



KCSS
Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

GENDER INTEGRATION IN THE KOSOVO SECURITY FORCES





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About the Gender, Peace and Security Programme

The Gender, Peace and Security Programme has been developed to support Kosovo's progress in achieving objectives outlined in the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In line with UNSCR 1325, KOSS's Gender, Peace and Security Programme aims to support public security institutions in Kosovo in establishing internal and external gender responsive policies. Among others, the programme aims to ensure gender-equal participation across Kosovo's main security institutions such as the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) and the Kosovo Police (KP). Additionally, it seeks to consolidate a breadth of research identifying the main challenges related to gender-responsive security reform in Kosovo. Through providing robust gender analysis on Kosovo's security sector development, the programme aims to promote internal reform in line with the country's gender-equality principles enshrined in the Law on Gender Equality. The programme will be further developed through:

- Central and local advocacy to identify prominent challenges related to women's participation in the security sector;
- Baseline, midline and endline monitoring of recruitment within public security institutions in Kosovo
- Gender-analysis in line with Kosovo's WPS objectives.

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EXECUTIV SUMMARY

- Leadership positions within the Kosovo Security Forces entail distinct challenges for women, shaped by systemic and societal factors. In environments traditionally dominated by men, such as security forces, women frequently face hurdles that impede their professional progress and leadership effectiveness. Efforts are needed to bolster the involvement of women in leadership roles. The dearth of female representation in security force leadership not only constrains mentorship opportunities but also escalates the likelihood of discrimination and harassment, resulting in a less supportive work environment.

- The vacuum of a gender-inclusive approach and policies within the Kosovo Security Forces, such as expanding access to closed training and providing accessible childcare, creates substantial challenges for women. Balancing career aspirations with family responsibilities becomes particularly arduous for women aiming to sustain their participation in training programs within this context.

- Women within the Kosovo Security Forces often exhibit a consistent reluctance to report incidents of bullying, harassment, or discrimination encountered in the security sector. This hesitation finds its roots in two main factors: the absence of confidential reporting mechanisms in a closely interconnected work environment, leading to fears of identification, and the concern regarding potential biases from colleagues or the broader community. Establishing a secure and supportive reporting environment while streamlining the reporting process is crucial in addressing this issue.

- Women within the security sector often confront a difficult choice—prioritizing their professional commitments at the cost of their personal lives or attempting a delicate balance between the two. These domestic constraints significantly impede women’s pursuit of equality in workplaces, notably in sectors like security, where achieving parity demands heightened effort.

- The Kosovo Security Forces' absence of gender-sensitive perspectives and comprehensive policies, like optional training frameworks and accessible childcare provisions, presents significant challenges for women seeking to balance careers and participation in training programs alongside their family responsibilities. It's essential to enhance gender sensitivity training across all personnel within the KSF to cultivate a culture centered on respect, empathy, and inclusivity.

INTRODUCTION

The security forces are inherently gendered institutions where gender plays a pervasive role throughout their processes, practices, images, and ideologies. The absence of women has historically defined these institutions. However, roles for women are gradually evolving as members of society increasingly acknowledge the inherent inequalities and work towards meaningful change.¹

It is paramount that security institutions understand women's perceptions of security institutions. Their unique perspectives, skills, and experiences have the potential to bring about transformative change, enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of these institutions. These insights inform policies and strategies that redefine institutions, serve as roadmaps for new security ideals around defense, crisis management, and cooperative security, and inform education and training programs for girls and women in the security sector. Women play active roles as combatants, peacebuilding, and politicians and are often in a stronger position to bring peace to their communities. Studies suggest that women worldwide have emerged as voices of peace, mobilizing across communities and demanding attention to the complex issues of peace and peacebuilding, using their social roles and networks to mediate and mitigate violence.²

The past two decades have been marked by the efforts of the countries in the Western Balkan countries to enhance gender equality normative and policy frameworks. This has led to the improvement of the position of women and the advancement of gender equality, yet gender inequalities remain pronounced in all areas necessary for achieving equality in the social position, influence, and welfare of women.

Nevertheless, in many countries, such as Kosovo, security sector policies and programming have failed to understand women's particular security needs and priorities adequately and involve women and men equally by integrating their gender perspectives. However, despite progress, Kosovo still faces numerous gender equality challenges, particularly in the realms of women's leadership positions and equal political participation. Traditional gender role mentalities, discrimination, and stereotyping have presented significant barriers to women's involvement in decision-making at all levels, including within the security sector. While there have been positive strides, achieving better representation of women in the Kosovo Security Forces is still an ongoing process.

The data does indicate that Kosovo's Security Forces have demonstrated significant efforts to enhance the gender perspective within the institution. However, challenges persist, stemming from factors such as the limited participation of women in managerial and decision-making roles, traditional male dominance, and patriarchal mindsets.

METHODOLOGY

This report utilizes a qualitative methodology, primarily relying on semi-structured interviews with experienced and high-ranking women in the Kosovo Security Forces (KSF). These interviews have been designed to provide insights into the working environment, gender sensitivity within security institutions, and the primary challenges women encounter in the sector.

In addition to these interviews, we have conducted seven focus groups with women serving in the KSF who do not hold high-ranking positions. These focus groups aim to analyze and understand the dynamics and factors that impede women's advancement to higher ranks within the KSF. These focus groups were conducted at KSF barracks in Prizren, Prishtina, Mitrovica, Pomozetin, Ferizaj, Istog, and Gjilan. These focus groups have gathered comprehensive information about the working environment and gender integration within the Kosovo Security Forces.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal framework in Kosovo supports the inclusion of women in the KSF through the principles of nondiscrimination and gender equality. Various national policies, strategies, and recruitment practices aim to involve women in the KSF actively. The efforts align with international commitments to promote women's participation in peace and security initiatives, making it clear that gender equality and women's inclusion are fundamental values in Kosovo's security sector. The Kosovo government, in alignment with international standards and commitments, has implemented various policies and strategies to enhance the inclusion of women in security institutions, including the KSF, which has implemented recruitment policies and practices that aim to facilitate the participation of women.

On February 20, 2012, the Government of Kosovo decided to draft a National Action Plan to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace, and Security." Kosovo adopted its first National Action Plan in 2014 for the period 2013-2015. The National Action Plan was developed by the Agency on Gender Equality in the Office of the Prime Minister in cooperation with the working group, which consisted of central governmental entities and civil society members, and with the support of UN Women and OHCHR.³

The Kosovo Constitution serves as the cornerstone of legal documents and underscores the principles of equality and non-discrimination, guaranteeing prevention and protection against all forms of discrimination, including gender-based discrimination.⁴

The Gender Equality Law in Kosovo is a vital piece of legislation designed to promote and enforce gender equality while actively prohibiting gender-based discrimination. This comprehensive Law outlines a series of essential measures aimed at advancing gender equality, which are detailed as follows: «This law delineates both general and specific measures that must be taken to ensure equal rights while clearly defining the responsible authorities and their respective competencies.»⁵

The Law on Kosovo Security Forces does not have specific provisions exclusively addressing the inclusion of women; it upholds the general principle of nondiscrimination and the multiethnic character of the KSF, which indirectly promotes gender equality and inclusion in the KSF. On the other hand, the Law outlines the rights and responsibilities of KSF members. This Law focuses on service conditions and rights, maintaining the principle of nondiscrimination and gender equality, and providing support for female KSF members.⁶

The Law on the Service of the Kosovo Security Forces⁷ outlines the rights and responsibilities of KSF members. This law focuses on service conditions and rights, maintaining the principle of non-discrimination and gender equality, and supporting women KSF members. It firmly upholds the overarching principle of nondiscrimination and the multiethnic composition of the KSF, which indirectly serves to promote gender equality and women's inclusion within the organization. However, the law needs to include specific provisions exclusively dedicated to the inclusion of women.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN THE KSF

For women employed in the military, the highest percentage is among those with fewer years of service, while the lowest is among those with more years of service. This is due to the higher demand for women to leave their duties before retirement due to family planning or caring for family members, which delays their career development as they cannot commit as much as men. Therefore, the adoption of 'Regulation No. 05/2022 on the Care of KSF Personnel Before, During, and after Deployment and Care for their Families during International missions', is a significant effort to provide support for family-related projects, particularly for the immediate and daily care of the children of military personnel during international missions. This departure of women personnel with relatively fewer years of service contributes to a gender imbalance within the KSF, with fewer women represented in positions that require greater experience and seniority.

This limits the opportunities for career advancement among women and affects the overall diversity and gender representation within the organization (figure nr. 1)

FIGURE 1 The percentage of women and men in different positions in the KSF

Rank	Male %	Female %
General	89%	11%
Colonel	97%	3%
Lt. Colonel	96%	4%
Major	92%	8%
Captain	96%	4%
Lieutenant	89%	11%
Second Lieutenant	90%	10 %

While the number of women in uniform participating in the focus groups within the KSF has consistently communicated a deep and genuine sense of honor associated with their service, for them, being a part of the KSF is more than just a job—it's a meaningful opportunity to contribute significantly to the ongoing transformation of their country. This sentiment is even more particular when viewed through the lens of Kosovo's historical context, where each woman perceives her role in shaping and positively influencing the development of their country. Their commitment goes beyond mere duty; it reflects a profound dedication to being catalysts for positive change and progress within their community and the broader context of Kosovo. As one participant mentioned during the focus group, "The KSF transformed me completely – I'm a different person now. I compare myself to my family members and handle everyday situations differently. If something happens, I won't be surprised. I would have been more surprised if I hadn't faced the challenge in the KSF."⁸

Women face unique challenges in leadership positions within security forces stemming from systemic and societal factors. In traditionally male-dominated environments, such as security forces, women often encounter barriers that can hinder their professional growth and effectiveness as leaders. One interviewee highlighted that the security sector is often conceived as a domain exclusively for men; apart from that, we are still a relatively young democracy with limited experience. "That's why I've seen that women's position is even more challenging. So much so that women might not feel encouraged to participate in decision-making processes, or perhaps they might not even compete for decision-making positions because it's always assumed that those positions are reserved for men and they (women) might not have that opportunity."⁹

While there is generally a strong commitment among women in uniform to fulfill their duties, as consistently expressed during the focus groups, they continue to encounter prejudices within both the institution and society. As a woman in uniform mentioned during the focus group: "When I applied, people sarcastically asked, "What are you going to do there, keep brooms?" trying to belittle us."¹⁰

The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within security forces not only results in a scarcity of mentorship opportunities but also renders them more susceptible to discrimination and harassment, thereby fostering a hostile work environment. One participant in the focus groups recounted a disheartening incident during a ceremonial gathering. Despite performing the same duty as her male counterparts, the commander publicly reprimanded a female instructor, who exclaimed, "What are you doing here? Go away; nobody wants to see you here."¹¹

Women in the security often face the difficult choice of either sacrificing their personal lives or dedicating themselves entirely to balancing their professional and personal responsibilities. These domestic barriers hinder women's equality in the workplace, particularly in sectors like security, where they must often exert greater effort to achieve parity. The lack of a gender perspective and gender-integrated policies within the Kosovo Security Forces, including options for closed training and accessible childcare options, presents significant hurdles for women in their efforts to sustain a career and participation in the training programs while managing their family responsibilities. As women in focus groups expressed: "Having a child and being a woman in uniform is challenging, but it is not in the professional aspect."¹²

Another woman in uniform also shared a similar experience during the focus group:

"We have all equal responsibilities that I handle like men. However, you are not mentally prepared if you leave a child alone. You can't leave the child with someone else. I haven't been able to complete the training for my career, and for 13 years, I haven't been able to get promoted. The first nine years didn't give us the opportunity. I completed the training to be promoted, but they haven't promoted me."¹³

As an interviewee mentioned, "what's lacking in the Ministry of Defense is a sense of awareness regarding gender integration. The absence of gender issues as an integral part of the agenda in the Ministry of Defense is problematic. I believe that when this inclusion becomes more systematic, the situation will change. In the Ministry of Defense, gender equality appears to be either denied or treated as a taboo subject."¹⁴

WORKING ENVIRONMENT AND GENDER SENSITIVITY IN THE KSF

A gender-sensitive environment within the security sector, in general, sheds light on the differential justice and security needs and experiences of men and women in society. This becomes particularly crucial in establishing sustainable peace and security in post-war societies, serving also as a means to combat gender-based violence. For women belonging to communities targeted by discrimination and harassment, participation in the security sector can serve as a pathway to enhance their quality of life.¹⁵

The glaring underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within the security sector is a cause for significant concern on several fronts. Primarily, it obstructs the attainment of gender diversity, limiting the array of experiences, insights, and perspectives crucial for a comprehensive and inclusive decision-making process. The exclusion of gender perspectives and experiences at the managerial level poses a risk of neglecting vital considerations related to gender-specific security issues. This encompasses addressing women's challenges in the sector and formulating policies that foster their well-being and advancement. Moreover, women's perspectives in decision-making can result in a more balanced understanding of security concerns, potentially overlooking women's specific needs and vulnerabilities.

In certain discussions or focus groups, women have expressed a sense of being appreciated within the KSF. However, simultaneously, they've communicated that their value isn't on par with that of men. This disparity is evident in the lack of acknowledgment of their contributions. There's a notable absence of acknowledgment or praise directed toward women for their accomplishments and efforts compared to the recognition routinely given to men within the institution.¹⁶ This discrepancy suggests that women's achievements might receive a different level of validation or acknowledgment than those of their male counterparts. As an interviewee mentioned: "Women face structural barriers to accessing decision-making roles. Initially, there's an unfavorable environment where a certain type of leadership, especially within security institutions, is idealized. There exists a stereotype of hostility, of a strong hand, of power..."¹⁷

The limited presence of women in leadership positions challenges achieving gender diversity. This shortage restricts the variety of perspectives, insights, and experiences that could contribute to more comprehensive decision-making processes. When gender perspectives and experiences are not integrated into managerial roles, there's a risk of overlooking critical issues specific to gender within security. These issues might include addressing women's challenges in the sector and establishing policies supporting their well-being and progression. As an interviewee highlighted: "Women face challenges with work schedules, the lack of supportive services for children, absence of daycare facilities, and unfortunately, due to gender stereotypes, the burden of family responsibilities still falls heavily on the shoulders of Kosovar women."¹⁸

Due to the lack of gender policies within the KSF, menstrual health, especially during strenuous physical exercises, remains a taboo subject. In most cases, it might even lead to bullying from male colleagues. During a focus group, female soldiers expressed the challenges they face during menstruation, highlighting the absence of policies recognizing this need for women. As a participant in a focus group, I empathized:

"When we attempt to justify our inability to perform specific physical exercises or tasks due to our health condition, referring to menstrual cycles, we aren't believed. They think that we're trying to escape our responsibilities. There are instances when we've been penalized simply for not following orders due to these circumstances."¹⁹

Implementing gender-sensitive approaches and policies is crucial to ensure the safety, inclusivity, and fair treatment of all individuals within the security sector. However, the absence of diverse voices, particularly at leadership levels, undermines these efforts, potentially perpetuating gaps in understanding and responsiveness to gender-related concerns within the field.

ENDURING A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT: REVIEW OF REPORT MECHANISMS WITHIN THE KSF

Creating a safe and inclusive working environment within the security sector is fundamental not only for promoting gender equality but also for facilitating professional development.²⁰ Data obtained from focus groups reveals a consistent pattern of reluctance to report bullying, harassment, or discrimination experienced by women within the security sector. This hesitancy to say can be attributed to two primary factors: firstly, the apprehension of being identified due to the absence of confidentiality in the closely connected work setting where everyone is acquainted with each other, and secondly, the concern of facing bias from colleagues or the broader community.

The fear of inadequate confidentiality poses a significant barrier, dissuading women from reporting incidents of discrimination, harassment, or bullying. Presently, the KSF handles complaints through the Board for the Review of Complaints, which is overseen by the Unit for Human Rights and Gender Parity.²¹ The establishment of the Board for the Review of Complaints falls within the framework of the Regulation on Review and Settlement of Complaints in the Kosovo Security Sector. This regulation outlines the rules and procedures for reviewing and resolving complaints submitted by members of the Kosovo Security Force. On the other hand, an interviewee also emphasized the significance of having a woman as General Inspector, overseeing all activities within the KSF, including training and handling matters resulting from complaints or general procedural aspects.²²

The data collected from the structured focus groups involving women in the KSF highlighted a troubling aspect regarding the reporting process. Participants expressed a significant concern that complaints might be leaked to the public domain even before formal reports are submitted to the protective mechanisms within the institution. This premature exposure further undermines their sense of safety and confidence in reporting cases of discrimination or harassment. A participant in the focus group shared: "There were two cases of reporting sexual harassment, and the girls who reported these incidents are still subject to ridicule in the KSF."²³

The younger generation within the KSF shows a more proactive approach to reporting incidents than the older generation. This shift in reporting practices has initiated the involvement of the new generation in the KSF.²⁴ However, there is acknowledgment that considerable work remains to refine reporting mechanisms explicitly addressing sexual harassment in the KSF. It's imperative to develop more sophisticated reporting systems. Establishing a robust reporting culture within the KSF is essential to effectively tackle this issue. This progression signifies the early stages of creating a safer working environment for women in the sector, notably evident among the newer generation within the KSF.

In discussions regarding sexual harassment with women in the KSF, a recurring observation is that their husbands also work in the same military barracks, which protects them from any form of sexual harassment. This pattern aligns with findings from research on "Women police officers' perspectives on gender integration within the Kosovo police."²⁵ Consequently, women report receiving more respect because of their marital connections, which acts as a protection against potential forms of sexual harassment at work. This underscores the enduring influence of the male-dominated hierarchy within security institutions.²⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS

Creating alternative modalities to close training within the KFS is crucial to ensure the inclusion of women in mandatory training sessions. Adapting these sessions is especially vital in addressing women's unique challenges during closed training. Tailoring training choices to accommodate diverse needs, such as caregiving responsibilities or other constraints, can foster an inclusive environment within the security forces. This approach supports and encourages the participation of all individuals, particularly women, in crucial training programs.

Specific strategies need development and implementation to bolster the representation of women in leadership positions within the Kosovo Security Forces. These strategies involve mentorship programs, initiatives for leadership development, and proactive recruitment policies. These measures aim to cultivate a more diverse and inclusive leadership cadre within the KSF.

Diversifying and strengthening compulsory training programs focused on gender sensitivity delivered to all personnel in the KSF (men and women) is vital for nurturing a culture of respect, understanding, and inclusivity. These programs should highlight the significance of gender perspectives in decision-making processes and tackle implicit biases and stereotypes hindering women's advancement in the security sector.

Improving the current reporting mechanisms for cases of discrimination, harassment, or bullying within the KSF requires attention in several key areas. Prioritizing confidentiality, establishing a secure and supportive reporting environment, and streamlining the reporting process are essential. These efforts are intended to empower more women to step forward and report incidents without fearing reprisal or the risk of public exposure.

Implementing the Yearly Gender Budgeting for Enhanced Gender Inclusivity in the Kosovo Security Forces as required by the Law on Gender Equality. This would be a pivotal strategic step that empowers institutions to scrutinize resource allocation and ascertain that investments are channeled effectively toward augmenting women's representation and capacities within the KSF. These deliberate actions will cultivate a more inclusive and gender-responsive environment, further empowering women and actively addressing their unique challenges.

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About KCSS

Established in April 2008, the Kosovar Center for Security Studies (KCSS) is a specialized, independent, and non-governmental organization. The primary goal of KCSS is to promote the democratization of the security sector in Kosovo and to improve research and advocacy work related to security, the rule of law, and regional and international cooperation in the field of security.

KCSS aims to enhance the effectiveness of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) by supporting SSR programs through its research, events, training, advocacy, and direct policy advice.

Advancing new ideas and social science methods are also core values of the centre. Every year, KCSS publishes numerous reports, policy analysis and policy briefs on security-related issues. It also runs more than 200 public events including conferences, roundtables, and debates, lectures – in Kosovo, also in collaboration with regional and international partners.

A wide-range of activities includes research, capacity-building, awareness raising and advocacy. KCSS's work covers a wide range of topics, including but not limited to security sector reform and development, identifying and analyzing security risks related to extremism, radicalism, and organized crime, foreign policy and regional cooperation, and evaluating the rule of law in Kosovo.

This year, KCSS celebrated its 15th Anniversary. For more details about KCSS, you can check on the following official platforms:



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