

The Report Card was developed by the Coalition of NGO's for Child Protection - KOMF, within the frame of the project: "Strengthening social services to provide continued quality social services for most vulnerable children and their families", supported by UNICEF Kosovo in partnership with USAID Kosovo.

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KOSOVO CHILDREN¹



30%

of the total population of Kosovo are children²



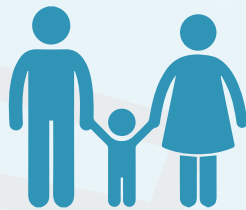
22.8%

of children live in poverty, and **7%** of children live in extreme poverty³



4%

only 4% of Kosovo budget is allocated for social policies and services, in 2022⁴



579

children without parental care⁵



14

children victims of trafficking⁶



2,341

criminal charges for minors⁷

592

cases of incidents of violence involving children in and around schools⁸

523

cases of children victims of domestic violence⁹

16

years old is the average age when people start to use drugs¹⁰

117 cases of death of newborn babies in 2022¹¹

91% is the vaccine coverage rate, according to the vaccination calendar of children¹²



45% has been the average of supply with medicines from the essential list in primary healthcare, in **2022**¹³

- only **15%** of children aged **3-4** attend early childhood education programs¹⁴
- Kosovo is ranked 76th out of 80 countries participating in PISA test, in **2022**
- only **609** schools are accessible for children with disabilities¹⁵
- only around **200** psychologists and pedagogues for **1047** schools¹⁶

¹ Latest data on children in Kosovo

² Kosovo Agency of Statistics

³ Kosovo Agency of Statistics

⁴ Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, 2022

⁵ Ministry of Justice, 2022

⁶ Ministry of Justice, 2022

⁷ Annual Work Report of the Prosecutor, 2022

⁸ Kosovo Police, 2022

⁹ Ministry of Justice, 2022

¹⁰ NGO Labyrinth, 2022

¹¹ Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2022

¹² National Institute of Public Health, 2022

¹³ Association of Kosovo Municipalities, 2022

¹⁴ MICS Multiple Indicator Survey 2020, Kosovo Agency of Statistics and UNICEF

¹⁵ Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, 2022

¹⁶ Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, 2022

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INTRODUCTION

Kosovo has undertaken steps to create policies and the legal framework regarding child protection. Kosovo must implement the legislation and provide adequate resources through which it will strengthen the child protection system.

The entry into force of the Law on Child Protection has created a new legal momentum in terms of child protection in Kosovo. This momentum and legal obligation requires from institutions to undertake concrete actions to make functional and implement the provisions of this Law, which in content is the first of its kind in Kosovo.

In order to achieve and implement child protection rights, there is a need for awareness, mobilization and increase of capacities regarding the roles and responsibilities of the family, child protection institutions and community.

The Report Card points out that Kosovo has a big gap between the approved legislation and its implementation. With this Report Card, we aim to introduce the gaps between policies and their implementation, by providing available facts and a general baseline, which would trigger debates regarding child protection policies and their implementation.

Kosovo should make financial investments to build capacities that would reduce the gap between the approved legislation and its implementation.

The Report Card offers opportunities for all actors to unify and strengthen the understanding of the child protection situation in our country. We expect the government, municipalities, donors and civil society to use the Report Card recommendations in order to increase the provision of services, institutional capacity, accountability, to close the gap between legislation and its implementation.

Donjeta Kelmendi
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Coalition of NGO's for Child Protection

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KOMF appreciates the support of the officials from the Department of Social Services and Child Protection, Probation Service and Correctional Service within the Ministry of Justice, Department of Social Schemes and Transfers within the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, Human Rights Division and Division of Inclusive Education within Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. KOMF also appreciates the support from the officials of the Ministry of Health, Kosovo Police, Association of Kosovo Municipalities, Pediatric Clinic, Psychiatric Clinic of the University Clinical Center of Kosovo, regional hospitals, mental health centers and Kosovo Agency of Statistics for providing the latest official information and data regarding the situation of children.

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METHODOLOGY

What is Kosovo's overall score for childcare? This is the first edition of the annual monitoring report from the Coalition of NGO's for Child Protection - KOMF, regarding the situation of children and the implementation of the Law on Child Protection.

The monitoring methodology for Kosovo context through the "Report Card" was developed by the international expert for child protection, Mr. George Bogdanov. George is also the President of the National Network for Children in Bulgaria, which for more than 10 years monitors the situation of children's rights in Bulgaria through the Report Card and which at the same time has been a motivating factor for KOMF to start this process. This monitoring instrument is used also by many other civil society organizations in various countries around the world, such as Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Canada, California, etc.

The main goal of KOMF through the publication of this report, is to perform an annual independent monitoring of civil society in the field of children's rights, based on facts and evidence. The report provides data regarding the status of children's rights, level of implementation of the Law on Child Protection and outlines recommendations that are expected to support improvement of policies and services regarding child protection rights in Kosovo.

The fields in which progress in terms of policies, legislation regarding the protection of children's rights and its implementation were analyzed, are: Social welfare; Child protection; Child health, Early childhood development, Education and Juvenile justice.

The report includes facts and data regarding the status of children's rights in Kosovo for the above mentioned fields. The analysis is based on official data and sources, and is not a subjective assessment of KOMF. Data sources are cited in the relevant references. In addition to constructive criticism, the report focuses on both achievements and shortcomings or regression.

With the aim of a more transparent and impartial assessment, support was requested from ministries, agencies and public institutions on collecting data and information regarding the achieved progress and challenges in the relevant fields. This detailed information was after used as a basis for analysis for each field. Other sources include data from reports of non-governmental organizations, government agencies and institutions, and media publications.

Authors, in this report have provided an assessment of the fields. The evaluation is based on a grading system, same as the one for pupils in Kosovo schools, from grade one to grade five, as follows: grade "1 = Insufficient", grade "2 = Sufficient", grade "3 = Good", grade "4 = Very good" and grade "5 = Excellent". Authors have provided concrete arguments to support their grading. Having in mind that one field can have more than one author, (that is, co-authors of fields), the arithmetic average method was used, meaning that authors' evaluations were used to arrive at the final evaluation and overall field average.

The process also involves external evaluators who have provided their evaluation through grading. The report agreed within KOMF (without grading given by authors) was sent to the external evaluators with the respective evaluation criteria. The external evaluation team consists of experts and professionals with experience in fields covered by the report. At the end of this evaluation, a joint meeting with the external evaluators has been organized to discuss and confirm the final evaluation.

SCORECARD: GRADING

The grading scale for the fields covered in the report is from **1 to 5**, with corresponding guidelines for assessment and grading. Evaluation was performed according to the detailed instructions for evaluation, starting from situation

review in the country, children's rights, policies for children and families, decisions and actions taken by institutions to solve problems, implementation of these decisions, their impact on children and families.

The following guidelines were used as a basis for the assessment:

Assessment / Grade	Progress
5	State institutions have successfully implemented actions by effectively undertaking measures, which have shown efficiency. This success has brought an important, positive, lasting and visible change in lives of children and families in Kosovo. This grade is given for continued efforts of institutions to successfully implement actions, ensuring a continuous positive impact for children and families.
4	There is commitment, planning and concrete steps have been undertaken. This commitment has an impact on a wide range of children. Institutions show commitment by following structured plans and taking actions to address challenges. Results are documented for a specific group of children. This evaluation is valid also in case when institutions have expressed political willingness to solve problems and have prepared plans for the implementation of actions, however, results have not yet been achieved for all the groups of children involved in these plans.
3	Institutions declare that they will engage in addressing problems and are ready to develop plans, however, planned steps are being delayed, postponed, and do not bring needed final results. In their commitment to solve issues, institutions have shown a political willingness and have prepared structured plans, however, results have not yet been achieved for all groups of children for which plans have been prepared.
2	Institutions declare that they are committed to solve problems, however, they do not provide necessary financial and human resources, and there is a lack of real and sustainable actions. Although institutions have expressed the will to address the issues, however, undertaken steps are minimal, sporadic, and/or inconsistent, without bringing visible results. (This can be attributed to lack of competence of main state institutions to solve problems).
1	Institutions do not undertake concrete actions to address problems and do not recognize recommendations on solving issues (they are not in the focus of the priorities of responsible institution). Actions taken are wrong and there are no results. In general, although the institutions have a supportive position, the actions have not brought the desired effect.

Field	GRADE
1. SOCIAL WELFARE	2.6
2. CHILD PROTECTION	2.5
3. CHILDREN'S HEALTH	2.25
4. EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT	2.25
5. EDUCATION	2.5
6. JUVENILE JUSTICE	2

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE GRADING OF THE REPORT CARD

SOCIAL WELFARE

Grade: 2.6

Kosovo focuses its support toward social welfare of children and families, mainly through social transfers. The current system of social protection in Kosovo does not sufficiently address the various needs of vulnerable children and families. Social transfers have very limited impact on reducing child and family poverty, resulting in high rates of child poverty in comparison to other countries in the region. Commencement of the revision process of social assistance legislation, is considered a positive step, as it is expected to eliminate the discriminatory criteria for children and to increase inclusion of children and families living in poverty. Adoption of the new Law on Social and Family Services, which officially opens the process of social services reform in the country, is considered an achievement. The main challenge in the field of social services remains the unstable financing, thus risking the closure or quality reduction of many social services for children and families in need. The draft Law on Local Government Financing, which has been finalized several years ago, is expected to create a Specific Grant for Social Services and to regulate the sustainable financing of social services, however, this Law has not been adopted yet. The process of costing of social services and establishing a financing formula, although started many years ago, has not yet been completed. Likewise, there was no mapping of services and population needs for services, that would also inform central and municipal policymakers in creating programs and planning social programs and services according to the needs.

CHILD PROTECTION

Grade: 2.5

Despite of the fact that the Law on Child Protection entered into force in 2020, this law has not yet been fully implemented. By-laws deriving from this law have not yet been completed. Out of 17 administrative instructions deriving from this law, nine have been adopted while the other eight have not been adopted. The new services and programs foreseen by the Law on Child Protection have not yet been established. Prevention is not yet a key element of child protection services. Likewise, the free child helpline and the child protection houses have not yet been established. Among the main challenges in the protection of children without parental care, remains the delay in resolving the status of children without parental care and services for children without parental care in difficult conditions and those after the age of 18. A positive step is the increase of the monthly payment for children in foster care and the development of programs dedicated to increase capacities of foster families for children without parental care, potential adoptive parents and professionals. In Kosovo, we currently have a fragmented child protection system, as a result, services between education, social welfare and health sectors, are not integrated. Identification and reporting or self reporting of children in situations of violence and systemic treatment of violence cases, are still problematic issues. Kosovo still lacks specialized services that would deal with the protection and reintegration of children involved in child labour. Regarding trafficking, identification of children victims of trafficking, justice system treatment and the long-term reintegration, remain among the biggest challenges. In order to address trafficking in a planned and coordinated manner with all competent authorities, the Government adopted the National Strategy for the Fight Against Human Trafficking.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Grade: 2.25

There is lack of statistical data on breastfeeding rate, number of children with disabilities, number of children that consume tobacco, alcohol and number of children that use drugs. Infant mortality in Kosovo, although decreased over the years, is still the highest compared to countries in the region. Vaccination coverage rate of children reaches 91%.¹⁷ An achievement has been the expansion of the Vaccination Calendar with three new vaccines for children, rotavirus vaccine, pneumococcal meningitis vaccine and HPV vaccine against cervical cancer. Regarding tertiary health system, operationalization of the new surgical-pediatric hospital has improved health care for children. Lack of medicines in the primary health care, regional hospitals and University Clinical Center of Kosovo, still remains problematic. The Law on Health Insurance, adopted in 2014, never entered into force. Government support for the provision of rehabilitation health services for children with disabilities, remains very limited. Our country still does not provide sustainable prevention services and programs that are more than necessary considering the growing trends of drug use by children and teenagers.¹⁸ Kosovo does not have special rehabilitation services for children victims of drug abuse. Requests from children for mental health services have increased, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to maintain a complete physical and mental well-being, Ministry of Health approved the Action Plan for Mental Health after the Covid-19 Pandemic. However, resources available for children's mental health in public health facilities, are very limited. Consumption of energy drinks is another concern for children's health in Kosovo and there is still no legal regulation regarding this issue.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Grade: 2.25

Kosovo still remains the country with the lowest inclusion of children in preschool education, compared to other countries in the region. The main reason for such low inclusion is the small absorption capacity of preschool institutions network and the general awareness on the traditional forms of education in the family. Preschool institutions are mostly focused in urban areas, and rural areas are almost excluded from access to early childhood development services. There is lack of sufficient alternative programs to support parents, services for early intervention in the family environment, day centers, learning centers, community centers, parents support groups. Children from vulnerable groups, although exempt from the payment fee, often are not included in preschool institutions. Early childhood care and education is even more important for children with disabilities, where early identification and intervention are largely lacking. Early childhood development services are not integrated with education, health and social care sectors. A positive step was the adoption of the Law on Early Childhood Education, which, among other issues, is expected to begin the integration of early childhood services. Although drafting of the Early Education Curriculum started years ago as a process, it has not been adopted.

¹⁷Data from the Ministry of Health, 2022

¹⁸Data from Organization Labyrinth

EDUCATION

Grade: 2.5

Education faces numerous challenges and problems, which reflect in the low quality of education in Kosovo. Kosovo was ranked among the lasts in the Program for International Students Assessment, PISA, where it ranked 76th out of 80 participating countries for reading, while it ranked in the 77th place out of 80 countries, for science. There are many factors that influence Kosovo to have such low quality in education, such as the quality of teachers' performance, quality of textbooks, the very large number of pupils in classes, especially in cities, lack of infrastructure in schools, bad management, politicization of educational staff in schools, non-functioning of cooperation between parents, teachers and pupils, low accountability, etc. Kosovo's institutions have made steps in the advancement of policies and legislation by attempting to implement the concept of inclusiveness as an integral part of all policies in education. However, there is still much work to be done in terms of implementing policies and developing mechanisms that ensure inclusiveness. Majority of municipalities have established municipal teams for the evaluation of children with disabilities, but in most municipalities these teams are not functional. Schools lack professional and support staff such as psychologists, pedagogues and assistants for children with disabilities. More specifically, not even one quarter of schools have psychologists employed. The decision of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation regarding the employment of 100 assistants for children with disabilities, was an action to be complimented. According to official data, there is a low level of school dropout, however, there is a higher rate of school dropout in Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, and this is a worrying phenomenon for these communities. Likewise, in the majority of municipalities, teams for prevention and response to dropout and non-enrollment in compulsory education level, are not adequately functional. Community learning centers are facing a series of challenges, due to lack of funding and neglect of institutional responsibilities, thus, risking their closure.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Grade: 2

Services for the prevention and protection of minors in conflict with the law without criminal responsibility, are largely absent. This happens due to the very limited capacities within Centers for Social Work, and due to the distinct lack of services from non-governmental sector. Establishment of the Team for monitoring and implementation of Administrative Instruction for the protection and treatment of children who commit criminal offenses without criminal responsibility, has been a positive step. Although the new Juvenile Justice Code (JJC) has doubled diversity measures, which play a decisive role in preventing the initiation of court proceedings against minors and promoting their rehabilitation and reintegration into society, the implementation of diversity measures faces challenges. Moreover, in the recent years, a significant decline in applying these measures has been observed in the juvenile justice system. Juveniles with educational measures are placed in a closed type institution, which is a violation of the Juvenile Justice Code (JJC) provisions, and which is a serious violation of the fundamental children's rights. This is due to the fact that the Open Education Center does not accept direct admissions based on the Court decision, but only transfers from the Correctional Center. A constant concern is caused by the fact that in the absence of a correctional center for female minors, they are placed in a center with adult female detainees/convicts. There is a large number of Correctional Center officers and a very small number of professional staff. The primary goal of the current organization is safety, preventing minors escape, by largely neglecting the work on rehabilitation, education and reintegration of minors, which is the purpose of these measures.



SOCIAL WELFARE

SOCIAL WELFARE

Grade: 2.6

- ▶ Social transfers have a very limited impact in reducing poverty of children and families
- ▶ Unsustainable financing risks closing or reducing quality of many social services for children and families
- ▶ Lack of mapping services and population needs for services



DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND GENERAL DATA



30%

OF THE TOTAL POPULATION OF KOSOVO ARE CHILDREN

Kosovo has a total of 1,739,825 inhabitants. The unemployment rate is 11.8%.¹⁹

The average salary is 521 Euro. It is worth noting that during 2022, inflation was at a high rate of 11.58%.²⁰

Currently in Kosovo, social support is oriented towards the monthly monetary payment assistance within the social schemes. Meanwhile, there is still lack of alternative programs to support and empower families, through the provision of necessary services.²¹

The budget for financing of social and pension schemes for 2022, for social protection, was over 600 million euros for the financing of regular schemes, without including the support provided for double payments or supplements that have been applied for social and pension categories in last

two months of 2022, which were financed according to the decisions and measures of the Government within the frame of the economic recovery program. Regarding the percentage of expenditures for social policies and social services (cash payments, for families in social assistance, foster care, payments for families with children with disabilities, payments of child and maternity benefits, support for energy subsidy program for poor families, support for NGOs sector through public calls and funding of residential institutions at the central level), was approximately 4% of Kosovo budget, approved for 2022.²²

CHILD POVERTY AND FAMILY EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS

Kosovo has still a high rate of children living in poverty and a high level of social exclusion of children. There are no official data on child poverty, for the last four years. According to Kosovo Agency of Statistics data for 2019, in Kosovo, 22.7% of children live in poverty and 7% of children live in extreme poverty.



22.7%

OF CHILDREN LIVE IN POVERTY

¹⁹ Data from Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2022

²⁰ Data from Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2022

²¹ Social services monitoring report, KOMF 2022, https://komfkosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Raporti-i-monitorimit_AL-1-1.pdf

²² Official data from the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfer, 2022

These disturbing data reveal the challenges of a large group of children in Kosovo, who experience malnutrition, lack of necessary clothing and poor living conditions, which hinder children's well-being and development.

Child poverty and social exclusion are result of many factors, such as unemployment, low level of population's education, poor healthcare, lack of access to services, poor early childhood care and other similar factors. The greatest inequalities still exist among the poorest children, children from marginalized communities such as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and children with disabilities.

Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers continued to implement schemes aimed at reducing poverty and empowering families in Kosovo. The main support program for families was the Social Assistance Scheme and Child Benefits²³.

Another program for the support of families, was the program for support of unemployed and employed mothers of newborn babies, where approximately 7,000 unemployed mothers benefited in the amount of 170 Euros for 6 months and approximately 1,500 employed mothers in the amount of 170 Euros for 3 months.²⁴

Likewise, the Government through several programs, with support from donors, has been engaged in the implementation of several measures, such as the employment of at least one family member for families that do not have anybody employed, employment of persons with disabilities and inclusion of young people in employment.²⁵ Meanwhile, there are no data if any person which was in social assistance scheme have benefited from these measures. These measures were implemented through the economic recovery program which is problematic, because it is a temporary program and does not provide sustainability.

Investments have not been sufficient in order to make difference for the overall population in reducing poverty and in inequalities among children. Developing programs on poverty reduction and family empowerment, ensuring equal access to services and ensuring sustainable financing, are necessary steps to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable children and families in Kosovo.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME



45,000

CHILDREN BENEFICIARIES OF THE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME²⁶



275,444

CHILDREN HAVE RECEIVED CHILD BENEFITS IN THE AMOUNT OF 10 OR 20 EUROS²⁷

During 2022, 22,980 families have been beneficiaries of social assistance, with a total number of 90,806 family members. Out of this number, around 45,000 or 50% of them are children that also benefited from an additional 10 euros within their family. The amount of social assistance was ranging from 70 to 250 Euros per month. Likewise, families receiving social assistance, due to inflation, benefited from a double payment in the last two months of 2022.²⁸ The monthly amount of the social assistance is too small to meet the basic living conditions of the family, especially with the inflation that has occurred in the last three years.

The Social assistance scheme is financed by the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, and is administered by the Centers for Social Work, in each municipality.

The social assistance scheme is not well adjusted and does not include all children and families living in poverty. Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers officials, have also stated that a number of families and children who have a difficult economic situation, are not part of the social assistance scheme beneficiaries. This is due to the criteria set in the Law on Social Assistance, such as the criteria where it is specified that the family must have at least one child under the age of 5 in order to benefit from the social

²³ Data from the Department of Social Schemes and Transfers, Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, 2022

²⁴ Data from the Department of Social Schemes and Transfers, Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, 2022

²⁵ Data from the Department of Social Schemes and Transfers, Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, 2022

²⁶ Data from the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, 2022

²⁷ Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, 2022

²⁸ Data from the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, 2022

assistance scheme, confirmation and assessment that the members of the family economy are subject of evaluations from medical commissions regarding their ability to work, lack of identification of accurate incomes and revenues to measure the family economy level of well-being, etc.²⁹ Criteria (I) in Category II, Article 4, where it is determined that family must have at least one child under the age of 5, is discriminatory and absolutely unacceptable by all actors involved in the scheme and also by the beneficiaries. According to this criterion, families in poverty who do not have children under the age of 5, fall into an unfavorable position, this criterion also excludes families who received social assistance until the time when the child reaches the age of 5, exactly when the child should start school and consequently the family will have even bigger expenses. All these shortcomings are expected to be addressed and regulated by the new Law on the Social Assistance Scheme, where it is expected to eliminate the discriminatory criteria and create opportunities for families with low incomes below the defined level, to benefit from the support of the scheme social assistance. Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers has started the process of compiling the new Draft Law of the Social Assistance Scheme, however, this draft law has not yet been approved. As a result, the current law continues to contain discriminatory criteria for children, thus, violating their essential rights.

In general, the current social protection system in Kosovo, although it provides a financial assistance, fails to respond to the diverse needs of vulnerable families and children. It is imperative to have a more comprehensive approach to ensure equal access to support services and full family empowerment. Currently, the social assistance scheme managed by Centers for Social Work operates separately, almost completely isolated from social services. It is estimated that a significant number of families living in poverty need also social and family services. Therefore, it is more than necessary to integrate the social assistance scheme and social services within the Centers for Social Work, as well as to connect them with employment centers.

CHILD BENEFITS

Since 2021, Government has started to provide child benefits, where it has established the model of universal

welfare schemes, offering benefits of equal amount to all children regardless of the economic condition of the family. During 2022, a total of 275,444 children have benefited from this scheme. All children aged 0 - 24 months have benefited from the additional amount of 20 Euros per month, while children over the age of 2 up to 16 years, have benefited from an additional amount of 10 Euros per month.³⁰

Child benefits are available for children up to the age of 16, so, ages of 17 to 18 are not included. According to Kosovo legislation, definition of children includes ages of 0 to 18 years, therefore, child benefits must cover children up to 18 years old. Currently, child benefits do not have a sustainable legal basis, they are offered based on a decision within the emergency package from Covid – 19 period.

It is more than necessary to draft the legal basis for child benefits in order to ensure their sustainability. Monthly amount allocated is low, it is not enough to meet children's needs.

Likewise, vulnerable children such as children without parental care and some children from marginalized families have not received child benefits, due to the inability to register on e-kosova platform.³¹

MATERIAL SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

In Kosovo, the right to material assistance for children with disabilities is defined as a protection element for this category. However, the Law on Material Support for Families of Children with Permanent Disability does not guarantee a comprehensive protection for all children with disabilities, but recognizes the right to material compensation only for children with permanent physical, mental and sensory disabilities, who are completely unable to perform the daily life activities without receiving care from another person.³² This law provides support for only approximately 3,000 children with disabilities, excluding the vast majority of children with disabilities. Therefore, it discriminates and does not cover all children with disabilities. Furthermore, the financial support in the amount of 100 euros offered to children and their families, is insufficient for children with disabilities needs.

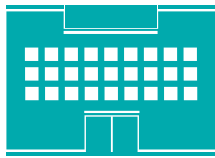
²⁹Data from the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, 2022

³⁰Data from the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, 2022

³¹Data from SOS Children's Villages and Organization for Children without Parental Care

³²Law on Material Support for Families of Children with Permanent Disability, <https://mpms.rks-gov.net/en/wpdm-package/law-on-material-support-for-families-of-children-with-permanent-disability-pdf/>

SOCIAL SERVICES



38

CENTERS FOR SOCIAL WORK IN 38 MUNICIPALITIES WITH 404 OFFICIALS³³



50

ORGANIZATIONS LICENSED TO OFFER SOCIAL SERVICES³⁴

Social services are provided by Centers for Social Work, other public providers and from around 50 non-governmental organizations licensed to provide social services.

In the territory of Kosovo, there are 38 Centers for Social Work, in 38 municipalities with around 404 officials, out of which 164 are social service officials. Centers for Social Work are the main bodies of municipal public authorities mandated to provide social services for children and families in need and to coordinate the integrated system of services. Centers for Social Work do not have the necessary human and financial resources for the provision of social services. Centers for Social Work were overwhelmed with emergency response, leaving aside preventive and reintegrated services. This was not only as a consequence of the insufficient number of officials in the Centers for Social Work, but also due to not setting the formula regarding the number of social service officials needed, in relation with the number of population or number of cases.



85

CASES ON AVERAGE FOR ONE SOCIAL SERVICE OFFICIAL



ONLY 10 MILLION EUROS FOR SOCIAL SERVICES³⁵



ONLY 8 INSPECTIONS OF SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS DURING 2022³⁶

Highest case load in relation to social services officials, are registered in bigger municipalities, such as in the Center for Social Work in Ferizaj, which presented that one official has 270 cases per year, and the Center for Social Work Prishtina, which presented that one official has 318 cases per year. Only 28% of Centers for Social Work have relatively good infrastructural conditions, while the rest of them provide services in unsuitable working spaces.



HALF OF CSW's ARE NOT ACCESSIBLE FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

More than half of Centers for Social Work have difficult or impossible accessibility for children with disabilities. In Centers for Social Work, the representation of professions is unbalanced, mostly, there are lawyers, followed by sociologist, pedagogues, psychologists and social workers.

³³ Analysis of Centers for Social Work, KOMF and Ministry of Justice, 2023

³⁴ Analysis of Centers for Social Work, KOMF and Ministry of Justice, 2023

³⁵ Data from the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, 2022

³⁶ Data from the Ministry of Justice, 2022

It is worth noting that only 12 social workers are employed in the Centers for Social Work.³⁷

Main services provided by Centers for Social Work were assessment, counseling, enabling contact between family members, providing professional opinion, placing children without parental care in fundamental forms of legal and family protection, providing assistance for persons with disabilities and elderly persons, and case referral on obtaining adequate specialized services in accordance to the specific categories, from the non-governmental sector.³⁸

50 licensed non-governmental organizations have provided specialized services for special categories of children. Specifically, 10 shelters have provided 24-hour residential services for the protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of children victims of domestic violence, abuse, neglect and trafficking. Approximately 30 Day Care Centers for children and adults with disabilities have provided social services on daily basis for early intervention for children with disabilities, psychosocial, rehabilitation and counseling services and services to empower parents of children with disabilities. Other services provided by non-governmental organizations include services in support of alternative care for children without parental care, such as services for children without parental care in foster families and SOS families, services for family empowerment and prevention of child abandonment, support for young people. Services are also offered to children that use narcotic substances. A day care center for children in street situation has been opened in Nashec, in Prizren Municipality, becoming the second Day Care Center for children in street situation in our country.³⁹

An important achievement was the approval of the new Law on Social and Family Services, started five years ago, which develops the reform of social services. From this law, it is expected that children, families and citizens in need, will receive more quality and sustainable social and family services. The new law is expected to bring innovations, such as: Increasing the range of services, establishing new services by defining prevention, protection, rehabilitation and reintegration services; Establishing an open scheme for the provision of social services between public, non-governmental and private sectors; Developing and strengthening of family and community-based services; Division of responsibilities of central and municipal level institutions; Strengthening inspection by granting it executive powers; Regulation of the contracting social and family services.

The main challenge for social service providers from the non-governmental sector, remains the unsustainable financing for the provision of social services from the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers and from the municipalities.⁴⁰

It is worth noting that compared to the previous years, funding for shelters has been more sustainable.



**FINANCING OF SOCIAL SERVICES IS ONLY FOR
SHORT TIME PERIODS
6 UP TO 10 MONTHS**

However, funding continued to be provided through subsidies for short periods of time, meaning few months (6 to 10 months) and is not based on the needs of beneficiaries. Whereas social services for children with disabilities provided by day care centers, have mainly remained under the support of foreign agencies and donors, while state support remains very limited. The unstable nature of providing these services minimizes the full inclusion of children with disabilities and limits the long-term rehabilitation plan needed to help children with disabilities to reach their full potential.⁴¹

Municipalities and the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers have not created a sustainable contracting scheme for the purchase of social services from the non-governmental sector, and support to non-governmental organizations has been provided on ad hoc basis and through subsidies. Financial means allocated for the non-governmental organization's projects are considered insufficient and they cover only a small portion of the overall services costs. It is worth to mention that the short duration of published calls for the provision of services and the time gaps between these calls from the Ministry and municipalities, are continuously causing difficulties in the functioning of social service providers. The budget allocated by municipalities is mainly divided proportionally in equal amounts among service providers, without taking into account the needs of the beneficiaries. This manner of financing risks the termination of services provided by the non-governmental sector, therefore an immediate intervention is recommended for the development of a sustainable scheme through the establishment of a specific and simpler mechanism for the purchase of services, which takes into account the specificities of social services and their potential providers. Due to the sensitivity of social services,

³⁷ Analysis of Centers for Social Work, 2023, <https://komfkosova.org/analiza-mbi-gjendjen-aktuale-te-qendrave-per-pune-sociale/>

³⁸ Analysis of Centers for Social Work, 2023, <https://komfkosova.org/analiza-mbi-gjendjen-aktuale-te-qendrave-per-pune-sociale/>

³⁹ Data from member organization: Terre des hommes

⁴⁰ Social services monitoring report, KOMF 2022, https://komfkosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Raporti-i-monitorimit_AL-1-1.pdf

⁴¹ Data from Down Syndrome Kosova, Day care center Pema, Handikos Gjakova, Handikos Ferizaj

they should be presented as a separate category in the Law on Public Procurement.⁴²

Likewise, the sustainable contracting scheme and needs-based funding cannot be achieved without setting a costing of social services and a financing formula. The process of calculating costs and establishing a financing formula, started five years ago but has not been completed yet. Likewise, there was no mapping of services and population needs for services that would inform municipal and central policy makers in creating programs and planning services according to the needs.

The total funding for social services during 2022 was around 10 million Euros. Social services are an independent municipal competence and based on the Law on Local Government Finances, they are financed from municipalities through two sources of funding, namely: the general grant and municipal own source revenues. The problem for social services begins right here, because all departments receive budget from these two sources and this manner does not guarantee that there will be sufficient budget allocations in order to ensure the minimum funding for social services. This is because there is no financing formula for allocating the budget amount for operational and capital social services. So that this municipal function does not remain at the will of the municipal level, it has been suggested to establish a Specific Grant for Social Services.⁴³ The draft Law on Local Government Finances, finalized a few years ago, which is expected to establish the Specific Grant for Social Services and to regulate sustainable financing of social services, has not been approved yet.⁴⁴ With the entry into force of the draft Law on Local Government Finances and the establishment of the Specific Grant for Social Services, it is estimated that the budget for social services within first year of its implementation, will increase by 10 million Euros.⁴⁵

Accountability in the field of social services, continues to be unregulated. Monitoring and inspection mandate of social services has continued to be unclear and undefined. The Unit for Monitoring and Inspection within the Ministry does not have executive powers yet, it has only an advisory function, which weakens the role of inspection in front of social service providers.⁴⁶ Likewise, the small number of staff for the inspection of social service providers is a challenge, as actually there are only two officials appointed to perform inspections. During 2022, out of about 120 providers of public and non-governmental social services, only 8 inspections were carried out.⁴⁷

Structured data management processes are not fully functional. First of all, it is stated that the database of social services is not sufficiently and regularly updated with data, and even the registered data is not used for planning services or budgets, nor as a basis for developing programs or policies. Another disadvantage is the fact that only Centers for Social Work have access to this database, data on beneficiaries from the non-governmental and private providers of social services, are not included.

For the first time in 2022, Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers has started to develop the necessary training programs for social services that are subject to accreditation process. It is planned to design and accredit a total of 24 social services programs. Currently, there are no accredited training programs for social services, trainings are being organized on ad hoc basis and they depend mainly on donors or non-governmental organizations. Therefore, this initiative is a positive step in increasing capacities of social service providers.

⁴² Analysis of Centers for Social Work, Ministry of Justice and KOMF, 2023, <https://komfkosova.org/analiza-mpi-gjendjen-aktuale-te-qendrave-per-pune-sociale/>

⁴³ Manual for Planning, Financing and Contracting Social Services, KOMF, <https://komfkosova.org/manual-for-planning-budgeting-and-contracting-social-services/?lang=en>

⁴⁴ Data from Ministry of Finance, 2022

⁴⁵ Data from Ministry of Finance, 2022

⁴⁶ Position paper on new Law on Social and Family Services, KOMF, Ombudsman Institution, Association of Kosovo Municipalities, Association of Centers for Social Work, SOS Children's Villages, Organization for Children without Parental Care, <https://komfkosova.org/position-paper-on-specific-grant-for-social-services/?lang=en>

Recommendations:

- ▶▶ Adopt the new Law on Social Assistance, exclusion of discriminatory criteria for children. Increase the monthly amount of social assistance in order to cope with the inflation of the recent years;
- ▶▶ Draft and adopt the legal basis for child benefits;
- ▶▶ Include the age group 17 to 18 years old, within the frame of the child benefits scheme; Increase monetary amount for child benefits;
- ▶▶ Enable child benefits for children without parental care and children from marginalized families;
- ▶▶ Integrate or connect social assistance service with social and family services and with employment offices, with the aim of reducing poverty, increasing family wellbeing and increasing employment;
- ▶▶ Develop and implement services and programs to support families, aiming at providing services with the family being at the center of these services and providing integrated services;
- ▶▶ Develop and implement a family empowerment strategy to help families address economic and social challenges and improve their overall wellbeing. Social services, economic empowerment and good parenting programs should be available to all families living in poverty and identified as families in need;
- ▶▶ Adopt the new legislation for the recognition of the status, assessment and support for all children with disabilities;
- ▶▶ Map existing social services and current needs in each municipality, to precisely identify missing services and plan their development. This would also help in realistic annual planning of services according to needs and budget planning based on evidence;
- ▶▶ Set a formula for the employment of social services officials by the Ministry, in accordance to the needs of population and establishing of the minimum standards to set the workload per official and the average number of cases to be handled;
- ▶▶ Increase the number of employees with work profiles of “social worker” and “psychologist” in all Centers for Social Work;
- ▶▶ Define social services that can be provided by the Center for Social Work. Services that cannot be provided by the Center for Social Work must be presented in the annual plan for purchasing of these services from non-governmental or private sector;
- ▶▶ Provide sufficient and appropriate work spaces in Centers for Social Work, for those which do not have such spaces. Ensuring accessibility for children with disabilities to the Centers for Social Work, according to standards defined in A.I. 33/2007 and to international standards;
- ▶▶ Review and modify of Centers for Social Work database, as well as identification of data management modalities in order to be informed in real time, including the data of beneficiaries provided from the non-governmental and private social services providers, monitoring data and evaluation data;
- ▶▶ Establish a sustainable scheme by the Ministry and municipalities on social and family services contracting, from the non-governmental sector. Ministry and municipalities must increase the financing threshold for social services, must reduce time gaps between calls for service providers, finance services for a three-years’ time period and sign contracts with the licensed organizations;
- ▶▶ Draft and adopt the Administrative Instructions deriving from new Law on Social and Family Services;
- ▶▶ Approve the Law on Local Government Finances in order to establish the specific grant for social and family services. This grant will have clear criteria in order to ensure a fair distribution and adequate funding for social services;
- ▶▶ Adequate, gender-sensitive costing of social and family services. Financing formula for social services should derive the cost per unit for each beneficiary for social services and should take into account the social criteria and indicators in municipalities;
- ▶▶ Amend the Law on Public Procurement in order to establish a specific and simple mechanism for the purchase of social services;
- ▶▶ Accredite social services programs and continuous capacity building of social service providers.



CHILD PROTECTION

CHILD PROTECTION

Grade: 2.5

- ▶ Lack of preventive services and long-term reintegration services for children
- ▶ Fragmented child protection system, services among education, welfare and health sectors are not integrated
- ▶ Identification, reporting and low self reporting of children in situations of violence



500

children without parental care to relatives (kinship care)⁴⁸

579

Children without parental care⁴⁹

79

children without parental care in foster families⁵⁰

9

domestic adoptions accomplished⁵¹

CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTAL CARE

The Law on Child Protection defines the protection of children without parental care through fundamental forms of legal and family protection: guardianship, foster care, residential care, adoption, and supervised independent living.⁵²

In total 579 children without parental care were placed in foster care, in 2022. Meanwhile, 12 infant children were abandoned. It is worth mentioning that compared to the previous years, there is a decrease in the number of abandoned children.⁵³ 500 children without parental care were placed in the homes of their relatives (kinship care). Whereas, 79 children were placed in foster families.

In 2022, 11 requests for adoption were reviewed, out of which, 9 requests for domestic adoption were approved and 2 requests regarding inter-country adoption (requests within the family) were rejected. In the same year, Centers

for Social Work have accomplished 5 cases of family reunion of abandoned children with their biological families, out of which: 1 case of a child born during 2022, and 4 cases carried from the previous years.⁵⁴

The Law on Child Protection foresees the component of prevention, determining that aspects which endanger child wellbeing and development must be prevented. Public, private institutions and non-governmental organizations, according to their mandate, should develop measures to prevent child's need for help and reduce existing problems.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, services to prevent child abandonment or separation from parents are largely absent, due to insufficient resources. Consequently, prevention is unlikely to be an essential element of Centers for Social Work scope of work. Prevention of abandonment and family empowerment services are mainly provided by the non-governmental sector. Main available services available from Centers for Social Work for children without parental care are assignment of the case manager and legal guardian, writing of the individual plan,

⁴⁸ Data from Ministry of Justice, 2022

⁴⁹ Data from Ministry of Justice, 2022

⁵⁰ Data from Ministry of Justice, 2022

⁵¹ Data from Ministry of Justice, 2022

⁵² Article 22, paragraph 1, Law on Child Protection

⁵³ Data from Ministry of Justice, 2022

⁵⁴ Data from Ministry of Justice, 2022

⁵⁵ Article 24, paragraph 2, Law on Child Protection

placing the child in foster care or residential care, performing monitoring visits and performing reunification procedures or adoption. Monitoring visits cannot be carried out regularly by the Centers for Social Work due to the very large case load and the impossibility of reaching all the children. Whereas, majority of services such as rehabilitation, protection, reintegration, empowerment, professional training and independence, are provided by social service providers from civil society organizations, depending on which form of care the child is placed, foster family, SOS family/alternative care, residential care, or community-based house.

Foster care for children without parental care is considered to be one of the areas where the biggest progress in recent years has been achieved, in terms of legislation development, increased investments and capacity building. The new Law on Social and Family Services for the first time recognizes foster families as social services providers and paves the way for their inclusion in the pension scheme. Another positive step was the decision taken by Minister of Justice to increase payments for foster care. Specifically, the payment for children without parental care placed at their relatives (kinship care) has increased from 100 Euros to 150 Euros. Payment for children without parental care placed in foster families has increased from 250 Euros to 350 Euros. Payment for children without parental care with disabilities placed in foster families has increased from 350 Euros to 450 Euros.

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In 2022, the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, supported by SOS Children's Villages, has developed PRIDE international program, dedicated to capacity building of foster families, training for potential foster families and potential adoptive parents. This approach is expected to strengthen the quality of foster care and adoption services by providing standardized, consistent and structured framework in the capacity building of professionals working in this field and for the recruitment, preparation and selection of foster parents and adoptive parents.⁵⁶

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The small number of foster families is amongst the main challenges in protecting children without parental care. Currently, there are 38 foster families caring for children without parental care. The Law on Child Protection defines that each municipality must have at least three foster families for children without parental care, which are assessed, trained and approved according to the standards determined by the relevant Ministry for Social Welfare.⁵⁷ However, foster families are not located in the entire territory of Kosovo, they exist in

only 17 municipalities. Municipalities that do not have foster families, excluding municipalities with Serbian majority population, are: Peja, Mitrovica, Podujeva, Vushtria, Kamenica, Deçan, Klina, Skenderaj, Kaçanik, Hani i Elezit and Junik.⁵⁸ Foster families are not specialized to work according to the categories of children.

Delays in resolving the status of children without parental care remains a challenge, thus children don't have the opportunity to be adopted. This affects mainly children between ages of 3 and 18 who are without parental care, are placed in family or residential care for a very long time and are not considered for adoption. Kosovo is among the only countries in Southeast Europe with the lowest number of adoption cases of children older than 3 years per capita. Hesitancy of potential adoptive families to adopt children older than 3 years old, due to their requests to adopt children under this age, plays a role in the lack of adoption of this age group. Another challenge is lack of interest to adopt children with disabilities without parental care.⁵⁹

Even though the Law on Child Protection has foreseen the Supervised Independent Living as a new form which means provision of services and support for children without parental care after the age of 18 until the age of 26, this form of protection has not yet been implemented.⁶⁰ Services for children without parental care after the age of 18 are largely lacking. Consequently, if a child cannot stay in the foster family after the age of 18, the Guardianship Body is obliged to stop the care and services, or in cases of children with disabilities, to place the child in the Institute of Shtime (residential shelter), which negatively affects the overall wellbeing of the child. Practice in Kosovo shows that after reaching the age of 18, the child is not necessarily prepared to cope with independent living. Thus, most states have extended the age of care, where children without parental care after the age of 18 continue to receive support and services until the age of 25-26, until they complete their full education, vocational training and become independent.

⁵⁶Data from SOS Children's villages Kosovo
⁵⁷Article 14, Role of the Municipality, paragraph 6, Law on Child Protection
⁵⁸Data from Organization for Children without Parental Care, 2022
⁵⁹Data from Ministry of finance, Labor and Transfers and Organization for Children without Parental Care, 2022
⁶⁰Data from Organization for Children Without Parental Care

CHILDREN INVOLVED IN HAZARDOUS WORK

The Law on Child Protection stipulates that a child under the age of 18 cannot be implicated in hazardous work.⁶¹ In 2022, 160 children were identified as children involved in hazardous works, mainly in sectors such as: agriculture and forestry sector, construction sector and work on the streets.⁶² From this number, it can be concluded that only a small part of children involved in hazardous work has been identified by institutions. Consequently, most children involved in hazardous work are not part of the protection system and do not receive services.

Centers for Social Work in cooperation with the Organization Terre des Hommes, launched mobile teams for the early identification of children in street situation and children involved in hazardous work. These teams are active in the following municipalities: Pristina, Fushë Kosovë, Gjakovë, Obiliq, Ferizaj and Prizren. However, there are significant capacity limitations to identify and increase reporting of children involved in child labor.⁶³

Kosovo continues to lack specialized services provided by municipalities to address protection of children involved in child labor; including day care centers, mobile teams, rehabilitation and reintegration services (social, educational and psychological support for children and their families).



ONLY TWO SPECIALIZED CENTERS FOR CHILDREN INVOLVED IN HAZARDOUS LABOR IN KOSOVO

Initiatives from some non-governmental organizations, such as Terre des hommes which runs two-day care centers in Pristina and Prizren for the treatment and reintegration of children involved in hazardous labor, with focus on the treatment of children in street, remain an exception.

Based on the Analysis on Centers for Social Work, regarding services that are mostly lacking, Centers for Social Work and non-governmental organizations have identified that there is lack of prevention services, specialized rehabilitation and reintegration services for children involved in hazardous work and in street situation.

Another challenge is the lack of NGOs that work with children involved in hazardous work and the impossibility of contracting services in a sustainable manner from the Ministry and municipalities.

Following the entry into force of the Law on Child Protection, an updated version of the List of Hazardous Child Labor and Standard Operating Procedures for Children in Hazardous Child Labor, has been drafted. In addition, a database has been created for the digital management of child labor cases, under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers and with the support of the International Labor Organization.

CHILD TRAFFICKING

In 2022, 22 victims of trafficking, out of which 14 children, have been identified.⁶⁴ Sexual exploitation and forced labor continue to be the most dominant forms of human trafficking in Kosovo. Marginalized Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are mostly at risk from forced begging and sex trafficking.⁶⁵

One of biggest challenges is the identification of children victims of human trafficking. The Office of Chief State Prosecutor, created local multidisciplinary teams to improve the coordination on human trafficking cases, in three regions. It is necessary to strengthen the mechanisms for identification and reporting that will facilitate self-reporting, peer reporting and access to reporting by professionals who regularly work with children and young people (e.g. teachers, school psychologists, counsellors). In Kosovo, there are no planned nor implemented programs for the long-term reintegration of children victims of human trafficking.⁶⁶ It is necessary to have an approach of work with the victims which is more victim-centered, child-friendly, sensitive to child gender, as well as culturally and socially appropriate.

⁶¹ Article 51, paragraph 6, Law on Child Protection

⁶² Data from Ministry of Justice and Kosovo Police, 2022

⁶³ Data from Ministry of Justice, 2022

⁶⁴ US Department of State Report, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/kosovo/>

⁶⁵ Data from Organization Terre des Hommes

⁶⁶ Data from Ministry of Justice

During 2022, Kosovo Police continued to classify forced begging of children by their parents, as neglect or abuse by parents and not as trafficking, stating that children accompanied by their parents did not meet the definition of trafficking. Prosecutors tended to classify trafficking offenses as lesser crimes, and judges continued to issue lenient sentences for the majority of convicted traffickers, which were below the minimum penalty of five years in prison, prescribed in the Criminal Code of Kosovo.⁶⁷

In order to address trafficking in a planned and coordinated manner with all authorities, the Government approved the Anti-Trafficking National Strategy Against Human Trafficking 2022-2026.⁶⁸

Rehabilitation and reintegration services for high-risk children victims of trafficking, are provided by the state shelter under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, while rehabilitation and reintegration services for medium and low-risk child victims of trafficking are provided by civil society organizations with partial state and foreign donors financing. Government financial support for shelters, for children victims of trafficking, continues to remain for short time periods, up to 10 months at most. It is worth noting that the Ministry of Justice has increased funding for shelters run by non-governmental organizations, enabling more sustainable and quality services. Likewise, the Government in its Program for the 2021-2025, has foreseen to place the budget line for Basic Services for Shelters, as a permanent budget line in the Law on Budget of Kosovo, in order to regulate the financial sustainability of shelters.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ US Department of State Report, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/kosovo/>

⁶⁸ <https://mpb.rks-gov.net/Uploads/Documents/Pdf/AL/2472/Strategjia%20TONJ%202022-2026.pdf>

⁶⁹ Data from the Ministry of Justice, 2022

CHILD PROTECTION FROM ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Violence and punishment of children in Kosovo remains a social norm which is accepted and applied from parents as an educational measure for their children.⁷⁰ There is a great need for programs and services for good parenting and for the prevention of violence in families and institutions. Although the Law on Child Protection has foreseen that Government, upon proposal of Ministry of Education, shall issue an Administrative Instruction to ensure programs that promote education, increase awareness regarding degrading consequences of corporal punishment and parenting programs that promote non-violent manners of discipline in family and school,⁷¹ this Administrative Instruction has not been approved.

Our country continues to lack programs or services that support parents for children wellbeing or positive parenting, thus, public institutions do not have data on the number of parents which have benefited from positive parenting programs.⁷² Exceptions are some initiatives of civil society organizations which have provided training for positive parenting, counseling and family services in order to strengthen the family. However, these initiatives, although important, remain limited in comparison with the needs.⁷³ Currently, there are no assigned institutions or special services for empowering parents on the wellbeing of children. The situation can be improved with the implementation of new Law on Social and Family Services, which foresees the establishment of preventive services, including services for good parenting and counseling centers in municipalities, that will aim to empower parents in wellbeing of children and prevention of children punishment forms.

Identification, reporting and self-reporting of children in situations of violence as a first step toward child protection, are still problematic issues. The Law on Child Protection has provided the establishment of the free-of-charge telephone line for children who need to ask and receive advice regarding their rights and to report cases of violence, abuse, neglect and trafficking.⁷⁴ However, even though the free telephone line has been initiated as a process by the Office of Good Governance, Office of the Prime Minister, the free-of-charge telephone line has not been established.

Legislation⁷⁵ obliges all officials and professionals whose duty is to take care of children in health, education and justice

sectors, to report suspicions of violence to the respective Center for Social Work or to Kosovo police authorities. Despite the legal obligation, referrals from these institutions remain at a low level, especially in cases of violence in schools. As for the latter, according to Kosovo Police, there has been a large increase of violence incidents, compared to the previous years. During 2022, a total of 592 cases of incidents in and around schools, were reported.⁷⁶



592

INCIDENTS IN AND AROUND SCHOOLS

The protocol regarding prevention and referral of violence in pre-university education institutions, is being partially implemented, without any supervision. This is also evidenced from the very small number of cases of violence reported in the Education Management Information System - EMIS, only 39 cases of violence in schools were reported during 2021/22 school year.



ONLY 39

CASES OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN EMIS

Meanwhile, during the 2022/23 school year, only 44 cases were reported.⁷⁷ Data of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation show that reporting in Education

⁷⁰ Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey MICS 2020, Kosovo Agency of Statistics and UNICEF, <https://askapi.rks-gov.net/Custom/08eb3166-e575-407a-a383-d959ead4088e.pdf>

⁷¹ Article 63, Paragraph 6, Education on child protection, Law on Child Protection

⁷² Data from Ministry of Justice

⁷³ Data from SOS Children's villages Kosovo and Organization for Children without Parental Care

⁷⁴ Article 22, paragraph 4, Formal institutional system and phone line for children, Law on Child Protection

⁷⁵ Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo, Law on Child Protection, Law on Social and Family Services

⁷⁶ Data from Kosovo Police, 2022

⁷⁷ Data from the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation 2022

Management Information System - EMIS is low, considering that not all cases are reported. Large discrepancy of data indicates that the system of prevention and handling of violence within schools is not functioning.

Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation has made some efforts to increase reporting by rewarding reporting schools, however barriers to reporting still exist. Reasons for non-reporting are related with the tendency of school leadership to keep cases isolated, to preserve the school's image, and in some cases school leaders are reluctant to report due to threats from outside.

In many schools in Kosovo, the mediation program between peers is being practiced, which has given positive effects in preventing violence in schools and increasing reporting. In 2022, 130 schools in 19 municipalities have practiced the mediation program.⁷⁸

Services for protection of children victims of violence are accessible, such as basic services within the Centers for Social Work and shelters. During 2022, Centers for Social Work have managed 523 cases of children victims of domestic violence, directly or indirectly involved.⁷⁹



523 CASES

CHILDREN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

One part of these cases has benefited from services provided by 10 shelters for protection from violence, managed by the non-governmental sector. 875 cases of domestic violence were sheltered, treated and received rehabilitation services in shelters (mothers and children). During sheltering and accommodation, victims were offered medical, pharmaceutical, psychological and social services. Although the funding of

services provided by shelters is not yet sustainable, compared to the previous years, shelters have received increased funding and support from the Ministry of Justice. Thus, services have been sustainable and there was no risk of closing these services, as it has happened in the previous years.⁸⁰

.....
 • Law on Child Protection Law foresees issuing of an
 • administrative instruction on establishing Child Protection
 • Houses, however, this administrative instruction has not been
 • issued and child protection houses have not been established.
 •

In the recent years, there have been concerns regarding the treatment of cases of criminal offenses against the sexual integrity of children, such as rape, sexual assault, degradation of sexual integrity and child pornography. Criminal offenses against sexual integrity of children are occurring in environments such as families, communities, as well as in institutions mandated for the protection of children, such as educational institutions, schools, etc.

Civil society has expressed its deep indignation regarding the creation of non-punitive occurrence for perpetrators of sexual crimes against children, which has influenced incitement of an unsafe social environment, where basic rights of children are violated, violation of their physical, moral and sexual integrity becomes a common phenomenon and not an exception. They have requested mobilization and accountability, for lack of performance at the responsibility level of all actors in the child protection system.

In order to increase awareness to report violence, the campaign "16 days of activism against gender-based violence" has been organized under the leadership of the Ministry of Justice, which mainly focused on violence against girls.

Although the Law on Child Protection has defined that Judicial Council of Kosovo must issue a by-law to set rules and procedures for maintaining a DNA database with persons convicted of criminal offenses against sexual integrity⁸¹, this has not been accomplished.

In Kosovo, we currently have a fragmented child protection system. Therefore, services between the education, welfare and health sectors are not integrated. The institutions' interventions and services are isolated, uncoordinated and do not meet one of the fundamental principles for dealing with violence, that is the multidisciplinary approach.⁸²

⁷⁸ Data from Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation and data from Organization: Kosovo Education Center

⁷⁹ Data from Ministry of Justice, 2022

⁸⁰ Data from Hope and Home for Children and Center for Protecting Victims and Preventing Trafficking in Human Beings- MVPT

⁸¹ Article 58, paragraph 2, Law on Child Protection

⁸² Position paper on the Law on Social and Family Services, KOMF, <https://komfkosova.org/position-paper-on-specific-grant-for-social-services/?lang=en>

Recommendations:

- » Establish and strengthening preventive programs and services aimed at family support, child abandonment prevention, separation of children from parents prevention, addressing risk factors that may lead to losing family care;
- » Develop and strengthen family services and community-based services, expand forms of protection, specifically, development of foster care after reaching the age of 18, through the development of a new form of protection: "Supervised independent living";
- » Provide scholarships by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation for children without parental care;
- » Increase the number of foster families and extend them to all municipalities based on the Law on Child Protection, where it is provided that each municipality must have at least 3 foster families;
- » Undertake actions by institutions to change the damaging practice of not adopting children over the age of 3 and children with disabilities, and increase awareness of potential adoptive parents;
- » Specialize foster families according to the categories and increase capacities of foster families and potential adoptive parents;
- » Compensate foster families with 50% of the amount during the time they do not have fostered children;
- » Provide continuous support, more frequent visits and rehabilitation as needed for children placed in kinship care;
- » Intensify preventive actions against human trafficking, develop awareness campaigns at all levels, including community-based campaigns;
- » Establish and functionalize mobile teams in all municipalities for the identification of children in street situation and children involved in child labour;
- » Establish and develop services for children involved in hazardous forms of work;
- » Open specialized day care centers for children involved in child labour;
- » Strengthen mechanisms for identification and reporting of trafficking cases;
- » Develop and implement programs for the long-term reintegration of children who are victims of trafficking;
- » Ensure sustainable funding of shelters that shelter and protect children victims of trafficking;
- » Complete implementation of the Anti-Trafficking National Strategy (2022 -2026).
- » Implement the legislation on child protection, with focus on the implementation of the Law on Child Protection and Protocol on Prevention and Reference of Violence in Institutions of Pre - University education;
- » Approve and issue all Administrative Instructions, as provided for in the Law on Child Protection;
- » Establish and provide programs and services for good parenting, strengthening the family and preventing domestic violence, increasing skills and supporting parents in education and wellbeing of children, through positive forms of parenting;
- » Establish and implement of programs dedicated to children from the age of early childhood. Programs should aim at recognizing situations and forms of violence, not accepting violence, reporting these cases, accepting diversity to prevent bullying, etc.;
- » Implementation of activities regarding capacity building and increasing teachers and educational staff awareness on the prevention of violence and treatment of these cases;
- » Increase reporting of child violence cases, identified by public institutions;
- » Establishment of the free of charge child helpline, as provided for in the Law on Child Protection, to facilitate and increase reporting of cases of violence, abuse, neglect and trafficking of children;
- » Establish the child protection houses;
- » Create a friendly and supportive environment within the school, so that the problem of violence is not only treated with a reactive approach, but has full coherence in the development of activities related to prevention, response and reporting;
- » Immediate intervention and investment in establishing and strengthening integrated educational, psychological and social services, in order to prevent violence against children;
- » Ensure sustainable funding for residential social services provided by shelters that shelter children victims of violence and organizations that provide social services in family and community in order to prevent and protect children from violence;
- » Create a data base of persons convicted of criminal offenses against sexual integrity of children and consequently prohibit their access to children, according to existing models in European Union and based on the Law on Child Protection;
- » Audit the treatment of cases of sexual violence against children from the state institutions, including treatment of perpetrators with offenses related to sexual violence during the last five years, in order to identify systematic problems in the treatment of violence cases and addressing these problems;
- » Increase monitoring and accountability of service providers, in order to prevent and handle cases of violence in a timely manner;
- » Increase the public awareness by organizing awareness raising campaigns aimed to sensitize the public opinion regarding the consequences of violence against children and to promote reporting of violence cases.

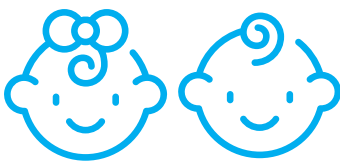


HEALTH

HEALTH

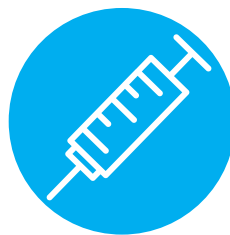
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- ▶ Lack of statistical data regarding the number of children with disabilities, number of children that consume tobacco, alcohol and number of children that use drugs
- ▶ Lack of medicines in primary, secondary and tertiary health care
- ▶ Lack of preventive services and specialized rehabilitation services for the treatment of children who use narcotic substances
- ▶ Very limited human resources for the mental health of children



31,420

births⁸³



91% is the vaccine coverage rate, according to children's vaccination calendar⁸⁴



45% is the average supply with medication from the essential list in primary health care, for 2022⁸⁵

117 cases of death of newborn babies in 2022⁸⁶

Child's right to health treatment is guaranteed by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Law on Child Protection. The Article 42 of the Law on Child Protection guarantees free of charge health care for children, enabling them to benefit from high-standard disease treatment and health rehabilitation services. The responsible Ministry for health, is obliged to ensure this right.⁸⁷

Regarding the data on children's health, KOMF has requested the official data from the Ministry of Health and Kosovo Agency of Statistics, but it has not been provided for all the related fields. Specifically, KOMF estimates that there are no statistical data for the recent years regarding breastfeeding, number of children with disabilities, number of children that consume tobacco, alcohol and number of children that use

drugs, number of children medical visits in the private health care, etc. The latest data on breastfeeding has been published in the Multiple Indicator Cluster survey, in 2020.⁸⁸

KOMF assesses that in order to fulfill the obligations arising from the Law on Child Protection, it is necessary to start an effort to research occurrences that harm children's health and to collect accurate data on all health services offered to children in Kosovo. In particular, there is a significant lack of data regarding health services provided by the private sector, which hinders the collection of accurate data on children's health and needs. It is very important to operationalize the Health Information System, in order to collect health related data and to plan interventions based on data.

⁸³ Data from Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2022

⁸⁴ Data from Ministry of Health, 2022

⁸⁵ Data from Ministry of Health, 2022

⁸⁶ Data from Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2022

⁸⁷ Data from Association of Kosovo Municipalities

⁸⁸ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey MICS 2020, Kosovo Agency of Statistics and UNICEF, <https://askapi.rks-gov.net/Custom/08eb3166-e575-407a-a383-d959ead4088e.pdf>

INFANT MORTALITY

According to Kosovo Agency of Statistics, in 2022, 31,420 births were registered in Kosovo, out of which 22,632 births happened in Kosovo, and 8,788 births happened out of Kosovo.⁸⁹

Although decreased over the years, infant mortality in Kosovo, still remains the highest compared with the countries in the region.⁹⁰

In 2022, 117 cases of death of newborn babies were recorded.⁹¹ Reports of the Department of Neonatology show a decrease of infant mortality rate in the same period compared to 2021. In 2022, infant mortality rate was 14.4 per 1,000, which is a significant decrease compared to the previous year, with 18.6 per 1,000.⁹²

Perinatal health issues, complications of prematurity, anomalies, congenital disorders and infections, are among the causes of infant deaths in Kosovo.

Newborn's screening is still not being applied in our country. Newborn's screening is planned to be implemented in 2023 – 2025 Action Plan for maternal and child health, which has been finalized and is expected to be approved after assessing the financial costs.⁹³ Currently, the neonatal transport of babies from regional hospitals to the University Clinical Center of Kosovo - UCCK is performed in inadequate conditions and by teams that are not well prepared.

Neonatal transport from regional hospitals to University Clinical Center of Kosovo - UCCK, and capacity building of health personnel on the neonatal transport, should be one of the established priorities which will affect reduction of infant mortality.

Some Family Health Centers, in some municipalities, are facing shortage of gynecologists and pediatricians, due to the exclusion of specialist positions in the primary care. In such cases, patients have problems going to larger municipalities to receive gynecological services. This is especially problematic in the remote municipalities, such as Dragash Municipality, which currently does not have a gynecologist and patients have problems to go for a checkup in the Municipality of Prizren.

IMMUNIZATION

Immunization of children is key tool in controlling and eliminating life-threatening diseases. World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that all infants and young children be vaccinated against tuberculosis, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, measles, hepatitis B, Haemophilus influenzae type B, pneumococcal disease, rotavirus and rubella. Vaccination helps to stop the spread of these diseases and helps to efficiently maintain child health.

In Kosovo, it is mandatory for children to be immunized against ten communicable diseases, which are part of the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI). Vaccinations for these diseases are legally mandatory and children are vaccinated at time frames according to the Law.

According to data from the Ministry of Health, the vaccination coverage rate reaches 91%. The table below presents the vaccine coverage data for 2020, 2021 and 2022.⁹⁴ An important accomplishment has been the expansion of the Vaccination Calendar with three new vaccines for children, rotavirus vaccine, pneumococcal meningitis vaccine and HPV vaccine against cervical cancer.

TABLE 5. Vaccination coverage rate (%), 2017-2022

ANTIGEN	2020	2021	2022
BCG/HepB	94	92	93
DTP1/HepB1/Hib1	94	92	93
DTP2/HepB2/Hib2	91	89	92
DTP3/HepB3/Hib3	92	87	90
IPV1	94	92	93
IPV2	91	89	92
IPV3	92	87	90
MMR	90	85	88

⁸⁹ Data from Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2022

⁹⁰ Recommendation Policy for the Protection on Children's Health, KOMF, <https://komfkosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Politika-rekomanduese-Grupi-per-Shen-detesi-1-1.pdf>

⁹¹ Data from Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2022

⁹² <https://kuvendikosoves.org/shq/punesimi/per-publikun/lajmi/anetaret-e-komisionit-per-te-drejtat-e-njeriu-32171/>

⁹³ Data from Ministry of Health, 2022

⁹⁴ Data from Ministry of Health, 2022

Regarding health care, there is a big discrepancy between children living in Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and children from the general population.⁹⁵ Ministry of Health should review strategies for the inclusion of communities, with a focus on mother's and child's health. i.e. neonatal visits for pregnant women, children immunization, healthy nutrition, postnatal medical checks, etc.

BREASTFEEDING

In the recent years, there are no published or accessible official data on the breastfeeding rate at the country level. 2020 MICS Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, continues to be a benchmark statistic regarding breastfeeding, with only 32% of newborns being breastfed within the first hour after birth, and only 29% of children under the age of 6 months, data that show a fairly low level of breastfeeding. Whereas, only 16 percent of children under the age of 6 months from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo are breastfed.

.....

Ministry of Health has already developed home health visits program, with the donors support. According to data provided by the Ministry of Health, so far, visits have happened in 29 municipalities.⁹⁶ These visits aim to support breastfeeding practices, healthy eating, identify health problems in children and to improve pregnant women and mother's health.

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In some of Kosovo municipalities, Family Health Centers have started to organize classes for mothers. The purpose of these classes is to influence the improvement of mother and child health through health education of mothers from pre-birth to post-birth process and child care, thus, influencing development in early childhood. Currently, Information Centers for Women's Health program (ICWH - Classes for mothers) is active in the Obstetrics and

Gynecology Clinic in Pristina and in the Main Family Health Centers in 18 municipalities. Ministry of Health jointly with municipalities should expand this program to all municipalities of Kosovo in order to increase awareness and educate women and their partners regarding mother's and child's health.

HOSPITAL CARE AT THE PEDIATRIC CLINIC IN THE UNIVERSITY CLINICAL CENTER OF KOSOVO - UCCK

Regarding public health services for children, based on the data from University Hospital and Clinic Service of Kosovo, the Pediatric Clinic in 2022 reported that 20,127 outpatient visits, 20,861 other diagnostic visits and 114 dialysis sessions were performed. Out of these numbers 7,124 children were treated at this clinic, thus, causing a noticeable overload. This comes as a result of the limited number of beds, only 151 beds available at the Pediatric Clinic.⁹⁷ Based on communications with parents and KOMF member organizations, due to lack of space and conditions in this clinic, there are cases when two children are treated in one bed.

Regarding the staff employed in this clinic, it is reported that it includes 49 doctors and 136 nurses.⁹⁸ This number of staff is insufficient to meet all needs of children in Pediatrics clinic. Due to human resources limitations, the health staff is very busy in providing health services for children. This causes decrease of the quality of health services for children.

Operationalization of the new pediatric surgical hospital has improved children health care at the tertiary level. The hospital has integrated the pediatric emergency medical services, trauma services, recovery services, specialized ambulatory services, pediatric and surgical services, etc. However, considering the overload and small number of staff, increase of human resources and work reorganization is necessary.

⁹⁵ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey MICS 2020, Kosovo Agency of Statistics and UNICEF, <https://askapi.rks-gov.net/Custom/08eb3166-e575-407a-a383-d959ead4088e.pdf>

⁹⁶ Data from Ministry of Health, 2022

⁹⁷ <https://shskuk.rks-gov.net/Navbar/SingleNeës/17764>

⁹⁸ Data from Pediatric Clinic, University Clinical Center of Kosovo, 2022

SUPPLY WITH MEDICINES FROM THE LIST OF ESSENTIAL MEDICINES

Although the Law on Child Protection guarantees free of charge health care, it has continuously been reported on the lack of medicines and items in primary health care, regional hospitals and the University Clinical Center of Kosovo - UCCK.⁹⁹

Lack of necessary health therapy for children in need can have consequences for children's health. Due to lack of medicines from the essential list, parents are forced to buy them with their own money.¹⁰⁰

Regarding the level of supply with medicines from the List of Essential Medicines at the University Clinical Center of Kosovo - UCCK, the Ministry of Health has not provided data. However, lack of medicines from the List of Essential Medicines has been continuously reported by media and by parents, which are forced to buy the necessary medicines regardless of their economic situation.

Regarding the supply of medicines from the Essential List in primary health care, the average supply of drugs from the Essential List for 2022 was 45%, while the average supply of consumables for 2022 was 71.71%.¹⁰¹

	MUNICIPALITY	SUPPLY WITH ESSENTIAL MEDICINES %	SUPPLY WITH MEDICAL CONSUMABLES %
1	Deçan	36.88	71.22
2	Dragash	45.05	64.50
3	Drenas	38.34	72.43
4	Ferizaj	28.70	66.44
5	Fushë Kosovë	36.83	72.25
6	Gjakova	50.00	70.00
7	Gjilan	42.28	80.34
8	Hani i Elezit	40.49	65.93
9	Istog	36.50	50.00
10	Kaçanik	60.00	90.00
11	Kamenica	46.00	70.00
12	Klina	40.43	77.23
13	Malisheva	40.42	81.08
14	Mamusha	55.00	90.00
15	Mitrovica E. J.	54.75	91.00
16	Novobërda	30.00	40.00
17	Obiliq	60.00	80.00
18	Pejë	55.10	70.20
19	Partesh	65.00	35.00
20	Podujeva	43.00	80.00
21	Prishtina	32.00	76.00
22	Prizren	40.74	79.05
23	Rahovec	40.00	55.00
24	Ranillug	65.00	80.00
25	Shtërpcë	51.00	72.00
26	Skënderaj	40.50	64.40
27	Suhareka	60.00	80.00
28	Vushtrri	40.99	81.85
29	Viti	30.14	73.89
		MEDICINES	CONSUMABLES
	AVERAGE	45.00	71.71

⁹⁹ Reporting's in medias

¹⁰⁰ Recommendation policy on children's health, KOMF, <https://komfkosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Politika-rekomanduese-Grupi-per-Shendetesi-1-1.pdf>

¹⁰¹ Data from Association of Kosovo Municipalities, 2022

Regarding medicine supply from the above mentioned list, municipalities that reported the lowest supply, are: Ferizaj 28.7%, Novobërda 30%, Vitia 31.04% and Pristina with 32%. The highest level of supply was reported by the municipalities of: Ranillug and Partesh with 65% each, Suhareka, Kaçanik and Obiliq with 60%.¹⁰²

Regarding medical consumables, the municipalities with the lowest reported supply are: Partesh 35%, Novobërda 40% and Istog 50%. The highest supply in this category was reported by the municipalities: South Mitrovica 91%, Mamusha 90% and Kaçanik 90%.¹⁰³ 103

Lack of medicines from the essential list, without which children cannot survive, remains extremely worrying. The situation with surfactant medication, without which premature babies can die, is time after time problematic in relation to the regular supply. For years now, surfactant medication has been provided by KOMF member organization “Action for Mothers and Children”, for the Neonatology Clinic. However, in some cases, there are time periods that are not covered with supply of this medication and as a result, the Neonatology Clinic remains without this medication, thus seriously endangering lives of prematurely born babies. Surfactant medication is not included in List of Essential Medicines. KOMF has proposed to include some fundamental medication, in a certain percentage, within the List of Essential Medicines, despite the fact that they are provided by donors, so that there are no such shortages. For example, in the case of surfactant, 90% should be provided by donors and 10% should be provided through the List of Essential Medicines.

Similarly, lack of therapy supply from the List of Essential Medicines for children with cystic fibrosis, which is included in the rare diseases, remains problematic. Parents have expressed their concerns and big difficulties they have in ensuring the therapy for their children with cystic fibrosis.¹⁰⁴

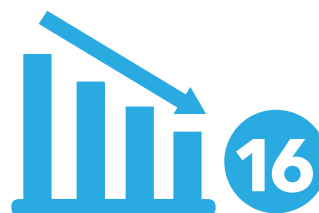
In 2022, the budget allocated for health, was 198 million Euros, while for the List of Essential Medicines and specific programs, the allocated budget was 11.2 million Euros.

LAW ON HEALTH INSURANCE

Investments in health sector in Kosovo are small. A vast part of citizens doesn't have sufficient access to health care due to the high payments for medicines, made from their own pockets. This is even more problematic, considering that 22% of children in Kosovo live in poverty and 7% live in extreme poverty. Although the Law No. 04/L-249 on Health Insurance was approved in 2014, this law has never entered into force. In the Legislative Plan of the Prime Minister Office for 2021, it was foreseen to finish the Draft Law on the amendment of the Law No. 04/L-249 for Health Insurance, by the 30th of November 2021. However, this law has not been approved. According to 2020 MICS Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey, the percentage of children covered by any type of health insurance was 5.6% for children under 5 and 3.6% for children over 5.

USE OF NARCOTICS BY CHILDREN

Kosovo faces numerous challenges in prevention and treatment of children victims of drug abuse. In the recent years, it is estimated that the total number of users has exceeded 30,000 users for the first time, children and teenagers continue to be part of this number of users more and more each year.¹⁰⁵



AVERAGE AGE OF STARTING DRUG USE DROPPED TO 16 YEARS OLD

Based on the database of the Organization Labyrinth, the average age of starting drug use has dropped from 18 in 2018 to 16, in the latest period. According to Labyrinth, based on the requests for treatment and ongoing work in the field, it is estimated that there are around 35,000 active drug users in Kosovo. 2,885 users receive profound treatment at Labyrinth Center. Meanwhile, around 3,000 drug users do not want to be identified, therefore, they are not registered in the database.¹⁰⁶ However this data includes all users and there is no estimation of how many of them are children.

¹⁰² Data from Association of Kosovo, 2022

¹⁰³ Data from Association of Kosovo, 2022

¹⁰⁴ Recommendation policy on children's health, KOMF, <https://komfkosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Politika-rekomanduese-Grupi-per-Shendetesi-1-1.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Data from Organization Labyrinth

¹⁰⁶ Data from Organization Labyrinth

Labyrinth Center is the only organization licensed in Kosovo by the Ministry of Health, for the provision of rehabilitation services for children and adults drug users.

It is disquieting that there is an increase of drug use among young people. The average age of drugs users is around 27 years old, indicating that this age group is mostly affected. According to Kosovo Police during 2022, there were 56 children from the age group 14 – 18 (55 males and 1 female, where the youngest age registered among users was 14 years old, 1 person), who were charged with the criminal offense “Unauthorized purchase, possession, sale and distribution of narcotics, psychotropic and analogues” from the Article 267 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo, and the criminal offense “Unauthorized possession of narcotics, psychotropic substances or analogues”, from Article 269.¹⁰⁷

Marijuana continues to be the most used substance in Kosovo. Although until 2018 there was a decrease in the overall use of heroin, during the last four years there has been a slight increase of heroin users, particularly, among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, and also there is a rapid increase and very high prevalence of cocaine use in the general population. Stimulant drugs such as ecstasy, MDMA, amphetamine, GHB, lsd, etc. are also present, but there is no visible trend of increased use or circulation of new drugs on the market. (NPS - New Psychoactive Substances).¹⁰⁸

Reasons why children start using drugs are many, including the availability of drugs, early childhood trauma, lack of information on dangers of drug use, social pressure and curiosity to try new things, etc. Use of drugs brings harmful consequences to the child, family, society and state, by damaging the physical and psychological health, creating social problems, increasing criminality, implicating big financial expenses and causing long-term damages to the child, family and society.

Our country is not yet providing structured and sustainable preventive services and programs which are more than necessary, having in mind growing trends of drug use by children and adolescents. Kosovo Police is exception to this issue, as it has an annual program of lectures on the prevention and awareness of several occurrences, which includes the topic related to prevention of use of narcotic substances. In 2022, lectures were held in 108 schools, with the participation of 5,624 pupils.¹⁰⁹ Having in mind that in Kosovo there are 327,676 students, we can conclude that programs on the prevention of substance use, are not sufficient to cover the needs.

To address this situation, it is important that authorities take immediate steps to increase awareness regarding the dangers of drug use, and to develop a structured prevention and treatment of drug abuse in Kosovo. Furthermore, attention should be focused on youth and adolescents to avoid their early beginning of drug use. Kosovo does not provide sufficient accessible services for the identification of children that are victims of drug abuse. There is a lack of services and mobile teams in the community, that would enable testing and identification of possible cases of children using narcotic substances.

In this regard, the lack of drug detection tests was a worrying issue. Until 2020, the purchase and administration of drug tests such as the Opiate and Methadone tests, was allowed. These tests have served as biological tools to assess possible presence of drugs in the organism and for the further treatment of persons that are drug users. This problem has now been fixed by the Ministry of Health and rapid drug detection tests have been included in the Essential List of Medicines.¹¹⁰

Kosovo does not offer special rehabilitation services for children victims of drug abuse. The existing services are provided within the treatment of adults that use narcotics. The Psychiatric Clinic at the University Clinical Center of Kosovo (UCCK), has improvised a separated ward to treat addiction, but this ward is dedicated for adult patients, although it also treats children since there is no other facility available or a specialized ward for children. This ward is not suitable for children, it is not friendly and doesn't constitute a safe environment for them. Health treatment at UCCK is based on detoxification programs, where medicines from the List of Essential Medicines are used. In 2022, this department treated 7 child users under the age of 18.

In general, professionals face great challenges in treating children that are victims of drug abuse. They do not have the necessary resources, including the multidisciplinary teams and the specialized wards for children, to implement specialized rehabilitation plans and programs. Professionals do not have the necessary resources to empower parents or guardians in treating and supporting their children that are victims of drug abuse. This lack of resources and services means that parents and guardians feel unprepared in their fight against drug abuse.

¹⁰⁷ Data from Kosovo Police, 2022

¹⁰⁸ Data from Organization Labyrinth

¹⁰⁹ Data from Kosovo Police, 2022

¹¹⁰ Data from Organization Labyrinth

Currently, Ministry of Health and municipalities have not developed a sustainable scheme for purchasing services from the non-governmental and private sector. Support from the Ministry of Health and municipalities is provided through short-term subsidies and insufficient budget allocations, which is considered a not suitable and sustainable manner of financing services and programs.

Also, another system shortcoming regards the lack of accurate statistics at national level, on the number of children drug users.

In conclusion, there is need for development of prevention programs and establishment of specialized services and centers for the treatment of children and young persons that use drugs. Also, it is important to develop programs to empower parents of drug-using children, to increase their capacities to care for drug-using children.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Children's mental health is a big challenge especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, also having in mind the limited number of resources and services available.

In order to maintain the complete physical and mental wellbeing, Ministry of Health approved the Action Plan on mental health, after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Within the frame of the mental health services in Kosovo, the following clinics operate¹¹¹: Psychiatry Clinic at the University Hospital Service of Kosovo, Psychiatry Department of the General Hospital in Gjakova, Psychiatry Department of the General Hospital in Peja, Psychiatry Department of the General Hospital in Gjilan, Department of Psychiatry in Prizren and Mental Health Centers in Prishtina, Mitrovica, Prizren, Peja, Gjilan, Ferizaj and Gjakova.

Regarding human resources, 52 psychiatrists are employed in public health institutions nationwide, from whom 45 psychiatrists for adults and only 7 psychiatrists for children and adolescents.



ONLY 7 PSYCHIATRISTS
KOSOVO WIDE FOR CHILDREN

There are also 10 specialists of clinical psychology, 2 clinical psychologists, 7 social workers and 2 psychosocial counselors which work in the secondary and tertiary health levels and 217 nurses.¹¹² The fact that there are only 7 psychiatrists for children who work in public health institutions nationwide, and the number of clinical psychologists, is a very worrying issue when we speak regarding the resources available in public institutions for children's health.

Regarding the private sector health services, there is a significant number of psychiatric and psychological services, however, there is no data on the number of children treated in the private sector services.

The number of requests from children regarding mental health services has increased, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, and the number of mental health professionals is very limited to cope with these requests and to provide quality services. In the Mental Health Unit for Children and Adolescents, part of the Mental Health Center in Prizren, during 2022, a very big number of requests for treatment of children and adolescents with mental health problems, has been registered. In total, 531 cases of children and adolescents who sought help in this health unit, were reported. Services such as: psychiatric visits and home visits, psycho-educational activities, family psychotherapy, individual psychotherapy and medication therapy are offered in this unit.¹¹³ In this unit there are special programs and services on empowering parents and families for drug-using children, such as: Family Psychoeducation and Family Psychotherapy, where 21 adolescents and their families have benefited from these programs, during 2022. Regarding human resources, only one psychiatrist for children and adolescents and a nurse work at the Prizren Mental Health Unit for Children and Adolescents. Taking into account 531 children's cases during 2022 and services provided in this unit in relation to human resources, specifically one single psychiatrist working there, a big overload can be noticed, which affects quality of offered services.

103 cases of outpatient visits for children with mental health problems were reported at the Department of Psychiatry in Prizren Hospital, in 2022. Also, 7 cases of hospitalization were recorded, out of this number, 3 children were drug users, they were treated in the hospital and were included in the psychoactive substance detoxification process. The Department of Psychiatry in Prizren Hospital has 5 psychiatric specialists and 11 nurses, they work with adults and children with mental health problems, as well as detoxification cases. On the average, in this Department only one service has been provided, as cases were referred to the child and adolescent psychiatrist at the Mental Health Center in Prizren for the follow-up treatments.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ <https://shendetimendor.uni-pr.edu/hospitalList.html>

¹¹² Data from the Post Covid-19 Pandemic Mental Health Action Plan

¹¹³ Prizren Mental Health Unit for Children and Adolescents

¹¹⁴ Data from Department of Psychiatry in Prizren Hospital 2022

In the Department of Psychiatry in the General Hospital of Gjakova, during 2022, 335 cases of children up to 18 years which sought treatment for mental health problems, were reported. In the Addiction Unit, at the Psychiatry Department of Gjakova General Hospital, 9 cases of children were treated during 2022, out of this number, 2 cases were referred for treatment by the Center for Social Work and 4 minors were referred by the Probation Service of Kosovo to receive psychological counseling sessions. 5 psychiatrists work in the Psychiatric Department of Gjakova General Hospital. One psychiatrist is specialized in working with substance abuse cases, one psychiatrist is specialized in working with children, and one psychiatrist has special training on family psychotherapy. Also, there are 2 general psychiatrists that provide treatment for general mental health cases. This specialized staff is important in providing appropriate and personalized care for children with mental health problems.¹¹⁵

CONSUMPTION OF TOBACCO, ALCOHOL, ENERGY DRINKS, HOOKAH AND ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES (VAPE)

Children in Kosovo are exposed to dangers associated with smoking, both active and passive smoking. Children who stay in smoking environments, such as houses or other closed environments, have a higher risk of lung infections and diseases, including bronchitis, pneumonia and cardiovascular disease. Although, Kosovo in 2008 adopted the Law on Tobacco Control, this law is not being implemented. The Law on Tobacco Control is not respected in various businesses, including gastronomy businesses near schools and regularly frequented by children.

Consumption of energy drinks is another important concern for the health of children in Kosovo. The market for these products in Kosovo is very big and they are sold everywhere, regardless of the person's age. Energy drinks contain caffeine and heart stimulants, thus, they are unnecessary for children, they are harmful and can affect their heart rate and cause other health problems.

In Kosovo, there is no legal basis for banning and sanctioning sale and consumption of energy drinks for children. In fact, the Law that will regulate consumption of these drinks, including drinks with high amount of sugar, has not been finalized and approved. Regardless of the steps taken in this direction, including establishment of working group by Parliamentary Committee for Environment, Food, Agriculture, Planning and Development on drafting this law, it has not yet been completed and approved.

In Kosovo, there is no legal basis that regulates the consumption of hookahs and electronic cigarettes, otherwise known as "vapes". Lack of such law has constantly worried parents, who have often raised their voices for their children's safety. Kosovo Parents Council has considered this as a disturbing occurrence and has called for urgent measures to be taken in order to prevent the use of electronic cigarettes, having in mind that there are possible serious consequences. Until now, state authorities have not taken steps to fix this issue and to prohibit the sale of these products to children.

Also, the lack of legal regulation within the Criminal Code of Kosovo that condemns sale and serving alcoholic beverages to persons under the age of 16, is worrying. In Kosovo legislation, children are considered all persons up to the age of 18, so this contradicts the legal regulation that defines children in Kosovo and deprives protection of children's health from the use of harmful substances.

Recommendations

- ▶ Perform screening or "screening test" for newborns in public and private health institutions, for the early diagnosis of potential diseases;
- ▶ Organize neonatal transport from regional hospitals to the University Clinical Center of Kosovo - UCKK and increase capacities of the health personnel regarding the neonatal transport. This will affect reduction of infant deaths, since infants are currently being transported by poorly prepared teams and in inadequate conditions;
- ▶ Intensify home visits program by Family Health Centers in all Kosovo municipalities, organize vaccination at home (door-to-door vaccination), support for breastfeeding practices, healthy nutrition and identification of health problems in children, thus, directly contributing to children's health and their development;
- ▶ Expand and promote Information Centers for Women's Health (ICWH- Classes for mothers) model in order to promote health education, maternal health during pregnancy, breastfeeding, vaccination and healthy growth;

¹¹⁵Data from Department of Psychiatry in Gjakova General Hospital, 2022

- ▶▶ Provide gynecological services at least once a week to remote municipalities, for patients in primary care centers. For example, the gynecologist from Prizren Municipality, can once a week visit the Family Health Center in Dragash to provide medical check-ups;
- ▶▶ Ministry of Health should propose legal changes to Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, on foreseeing punitive measures for parents who neglect and refuse to vaccinate their children. These examples can be taken from European Union, where non-vaccination of children by parents is considered as health negligence and is punished with a fine. In addition, it is recommended to define vaccination of children as a condition for school registration and as a criteria within the new Law 2003/15 on Social Assistance Scheme, which is in the amendment process;
- ▶▶ Increase the number of health personnel in the Pediatric Clinic in order to provide better quality services for children;
- ▶▶ Increase information, awareness and health education through campaigns to improve health practices, family planning, reproductive health and receiving health services;
- ▶▶ Provide sustainable supply of medicines in the University Clinical Center of Kosovo - UCCK, regional hospitals and primary health care, to guarantee that there is no more lack of essential medicines;
- ▶▶ Review the List of Essential Medicines in order to include surfactant and medicines for the treatment of rare diseases;
- ▶▶ Define measures and programs for the prevention of drug use by children. Organize mobile teams in community to identify, test and support cases of children victims of drug abuse;
- ▶▶ Strengthen the treatment and rehabilitation services within the University Clinical Center of Kosovo and regional hospitals by establishing specific units or specialized centers only for drug-using children. These units should provide friendly and safe environments for the treatment of drug-using children;
- ▶▶ Prepare parent empowerment programs in order to increase parents' capacities for care and support of children during rehabilitation and reintegration;
- ▶▶ Increase human resources within public health institutions regarding mental health, increase the number of psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers for children;
- ▶▶ Establish sustainable mechanisms for data collection at municipal and central level in order to generate accurate and sustainable data on the number of children that are victims of drug abuse, their age, economic status, types of drugs, etc. These data would help in a more adequate planning of relevant programs and services;
- ▶▶ Increase monitoring and inspection of non-smoking rule in all premises prohibited by law;
- ▶▶ Prepare or sponsor awareness raising campaigns to increase wide public awareness on damages caused by the consumption of tobacco, alcohol, energy drinks, hookahs and electronic cigarettes;
- ▶▶ Regulate legal framework to prohibit the sale and consumption of alcohol for persons under the age of 18;
- ▶▶ Formulate legal regulations prohibiting sale and consumption of energy drinks, hookahs and electronic cigarettes;
- ▶▶ Define a sustainable scheme to finance and purchase services provided by non-governmental organizations, to provide health services for children that are victims of drug abuse so that these services are more accessible and closer to children and families.



**EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT**

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Grade: 2.25

- ▶ Low inclusion of children in preschool education, insufficient capacities of preschool institutions
- ▶ Lack of early intervention services in the family environment, lack of alternative programs to support parents



Kosovo continues to remain the country with the lowest inclusion of children in preschool education, compared to countries in the region.



ONLY 15%

OF CHILDREN AGED 3-4 ATTEND EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Only 15% of children aged 3-4 attend early childhood education programs, who usually are children living in wealthier households. The main reason for such a low inclusion, is the insufficient capacity of preschool institutions and the general awareness of traditional forms of education within the family.¹¹⁶



ONLY 54

PRESCHOOL INSTITUTIONS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

In Kosovo there are 54 preschool/kindergarten institutions, in the public sector.¹¹⁷ Preschool institutions are in the urban areas, while 10 municipalities do not have public preschool institutions. Rural areas are almost excluded from access to early childhood development services. 172 private preschool institutions in Kosovo are licensed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. Regarding private preschool institutions that work without license, their number is not known.

The total number of children attending preschool education in 2021/2022 has been 32,397, out of this number, 24,431 children attended public preschool education and 7,966 children attended private preschool education. 4,937 children attended public preschool institutions 0-5 years old), and 19,494 attended public pre-primary education

¹¹⁶ Recommendation Policy on Early Childhood Development, <https://komfkosova.org/recommendation-policy-on-early-childhood-development/?lang=en>

¹¹⁷ Data from Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, 2022

(5-6 years old). Regarding private educational institutions licensed by MESTI, currently 5,374 children are attending preschool education (0-5 years old) and 2,592 children are attending pre-primary education (5-6 years old).¹¹⁸

Children from marginalized groups, despite being exempt from payment, are often not included due to the limitation of the number of children.¹¹⁹ Out of 4,937 children in public preschool education, only 98 children belong to other non-majority communities, and 4,839 are Albanians. From the general number of children in preschool education, 95.9% of children are Albanians and 4.1% are children from other ethnic groups.¹²⁰

Early childhood care and education is even more important for children with disabilities.¹²¹ Services for early identification and intervention are inexistent. In 2021/2022, 45 children with disabilities (1-6 years old) were included in resource centers/special schools. 511 children with disabilities (1-6 years) were included in regular classes.¹²² However, official data show that data on children with disabilities and the accuracy of this data are complex due to the fact that not all children with disabilities have been assessed. This is because, in most municipalities, commissions for assessment of children with disabilities are only formally established, but they are not functional.

Mostly, professional services for children with disabilities are provided by the non-governmental sector, and the main challenge is lack of services sustainability.

It is evident from the above data that generally only a certain group of children who have a more favorable financial and social situation, benefit from early childhood services.

There is a big number of private preschool institutions that operate without a license and the monitoring and inspection system almost lacks.¹²³ Day care institutions include children of pre-primary age, however inspection is performed periodically only in kindergartens. Also, if kindergartens are registered as NGOs, they do not fall under the scope of the Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation.

Having in mind that only 15%¹²⁴ children of preschool age are included in preschool institutions, vast majority of children in their early years remain at home, mostly with their unemployed mothers as primary caregivers and without any support in the child's family environment and outside the institutional environment. Only 1 in 3 children aged 2-4 years receive responsive care and early stimulation from any adult household member, such as storytelling, singing songs, reading books or simple games.¹²⁵

In Kosovo, there is a lack of alternative programs to support parents and early intervention services in the family environment, lack of day care centers, learning centers, community centers, parent support groups, etc. It is necessary to develop programs for parents support, families and guardians in the child's family environment, outside of the institutional environment.

Early childhood development services are not integrated in education, health and social welfare sectors. Services are isolated, unintegrated and uncoordinated – the family goes to various institutions to receive services. Services are mainly therapeutic and preventive services are inexistent.¹²⁶

¹¹⁸ Education statistics in Kosovo 2021-2022, <https://masht.rks-gov.net/statistikat-e-arsimit-ne-kosove-2021-2022/>

¹¹⁹ Data from Organization: Balkan Sunflowers Kosova

¹²⁰ Education statistics in Kosovo 2021-2022, <https://masht.rks-gov.net/statistikat-e-arsimit-ne-kosove-2021-2022/>

¹²¹ Data from Organization: Down Syndrome Kosova

¹²² Education statistics in Kosovo 2021-2022, <https://masht.rks-gov.net/statistikat-e-arsimit-ne-kosove-2021-2022/>

¹²³ Data from Organization: Terre Des Hommes

¹²⁴ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey MICS 2020, Kosovo Agency of Statistics and UNICEF, <https://askapi.rks-gov.net/Custom/08eb3166-e575-407a-a383-d959ead4088e.pdf>

¹²⁵ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey MICS 2020, Kosovo Agency of Statistics and UNICEF, <https://askapi.rks-gov.net/Custom/08eb3166-e575-407a-a383-d959ead4088e.pdf>

¹²⁶ Manual on Early Childhood Methodology and Intervention, KOMF, https://komfkosova.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Manual_eng_compressed.pdf

An initiative towards intervention in early childhood through family services, is the systematic home visits model which is carried out by primary care health professionals within the Family Health Centers. This model would also be suitable for early childhood services to provide support for parents and caregivers.

Adoption of the Law on Early Childhood Education is a positive step. One of new approaches brought by this law is the establishment of a legal basis for inter-sectorial coordination and integration of services between education, health and social care services in early childhood.

Despite the fact that the drafting process of the Early Childhood Education curricula has started a few years ago, it has not yet been approved.

Recommendations:

- ▶▶ Finalize and approve the Early Childhood Education curricula;
- ▶▶ Draft and approve the administrative instructions that derive from the Law on Early Childhood Education;
- ▶▶ Increase the number of preschool institutions and increase inclusion of children at the preschool level;
- ▶▶ Increase the inclusion of vulnerable children such as children with disabilities, children without parental care, children living in poverty, children from communities, etc., in preschool institutions;
- ▶▶ Prepare alternative early childhood development programs such as parent support programs, community centers, day care centers, family childcare, early childhood intervention, parenting groups, systematic home visits, early childhood mobile teams, early childhood online platforms;
- ▶▶ Increase subsidies for Learning Centers that provide support to preschool children from the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation;
- ▶▶ Conduct systematic home visits together with health and social workers for early identification, case management and support for parents and caregivers on early childhood development;
- ▶▶ Implement the Child Protection Policy in preschool institutions as a key tool to ensure a safe and protective environment for children and increase expert's capacities on the implementation;
- ▶▶ Integrate early childhood development services among education, health and social protection sectors, according to the new Law on Early Education;
- ▶▶ Improve assessment and inspection quality of preschool services;
- ▶▶ Establish or operationalize commissions for the assessment of children with disabilities;
- ▶▶ Define the legal basis and standards regarding daycare for children of pre-primary school age which work separately or within private kindergartens;
- ▶▶ Liaise with the Department for Non-Governmental Organizations within the respective Ministry (Ministry of Local Government or Ministry of Internal Affairs) regarding cases where private kindergartens are registered as non-governmental organizations.



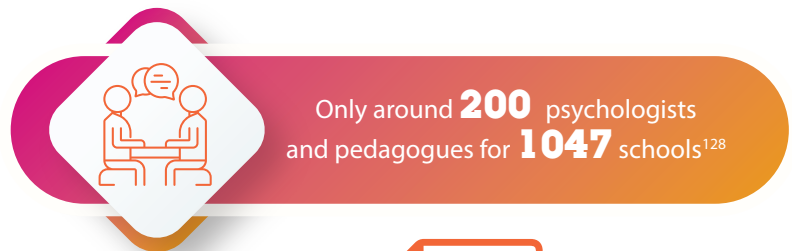
READY
STEADY
GO!

EDUCATION

EDUCATION

Grade: 2.5

- ▶▶ Low quality of education in Kosovo
- ▶▶ Inclusion of children with disabilities in schools is not significant and based on children's individual needs
- ▶▶ Lack of professional and support staff such as psychologists, pedagogues and assistants for children with disabilities in schools



In total, there are 327,676 pupils in the pre-university education (169,143 boys and 158,533 girls). The primary and lower secondary education system has 224,429 pupils, while 70,850 pupils are in the upper secondary education.¹²⁹

According to MESTI data for 2021-2022, the number of the educational staff is 27,915, out of which 23,033 are teachers, 1,606 administrative staff and 3,276 support staff. In total, Kosovo has 1,047 educational institutions.¹³⁰

Pre-university education faces numerous challenges and problems, which reflect in the low quality of education in Kosovo. The Program for international assessment of students



“PISA”

HAS RANKED KOSOVO 68TH OUT OF 72 COUNTRIES

resulting in a low level of quality in education. There are many factors that affect Kosovo's low quality in education, such as quality of teachers, overcrowded schools, big number of pupils in classes, especially in cities, lack of infrastructure in schools, bad management, politicization of educational staff in schools, failure of cooperation between parents, teachers and students, low accountability, etc.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Data from the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, 2022

¹²⁸ Data from the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, 2022

¹²⁹ Education statistics in Kosovo 2021-2022, <https://masht.rks-gov.net/statistikat-e-arsimit-ne-kosove-2021-2022/>

¹³⁰ Education statistics in Kosovo 2021-2022, <https://masht.rks-gov.net/statistikat-e-arsimit-ne-kosove-2021-2022/>

¹³¹ Data from KOMF members Organizations

In order to create a system for the prevention, response and protection of children, Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation has approved the Child Protection Policy.

Although continuous efforts are being made toward implementation of the concept of comprehensive education, this process is accompanied by many difficulties, having in mind that Kosovo is still in the process of creating a culture and practice, which is still a long way ahead and which requires human resources and sufficient funds.¹³² Steps have been taken in the advancement of policies and legislation, attempting to include the concept of inclusiveness as an integral part of all policies. However, in terms of implementing policies and developing mechanisms that ensure inclusiveness, there is still much work to be done. Amongst the main challenges regarding inclusive education are: inadequate training of teachers, lack of inclusive teaching methods, lack of technological support equipment, social norms and attitudes, curricula, socio-economic factors and lack of human resources and funds.¹³³

Inclusion of the most vulnerable children at all levels of education, such as children with disabilities, children from non-majority communities, who do not receive adequate support to achieve their full potential, continues to remain the most challenging issue.¹³⁴

Having in mind that Kosovo does not have official statistics on the number of children with disabilities, it is impossible to determine the inclusion level of children with disabilities in educational institutions. Lack of data is the main obstacle in addressing the needs of children with disabilities. Data collection becomes even more difficult because there is no harmonization of mechanisms and systems among ministries. Information collected at school level that may be used in the future for funding purposes, may not be reliable as it lacks relevant supporting documentation.¹³⁵ Although it is set by law that every municipality must have municipal teams for the assessment of children with disabilities¹³⁶, often these children are identified only when they reach school age and try to enroll in schools, time when the intervention is already too late to have a sustainable influence on their development. Most municipalities have established municipal teams for the assessment of children with disabilities, but not all teams are functional. Moreover, there are municipalities such as Klina Municipality and Dragash Municipality that do

not have assessment teams, as they have difficulties for the needed professionals or financing difficulties in accordance to the administrative instructions.¹³⁷ Consequently, children with disabilities are often not assessed and individualized plans that are designed according to the child's impairments and environmental barriers, are not compiled.

Another challenge faced by children, parents and schools, is the small number of support teachers and assistants who work with children with disabilities. Currently, for the 2021/2022 school year, 291 pupils with disabilities have continued to learn in resource centers/special schools, while



ONLY 3,965 CHILDREN

WITH DISABILITIES ARE INCLUDED IN REGULAR CLASSES

Inclusive education is possible when parents of children with disabilities have the right information and support. Support for parents and extent of services for them is low, fragmented, mostly limited and mainly supported from civil society organizations initiatives. Without services at local level, many families feel unable to support their children's psychosocial development, rehabilitation at home and their inclusion in schools and in the community.

Schools lack professional and support staff such as psychologists, pedagogues and assistants for children with disabilities. Currently, there are about 200 psychologists and pedagogues in schools nationwide.¹³⁸ Having in mind that there are 1,047 educational institutions, it can be concluded that not even one quarter of schools has psychologists.

¹³² Data from Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, 2022

¹³³ Data from Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, 2022

¹³⁴ Data from KOMF member organizations

¹³⁵ Hunt PP; Belegu-Caka V.: Situation analysis: children with disabilities in Kosovo, Prishtina: UNICEF, 2018. <https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/media/216/file/KOS-SITAN-ENG.pdf>

¹³⁶ Data from Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, 2022

¹³⁷ Data from Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, 2022

¹³⁸ Data from Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, 2022

In most cases, one psychologist covers four schools. While there are municipalities that do not have psychologists at all.

The employment of 100 assistants for children with disabilities, was a positive action in 2022. However, hiring and increasing the number of assistants for children with disabilities should be continued, to fulfill the needs of all children with disabilities. An additional concern has been raised and emphasized by KOMF regarding the support assistants for children with disabilities in educational institutions, who are not engaging in providing professional support, as defined in legislation.

According to official data, school dropout rate is low, nonetheless, this is considered more existent and disturbing among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.¹³⁹ Situation continues to remain unsatisfactory regarding education of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. One of the main reasons for not being included in education are: unwillingness to enroll in school, dropping out of school, children involved in hazardous work, lack of motivation regarding education and schooling and lack of parents and family awareness regarding the education of their children.¹⁴⁰

It is generally considered that one of main challenges of preventing school drop is schools lack of reporting by EWS (Early Warning System). Likewise, teams for prevention and response to dropout and non-enrollment in compulsory education, are not adequately functional. In some municipalities, these teams have not even been established at all, and there are cases where teams are only formally established, which has a negative impact and makes it impossible to take preventive measures to avoid dropping out of school, especially for children from communities. In all cases, these teams do not deal with prevention and response to cases of non-registering in school.

Existing learning centers organized by non-governmental organizations for additional learning, are seen as promising institutions on supporting the education of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community's children and preventing school dropouts. But these centers are facing a lot of challenges due to lack of funding and neglect of institutional responsibilities, risking their closure. Currently, Kosovo Government allocates

only 200.000 Euros per school year on subsidizing learning centers through a public call for funding projects of non-governmental organizations that organize learning centers, which contribute to the educational achievement and support of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian pupils and also other pupils. This monetary amount is considered too low to cover the needs for functioning of the learning centers, having in mind that there are over 48 learning centers licensed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. Another issue is the ambiguity in the implementation of the administrative instruction no. 19/2018 on the establishment and functioning of the learning centers related to licensing and re-licensing, institutionalization and financing from municipal level. Thus, this is a major obstacle in ensuring sustainability of learning centers, which are currently managed by non-governmental organizations.

Regarding inclusion of children from families with low socio-economic status in the education system, during the school year 2021/2022, 14,184 children whose families were in social assistance, were included in educational institutions, 4,278 children were with one parent and 132 children without parents.¹⁴¹ However, there is no data if measures have been taken by institutions to address the educational needs for children from families with low socio-economic status.

Schools in Kosovo do not fully meet the concept of child-friendly schools, due to unsafe and unfriendly environment, inadequate infrastructure, teachers approach and lack of cooperation between students, teachers, parents and community.

According to the research conducted by the Student Council of Kosovo, 27.9% of professors hit pupils. 34.4% pupils have reported that there are teachers who sexually harass in schools. In 40.2% of cases, pupils are bullied by other pupils. According to the same research, 41.2% of pupils stated that there is no library in their schools, 49% of students stated that there are no security guards in their schools, 61.9% of students stated that they feel threatened by stray dogs on their way to school.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Education Strategy 2022-2026, <https://masht.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/03-Strategja-e-Arsimit-2022-2026-Eng-Web.pdf>

¹⁴⁰ Data from KOMF member Organizations

¹⁴¹ Education statistics 2021-2022, <https://masht.rks-gov.net/en/education-statistics-in-kosovo2021-2022/>

¹⁴² Student perceptions regarding content, process and learning environment

In Kosovo, the concept of child participation is relatively new. This concept is included in legislation, such as the Law on Child Protection, National Strategy on Children's Rights, regulations and other by-laws at central and municipal level. Although according to the legislation in force, the role of Pupils' Council is to work on improving learning environment, and interests related to the health, safety and well-being of pupils and representation in school

governing board, unfortunately, practices show that in most cases, pupils' councils and other children's organizations, are formally established and through procedures that are not at all democratic, very often imposed by teachers and school management. Instead of properly representing pupil's interests, Pupils' Councils remain in function of teachers and school management for controlling pupils.¹⁴³

Recommendations:

- » Implement the Child Protection Policy in institutions that work with children, as a key tool to provide safe and protective environment for children;
 - » Create child-friendly schools to provide healthy, humane, friendly and safe environments, support from teachers and above all, pupils' involvement and active participation;
 - » Establish or functionalize the commission for the assessment of children with disabilities;
 - » Remove obstacles in order to ensure accessibility for children with disabilities in educational institutions;
 - » Implement the function of the support assistant for children with disabilities, as provided for in legislation
- and employ of additional assistants based on the need;
 - » Establish or operationalize (according to the municipality's specifications) the teams for the prevention and response to dropout and non-enrollment in compulsory education;
 - » Employment of psychologists and pedagogues in schools;
 - » Functionalize the Early Warning System;
 - » Increase funding for Learning Centers in order to ensure sustainability of their services;
 - » Invest in increasing quality of education, by increasing capacities of teachers, revising textbooks, digitalizing education and adapting to the labor market needs.

¹⁴³ Brief policy, Pedagogical triangle, ETEA 2022, https://issuu.com/etea.ks/docs/trekendeshi_pedagogjik_politike_e_shkruter



JUVENILE JUSTICE

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Grade: 2

- ▶ Lack of services for prevention and protection of minors in conflict with the law without criminal responsibility
- ▶ Significant decrease of the implementation of diversity measures in the juvenile justice system
- ▶ Lack of professionals for the rehabilitation and reintegration of minors in the education and correctional system



CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW UNDER THE AGE OF CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY

During 2022, Centers for Social Work within the frame of protection of this category, have managed



579 CASES

OF MINORS IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW UNDER THE AGE OF CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY¹⁴⁴

Social services for children in conflict with the law without criminal responsibility have been offered in cooperation with other partners such as: Police, Probation Service, family, schools, non-governmental organizations and other actors within the child protection system.

Within the frame of the implementation of the Administrative Instruction (GRK) No. 01/2021 on the protection and treatment of children as offenders of criminal offences under the age of criminal responsibility¹⁴⁵, the following have been established: Team for monitoring and implementation of the Administrative Instruction for the Protection and

Treatment of Children Committing Offenses Under the Age of Criminal Responsibility\02-1708, have been created.¹⁴⁶; Work regulation of the team for monitoring the implementation of administrative instruction GRK 01.2021 on the protection and treatment of children committing criminal offenses under the age of criminal responsibility as well as the standards regarding the recommendations of the team, content of the report of the team and quality of monitoring and evaluation of the administrative instruction implementation.

Based on this Administrative Instruction, for the child who commits criminal offenses under the age of criminal responsibility, the following is defined: Protection; protection program; peer mediation; legal aid and treatment.

However, the implementation of this Administrative Instruction and operationalization of its implementation mechanisms, continues to remain challenging. This is due to the very limited capacities within the Centers for Social Work to provide the necessary services in accordance with the needs. It is worth mentioning that in this regard, there is a significant lack of services from other providers, such as the non-governmental sector. Also, another deficiency of the system is the lack of work with family, where again Centers for Social Work lack necessary human resources to carry out work with the family, which in these cases must be developed in parallel with the work that is done with the child.

In addition to the challenge of providing social services, cases when minors have to leave their families due to lack of proper parental care, represents another issue. Regarding these cases, there is no form of specialized foster care, no day care or residential services, which could offer specialized and professional services for their rehabilitation and reintegration.

¹⁴⁴ Data from Department for Social and Family Policy, Ministry of Justice, 2022

¹⁴⁵ AI GRK-No.-01-2021; <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=36551>

¹⁴⁶ Decision on establishment of Team for monitoring the implementation of AI GRK-No-01-2021; <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=50068>

Establishment of specialized services for children in conflict with the law under the age of criminal responsibility is expected to be done with the approval of the new Law on Social and Family Services.

CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW WITH CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY, RIGHTS, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR THEM



KOSOVO PROBATION OFFICE HAS PROCESSED 700 CASES OF MINORS

Kosovo Probation Service in 2022, has processed a total of 700 cases involving minors, where the most dominant offenses included injuries, assaults, thefts, etc. Out of this number, 387 diversity measures, 245 educational measures and 31 cases with orders on community work, were applied.¹⁴⁷

Within Probation Service, motivational interviewing and programs such as Anger Management and Conversations for Change, are implemented. Furthermore, regarding provision of professional assistance to minors, the Probation Service has agreements with many institutions such as Mental Health Centers, Centers for Social Work, Vocational Training Centers, Non-Governmental Organizations and local institutions where alternative measures are implemented. However, implementation of the existing legislation, preparation and implementation of programs on prevention, protection and reintegration of children at risk, still remains challenging, despite the advancement of the legal framework, policies and continuous reforms in the child protection system and justice for children in Kosovo.

Even though the new Juvenile Justice Code has doubled diversity measures from 8 to 16,¹⁴⁸ which play a crucial role in preventing the initiation of court proceedings against minors and promoting their rehabilitation and reintegration in the society, the effective implementation of diversity measures is facing various obstacles and challenges. Moreover, in the recent years, there has been a marked decline of the implementation of these measures within the juvenile justice system, raising concerns about the possible consequences in the lives of juveniles and their chances of successful rehabilitation.

¹⁴⁷ TData from Kosovo Probation Service, 2022

¹⁴⁸ Juvenile Justice Code, Article 20, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=18019>

¹⁴⁹ State Prosecutor Annual Work Report <https://www.prokuroria-rks.org/assets/cms/uploads/files/RAPORTI%20VJETOR%20I%20PROKUROR-IT%20TE%20SHTETIT%202022.pdf>



2,341

CRIMINAL CHARGES FOR MINORS

During 2022, out of 2,341 criminal charges against minors with 3,639 persons, Juvenile Justice prosecutors of the Basic Prosecutor's Office have resolved 1,661 criminal reports with 2,477 minors. Specifically, for 389 or 15.70% of minors, preparatory procedure has not started (principle of opportunity). Mediation procedure has been proposed for 29 or 1.17% of minors. For 182 or 7.34% of minors, preparatory procedure was stopped. Criminal charges were filed against 434 or 17.54% of minors. For 207 or 8.35% of minors, diversity measures were proposed¹⁴⁹. From this data, it is obvious that we have a drastic reduction of diversity measures imposed by the prosecution, and even more worrying is the fact that new diversity measures are not being implemented at all.

One of the main reasons that hinders the effective implementation of diversity measures, is lack of necessary training for juvenile justice professionals, such as: police officers, prosecutors, judges, lawyers and social workers who have contacts with children. They do not receive regular trainings on working with children. They have not even received training on the new diversity measures provided for the first time in the Juvenile Justice Code, which would ensure a better knowledge about these measures, their goals, and consequently, their application in the appropriate cases. Furthermore, there is no monitoring of the implementation of such measures by children justice professionals, that would provide accurate data, identify gaps and provide opportunities for improvement.

The current curricular programs about juvenile justice and child protection, in frame of the Kosovo Academy of Justice, need immediate revision. Programs need to be prepared based on international and European standards for children's rights and juvenile justice, including child protection concepts, interviewing techniques and child-friendly communication during court proceedings.

Kosovo Correctional Service, during 2022, received 126 cases of children in conflict with the law, among which 24 light and serious physical injuries, 22 theft and serious theft, 19 robberies, 11 attempted murders and 10 rapes, as well as other crimes. Out of 126 criminal offenses committed by children with criminal responsibility, 25 corrective educational measures were implemented, 2 sentenced to imprisonment for minors and 99 were detained, in the Correctional Center for Juveniles in Lipjan.¹⁵⁰

Placement and treatment of cases of minors accepted by the Kosovo Correctional Service, is done at Educational-Correctional Centre and Educational-Correctional Centre for Juveniles in Lipjan. According to the Juvenile Justice Code, juvenile correctional institution is of the semi-open and open type. However, the Correctional Center for Juveniles in Lipjan and Educational-Correctional Centre are administered by the same management, and the placement of minors with a corrective educational measure in the Educational-Correctional Centre is done only after minors are firstly placed in Correctional Center and after fulfilling certain criteria they can move to Educational-Correctional Centre.¹⁵¹

This means that in the open-type Educational-Correctional Centre no direct admissions can be applied in accordance to the Court's decision, but only transfers from the Correctional Center. During 2022, a total of 25 transfers has been done. As a result, juveniles with corrective educational measures are kept in a closed type institution, which constitutes violation of the Juvenile Justice Code provisions, thus causing a serious violation of children's fundamental rights. Management and routine of minors with corrective educational measures and convicted minors does not differ, remaining in disagreement with the court's decision.

Juveniles in the Juvenile Correctional Center in Lipjan participate in two rehabilitation programs, which are insufficient to fulfill the functions that the correctional center should have and programs it should apply with juveniles, especially with juveniles under corrective educational measures. Lack of work with the family is another shortcoming identified in the field of juvenile rehabilitation and reintegration.

Another ongoing concern is the fact that there is no correctional center for female juveniles, and they are placed in the Correctional Center for Women in Lipjan with adult detainees/convicts. In this correctional center there is no specific environment for convicted, detained correctional educational measures female juveniles, so they are placed in wards with convicted and detained adult women.

¹⁵⁰ Data from Kosovo Probation Service, 2022

¹⁵¹ Data from Kosovo Probation Service, 2022

¹⁵² Juvenile Justice Code (Code No.06/L-006,2018), Article 85, paragraph 4

Lack of professional staff represents a challenge for Kosovo Correctional Service in managing correctional institutions. The Correctional Center has 101 employees, out of this number, 82 are correctional officers, 1 social worker, 1 psychologist, 12 civilian staff and 5 support staff. The number of professional staff and number of correctional officers at Educational-Correctional Centre is 27 employees: 24 correctional officers, 1 education officer, 1 IT instructor and 1 maintenance worker.



Lack of educators continues to be a concern, and even though the Juvenile Justice Code strictly stipulates that for every 10 minors there should be 1 educator¹⁵², until now this has not been accomplished! It is extremely worrying that for a long time now, there is only 1 social worker in the Educational-Correctional Centre for juveniles and in the Correctional Center, while in 2022, the Kosovo Correctional Service received 126 cases of juveniles in conflict with the law, which tells us about the situation and real possibility for 1 social worker to work and provide quality services for all juveniles.

There is big number of correction officers and very small number professional staff. Educational measures are aimed at rehabilitating juvenile offenders, providing protection, assistance and supervision, education and professional training, developing their personal responsibility and stopping recidivism, and the professional staff is responsible for providing services and implementing the rehabilitation and reintegration of juveniles. Therefore, in order to achieve the goal for which these educational measures were given, it is recommended to increase the number of professional staff, focusing in the employment of psychologists and social workers. The primary goal of the current structure is safety, preventing juveniles from escaping, thus, neglecting work on rehabilitation, education and reintegration of juveniles, which is the purpose of the measures.

Educational-Correctional Centre for Juveniles in Lipjan must have sufficient human resources to implement individual programs, rehabilitation and reintegration programs, educational programs and forms of assistance that are adequate and in accordance with the individual needs of juveniles under educational measures and convicted juveniles.

Compiling individual plans has an important impact on juvenile's treatment. Individual programs should be designed and implemented by the multidisciplinary team working with minors, this would affect their preparation for resocialization and rehabilitation.

Educational-Correctional Centre for Juveniles in Lipjan is a special institution for Educational Measure implementation and functions as an open-type center under the management

Correctional Center of Lipjan. However, this institution has never had female minors placed in it. Although there is a separate ward for placement of female juveniles, if they were to be placed there, their management would be quite difficult due to the facility structure and the main problem would be keeping female juveniles away from male juveniles.¹⁵³

Even though the Juvenile Code Article 119 stipulates that if there are no classes on some school subjects or there is no education level in correctional institution, the juvenile is allowed to continue classes outside the correctional institution, the education of juveniles is organized in the juvenile detention center where also juveniles from Correctional Center attend classes. The educational system has challenges in organizing the learning process, teaching quality and failure to have classes for all school subjects that are in the curricula, which results with a very low level of education.

Recommendations:

- ▶▶ Review Kosovo Academy of Justice current curricular programs on juvenile justice and child protection in order to assess the needs for improvement/change of current programs;
- ▶▶ Compile the new curricular programs of the Kosovo Academy of Justice in accordance with international and European Union standards for children's rights and juvenile justice, interviewing techniques and friendly communication with children during court proceedings;
- ▶▶ Organize systematic trainings in order to increase capacities of justice system professionals on working with children. Trainings related to new diversity measures as provided for in Juvenile Justice Code;
- ▶▶ Create individual programs adapted to the condition, psychological and physical development of each minor, in accordance with the Juvenile Justice Code;
- ▶▶ Programs must be prepared by a multidisciplinary team, must include social worker in charge of cases, psychologists, correctional officers, educators, minors, parents or guardians and other relevant institutions;
- ▶▶ Monitor diversity measures; monitor prosecutor's offices and courts during entire process, from the beginning of the procedure to its implementation;
- ▶▶ Create sustainable programs on rehabilitation and reintegration of juveniles;
- ▶▶ Separate female juveniles from convicted adult women, in order to provide suitable environment for the rehabilitation and reintegration of female juveniles with measures and convicted female juveniles;
- ▶▶ Employ the adequate professional staff such as social workers, psychologists, professional instructors, counselors, etc. There must be sufficient human resources in order to implement individual, rehabilitation and reintegration, and educational programs.

¹⁵³ Data from Educational-Correctional Centre, 2022

KOMF MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

- Action for Mothers and Children
- Association for Social Training, Research and Advocacy
- Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo
- Childproof/CIPOF
- CONCORDIA Social Projects
- Down Syndrome Kosovo
- Education Comes First
- Handikos Ferizaj
- Handikos Gjakova
- Hareja
- Network of Peace Movement
- Nevo Koncepti
- OPFAKKOS
- "Autizmi" Organization
- Akti Organization
- Organization for Children without Parental Care – OFAP
- PL4Y International
- Civil Rights Program
- Public Organization for Local Initiatives and Supports – POLIS
- Day Care Center PEMA
- Kosovo Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims – QKRMT
- Labyrinth Center
- Kosovo Education Center– KEC
- Center for Protection of Victims and Prevention of Human Trafficking
- Center for Advanced Studies– FIT
- Social Educational Center SOS Kindergarten
- Peer Educators Network
- Save the Children in Kosovo
- SOS Children Villages Kosovo
- Association of Children Paraplegics and Paralysis in Kosovo – HANDIKOS
- Patients' Rights Association Kosovo – PRAK Kosovo
- Hope and Homes for Children – SDSF
- Terre des hommes
- The Ideas Partnership
- Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians – VoRAE

