

POLICY BRIEF ON WOMEN'S AGENCY AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT IN SECURITY SECTOR





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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Methodology	3
Assessing Gender equality in the Security Institutions	4
Gender sensitivity within the working environment in the security sector	5
Representation of women in managerial and decision-making positions	7
Protective mechanisms within the institutions and the review of complaints	9
Main Recommendations	10

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The low application rates of women to join security institutions, primarily stems from the perception that this field is predominantly for men. This perception affects women working in the sector who encounter a patriarchal mentality undermining their knowledge and expertise compared to their men counterparts. Moreover, women often confront the pressure to conform to societal expectations, compromising their personal freedoms and authentic selves;
- Women in the security sector are underrepresented in managerial positions and their ambition to pursue leadership roles is harmed by prejudice and perceived gender roles. The undervaluing and differential treatment of women within the security sector hinders their ambitions and self-esteem, leading to a belief that they are unfit for managerial positions. Moreover, gendered domestic responsibilities create substantial barriers for women in attaining managerial positions and assuming increased responsibilities within the security sector, hindering their career progression; This role significantly hinders women's ability to pursue extensive training programs necessary for career advancement, particularly in the military.
- There is a trend of underreporting when it comes to bullying, harassment, or discrimination cases among women in the security sector. As this was described as lack of "reporting culture", it refers to the discouraging atmosphere that deters women from coming forward and reporting such incidents. As well as reporting mechanisms are perceived as non-confidential.
- There is reluctance to address issues of gender equality in Kosovo Police (KP), while there is continuous request from civil society organizations to cooperate and share data and insights regarding women's position and gendered working environment in KP.

INTRODUCTION

The report assesses women's agency and working environment within the security sector in Kosovo, primarily from an institutional perspective.

This report serves as a follow-up to our previous baseline assessment on gender-based violence (GBV) conducted in Kosovo. The baseline assessment revealed findings that prompted further research into the gender sensitivity of the working environment within security institutions. In the earlier report, we discovered several significant data points related to GBV, highlighting the challenges posed by patriarchal mentality, the lack of prioritization of handling GBV cases by local security and judicial institutions, and the absence of a gender-sensitive approach among officials working within these institutions.¹

The primary aim of the current research is twofold. Firstly, we aim to measure the agency of women within the security sector and evaluate the extent to which it is inclusive and accommodating towards a gender perspective. Secondly, our research focuses on evaluating the capacity of institutions within the security sector to address gender-specific challenges and to use gender lens within the security sector. Given the low representation of women in these institutions, it is crucial to understand the underlying factors that hinder their participation and advancement. By identifying these barriers, we can develop strategies and recommendations to promote gender equality and create a more inclusive environment within the security sector.

The report provides insights about researchers experiences and general impressions, providing a contextual backdrop. Moreover, the report explores some of the key aspects: first, it examines the patriarchal mentality as a significant hindrance to joining the, and working in, security institutions; second, it analyzes the treatment and representation of women in managerial and decision-making positions; and third, it evaluates the protective mechanisms within these institutions and reviewing the handling of complaints.

It is important to note that this brief serves as a preliminary overview, presenting a selection of the main findings and insights from our research, and providing a prequel to the final report on women's agency and working environment in the security sector.

Methodology

This report provides a short overview of women's agencies and the working environment in security institutions. The report follows a qualitative methodology and relies on semi-structured interviews with women experienced in security institutions in Kosovo to obtain insights about the working environment and gender sensitivity in security institutions. Other institutions within the security sector are covered through desk research and analysis of publicly available data. The initial phase of this research involved conducting a literature review to gain a fundamental understanding of the relevant concepts and

¹ More on: https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Baseline_Assessment_Eng_%281%29.pdf

to examine the operating environment within Kosovo's security institutions. Additionally, the legal foundations of these security institutions were thoroughly researched. During the second phase of the research, we examined the data obtained from interviews conducted with personnel from security institutions.

ASSESSING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE SECURITY INSTITUTIONS

In the process of conducting this research, numerous challenges were encountered. The initial plan for this report encompassed the utilization of interviews with women employed in the security sector, along with the organization of numerous focus groups involving both men and women participants, from different departments, grades, and positions, from the Kosovo Police (KP) and Kosovo Security Force (KSF).

While the **KSF has exhibited responsiveness and cooperation** in granting interviews with their staff members, the execution of focus groups has been impeded by ongoing procedures to appoint a commissioner for communications, who would assume responsibility for coordinating such engagements with the public. The interviews conducted with KSF women officials treated topics related to women well-being and agency in this institution. Formal discussions treated their perceptions on recruitment processes, treatment in the work environment, promotion opportunities and skills development. Further it was discussed about complaint platforms and opportunities to make the environment more inclusive for women.

Broadly speaking, women employed within the KSF express satisfaction with their working environment, and instances of sexual harassment or other forms of harassment have not been reported. Nonetheless, **traces of a patriarchal mindset persist within the institution, although adherence to respect, as mandated by the law and chain of command, is regarded as paramount.**

While women within the KSF resist characterizing the institution as a predominantly male environment, they do endorse the notion that women are more inclined to sacrifice their careers for the sake of family responsibilities, which subsequently hinders their professional advancement. In general interviewees exhibited hesitance when discussing the challenges and difficulties faced by women in the KSF. However, in informal post-interview discussions, they would be more forthcoming about such challenges, albeit still constrained by the hierarchical structure.

Additionally, in most of the cases **women employees don't express the fact that their promotions may entail a degree of gender inequality.** Many individuals occupying managerial positions disclosed that they had to exert exceptional effort to attain their promotions. While the KSF demonstrates a certain level of compliance with [Law no.05/L-020 on Gender Equality](#), there remains further progress to be achieved in this regard.

Conversely, the **KP has exhibited a denial of cooperation across all levels.** Requests for interviews and focus groups have been unequivocally declined by the institution. Informal discussions have disclosed a latent interest in discussing the subject matter, particularly among women within the KP. Nonetheless, the chain of command has consistently refused interview and focus group requests. This obstinate stance toward gender-related topics within the KP raises pertinent questions regarding the rationale behind their non-cooperation. In our subsequent research, we aim to explore whether the institution, as a whole, displays a general apathy toward addressing issues of gender equality or if there exists a deliberate intent to withhold information from the public.

GENDER SENSITIVITY WITHIN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT IN THE SECURITY SECTOR

The lack of women's representation in the security sector is a significant concern that needs to be addressed. Despite some progress regarding the presentation of women in the security sector, the numbers remain alarming, with women making up only approximately 10% of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) staff and 15% of the Police Force (PF).² One of the primary factors contributing to this gender disparity is the **prevailing mentality that perceives the security sector as a domain exclusively for men**. Even for those women who do choose to pursue careers in this field, they often face discouragement that deters them from staying. This discouragement manifests in two distinct ways: firstly, women are frequently treated as if they possess less knowledge and expertise, and secondly, they often feel compelled to compromise their individual liberties to conform to societal expectations of appearing more convincing or masculine. In the following sections, we will delve deeper into these challenges and shed light on the barriers that hinder women from fully participating in the security sector.

The low application rates of women to join security institutions, primarily stems from the perception that this field is predominantly for men. Insights from the interviews with women that have experience in the security institutions explain the underlying factors that discourage women from pursuing careers in the security sector as being related to the community perception that the sector is a suitable career path only for men. One interviewee highlighted the prevailing hesitations surrounding women's involvement in the military mostly come from the fact that it is not readily accepted by the community, be it their families, relatives, and future colleagues.³ This viewpoint underscores the entrenched belief that the security sector is primarily geared towards men, acts as a hinderance for women who aspire to join. Moreover, the people that already work in the security institutions, sometimes tend to advertise it as a not suitable job for women, further discouraging young women from pursuing career opportunities and advancement within the sector. As a worker in the security institutions explains:

"individuals within the system tend to put in place some 'measures' to prevent you from joining the system. They say 'remember that you're going to get married, you are endangering your future family life, you have to answer people very late at night and go into field missions, which are not suitable for a woman'".⁴

Furthermore, even when women manage to overcome the prejudices and join the security sector, they often face the patriarchal mentality that perceives them as less knowledgeable than their men counterparts. This mindset undermines their capabilities and expertise, dismissing their contributions based solely on their gender.

² Data from the Interviews with KSF officials, Kosovo Police Annual Report 2022, accessed at: https://www.kosovopolice.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Raporti-vjetor-i-pun%C3%ABs-s%C3%AB-Policis%C3%AB-s%C3%AB-Kosov%C3%ABs-Janar-Dhjetor-2022_SHQIP.pdf

³ Key Informant Interview no 9

⁴ Key Informant Interview no 6

As a woman working in the sector describes:

"I entered meetings and encountered the 'you can't tell me how to work with the military' comment, or 'what could you possibly teach us?' as they believe we don't know anything about the army".⁵

These demeaning comments not only undermine their self-esteem, but also raise doubts about the worthiness of their presence and efforts in the sector. As the same interviewee expressed:

"This harms you because you lose the motivation to work, you often say, is it worth it? You get so stressed when among 50 men you are belittled and they say, are you capable?".

Another interviewee also emotionally describes that sometimes it gets hard to handle all the pressure that is more unique for women in the sector:

"There are cases when I really want to give up, with all the strength I have, with all the confidence I have. I come to the situation when I say is this all worth it? This country is used to only see a man seated in high positions".⁶

Women in the security sector often confront the pressure to conform to societal expectations, compromising their personal freedoms and authentic selves. They face challenges ranging from derogatory comments to altering their appearance. This pressure becomes particularly pronounced when they find themselves as the lone woman among a group of men. One interviewee articulates the reluctance to express opinions or make decisions due to the anticipated sexist backlash "We sometimes step back and not comment on something I really think it is worth commenting, just knowing what their comments would be".⁷ Furthermore, they describe how they have modified their appearance to evade unnecessary attention and comments: "I often have to be on a table with 30 men, and if one heel hits the floor everyone turns around and looks at you. I have kind of 'killed' the woman inside me and not worn any dresses or skirts at work for 4 years now".⁸ Even though there are no policies or regulations that regulate the attire, the mere perception of their gender often leads to feelings of self-censorship.⁹ The pervasive pressure on women within the security sector to conform to gendered expectations and compromise personal freedoms creates a hostile environment that potentially discourages women from pursuing careers in the sector, leading to fewer women joining and contributing to its workforce. The systemic barriers and gender biases undermine the sector's ability to attract and retain diverse talent, limiting opportunities for women to participate and excel in security-related roles.

5 Key Informant Interview no 6

6 Key Informant Interview no 3

7 Key Informant Interview no 6

8 Key Informant Interview no 3

9 Key Informant Interview no 6

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MANAGERIAL AND DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS

The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within the security sector raises significant concerns on multiple fronts. Firstly, it hinders gender diversity, limiting the range of experiences, insights, and perspectives that can contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive decision-making process. Lack of involvement of gender perspective and their experience at the managerial level entails a risk of overlooking crucial considerations related to gender-specific security issues, such as addressing the unique challenges women face in the sector and implementing policies that promote their well-being and advancement. Furthermore, the lack of women's perspectives in decision-making processes can lead to a skewed understanding of security concerns and potentially overlook the specific needs and vulnerabilities faced by women. Gender-sensitive approaches and policies are essential for ensuring the safety, inclusion, and equitable treatment of all individuals within the security sector, and the absence of diverse voices at leadership levels undermines these efforts.

The pervasive undervaluing and differential treatment of women within the security sector hinders their ambitions and self-esteem, leading to a belief that they are unfit for managerial positions. This discouragement stems from a deeply ingrained patriarchal mindset that perpetuates the notion that women are incapable. As one interviewee candidly expresses:

*"Maybe it's a lack of self-confidence, or perhaps it's because we live in a male-dominated world that says these women don't know, these women can't do it... they have this belief that they can't achieve and feel content with what they have."*¹⁰

On the other hand, men tend to encounter fewer challenges related to self-doubt and experience smoother career advancement within the security sector, as they do not encounter as much comments and criticism, leading to higher levels of confidence. As one interviewee explains:

*"from my experience, men do not have the worry that someone will say to them 'you're not doing your job right' or 'you don't know'. In a patriarchal society, when you praise men even when they do something wrong, they get the self-confidence and don't suffer from how others perceive them, and have the courage to move forward, which is never the case for women."*¹¹

Gendered domestic responsibilities create substantial barriers for women in attaining managerial positions and assuming increased responsibilities within the security sector, hindering their career progression. Contrary to men, women face societal expectations and pressures that assign them greater domestic and family

¹⁰ Key Informant Interview no 4

¹¹ Key Informant Interview no 3

responsibilities. These responsibilities often consume their time and energy, leaving little room for taking up additional responsibilities for career advancement. This expectation of women's primary roles as caregivers and homemakers is also reflected in the experiences shared by interviewees. One interviewee highlights how many women, despite their hard work and dedication, find contentment in their current roles and are not actively seeking higher positions.¹² Left without a choice nor help, they tend to prioritize their domestic responsibilities and are not driven by a strong ambition for career advancement.¹³ Furthermore, even when women do attain managerial positions, the burden of domestic obligations often hinders their availability to fully assume their responsibilities. There are cases where women in managerial roles – overwhelmed by family obligations and enforced gender roles within families –, request to be reassigned to non-managerial positions. In this regard, one of the informants explains:

*"[even when appointed] they come every second day to be relieved from their duties with reasons like: my mother-in-law is sick, [the job] is not letting me enough time for my kids, I'm being late, I can't handle the work. I have such a hard time finding women that want to be appointed to managerial positions".*¹⁴

The gendered burden of domestic obligations significantly hinders women's ability to pursue extensive training programs necessary for career advancement, particularly in the military. The advancement of women in the security sector, particularly in the military, is conditioned by the requirement to undergo extensive training programs for career progression. These training courses often involve significant time commitments and are often located abroad, spanning months or even years. In this context, women face unique challenges rooted in gender roles and cultural norms, which make it exceedingly difficult for them to undertake these trainings compared to men in similar positions. A woman with experience in the sector, interviewed for this research, admits that "undergoing a training that lasts one year is very easy for a man, and much much harder for a woman"¹⁵ referring to expectations and family obligations that prevail. Other problems that slow down the process of career advancement include pregnancies, and maternity leaves, which according to one official of the MoD, "this prevents them from finishing courses, which are preconditions for getting a higher grade, and they are left without qualifications".¹⁶

12 Key Informant Interview no 4

13 Ibid.

14 Key Informant Interview no 3

15 Key Informant Interview no 5

16 Key Informant Interview no 1

PROTECTIVE MECHANISMS WITHIN THE INSTITUTIONS AND THE REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

Within the context of the security sector, ensuring a safe and inclusive working environment is crucial for fostering gender equality and professional growth. **The data collected from interviews shows a trend of underreporting when it comes to bullying, harassment, or discrimination cases among women in the security sector.** There are two main reasons for this underreporting: first, is the fear of being exposed due to the lack of privacy in the close-knit environment where everyone knows everyone else, and second, is the potential to be misjudged or prejudiced by colleagues or the community in general.

The fear of the lack of confidentiality creates a discouraging atmosphere that deters women from coming forward and reporting such incidents. Currently, the KSF addresses the complaints through the Board for the Review of Complaints, which is overseen by the Unit for Human Rights and Gender Parity.¹⁷ However, the process of submitting a complaint is not as friendly, considering the low numbers of complaints received.¹⁸ According to qualitative data, the reporting process is seen as problematic, as complaints become known publicly even before formal reports are submitted to the protective mechanisms within institutions.¹⁹ Considering the close working environment, this is highly discouraging for women, knowing that they will continue to work at the same place after the complaints are potentially made public. Additionally, there is a fear among women that information may be leaked to news portals and tabloids,²⁰ further undermining their sense of safety in reporting cases of discrimination or harassment.

Besides the mechanism for complaints, the KSF implemented measures to facilitate discussions and support for women in the institution through its Unit for Human Rights and Gender Parity. These efforts include meetings with women where a range of topics are discussed and tries to enable women to voice their concerns.²¹ However, despite the availability of these informal meetings and efforts, still almost no concerns were ever raised as per discrimination, harassment, or bullying.²² One of the causes mentioned by people interviewed for this research, is the fear of being misjudged or prejudiced by colleagues themselves, which still prevails among women.²³ This fear acts as a deterrent, preventing women from speaking up about potential harassment cases they may be experiencing. Thus, the development of a more robust complaint culture within the KSF is crucial to address this issue effectively, which would lead to the sector being a safer space for women to work at.

17 <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=20620>, article 3.11

18 Key Informant Interview no 4

19 Key Informant Interview no 6

20 Key Informant Interview no 8

21 Key Informant Interview no 4

22 Ibid.

23 Key Informant Interview no. 6

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Security institutions in Kosovo should produce annual gender reports to track the gender ratio, identify women's challenges and needs, and develop strategies for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment within the sector. Additionally, conducting yearly gender budgeting will enable institutions to assess resource allocation and ensure investments are directed toward increasing women's representation and capacities within the security sector. These actions will foster a more inclusive and gender-responsive environment, enhancing women's agency and addressing the specific challenges they face.
- Establishing external monitoring mechanisms within the security institutions in Kosovo will strengthen gender sensitivity within the sector. These mechanisms can be in the form of independent oversight bodies or partnerships with civil society organizations working on gender equality and women's rights. By involving external monitors, it creates a system of accountability. These external monitors can regularly assess and report on the progress of the institutions in terms of gender representation, policies, practices, and the implementation of gender-responsive initiatives. Ultimately, this collaborative approach will contribute to more transparent, inclusive, and gender-responsive security institutions in Kosovo.
- New gender-sensitive measures should be introduced within the security sector to increase the representation of women in managerial positions by using mechanisms that would improve women's needs and challenges. This should include the implementation of tailor-made programs focused on women's advancement, providing mentorship, leadership training, and skill development opportunities. Additionally, establishing kindergarten facilities or nearby childcare options will support women's participation by enabling them to balance their professional and parental responsibilities effectively. By implementing these measures, security institutions can create an inclusive and supportive environment that promotes gender equality and empowers women in their careers, ultimately leading to increased representation of women in managerial positions within the sector.
- Implementing comprehensive training programs for the Department of Human Rights and Gender Equality and the Board of Complaints within KSF to address and effectively respond to sexual harassment. The training should focus on building knowledge and skills related to recognizing, investigating, and handling sexual harassment cases, providing support to victims, and enforcing appropriate disciplinary measures. By strengthening the capacity of the Department and Board of Complaints, KSF can create a safer work environment, promote a culture of respect and gender equality, and ensure a fair and robust process for addressing sexual harassment complaints.
- Provide a handbook against sexual harassments within the security sector. This handbook should serve as a guide to raise awareness among employees about what constitutes harassment and sexual harassment, providing clear definitions and examples. It should also outline the reporting mechanisms available, enabling individuals to confidentially report incidents. The handbook should emphasize the importance of taking all reports seriously, ensuring confidentiality, conducting thorough investigations, and enforcing appropriate consequences for perpetrators. By implementing this handbook, security institutions can enhance awareness, empower employees to report

harassment incidents, and establish a supportive and accountable culture that actively addresses and prevents harassment within the workplace.

- Organize training programs against sexual harassments within the security sector. This training program aims to educate employees about sexual harassment, providing them with tools to prevent and respond effectively. It defines sexual harassment, including various forms and examples, and emphasizes its impact on victims. The training highlights legal protections, reporting mechanisms, and organization policies. It promotes prevention strategies, bystander intervention, and effective communication. Confidentiality is emphasized throughout the reporting and investigation process. By implementing this training, the organization enhances awareness, empowers employees, and fosters a safe and respectful workplace culture that actively prevents sexual harassment.
- Organize promotional campaigns to promote career opportunities in the security sector for women actively. These campaigns can, for example showcase successful women in various roles in the sector, highlighting their achievements and contributions as inspiring examples. Targeted initiatives should specifically reach out to young girls, effectively engaging and encouraging them to consider careers in security. The campaigns should prioritize messages of gender equality, diversity, and inclusivity within the sector. Leveraging multiple channels such as social media, conferences, and networking events, these campaigns will effectively raise awareness and promote women's participation. By breaking down barriers, challenging stereotypes, and creating a supportive environment, the security sector can attract and empower more women to pursue and excel in security-related careers.
- KSF and KP should prioritize formulating an action plan to promote recruitment campaigns for women joining the KSF or the KP, which involves several key steps—first, conducting an internal assessment to identify barriers and challenges that hinder women's participation. Next, developing targeted messaging that highlights diverse roles and opportunities within the force. Collaborating with women's organizations and showcasing successful women role models will help amplify the campaigns. Mentorship programs and engagement with educational institutions will support and raise awareness among potential recruits. Ensuring gender-inclusive policies and regularly monitoring its effectiveness is crucial. By implementing some action plan, the security sector can actively promote recruitment campaigns, attract more women to join the force, and create a more diverse and inclusive security sector in Kosovo.
- To address the reluctance in addressing gender equality issues within the Kosovo Police (KP) and respond to the continuous requests from civil society organizations (CSOs) for cooperation and data sharing, it is crucial to prioritize increased transparency and collaboration. The KP should establish open dialogue channels, fostering regular communication and meetings with CSOs to facilitate the exchange of information, insights, and concerns regarding women's position and the gendered working environment in the police force. Additionally, sharing relevant data, statistics, and research findings between the KP and CSOs will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the current state of gender equality within the KP. By embracing collaborative initiatives, the KP and CSOs can work together to address these issues effectively and promote a more inclusive and gender-equal working environment within the Kosovo Police.

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