



Kosovo Women's Network

Serving, Protecting and Promoting the Rights of Women and Girls

Under Threat, and Resilient

The Situation of Women's
Organisations in Kosovo

Executive Summary

Amid a rapidly changing geopolitical situation and funding climate, the Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) conducted face-to-face surveys with 103 diverse women's rights civil society organisations (WCSOs) in Kosovo to assess their current situation.¹ Surveyed WCSOs represent the interests of women of all ethnicities, ages and (dis)abilities in rural and urban areas.

Key Findings

- The enabling environment for civil society generally is aligned with international human rights standards, but improvements to philanthropy, volunteer and funding frameworks could facilitate access to resources for (W)CSOs.
- The Administrative Instruction on public-private partnership has not been adopted, and there is no dedicated state budget line for (W)CSO support. Regulatory frameworks governing taxes, donations and volunteerism require refinement.
- [Evidence](#) illustrates that WCSOs have been the motor behind key achievements towards inclusive democracy, good governance, rule of law, access to justice and human rights, furthering progress towards European Union (EU) Accession.
- Despite their valuable role, WCSOs are under threat amid global shifts in funding trends. Several bilateral funders and private foundations have reduced aid suddenly and significantly. Shifting priorities also are evident in the EU.
- In the last two years, 40% of WCSOs report that funding has decreased.
- 59% of WCSOs did not have any revenue for 2026. Only 9% had funds for 2027 and beyond.
- More than 22 staff have been laid off and at least 49 activists have reduced working hours.
- Funding cuts have led to reduced services, support for women's economic empowerment, advocacy and watchdog efforts, awareness-raising, education and research. Further, the situation has contributed to stress, insecurity and burnout among activists.
- In the past, 81% of WCSOs have received support from Kosovo institutions, though contracts averaged less than five months. Opportunities exist for improving this support.
- Evidencing the resilience and spirit of activism among women's rights activists, 91% said that they will continue their work without donor funding, despite affiliated challenges.

Key Recommendations

- **For the Government of Kosovo:** Urgently allocate sufficient funding to fully support specialised services provided by WCSOs, particularly in the absence of state services, using gender-responsive budgeting for annually assessing costs accurately. Include in the Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2025-2035 explicit commitments and targets for long-term, quality government funding of diverse WCSOs in line with the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. Improve legal frameworks and enabling environments for diverse (W)CSOs to fundraise from individuals and businesses and to engage volunteers.
- **For international funders:** Continue allocating multiyear, flexible financing and core support, particularly for think tanks, watchdogs and advocacy-oriented WCSOs so that they remain independent in holding the Government accountable, towards safeguarding human rights, gender equality, good governance, democracy, access to justice and an independent civil society. Utilise a "cocktail" of core support, project grants and sub-granting for smaller WCSOs, to address diverse WCSOs' needs.

¹ KWN conducted this study using its own, limited resources, including some core support from the Sigrid Rausing Trust, Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, and UK International Development. Its contents are the sole responsibility of KWN and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation or the Government of the United Kingdom. KWN thanks WCSOs who contributed their valuable time, without pay, to engage in this survey. Special thanks to KWN staff who worked hard to make this paper possible.

Civil Society Enabling Environment

In Kosovo, the enabling environment for civil society (e.g., freedom of association, peaceful assembly and freedom of expression) is largely aligned with international human rights standards.² The European Commission's 2024 Report on Kosovo recognised the active role of civil society in the development, implementation and oversight of reforms related to EU Accession.³ It noted that the government facilitates this role by providing access to draft legislation and policies through the online platform for public consultation. However, the Report highlighted that consultations remain insufficient as they are poorly organised, lack early state engagement, and provide civil society with inadequate time for meaningful input. The Report specifically mentioned that CSOs for persons with disabilities and WCSOs are not systematically included. The Report emphasised the Government's need to improve the funding framework for CSOs.

While the framework for distributing public funds to CSOs is in line with international standards, its implementation remains challenging.⁴ Public calls are inconsistently implemented across institutions, and reporting obligations are not adjusted to CSO capacity, placing undue burdens on less-resourced CSOs. Public funding levels for CSOs dropped in 2024 to approximately €8.6 million, down from €14.4 million in 2023 and €29.3 million in 2021.⁵ This decrease has raised concerns about the predictability of support for civil society and its sustainability, particularly in the absence of provisions for emergency or small-scale funding.⁶

According to the last report of the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) in 2024, "Kosovo's civil society sector continues to demonstrate resilience and commitment despite growing financial uncertainty and legislative setbacks."⁷ It observed civil society's vital role in "preventing harmful laws". Yet, it noted that "these achievements remain vulnerable without continued funding, active participation, and robust safeguards. Addressing these gaps is crucial to maintaining democratic accountability, fostering civic engagement, and ensuring the sector's long-term viability."

About Women's Organisations, Their Members and Beneficiaries

WCSOs play a crucial role in addressing inequalities among diverse women and men worldwide, including across the Western Balkans (WB) and in Kosovo. As KWN's prior research has shown, WCSOs are "change-makers, advocates, service providers, researchers, teachers, and experts who have contributed significantly to several social, political, legal, economic, and individual-level changes within their countries and beyond."⁸ WCSOs have, and continue to:

- Provide psychological support, healthcare, protection, legal aid and empowerment for women and children affected by violence, furthering **access to justice** and **rule of law**
- Contribute to **good governance** and **democracy** with their expertise and by mobilising public pressure to adopt vital laws and policies that protect women, children and LGBTIQ+ persons, including related to addressing gender-based violence, labour rights, anti-discrimination, gender equality, better budgeting, EU Accession and others

² Anja Bosilkova-Antovska and Simona Mladenovska, [Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development – Regional Report: Western Balkans and Türkiye 2024](#), 2025, p. 21. They note that legal and regulatory measures introduced in 2024 to implement the Law on Freedom of Association raised some concerns.

³ The Office of Good Governance within the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, 2026, p. 8.

⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

⁶ DG ENEST Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in the Enlargement Region: 2024 Assessment: Report for Kosovo.

⁷ BCSDN, [Monitoring Matrix Kosovo report](#), 2024. KWN could not find more recent research on the situation of civil society in Kosovo in its rapid literature review of online sources.

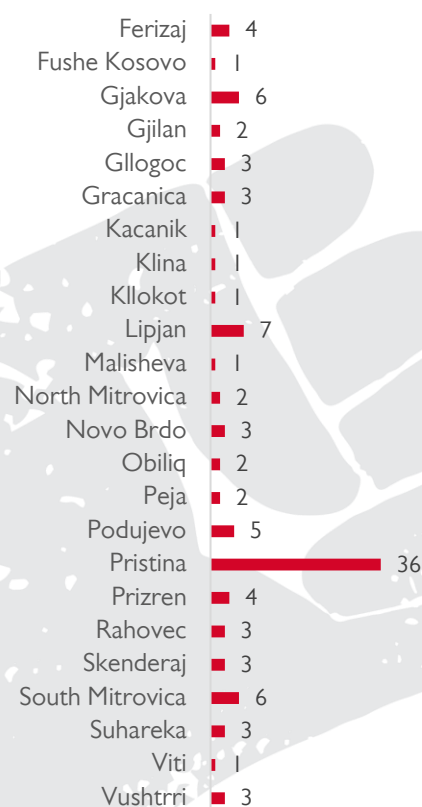
⁸ For examples, see KWN, [Where's the Money for Women's Rights? Funding Trends in the Western Balkans](#), 2020.

- Forge peace across ethnic and national barriers and contribute directly to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda
- Mobilise humanitarian aid, education and healthcare for children, the elderly, people with disabilities and of diverse ethnicities
- Empower more, diverse women to enter politics and decision-making at all levels, strengthening **democracy**
- Conduct research that informs laws, policies, education and media based on evidence
- Contribute directly to implementing the EU Gender Action Plan III and **EU Accession** processes from a gender perspective with expertise, monitoring, research and advocacy, as key partners to the EU in furthering progress related to the EU's **fundamental values**
- Serve as watchdogs, holding governments and justice systems accountable through monitoring, advocacy, legal aid and strategic litigation, contributing to progress on EU Accession related reforms
- Provide **vital services**, particularly when government systems are unable to respond or where services have been disrupted or not yet institutionalised.

As Graph 1 illustrates, WCSOs are located throughout Kosovo.⁹ Several work across Kosovo regardless of their headquarters. In 2024, altogether, WCSOs had approximately **152,000 beneficiaries**. In 2025, WCSOs had an estimated 10,404 **active members**, averaging 101 per organisation. They engaged 740 staff members (seven on average); 64% were paid. Additionally, WCSOs engaged 752 volunteers.

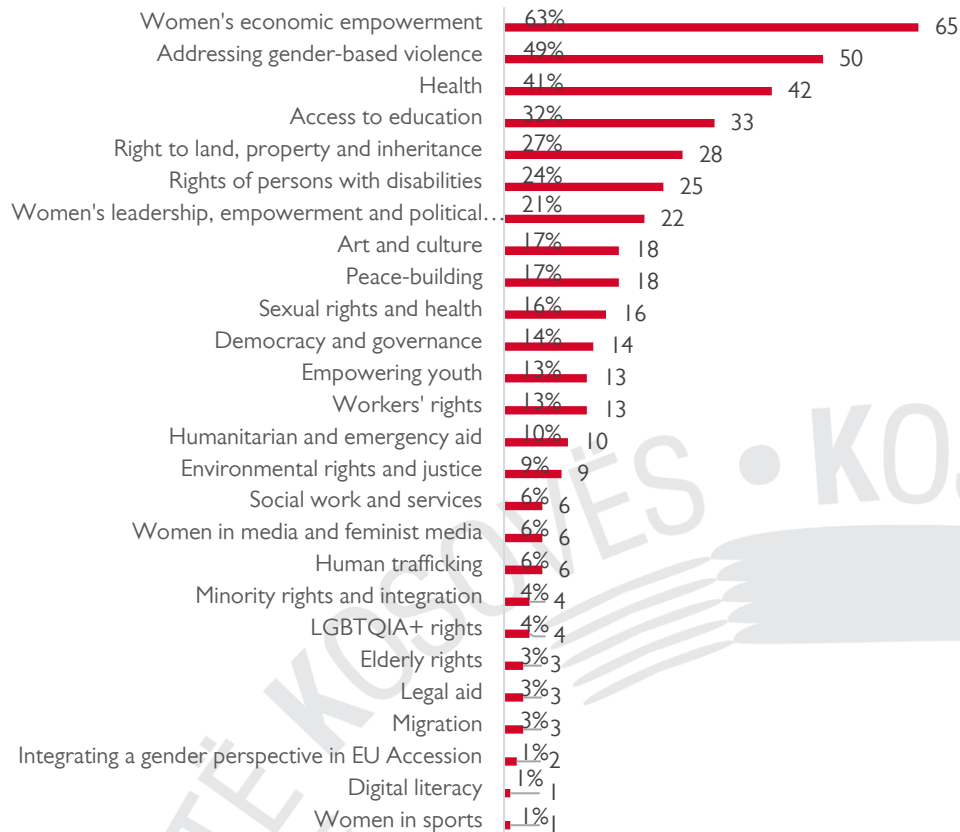
As Graph 2 shows, WCSOs focus on several issues including women's economic empowerment (63%); addressing gender-based violence, including sexual violence perpetrated during the war (49%); women and girls' health (41%); access to education, including informal and continuing education (32%); the right to land, property and inheritance (27%); rights of persons with disabilities (24%); women's leadership, empowerment and political engagement (21%); art and culture (17%); peace-building and transitional justice (17%); sexual rights and health (16%); democracy and governance, including monitoring and holding governments accountable (14%); empowering youth (13%); workers' rights (13%); humanitarian and emergency aid (10%); environmental protection, rights and justice (9%); social work and services (6%); women in media (6%); human trafficking (6%); minority rights and integration (4%); LGBTQIA+ persons' rights (4%); elderly rights (3%); legal aid (>3%); migration (3%); integrating a gender perspective in EU Accession (3%); digital literacy (1%); and women and girls in sports (1%). WCSOs tend to work on multiple issues and target several diverse groups.

Graph 1. WCSOs' Locations



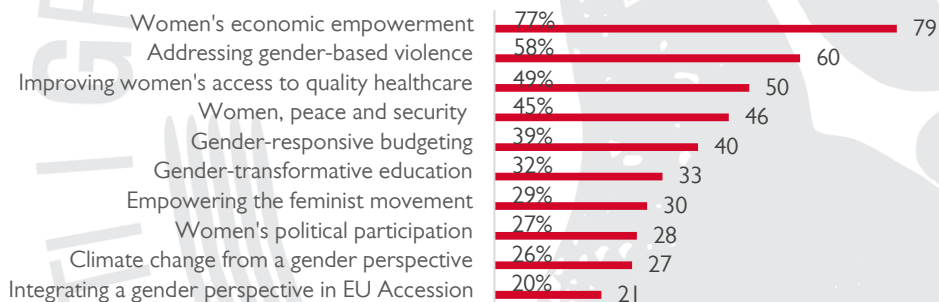
⁹ Conducted in August 2025 through January 2026, the survey was based on the [methodology](#) of the Association of Women in Development (AWID). It was adapted for slightly shorter, face-to-face interviews in person or online, towards reaching very diverse WCSOs that may not have access to an online survey. Participants included both KWN members and non-member WCSOs working in rural areas (49%) and with persons with disabilities (12%). Six survey WCSOs were Serb-led while several worked with beneficiaries of all ethnicities. It can be considered representative of the population of WCSOs in Kosovo as nearly all active WCSOs participated with few exceptions (primarily related to health issues or the inactivity).

Graph 2. WCSOs' Main Focus Areas
(% and # of WCSOs)



In the future, WCSOs said that KWN should focus on the priority areas in Graph 3. These could be considered the priorities of the women's movement in Kosovo as they have been endorsed by several WCSOs. Further, they are based on evidence of key inequalities requiring address in Kosovo.

Graph 3. Areas KWN Should Focus on in the Future
(% and # of WCSOs)



Overall, 77% of WCSOs said focus should be on women's economic empowerment, including labour law amendments; 58% said addressing gender-based violence; 49% improving women's access to quality healthcare; 45% women, peace and security; 39% gender-responsive budgeting; 32% gender-transformative education, including access to education; 29% empowering and expanding the feminist movement; 27% women's political participation; 26% climate change from a gender perspective; and 20% integrating a gender perspective in EU Accession. Several WCSOs emphasised the importance of continuing to support youth, the elderly, rural, disabled and minority women.

A Changing Funding Landscape

In January 2025, the sudden decision of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to suspend or end funding globally has contributed to the vulnerability of civil society, including in Kosovo. Rapid research by the [Kosovo Civil Society Foundation](#) (KCSF) estimated that USAID funding cuts froze €28 million in 68 CSO contracts in Kosovo.¹⁰ KWN's rapid survey in early 2025 found that at least 11 Kosovar CSOs focusing on furthering diverse women's rights lost or would likely lose funding amounting to more than €1.25 million. On average, this comprised roughly 46% of these CSOs' budgets for 2025. Funding cuts put lives at risk (i.e., due to violence or lack of healthcare); reduced security for activists; contributed to women losing access to economic support, empowerment programs and services like shelter or counselling; and decreased advocacy and watchdogging, awareness-raising, education, research, monitoring, evaluation and learning. Cuts negatively affected programs related to addressing gender-based violence, including cyberviolence; rule of law, legal aid and access to justice; women's economic engagement and labour rights; coalition-building; policy advocacy; women, peace and security; educational programs; minority women's rights; LGBTQI+ rights; reproductive health; women with disabilities' rights; women's political participation; and gender-responsive environmental programs. More than 22 staff have been laid off and 49 activists/human rights defenders reported reducing working hours. Cuts have contributed to activist stress and/or burnout.

Since then, several other bilateral funders have reduced foreign aid significantly, exacerbating the situation. The latest significant blow to WCSOs was the Swedish Government's general decision to end all regional programming; this forced the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation to abruptly end its support to 15 WCSOs in the WB, including three from Kosovo. The regional program supported service provision, peacebuilding, citizen engagement and WCSOs' monitoring of the EU Accession process. Meanwhile, Belgium plans to cut foreign aid by 25% over five years; the United Kingdom has reduced it by 40%, France by 37%, Germany by 27% and the Netherlands by 30%. Concerningly, the Dutch Government announced plans to reduce funding to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) by more than 70% from 2026 to 2030 and to end support for furthering gender equality.¹¹ Some private foundations also have ended or scaled back support for women's rights. While shrinking aid budgets can be linked to the rise of right-wing political ideologies, growing scepticism toward international assistance and



This will directly undermine democracy by shrinking the space for civil society and silencing or quieting the voices of women's rights organisations. Some may be forced to close or pause work while stronger organisations struggle to reorganise and pay basic costs, which takes time away from our monitoring, watchdog and advocacy work, including to provide expertise in working groups, on draft laws and policies ... as important to democratic processes and quality EU-related reforms.

- Women's rights activist



¹⁰ Overall findings could no longer be found online. GAP also conducted [research](#) and presented higher figures because they included projects that were nearly finished and beyond the civil society sector.

¹¹ Lahiri, I., "[From Finland to the UK. European countries are slashing aid. What does it mean for climate funds?](#)", *Euronews*, March 2025; Sheldrick, M., "[Foreign Aid Is Shrinking—What Happens Next?](#)", *Forbes*, February 2025; SEEK Development, "[Netherlands cuts NGO funding by US\\$1.1 billion](#)", *Donor Tracker*, November 2024; Government of Netherlands, "[Letter of 20 February 2025 from the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development to the House of Representatives on International Development](#)", 2025.

declining trust in the effectiveness of aid systems,¹² they are more broadly attributed to shifting strategic interests and priorities among donors, particularly the reallocation of public resources toward domestic security and defence in the current geopolitical context.

Shifting priorities also are evident in the EU, which remains the largest donor to the WB. The proposed Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2028-2034 – the EU budget – plans to [channel substantially more resources](#) to security, defence and competitiveness, compared to the current MFF. EU financing instruments for global development will be merged with those supporting EU Accession and humanitarian aid funds, under a new “Global Europe” instrument that places stronger emphasis on advancing the EU’s strategic interests.¹³ This restructuring is accompanied by proposed significant changes to funding modalities: to reduce the spending target for official development assistance from 93% to 90%; to increase the share of non-programmable funding in external action, removing former standalone thematic programs, including those dedicated to human rights and civil society; and flexibility to shift funds across geographical and thematic pillars. According to the proposal, binding spending targets for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will be removed.¹⁴ Critics caution that these changes risk deprioritising long-term sustainable development, including women’s rights, gender equality and support for CSOs working on these issues, in favour of short-term interests.¹⁵ Meanwhile, in the WB, future civil society funding reportedly will focus on implementing [growth plans](#). As these barely attend to furthering gender equality and human rights, this risks further undermining WCSOs’ access to financing for their work.

While women’s rights activists and peacebuilders continue to offer evidence illustrating the impacts and importance of flexible, core support, most donors are moving toward more restrictive, short-term, project-tied funding.¹⁶ Further, the EU plans to reduce the number of contracts it manages, distributing funds through EU Member States and UN agencies. This poses further risks of shrinking funds and inflexible short-term contracts, which hamper CSOs’ ability to strategically impact change.¹⁷ All of these trends are particularly concerning amid the rise in anti-gender and anti-rights movements.¹⁸ KWN research documents how well-resourced actors quietly are spreading anti-gender narratives in Kosovo through semi-private seminars, media spaces and institutional channels that reinforce traditional gender hierarchies and recruit young people. “For me, it is much more disturbing, the comments of young people about assisted fertilization, especially young boys have more tendencies to regress and go towards conservatism...”, said one research participant active in politics. Another participant, a media representative, warned that the shifting funding landscape threatens CSOs, including WCSOs, independence, as they face a constant “risk of their activism being determined by external

¹² Alonso, J. A., “[The crisis of aid: ideal models for the future of development cooperation](#)”, *Barcelona Centre for International Affairs*, October 2025.

¹³ Jones, A., “[A companion guide to the Global Europe instrument proposal](#)”, *European Centre for Development Policy Management*, July 2025, pp. 1, 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 4, 5, 14.

¹⁵ See, for example, Jones, A.; CONCORD Europe, [Analysis of the European Commission’s proposal for the EU’s next Multiannual Financial Framework and the Global Europe Instrument](#), December 2025.

¹⁶ Observations from workshops and webinars on the funding landscape for feminist organising; Baekgaard, K., Rickenbrode, V. & Smith, J. M., [The Women, Peace and Security Survey: Reflections from Women Peacebuilders](#), Summary, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2025, p. 5; Spasovska, B. & Bosilkova-Antovska, A., [Donor Support, Civic Space, and the Future of Civil Society in the Western Balkans](#), BCSDN, 2025, p. 15; KWN, [Where’s the Money for Women’s Rights? Funding Trends in the Western Balkans](#), 2020.

¹⁷ See KWN, [Where’s the Money for Women’s Rights? Funding Trends in the Western Balkans](#), 2020. It notes that “WCSOs expressed concern that INGOs and multilaterals are encroaching on their work by taking on issues that WCSOs historically have led, thereby monopolising already limited funding.” As a bilateral funder said: “We have seen examples of UN agencies competing for small funds that could go to CSOs”. WCSOs have expressed concern that this has contributed to decreases in their access to funding. Even when such funds involved sub-granting, WCSOs did not feel adequately consulted or engaged in determining priorities, and funding was small and short-term, hindering their impact.

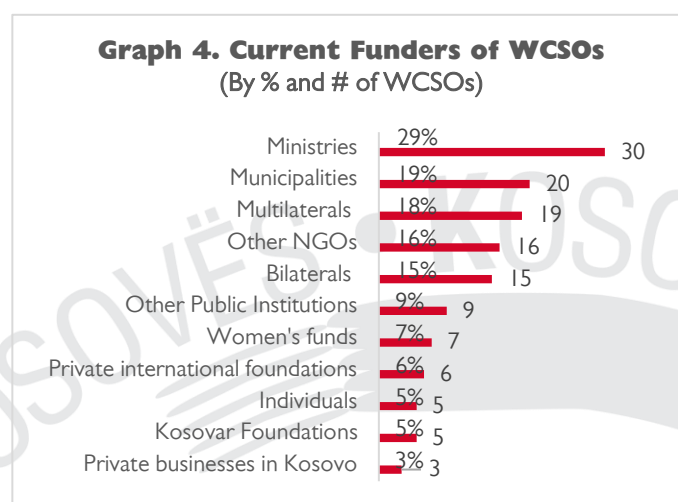
¹⁸ AWID, [Where is the Money? An Evidence-Driven Call to Resource Feminist Organizing](#), 2025, p. 19, 31.

agendas”.¹⁹ This dynamic illustrates a central paradox of civil society support: External funding is essential for survival but can also distort missions and create dependency, challenging the very autonomy it aims to promote.²⁰

Funding Trends in Kosovo

In 2024, Kosovar WCSOs’ average revenue was €83,122, ranging from €0 to €1.2 million. Notably, 20% had no revenue. In 2025, revenue decreased by 24% to €63,360, on average; 21% had no revenue. For 2026, WCSOs’ expected average revenue was €41,347, suggesting further decline in financial support (by 50% compared to 2024).

The 48% of WCSOs with donors in 2025 had only one donor on average, though some had up to eight. At the time of the survey (fall 2025 for most), 29% of WCSOs received support from ministries, 19% from municipalities, 18% from multilaterals (e.g., EU, UN, World Bank), 16% from other CSOs, 15% from bilaterals like Austria, Sweden, Germany, the United States, Canada and Switzerland, and 9% from other Kosovar public institutions (see Graph 4).²¹ Women’s funds unfortunately were not included as a



specific option in the survey but were added by 7% of survey participants; several others likely received support from women’s funds but may not have indicated this. Meanwhile, 6% received funds from international private foundations, 5% from individuals, 5% from Kosovar foundations and 3% from businesses in Kosovo.

In the past, 81% of WCSOs reported receiving support from the Government of Kosovo. However, contracts tended to average less than five months and participants noted that such short-term funding created challenges. In 2025, 31% of WCSOs reported receiving financial support from municipalities, 18% had office rent covered, 17% had free access to space for their activities, 5% services, 3% utilities and 2% municipal assistance in organising activities. While the scope and nature of support has varied across municipalities, this signals opportunities. Indeed, the Government of Kosovo’s draft Civil Society Strategy has foreseen improving regulations and guidance for municipalities to provide office space for CSOs, which could reduce significantly operational costs.²²

Only 25% of WCSOs reported having any income-generating activities. Among these, 10% sell food products, 9% sell handmade products, 6% provide services and 2% sell other goods. This indicates that most WCSOs remain heavily dependent on donor funding, while evidencing that opportunities do exist for securing some funds from local sources.

Generally, 40% of WCSOs observed that their funding had decreased in the last two years, while 38% said it remained the same and 22% said it had increased. Further, 17% of

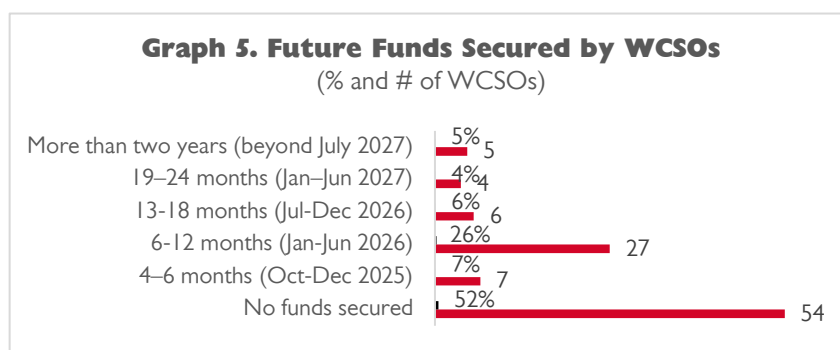
¹⁹ KWN forthcoming research on the anti-gender movement and its presence and scope in Kosovo and the region.

²⁰ Golub, S., *Beyond Rule of Law Orthodoxy: The Legal Empowerment Alternative*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003, p. 41.

²¹ Meanwhile, in the past two years (since 2023), municipalities were the most frequently cited source of funding (45% of WCSOs), followed by ministries (43%), multilateral donors (32%), bilaterals (21%), Kosovar foundations (26%) and other CSOs (20%). A smaller but noteworthy share of WCSOs received support from private businesses in Kosovo (15%), individual donors (13%), other state institutions (11%) and private foundations (9%).

²² The Office of Good Governance within the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, Government Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society 2026–2031 [draft], 2026, p. 30.

WCSOs reported losing up to three donors over the past two years, while 17% said they did not have any funders to lose. Notably, 59% of WCSOs did not have any revenue planned for 2026 (Graph 5). Only 9% had secured funds for 2027 and beyond.



On average, WCSOs said they need €4,990 monthly to **remain operational** (€59,886 annually), ranging from €0 for five WCSOs up to €40,000 for others. While varying substantially across organisations, from as little as €500 to up to €80,000, on average WCSOs said they would need approximately €7,789 per month to **fully achieve their goals** (€93,469 annually). Notably, WCSOs are very diverse, and the amount required differs dramatically based on the WCSO, its services, expertise, focus and location.

Challenges

WCSOs said their main challenges include insufficient support from municipalities (47% of WCSOs),²³ a lack of physical space for their operations (35%), insufficient staff (32%) and the current political situation, which hinders advocacy and progress on furthering gender equality. In total, 23% of WCSOs have no physical office space.²⁴ Yet, the main challenge that 90% of WCSOs said they face is lack of funding, which could help address most other challenges.

Globally, evidence shows that insufficient funding leads (W)CSOs to spend more time applying for survival-level funding, reducing the time they have available for services, advocacy, alliance-building and shaping policy.²⁵ Domestically, small yet highly effective WCSOs often lack the time and human resources to navigate complex and bureaucratic public funding applications.²⁶ While local WCSOs are particularly effective at reaching marginalised groups, including minority and rural women, thanks to their deep community ties and trusted legitimacy, they struggle to navigate complex application processes in English; funding disproportionately reaches larger, already well-established organisations.²⁷ Further, grants can be too big for smaller WCSOs to absorb. Some funders have tried to work around this by funding women's funds, which distribute smaller grants to support more grassroots groups; such initiatives remain effective albeit rare.²⁸ One such example was the KWN Kosovo Women's Fund, previously supported by Kvinna till Kvinna, Austria, Sweden, the EU, Sigrid Rausing Trust, UN Women and UNFPA. From 2026, it has had to pause operations due to insufficient funding. The innovative Fund that built capacities using a "learning by doing" methodology has effectively furthered

²³ When asked, "How would you describe your cooperation with the municipality where you operate?", 25% said that it is "very good", 48% said "good", 11% said "poor" and 16% said there is no cooperation.

²⁴ Of those with office space, 40% have spaces provided by public institutions; 17% own their premises; 36% rent; and the rest share spaces with businesses, private homes or other CSOs.

²⁵ See for example: Friends of Europe, *Frontline Voices*, 2025, p. 11; Alliance for Feminist Movements, results from a member survey aimed at informing their new Membership Engagement Strategy, presented at a webinar on 27 January 2026; KWN, *Where's the Money for Women's Rights? Funding Trends in the Western Balkans*, 2020, p. 93.

²⁶ See further KWN, *Where's the Money for Women's Rights? Funding Trends in the Western Balkans*, 2020, "Case Study: The Kosovo Women's Fund"; KWN, "Little Grants, Big Changes: Reflecting on the Legacy of the KWN Kosovo Women's Fund", 31 July 2025.

²⁷ AWID, *Where is the Money? An Evidence-Driven Call to Resource Feminist Organizing*, 2025, p. 14; observations from KWN participation in workshops and webinars on the funding landscape for feminist organising; KWN members' statements.

²⁸ Miller, K. & Jones, R., *Toward a Feminist Funding Ecosystem*, AWID, 2019, p. 42.

grassroots and smaller WCSOs' capacities to apply for grants from other funders, particularly the government, contributing to their sustainability.²⁹ Still, the Fund's lack of funding has contributed to the shrinking space for diverse WCSOs in Kosovo, particularly smaller ones.³⁰

Loss of funding has resulted in further challenges for WCSOs, including increased stress (25% of WCSOs) and activist burnout (14%). Moreover, 18% reported having to lay-off staff. Beyond losing human resources to carry out actions amid increased workloads affiliated with extra fundraising, this can contribute to losses in expertise and knowledge that WCSOs have worked hard to develop. Meanwhile, 8% of WCSOs had to close organisational programs, including service provision.

While CSOs, including WCSOs, are integral partners in service delivery, and recognised as such under existing legislation, financing for these services is short-term and inefficient, frequently interrupting essential provision.³¹ WCSOs reported several challenges with government funding, including insufficient funds (61%), short timeframes for implementation (38%), late transfer of funds (28%) and bureaucratic procedures (21%). Kosovo still lacks a stable contracting framework for services provided by (W)CSOs, as the Administrative Instruction on public-private partnership is not yet finalised or adopted, and there is no dedicated state budget line for CSO support.³²

Despite their recognised expertise and the fact that Kosovo's legal and policy framework requires gender mainstreaming, rarely have the Government or contractors supporting reforms engaged WCSOs as paid experts, implementers, monitors or evaluators. Government institutions seldom allocate resources to compensate WCSOs for their expertise in processes such as ex-ante gender impact assessments, participation in working groups for draft legislation, or support to mainstream gender across public programs. As a result, opportunities to strengthen the quality of policies and provide sustainable financing to WCSOs are missed.³³

Alternative Funding Sources and Resilience Strategies

Inspiringly, 91% of WCSOs said that even if donor funding stops, they will continue their work. The spirit of activism and dedication among WCSOs is perhaps the strongest quality underpinning their resilience.

Philanthropy and volunteerism could help WCSOs sustain their work. Indeed, Kosovo has a history of volunteerism and giving stemming from the 1990s and continuing today, particularly with diaspora contributions to Kosovar families' wellbeing and various development areas. Yet, potential contributors lack awareness on the benefits of supporting (W)CSOs.³⁴

“We are facing serious financial difficulties and are struggling to continue activities for children with disabilities.”
- Women's rights activist

“Even without active projects, we continue supporting women every month by helping them access benefits and essential services.”
- Women's rights activist

²⁹ See Main Level Consulting AG, *Kosovo Women's Network External Evaluation of the Kosovo Women's Network, its Strategy for 2015-2018 and Key Programs Contributing to this Strategy: Evaluation Report*, 2018, p. 22; KWN external evaluation of Austrian Development Cooperation support, forthcoming 2026.

³⁰ KWN discussions with KWN members and other stakeholders.

³¹ The Office of Good Governance within the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, *Government Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society 2026–2031* [draft], 2026, p. 19.

³² Ibid.

³³ See further KWN, *Where's the Money for Women's Rights? Funding Trends in the Western Balkans*, 2020.

³⁴ The Office of Good Governance within the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo, *Government Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society 2026–2031* [draft], 2026, p. 18.

Moreover, regulatory frameworks governing donations and volunteerism require refinement. For example, individuals and corporations enjoy tax benefits for donations to (W)CSOs undertaking public interest activities. However, the Law on Corporate Income Tax adopts a narrower definition of “public interest” than the NGO Law’s broader concept of “public benefit”, limiting eligible purposes of donations to humanitarian, health, education, religious, scientific, cultural, environmental protection and sports activities. As a result, donations to causes such as human and women’s rights are not tax-deductible for corporate donors, despite being recognised as contributing to the “public benefit” under the NGO Law.³⁵ A specific Law on Sponsorships offers higher deductions for donations, but only for sports, culture and youth.³⁶

While (W)CSOs in Kosovo generally are exempt from value added tax (VAT), exemptions for the supply of goods and services (in-kind donations) apply only to humanitarian and reconstruction programs. This narrow scope is not in line with EU practice, where broader exemptions cover non-profit activities more generally. Although monetary donations are normally not subject to VAT, it remains unclear whether this applies to certain fundraising methods, such as SMS donations.³⁷ Such legal inconsistencies and unclearities may create disproportionate incentives for certain types of support and can create obstacles for (W)CSOs when seeking to mobilise resources.

KWN’s Volunteer Program, among others, indicates strong interest in volunteering. However, the absence of a comprehensive and coherent legal framework limits the ability of WCSOs to fully harness this potential. A Law on Volunteerism has been initiated, but not yet finalised or adopted. Existing provisions exclude adult volunteers, impose restrictive requirements such as minimum hours of engagement and do not offer a comprehensive, institutionalised framework.³⁸

KWN asked WCSOs about contingency options. When asked if they could continue their work without offices, 47% of WCSOs indicated that they would operate from home, demonstrating a high level of adaptability. Others said they would work from alternative spaces such as public facilities (26%), another CSO’s office (11%) or schools (6%). Thus, space-sharing among WCSOs perhaps could decrease operational costs. When asked about their willingness to share their workspaces with other CSOs in their municipality, 45% indicated an openness to such collaboration. Another 48% answered “maybe”, citing office space limitations for accommodating others. These findings suggest a spirit of solidarity among many WCSOs, which are ready to support each other.

WCSO Needs

WCSOs shared several needs (Graph 6). Most (88%) identified financial support as their greatest need. Several said they need training and capacity building (50%), support in staff or volunteer management (27%), technical support, such as related to Internet Technology or website development (21%), support with awareness and advocacy campaigns (18%) and networking with other CSOs (17%). They also requested support with accessing resources (17%), monitoring and evaluation (12%) and policy development and legal assistance (11%).³⁹

³⁵ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, [Law No. 06/L-105 on Corporate Income Tax](#), 2019, Article 11; Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, [Law No. 06/L-043 on Freedom of Association in Non-governmental Organizations](#), 2019, Article 37.

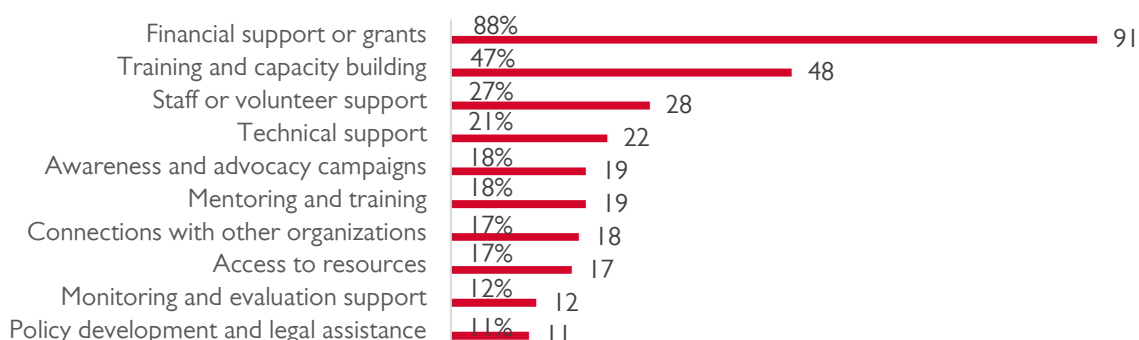
³⁶ KCSF, [Analysis of legal and regulatory framework on philanthropy in Kosovo](#), 2024, p. 16.

³⁷ As the VAT Law contains no specific exemption for telecommunication services, donations made via SMS or phone call may be treated as taxable services and therefore subject to VAT (ibid., pp. 14, 19).

³⁸ Sheremeti, C., “[Are Kosovo’s Policies Actually Helping Youth Who Want to Volunteer?](#)”, *Kosovo 2.0*, 16 July 2019.

³⁹ When asked specifically how KWN could better support them, most WCSOs requested financial support or grants (88%), training and capacity-building (47%), assistance with staff or volunteers (27%), support with technology (21%), mentoring and training (19%), awareness and advocacy campaigns (18%), access to resources (17%) and networking with other CSOs.

Graph 6. CSO Needs
(By % and # of WCSOs)



Specifically, WCSOs requested mentoring and training in topics, such as fundraising and project proposal writing (35%), alternative fundraising strategies (19%), advocacy and lobbying (17%), financial management (16%) and public communication (15%). Other topics requested include organisational governance (5%), monitoring and evaluation (4%), use of computers and digital tools (3%) and public relations (2%). While KWN has provided training and mentoring on these topics previously, including through the Kosovo Women's Fund, WCSOs' requests indicate the need for continued support, particularly amid new challenges and staff turnover.

When asked which type of funding would be most suitable for their organisation, WCSOs showed a strong preference for long-term grants (82%) and core (institutional) support (57%), highlighting the importance of stable, predictable funding. Meanwhile, 32% sought support for specific projects and 27% favoured flexible funding arrangements that allowed adaptive use of resources.

The main expense that WCSOs have for achieving their organisational objectives is staff, stated by 86% of WCSOs. This is unsurprising since planning, implementation, research, advocacy, awareness-raising, capacity development, service delivery, monitoring and evaluation all primarily require human resources. Altogether, WCSOs said they needed at least 415 full-time staff and 274 part-time staff to implement their activities and serve their target groups. Other costs included utilities (67%), transport reimbursement (65%), food and beverages for participants (58%), rent (46%), printing materials (42%) and meeting space (30%).

Conclusion

Kosovar WCSOs are very diverse and have diverse needs. Yet, they share a common thread of resilience and commitment to advancing women's rights, democracy and social justice. Evidence suggests a decrease in funding available to WCSOs and an uncertain future. Given the vital services and actions that WCSOs provide and take, insufficient funding can place persons with disabilities, minorities, youth, the elderly, violence survivors and others at risk of violence, poverty, addiction, illness and insufficient engagement in public life. Underfunding also threatens progress on inclusive, people-centred policies and reforms crucial to Kosovo's EU Accession.

In the past, the Government has supported many WCSOs, albeit short-term. Opportunities exist for expanding and improving such support, particularly for service providers and contracted expertise. Meanwhile, advocacy-oriented WCSOs, including watchdogs and think tanks, still need foreign support to remain independent and hold governments accountable, particularly until independent apolitical funding mechanisms can be established in Kosovo. Philanthropy and volunteerism can facilitate WCSOs' work if legal and regulatory barriers are reduced. Without addressing these constraints, Kosovo and its international

partners risk losing support from the very organisations that have been central to progress on gender equality, human rights, state-building processes and EU-aligned reforms.

Recommendations

Recommendations derive from findings and are adapted from prior research by KWN and other actors globally on resourcing women's movements.⁴⁰

For the Government of Kosovo

- Urgently take responsibility for allocating sufficient funding to **fully support specialised services** provided by WCSOs, particularly in the absence of state services, including but not limited to addressing gender-based violence in accordance with the Istanbul Convention, supporting persons with disabilities, elderly care, mental health, survivors of sexual violence and other services. **Permanent budget lines** should be established for these services based on evidenced needs, using gender-responsive budgeting annually to reassess costs to inform adequate budget allocations as per the Law on Gender Equality.
- Finalise and adopt the Administrative Instruction on public-private partnerships with WCSOs' input, enabling **multi-year social contracting** of WCSOs as implementers of publicly funded programs. This can reduce administrative burden for the Government and CSOs.
- Include in the forthcoming Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2025-2035 explicit commitments and targets for government funding of diverse WCSOs via the Agency for Gender Equality. Ensure long-term, stable funding via transparent grant-making processes that are co-created with WCSOs and based on their needs.
- Implement commitments to gender mainstreaming laws, policies, programs and budgets, including appropriate use of gender-responsive budgeting. Implement requirements for *ex ante* and *ex post* gender impact assessments. Allocate budgets for contracting experts to support the Government with these tasks. Ensure transparent procurement of experts offering this support, allowing WCSOs to apply as experts and independent evaluators (not only individuals and businesses).
- Improve legal frameworks and enabling environments for diverse (W)CSOs to fundraise from individuals and businesses. Align the Law on Corporate Income Tax with the NGO Law, broadening the definition of "public interest" to match the NGO Law's "public benefit" definition, ensuring that donations to women's rights initiatives are tax-deductible for corporate donors. Extend VAT exemptions on in-kind donations beyond humanitarian and reconstruction programs, clarifying the applicability of VAT exemptions to alternative fundraising methods such as SMS donations. Enable equitable tax incentives for donations to women's rights, comparable to existing deductions for sports, culture and youth.
- Establish a National Philanthropy Fund as a public-private matching fund endorsed by the Government to encourage large-scale charitable giving.
- Finalise the Law on Volunteerism and ensure it does not impose age or minimum-hour restrictions. Ensure that the Law on Volunteerism recognises volunteering as formal working experience.
- Ensure transparent and fair provision of public funds. Establish safeguards to mitigate risks of misuse, such as open calls with clear selection criteria, the engagement of independent evaluators and assurance of functioning complaint mechanisms.

⁴⁰ For further details and evidence, please see these more comprehensive publications that remain timely: Miller, K. & Jones, R., [Toward a Feminist Funding Ecosystem](#), AWID, 2019; KWN, [Where's the Money for Women's Rights? Funding Trends in the Western Balkans](#), 2020; and AWID, [Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots](#), 2013.

- Ensure that public funds are monitored, and impact is assessed through data disaggregated by gender, rural/urban location, age, ethnicity and disability.
- Simplify administrative processes for WCSOs applying for public funding by reducing unnecessary paperwork and digitalising processes.
- Make data regarding expenditures provided to civil society regularly publicly accessible, disaggregated by gender as per the Law on Gender Equality.

International Funders

- Continue allocating long-term, flexible financing particularly for think tanks, watchdogs and advocacy-oriented WCSOs so that they remain independent in holding the government accountable, towards safeguarding human rights, gender equality, good governance, democracy and an independent civil society.
- Utilise what AWID has coined as a “cocktail of modalities” in a “[dynamic funding ecosystem](#)” that includes core support, project grants and sub-granting for smaller WCSOs, addressing the needs of diverse WCSOs.
- Collaborate more with women’s funds to distribute grants to smaller WCSOs, as international evidence points to their efficiency and effectiveness.
- **Multiyear funding** and **core support** are crucial for contributing to more strategic long-term actions, **flexibility** amid unstable political situations, enhanced capacities, organisational sustainability and the achievement of impacts that require long-term engagement.
- Ensure dialogue with WCSOs about their funding needs, ways to address their needs, and best methods for furthering gender equality, co-creating funding modalities.
- Earmark future funds specifically for furthering gender equality and explicitly for WCSOs, prioritising funds to address significant inequalities identified through gender analyses, as foreseen by the WPS Agenda.
- Allocate financing for supporting WCSOs with cost-shares or remove such requirements. When required, allow well-documented in-kind contributions to contribute to cost-shares, recognising activists’ significant voluntary and in-kind contributions.
- Improve donor coordination and joint strategizing to further gender equality. Where possible, use pooled funding and joint reporting with other funders, towards minimising administrative burdens.
- Require obligatory ex ante gender analysis and gender mainstreaming of all programs in line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) gender marker criteria. Contract WCSOs and activists as experts to support this, compensating them for their expertise.
- Improve systems for tracking spending on gender equality, women’s rights, women and girls and direct support to WCSOs, respectively. Using best practices in gender-responsive budgeting, improve measure of funds allocated and spent.
- Require beneficiary governments to incorporate a gender perspective in programs funded through external financing and to implement gender-responsive budgeting, as part of funding agreements and direct budget support.

For the European Union

- As recommended by the European Institute for Gender Equality, introduce “an obligation for spending on gender equality, capacity-building among relevant officials for mainstreaming gender in the MFF and the budgetary processes and conducting gender budget analysis of all funding programs to analyse their impact on gender equality”.
- Establish binding requirements for furthering gender equality via external financing. Ensure that regulations for all instruments: 1) require ex ante gender impact assessments for all

actions; and that these analyses inform clear objectives, indicators and targets towards gender equality in actions, as per OECD DAC Gender Marker criteria; 2) earmark funding for gender equality like that set aside for the environment; 3) make gender-responsive budgeting obligatory; 4) require that all evaluations examine effects on gender equality; and 5) require regular tracking and reporting on actual expenditures on gender equality, women and girls and WCSOs, respectively.

- To effectively building the capacities of (W)CSOs in enlargement countries to manage EU funds, include conditionalities in eligibility criteria of all EU Civil Society Facility support, ensuring that funds *only* support *local* CSOs registered in beneficiary countries with established experience working in these countries.
- Earmark annual programming for furthering gender equality in sectors identified through gender analyses. This should go beyond Growth Plans, which tend to be gender neutral.
- As part of direct budget support to beneficiary governments (including related to the Growth Plan), always require indicators measuring progress towards gender equality.
- Through political dialogue related to the EU Accession process, encourage government action to improve gender equality, including by allocating resources to WCSOs.
- Support Kosovo to establish more sustainable funding for WCSO service providers assisting persons who have suffered violence.⁴¹ Similarly, encourage the government to allocate financing to contract other expert (W)CSO services, such as for persons with disabilities, the elderly and youth, among others.

⁴¹ KWN has established a methodology and has forthcoming research (2026) assessing the costs of providing specialised services related to the Istanbul Convention which can support costing.



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