

## Integrating Gender-transformative Approaches in Early Education Curricula and Pedagogy



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## Introduction

Research links enrolment of girls and boys in Early Childhood Education (ECE) to greater success in primary education<sup>1</sup> as well as economic empowerment of women.<sup>2</sup> Global studies suggest that early education could help transform traditional gender roles and norms by educating children from an early age that they have equal opportunities to diverse occupations and life choices, regardless of their gender. The EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III, United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and EU Barcelona Objectives emphasise the importance of addressing traditional gender norms, roles, and relations through education, at all levels, in curricula and in teaching practices, towards sustainably transforming socialised roles and relations that contribute to gender inequalities.

Kosovo's legal framework explicitly references gender equality and protection against discrimination as key objectives. The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) has prioritised ECE as a strategic objective and is engaged in planning and developing the ECE curriculum,<sup>3</sup> provisioning facilities, establishing standards,<sup>4</sup> and making attendance in pre-primary education compulsory for girls and boys ages 5-6.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the time is ripe to take stock of (and learn from) international best practices for transforming traditional gender norms and furthering gender equality within ECE. This policy paper seeks to contribute to integrating gender transformative ECE best practices within relevant institutions, policies, curricula, and pedagogical practices with the aim of contributing to the economic empowerment of women, gender equality, and transformation of traditional and/or discriminatory gender norms in Kosovo.

## Best Practices

International best practices recognise the necessity of integrating gender transformative educational approaches across multiple areas. Focusing only on policy or curricula may not effectively transform discriminatory gender norms. Best practices seek gender transformative solutions coordinated across ECE policies, curriculum, infrastructure, organisational mechanisms, services, teacher and staff training, and pedagogy. As such, all relevant institutions should apply and integrate gender transformative approaches into legislation, policies, social schemes, and quality assurance mechanisms; infrastructure and service provision, including pre-service and in-service training; and curricula and pedagogy. Further, specific recommendations for implementing such curricula should respond to evidence-based developmental abilities of girls and boys; the different situations and needs of girls and boys, women and men; as well as their different intersectional needs;<sup>6</sup> and the needs of communities.<sup>7</sup> Based on a number of global case studies, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has identified best practices that apply an holistic gender transformative approach across five areas: 1. planning and budgeting, 2. curriculum development and implementation,

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<sup>1</sup> Different definitions of ECE, preschool, and pre-primary education are used in Kosovo and globally. In this brief, ECE refers to early education for girls and boys ages 0-6. The term preschool refers to ages 0-5. Pre-primary refers to ages 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (EC), *Barcelona Objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth*, 2013, p. 4. Recently, the EC increased the Barcelona targets for children enrolled in ECE. Revised ECE enrolment targets for 2030 are 45% of children younger than three years of age and 96% of children between three years of age and compulsory primary education. See Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation on early childhood education and care: Barcelona targets for 2030*. For a Kosovo specific study, see KWN, *Who Cares?*, 2016, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister *Committee for Early Childhood Education*.

<sup>4</sup> Administrative Instruction No. 03/2022 on *Inclusion of Children in Preschools*.

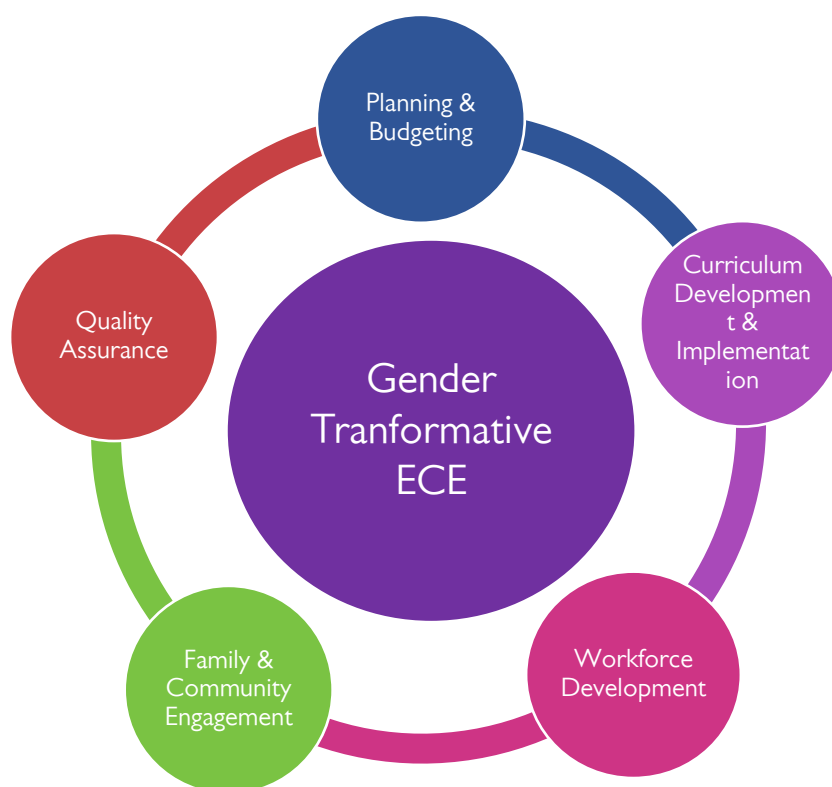
<sup>5</sup> Law No. 08/L-153 on *Early Childhood Education*.

<sup>6</sup> In this paper, "intersectional" refers to interconnected experiences in society, such as the ways in which gender may intersect with other factors to affect access and rights, such as with ethnicity, religion, language, disability, age, socio-economic situations, geographic location (rural and urban), single caretaker living situations, and girls and boys without parents.

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, *Build to Last, A Framework in Support of Universal Quality Pre-primary Education*, 2020.

3. workforce development, 4. family and community engagement, and 5. quality assurance (see Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> This paper discusses each.

Figure 1. UNICEF Best Practices in Gender-transformative ECE



## Planning and Budgeting

Planning and budgeting require coordinated advocacy, awareness, policy design and implementation, training, monitoring and evaluation.<sup>9</sup> Best practices underscore the importance of holistic, institutional, multi-stakeholder, and evidence-based ECE planning, budgeting, and management of human and physical resources. In planning, a gender analysis that engages relevant stakeholders, civil society, and experts is essential for assessing the extent that legislation, policies, and mechanisms are gender responsive. Gender analyses should identify intersectional situations that act as obstacles to the enrolment of diverse girls and boys in ECE, such as where children reside (urban and rural); family situations (special needs of children, economic means, single caretaker, education of women and men caretakers, ethnicity, language, etc.); and caretaker awareness of the benefits of ECE.<sup>10</sup> Findings from these analyses should be reflected in the objectives and indicators of the Educational Sector Plan, or Educational Strategic Plan and Action Plan (in the case of Kosovo).

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF, *Tackling Gender Inequality From the Early Years*, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF, *ECE Accelerator Toolkit*, 2020; UNICEF, *Tackling Gender Inequality from the Early Years*, 2022.

**Figure 3. Intersectional Gender Analysis Needs to Inform Educational Planning and Budgeting**

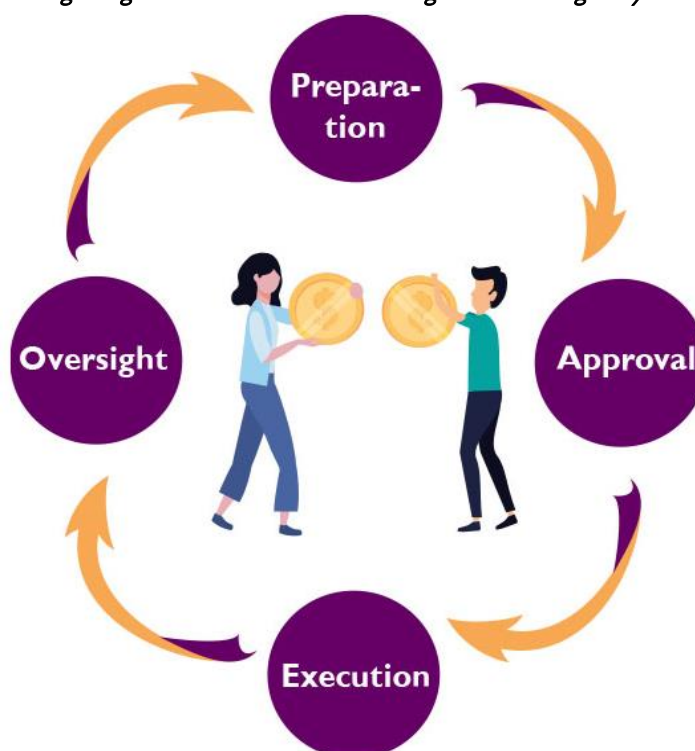


*Depending on where children live, they may face extra obstacles attending school; children in rural areas may have difficulties accessing transportation and ensuring secure travel, particularly girls. Children with disabilities may face added accessibility challenges. Children's economic situation can affect their access. Thus, a gender-responsive intersectional approach to addressing these challenges is needed.*

Legislation that ensures access to education for girls and boys as well as prevents discrimination based on gender, ability, and family situations contributes to girls' and boys' enrolment in ECE. Similarly, policies and mechanisms that monitor and evaluate the implementation of legislation ensure more inclusive ECE learning opportunities for diverse girls and boys. Policies need to consider how to incorporate explicit gender responsive and transformative approaches into teacher training, minimum certification, and quality standards of services.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, policies need to define organisational requirements such as operational and employee Code of Conduct standards for ECE care providers and staff.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, policies should foresee strategies for increasing community and parental engagement that raises awareness about the benefits of gender transformative ECE.

Finally, gender responsive budgeting (GRB) is needed to transform gender norms and contribute to gender equality. For example, the United Nations Girls Education Initiative gender-responsive public expenditure management tool integrates gender in four stages of the budget cycle: (1) preparation, (2) approval, (3) execution, and (4) oversight (see Figure 4).<sup>13</sup> Policies need to require that educational budgets respond to the different intersectional situations and needs of diverse girls, boys, women, and men. For GRB, educational sector planning and budgeting needs to engage parents, teachers, and staff.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 4. Gender-responsive Public Expenditure Management: Integrating Attention to Gender throughout the Budget Cycle**



<sup>11</sup> UNICEF, *ECE Accelerator Toolkit*, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Girls Education Initiative, *Spending Better for Gender Equality in Education*, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> VVOB, and FAWE, *Gender-Responsive Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education a Toolkit for Teachers and School Leader*, VVOB, Brussels, 2019.



Increased public funding that makes ECE services more accessible and affordable is linked to more active participation of women in the labour market.<sup>15</sup> For ECE to be accessible there need to be enough care facilities that are conveniently located (proximate) and offer childcare services during caretakers' working hours. Similarly, costs of ECE need to reflect the economic situation of the community. Global studies indicate that lower family income and the high cost of ECE are major barriers to inclusive ECE.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the Barcelona Objectives recognise single caretaker homes and lower income earning families as most in need of affordable, accessible ECE services.<sup>17</sup> Countries that have achieved the previously established Barcelona Objectives have invested in ECE infrastructure, provided ECE vouchers and/or subsidies, and in some cases offered free ECE.<sup>18</sup>

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**For ECE to be accessible there needs to be a sufficient number of care facilities that are conveniently located and other child care services during caretakers' working hour.**

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## Curriculum Development and Implementation

Best practices for ECE curricula identify play-based learning opportunities that include gender responsive learning objectives with explicit instructions and examples of gender transformative organisational and pedagogical practices as important. Such curricula describe principles and pedagogical approaches for realising learning outcomes; include suggested learning materials; clearly outline operational and workforce competencies; and identify strategies for ensuring the “hidden curriculum”<sup>19</sup> does not perpetuate discriminatory gender stereotypes and norms.

Best practices require that stakeholders, educators, and policy makers work together to identify and assess discriminatory gender stereotypes in class materials towards incorporating more gender-neutral play-based learning materials.



**Figure 5.**  
*Curricula can challenge gender stereotypes.*

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, [Tackling Gender Inequality From the Early Years](#), 2022.

<sup>16</sup> EC, [Barcelona Objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth](#), 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Previously, Barcelona Objectives sought 90% enrolment rate of girls and boys between the age of three and compulsory primary school age and 33% enrolment for girls and boys younger than three years of age (EC, [Barcelona Objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth](#), 2013). The revised Barcelona Objectives now strive for a 96% enrolment rate of girls and boys between the age of three and compulsory primary school age and 45% enrolment for girls and boys younger than three years of age (see Council of the European Union, [Council Recommendation on early childhood education and care: Barcelona targets for 2030](#)).

<sup>19</sup> Hidden curriculum is defined as the informal transmission of norms in the learning environment that are outside of the formal curriculum (UNICEF, [Tackling Gender Inequality From the Early Years](#), 2022). Hidden curriculum may transmit gender norms through books, pictures, teacher biases, and teacher/staff interaction with girls and boys.

This includes textbooks, books, videos, and toys. Gender analyses of all learning materials can assess how many times girls, boys, women, and men are pictured, the roles they are presented as having, the extent of diverse representation of girls, boys, women and men in materials (e.g., diverse races, ethnicities, abilities, ages).<sup>20</sup>

*Figure 6. Teachers can provide toys to children that challenge gender stereotypes.*



Finally, best practices strive to make the “hidden curriculum” more gender transformative. This requires that institutions and ECE providers engage publishers in developing gender transformative texts and books; and engage teachers and staff in activities that provide opportunities to reflect on their own gender biases, habits, and interactions with children and parents. Gender transformative curricula provide tools for teachers and staff to adopt teaching and administrative approaches that meet gender transformative quality standards. Such standards, of course, need to be clearly stipulated in legislation, policies, curricula, and other mechanisms. Legislation and policies must foresee updating and provisioning pre- and in-service training (with realistic timelines and on the job training opportunities) to support teachers and staff in developing gender transformative teaching competencies. Gender transformative training opportunities also need to be provisioned in gender responsive educational budgeting.<sup>21</sup>

## **Workforce Development**

Workforce development includes staff and educator recruitment strategies that strive for greater gender parity at the ECE level, professional development, and retention plans; professional competency standards and training; and support for ensuring learning opportunities of pre-primary age girls and boys.<sup>22</sup>

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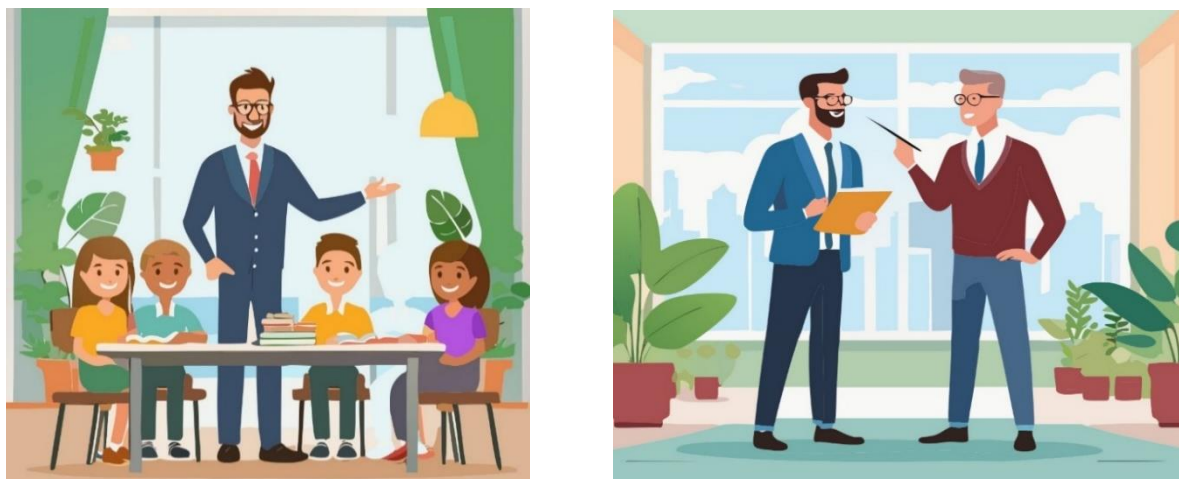
<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> UNICEF, [Tackling Gender Inequality From the Early Years](#), 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Gender responsive recruitment of ECE educators strives for greater gender parity of ECE teachers. To recruit more men ECE educators, best practices suggest professionalising the sector, increasing wages, providing alternative career pathways (e.g., applying university credit for previous experiences), and awareness campaigns that combat discriminatory stereotypes of men caretakers and promote men as competent caretakers.<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 7. Professionalising the sector, increasing wages, providing alternative career opportunities, and awareness campaigns can all encourage more men to work in ECE.**



In addition to increased gender parity of ECE professionals, retention strategies are important. To support ECE teacher retention, teaching staff need training on how to implement gender transformative approaches. Quality pre-service and in-service training may also contribute to better retention since teachers are better able to fulfil standards. Retention also requires that organisational standards ensure working conditions are good and teachers have sufficient support. Examples of best practices in operational standards may include low child to teacher ratio, professional development opportunities that teach gender transformative pedagogical strategies, competitive pay and promotional opportunities, and necessary support staff, especially for children with diverse learning needs.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 8. Operational Standards can encourage ECE teacher retention**



<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Danish and Swedish governments have seen small positive increases in gender parity of ECE teachers and staff by integrating gender responsive recruiting measures into educational policies (EC, [Barcelona Objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth](#), 2013; OECD, [Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care](#), OECD Publishing, Paris, 2017; UNESCO, [Education Starts Early](#), 2022.

<sup>24</sup> UNICEF, [Tackling Gender Inequality from the Early Years](#), 2022.



To ensure the qualifications of teachers and staff, quality standards and strategies need to be explicitly defined in policies with specific budget lines for training. Best practices recognise the importance of pre-service *and* in-service training opportunities. Pre-service training should include strategies for recruiting more men educators and increase awareness about the benefits of men ECE teachers. In-service training should integrate strategies for empowering existing ECE teachers with updated standards over a reasonable period of time and in convenient training modules (e.g., weekend training modules or online training). The cost of professional development should reflect the means of ECE professionals to ensure retention of providers.<sup>25</sup> To better support diverse, intersectional needs of girls and boys, teacher training should include special education training for ECE teachers and assistant teachers.

## Family and Community Engagement

Accessible, affordable ECE services are essential for engaging communities. Best practices include government and private investors in building infrastructure conveniently located in communities; incentives for offering on-site crèches and ECE centres; provision of transportation for girls and boys enrolled in centres;<sup>26</sup> and considering the diverse situations of women and men. This includes considering how women and men of different socio-economic situations organise transportation of their children, which may determine the location of the facility. Infrastructure should respond to diverse and intersectional cultural values and needs of communities. Finally, facilities and services should provide for the diverse cognitive and physical needs of girls and boys.

*Figure 9. Infrastructure Investments Can Facilitate Access to Affordable ECE Services*



Accessibility also considers how the hours of operation and cost of ECE services respond to the needs of primary caretakers in the community.<sup>27</sup> The hours when care is offered should reflect the working hours of primary caretakers, such as by including extended care like early drop-off and after school care, nutritious and culturally appropriate meals (breakfast, lunch, and snacks), and year-round services.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> EC, *Barcelona Objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth*, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> UNICEF, *Tackling Gender Inequality from the Early Years*, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Government investment in infrastructure contributes to lower ECE costs. However, investment in infrastructure alone may not make ECE affordable for all families. Making ECE affordable for all girls and boys must consider different socio-economic situations. The cost of services should not outweigh the earning potential of the primary caretaker. Examples for increasing the affordability of ECE for all families, include free ECE, government subsidies, and/or private incentives.<sup>29</sup> ECE services thus must be planned and budgeted for based on the diverse, intersectional needs of the community with special attention to lower-income earning families and single care-taker households.<sup>30</sup>

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**The cost of services should not outweigh the earning potential of the primary caretaker**

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Global studies recognise the role of family and caretakers' values and norms in shaping girls' and boys' gender norms. Thus, outreach needs to raise caretakers' awareness about the benefits of ECE and how it contributes to gender equality. Since women caretakers are typically more engaged in education and care, ECE centres with strategies for engaging both women and men caretakers contribute to more gender transformative learning environments.<sup>31</sup>

To increase awareness of the benefits of ECE and of the involvement of both women and men caretakers, women and men caretakers should be engaged more equally in girls' and boys' learning and in promoting the importance of transforming discriminatory and stereotypical gender norms. For example, ECE policies can require teachers and staff to contact both the mother and father when a child is sick; offer activities engaging only fathers or men caretakers; and organise other community events that promote awareness of the ways that social norms may unconsciously contribute to discriminatory and/or stereotypical gender norms.<sup>32</sup>

**Figure 10. ECE policies can encourage both parents' engagement, such as by contacting both fathers and mothers when a child is sick.**



<sup>29</sup> For Kosovo specific examples, see: KWN, [Who Cares?](#), 2016,

<sup>30</sup> EC, [Barcelona Objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth](#), 2013.

<sup>31</sup> UNICEF, [Tackling Gender Inequality from the Early Years](#), 2022.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

## Quality Assurance

Quality assurance (QA) ensures the quality of ECE services and provides opportunities to improve ECE. Similar to planning and budgeting, QA is a holistic endeavour and QA strategies and mechanisms need to be utilised in all the above referenced areas.<sup>33</sup> Further, QA and data collection need to be linked to ECE systems for planning and budgeting. A multi-stakeholder approach to gender analysis (national, regional, preschool level, formal and informal training, etc.) is needed to ensure that all areas are assessed and adapted to the needs identified. Engaging stakeholders not only provides insight about areas needing improvements and investments but also increases the accountability of relevant stakeholders.<sup>34</sup>

Best practices incorporate policies that define standards, data collection, data analysis, and strategies for developing and/or adapting relevant policies and budgeting according to findings. At minimum, data needs to be disaggregated by gender and other intersectional factors affecting women, men, girls, and boys. Best practices integrate inspection schedules and tools into QA policies. However, data and QA policies alone are insufficient for ensuring that learning environments and teaching approaches are gender transformative.

QA strategies must incorporate assessment tools for ECE service providers and communities that explicitly assess the extent ECE services address gender stereotypes. Such practices may assess the extent to which teachers, disaggregated by gender, have received gender transformative training; the number of teachers implementing gender-responsive and transformative pedagogy; and the use of gender sensitive language and illustrations.<sup>35</sup> These assessments can be implemented in a variety of ways and combine both external monitoring practices as well as reflective self-assessment surveys. Examples of tools for supporting more gender transformative learning environments include integration of gender transformative indicators in monitoring tools<sup>36</sup>; manuals for assessing gender bias in learning materials; and self-assessment opportunities for teachers and staff to reflect on their own gender biases and how these influence their pedagogical and interpersonal interactions with girls and boys.

*Figure 11. Several tools can support gender-transformative learning environments*



<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF, *Tackling Gender Inequality from the Early Years*, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> For examples of gender transformative indicators see: The World Bank, *Teach ECE: Helping Countries Track and Improve Teaching Quality in Early Childhood Education*, 2021. KWN also developed templates for observing the extent that learning environments and pedagogical approaches are gender transformative in Kosovo secondary schools. Many of these indicators can be adapted for the ECE learning environment.

## Findings

The findings in this section are derived from a desk review of Kosovo legislation, policies, mechanisms, and available data and reports from public, international, and local institutions.

### International Laws and Mechanisms

The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo renders the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW applicable in Kosovo.<sup>37</sup> Although access to free ECE is not explicitly referenced in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right to education is guaranteed, without discrimination based on gender and ethnicity; further, education must be accessible to girls and boys with disabilities.<sup>38</sup> Articles 28 and 29 explicitly reference the right to quality education that contributes to respect for human rights; and education that contributes to understanding gender equality is explicitly mentioned in Article 29.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, Article 5 of CEDAW requires states to actively combat harmful or discriminatory gender stereotypes and roles.<sup>40</sup> Article 10 requires states to combat gender stereotypes through provision of equal opportunities to education at all levels and ensuring that textbooks, school programs, and teaching methods do not perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes or gender roles.<sup>41</sup> SDGs also reference gender equality in the context of education. SDG 4<sup>42</sup> prioritises inclusive and equitable quality education and SDG 5<sup>43</sup> strives to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls through legislation and policies that promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at all levels. In 2018, Kosovo Government adopted a Resolution for Sustainable Development and established the Council for Sustainable Development. In this context, SDGs have been integrated into a mechanism within the Ministry of Local Government (Municipal Performance Management System) in which specific SDGs are integrated into a set of 119 indicators to analyse Municipal performance.<sup>44</sup> By integrating SDGs into Government mechanisms, the Kosovo Government has not only shown its commitment towards these goals but is obliged to work towards achieving these SDGs.

Although the Kosovo Government has not formally adopted the Barcelona Objectives into legislation, these objectives remain relevant for Kosovo in the context of its EU Accession process, particularly related to the importance of ECE education for contributing to women's empowerment and gender equality.

### Kosovo Legislation, Policies, and Strategies

#### The Constitution of Kosovo

In Kosovo, equal access to affordable education, gender equality and protection against discrimination are referenced in the Constitution. Articles 7, 22, 24 ensure protection from gender-based discrimination while Article 47 entitles girls and boys to equal access to education, including preschool in one of the official languages of Kosovo (Article 59).<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Article 22, [The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo](#), 15 June 2008.

<sup>38</sup> UN, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), 1989.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> UN, [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), 1981.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> "SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all." See [Local Government in Kosovo and Sustainable Development Goals](#). In this report, the Kosovo government specifically cites SDG 4.2 referring to access to quality ECE and 4.5 referring to inclusive and equal access at all levels of education for children with disabilities and children living in vulnerable communities and/or vulnerable living conditions. School infrastructure and teacher qualifications are also referenced (4.a and 4.c) ([Local Government](#), p. 7).

<sup>43</sup> Kosovo Government includes "SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" with specific reference to end all forms of discrimination (SDG 5.1) and 5.c "adopt sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels" ([Local Government](#), p. 8).

<sup>44</sup> See [Local Government in Kosovo and Sustainable Development Goals](#).

<sup>45</sup> [The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo](#), 15 June 2008.

## Kosovo Legislation on Gender Equality and Protection from Discrimination

The Law on Gender Equality<sup>46</sup> and the Law on Protection from Discrimination<sup>47</sup> explicitly protect the rights of women, men, girls, and boys against discrimination based on gender. Additionally, the legislation (laws<sup>48</sup> and bylaws<sup>49</sup>) recognise the international rights of the child. Legislation ensures access to education for girls and boys as well as protection from discrimination in educational institutions from pre-university to tertiary education.

## Law on Early Childhood Education

The newest law on Early Childhood Education went to into effect in August 2023.<sup>50</sup> This law ensures equal access without discrimination to all girls and boys. Article 3 explicitly protects girls and boys from discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, race, language, disability, socio-economic living situations, and family living situations. The law establishes the right of girls and boys to participate in inclusive quality ECE according to their individual needs; ensures the well-being of girls and boys; establishes the mechanisms for ECE institutions; determines the responsibilities of ECE service providers; provides guidance for professional development, monitoring, inspection, financing, and sanctioning ECE service providers; and determines monitoring mechanisms to ensure quality standards are upheld.

Access to education requires inclusive social norms, legislation, budget, and management.<sup>51</sup> While the law makes references more generally to the “individual needs of children” and “children with special educational needs”.<sup>52</sup> However, there is only one explicit reference to gender,<sup>53</sup> and other intersectional needs<sup>54</sup> of girls and boys, women and men parents and caretakers, and ECE providers. Although it seems that the law generally follows global best practices, it is not gender transformative, nor sufficiently mainstreamed for other intersectional needs affecting men, women, girls, and boys.

Further, UNICEF reports that while Kosovo legislation and policies are mostly consistent with international norms, significant gaps remain between policies and implementation, and include insufficient access to education and care; poor quality education; municipal implementation of policies; vulnerable communities’ access to ECE; and programs for combating gender-based discrimination, particularly regarding women’s access to economic, political, and social opportunities; and the prevention of violence against women and children.<sup>55</sup>

## Law on the Regulated Professions in the Republic of Kosovo

This law explicitly references all “teachers of all levels of pre-university education”.<sup>56</sup> It also more generally references training and qualifications; criteria for professional practice; the State Council for determining whether professional practitioners meet the criteria; the State Examination Agency and state exam; professional practice and membership in professional associations; responsibilities of the

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<sup>46</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, [Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality](#).

<sup>47</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, [Law No. 05/L-021 on the Protection from Discrimination](#); Regulation [GRK No. 03/2017 on Institutional Mechanisms on Protection against Discrimination in Government and Municipalities](#).

<sup>48</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, [Law No. 06/L-084 on Child Protection](#).

<sup>49</sup> Administrative Instruction (AI) on [Authorities for the Rights of the Child](#); AI on the [Council for the Rights of the Child](#); AI for the [Team on the Protection of the Child](#).

<sup>50</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law No. 08/L-153 on [Early Childhood Education](#).

<sup>51</sup> UNICEF, [State of Children's Rights Kosovo](#), 2021, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Disability and special education needs, or development delays, are referenced nine times. Disability and special education needs are each referenced three times, in Article 4, defining key terms. Disability is explicitly referenced in Article 3, ensuring protection from discrimination, Article 9, defining the competencies and responsibility of ECE institutions, and Article 10 defining the competencies and responsibility of ECE staff.

<sup>53</sup> Gender is explicitly referenced once in Article 3, 1.7.

<sup>54</sup> Minority communities, lower income earning families, and girls and boys in vulnerable living situations are referenced only in Article 3, ensuring protection from discrimination. Furthermore, single caretakers are not explicitly referenced at all.

<sup>55</sup> UNICEF, [State of Children's Rights Kosovo](#), 2021, pp. 5-8.

<sup>56</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law No. 05/L-066 on the [Regulated Profession in the Republic of Kosovo](#).



Ministry; development of standards for practicing the profession; the responsibilities and code of ethics of the practicing professional; disciplinary measures; and transitional provisions.

This is a more general law that applies to a variety of professional practitioners. It does not make explicit reference to preventing discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, socio-economic situations, or disability. To ensure that ECE service providers have competencies to promote gender equality, implement gender transformative approaches to teaching, and ensure inclusive practices, explicit references to gender equality, disability, and other socio-economic situations of women and men, girls and boys should be referenced in the law, especially in articles concerning the State Council; responsibilities of State Council, ministries, and professional practitioners; state exam; and requirements for Professional Codes of Ethics and data collection.

### **Law on Education in the Municipality of the Republic of Kosovo**

This law regulates the organisation of all public educational institutions, pre-university through tertiary, in Kosovo municipalities. It describes the responsibilities and competencies of municipalities relevant to the registration and licensing of educational institutions; recruitment; hiring and payment of salaries; training of educational staff and administration; inspection of educational institutions operations and student achievements; and determination of fees.<sup>57</sup> This law also establishes municipal administrative responsibilities for the functionality of educational institutions; provision of land for educational institutions; construction of educational institutions; and identifying the different educational needs of girls, boys, women, and men, including construction of new educational facilities and language of teaching and learning.

This law is not sufficiently gender mainstreamed. Nor does it provide sufficient reference to the diverse intersectional needs of women, men, girls, and boys. There are two references to MESTI's responsibility for promoting a "non-discriminatory educational system" and an inclusive policy for the integration of people with disabilities into the education system.<sup>58</sup> There is one reference to the municipal responsibility to non-discriminatory registration processes.<sup>59</sup> Chapter V provides for education in the Serbian language and the competencies of the Municipality of Mitrovicë/Mitrovia North.<sup>60</sup> There are no other explicit references to municipal responsibilities or competencies for promoting gender equality and inclusive learning environments for women, men, girls, and boys in different intersectional situations.

### **Law on Education Inspectorate in the Republic of Kosovo**

This law regulates the competencies, responsibilities, and organisation of the Educational Inspectorate; and the implementation of legislation on educational and professional development services.<sup>61</sup> It defines the Educational Inspectorate as the central executive body on QA; defines the functions of this body; identifies the types of inspections; regulates and defines the selection criteria and duties of Educational Inspectors; establishes the criteria of assessment of teachers and administrative personnel; confidentiality; and complaints for all levels of education, including ECE.

While this law generally defines the duties and competencies of the Educational Inspectorate, it does not explicitly reference mechanisms or duties for preventing discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability, or other intersectional living conditions. The only explicit references related to the different needs of women, men, girls, and boys is in Article 10, which designates the Inspectorate as a responsible public official for assessing complaints of discrimination and children experiencing violence.

Articles 11 and 12 do reference the Inspectorates' responsibility for assessing the quality of educational institutions and teacher and administrative performance. However, there is no reference to competencies and quality assessment relevant to promoting gender equality, gender transformative

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<sup>57</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law No. 03/L-068 on [Education in the Municipality of the Republic of Kosovo](#).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Article 3.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Article 5.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Republic of Kosovo, Assembly, Law No. 06/L-046 on [Education Inspectorate in the Republic of Kosovo](#).

approaches, or other mechanisms promoting inclusion of girls and boys with disability, or those in other intersectional situations.

### Administrative Instructions (AI)

The AI MESTI No. 03/2022 on the Inclusion of Children in Preschool Institutions in Kosovo regulates the inclusion, registration, fees, teacher-child ratio of girls and boys from the age of nine months to six years, working hours, and preparation hours of teachers. This AI does explicitly describe provisions for girls and boys with disabilities, families receiving social assistance, those with single parents, children living in shelters, and children without parents.<sup>62</sup> The provisions include fee waivers and other assistance for children with special needs. However, the provision of assistance for children with special needs and disability is not guaranteed, but rather contingent on whether the ECE system has enough teachers with the required professional competencies.<sup>63</sup> This could hinder access to such services.

Additional AIs regulating ECE are on licensing and registration criteria for private ECE institutions<sup>64</sup>; deduction of fees to be paid by parents with more than one child<sup>65</sup>; the conditions and support to establishing and operating community-based ECE<sup>66</sup>; the means for financing public ECE education<sup>67</sup>; procedures for terminating ECE services<sup>68</sup>; establishing working hours and service provisions of ECE institutions<sup>69</sup>; establishing the most important organisational requirements for ECE institutions<sup>70</sup>; regulating ECE service offerings for parents of girls and boys between the ages of nine months and six years<sup>71</sup>; and the total contact and planning hours for preschool educators.<sup>72</sup> These AI are more technical than qualitative with the exception of the AI regulating the licensing criteria for private institutions. This AI includes specific parameters and criteria aimed at ensuring the physical safety of girls and boys in all activities occurring in the ECE institution. It is gender neutral and the only reference to children with special needs requires that the bathroom be accessible.<sup>73</sup>

Other AI relevant to QA include the following: for School-based Teachers' Professional Development<sup>74</sup>; for Funding Teacher Professional Development<sup>75</sup>, and on Pedagogical Professional Surveillance of the Work of Educators and Professional Collaborators, which was repealed on 23 December 2021.<sup>76</sup> These AI define in detail technical criteria for professional training, the various public institutions' duties and competencies, procedures for determining professional development needs, QA procedures for evaluating trainings, and budgeting criteria and procedures. However, none of these AI are gender mainstreamed nor inclusive of different intersectional needs of girls, boys, women, and men.

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<sup>62</sup> AI, [MESTI No.03/2022 on the Inclusion of Children in Preschool Institutions in Kosovo](#) [Albanian].

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Article 3 [Albanian].

<sup>64</sup> AI No. 06/2011 [Licensing and Registration of Private Preschool Educational Institutions](#).

<sup>65</sup> AI No 41/2007 [Deduction of Fees that have to be Paid by Parents for more than one Child in Preschool Institutions](#).

<sup>66</sup> AI No. 42/2007 [Conditions and Possibilities for the Support of Preschool Education by Community](#).

<sup>67</sup> AI No. 02/2008 on [Dedicated Means for Financing Public School Education and Ways of Spending](#).

<sup>68</sup> AI MESTI No. 43/2007 for [Determination of Procedures, Cases, and Deadlines of Terminating Work in Preschool Institutions](#).

<sup>69</sup> AI MESTI No. 44/2007 on the [Duration of Preschool Programs](#).

<sup>70</sup> AI MESTI No. 45/2007 on [Publication of Organization of Education in Preschool Institutions](#).

<sup>71</sup> AI MESTI No. 46/2007 for the [Manner of Selection of Preschool Programs for Parents of Children](#).

<sup>72</sup> AI MESTI No. 47/2007 on the [Weekly Fund of the Classes for Educators](#).

<sup>73</sup> Article 9, AI No. 06/2011 [Licensing and Registration of Private Preschool Educational Institutions](#).

<sup>74</sup> AI MESTI No. 119/2020 on [School-based Teachers' Professional Development](#) applies to all pre-university educators and includes instruction on "internal and external procedures for identifying the needs, implementing activities, supervision, monitoring, certification, and evaluation of teachers" (articles 1 and 2).

<sup>75</sup> AI MESTI No. 15/2013 for [Funding of Teacher Professional Development](#). This AI does not explicitly reference ECE. However, it does state that MESTI can allocate funds to Municipal Education Directorates for prioritised professional development activities. Since MESTI has identified ECE, these administrative instructions would presumably apply.

<sup>76</sup> AI MESTI No. 40/2007 for [Pedagogical Professional Surveillance of the Work of Educators and Collaborators](#) (repealed by Decision GRK, No 02/50 dated 23.12.2021).

## Kosovo Program for Gender Equality

Strategies also reference the correlation between education, women's empowerment, and gender equality. Specifically, the Kosovo Program for Gender Equality (KPGE) 2020-2024 connects challenges related to human development, gender roles, and stereotypes with discrimination in education.<sup>77</sup> KPGE has an overall strategic objective for "promoting gender equality through quality education and health, inclusiveness and human capacity utilisation as factors contributing to sustainable human development and the elimination of gender inequalities and stereotypes".<sup>78</sup> KPGE identifies access to affordable preschool as important for increasing women's participation in the labour market<sup>79</sup> and for supporting improved educational outcomes.<sup>80</sup>

## The Education Strategy 2022-2026 and Action Plan

The MESTI Education Strategy Area I prioritises ECE with the overall objective to increase inclusion and equal access to ECE.<sup>81</sup> Specific objectives foresee interventions to increase ECE services; improve the quality of services and competencies of service providers (both educators and administrators); draft laws on ECE; and develop an ECE curriculum and quality assurance system. Further and relevant to UNICEF's findings, MESTI has prioritised developing ECE in four specific objectives of the MESTI Education Strategy 2022-2026 and Action Plan. Overall, MESTI seems to have addressed UNICEF recommendations and some of the aforementioned best practices for quality play-based ECE.

Generally, the Education Strategy includes gender analyses of the situations of women, men, girls, and boys and foresees collection of gender-disaggregated data. In gender analyses relevant to ECE, the Strategy references low gender parity in the ECE workforce, the prevalence of gender stereotypes in the education sector, in learning materials, and classroom practices.<sup>82</sup> The intersectional situations and needs of women, men, girls, and boys do reference the low enrolment of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian girls and boys; girls and boys with disabilities, and lower ECE enrolment in rural areas.

While the MESTI Education Strategy does seem to be minimally gender mainstreamed with some gender responsive components, the development of policies and mechanisms pertaining to ECE is not sufficiently gender-responsive or responsive to all of the intersectional needs of families. There are a few references to developing legislation for increasing enrolment of girls and boys from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities and with disabilities. However, there are no references to strategies for increasing enrolment of lower income earning families, which is also important for increasing women caretakers' engagement in the labour market.

The Action Plan has a few actions and corresponding indicators that explicitly integrate gender-responsive measures pertaining to ECE curricula and pedagogical approaches. Foreseen actions include a gender review of textbooks and learning materials using the *Manual for the Prevention of Gender Stereotypes in Textbooks*<sup>83</sup>; gender responsive awareness raising on the importance of ECE<sup>84</sup>; and gender responsive recruitment strategies for ECE professionals.<sup>85</sup> Overall, however, gender-transformative approaches for combating discriminatory gender stereotypes are not always explicitly stated. Foreseen in the Education Strategy, but not the Action Plan, is training for educators

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<sup>77</sup> Agency of Gender Equality (AGE), [Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024 Action Plan](#), 2020.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>80</sup> EC, [Barcelona Objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth](#), 2013, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Strategic Objective I aims to increase inclusion and equal access to ECE: "increasing the number of Preschool Institutions (PI) and organizing their adequate distribution; developing the legislative framework, curriculum for ECE and creating a qualitative education environment; creating infrastructure suitable for the children; and cross-sector support in provision of qualitative services in ECE" (MESTI, [Education Strategy 2022-2026](#), 2022, p. 59).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-40.

<sup>83</sup> MESTI, [Education Strategy 2022-2026 Action Plan](#), 2022, pp. 8, 40.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

contributing to gender equality.<sup>86</sup> Lastly, many indicators referenced in the Strategy and Action Plan do not seem to measure the transformativeness or responsiveness of actions.

UNICEF identifies low prioritisation and investment in ECE; weak QA mechanisms; lack of policies for responsive, equitable expansion of ECE for all children, especially Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children and families with lower socio-economic statuses as barriers to girls' and boys' right to education.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, and relevant to affordable and accessible ECE services, UNICEF cites limited engagement of the private sector and the low supply of affordable ECE as an obstacle for equitable access to ECE, which thereby contributes to increased costs of ECE.<sup>88</sup>

Although legislative and policy measures and investment in accessible and affordable ECE is identified as a specific objective in the MESTI Education Strategy and Action Plan,<sup>89</sup> indicators measuring the achievement of this objective do not explicitly measure the quality or the gender responsiveness of foreseen actions. Although some indicators are disaggregated by gender, they are more quantitative, and measure increased enrolment of girls and boys and the number of new or renovated ECE institutions built. However, baseline and target indicators are not disaggregated by gender or other intersectional differences such as ethnicity, disability, or the socio-economic situation of families. Similarly, the extent that budgeting is gender responsive, or responds to diverse intersectional situations of stakeholders is not evident in the Education Strategy and Action Plan.

## Institutional Data Collection and Reporting

While the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) does have data sets which demonstrate that gender-disaggregated data is being collected, data do not always demonstrate the different educational needs of girls and boys across intersectional demographics. This hinders use of evidence-based data to respond to different needs pertinent to ECE facilities and services (e.g., policies, planning, budgeting, service provision, professional development, awareness-raising). Similarly, MESTI has reported data on public schools, disaggregated

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**Gender-disaggregated data on enrolment and staff demographics in Serbian-language ECE institutions is limited.**

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by region, grade, subject, institutional roles, and student enrolment, by gender. Some quantitative data related to educational needs are available across various intersecting demographics and situations by gender, but they do not always show the intersecting demographics and situations for all ECE age groups. Gender-disaggregated data pertaining to the enrolment of boys and girls, as well as teacher and staff demographics in Serbian language ECE institutions is limited. Similarly, actual enrolment and organisational demographics in private ECE institutions may not be fully reflected in KAS datasets, since not all private institutions have registered and/or report gender-disaggregated data.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>87</sup> UNICEF, [State of Children's Rights Kosovo](#), 2021, p. 8.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> “1.1 Specific Objective: Creation of healthy environments with adequate conditions for ECE and provision of human resources” (MESTI, [Education Strategy 2022-2026, Action Plan](#), 2022).

<sup>90</sup> Mevlude Aliu Gashi, Zehrie Plakolli, et. al., [Cidree Yearbook 2022, Challenges facing the organisation and realisation of pre-school education in Kosovo](#), 2022.

## ECE Curricula Standards, Textbooks, Learning Materials, and other Guidelines

The UNICEF annual report for 2023 references collaboration with MESTI in drafting core curricula for girls and boys from birth to six years of age; it is foreseen that these curricula will be piloted in 2024.<sup>91</sup> Relevant to this, on 8 December 2023, MESTI announced the launch of a training of trainers for piloting the ECE curricula.<sup>92</sup> This will be the first time that specific ECE curricula is piloted for girls and boys from birth to three years of age. Since the newest core curricula is not yet publicly available, the extent that curricula is gender responsive or transformative cannot be assessed.

Nevertheless, prior to this achievement, curricula for girls and boys from birth to five years of age and pre-primary ages five to six is minimally described in seven subject areas, without reference to competencies, in the Pre-University Curriculum Framework as level ISCED 0.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, learning activities are minimally referenced. Examples include: “activities that encourage communication using language” and “activities that encourage artistic expression”.<sup>94</sup> In 2018, the curricula for girls and boys at the pre-primary level (ages five and six) was revised and has a more detailed syllabi for each subject (seven in total).<sup>95</sup> The language and examples used in the curricula descriptions are minimally gender mainstreamed; the curricula description does use gender neutral terms such as “children” and both male and female pronouns “he/she” and “his/her”. Although the introduction acknowledges the importance of equal opportunities for girls and boys to participate in all activities, there are no examples of lessons that are gender transformative. Additionally, there are some descriptions that continue to use gendered terms; for example, in the “Natural Sciences” section, the male gendered term “*njeriu edhe natyra*” (in English, “mankind and nature”) is used.<sup>96</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Early Learning Development Standards for Children ages 0-6*,<sup>97</sup> published by MESTI, does provide some guidance for ECE activities for girls and boys. This publication recognises that gender inequality is reinforced by communication and language development in and outside the home and emphasises that caretakers and teachers implementing the activities should pay close attention to equal treatment and involvement of girls and boys as well as gender stereotypes pertaining to attitudes, roles, and beliefs about family members and caretakers.<sup>98</sup> There are explicitly referenced gender transformative examples of activities for girls and boys from birth to six years of age. This might serve as a good example when developing ECE curricula, describing sample learning opportunities and lesson plans that are gender transformative.

MESTI reports that the draft law on school textbooks was finalised in 2022 and approved by the Kosovo Government.<sup>99</sup> This law foresees providing teacher manuals with guidelines on how to design lesson plans according to the core curricula; support for capacity building of teachers; measures ensuring the competencies of textbook reviewers; piloting of textbooks; continuous review of textbooks; digitalisation of textbooks; possibilities for translation of textbooks; and capacity building for the State Council established for reviewing textbooks.<sup>100</sup> Notably, capacity building explicitly references competencies related to assessment based on science of learning concepts and child development; implementation of curricula, subjects, and digitalisation; and diverse modern teaching approaches that are inclusive and promote gender equality.<sup>101</sup> However, there is no specific reference to ECE

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<sup>91</sup> UNICEF Kosovo Country Office, [Country Office Annual Report 2023](#).

<sup>92</sup> MESTI, “[MESTI Started the Training of the Trainers for Piloting the ECE Curriculum](#)” [in Albanian], 8 December, 2023.

<sup>93</sup> MESTI, [Curriculum Framework of Pre-University Education of the Republic of Kosovo \(revised\)](#), 2016, [Albanian].

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>95</sup> MESTI, [Subject Curricula/Syllabuses, Preparatory Grade](#), 2018.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 55. [Albanian]. Also available in [English](#).

<sup>97</sup> MESTI, [Early Learning Development Standards for Children ages 0-6](#), October 2011.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pp. 33, 45

<sup>99</sup> MESTI, “[Minister Nagavci Participated in the Public Hearing of the Draft Law on School Textbooks](#)” [in Albanian], 27 March 2024.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.



textbooks, learning materials, and toys. As such, it is not clear how this law will apply to ECE learning materials and training of ECE teachers.

Notably, there is an AGE handbook for teachers to evaluate textbooks; however, it does not seem to specifically reference ECE textbooks, learning materials, and toys.<sup>102</sup> Although the handbook on textbooks does provide strategies for reviewing the gender transformativeness of images and wording, it does not specifically provide guidelines related to strategies for selecting and utilising potentially gender transformative and inclusive learning materials and toys. In April 2023, MESTI published a handbook on cultural diversity education, which provides strategies for developing more inclusive learning environments at all levels of education for diverse cultures, races, ethnicities, etc.<sup>103</sup> However, this handbook does not provide specific lesson plans for ECE. Further, although the introduction does acknowledge the importance of teaching about diverse cultures, races, ethnicities, and gender equality, many of the images in the book seem to reflect stereotypical gender roles and there are more lesson plans referencing prominent historical men than women.

Pertinent to infrastructure and increasing availability and accessibility of ECE institutions, there are guidelines on the standards for ECE institutional structures.<sup>104</sup> These guidelines describe building standards based on developmental abilities of girls and boys from birth to six years of age, including appropriate furniture, learning spaces, hygienic areas, eating spaces, outdoor play areas, etc. The guidelines do refer to the different needs of girls, boys, women, and men, especially those with physical disabilities. These guidelines also foresee operational spaces necessary for administrative and other services such as pedagogues, nurses, etc., as well as protocol for ensuring the physical safety and security of girls and boys. However, guidelines do not reference specifically how to ensure that the location of the facility supports the diverse needs of different women, men, girls, and boys, especially those living in more rural regions, with limited access to public transportation, and/or with lower earning households.

## Early Childhood Education Services, Enrolment, and Staff

Meanwhile, the availability of affordable ECE services remains low, hindering women's equal participation in political, economic, and social areas of life.<sup>105</sup> Relevant to the affordability of preschools, the average Kosovo income reported in 2022 remains low (€521 per month).<sup>106</sup> Similarly, women's participation in the labour market in 2022 was 18%, compared to 49% among men.<sup>107</sup> Despite minimal statistical data on Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian women and men's participation in the labour market, their labour market participation is known to be lower. Data for 2022 also indicate higher unemployment rates among women (16.5%) than among men (11%).<sup>108</sup> The lack of affordable and/or free public ECE institutions, especially in rural regions where unemployment is higher (more than 40%),<sup>109</sup> may undermine higher enrolment rates of children in ECE. It also impacts women's engagement in the labour market.

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**The shortage of affordable ECE in high-unemployment rural areas hinders child enrollment.**

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<sup>102</sup> AGE, [Preventing Gender Stereotypes and Promoting Gender Equality in School Textbooks and Materials, A Methodological Guide](#).

<sup>103</sup> See MESTI webpage for the [Handbook for Teachers, Interculturalism in Education](#) [Albanian].

<sup>104</sup> MESTI, [Guidelines for Norms and Standards for Spaces of Preschool Buildings](#), 2018 [Albanian].

<sup>105</sup> KWN, [Kosovo Gender Analysis](#), 2018, p. 33.

<sup>106</sup> KAS, “[Agency of Statistics of Kosovo](#)” [in Albanian], accessed 15 April 2024.

<sup>107</sup> KAS, “[ASK data: Labour Force Survey](#)”, 2022, accessed 15 April 2024.

<sup>108</sup> KAS, “[ASK data: Unemployment and Unemployment rate by sex and age group, 2012-2022](#)”, 2022, accessed 15 April 2024.

<sup>109</sup> Vigan Behluli, [Mapping of Early Childhood Development Services in Kosovo](#), 2020.

The number of public preschool and pre-primary institutions seems quite low, with only 54 public ECE institutions<sup>110</sup> and 172 private licensed institutions.<sup>111</sup> While most municipalities seem to have at least one public ECE, most registered private ECE institutes are in Prishtinë/Priština. Data indicate that families living in rural regions may have limited access to public and private ECE services. Information is unavailable on the number of ECE institutions in Serbian and some other municipalities, except for Gračanica/Graçanicë, in which there are two private ECE institutions.<sup>112</sup>

Overall, enrolment of girls and boys younger than five years of age in preschool institutions in Kosovo is quite low (20%), while enrolment rates are higher for the pre-primary level (89%).<sup>113</sup> A slightly higher percentage of boys (52%) than girls (48%) are engaged in ECE (see [Annex Graph 2](#)).<sup>114</sup> However, the precise percentage of all girls and boys, respectively, is unavailable.<sup>115</sup> Notably, enrolment varies by region, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic situations in which participation of girls and boys living in rural regions, belonging to Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, with disabilities, and in families receiving social assistance, single parent households, and without parents are typically lower.<sup>116</sup>

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**20%**  
Preschool enrollment in Kosovo  
is very low.  
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Similar to global statistics, available data reflects significantly fewer male ECE educators and caretakers engaged in Kosovo. Based on KAS data, only two men are currently registered as teachers in public preschool (0-4 years) institutions (3%).<sup>117</sup> Gender parity for teachers at the pre-primary level is less clear since data is not disaggregated by grade level. At the pre-primary level, the number of women and men teachers is collectively reported in the data for pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary levels. Similarly, available data sets indicate higher rates of women administrators (89%) and support staff (67%) working in public preschool (0-4 years) institutes, while administrators and support staff working only in pre-primary are not disaggregated by grade level.<sup>118</sup>



*Figure 12. Only two men are registered as public preschool teachers (3%)*

<sup>110</sup> MESTI, [Educational Statistics in Kosovo](#), 2023. [Albanian]

<sup>111</sup> MESTI, [List of licensed preschools and preprimary schools](#), accessed 15 April 2024.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., Annex Graph 1.

<sup>113</sup> MESTI, [Annual Statistical Report with Education Indicators 2021-2022](#), pp. 83-85. Notably, the total percentage of girls and boys enrolled in ECE 0-6 is not referenced in the most recent MEST Annual Statistical Report for 2022-2023.

<sup>114</sup> MEST, [Educational Statistics in Kosovo](#), 2023. [Albanian]

<sup>115</sup> The number of all girls and boys ages 0-6 in Kosovo is not referenced in MESTI documents. Based on the 2021-2022 report, it seems that MESTI may be using 2011 census data. KAS disaggregates population data by age. However, the age ranges are disaggregated by 0-4 and 5-9. Therefore, the precise number of girls and boys in the pre-primary (5-6) age group is unavailable publicly.

<sup>116</sup> See Annex [Table 1](#), Graphs [3](#), [4](#), and [5](#).

<sup>117</sup> MEST, [Educational Statistics in Kosovo](#), 2023, pp. 37-45, [Albanian].

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. See [Annex Graph 6](#).

## Conclusion

Global studies claim that despite increased gender parity among girls and boys in ECE, quality education that combats gender stereotypes is still lacking.<sup>119</sup> While access and enrolment in ECE may contribute to women's economic empowerment generally, access alone is insufficient for transforming harmful and discriminatory gender stereotypes.

While the reports referenced in this paper describe achievements and obstacles related to providing quality education in Kosovo, few assess the quality of ECE and the extent that Kosovo curricula and pedagogy promote gender equality and the transformation of discriminatory gender norms. These reports mainly identify achievements in educational legislation, municipal and school level implementation of legislation, and outstanding challenges in implementing curricula and provisioning teachers' professional development. They do not assess the (re)design and implementation of curricula, pedagogy, and policies towards transforming gender stereotypes and corresponding gender norms to promote gender equality.

While Kosovo legislation and mechanisms ensure access to education for girls and boys, as well as protection from discrimination in educational institutions, a gender transformative approach is not taught in Kosovo. Further, attendance in preschool education (especially for girls and boys 0-4 years of age), where such learning should begin, is low due to the lack of affordable preschool institutions. This contributes to women's low employment rates, given their traditional social roles as caretakers; children's lower educational performance; and Kosovo failing to achieve the EU Barcelona Objectives.<sup>120</sup>

Relevant to availability (e.g., infrastructure, quality education, and policies), UNICEF similarly concluded that inclusive education is not prioritised in Kosovo; standards for determining disability and social stigmas remain barriers for an enabling environment that supports responsive and inclusive access to education. This includes inaccessible infrastructure; limited transport; little support for learning centres, especially for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian families; as well as an insufficient number of adequately trained teachers and teaching assistants.<sup>121</sup> Other identified obstacles that affect the school attendance of girls and boys from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities and lower income earning families include poor living conditions; social norms for keeping girls home; bullying; and low parental and caretaker awareness of the importance of education.<sup>122</sup>

Regarding the quality of education, barriers include low investment in education; limited intersectional gender-disaggregated data; curricula that do not reflect market demand; insufficient teacher training; weak QA mechanisms; poor planning for ensuring adequate facilities that reflect population density in rural and urban regions; low quality educational facilities; limited attention to digital literacy and competencies; top down pedagogical approaches; low parental education; and limited access to ECE opportunities for girls and boys.<sup>123</sup>

Since ECE bylaws, policies, and formal curricula is not yet finalised in Kosovo, it is not yet evident that institutions are integrating, or have sufficient plans for integrating a gender-transformative approach to ECE. As such, the quality and extent that ECE curricula and learning environments are gender transformative cannot be fully assessed at this time.

Relevant to implementing gender-transformative curricula, KWN could not find a publicly available state-wide gender review of textbooks. However, MESTI has stated that all new curricula are reviewed from a gender perspective. In 2007, the Kosovo Gender Studies Centre (KGSC) published a report assessing the gender responsiveness of texts, learning materials, and teacher pedagogy in pre-primary, primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools. Overall, KGSC found that learning

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<sup>119</sup> UNICEF, *Tackling Gender Inequality From the Early Years, Strategies for Building a Gender Transformative Pre-primary Education System*, 2022, p. 9.

<sup>120</sup> EC, *Barcelona Objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth*, 2013, p. 4. See KWN, *Who Cares?*, 2016, p. 8, which also cites these issues.

<sup>121</sup> UNICEF, *State of Children's Rights Kosovo*, 2021, p. 8.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

materials, pedagogy, and student attitudes reflected and perpetuated gender biases and gender stereotypes.<sup>124</sup> Likewise, KWN, the Kosovo Education Centre (KEC), and Balkans Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) have all reported that textbooks contribute to perpetuating gender norms in Kosovo.<sup>125</sup> Notably, AGE has developed a handbook for reviewing textbooks and learning materials in which examples of types of play is referenced (and applicable to ECE learning environments), using a gender lens.<sup>126</sup> However, the examples provided do not describe how to integrate toys into ECE learning opportunities according to the curricula currently available. Further, while some types of toys are referenced in picture examples, a list of specific gender-neutral toys that are available in Kosovo are not referenced. Nevertheless, the Education Strategy does foresee a gender review of ECE learning materials and toys.

Currently, Kosovo QA laws referenced in this paper provide for mechanisms that establish minimal teaching competencies; municipal procedures for ensuring quality standards of curricula implementation; pedagogical practices; and a teacher manual to assess the extent that textbooks perpetuate gender stereotypes. These QA mechanisms pertain more to primary through tertiary education. Nonetheless, there have been efforts to update QA of ECE that aim to increase the availability of quality licensed ECE providers (and by doing so, increase enrolment of girls and boys ages 2-6); update curricula and legislation on the implementation of curricula; improve teachers' competencies; and implement play-based curricula. Existing legislation assuring the quality of preschool and pre-primary education regulates general education standards, standards for facilities, licensing of ECE providers, pre-service training and education, professional competencies of ECE teachers and staff, the number of children per teacher, and nutrition.<sup>127</sup>

The Kosovo Pedagogical Institute (KPI) found qualitative achievements in pre-school institutions; educators' professional development opportunities; support for children whose families receive social benefits; and inspections of the quality of education.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, KPI observed that the following areas need improvements: QA monitoring of private and public ECE learning environments; cooperation between preschool institutions and MESTI; cooperation between preschool institutions and Municipal Education Directorates (MEDs); principal-educator cooperation; preschool institution and parent cooperation; and better quality education in preschool institutions.<sup>129</sup>

While the aforementioned QA achievements provide criteria for assessing and ensuring quality ECE services, the extent to which existing QA mechanisms and systems have responded to different situations and needs of women, men, girls, and boys seems minimal. Existing gender-responsive QA mechanisms include: gender officers in MESTI and MEDs; AGE; and the teachers' manual: *Preventing Gender Stereotypes and Promoting Gender Equality in School Textbooks and Materials, A Methodological Guide*. Foreseen QA interventions include: recruitment strategies for engaging more men ECE teachers; a gender review of learning materials including toys; training for ECE professionals; training for public officials at national and local levels on data collection and monitoring practices; drafting a monitoring framework and strategies related to ECE legislation, policies, and standards (institutional and pedagogical); and a review of licensing procedures for ECE institutions.<sup>130</sup> However, training for ECE professionals and public officials are not explicitly gender responsive in the *Education Strategy 2022-26* and *Action Plan*. Although numerous QA actions are foreseen in the Action Plan, only the actions for recruitment of more men ECE professionals, review of textbooks and other

<sup>124</sup> KGSC, *Auditing of Gender Issues in the Education System*, Pristina, 2007.

<sup>125</sup> See KWN, *Kosovo Gender Analysis*, 2018 and *Who Cares?*, 2016; KEC, *Gender Equality in the Reading Textbooks During the Nine Years of Compulsory Education in Kosovo*, 2007; and BIRN *Textbook Problems and Shortcomings: Study of Kosovo's Middle School Textbooks* (Grades VI, VII, VIII, and IX), 2013.

<sup>126</sup> AGE, *Preventing Gender Stereotypes and Promoting Gender Equality in School Textbooks and Materials, A Methodological Guide*.

<sup>127</sup> Mevlude Aliu Gashi, Zehrie Plakolli, et. al. *Cidree Yearbook 2022, Challenges facing the organisation and realisation of pre-school education in Kosovo*.

<sup>128</sup> Aliu-Gashi, M., et al., KPI, *Edukimin parashkollor ne Kosove - Arritjet dhe sfidat* ["Preschool education in Kosovo - achievements and challenges"] in *Kerkime Pedagogjike* [Pedagogical Research] [in Albanian], 2021.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> MESTI, *Education Strategy 2022-2026, Action Plan*, 2022.

learning materials, and engagement of fathers in girls' and boys' ECE are sufficiently gender responsive and potentially transformative.

## Recommendations

Gender transformative approaches should be integrated into all legislation, policies, sectors, mechanisms, infrastructure, service provision, training, QA, and curricula and pedagogy for all levels of education. Recommendations for implementing curricula should respond to evidence-based developmental abilities of girls and boys enrolled in ECE programs; the different situations and needs of girls, boys, women, and men; as well as their different intersectional situations and needs.<sup>131</sup> Towards gender transformative education, the government and ECE service providers must take a holistic, coordinated approach to planning, designing, implementing, budgeting, and QA for ECE curricula at national, local, community, school, and family levels.<sup>132</sup> The recommendations in this section are derived from international best practices and relevant based on data available in Kosovo. Recommendations are grouped according to the interrelated aforementioned categories of international best practice. Since Kosovo institutions are in the process of developing curricula and standards for ECE, recommendations relevant to planning and the Action Plan might be prioritised, while considering and preparing for other recommendations to be implemented in the future.

### Planning and gender-responsive budgeting

- Ensure situation analyses at national and municipal levels include gender analyses of the different intersectional situations and needs of diverse girls, boys, women, and men. Ensure intersectional analyses with attention to gender and ethnicity, language, disability, region (urban and rural), and socio-economic family situations. Gender analyses should assess different situations pertaining to demand, supply, and social schemes, including: conditions of access for girls and boys, cost, scope of access, convenience of location for women and men with different needs, in different regions (urban and rural areas), duration of services needed (i.e., full day, year round), policies for subsidising ECE costs, or ensuring free access. Gender analyses also should assess knowledge of gender equality relevant to ECE, including policymakers, community members, and ECE service providers.
- Engage gender experts, pre-service and in-service trainers, community members, and other stakeholders at municipal and national levels in situational analyses and planning.
- Budget for and train relevant public officials at municipal and national levels (e.g., MED, ECE MESTI committee members, Kosovo Accreditation Agency, gender focal points, KAS) in gender-responsive data collection and analysis. Engage these officials in all situational assessments, gender analyses, and related policymaking working groups.
- Train relevant public officials in gender responsive pedagogy (GRP) (e.g., MED, ECE MESTI committee members, and Inspectorate). Engage these officials, as well as ECE service providers (staff and teachers) and University of Prishtina Faculty of Education in working groups developing curricula and QA frameworks and monitoring systems.
- Strive for legislation to make ECE accessible and affordable for lower income earning families and those with girls and boys who have diverse learning needs. Ensure that the Law on ECE, Law on the Regulated Professions in the Republic of Kosovo, Law on Education, Law on Education in the Municipality of the Republic of Kosovo, Law on Education Inspectorate in the Republic of Kosovo, Law on School Textbooks, AI for School-based Teachers' Professional Development, and AI for Funding Teacher Professional Development respond explicitly to different intersectional situations and needs of diverse girls and boys based on gender analysis by integrating explicit gender

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<sup>131</sup> UNICEF, *Build to Last, A Framework in Support of Universal Quality Pre-primary Education*, 2020.

<sup>132</sup> UNICEF, *Tackling Gender Inequality from the Early Years*, 2022.



responsive and transformative criteria and duties for all stakeholders. Legislation for social schemes, subsidies, and investment in free ECE services may improve affordability.

- Increase national and municipal government funding for ECE, building and expanding facilities and conditions to increase the number of diverse girls and boys enrolled in ECE, based on assessments of communities most in need of public ECE services. Investments need to include budgeting for ECE facilities that respond to diverse regional situations (urban, rural, transportation needs, and working hours of women and men caretakers), physical and cognitive abilities of girls and boys (e.g., budget for teaching assistants, assessable infrastructure, and assistive devices), language, and nutritional needs.
- Include explicitly GRB in the Educational Strategy and Action Plan, annual education budgets, as well as other ECE and social assistance policies and legislation to ameliorate gender inequalities at local and national levels. Policies need to budget for implementing GRP (e.g., policies regulating pre-service education and in-service professional development opportunities) and QA using gender-responsive indicators for assessing changes in gender stereotypes and inter-institutional coordination. Include separate budget lines that allocate funding for relevant gender responsive trainings, QA strategies, social schemes, recruitment strategies, and community engagement activities. Consider engaging KWN to provide expertise to support GRB.
- Budget in action plans for gender-transformative training for all relevant public officials, including: capacity-building for bringing awareness to gender equality legislation and mechanisms, the rights of girls and boys, discriminatory gender norms, gender-responsive organisational mechanisms, gender-responsive recruiting strategies, gender-responsive pedagogical approaches, gender review of teaching and learning materials, and community and parental awareness programs for gender-transformative educational and social approaches.
- Require in policies that curricula include descriptions and examples for ECE teachers and staff on how to implement curricula using a GRP approach.
- Policies must include gender-responsive and intersectional indicators for assessing the implementation of curricula, the quality of services, and the beneficiaries of services.
- Engage gender experts, including women's rights organisations, to develop and provide gender-transformative training for relevant public officials.

## **Curricula and Implementation**

- Ensure the curriculum framework includes specific criteria or standards (for teachers and management of ECE institutions) for creating gender-responsive learning environments in which diverse girls and boys feel welcome and comfortable.
- Ensure curricula are gender transformative and consider gender biases and how these are reflected in curricula content.
- Develop learning outcomes based on age-appropriate developmental competencies that are gender transformative. The inclusion of gender transformative learning outcomes does not necessarily ensure that curriculum is implemented using a GRP and must be accompanied by appropriate teacher training in delivering gender-transformative curricula.
- Include in the curriculum framework specific pedagogical practices teachers are expected to use in the classroom to ensure they apply gender-responsive approaches in their delivery of curricula. The ECE curriculum framework should include instructions and descriptions of examples of gender responsive and transformative approaches for ECE service providers. For instance, the curriculum framework needs to include tools and instructions on how to implement a gender review of learning materials (books and toys); provide step by step guidance on how to engage girls and boys in gender-responsive and -transformative activities that challenge gender stereotypes portrayed in stories and illustrations; and include suggestions and examples of different instructional methods to make the content relevant to different interests and life experiences of girls and boys. Guidelines might recommend certain gender-neutral learning materials for play-based learning (e.g., dolls and toys that do not reinforce gender norms or a variety of girl and boy dolls and toys) and for daily

routines that provide equal access to girls and boys to learning corners, outdoor playtime, and equipment.

- Include in curricula recommended learning activities that are gender responsive and potentially transformative. For example, include optional activities to ensure that both girls and boys can access the same content at the same level, using differentiated engagement methods. Include activity examples that combat gender stereotypes about which activities girls or boys should engage. Include suggested activities that encourage girls and boys to work together.
- Review learning materials and textbooks for gender biases. Allocate funds for data collection, analysis, and revisions.
- Collaborate with publishing companies to ensure that publishers are aware of discriminatory gender stereotypes and have the capacity to address these using appropriate images and language in the texts.

## **Workforce**

- Include gender-responsive competencies and standards for ECE service providers and teachers. Policies should clearly and explicitly state GRP standards, indicators, and foresee provisions to support teachers in realising these.
- Use GRB to allocate specific budgets in legislation and policies for gender-transformative teacher training to ensure teachers' ability to implement the curricula and provide diverse girls and boys with opportunities to learn and develop.
- Incorporate teacher training strategies based on needs assessment for pre-service training and in-service professional development. These should increase awareness of discriminatory gender stereotypes; include strategies for reflecting and assessing individual awareness, attitudes, and knowledge of GRP; educate on how language use addresses discriminatory gender stereotypes; and advise on how to use learning materials (e.g., books, toys, equipment), providing equal access to resources for girls and boys.
- Develop strategies for improving the work environment of ECE institutions and professions. Besides infrastructural improvements and investments, establish wages that allow for a decent standard of living, strive to professionalise the service, provide teachers adequate time for preparation of lessons and training, and enforce occupational safety and health policies specific to ECE institutions. Strategies might include alternative competency requirements for teachers already engaged in providing ECE and national strategies for establishing career pathways in the ECE sector.
- Develop a gender-responsive recruitment strategy that seeks to increase gender parity among ECE service providers and teachers. When men are part of the ECE workforce their engagement can counteract traditional views of women as caregivers and ensure that school and learning are gender neutral. Measures for gender-responsive recruitment could include: more gender-responsive communication campaigns; vocational and career advice; the establishment of networks and/or ECE unions; screening and reviewing pre-service training curricula and culture to make them more male-friendly; and inclusion of strong academic requirements.

## **Family and Community Engagement**

- Implement awareness-raising campaigns on the benefits of ECE that target and reach women and men caretakers living in diverse regions, of different ethnicities, socio-economic situations, and educational backgrounds.
- Establish ECE institutional standards that engage women and men caretakers equally. For example, when the child is sick, the school should call both caretakers. This might also include supporting educators and other staff to invite and include men caretakers in parent activities, making spaces more welcoming for men caretakers, and organising separate sessions for men and women caretakers.

- Provide training opportunities for ECE staff and teachers on strategies for, and the benefits of, engaging equally women and men caretakers in the early education and care of children.

## **Quality Assurance**

- Develop, plan, and budget for QA strategies and practices at national, municipal, and preschool levels, with inspection tools and self-assessment forms that explicitly ask to what extent preschools are addressing gender stereotypes. Involve gender experts at all stages of QA. Involve community and other stakeholders in consultations and sharing of findings.
- Ensure that policymakers, gender experts, and stakeholders use these findings to inform revisions of existing policies, new policies, and GRB.
- Undertake a gender review of existing legislation and policies to ensure that various barriers are overcome vis-à-vis legislation and policy specifications and standards. Engage gender experts, including women's rights organisations, and stakeholders.
- Budget adequately for implementing QA strategies.
- Implement monitoring strategies and processes for ensuring quality standards of ECE facilities, services, preschool organisational operations, staff and teachers' competencies, and learning environments (e.g., learning materials and teachers' pedagogical practices). For institutional and classroom observations, KWN can support with tools and templates for assessing gender responsive and transformative approaches implemented in ECE institutions and learning environments.
- Train relevant QA inspectors, MED officials, MESTI officials on how to use tools and templates for assessing the gender-responsiveness and transformative organisational systems and pedagogical approaches of teachers and staff in ECE.
- Include specific gender-responsive indicators in assessment criteria. Include process level and gender-disaggregated indicators. Indicators should be gender-disaggregated across all different intersectional situations and needs. Include gender bias indicators that assess the extent teachers provide girls and boys with equal opportunities to participate in the classroom; have similar expectations for girls and boys; exhibit bias (i.e., in language and/or attitude); and challenge stereotypes in the classroom. KWN can support institutions in this assessment with indicators and templates for assessing these criteria.
- Ensure the QA strategy explicitly describes the procedure to integrate findings into planning, including any redesign to respond to gender disparities and inequalities. These findings then can contribute to updating gender analyses that inform improvements.

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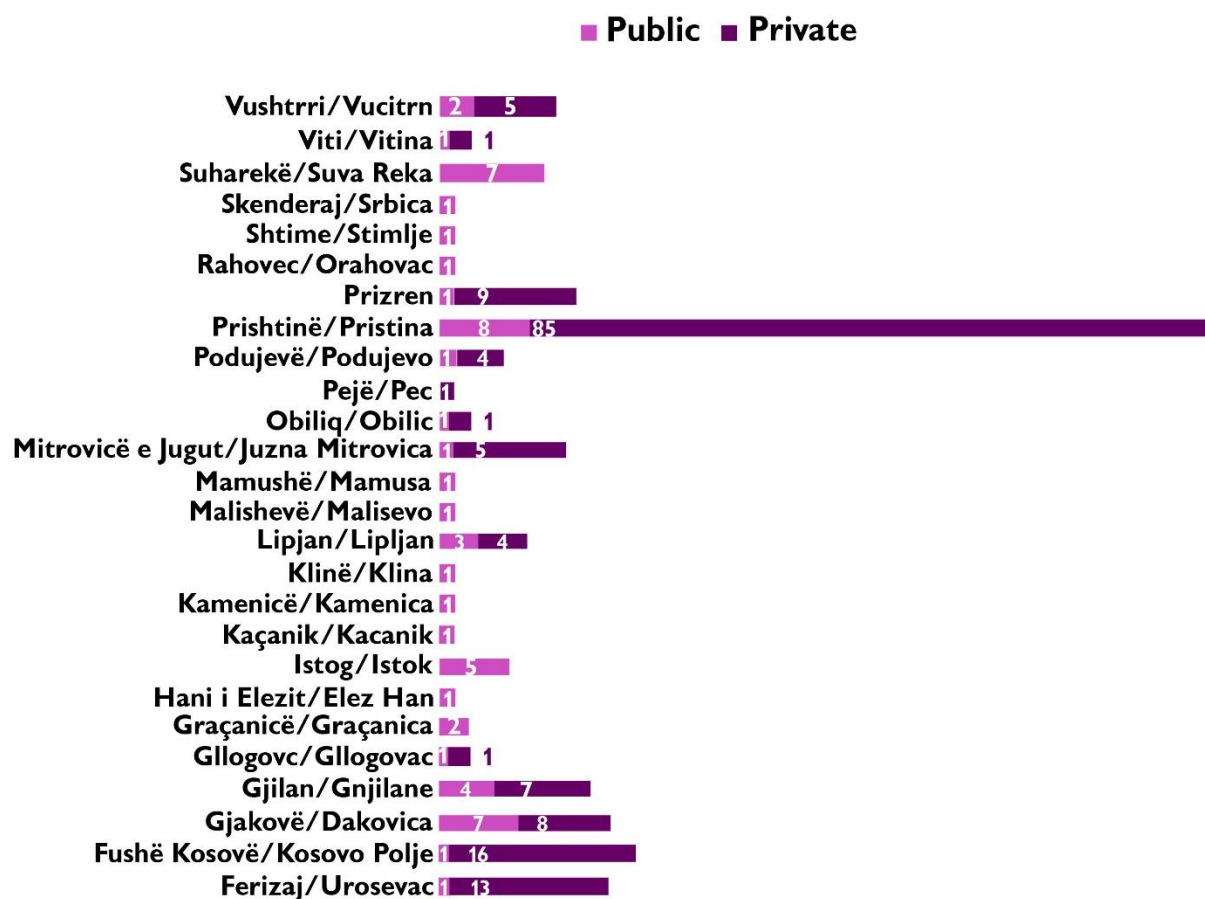
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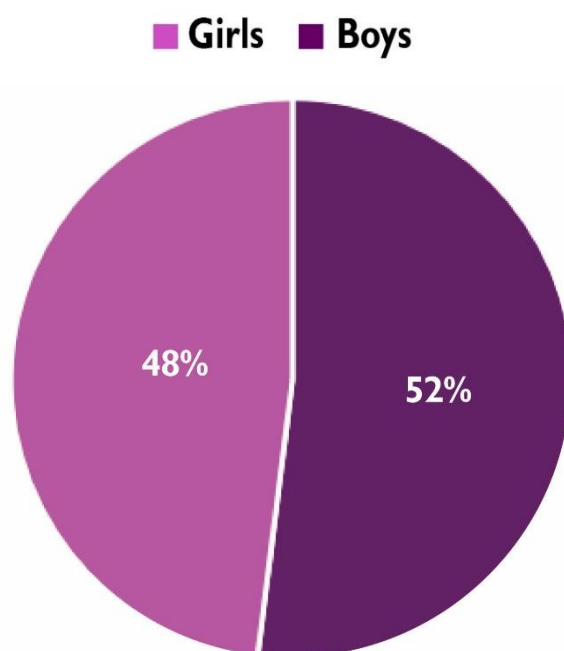
## Annexes

**Graph 1. Number of public and private ECE and preschool institutions (by municipality)**



Source: Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) "[List of licensed preschools and preprimary schools](#)", accessed 15 April 2024.

**Graph 2. Enrolment in public and private ECE in 2022/23 (by gender)**



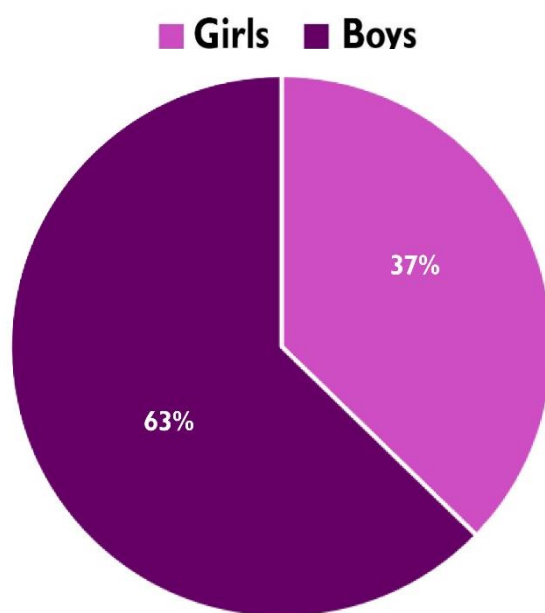
Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS)

**Table 1. Girls and boys attending ECE (0-6) in Kosovo (by ethnicity)**

Ethnicity	Preschool (0-4)	Pre-primary (5-6)	Total
Albanian	5330	18152	23482
Serb	35	41	76
Turkish	22	223	245
Bosniak	14	119	133
Gorani	0	29	29
Ashkali	3	221	224
Roma	14	73	87
Egyptian	2	84	86
Croat	0	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>5420</b>	<b>18946</b>	<b>24366</b>

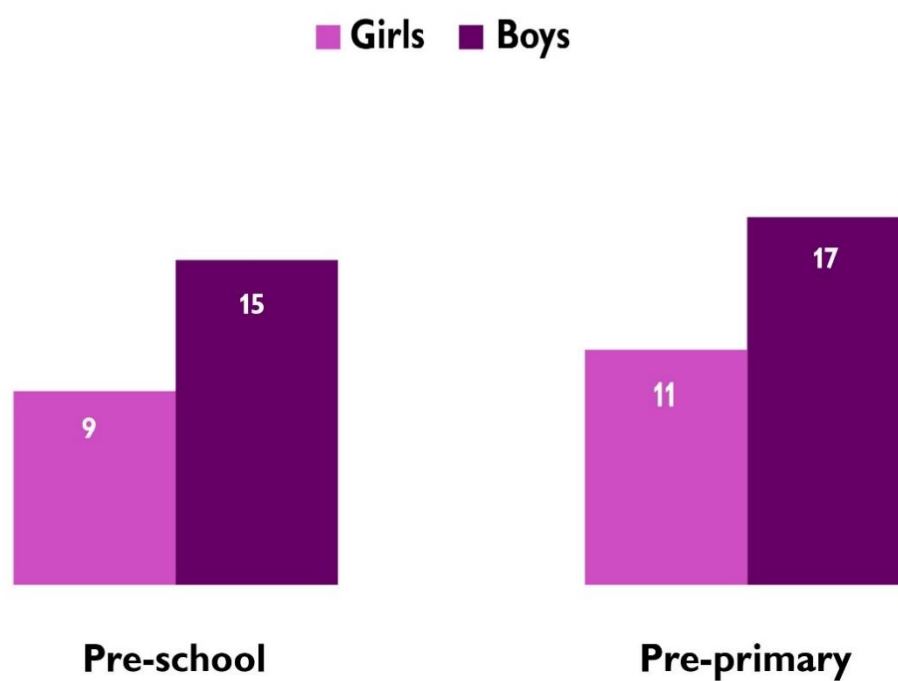
Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS)

**Graph 3. Children with disabilities attending public ECE (0-6)**



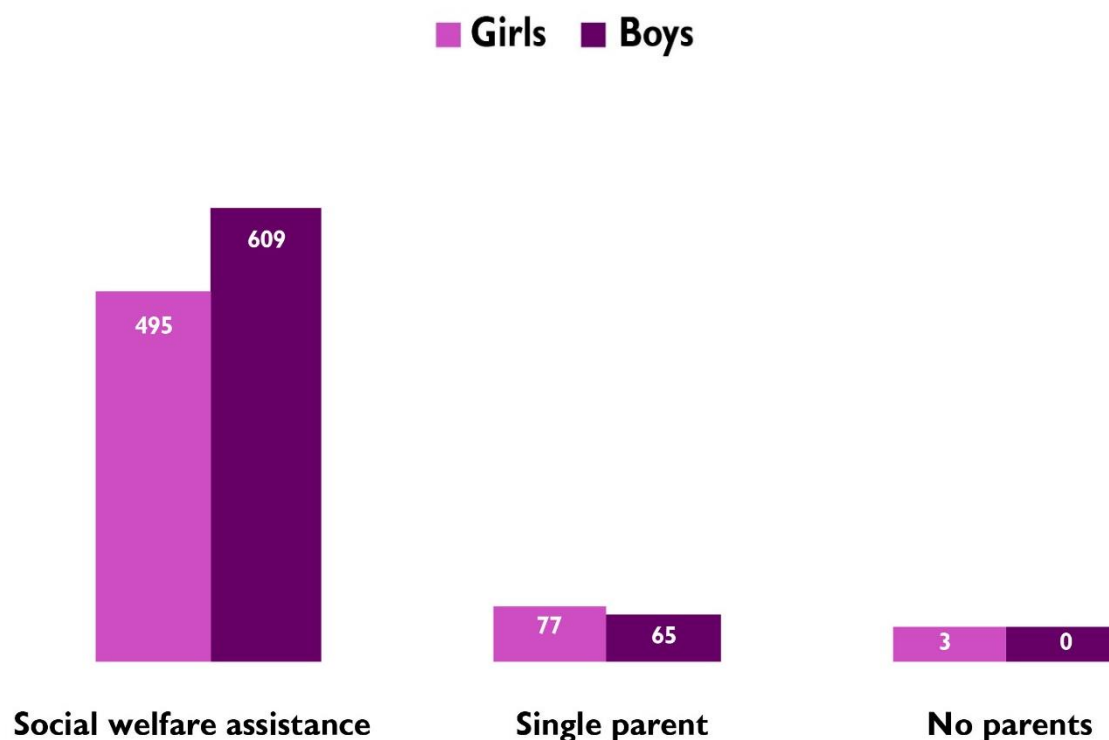
*Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS)*

**Graph 4. Girls and boys attending ECE resource centres**



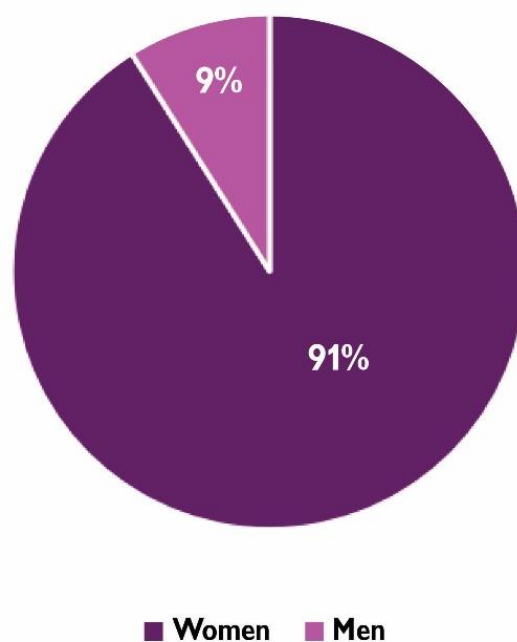
*Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS)*

**Graph 5. Social and family status of girls and boys attending ECE and preschool education (0-6)**



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS)

**Graph 6. Employees working in public preschools (0-4) by gender**



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS)