



KCSS
Kosovar Centre for Security Studies



WOMEN'S SECURITY CONCERNS IN KOSOVO



February 2024



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About the Gender, Peace and Security Programme

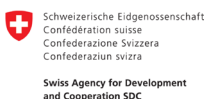
The Gender, Peace and Security Programme has been developed to support Kosovo's progress in achieving objectives outlined in the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In line with UNSCR 1325, KCSS's Gender, Peace and Security Programme aims to support public security institutions in Kosovo in establishing 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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February 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender-based violence poses a substantial security threat to women and girls in Kosovo, as evidenced by a rising number of gender-based violence and murders of women in recent years. Despite a noticeable increase in reported domestic violence cases over recent years in Kosovo, un-reported cases of gender-based violence remain high due to complex socio-economic factors that contribute to this phenomenon.

Women's trust in security and justice institutions is critical for reporting gender-based violence. However, the leniency of the judicial system towards perpetrators and the prolonged duration of domestic violence cases discourage women from seeking justice. There is a lack of sensitivity and expertise among law enforcement authorities, especially in rural areas, to handle gender-based violence cases effectively.

The absence of property ownership among women is a significant barrier to their economic independence and security. Despite legal provisions for equal property rights, women often relinquish their inheritance, leaving them with limited resources and options when facing violence. This lack of financial autonomy leaves women in a troubling situation where they may feel compelled to return to their abusers.

Many women withdraw their complaints of gender-based violence due to third-party interventions, often under family pressure. There is a tendency among family members and officials to blame women for reporting abuse, further discouraging them from seeking help. Women reporting domestic violence often endure double discrimination from institutions, society, and their families.

There is limited information about rights and available support services for victims of gender-based violence in Kosovo. The lack of awareness intensifies feelings of vulnerability and exacerbates the sense of helplessness when seeking solutions. There is also insufficient investment in support services for victims and consequences for perpetrators.

Insufficient and unstable funding for shelters poses a significant challenge to supporting survivors of domestic violence. Without adequate resources, shelters struggle to maintain essential services and meet the increasing demand for their services. There is also a lack of sustainable institutional support for victims, leading some to return to their abusers.

INTRODUCTION

The research analyses the primary safety concerns faced by women and girls, assessing the capabilities of both local and central security mechanisms in responding to raised safety issue of women. Another aspect of the study involves gauging community awareness regarding the repercussions of domestic violence and violence against women and girls. Furthermore, it evaluates the effectiveness of non-formal local security mechanisms and community engagement in preventing and combating domestic violence.

Domestic violence encompasses “all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim.”¹ Domestic violence and gender-based violence can take different forms of discrimination; Kosovo has faced many tragic cases of gender-based violence that have ended up with femicide. The cases of Diana Kastrati, Valbona Marku, Sebahate Morina, Diana Kastrati, Antigona Morina, Dafina Zhubi, Zejnepe Berisha are cases known to the public in Kosovo, which were murdered by their partners.

Gender-based violence poses a substantial security threat to women and girls in Kosovo, evidenced by a rising number of gender-based violence and murders of women in recent years. The majority of survivors, who are primarily women and girls experiencing domestic violence, face a lack of sustainable support at the institutional level. This deficiency in institutional support, coupled with a criticized patriarchal institutional approach and treatment of such cases, has drawn condemnation from human rights organizations and activists in Kosovo. In recent years, organized protests have taken place across Kosovo in response to gender-based violence and femicide, specifically addressing the alarming number of femicides.²

The number of cases of domestic violence reported to police has risen steadily, from 1,915 in 2019 and just over 2,000 in 2020 to over 2,400 in 2021 and over 2,700 in 2022.³ the figures are likely lower than the number of actual cases of domestic violence due to many survivors opting not to report abuse to the authorities.⁴

While the number of reporting domestic violence shows the rising awareness of gender equality in Kosovo, there is also evidence of the lack of institutional capacities to prevent gender-based violence. Moreover, the reported cases often come with a victim-blaming approach, deeply rooted within the patriarchal fabric of society. The gravity of this situation intensifies when considering the low rate of women’s employment and their limited financial independence.

1 Istanbul Convention, Article 3(b).

2 “Three Decades of Protest”, Kosovo 2.0, <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/three-decades-protest/> (i qasshëm).

3 “Share your Experience: Domestic Violence in Kosovo,” Balkan Insight, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/03/13/share-your-experience-domestic-violence-in-kosovo/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20cases%20of,of%20the%20victims%20being%20women> (i qasshëm).

4 “From Paper to Practice: Kosovo Must Keet its Commitments to Domestic Violence Survivors,” Amnesty International, 2023, p.16.

While there are many institutional and social challenges in preventing gender-based violence, on the other hand, the current government has pointed to combating gender-based violence as a national priority. Given the implementation and monitoring of policies for preventing violence against women, several institutional measures have been taken. These measures aim to achieve long-term coordination in the prevention of violence against women, more specifically through the: (i) functionalization of the Inter-Ministerial Group for Monitoring and Implementation of the National Strategy on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women 2022-2026; (ii) establishment of Local Coordination Mechanisms; (iii) definition of duties and responsibilities of the Municipal Coordination Mechanisms through the Law on Prevention against Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women and Gender – Based Violence; (iv) definition of Standard Operating Procedures.⁵

Methodology:

The research is based on desk research, delving into the existing legal, political, and institutional framework addressing gender-based violence as well as field research.

KCSS has organized a series of focus group discussions in 29 municipalities, including Skenderaj, Gjilan, Vushtri, Kaçanik, Shtërc, Istog, Lipjan, Obiliq, Malishevë, Prishtinë, Prizren, Viti, Gjakovë, Suhareka, Rahovec, Fushë Kosovë, Drenas, Dragash, Klina, Mitrovica, Hani i Elezit, Shtime, Mitrovica e Veriut, Kamenica, Podujeva, Peja, Mamushë, Klokoti, and Ferizaj. Participants in these focus groups included crucial stakeholders involved in preventing gender-based violence, such as women's associations, social workers, and security institutions. The focus group discussions aimed to gain deeper insights into the prevalence of gender-based violence, discern community attitudes, highlight challenges in the institutional approach, and potentially reveal trends by municipalities.

Additionally, six key informant interviews were conducted, engaging representatives from seven shelters for survivors of domestic violence in Kosovo. Two interviews have also been conducted with both the Kosovo Juridical Council and the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council. KCSS undertook this comprehensive research initiative from March 2022 to February 2024.

⁵ National Strategy on Protection Against Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women 2022- 2026, <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ENG-Strategjia-Kombetare-per-Mbrojtje-nga-Dhuna-ne-Familje-dhe-Dhuna-ndaj-Grave-2022-2026.pdf> (accessed).

LEGAL, POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK IN KOSOVO

Kosovo has developed an advanced legal, policy and institutional framework to address gender-based violence. The effective implementation of this framework has the potential to transform the efforts to combat gender-based violence in Kosovo significantly. However, Kosovo continues to face many challenges in fully implementing its legal and institutional infrastructure aimed at preventing gender-based violence.

According to Article 22 of the Constitution, all international treaties are directly applicable in Kosovo. This provision established that human rights and fundamental freedoms that are guaranteed by UN and CoE instruments are directly applicable in Kosovo, and they have priority over the provision of laws and other acts of public institutions. They include the following: Universal Declaration of Human Rights; European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Protocols; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Protocols; Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; Convention on the Rights of Child; Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.⁶

In 2020, Kosovo took a significant step by adopting a constitutional amendment that granted direct effect to the Istanbul Convention – a major human rights treaty defining comprehensive legal standards to safeguard women’s right to be free from violence.⁷ Subsequently, in 2022, Kosovo further enhanced its commitment by introducing the **National Strategy on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women for the years 2022-2026**. Notably, the new Strategy not only extends its scope beyond its predecessor but also aligns the implementation of gender-sensitive measures with the principles outlined in the Istanbul Convention.⁸

The Law No. 05/L – 020 on Gender Equality which was adopted in 2004 and then amended in 2015 guarantee, protect and promote equality between genders as a basic value of democratic development of society.⁹ In accordance with Article 11 of the Law on Gender Equality, the Government adopted the **Kosovo Program on Gender Equality 2020-2024**, under the leadership of the **Agency for Gender Equality - Office of the Prime Minister**. This strategic document is based on a situation analysis conducted through an inclusive drafting process involving non-governmental organizations as well as local and international

6 Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 22.

7 The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/council-of-europe-convention-on-preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence> (accessed).

8 “National Strategy on Protection Against Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women,” <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ENG-Strategjia-Kombetare-per-Mbrojtje-nga-Dhuna-ne-Familje-dhe-Dhuna-ndaj-Grave-2022-2026.pdf> (accessed).

9 “Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality,” Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=10923> (accessed).

partners. The program comprises of three pillars: (i) economic empowerment and social well-being; (ii) human development, roles, and gender relations; and (iii) women's rights, access to justice, and security.¹⁰

The Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo, categorizes sexual harassment and female genital mutilation as offenses. Additionally, the law addresses criminal offenses against sexual integrity by delineating consent. According to the law, consent is defined as the voluntary agreement of a person aged sixteen (16) years or older to engage in the specified sexual act. It also encompasses the voluntary agreement of two persons aged fourteen (14) years or older, with a permissible age difference not exceeding two (2) years, to engage in the specified sexual act."¹¹

In 2023, Law no. 08/L – 185 on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, Violence against Women, and Gender-Based Violence was approved by Kosovo's Parliament. The purpose of this law is to prevent and address violence against women, family violence, and gender-based violence, to protect and contribute to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, to promote gender equality, and to empower women. It also aims to establish the necessary mechanisms to provide support to victims of all forms of violence regulated by this law.¹² The EU also welcomed the adoption of the Law and called for swift implementation of the law in line with the Criminal Code and the Istanbul Convention.¹³

Kosovo institutions and service providers are obligated to prevent gender-based violence and offer support to survivors. These entities include the Kosovo Police, Prosecution offices, Courts, Kosovo Coordinator on Protection from Domestic Violence/Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Justice, Centers for Social Work, Victim Protection and Advocacy Office/Victim Advocates, Ministry of Education, Sciences and Technology/Directorate of Education, Schools, Ombudsperson/Gender Equality Department, Shelters, and Civil Society.¹⁴

10 Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020- 2024, Office for the Prime Minister, <https://abgj.rks-gov.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/AGE%20Kosovo%20Program%20for%20Gender%20Equality%202020-2024.pdf> (accessed).

11 "The Code no. 06/ L-074 Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo" The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, <https://md.rks-gov.net/desk/inc/media/A5713395-507E-4538-BED6-2FA2510F3FCD.pdf> (accessed).

12 Law no. 08/L – 185 on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, Violence against Women and Gender Based Violence, Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=83131> (accessed).

13 The EU in Kosovo welcomes the adoption of the Law on Domestic Violence, Gender-based Violence, and Violence against Women, The European Union Office in Kosovo European Union Special Representatives in Kosovo, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/eu-kosovo-welcomes-adoption-law-domestic-violence-gender-based-violence-and-violence-against-women_en?s=321 (accessed).

14 "Reporting on Domestic Violence," OSCE, 2018, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/2/404348.pdf> (accessed).

CHALLENGES ON ADDRESSING WOMEN SECURITY CONCERNS IN KOSOVO

Gender-based violence poses a substantial security threat to women and girls in Kosovo, evidenced by a rising number of gender-based violence and murders of women in recent years. Under-reported cases pose a significant challenge in understanding the full extent of the despite a noticeable increase in reported domestic violence cases over recent years in Kosovo, this research sheds light on the alarming persistence of unreported cases of gender-based violence, particularly emphasizing the complex socio-economic factors that contribute to this phenomenon. The reluctance to report gender-based violence is multifaceted, encompassing economic dis-empowerment, social stigma, and a lack of trust in security and justice institutions. However, trust in security and justice institutions emerges as a critical factor influencing the decision to report gender-based violence. Property ownership, a crucial aspect of women's economic independence, emerges as another pressing concern. Despite legal frameworks mandating equal property rights, the stark reality reveals a significant gap between legal provisions and practical outcomes.

The prevailing patriarchal narrative within institutions intend to normalize such violence, hindering progress towards a gender-sensitive approach. The withdrawal of complaints due to third-party interventions, often fueled by family pressures, adds another layer to the challenge, perpetuating double discrimination against women reporting domestic violence. Limited information about rights and available support services for victims exacerbates the problem. Despite increasing awareness about reporting gender-based violence, there is insufficient investment in support services and consequences for perpetrators. The absence of treatment options for recidivist offenders in domestic violence incidents poses a central obstacle, emphasizing the need for effective strategies to rehabilitate and deter repeat offenders.

Throughout our research, we have identified key challenges stemming from institutional, economic, political, and legal levels that hinder efforts to ensure women's security in Kosovo. These challenges are outlined in the following sections.

Under-reported cases of gender-based violence The number of cases of domestic violence reported to police has risen steadily, from 1,915 in 2019 and just over 2,000 in 2020 to over 2,400 in 2021 and over 2,700 in 2022.¹⁵ This research found that unreported cases of gender-based violence persist, with a significant portion involving domestic violence often going unnoticed. As a woman during a focus group emphasized: "It takes courage to report

¹⁵ "Share your Experience: Domestic Violence in Kosovo," Balkan Insight, <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/03/13/share-your-experience-domestic-violence-in-kosovo/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20cases%20of,of%20the%20victims%20being%20women> (accessed).

gender-based violence, considering the lack of institutional support that women receive.”¹⁶ This under-reporting is primarily attributed to the economic and social dis-empowerment of women, compounded by insufficient state support for victims of domestic violence. Instances that are reported tend to arise when victims perceive no viable alternative for seeking help.¹⁷ During the focus group in Klina, a participant pointed out: “When a woman decides to report the case, be aware that it is a recurrent case; the first case is never reported; it takes some time until they present it. When women decide to report, they have suffered for a long time.”¹⁸ Furthermore, the breaches of confidentiality have negatively affected the report of the gender-based violence, as media reporters breach the confidentiality principles, violating the integrity of the survivors.^{19 20} The fear of being judged by friends, neighbors or even family members often prevents women from reporting abuse. Many women opt to stay silent about their experiences because of the pervasive stigma attached to being victims of abuse. This stigma can trigger feelings of shame, guilt, and embarrassment, further deterring women from seeking help or speaking out. The culture of victim-blaming and judgment perpetuates a harmful cycle of silence, this gives abusers freedom to carry on with the abuse.

Trust in security and justice institutions The legal sentences handed down by the courts, along with the prolonged duration of domestic violence cases, discourage women from reporting gender-based violence. During the focus group in the municipality of Klina, a participant said: “One of the reasons why they do not report is a lack of trust in institutions. Women trust security police institutions, but they do not trust justice institutions. This distrust arises due to very lenient sentences for perpetrators of violence and prolonged procedures.”²¹ Amnesty International’s systematic review of court judgments against 218 defendants found that 74 percent received a suspended prison sentence, 45 percent received a fine, and 20 percent received a suspended fine. Some defendants received a combination of sentences, such as a suspended prison sentence and a fine.²² Except for the lenient sentence of perpetrators of gender-based violence, gathering evidence at the crime scene is one of the key challenges in combating gender-based violence.²³

On the other hand, the delays in divorce or custody of children cases can compel survivors to reunite with their abusive partners.²⁴ Furthermore, in numerous rural municipalities,

16 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Gjakova, April 1, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

17 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Gjakova, April 1, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

18 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Klina, October 18, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

19 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Klllokot, May 31, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

20 Focus Group Discussion in municipality of Drenas, September 16, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

21 Focus Group Discussion in municipality of Vitia, March 4, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

22 “From Paper to Practice: Kosovo Must Keep its Commitments to Domestic Violence Survivors,” Amnesty International, 2023.

23 Interview with a representative of Kosovo Prosecutorial Council, February, 2024.

24 KCSS Interview with Representative of Shelter for Domestic Violence Victims in Peja, June, 2022.

women may be hesitant to report instances of gender-based violence, while law enforcement authorities often lack the expertise required to appropriately handle such cases. A participant from a focus group discussion in the municipality of Klllokot mentions “The police did not have full knowledge of processing a case of domestic violence.”²⁵

The absence of property ownership of women stands out as a pressing concern. Property ownership is very crucial because it can facilitate access to legal protections and support services, enabling women to assert their rights and seek assistance without fear of displacement or retaliation. A participant from the shelter of Gjakova states “The issue of ownership and inheritance is a big problem, because even when women are offered inheritance, they refuse it and give it as a gift to their brothers, and then in case of violence they have nowhere else to go”.²⁶ The research underscores the lack of inheritance in the property as a primary obstacle hindering women’s economic independence. This insufficiency not only confines financial autonomy but also contributes to a troubling pattern where women may feel compelled to return to their abusers, endure violence, and abstain from reporting it. Despite Kosovo’s legal framework mandating equal property rights for both genders, the stark reality reveals that only 19 percent of properties are owned by women, according to the Chief Executive of the Agency for Gender Equality.²⁷ This stark disparity between legal provisions and practical outcomes emphasizes the urgent need for initiatives that advocate and enforce equal property ownership, ensuring that women possess the means to attain economic autonomy and extricate themselves from abusive situations. Additionally, according to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, in 2022, the highest employment rate was among men at 50.8 percent, compared to women, whose employment rate was 19.1 percent.²⁸ This further compounds the multifaceted subordination and discrimination faced by women in Kosovo, contributing to the fragility of their security. Addressing these interconnected challenges is imperative for fostering gender equality and empowering women economically and socially.

Lack of Gender Sensitivity at the institutional level: The research has revealed that institutions in Kosovo lack a gender-sensitive approach in dealing with cases of gender-based violence. There is a deficiency in their comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics related to gender, which includes a failure to recognize power imbalances, societal norms, and stereotypes contributing to gender-based violence. The prevailing patriarchal narrative continues to downplay and normalize gender-based violence, perpetuating women’s subordinate position in society. During the focus group meeting in Fushe Kosove with the institutional actors and members of Civil Society, a participant emphasized, “We witness cases where police officers – who should be the primary protectors against gender violence – tend to

25 Focus Group Discussion in municipality of Klllokot, May 31, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

26 Interview with a representative of Shelter of Gjakova, June 2, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

27 <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/03/09/kosovo-women-still-struggling-to-win-property-rights/#:~:text=Kosovo's%20legal%20framework%20gives%20equal,for%20Gender%20Equality%2C%20Edi%20Gusia>

28 Labor Force Survey (LFS) for the third quarter (Q3) of 2022 <https://ask.rks-gov.net/Releases/Details/6380> (accessed).

normalize it by casually saying: ‘nothing happens from a slap.’ The normalization of violence is widespread in discussions with institutional actors, where arguments suggest that reporting violence is becoming a trend. This is particularly evident because the reporting of sexual violence also includes instances of economic and psychological violence, as referenced in the Istanbul Convention.²⁹

The withdrawal of the complaint of gender-based violence. Often, with the intervention of third parties to reconcile the women who were the victims of the violence with their abusers (in most cases, their abusive partners), women withdraw the complaint of gender-based violence. This occurs under the pressure coming from the family members.³⁰ The research found that focusing on reconciling family members in cases of domestic violence has started to be followed as a procedure, although it is not applicable to all cases. However, there are instances where women face blame from family members and officials for reporting domestic violence. A participant in the focus group held in Vitia municipality highlighted this issue: “I have heard a police officer say to a female victim, ‘Aren’t you ashamed to report your husband and send him to prison?’”³¹ The family of the woman who reports domestic violence rarely supports her decision to escape abuse and leave the abusive husband, and tries to convince her to return to the abusive husband who in many cases is a recidivist.³² Women reporting domestic violence continue to endure double discrimination, whether from institutions, society, or their families. This serves as another indicator inhibiting women from reporting instances of domestic violence. One participant during the focus group held in Rahovec emphasized that: “There are also cases, due to the lack of sustainable institutional support towards victims, they returned to their abusers because of their children.”³³

Limited information about their rights and the availability of support services for victims of gender-based violence persists. While there is increasing awareness about reporting gender-based violence, there is insufficient investment in both the support that victims could receive and the consequences that perpetrators could face for their abusive acts. Limited understanding of available support systems can intensify feelings of vulnerability and exacerbate the sense of helplessness when seeking solutions. Closing this information gap requires coordinated efforts to enhance outreach programs, increase awareness through campaigns, and simplify access to resources. There are cases when women who face domestic violence are not informed about the existence of shelters.³⁴ A participant in the focus group

29 Istanbul Convention, Article 3/b8.

30 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Suhareka, March 3, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

31 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Viti, March 4, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

32 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Podujeve, April 7, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

33 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Rahovec, November 8, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

34 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Ferizaj, December 11, 2023. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

in the municipality of Rahovec emphasized, “Citizens must be informed about the legal consequences; there should be a clear warning that those who commit domestic violence are punishable by imprisonment for a specified number of years, and the same applies to repeat offenders.”³⁵

The absence of treatment for recidivists. A considerable proportion of domestic violence incidents involve individuals with a history of recidivist offenses, posing a central obstacle to effectively addressing such cases. Within the context of domestic violence, it is observed that many cases involve individuals who repeatedly engage in violent acts within a domestic setting. The persistence of recidivism in these instances can be attributed to the absence of sustainable institutional treatment options for perpetrators.³⁶ A participant in the focus group in Klina underscored the prevalence of recidivism, noting that “When a woman decides to report a case, it is likely a recidivist situation because violence is seldom reported immediately. This implies that women often endure prolonged suffering before choosing to report the violence to the police.”³⁷ Similarly, a representative from the Shelter for Domestic Violence Victims in Ferizaj highlighted the recurring nature of the issue, stating, “We have instances where the survivor leaves the shelter only to return later after experiencing repeated violence.”³⁸ A significant challenge arises from the inadequacy of suitable treatment or intervention measures for these repeat offenders. Furthermore, most recidivist cases are happening as a result of the shelters offering service for only six months. Addressing and preventing recidivist instances of domestic violence necessitates the development of effective strategies to rehabilitate and deter individuals with a history of perpetrating violence within domestic settings.

The lack of female police staff is an important indicator of the underreporting of gender-based violence. During our research, we found that in the municipality of Dragash, there is no official female police officer, as highlighted during the meeting we conducted. This deficiency is viewed as a significant obstacle to fostering trust in institutions for reporting incidents of family violence.³⁹ The active involvement of women in key security institutions such as the Kosovo Security Force (FSK), the Police of Kosovo (KP), the Intelligence Agency of Kosovo (AKI), and other relevant security mechanisms is seen as a positive step. It enhances the possibilities for preventing instances of violence within families and communities. The broader inclusion of women in various roles within security structures not only promotes gender

35 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Ferizaj, Dember 11, 2023. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

36 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Podujeve, April 7, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

37 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Klina, October 18,2022.Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

38 Interview with a representative of Shelter for Domestic Violence Victims in Ferizaj, June 7, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security

39 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Dragash, October 26 ,2023.Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

equality but also strengthens the overall effectiveness of these institutions in addressing and preventing gender-based violence.⁴⁰ The recent publication of the KCSS on “Women’s Police Officers Perception of Gender Integration in the Kosovo Police” and “Gender Integration in the Security Forces in Kosovo” highlight the significant impact of women’s participation in the security sector. This involvement not only enhances women’s agency within the security sector but also fosters increased trust among women to report instances of gender-based violence.

Insufficient and unstable funding and services for survivors of domestic violence, particularly for shelters, pose an ongoing challenge to the institutional response.

Insufficient and unstable funding for shelters poses a significant challenge to addressing domestic violence and supporting survivors effectively. Limited funding jeopardizes shelters’ ability to maintain essential services. Without adequate resources, shelters struggle to meet the increasing demand for their services, leaving many survivors without the help they urgently need. As the head of a shelter in Gjakova states, “Finances are the main problem we face. We receive small funds from international donors, but they do not give money for food, clothing, and basic materials that we need in shelters because they consider that the state should deal with this work with social policies for people who do not have opportunities”⁴¹ Furthermore, a participant in the focus group discussion in Gjilan emphasized: “In the absence of services, we encounter recurrent cases; victims are sheltered briefly, but continuity is lacking. Consequently, violence escalates and repeats. According to the Istanbul Convention, we are obligated to continue protecting the victims even after the conclusion of their stay in shelters.”⁴² The participants of the social services in the focus groups also share a common concern about lacking adequate funds to offer optimal treatment for gender-based violence cases. The limited support available for women compels them to return to their abusers, triggering heightened levels of violence.⁴³

40 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Rahovec, November 8, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

41 Interview with head of a shelter in Gjakove, June 2, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

42 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Gjilan, May 13, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

43 Focus Group Discussion in the municipality of Gjilan, May 13, 2022. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implementation of initiatives to strengthen women's economic empowerment, including the implementation of property rights and promotion of equal employment opportunities to empower women economically.

2. Advocacy campaign towards highlighting the available services for gender-based violence cases. Existing research indicates that previous campaigns predominantly concentrated on increasing the awareness of reporting gender-based violence rather than enhancing awareness about the crucial support and services offered to victims of gender-based violence.

3. Implementing awareness campaigns that actively discourage third-party interventions seeking to coerce women into withdrawing complaints or reconciling with abusive partners against their will. These guidelines should emphasize the importance of empowering survivors to make independent decisions and highlight the negative consequences of such interventions, aiming to create a supportive environment that respects the agency and autonomy of survivors in cases of gender-based violence.

4. Increase women's representation in key security institutions, including the police force, to foster trust and enhance gender sensitivity in addressing gender-based violence.

5. Ensure stable and sufficient funding for shelters and support services to meet the increasing demand and provide continuous support to survivors.

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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:



www.qkss.org
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