect, and attend to mindfulness that can contribute to increasing their self-care and wellness. As AWID has observed, such activities can serve as a “political tool to ensure the survival of our movement as well as our personal wellness”.<sup>149</sup> KWN will also continue providing psychotherapy to staff and members where possible.

**Expected result 5.1.3. Improve the capacity of KWN members, towards their sustainability.** By conducting OACA with KWF grant recipients and other interested member organizations, KWN will identify specific areas in which KWN members need support. Based on the OACA, KWN will support members in developing tailored Capacity Development Plans towards addressing their identified capacity development priorities. Then, KWN will provide individual mentoring towards supporting members in realizing their aims. KWN will continue providing grants through KWF, using the “learning by doing” approach to advocacy, organizational management, and grant management. Having stronger members will contribute to a stronger feminist movement.

**Expected result 5.1.4. Increase the capacities of KWN staff.** KWN has dedicated and strong staff members but considers continuous learning and skills development important. Therefore, KWN will continue encouraging its staff members to further their education, to attend additional training, and to receive on-the-job training and mentoring, towards further enhancing their capacities, particularly related to feminist principles, methodologies, and strategies. KWN also will establish a more formal Volunteer Program to further the

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<sup>149</sup> AWID, “Wellness, Self-Care and Security – Why this is Important to Feminism”, [AWID website](#), 15 June 2012.

capacities of other activists. In cooperation with its members, KWN will develop a program that better organizes the work of volunteers and their involvement in the feminist movement, by working with KWN and its members.

### **Objective 5.2. Improve the funding climate for women’s rights organizations.**

Although some advocacy initiatives can be undertaken on a voluntary basis, WCSOs still need resources to support many aspects of their important work. Sustainable women’s rights activism requires resources, and KWN will continue its efforts to mobilize sufficient resources from local and international actors to support the women’s movement in Kosovo and beyond. This will be achieved through the following results.

**Expected result 5.2.1. Improve implementation of KWN’s Resource Mobilization Strategy.** KWN will cooperate with its members, Board, and partners in undertaking activities foreseen in its Resource Mobilization Strategy. This includes further diversifying KWN’s resources to support its long-term sustainability.

**Expected result 5.2.2. Improve knowledge and understanding among relevant funders regarding the types of support that diverse WCSOs need.** This includes enhancing their knowledge regarding the long-term impact that WCSOs can have in bringing about political, social, and economic change; and the importance of providing long-term, operational support for strategic impact. Based on KWN’s research,<sup>150</sup> KWN will meet various donors to inform them about the financial situation of WCSOs and the women’s movement, as well as to discuss ways to improve donors’ support for WCSOs and the feminist movement.

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<sup>150</sup> KWN, *Where’s the Money for Women’s Rights*, 2020.



Where relevant, KWN also will write advocacy letters and engage in international advocacy coalitions.

## **Interest Groups**

Towards achieving these objectives, KWN foresees continuous cooperation with its member organizations and with women's rights groups in the region. KWN members will be the main target group of this program. Citizens, especially women and girls, will benefit from a sustainable feminist movement that advocates on their behalf. KWN will cooperate and coordinate its support for WCSOs with other actors seeking to increase the capacities of civil society, such as the EU, USAID, Sida, the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, ADA, and the Kosovo for Civil Society Foundation (KCSF). Regional and international advocacy partners include: the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, partner organizations in the region, AWID, and MamaCash. Advocacy will target the Directorate General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), as responsible for funding WCSOs in WB countries, the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), which plays a leading role in funding decisions at the international level, the Thematic Center of Excellence for Civil Society Support in DG NEAR, which is responsible for providing guidelines and proposal for approaches in financing WCSOs, the Gender Advisor in DG NEAR, responsible for monitoring and supporting implementation of GAP III, UN agencies, and international financial institutions. Other key actors include: AGE, the Ombudsperson Institution, the Ministry of European Integration, the Office for Good Governance, deputies of the Assembly of Kosovo and government officials.

# Crosscutting Aim: Environmental Protection

## Laws, Policies, and Institutional Mechanisms

- The Law on Gender Equality requires gender mainstreaming all laws, regulations, strategies, action plans, regulations, and other documents.
- According to the Kosovo Strategy on Environment Protection 2013-2022, social and economic development go hand in hand with a healthy environment, and this is crucial for Kosovo as a conflict-affected country.
- Adopted in 2014, the Climate Change Strategy (CCS) has a vision of “a climate-resilient Kosovo, which is effectively mitigating the causes of climate change, and is effectively anticipating on, and responding to, the impacts of climate change, taking into account internationally endorsed principles for sustainable development”.<sup>151</sup> It establishes climate change among the Government’s priorities and considers climate change mitigation and adaption measures. Objective 2 “aims to enhance adaptive capacity of natural systems, vulnerable ecosystems, and society, especially for vulnerable communities, such as poor farmers, marginal groups and women, to address the climatic impacts and related risks on their lives and livelihoods”. The National Adaptation Component aims to introduce new mechanisms towards climate actions, particularly for vulnerable communities, including poor farmers and women.

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<sup>151</sup> Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning, and Infrastructure, [Climate Change Strategy 2019-2028](#), 2018.

- Although Kosovo has not yet signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Kosovo has a responsibility to respond to requests as one of the signatories to the Energy Community Treaty. The Energy Community Treaty also sets clear targets for climate change and for reducing the use of energy produced from coal, while calling for an increase in the proportion of renewable energy sources.

## Situational Analysis

Environmental issues affect women's and men's wellbeing differently. Policies intended to address the different needs of diverse men and women can be created only by examining how spatial planning and environmental policies impact men and women differently. Currently the environmental policies in place do not consider a gender perspective.<sup>152</sup> KWN has supported the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning in conducting gender analyses to inform the budget in 2017.<sup>153</sup> The methodology which was shared with them has been and is still useful, but seldom used.

## Key Challenges

- Insufficient data and research exist regarding the impact of environmental degradation and climate change on diverse men and women from an intersectional approach.
- After the war, Kosovo faced rapid urbanization because of internal migration from rural to urban areas. Therefore, there are many issues regarding spatial planning and the environment.

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<sup>152</sup> KWN, *Budgeting for a Better Environment: A Gender Analysis of Expenditures and Services in the Ministry of Environment of Spatial Planning*. Prishtina: 2017.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

- Diverse women and men have been insufficiently consulted during the process of drafting legislation and policies related to the environment and climate change. Subsequently, legislation does not consider people's diverse needs, which can hamper gender-responsive implementation of these policies.

## **KWN's Strategy**

The overall objective is: **Improve the extent to which gender, including the different needs and interests of diverse women and men, are reflected in environmental policy and urban planning.**<sup>154</sup> This objective will be addressed through the Rule of Law Program, which includes gender analysis and gender-responsive budgeting related to the environment and climate change. Based on analysis, KWN will undertake evidence-based advocacy for the establishment of improved laws and policies related to the environment and climate change that integrate a gender perspective. Additionally, KWN will work to ensure diverse women and men's inclusion in discussing these policies.

Meanwhile, KWN provides capacity building for its members in minimizing the environmental impact of public relations materials, using ecological printing, and resource conservation where possible. All KWF grantees receive training on environmental protection as part of mandatory orientation sessions. KWN aims to protect the environment through its organizational practices, including energy conservation, recycling, the use of eco-printing and the use of public transport and carpooling where possible. KWN also supports its members and partners in advocacy efforts to improve environmental conditions in Kosovo.

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<sup>154</sup> This is in line with the EU GAP III as well as the Law on Gender Equality.

KWN will undergo training and seek to identify additional ways to integrate attention to the environment and climate change into KWN's everyday work.

# Inclusiveness

In line with its mission, KWN ensures that its programs and activities include diverse persons, regardless of their political and religious beliefs, age, level of education, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, or ethnicity. KWN and its members ensure that activities consider the interests and needs of diverse people when implementing this Strategy.

**Gender Equality** is part of KWN's organizational mission, vision, strategic programs, and actions. Gender analyses always inform the design of KWN's programs and initiatives. As part of gender analysis, the relevant legal framework is always analyzed. KWN regularly tracks its target groups, disaggregating by gender, age, ability, ethnicity, and location, insofar as possible. Records are kept in KWN's Monitoring and Evaluation database. Gender sensitive indicators are developed in this database and used to measure progress regularly. Systematic barriers for equal access to resources and services for women and men are identified and addressed primarily through KWF-supported initiatives, but also through national level advocacy. KWN seeks to address obstacles to participation in decision-making processes at the household level through regular mentoring, visits to rural and urban areas, and support for local level advocacy efforts through KWF, Lobby, and the Coalition for Equality.

Regarding **Social Inclusion**, KWN has analyzed the relevant legal framework, and this has informed its initiatives, as well as those of KWF beneficiaries. KWN and KWF grantees continuously maintain records of beneficiaries, disaggregating data by gender, age, ability, ethnic group, and location. Information is recorded in the KWN monitoring and evaluation database.

In general, KWN aims to ensure that no individual or group is excluded, but rather seeks to ensure inclusion in initiatives supported by KWN, Lobby, and KWF, as part of the “Leave no one behind” approach. Further, by having various women’s organizations as members, KWN aims to reach rural and urban areas, men and women of different ethnicities, abilities, ages, and geographic regions. KWN works towards strengthening social, economic, and political skills of its member organizations, many of which belong to marginalized groups. This is achieved through mentoring sessions, political engagement in the Lobby, the Coalition for Equality and enabling their access to KWF grants, for those that do not have access to resources. Existing labour standards and conditions are part of KWN rules and regulations and are passed on to its members through KWF grants, providing them with templates and guidance throughout their initiatives.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

KWN monitors and evaluates progress towards implementing its Strategy using a Monitoring and Evaluation database containing indicators for progress on each objective and expected result. KWN reports on progress to its members semesterly and publishes this information in its Annual Report. Further information regarding KWN's indicators and targets is available upon request.



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