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Commission

Thematic Evaluation of EU support on social protection to Kosovo

Final Evaluation Report

June 2024

Evaluation carried out on behalf of the European Commission

ICON
INSTITUT

Neighbourhood
and Enlargement
Negotiations



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Thematic Evaluation of EU support on social protection to Kosovo

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*The opinions expressed in this document represent the authors' points of view
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List of Acronyms

AIs	Administrative Instructions
COSME	Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSW	Center for Social Work
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DG	Directorate General
EC	European Commission
EIP	Economic Investment Plan
EQ	Evaluation Question
ERP	Economic Reform Programmes
EU	European Union
EULEX	European Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
EU MS	European Union Member States
EUOK	European Union Office in Kosovo
FPI	Foreign Policy Instrument
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IcSP	Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
KOMF	Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection
KWN	Kosova Women's Network
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IR	Inception Report
JC	Judgement Criterion
KAS	Kosovo Agency of Statistics
LSFS	Law on Social and Family Services
MFLT	Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers
MLSW	Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDS	National Development Strategy
NDP	National Development Plan
NIPAC	National IPA Coordinator
NSPDV	National Strategy on Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OGG	Office of Good Governance
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PEMA	Qendra e Kujdesit Ditor
PKBGJ	Kosovo Program for Gender Equality
SA	Social Assistance
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
SAS	Social Assistance Scheme
SSPs	Social Service Providers
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1. Executive Summary

Evaluation objectives

As per the Terms of Reference (ToR) “the objective of this evaluation was first and foremost¹ to help the EU Office in Kosovo (EUOK) and the Kosovo government programme a new EU social protection support.”² The evaluation’s key objective clearly indicates the summative, forward-looking character of the effort, which aims to shape future actions in the field of social protection.

The ToR further underscores that the expectation from the evaluation is to “provide recommendations to the EUOK on future IPA projects on social protection targeting both the institutional level and the civil society activism, contribute to the adequate design of such future projects, and identify gaps and/or windows of opportunities for a more efficient EU support in the sector.”³

Context

The timing for the evaluation coincided with larger efforts for reform in Kosovo’s social protection system. The government has started reforming the Social Assistance Scheme (SAS), with the support of the World Bank. This reform opens the way for deep structural reforms and a better targeted SA system. In addition, the Kosovo’s Assembly approved the new Law on Social and Family Services in December 2023.

Despite significant progress, Kosovo remains one of Europe's poorest regions, with high levels of poverty and unemployment, particularly affecting women and marginalized communities. The pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, causing the country's first recession since independence. Kosovo's social policy and employment sector are areas of concern, with high unemployment and inactivity rates and limited spending on social protection, resulting in inadequate access to essential services, especially for disadvantaged groups like Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, as well as people with disabilities and those living in rural areas. Discrimination and marginalization persist, particularly among women in these communities, exacerbating inequalities in access to public services.

The social protection sector in Kosovo faces a complex array of challenges, encompassing institutional arrangements, financial sustainability, and organizational dynamics. Since the initiation of social services decentralization in 2009, there has been a concerted effort to transfer responsibilities from the central government to municipalities. Despite this intent to bring services closer to citizens, the process remains incomplete, hampering the sector's ability to meet the needs of the population effectively.

Delays in legislative processes related to social services and their financing, particularly concerning crucial laws such as the Law on Social and Family Services (LSFS) and the Law on Local Government Finance (LLGF), have been significant. The latter law is still pending approval and has affected the decentralization of the social services budget.

The financing of social services remains the main challenge in ensuring a continuous and qualitative provision of social and family services. There has been no progress with the decentralization of the social services budget, due to the non-approval of the draft LLGF. Heavy reliance on short-term government subsidies and sporadic donor funding adds to the sector's financial fragility, highlighting the urgent need for a sustainable procurement scheme. While municipalities finance social services through general grants and own-source revenues, the absence of a clear funding formula results in unpredictable allocations that often fall short of meeting the minimum funding requirements. Support to the non-governmental sector has continued to be

¹ Underline added

² ToR, p. 2

³ *ibid*

provided through subsidies, which is not considered a sustainable form of financing. It is worth mentioning that the MFLT has increased the budget for non-governmental sector services compared to previous years.

The organizational landscape of the social protection sector in Kosovo involves both public and non-governmental entities in service provision. Centers for Social Work (CSWs) operate at the municipal level, tasked with providing essential social and family services. However, the sector also relies heavily on the contribution of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)⁴ to fill gaps left by public services. Despite their complementary roles, both CSWs and NGOs face challenges related to staffing and capacity, affecting their ability to deliver services effectively and efficiently.

The capacities of municipalities for management and provision of social services remain insufficient. Lack of professional staff in social services within the Department of Health and Social Welfare (DHSW) has been reported as a key difficulty in managing services. In all municipalities, DHSWs and CSWs need to increase the number of staff, especially the number of social service officers and increase the capacities of finance officers. Municipalities and CSWs are not prepared for budget planning and providing social services close to the citizen. There is a lack of capacity-building for budget planning and management, lack of needs assessments in each municipality and proper cooperation between CSWs and DHSWs for drafting a joint budget planning in accordance with these needs. Municipal budget planning tends to repeat preliminary budget planning, without any real and updated assessment of citizens' needs for social services.

In addition to the challenges related to legislative processes and financing, the monitoring, inspection, and licensing of social services also present significant issues within the social protection sector. The mandate of monitoring and inspecting social services has continued to be unclear and undefined. The Monitoring and Inspection Unit within the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers (MFLT) lacks the human capacity to carry out inspection processes. The unit still has no executive powers, which dilutes the role of inspection among social service providers. However, this Unit faces operational problems, including a shortage of inspection officers, minimal operating conditions, lack of professional training, and absence of inspection guidelines. Efforts to address these challenges have been hindered by structural issues. Overall, the current monitoring system for social services lacks uniformity and effectiveness across municipal directorates. While some municipalities conduct monitoring through visits, reports, and meetings with service providers, many others lack the necessary tools and capacities for comprehensive monitoring. As a result, proper monitoring processes, especially in terms of regularity and quality control remain insufficient in most areas.

Furthermore, the licensing of social services presents another challenge. While public service providers are subject to the licensing process, services provided by Centers for Social Work (CSWs) are not currently licensed under the existing legal framework. The lack of licensing for CSWs raises concerns about accountability and quality assurance in service delivery. Efforts have been made to address this issue, with calls for the licensing of social services provided by CSWs based on minimum standards to enhance service quality and accountability. Despite some progress in licensing of civil society organization (CSOs), challenges persist, including the operation of unlicensed CSO social service providers.

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from government bodies, municipalities, civil society, and international stakeholders. Strengthening institutional frameworks, expediting legislative processes, and ensuring sustainable financing mechanisms are crucial steps toward improving the social protection sector's resilience and responsiveness.

Additionally, investing in the capacity-building of both public and non-governmental entities is essential for enhancing service delivery and meeting the diverse needs of Kosovo's population. The issues surrounding monitoring, inspection, and licensing need to be addressed for enhancing the effectiveness, accountability, and quality of social services in the Kosovo social protection sector.

⁴ The terms civil society organization (CSO) and non-governmental organization (NGO) will be used interchangeably in the report.

Main findings

Overall Assessment

Overall, the EU interventions in Kosovo's social protection system have been highly effective, efficient, impactful, and sustainable, demonstrating substantial added-value. Across various fronts, including legal and policy framework advancements, service provider expansion, and service quality improvement, EU support has led to tangible progress, notably amid challenges like political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interventions have significantly impacted policy and legal changes, resulting in lasting improvements and enhanced institutional support during crises. Moreover, cooperation between CSOs and government institutions has improved, leading to better outcomes and expanded access to essential services, especially for vulnerable groups. Capacity-building initiatives have empowered stakeholders to address emerging challenges effectively.

Moving forward, sustaining these efforts, investing in capacity building, addressing power imbalances and funding gaps, and reinforcing gender mainstreaming, policy advocacy, and community-based approaches will be crucial for continued progress towards an efficient, inclusive, and sustainable social protection system in Kosovo, reflecting the EU's significant added value in the region.

Effectiveness: The effectiveness of EU supported interventions in strengthening Kosovo's social protection system is evident across multiple fronts: legal and policy framework, service provider expansion, enhancement in service standards. In terms of legal and policy framework effectiveness, EU support facilitated significant advancements in the legislation governing social services.

Despite challenges, including political instability, the advocacy efforts and stakeholder collaboration resulted in tangible progress, notably in decentralization processes. The expansion of service providers, a key indicator of effectiveness, was significantly facilitated by EU funding. Sub-grants allocated to organizations such as Save the Children and Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) allowed for the provision of specialized services, effectively increasing accessibility for vulnerable groups and fostering better coordination between local institutions and CSOs.

Efficiency: The EU-funded support in Kosovo has demonstrated remarkable efficiency, competently addressing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. Grantees efficiently managed project activities, ensuring timely delivery and optimal resource utilization.

Despite disruptions, all the projects displayed adaptability by adjusting activities to meet emerging needs. Proactive engagement with stakeholders and international partners further enhanced efficiency and outreach.

Impact: The EU-funded interventions in Kosovo's social protection system have significantly impacted policy and legal changes, leading to lasting improvements and strengthened institutional support, notably during crises. Collaboration between CSOs and government institutions has been enhanced, fostering a more cohesive approach to social protection. Tangible improvements in social services provision, particularly in response to COVID-19, have expanded access to essential services. Capacity-building initiatives have transformed Kosovo's social protection workforce, equipping stakeholders with the skills needed to address emerging challenges like COVID-19.

In response to COVID-19, EU-funded interventions have ensured the continuity of essential services, introduced innovative delivery models, and provided targeted assistance, strengthening social resilience and mitigating socio-economic impacts on vulnerable populations. Tailored support from EU-funded initiatives has addressed specific needs of vulnerable groups, reducing disparities in social protection outcomes and contributing to equality and social justice in Kosovo.

Sustainability: Cooperation and coordination between institutional bodies and CSOs in Kosovo's social protection sector have significantly improved with EU-funded support, fostering more sustainable partnerships and enhancing outcomes. Strengthened legal and policy frameworks, institutional support, capacity-building, and transparent communication channels sustain this improvement.

Main recommendations

Tables 1-3 below present the recommendations for the short, medium, and the long term respectively. The recommendations are numbered for easier referencing. The numbering does not indicate an order of importance. It should be noted that the recommendations differ in scope and specificity. In addition, the responsibility for some of them can be explicitly located with a level of government/institution, whereas for some of them that is less possible, as they obviously require cooperation between the central level, and local level, and civil society.

Table 1. Short-term recommendations (STRs)

Recommendation	Field of action	Responsibility
STR1. Increase national government funding for social protection services delivered by CSO SSPs to ensure long-term sustainability and prevent service suspension.	Policy	Central level
STR2. Increase specialist staff in CSWs to address the systematic neglect and ensure effective delivery of services.	Capacity	Central/local level
STR3. Increase CSW staff salaries to address the lack of competitiveness compared to other civil servants, improve motivation, facilitate recruitment.	Policy	Central level
STR4. Continue the renovation of CSWs and upgrade of equipment to address the inadequate facilities and lack of essential resources such as family rooms, child rooms, accessibility for PwDs, and modern equipment.	Capacity	Central/local level
STR5. Allocate support to CSO Social Service Providers (SSPs) via longer term grants (3-4 years) to mitigate funding voids and ensure service sustainability.	Policy	Central level
STR6. Conduct a comprehensive mapping of needs and available services, centrally coordinated to ensure consistency, comparability, and integration with other data sources.	Policy	Central/local level/CSOs
STR7. Develop a national strategy (and costed action plan) for social protection in Kosovo.	Policy	Central/local level/CSOs
STR8. Finalize the Administrative Instructions (AIs) for the recently adopted LSFS in order to commence the effective implementation of the law.	Policy	Central level/CSOs
STR9. Organize training sessions for stakeholders to facilitate the effective implementation of the LSFS.	Capacity	Central/local level/CSOs
STR10. Adopt the LLGF as it is essential for the effective implementation of the LSFS.	Policy	Central level

Table 2. Medium-term Recommendations (MTRs)

Recommendation	Field of action	Responsibility
MTR1. Continue the digitalization of CSW case management	Policy/Capacity	Central level
MTR2. Promote CSW staff specialization, addressing the need for specialized skills in various areas of social work.	Policy/Capacity	Central/local level/CSOs
MTR3. Promote the establishment of separate municipal directorates for social welfare, where feasible, to enhance institutional focus, channel efforts effectively, and potentially increase budgets for social protection.	Policy/Capacity	Local level
MTR4. Clarify roles and competencies in social protection at central as well as between central and local levels.	Policy	Central/local level/CSOs
MTR5. Develop local action plans for social protection (based on the national strategy).	Policy	Local level/CSOs
MTR6. Promote inter-municipal cooperation in social services to address capacity limitations, enhance specialization of staff, and effectively deliver the full range of services, particularly in small municipalities.	Capacity/Coordination	Central/local level/CSOs
MTR7. Promote effective social service contracting as part of the LSFS to ensure sustainability for CSO social service providers (CSO SSPs) by establishing clear funding criteria	Policy	Central level
MTR8. Strengthen the capacity of municipalities in social protection by investing efforts to enhance knowledge, understanding of competencies, recruitment of qualified staff, and prioritization of social protection within municipal agendas.	Capacity	Local level
MTR9. Continue to invest in the social service delivery capacity of CSO SSPs (building on the significant contributions made by previous EU support.	Capacity	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR10. Promote mental and emotional health initiatives for frontline workers, recognizing the significant stress and burnout they experience from daily exposure to human suffering.	Capacity	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR11. Promote the implementation of quality standards across all social services	Policy/Services	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR12. Systematically address barriers to access and advocate for the rights of marginalized persons in the field of social protection.	Policy	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR13. Promote women's empowerment and gender equality within social protection programs.	Policy/Services	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR14. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with gender-sensitive indicators and expand collaboration with diverse stakeholders to ensure services reach women.	Policy/Services	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR15. Expand the service typology and coverage and improve service quality, to maximize impact for vulnerable groups.	Policy/Services	Central/local level/ CSOs

MTR16. Ensure closer coordination between the CSW SAS and social services components.	Policy/Capacity	Central/local level
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Table 3. Long-term recommendations (LTRs)

Recommendation	Field of action	Responsibility
LTR1. Promote stronger coordination and synergies between social protection policies, particularly social services, and education and health policies	Policy/Coordination	Central/local level/ CSOs
LTR2. Enhance the prevention role of CSWs	Policy/Capacity	Central/local level/ CSOs

Feedback from Final Dissemination Event

A final dissemination event was held on 4 June 2024 in Pristina. The event took place in the Government building and involved over 40 stakeholders from the field of social protection, including from the Prime Minister’s Office, the key ministries (MFLT and MoJ), municipalities, municipal Governorates for Health and Welfare, CSWs, as well as CSOs working in the field of social protection. The event started with key note speeches from the EU Ambassador and representatives of the Prime Minister’s Office and the key line ministries, following which the evaluation experts presented the key findings and recommendations. The ensuing discussion involved a number of issues presented in this report, including but not limited to the:

- state of government funding for social services;
- results achieved with EU support to the sector;
- reforms introduced with the new LSFS;
- social service contracting;
- communication between municipalities, CSWs, and national institutions;
- status of CSWs and social workers;
- professional standards in the field;
- need to strengthen the CSWs;
- need to protect frontline professionals;
- progress achieved in social services in specific municipalities in the country;
- need of even stronger focus on the most vulnerable;
- financial sustainability of CSOs;
- EU funding for social protection in the next period;

Overall, the stakeholders welcomed and endorsed the findings and the recommendations of the evaluation report and agreed on the need of their timely implementation.

2. Introduction

Lot 4 Consortium led by ICON-INSTITUT Public Sector GmbH has been engaged by the European Union Office to Kosovo (EUOK) to conduct the Thematic Evaluation of EU support on social protection to Kosovo

FWC SIEA 2018 - LOT 4 – Human Development and Safety Net EuropeAid/138778/DH/SER/multi SIEA-2018-2182.

The evaluation aims to provide recommendations to the EUOK on future IPA projects on social protection targeting the institutional level and civil society. It will further contribute to the effective design of such future projects and identify gaps and/or windows of opportunities for more efficient EU support in the sector.

The evaluation focus is on the past and ongoing projects/programs supporting vulnerable populations, people in need of social protection, looking at dimensions such as rehabilitation and reintegration into the social system and/or the labour market, social well-being, inclusion and cohesion, empowerment, reduction of gender disparities, protection and preservation of human rights, institution (institutional capacity) building and improved partnerships between the institutional stakeholders and social partners, improved access, relevance and quality of social services and strengthening the resilience of the social protection system. More specifically, the evaluation covers 6 interventions financed by the EU in the social protection sector as follows:

- ✓ Strengthening social service provision for the most vulnerable groups, in response to Covid-19, CTR420836, 12.2020 – 12.2023
- ✓ Response to COVID-19- emergency and early recovery support, CTR – 421902, 12.2020 – 12.2022
- ✓ EU-Community Stabilisation Programme Phase IV (EU-CSP IV), CTR – 414002, 12.2020 – 08.2023
- ✓ Capacity development and financial support to civil society organizations (CSOs) working for gender equality amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath and beyond, CTR-426885, 02.09.2021 – 01.03.2024.
- ✓ Joint Action for Decentralisation, CTR – 404466, 20.12.2018 – 20.06.2023
- ✓ Social protection of most vulnerable groups of children - provision of comprehensive psychosocial, shelter and rehabilitation services, CTR – 422145, 01.2021 – 12.2023

The main objectives are “assessment of achievements, the quality and the results of the above-listed interventions in the context of an evolving cooperation policy, with increasing emphasis on result-oriented approaches and the contribution towards the achievement of the SDGs.” Gender sensitivity is of special importance in this assignment, considering that women and children are among the most vulnerable groups and often the main beneficiaries of the interventions at hand.

The objectives of this evaluation will therefore provide the relevant services of the European Union and the interested stakeholders with:

- ✓ An overall independent and gender-sensitive assessment of the performance and sustainability of the interventions referred above, paying particular attention to the systemic changes, new approaches, methodologies, and ways of working which they put in place.
- ✓ Key lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations in view of the legislative and institutional transformation of the social protection sector and policies in Kosovo, to shape and improve future gender-transformative and inclusive interventions. In particular, this evaluation will serve to:
- ✓ Assess the extent to which those 6 interventions have contributed to strengthening the capacities of the social service providers and improving the quality, access, and efficiency of the social services.
- ✓ Assess the performance of the EU assistance in the sector over the last 4 years, its enabling factors and those hampering or limiting a proper delivery and/or sustainability of results.
- ✓ Highlight good practices and key lines of support that should be sustained.
- ✓ Report transparently on the EU support to the social protection sector in Kosovo.
- ✓ Inform the future programming in the sector.

The main users of this evaluation will be the EU Office in Kosovo, the NIPAC (National IPA Coordinator), the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers, the Ministry of Justice, local governments, Centres for Social Work (CSWs), and CSOs involved in the sector as well as interested donors.

3. Key Methodological Elements

3.1. Overall Evaluation Approach

The evaluation methodology includes the following core elements:

- evaluation strategy,
- evaluation design,
- data collection methods,
- data analysis methods

Evaluation Strategy: The evaluation strategy is predominantly qualitative. This is dictated by the evaluation questions, the availability of data, as well as the nature of the interventions/projects being evaluated.

Evaluation Design: The evaluation design is that of a case study⁵, whereby the main case is the EU support to social protection in Kosovo. The report makes references as relevant to the 6 individual projects comprising it, and even more so to their specific components.

A key aspect of the evaluation which makes it a case study is that the intervention is being researched in its overall socio-economic and socio-political context, whereby some parts of the intervention (projects) have been recently completed and some are still ongoing. In addition, the expected results/outcomes (for ex. the policy effects) are still unfolding.

Data Collection Method: The effort rests on a combination of primary and secondary data. The key method of primary data collection was the key informant interview (KII). The secondary data were collected via review of relevant project documents, data, various stakeholder documents and data, statistical data, other relevant research, studies, analyses, legislative and policy documents of relevance to the topic.

Data Analysis Method: The key method for analysis of the qualitative data is the thematic analysis with some elements of grounded theory. Standard inductive-deductive evaluative reasoning is applied whereby hypotheses relating to key intervention elements are developed, tested and confirmed or disconfirmed.

Data collection strategy: The primary data was collected via qualitative (semi-structured interviews). This was a clear requirement of the ToR and the specific evaluation questions, as well as was indicated by the subject of evaluation.

In the process of primary data collection, the evaluators relied on individual KIIs, individual re-interviews (re-KIIs), as well as small group interviews, which do not require specific organization effort and/or additional budget (such as for premises, buffets, etc.). The key instrument for primary data collection was the KII. Re-interviewing was sometimes needed when additional data collected from other sources, as well as the analysis of the data provided by the respective KI indicated to areas and/or issues which required additional detail, additional in-depth review, and/or reviewing certain issues from a new or alternative perspectives. Small group interviews were in some instances conducted spontaneously for purposes of time, efficiency, as well as convenience for the KIs. For example, a small group 2-3 of KIs who have had the same type of involvement with the project (benefitted from the same service) and have fairly limited information to provide on the project, were interviewed together.

The secondary data can be generally divided into data provided by the EU grantees (and their sub-grantees), and other documents and data.

The following categories of KIs were be involved in the interviewing:

- Representatives/staff of the EU grantees and sub-grantees,
- Representatives of relevant public institutions at central and local level, in particular CSWs, municipal Directorates for Health and Welfare, line ministries, and in particular ministries with new competencies in the field, following the closure of the MLSW,
- Other key stakeholders, such as donors, other organizations with relevant mandate and/or activity in the field,
- Beneficiaries of specific project interventions,

⁵ Alternative designs include the experimental (requires control groups and random assignment), quasi-experimental (requires control groups, but it does not involve random assignment), longitudinal (requires data collection overtime), cross-sectional, comparative. Of these core models, elements of the cross-sectional model are to some extent consistent with the case study model proposed. In other words, the case study model has elements of the cross-sectional model, in that the data is collected in a single moment/period of time.

- Experts

The criteria for KI selection were the following:

- Knowledge (and involvement) in the interventions subject to evaluation.
- Ability to provide a relevant/additional/alternative perspective/point of view on the interventions subject to evaluation and more generally the overall topic of interest.
- Responsibility/mandate in the field of interest, or over specific issues of interest to the evaluation.

The primary data was collected by conducting 55 KIIs with relevant KIs. This includes the interviews conducted in the inception phase, as well as the field phase. To the extent possible, the KIIs were organized face-to-face unless the KIs insisted on having online interviews. Interviews were not recorded, as recording usually increases KI bias. Detailed interview notes were kept. The interviews will use the conversational interview style.

The standard principles of research ethics apply, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and no harm from participation in the evaluation research. The two evaluators exchanged interview notes/transcripts from the interviews they did not conduct as a team. They kept individual notes for the interviews they conducted as a team, and they also exchanged these notes as relevant. No other party except the two evaluators has had or will have access to the interview material. Following the approval of (this) final report, the interview material will be anonymized. In the phase of data processing, which is still ongoing, the identity of the KIs is relevant primarily for the purpose of filtering possible bias.

The key EQs represent the core questions guiding the process. For the purpose of interviewing, they were elaborated into specific questions adapted to the specific experience, position, and attitude of the KI. The evaluators refrained from asking leading questions, unnecessarily provocative questions, or questions which otherwise elicit bias on the part of the KI. Some of the questions were only relevant to some KIs and not to others. The interviewers adapted the questions during the interview as needed and were free to follow new lines of inquiry emerging from the discussions.

Data Analysis Method: The key method for analysis of the qualitative data is the thematic analysis. Standard inductive-deductive evaluative reasoning is applied with hypotheses relating to key intervention elements developed, tested and confirmed or disconfirmed.

A significant part of the analysis is deductive, departing from the EQs and the key evaluation criteria and searching for evidence which confirms or disconfirms them. Conversely, inductive analysis is also applied, starting from data emerging from the ground and checking this data against the key evaluation issues and criteria. Key questions of interest have been explored from a variety of perspectives; hypotheses and counter-hypotheses were tested looking for consistency of evidence with key lines of inquiry and arguments. Data from the different sources available were used (triangulation/mixed-method), to the extent possible, to analyse specific issues.

The evaluation criteria are discussed as related to the key project outputs, outcomes, and impacts. However, the discussion extends as needed to possible outcomes which have evidently materialized due to the intervention even though they are not included in the project logic intervention. This is consistent with the outcome harvesting approach. Looking for evidence of causal attribution of the project outcomes to the project intervention has been a central tenet of the evaluative reasoning. This primarily concerns impact and to some extent effectiveness. However, aspects such as efficiency, sustainability, and EU added value are given due attention in the exploration.

3.1.1. Desk Phase

The desk phase commenced with extensive review of the secondary data, including data and documents relating to the specific projects, as well as data and documents on the system of social protection in Kosovo overall. This includes, laws, draft laws, bylaws, strategies, policy papers, analyses, statistical data and so forth. During the desk phase, the evaluators:

- Initiated communication with the grantees and, as necessary, made specific data requests.
- Conducted online interviews/consultations with Key Informants (KIs), which were deemed timely and relevant as they pertained to specific lines of inquiry during this phase.

- Finalized and further refined the reconstructed intervention logic
- Developed optional proposals for smaller case studies or specific inquiries that could provide detailed insights into various aspects of the intervention.
- Initiated the planning for fieldwork, including the scheduling of interviews.

3.1.2. Field Phase

The field phase involved the field collection of primary qualitative data via KIIs, repeat interviews (as needed) and small group interviews. Written communication with stakeholders and beneficiaries continued also during the field phase as required to collect additional data.

The scheduling of the interviews started in the desk phase, given that some interviews, in particular with public sector stakeholders take longer time to schedule. The KIIs conducted in the field phase included the following:

- Grantees – 18
- Sub-grantees – 11
- National institutions – 3
- Local institutions ((CSWs, municipal departments, etc.) – 14
- Other stakeholders (CSOs, donors, experts, university) – 9

Concerning the interviews with the representatives (staff) of the projects subject to evaluation, where the organizations have implemented activities in various parts of the country, the evaluators aimed to interview the most relevant staff with first-hand knowledge of the program in the respective locations.

Some of the supported projects involved quite some different components. The intention of the evaluators, to the extent possible, was to interview staff who were directly in charge of different components and have first-hand knowledge of them.

A key criterion in the field work was to ensure the broadest possible territorial coverage, and to include the perspectives of different local settings.

The evaluators visited 7 local communities (cities/towns/villages) which benefitted in various ways from the supported intervention, in addition to the capital Pristina. To the extent possible, a visit to a community included several different KIIs, for example, with a CSW, with a CSO provider, beneficiaries of a certain intervention and so forth.

In the early phase of the field work, the first 2-3 days, the evaluators conducted the interviews together. This was important in order to ensure a level of synchronisation. The process of sharing of observations from the interviews and the discussion between the evaluators of specific issues raised in the interviews, is an important part of the qualitative data analysis and evaluative reasoning. This process helps refine ideas, test logical arguments, bring up issues, reformulate specific questions, focus on specific contentions, and so forth.

Following this initial phase, the evaluators split the field work for reasons of time and resource efficiency, however they continued to coordinate on daily basis. This coordination, in addition to the methodological aspects, also concerned logistics, for ex, travel, mode of transportation, etc.

Also, after the initial field phase, the evaluators conducted some of the particularly relevant KIIs together. Qualitative interviewing is complex and it is only semi-structured. It is always more productive if key KIIs are conducted by a well-coordinated team which can support and supplement each other.

At the end of the field phase the evaluators prepared and submitted an intermediary note with initial observations from the field work.

3.1.3. Synthesis Phase

During the field phase the evaluators edited and finalized transcripts on daily basis, whilst the material was still “fresh” and in this process they already start to formulate notes and memos in response to the initial

hypotheses, contentions, assertions. These initial argumentations were then developed in the following synthesis phase.

The (current) synthesis phase places particular emphasis on processing and analysing the primary data collected in the field. Data is processed, coded (as needed), tabulated, and organized. In this process, arguments are further developed and refined and the analysis is fully elaborated. The synthesis phase completes with the submission of the **draft final evaluation report**, and following comments, the final evaluation report.

The ToR for the evaluation effort includes all the 6 projects which were supported with EU funding. Hence, they are all subject to in-depth analysis and are considered as embedded cases of the overall case study of the EU support to social protection in Kosovo.

To the extent that it is relevant, the report discusses mini case studies, that is, specific issues of relevance which elaborate in detail certain aspects of the intervention or of the processes being analysed.

3.2. Challenges and Limitations

The key challenge to the evaluation was the extensive scope of the included interventions. The evaluation reviewed 6 large grants awarded by the EU. Two of the grants, to Save the Children and to KWN, included large sub-granting components of 47 and 28 sub-grants respectively. Each of the projects comprised a number of different interventions to the direct benefit of various categories of beneficiaries. Several of the projects involved combinations of services as well as of policy and service work. This broad range of various interventions limited the depth to which each specific intervention could be explored. This was not a major issue given that the focus of the evaluation was the entirety of the EU-funded effort in the field of social protection.

4. EU Support and its Evolution

4.1. Political and Socio-Economic Context

Kosovo gained independence in 2008 and has worked towards EU membership since. However, five EU member states (EU MS) do not recognize the independence status, which complicates the application process.

Kosovo remains one of the poorest places in Europe, with an estimated 23% of the population living in poverty compared to the European level (2019). Kosovo was also estimated to have the highest poverty rate among the Western Balkan countries, at over 34% of the population in 2017. The pandemic interrupted Kosovo's development journey, triggering the country's first recession since independence. Kosovo, like the rest of the world, has experienced one of the deepest recessions in 2020. The pandemic is assessed to have a long-lasting impact on the economy, particularly by eroding human capital.⁶ At the time of identifying the actions, the poverty is assessed to be very widespread, with 18% of the population living below the poverty line, and 5.1% in extreme poverty⁷. Poverty is more widespread in rural areas, where 64.4% of the poor and 63.7% of the extremely poor reside⁸. Poverty affects women more than men, with 19% of women and 17% of men living below the poverty line.⁹ Poverty affects women more than men, with 19% of women and 17% of men living below the poverty line¹⁰.

The current status as a potential candidate confirms the EU's support in the standardization process, and the country has made significant progress in the past years, and in 2015, a Stabilization and Association Agreement was signed as a result.

However, in the social policy and employment category, Kosovo is considered to only have achieved an early stage of preparation so far, whereas they have achieved a moderate stage of preparation in many other connected categories, such as economic and monetary policy, or taxation.

⁶ World Bank. 2021. Kosovo Country Economic Memorandum, November 2021: Gearing Up for a More Productive Future. © World Bank, Washington, DC. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/36896>

⁷ Kosovo Agency of Statistics. Consumption poverty in the Republic of Kosovo. May 2019, available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/210201560762490515/pdf/Consumption-Poverty-in-the-Republic-of-Kosovo.pdf>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid.

Unemployment and labor market inactivity rates in Kosovo are high, across different sectors. According to the Results of the Labour Force Survey (LFS), for Q1 2023, **60.5% of the working-age group (15-64 years old) are inactive**, with a higher percentage of women (77.2%) than men (43.6%) being inactive. The same survey reveals that youth unemployment remains high though significantly reduced compared to 2022 (31.4%), with a rate of 17.2% among those aged 15-24, and a higher rate among women at 20.1% compared to 15.9% among men. Additionally, more than **32% of young people (15-24 years old) are classified as NEET**,¹¹ emphasizing the ongoing difficulties of providing them with opportunities in the labour market, education, and training. Kosovo spends just 8.5% of its GDP on social protection, compared to an average of 28% in the EU.¹¹ As a result, people's access to health, education and other social services remains limited, especially for the most disadvantaged.

People from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are particularly underserved, as are those who have disabilities or who live in rural areas. There is little spending on social assistance targeted toward the poor (Social Assistance Scheme). In July 2023, 20 937 families with a total of 82 621 members benefited from the social assistance scheme¹². Expenditures on social services are disproportionately low. In 2019, Kosovo spent 0.05% of GDP on social services versus 0.45% spent on the SAS and 6.25% spent on other cash transfers. Social services are financed through a general grant/transfer from the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers (MFLT) to each municipality¹³. On average, more than half of this transfer is directed to the SAS and the CSWs, which administer the scheme. In theory, the remaining resources should finance a minimum package of interventions for individuals and families at risk. In practice, the resources are not earmarked for this purpose, raising concerns regarding adequate and equitable service delivery across municipalities. The large majority of the social protection fund is allocated for pensions, leaving little for other vulnerable communities. The latest social assistance scheme was unsuccessful in the Assembly.

Despite the progress in the legal, policy and institutional framework, there are still challenges in ensuring an equal, secure, and multi-ethnic society for all.¹⁴ The situation is particularly challenging for the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities where discrimination and marginalization, particularly among women persist.¹⁵ As a result, access to public services, including essential health services, is limited for all communities, with women facing the most severe consequences. Moreover, inadequate housing conditions further exacerbate public health risks, disproportionately impacting women who spend more time inside their homes compared to men in these communities¹⁶.

Various forms of gender-based violence (GBV) continue to be widespread yet underreported in Kosovo. Data from the Kosovo Police shows that up to 2,000 cases of domestic violence are reported annually¹⁷. However, anonymous surveys with women indicate that 57% of women have experienced some form of domestic violence in their lifetime¹⁸.

4.2. Relevant Regional/National Thematic Development Strategies

Since 2008, Kosovo has adopted several laws and policies to address and improve social protection and other related issues in the country.

On 31 March 2023, the government approved the revised **2023-2027 National Program for EU Integration**, further endorsed by the Assembly on 15 June 2023. Kosovo continued to implement the ERA II Action Plan. The Kosovo government adopted the **National Development Strategy and Plan 2023-2029 (NDS/NDP)**, which sets both long-term and short-term priorities, covering activities on a three-year rolling basis.

¹¹ UNICEF (2022). 2021 Annual Report, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/media/2931/file/English-2022.pdf>

¹² KAS 2023. Press Release. Social Welfare Statistics, July 2023

¹³ KAS. 2023. Press Release. Social Welfare Statistics, July 2023

¹⁴ European Commission Kosovo Report 2022, available at:

<https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Kosovo%20Report%202022.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ European Commission Kosovo Report 2022, available at: <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Kosovo%20Report%202022.pdf>

¹⁷ Center for Information, Critique, and Action, Open Data Platform "1≠1", 2023, available at: <https://data.qika.org>

¹⁸ OSCE (2019). Survey on the Wellbeing and Security of Women in Kosovo, available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/4/439790.pdf>

A **Social Assistance Reform** has been initiated in 2021 by the Government of Kosovo aiming at enhancing the effectiveness of the country's social safety net. This initiative aims to reform the design and implementation of the Social Assistance Scheme (SAS) while investing in its delivery systems. These efforts pave the way for a comprehensive reform of Kosovo's social protection system, ensuring a more accessible and impactful social assistance program. By eliminating categorical targeting, the reform seeks to alleviate poverty traps faced by beneficiaries and provide meaningful support to the poorest households, laying the groundwork for future crisis responses.

Detailed division of competencies on social services and social assistance have been delegated under the so-called “**Decentralization package**” and defined further in the Memorandums of Understanding signed between the MLSW, municipalities, Kosovo Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Local Government Administration in 2009.¹⁹ The document calls for an enhanced and sustainable system of local self-government, with centrally legislated minimum quality and quantity standards in the provision of public services, including minimum qualifications of personnel and accreditation of public service providers. Decentralization has been considered to guarantee social protection for all vulnerable groups in Kosovo and as a way to avoid potential tensions, in particular with ethnic minorities. The **2009 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** officially made municipalities fully responsible for social services delivery, using the budget transferred from the MLSW.

In 2022, Kosovo adopted the **2022-2026 Strategy for the Advancement of the Rights of the Roma and Ashkali Communities** and the **2022-2024 action plan**²⁰. The Strategy defines objectives in the areas of education, employment and social protection, health, housing and discrimination. The action plan associated with the Strategy contains target indicators and attributes institutional responsibilities and budget to all actions. In June 2022, an online “National Platform for Protection from Discrimination” was launched, which was developed in co-operation of the Office of Good Governance with international donors. The platform also exists in the form of a smartphone application and is primarily targeted at Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians.

The **2021-2025 Program for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms** and its Action Plan 2021 – 2023 were approved in 2021 by the Kosovo government as the main human rights instruments. Main strategic objectives include 1) Improvement of governance, transparency, institutional coordination and accountability within public institutions to further the realization of human rights; 2) Protection and promotion of human rights, 3) Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all and 4) Facilitate access to the justice system. The two main mechanisms responsible for monitoring the implementation of the program are: (i) the Inter-Institutional Coordination Group on Human Rights led by the Deputy Prime Minister for Minority Issues and Human Rights; and (ii) the Office for Good Governance within the Office of the Prime Minister (OGG/OPM).

As per Article 11 of the Law on Gender Equality, the Government of the Republic of Kosovo has approved the **Kosovo Program for Gender Equality (PKBGJ) 2020-2024**²¹ (Decision No. 01/3441), led by the Agency for Gender Equality - Office of the Prime Minister. The PKBGJ aims to embed gender equality across all governmental, civil society, private sector, and donor community structures, policies, and practices in Kosovo. It's a five-year program (2020-2024) with an Action Plan spanning 2020-2023, focusing on addressing structural inequalities affecting women and girls in economic empowerment, social welfare, human development, gender roles, relations, rights, access to justice, and security. Additionally, the Ministry of Justice adopted the **State Protocol for handling gender-based violence cases** in December 2022, defining institutional responsibilities.

¹⁹ Explanatory letter issued by Ministry of Economy and Finance titled “Authorization Letter for transferring the budget and the respective sta" on key roles and competencies of CSWs from MLSW to respective municipalities in 2009.

²⁰ Strategy for the Advancement of the Rights of the Roma and Ashkali Communities in the Republic of Kosovo 2022 – 2026 and the Action Plan 2022 – 2024, available at: <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/b1623eaca78e740ce79f50af0e2f9c51.pdf>

²¹ Kosovo Program for Gender Equality, available at: <https://abgi.rks-gov.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/Programi%20i%20Kosov%C3%ABs%20p%C3%ABr%20Barazi%20Gjinore%202020-2024%20-%20ANGLISHT.pdf>

The **National Strategy on Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women 2022-2026** (NSPDV)²², approved in January 2022, contains actions and measures aiming to provide protection from domestic violence and violence against women following the standards of ratified international instruments.

On employment policy, Kosovo has continued drafting a new **Employment and Labour Market Strategy 2024-2028**, a new employment policy 2024-2026, and a concept document regulating the field of employment. The **2021-2025 migration strategy and action plan** reflect the priorities in the government program for the same period. The strategy and action plan take into account obligations deriving from the Stabilization and Association Agreement as well as European and global initiatives such as the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and the Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration. The strategy meets all requirements, including defining baselines, clear budgeting and setting target values. Issues related to the diaspora are not included in the migration strategy; instead, it will form a part of the future diaspora strategy.

The **Child Rights National Strategy and Action Plan 2021 – 2023**²³ aims to establish a comprehensive policy framework and at the same time to serve as a base for other subsector strategies, in order to influence, to the greatest extent possible, the unification of institutional efforts within the reform of the system as a whole, in particular, the system referring to the rights of child. These policies refer to the child's life cycle, including prenatal, infancy, childhood and adolescence care, by prioritizing the most marginalized children. Such reforms would not make sense, if they were not reflected in a comprehensive spirit, to undertake initiatives for improving the situation of children in the economic, social and political context.

4.3. Analysis of the EU External Action Strategy

The European Commission on 6 February 2017 adopted a strategy for '*A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*', The Strategy spells out the priorities and areas of joint reinforced cooperation, addressing the specific challenges faced by the Western Balkans countries. Sustained efforts and irreversible reforms in crucial areas such as the rule of law, fundamental rights, the fight against corruption and organized crime, as well as economic reforms are considered the main priorities for a credible enlargement perspective.

The European Commission adopted a new **Growth Plan for the Western Balkans** on 8 November 2023, intending to bring some of the benefits of membership to the region in advance of accession, boost economic growth and accelerate much needed socio-economic convergence. The Plan aims to enable partners to step up reforms and investments to significantly accelerate the speed of the enlargement process and the growth of their economies. For this, a new €6 billion Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans has been proposed for the period 2024-2027. As part of the Growth Plan, every Western Balkan partner will be invited to prepare a Reform Agenda based on existing recommendations including the annual Enlargement Package and the countries' Economic Reform Programmes (ERP).

The EU has been actively involved in Kosovo since the end of the Kosovo War in 1999. Kosovo's independence in 2008 was recognized by most EU member states. The **EU-Kosovo Stabilisation and Association Agreement** (SAA) entered into force in April 2016. This comprehensive agreement provides a framework for political dialogue and covers cooperation in a variety of sectors. Since 2016, five Stabilisation and Association Council meetings and seven cycles of subcommittee meetings have taken place. Kosovo participates in the ministerial dialogue between the economic and finance ministers of the EU, and the candidate countries and potential candidates, aiming to help the latter gradually meet the economic accession criteria and be better prepared for economic reforms, competitiveness and job creation.

EU has continuously supported Kosovo's efforts towards political and economic reforms, including the establishment of democratic institutions and the rule of law. The European Union's political and financial commitment to Kosovo is two-fold. The EU provides assistance to meet Kosovo's institution-building needs and socio-economic development, and it provides a substantial contribution to the international presence in Kosovo.

²² 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>

²³ Available at <https://konsultimet.rks-gov.net/Storage/Consultations/40542-UpdEn.pdf>

The European Union is the single largest provider of funds and financial assistance in Kosovo. The EU is supporting the alignment with EU standards through substantial funds under the **Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance**. The bilateral EU support for Kosovo under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance II (IPA II) in 2014-2020 amounted to EUR 562 million, and included, among others, budget support operations on public administration reform, public financial management and socio-economic recovery. The IPA III Regulation for the 2021-2027 financial period continues to provide financial support to the region and will also finance the Economic Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans. Under the EIP, Kosovo benefits from EUR 312 million, generating mobilized investments of EUR 940 million. In the framework of IPA, I, IPA II and other EU instruments, from 2007 to 2020, the EU has invested more than €1.5 billion in Kosovo. The next phase of IPA – IPA III covers the years 2021-2027²⁴. In total, IPA III will have a budget of over €14 billion that will benefit the Western Balkans and Turkey. Kosovo will benefit from IPA III on its path towards fulfilling the EU accession criteria through deep and comprehensive reforms. The IPA III instrument is clearly aligned with the flagships and priorities of the ‘Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans’ (October 2020), the Western Balkan Strategy ‘A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans (February 2018), and the Commission Communication ‘Enhancing the accession process – a credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans (February 2020).

Kosovo continues to benefit from support under the IPA multi-country and regional programs. Additionally, Kosovo participates in three cross-border cooperation programs, and benefits, with IPA support, from participation in some EU programs. Kosovo also benefits from various instruments: TAIEX, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the Foreign Policy Instrument (FPI), and several EU programs including Erasmus+, COSME, Europe for Citizens, Creative Europe, Fiscalism, Customs, and during IPA III Horizon Europe. Since 2008, the European Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) has also been assisting Kosovo authorities in establishing sustainable and independent rule of law institutions. Under its current mandate extended until 14 June 2025, the Mission continues to undertake monitoring activities and has limited executive functions.

The EU’s COVID-related assistance to Kosovo amounted to EUR 68 million. As part of the wider COVID-19 response, the EU made available a Macro-Financial Assistance scheme of EUR 100 million in highly favourable loans to underpin the local economy. The EU also re-programmed parts of the planned annual programs for 2019 and 2020 to create a financial package of EUR 50 million for the economic and social recovery including:

- ✓ EUR 26.5 million in direct budget support via a newly developed “EU4 Resilience” project.
- ✓ EUR 11.9 million for “EU4 Social protection”.
- ✓ EUR 11.6 million for support to small businesses and other immediate needs which are underway.

In the sector relevant to the evaluation, in the framework of EU financial assistance under IPA, improving the functioning of the labour market; raising education standards; promoting skills development; and restructuring the social welfare system are the main areas of focus under the Education, employment & social policies priority sector. Strengthening the rule of law; fighting corruption and organized crime; implementing human rights law and protecting and including minority and vulnerable groups are considered the main areas of focus under the Rule of law & fundamental rights priority sector. More specifically, under the Thematic Priority 1: Education, employment, social protection and inclusion policies, and health, the actions intend to:

- Strengthen access to and quality of inclusive education, including vocational education and training, participation in Early Childhood Education and Care and lifelong learning opportunities at all levels.
- Contribute to fostering quality employment and access to the labour market, reducing the proportion of people engaged in informal employment as well as promoting equality and non-discrimination, social protection and inclusion and combating poverty.

²⁴ <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2021/09/16/european-parliament-gives-green-light-to-ipa-iii-worth-14-2-billion-euro/>

5. Intervention Logic

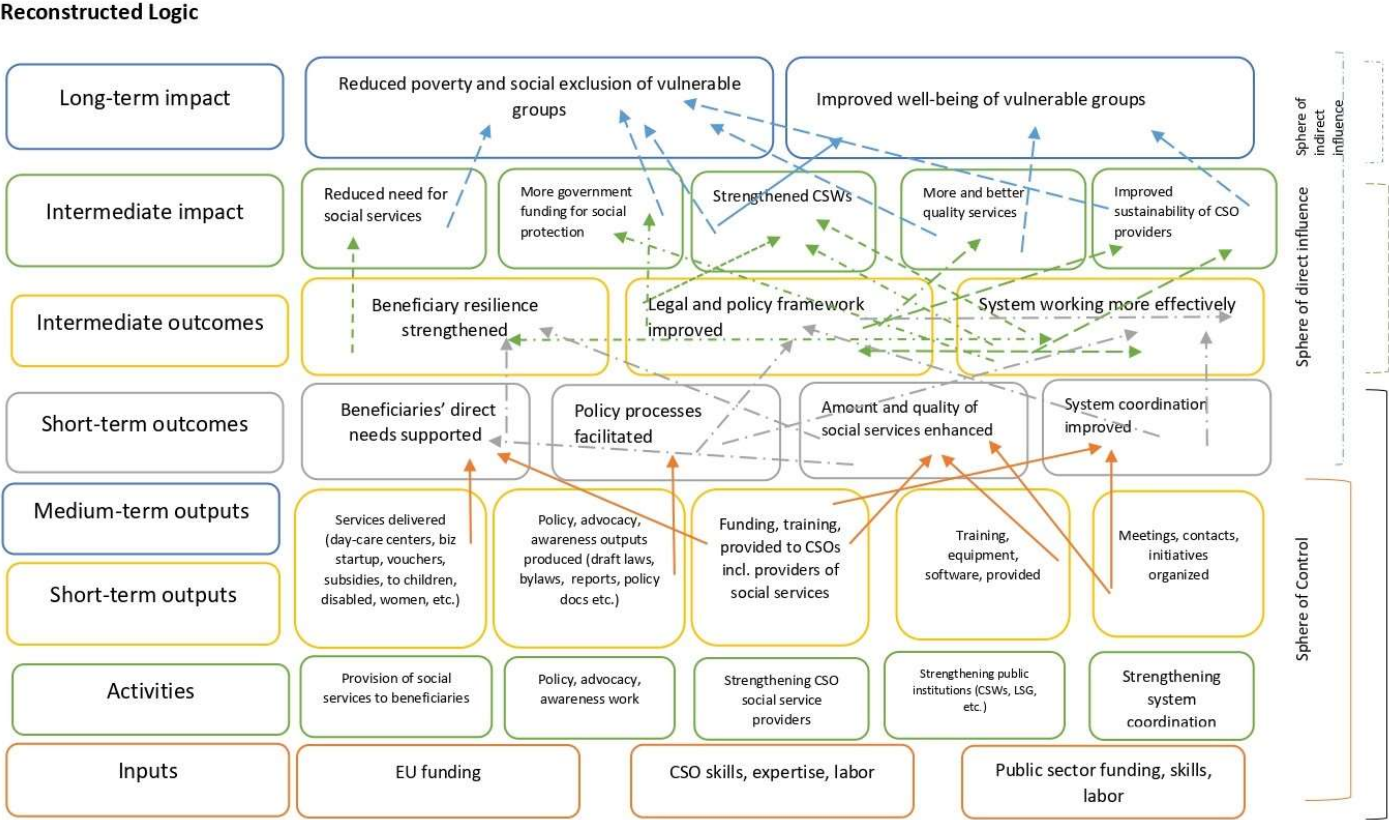
5.1. Reconstructed Intervention Logic

The diagram below (Figure 1) provides the graphical presentation of the reconstruction of the intervention's intended logic. The diagram follows the indicated DG Near format. The short text at the bottom of the reconstructed logic diagram succinctly indicates the key contextual factors that both enable and hinder the intervention. These factors are discussed at more length in the narrative analysis of the diagram.

The structure of the diagram is as follows:

- ❖ The bottom row (**Level 1**) of the diagram presents the inputs in the intervention (all 6 projects subject to evaluation).
- ❖ **Level 2** (from the bottom) presents the key activities included in the intervention. The key activities are defined based on the core activity/results components in the six projects comprising the intervention. The activities are categorized in the following way: provision of social services to beneficiaries (UNDP, PEMA, IOM, Save the Children, etc.); policy advocacy and awareness work (KOMF, UNDP, Save the Children, etc.); strengthening CSO social services providers (PEMA, KWN, Save the Children, etc.); strengthening public institutions (CSWs, municipalities, etc.) (UNDP, Save the Children, etc.); and strengthening system coordination (Save the Children, KOMF, etc.). The attribution of the key groups of activities to the individual projects is by no means exhaustive. It is simply an indication of some of the key components in the individual projects.
- ❖ **Levels 3 and 4** from the bottom include the short-term and medium-term outputs (under direct control of implementers). The two levels are merged together given the extended time-frame over which they were expected to occur.
- ❖ **Level 5** presents the short-term outcomes, which were expected to emerge as a result of the materialized outputs, they are not subject to direct project control but are in the sphere of direct influence.
- ❖ **Level 6** (from the bottom) presents the intermediate outcomes which succeed and expand on the short-term outcomes.
- ❖ **Levels 7 and 8** represent the expected intermediate and long-term impacts from the intervention.

Figure 1. Reconstructed Logic Diagram



Enabling factors: EU support, relevant donor presence, experiences CSOs, general political will;
 Hindering factors: political instability, weak institutions, chronic lack of public funding

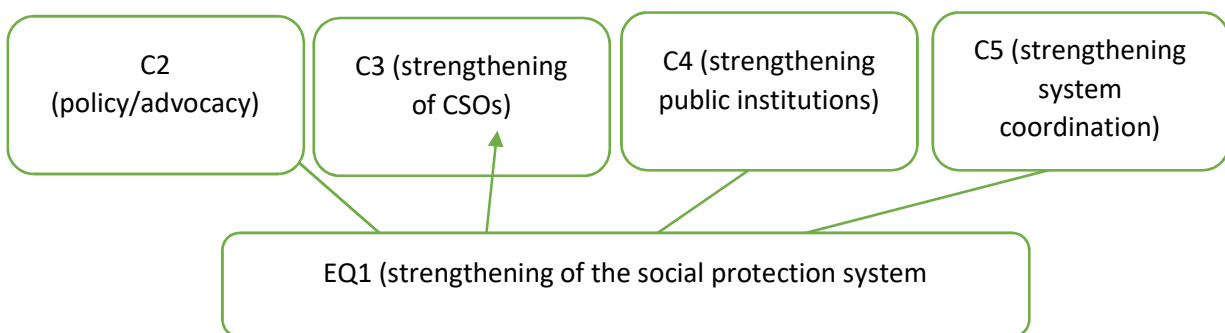
5.2. The Different Levels of the Reconstructed Intervention Logic

The intervention is comprised by five groups of activities, or five components: C1) provision of services to beneficiaries, C2) policy, advocacy and awareness work, C3) strengthening the capacity of CSOs active in the field of social protection, C4) strengthening the capacity of the public sector institutions involved in social protection, primarily CSWs as the key frontline providers, municipalities who (have the mandate to) manage the CSWs, as well as the relevant line ministries, and C5) strengthening the system coordination.

The reconstructed logic diagram is produced based on a review of the logical frameworks of the individual projects. Therefore, the reconstructed logic diagram is a sum of the intervention logic of all the individual projects. Different categorization of the key groups of activities/components is possible. The categorization in five activity groups provides a good balance between too much and too little detail, or between a too austere/restrictive vs. too complex/elaborate hierarchical presentation of the intervention logic. Both extremes are unproductive. In addition, the descriptions of the activity groups and the short-term and medium-term outputs are to a significant extent consistent with the key EQs indicated in the ToR. Specifically:

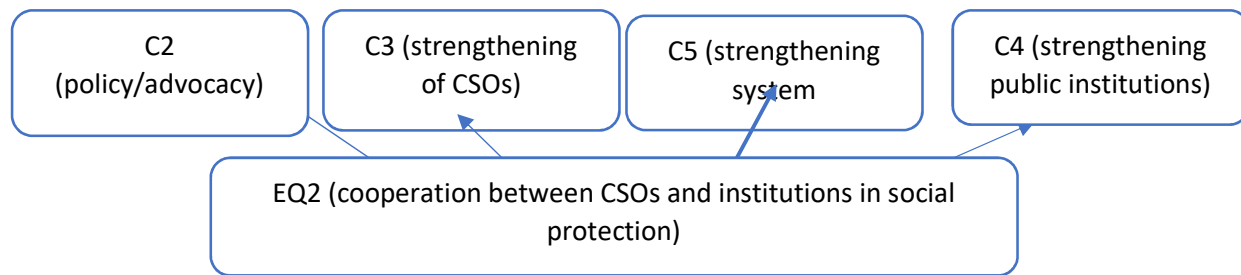
EQ1 (strengthening of the social protection system) is directly consistent with: (C2) policy/advocacy, (C3) strengthening the CSOs (which are part of the system), (C4) strengthening the public institution, and (C5) strengthening the system coordination. Even though a lot of the (1) service provision work was done directly with the beneficiaries, it is clear that this activity also contributes to strengthening the system, albeit less directly than the other activities.

Figure 2. Connection between EQ1 and activity groups/components



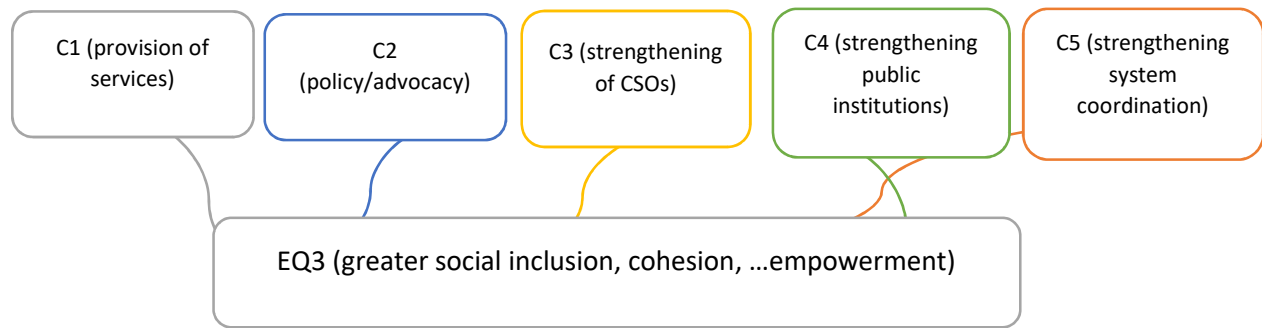
EQ2 (cooperation between CSOs and institutions in social protection) is most directly consistent with activity 5 (C5/strengthening system coordination) but it has obvious links with C2, C3, and C4.

Figure 3. Connection between EQ2 and activity groups/components



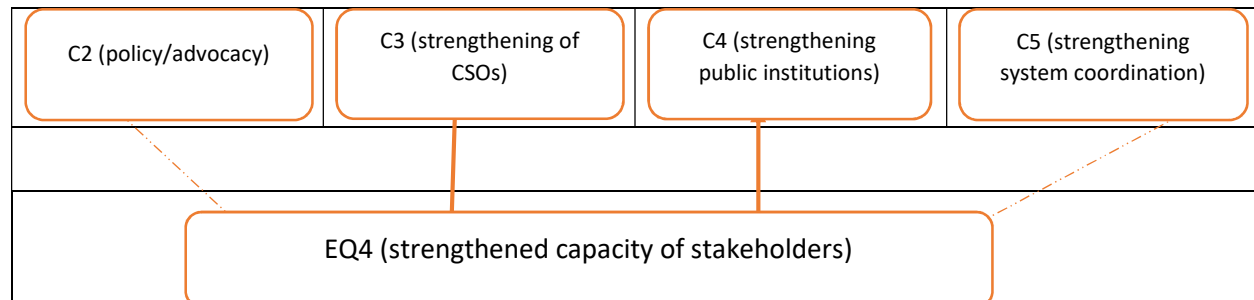
EQ3 (greater social inclusion, cohesion, ...empowerment), which is the broadest EQ overall, and which is most directly linked to the intermediate and long term impacts of the intervention, is consistent with all 5 activity groups/components, whereby the logical nexus is different with the different activities and outputs and it evolves differently over time.

Figure 4. Connection between EQ2 and activity groups/components



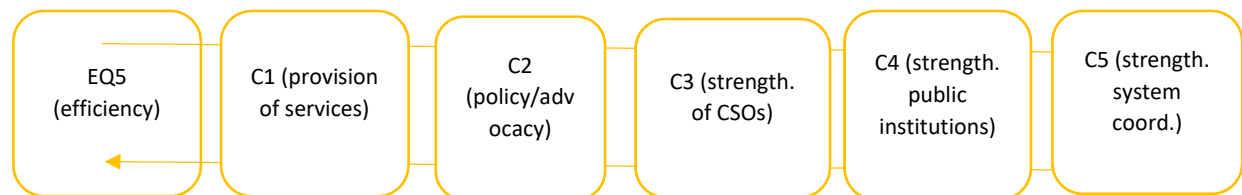
EQ4 (strengthened capacity of stakeholders) is closely consistent with C3 and C4; it is also indirectly consistent with C2 and C5.

Figure 5. Connection between EQ4 and activity groups/components



EQ5 concerns efficiency hence it cuts across all 5 activity groups;

Figure 6. Connection between EQ5 and activity groups/components



EQ6 concerns impacts and its connection is with the top levels of the logical hierarchy; EQ7 (best practices), EQ8 (gender), EQ9 and EQ10 (EU added value), EQ11 (additional principles) are also cross-cutting and concern all groups of activity.

Activity group 1(C1) comprises the various services provided to the beneficiaries across the six projects which are subject to evaluation. This component involves a large amount of different services; whose common denominator is that they meet certain beneficiary needs. Vouchers and utility subsidies (UNDP, IOM) are hence also counted in this group even though they are forms of financial support. This component involves the services of the day care centers provided to children with disabilities and in need of protection (PEMA), the shelter center services (PEMA, some of KWN grantees), the services provided by the 47 provides funded through the Save the Children project, the biz support training and mentoring (inclusive of startup financial support) provided by IOM, and so forth. Given the variety of this broad spectrum of services, the different contexts in which they were provided, and the different beneficiary needs, it is clear that they can each involve potentially different assumptions. The generally applicable assumption is that **these services did respond to relevant needs** which were previously assessed and hence were relevant, and hence could actually contribute to their alleviation. In addition, it is assumed that some of the services,

which combined goals of economic self-sufficiency, by helping beneficiaries generate income as well as in other ways, could, as a matter of design and implementation, as well as overall circumstance/context in which they were delivered, contribute to this end. Some of these services did this also indirectly. For example, a day center for children with disabilities aims towards the primary outcomes (educational, psycho-social, emotional, and empowering) related to the children beneficiaries. However, indirectly it can (it not necessarily would) contribute to the economic well-being of the family/household. Since the parent can trust the child to the day care center, s/he is free to work and earn. The same logic applies to kindergartens (pre-school child education), be they public or private.

The collected evidence and the analysis which processed it, does confirm that validity of the core assumption that these services responded to relevant needs. Hence, the validity of the vertical logic is also confirmed.

Activity 2 (C2) involves the policy, advocacy, and related awareness raising work. It comprises various components from several of the six projects, and potentially the sub-grantees/sub-recipients. This for example involves the work done by KOMF on policy and advocacy related to the system for social protection, some of the work done by UNDP directly related to the CSWs, and some of the activities implemented by Save the Children. The core working assumption is that **this work can indeed support and facilitate the reform of the legal and policy framework** in the field of social protection. At the short nexus between activity and short-term/medium-term outputs, the assumption is that the **outputs such as draft laws, bylaws, etc. are needed by the system**, that they can be produced in response to the specific needs of the system, and that they will be accepted. Whereas this is the “desirable” or the “correct” assumption, it is not necessarily unconditionally true. The system (in Kosovo as well as elsewhere in the region) is known to be slow, unresponsive, and bureaucratic. The system will not simply “accept” the outputs that are handed to it. This acceptance depends on the ability of the advocacy actors (usually CSOs including international organizations) to “convince” the system, to prompt it in continuity, and to be able to sustain the momentum of the process. In order words, it depends on the effectiveness of the advocacy effort. This assumption supports and supplements the previous assumption of relevance of the outputs.

The evidence and the conclusions conform the validity of the assumptions underpinning Activity 2. There is relevant evidence that the produced outputs were accepted by the system. The evidence suggests that the effort of the CSOs involved in policy and advocacy work was a relevant factor to this end.

As the causal nexus extends higher up the chain, the assumption is that the outputs can and will be implemented, and that their implementation will indeed make the system more effective. It is obvious that this logical connection can only work out over the medium to long term.

The evidence collected in the field phase confirms validity. The policy and advocacy work did indeed contribute to improving the legal framework. The new Law on Social and Family Services (LSFS) has been approved. The Law on Local Government Finance (LLGF) has been drafted but approval is delayed. It is widely expected that once implementation of the new LSFS begins, it will introduce positive changes in the overall system of social protection.

Activity groups 3 (C3) and 4 (C4) involve the capacity building work. This includes training, mentoring, provision of equipment, software, etc., in a nutshell, services as well as products whose aim is to strengthen the capacity of key providers of social services. The criterion for categorization is the type of provider, and for this reason they are divided into two separate groups. Alternatively, they could be counted simply as services, or merged into a single category of capacity strengthening. Instead, they are divided into two categories which are consistent with the two types of key social services providers, the CSWs and CSOs (including also international organizations). This is consistent with the key argument of the ToR that the CSOs are at the frontline to supplement the work of the CSWs. It is also consistent, as also noted earlier with the framing of the EQs.

From among the variety of assumptions relating to the diverse capacity strengthening activities, the short-run nexus (activity – short-term/medium-term output) is that **the intervention was relevant to the specific needs** in each and every case and that the specific outputs improved skills, and work processes, and supplemented the stock of equipment and software.

The evidence collected during the field work and the resulting analysis conform this assumption. There is ample evidence that the capacity building work was relevant (needed) and that it produced tangible improvements across the entire range of beneficiaries.

The final, activity group 5 (C5) (system coordination), is the smallest activity group in terms of volume/amount of work. It could easily be subsumed under the capacity strengthening components. However, it is singled out as a separate part of the effort, among other, since it closely corresponds to EQ2.

The overall assumption, across the entire logical nexus is that **improved coordination would mobilize and deploy additional efficiencies** in the system, which would ultimately result with improved service delivery and better outcomes for the beneficiaries. An additional, more practical assumption is that there is some common interest and motivation for improving such cooperation.

The collected evidence supports the validity of the assumption. The collected data provided indications of improved efficiencies in the system. However, it needs to be noted that the overall assessment is that there is significant room for improvement. At present the system suffers from poor level of coordination and general lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the various levels, specifically the central and the local. It is clear nonetheless that the EU program did make a contribution, both via the service work as well as the policy component. The effects of the latter are yet to materialize with the implementation of the new LSFS.

At the level of short-term outcomes, it is expected that the delivered services (short/medium-term output) result with the beneficiaries' needs being satisfied. This is a clear-cut nexus, however there is potentially a broader analytical discussion concerning the outcome of "satisfaction of beneficiary needs" which is obviously summative, abstract, and concealing a great variety of contexts and specific individual and group outcomes.

For example, it is clear that some of the interventions aimed at meeting urgent needs caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whereas these needs were obviously acute, it is not easy to assume that this relief-type intervention can induce some long-term sustainable outcome higher-up in the chain. However, the meeting of certain needs could have been combined with an empowerment and/or resilience strengthening component which could propel medium to long-term positive changes.

The direct short-term outcome from the policy/advocacy outputs is that the policy process in general is being facilitated. There is general understanding that policy processes are generally lengthy, inefficient, and prone to multiple administrative and political bottleneck and hurdles. For example, draft laws can be delayed for years. They would first be delayed in the various departments of the line ministry, then in the phase of checking normative compliance, then at the level of the central government, then in the relevant committees in parliament, then by elections or government reshuffling, and so forth. And this is only one aspect of policy work which is complemented by many others which may have as objectives monitoring of implementation, simple revisions, production of bylaws to ensure more effective implementation of certain legal provisions, extensive communication and networking effort, and so forth. The key assumptions here are that **the policy outputs produced by the policy activities were relevant and useful** to the specific work processes, in that they were needed, that there is general political will to improve the policy framework in social protection on the side of the policy and decision makers, and that such will can be maintained and promoted in continuity.

The evidence collected in the field phase confirmed this assumption, as already discussed earlier. The intervention provided a key output, the new LSFS, which was approved after years of delay, and

implementation is expected to start soon. Most stakeholders consider this a major reform in the field of social protection in Kosovo.

The short-term outcomes resulting from strengthening the capacity of the key social protection providers, the CSWs, and the CSOs, are expected to include delivery of improved amounts and quality of services for the beneficiaries. It should be borne in mind that this results from two separate short/medium-term outputs. The support to CSOs obviously results with direct services for the beneficiaries. However, the quality of the service is not automatic, nor are outcomes related to reach, targeting and so forth. In addition, the key related issue is always the sustainability of such services after the expiry of the funding.

The strengthened capacity of the CSWs was also expected to result with improved amount and quality of service. Thereat it is acknowledged that strengthening the capacity of CSOs and CSWs are completely different processes. The CSWs (total of 40) are part of a large public system of social protection, the rules under which they operate are different, and the context is dissimilar from that of CSOs. It is therefore acknowledged that causal nexuses from these medium-term outputs (strengthened CSOs and strengthened CSWs) evolve differently towards the joint short-term outcome of “amount and quality of social services enhanced”.

At this level of short-term outcomes, it is already expected that horizontal nexuses are at work, such as the association between the “amount and quality of social services enhanced” and “beneficiary direct needs supported.” The collected evidence found confirmation for both these causal nexuses. The evidence confirmed that the capacity of both the licensed CSO SSPs and the CSWs has been strengthened. The improved capacity resulted with automatic improvements of the quality of the service in many instances. The sustainability of the CSO SSPs and their services remains weak, and this is one of the major challenges to the system of social protection in Kosovo.

At the level of intermediate outcomes, the short-term outcomes group into fewer but broader categories. It is expected that at least some of the various forms of services and support to the beneficiaries leads to **increased beneficiary resilience** and possibly **strengthened self-sufficiency**. At this level, the satisfying of the direct beneficiary needs and the overall amount and quality of services in the system converge. This outcome is also a result of the improved effectiveness of the system overall (horizontal link).

The evidence collected in the field phase generally confirms this logic. The data indicated that the interventions contributed to improved well-being, increased self-sufficiency, and strengthened resilience for large numbers of beneficiaries. In addition, at this level of intermediate outcomes it is expected that **the overall legal and policy framework has been improved, meaning laws and bylaws have been adopted and are in force**. This derives from the facilitation of the policy processes, but also from the overall improvement in the effectiveness of the system. This is a self-reinforcing virtuous cycle/loop, whereby the overall system effectiveness is also in turn benefiting from the improved legal and policy framework.

Further up the chain, at the level of intermediate impacts, the following changes should be observed: reduced need for social services, more government funding for social protection, further strengthened CSWs, more and better quality services, and improved sustainability of CSOs providing social services.

As regards the reduced need for services, the logic (theory of change) is that the support will have led to strengthened resilience and self-sufficiency, which in turn will have as a result that at least some of the beneficiaries graduate from social services, or they need less services.

The evidence indicates that for some categories of beneficiaries, this effect did materialize. A particular case in point are the beneficiaries of the business support (IOM, and partly UNDP). There is evidence to this end concerning also other services such beneficiaries of women’s shelters, children benefiting from school support programs, and so forth. Given the broad range of services and categories of beneficiaries it is not possible to assess this aspect for each and every particular services, however, there is evidence that in cases where this was possible, it definitely did take place.

Concurrently with a reduced need, the system would on the other hand have more government funding available for social services. It is well-documented that at present many of the social services for persons with disabilities (day care centers, etc.), women victims of violence (shelter centers), children at risk, elderly, are provided by CSOs (including international organizations) with foreign donor funding. One of the expected outcomes of a reformed system of social protection is **more government funding available for social protection**. It is well-documented that over time the government funding in particular for social assistance to the most vulnerable has declined in real terms.²⁵ A strengthened system would ideally involve the allocation of more government funding for prevention, support and protection of the most vulnerable.

The available evidence suggests that this impact is yet to materialize. There are indications of minor changes in this direction, however the major impacts are yet to occur. In the period before this evaluation the government increased the grant funding for licensed CSO SSPs from 1 to 1.5 million Euros annually. This was also noted by the EU progress report on Kosovo for 2023.²⁶ Stakeholders indicated that the new LSFS comes with an increased budget envelop which is needed for the implementation of the law. It is yet to be seen if this budget will actually be allocated. The report discusses this issues in additional detail further in the text.

Additional intermediate impacts are the strengthened CSWs. This impact emerges from the confluence of several factors, such as the improved framework and the more effective system overall. It also has a horizontal connection with the better funding for the system. This is one of the key impacts expected in the medium to the long-term, given that the CSWs are the backbone of the system.

The evidence suggests that CSWs have already been strengthened in the previous period through the EU support, specifically from components in the UNDP grant. They have benefitted from renovations, partial digitalization, and training. The new LSFS will also further strengthen their role. In addition, the CSWs will be strengthened through the support for the reform of SAS implemented by the World Bank.

As a result of these changes the system would be able to provide more and better quality services. Whereas at the level of short-term outcomes, this derived as a direct result from funding, training and overall capacity building, higher at in the chain, at the level of impacts it is expected to derive to large extent as a policy effect and result of the overall improved effectiveness of the system.

Finally, another key intermediate impact would be the improved financial sustainability of CSOs which provide social services. They are, as indicated in the ToR, and argued throughout this report, “at the forefront to compensate institutional limitations and cover many needs”.²⁷ At this level, the improved financial sustainability of CSOs is expected to derive primarily from the improved legal framework. In other words, the policy outcomes should also secure more government funding for licensed CSO social providers. A reference to this end is also noted in the most recent EU 2023 Report on Kosovo.²⁸

It is clear that at this level there is a “great expectation” from a significant policy effect. The improved legal and policy framework feeds into the key impacts of “more government funding”, “strengthened CSWs”, “more and better services”, and “CSO sustainability”. Whereas they are not marked on the diagram, merely for the purpose of better visibility, there are clear horizontal nexuses at this level. However, their common source is the **improved government funding**. This rests on a rather fragile assumption that the political will for such a decision would be in place.

²⁵ World Bank, 2019 Kosovo Social Assistance Scheme Study. Assessment and Reform Options, p. 7

²⁶ See specifically European Commission Kosovo Report 2023, p.101, available at https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2023_en: “For 2023 the government fund dedicated for licensed NGOs to provide social services increased by 50% (from EUR 1 million to 1.5 million); this does not address fully the funding situation for the provision of quality social services at the local level. Municipalities should make effort to improve service planning and delivery, data collection and integrated care.”

²⁷ ToR, p. 4

²⁸ The government fund for licensed CSOs was increased by 50%, from 1 million Euros to 1.5 million Euros, EU 2023 Kosovo Report, p. 101

However, whereas more funding is critical, efficiencies are possible with better organization and coordination. The current public system is considered ineffective and inefficient.²⁹ The working hypothesis is that making it more effective within the current budget allocation would also have impact. Additional impact would also result from the better coordination and the synergetic effects from the cooperation with CSOs.

The final, long-term impacts from the intervention are defined in terms of “reduced poverty and social exclusion” and “improved well-being” of vulnerable groups.

These long term impacts result from the strengthened resilience of the vulnerable beneficiaries, which also reflects in the reduced need for services, as well as from the improved effectiveness of the overall system. More specifically, they will result from the improved funding, the strengthened CSWs, the more and better services, and the strengthened and more sustainable CSOs. There is nothing unexpected in the formulation of the long-term impacts. They are an obvious end goal of any intervention aimed at improving the system of social protection in any context.

The logic of the intervention is clear. But that does not mean that the intervention is easy or that these impacts are easily achievable. Had that been the case, they would have already been achieved. And whereas this discussion is focused on Kosovo, it reads equally well, also for the other countries in the region.

Improving the public system of social protection is no easy task, nor is strengthening the sustainability of CSOs, be it in Kosovo or anywhere else in the Western Balkans. This is the logic of the intervention that is presented in the diagram above. And it is consistent with the logic found in a number of relevant documents on the social protection system in Kosovo. It is unlikely that an alternative logic could be identified which would result with more effective change. The answers should thus be sought in the appropriateness and the effectiveness of the effort. This is discussed further in the following sections of this report.

6. Findings

6.1. Introduction

Considering that the evaluation report's key expectation is to contribute to future programming, the effort has considered four of the six OECD DAC's standard evaluation criteria – it omits relevance and coherence.

The key expectation of the report is that it is forward-looking, however, this of course does not diminish the focus on the core criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

The findings on how the overall intervention performed against these criteria have informed the recommendations. The evaluation findings are organized in five (5) sections, respectively: i) Effectiveness ii) Efficiency; iii) Impact; iv) Sustainability, and v) EU value added.

The relationship between the DAC Evaluation Criteria, EU-specific issues and EQs is displayed in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Relationship between the DAC Evaluation Criteria, EC-specific issues and the EQs

	EQ 1	EQ 2	EQ 3	EQ 4	EQ 5	EQ 6	EQ 7	EQ 8	EQ9	EQ10	EQ11
Efficiency					√√√			√√√			
Effectiveness	√√√	√√√	√√√	√√√	√				√	√	√√
Impact			√√√	√	√	√√√	√√√		√	√	√√
Sustainability		√√				√√√	√√√	√√			
EU value added									√√√	√√√	

√√√ Largely covered √√ Covered √ Also covered

²⁹ *ibid*, World Bank, 2019, see for example argument on smaller than average caseload for CSW staff, p. 37

The key EQs, explored against the abovementioned criteria, include the following:

EQ 1. To what extent have the EU interventions contributed to strengthening the social protection system that was in place (policy, legal framework, delivery procedures, cooperation and complementarity between the institutional and CSOs-led services, etc.)? What were the main factors contributing to this enhancement?

EQ 2. Has cooperation/coordination between institutional and CSO-led services improved and to what extent is it sustainable? What were the main factors contributing to this improvement and sustainability?

EQ 3. To what extent have the EU interventions contributed to greater social inclusion, cohesion, reintegration and empowerment of the vulnerable people targeted? What were the key factors contributing to this enhancement?

EQ 4. To what extent have the EU interventions contributed to enhancing the capacities of the main stakeholders (CSOs, Ministries, CSWs, municipalities, etc.)? What was missing or what should be continued?

EQ 5. Which factors critically influenced the efficient implementation/delivery of the EU-funded support? Which potential actions would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of future interventions, including actions in the administrative and organizational setting?

EQ 6. What have been the main impacts (at institutional, organizational, individual, and socio-economic level) of past and ongoing IPA assistance? Are there any elements which are/could hamper or boost the impact and/or sustainability of the assistance?

EQ 7. What are the key aspects of the EU interventions that should be promoted, replicated and sustained in the new social protection strategy, policies, initiatives and procedures? In responding, you will justify why and how to do so based on best practices seen, comments received or lessons learned resulting from the different interventions.

EQ 8. Which implementation arrangements or initiatives allowed to best redressing gender imbalances and what should be done to ensure their sustainability?

EQ 9. What is the added value of IPA EU interventions, compared to what could be achieved by the Civil Society Facility and by the State alone, and what should be continued, discontinued or enhanced in both cases?

EQ 10. What is the added value of EU support compared to what other donors have done or plan to do in the sector?

EQ 11. Which implementation arrangements or initiatives most effectively integrated the relevant SDGs, the principle Leave No One Behind, and the Human Rights-Based Approach?

6.2. Efficiency

The implementation of EU-funded support has been highly efficient, with all six grantees effectively executing their actions in line with approved agreements with EUOK. Best practices were developed to ensure transparent, effective project management, with regular consultations with relevant stakeholders to address potential challenges. Capable teams and good communication facilitated smooth implementation, despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability in Kosovo.

The EU-funded actions responded promptly to the pandemic, adapting implementation methods and reallocating budgets as needed. Grantees demonstrated a high level of adaptability, quickly shifting to online platforms for training and assistance.

However, political shifts and elections did present obstacles, delaying some activities. Nonetheless, grantees successfully navigated these challenges, maintaining continuous service provision and effectively lobbying for social protection improvements. Coordination with international actors and local CSOs strengthened, enhancing support for vulnerable groups. Additionally, efforts to promote gender equality

were evident across all actions, with a focus on empowering women and challenging gender norms through tailored interventions and collaborative partnerships.

6.2.1. Factors of Efficiency

Regular stakeholder consultations have been pivotal in anticipating obstacles, while proficient teams and clear communication channels have facilitated smooth implementation. Despite challenges from COVID-19 and political shifts, the project has exhibited resilience, adapting swiftly and ensuring continuous service provision.

While political factors posed challenges, grantees managed to maintain progress through continuous engagement and adaptation.

Close cooperation with international actors and local CSOs has enhanced support for vulnerable groups, with efficient collaboration at both national and local levels.

Financial procedures, although demanding for some CSOs, were managed with support from grantees, ensuring compliance and flexibility in implementation.

6.2.2. Considerations of System Efficiency

The issue of system efficiency, or in other words the overall efficiency in the system of social protection, has to do with the amount of resources spent for achieving results. It is also about the optimal distribution of the current/available resources in the system. There are factors which can increase system efficiency, that is, make the system produce the same results with less resources. And vice versa. Several issues are worth mentioning in this regard.

The current reform of the SAS led by the World Bank, is expected to increase system efficiency. It is common knowledge that at present the cash benefits are not distributed in the optimal way and that the current model discourages labor market activation of the vulnerable recipients. In simple terms, many persons who should be in the labor force, choose to stay out of it just to preserve the SAS benefits. People decline job offers because they would lose the SAS. This is only one aspects of the inefficiency of the current SAS model. SAS reform would propel people into the labor force and concurrently reduce the number of SAS beneficiaries. This would release resources which could be spent elsewhere in the system.

There is stakeholder recognition that social services sometimes overlap. For example, a city may have several day centers for children with disabilities, or a region may have several women's shelters. The opposite is of course also both possible and likely, such as that a town or a region does not have a provider of a critically needed service. Most of these services are donor funded and the overlap results from lack of coordination. Of course, having two provides of the same service in a city is not necessarily overlap. Sometimes maybe even two providers are not enough to meet all the need. However, overlaps are possible and this produces inefficiency. Planning the amount of service needed at local and regional level, can contribute to improved efficiency. It can also improve sustainability. For example, if a region instead of 3-4 shelters has one larger shelter, which is sufficient to meet the needs, more resources will be available for this shelter, and the services it provides will be more sustainable. The core argument is that efficiency can be improved through coordination and planning based on relevant data.

Some stakeholders have indicated that certain services can have counter-effect, specifically pointing to the proliferation kitchens for the poor. Their argument is that such a service (free food) if not targeted carefully can cause dependency, and prevent work-able poor from looking for work. Whereas this is a delicate argument, since depriving the most vulnerable of a meal is not an optimal solution, it indicates to the balances at stake when designing and delivering services.

Stakeholders indicate to the lack of coordination in the system, related to the lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities of key actors. This is subject to a discussion at several time throughout this report since it

is a critical issue. The concern is that of effectiveness. A system which is poorly coordinated does not work well. However, a related issue is that of efficiency. Such a system does not allocate resources efficiently. Thus, improving the coordination with the system, and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of specific actors would lead to improved efficiency.

The model of splitting the municipal directorates for health and welfare into two separate bodies is discussed in this report as a good model which strengthens the effectiveness of municipal work in social protection. However, this model can be considered from the point of view of efficiency. Increased effectiveness will often (but not always) result with improved efficiency as well. A separate body for social protection has stronger focus on key priorities, which can be expected to result with improved action. In a final run more will be achieved with the same resource, which is a definition of efficiency.

These are some of the issues which emerged from the discussions with the stakeholders. Some of them are observations of specific realities in the field at present. Some of them have the nature of considerations, both general and more specific. The common tenet is that all of them have to do with efficiency in the system of social protection in Kosovo.

6.2.3. Focus on World Bank Work on SAS Reform

The current World Bank project for reform of the SAS is aimed at complete overhaul of the social protection transfers. Around 22 thousand families in Kosovo benefit from the Social Assistance Scheme (SAS). By a common account, the current SAS model suffers from a number of shortcomings which prevent labor market activation of the vulnerable groups. A case in point is the requirement to suspend the cash benefit even if the SAS beneficiary obtains short-term or seasonal employment. This model perpetuates the labor market inactivity of the poor, even though the labor market would benefit from higher activity rates.

The current SAS model suspends the cash assistance for families as soon as their children reach the age of five, thereby encouraging families to have small children all the time, which clearly exacerbates the poverty severity of already poor families, and it further precludes women's labor market activity. These are just a couple of the deficiencies of the SAS model in Kosovo which are well-recognized in the public debate.

The World Bank project whose implementation is expected to be completed by the end of 2026, will expectedly result with a thorough reform of the SAS, which will in turn promote labor market activity and employment of the most vulnerable citizens.

The World Bank project also aims to fully digitalize the SAS process, whereby applicants and beneficiaries will only be required to present an ID, as opposed to the abundant paperwork they need to collect at present.

In addition, the World Bank project will invest in the capacity of the CSWs in Kosovo. It will provide vehicles, equipment, and will temporarily pay for additional staff.

Given the scope of the World Bank project, which is full overhaul of the SAS, and its size (est. 47 million Euros), it is important that related interventions in the field of social protection are coordinated with it in order to prevent overlap.

The other key issue is the coordination of the SAS with the social protection policy concerning services, and the delivery of social services themselves. The EU support in the field of social protection in Kosovo in the previous period has been channeled in service delivery and in policy and advocacy which have also mainly focused on social services.

The key issue is how to coordinate the social transfers (SAS) with social services. It is clear that the SAS recipients, as the poorest social strata in the country, are likely candidates for other social services, which they may not receive due to the lack of coordination with the SAS. It is also clear that the effects of the cash

transfer would be better if it is complemented with services which, for example, promote enrolment and performance of children in education, support the elderly, prevent and protect from DV, and related. These are only some of the arguments related to the issue of coordinating the SAS with social services.

At present, by a common account of most stakeholders, such a coordination does not exist or it exist sporadically and from case to case. Even the two parts of the CSWs, the one dealing with the SAS and the other, working on social services, generally have very little coordination. This has been confirmed by a number of KIs across the spectrum and it is generally undisputed. There is also no evidence of systematic coordination between the CSO service delivery and the SAS.

Promoting coordination between the (reformed) SAS and the social services has the potential to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall system. As such, this issue needs to be high on the policy agenda.

This issue is connected to a number of related issues such as the digitalization of the social services work of the CSWs, the effective mapping and documenting of needs and available services at the local level, the prioritization of social protection interventions at the local level, the coordination between the different parts of the social protection system, including the CSWs, CSOs, municipalities, and ministries.

6.2.4. Focus on Need of Data

At present Kosovo does not have a national strategy for social protection, since the previous one has expired. Most of the municipalities in Kosovo, with the exception of a few larger ones, do not have local strategies and or action plans for social protection. Some of the stakeholders indicated that a positive trend has been observed in the recent period whereby municipalities have started producing local plans to guide their effort in social protection.

The need of a national strategy and local action plan for social protection have been indicated by a number of stakeholders. The belief is that this would define priorities and coordinate the effort at both national and local level. In addition, it is expected that it would increase the commitment of local government to social protection and possibly augment resources.

Related to the issue of lack of strategic documents, a number of stakeholders indicated to a lack of data in the field of social protection. This lack of data concerns both data on needs as well as data on available and delivered services.

According to a stakeholder, *“every municipality should have an action plan for a 4-5 year period; the majority do not have them; in order to produce an action plan, they first need to map the needs which exist.”*

Similarly, *“...we need action plans for each municipality, and based on these action plans they should prioritize the measures. Somewhere it may be disability, elsewhere it may be violence, or the elderly...; and we need better data, evidence; we cannot design policies without it.”*

According to another view, *“...we need to know the needs in each municipality...there is data on the 22 thousand families who benefit from the SAS, but there is not data on social services; we do not know if they need houses for the elderly, ...the needs can be different, it can be GBV, elderly, disability....”* And in a consistent view, *“data are the key problem, how do you develop a policy if you do not have data...”*

Overall, there is clear recognition in the professional community of the need of better data and evidence as basis for policy development.

The argument about the need of data is commonly associated with the local, municipal level. The argument is that the data is needed to know the situation locally. This somewhat spontaneously indicates that the data mapping should be done locally. This may be interpreted that each municipality does it on its own, that is, that each local mapping is independent of others.

This report recommends that a nationally coordinated mapping is considered. This would ensure that it is done consistently, based on the same variables, across all municipalities. It would also ensure a central dataset which could then be periodically updated with data. Should the need arise to add or change variables, that could also be done centrally and apply to all municipalities. The model would also allow the inclusion of variables which are municipality – specific, in that they are of relevance to only certain municipalities. This model of course does not preclude individual efforts at municipal level, but it has the advantage of comprehensiveness and efficiency. This effort could be a part of the broader effort to develop the national strategy, or it could be a separate exercise.

To the extent possible this data should be integrated or be consistent with the data collected by the CSWs in their regular social services delivery work.

6.2.5. Focus: CSW Digitalization

A specific area of need of concern to the CSWs is the digitalization of their work processes in service delivery. Whereas the World Bank SAS reform project will digitalize the SAS-related work processes, the CSW work related to the social services is not part of this. According to stakeholders, digitalizing the case management of the CSWs will improve their efficiency.

Stakeholder accounts indicate that at present a significant part of the work processes are not digitalized, that records are paper-based which makes tracking and searching difficult, that the databases which do exist are not connected, and that the digital templates which do exist are often not used.

Part of the UNDP project which is subject to this evaluation did have a component which aimed to promote partial digitalization of the case management work of CSWs. This is a further confirmation of the need. The project supported the development of the required AIs, whereas the software was to be subsequently developed by the government.

Digitalization of the CSW case management work is a relevant need and it would significantly contribute to the overall efficiency of the system of social protection.

The recommendation is that the options for digitalization of the CSW case management are explored after the completion of the World Bank project.

Digitalization is related to other aspects of the system, such as number of staff in the CSWs, equipment, trained staff, and so forth. Thus, all of these aspects need to be assessed before digitalization is pursued. Ideally, the effort for digitalization should not be partial but comprehensive.

6.3. Effectiveness

EU-supported interventions in Kosovo have been instrumental in improving the country's social protection landscape. Organizations like KOMF and Save the Children have made significant strides in enhancing Kosovo's legal and policy framework, despite facing challenges such as political instability and the

pandemic. KOMF's efforts resulted in the drafting and approval of crucial legislation, marking key milestones in Kosovo's social services decentralization journey. Similarly, Save the Children's contributions in developing administrative instructions and regulations have aligned with the new legal framework, further strengthening the system.

However, concerns about sustainability due to heavy reliance on donor funding persist. Stakeholders advocate for continued EU support for services while emphasizing the need to strengthen governmental capacity and policy frameworks for long-term effectiveness.

The focus on services over policy in EU support reflects the ongoing imperative to address service gaps and improve access for vulnerable groups.

The collaboration between CSOs and institutional bodies, particularly CSWs and DSWs, facilitated by EU-funded initiatives, has proven highly effective. CSWs efficiently refer cases to CSOs, ensuring timely assistance, while CSOs manage the majority of social services, demonstrating their proficiency.

Although challenges persist at the municipal level, including deficiencies in understanding competencies and staff turnover, EU support has strengthened service providers' network, improved case management, and expanded outreach efforts, underscoring its effectiveness in enhancing social protection mechanisms in Kosovo.

6.3.1. Contribution to Strengthening the Social Protection System

6.3.1.1 Extent of Improvement of the Legal and Policy Framework

EU-funded support has been instrumental in enhancing Kosovo's legal and policy framework for social protection, thanks to the significant contributions of organizations like KOMF and Save the Children. KOMF's collaboration with governmental bodies led to drafting key legislation such as the LSFS and the draft LLGF, crucial for social services decentralization and budget allocation reform. Despite challenges like political instability and the pandemic, KOMF's advocacy efforts facilitated the approval of these laws, marking important milestones in Kosovo's social services development.

Moreover, Save the Children's partnership with government agencies resulted in essential administrative instructions and regulations aligned with the new legal landscape. Their contributions aimed at sectoral coordination, digitalization of case management procedures, and capacity building, further strengthening Kosovo's social protection infrastructure.

Through the provision of technical resources, collaboration with stakeholders, and adaptation to political contexts, significant progress has been made in enhancing Kosovo's legal and policy framework, although concerns persist regarding the capacities of both national and local governments to effectively implement the new legislation, especially concerning the LSFS.

6.3.1.2 Focus: Services vs Policy

The EU support for social protection in Kosovo in the previous period was a combination of measures supporting services and policy & advocacy. The significantly larger share of the total support was allocated for supporting services. The projects implemented by PEMA, UNDP, IOM, KWN, and Save the Children, predominantly involved support for services. The project implemented by KOMF, and smaller parts of the projects implemented by UNDP, KWN, and Save the Children had focus on policy & advocacy. A strict distinction between a service and a policy component within a project is possible but it is not always relevant. Projects which are predominantly services oriented might have an intertwined policy focus. In some cases, the delivery of services, for example training, and the policy work may be fully blended, such as for example when the training aims to prepare organizations and institutions to implement a certain policy. In sum, the largest part of the EU support subject to this evaluation was allocated for services.

A key question of interest for the forthcoming period is how much of the EU support should be for supporting policy vs. services.

A basic finding of the evaluation is that a significantly large share of the social services delivered in Kosovo are funded by international donors. This includes women's shelters, day centers for persons with disability, various child centers, services for the elderly, various services for marginalized persons, services for victims of abuse, and so forth. Most of these services are donor-funded. Whereas quality is expected to differ across providers, the finding of this evaluation is that many of these services, including those which have been partially or fully funded through the EU support for social protection, are of high quality.

The key shortcoming of this model of social services delivery is of course the lack of sustainability. Donor funding is time-bound, often short term, and cyclical. It is often allocated through a competitive process, which requires the CSOs which provide social services, to apply for funding in continuity, without a guarantee that they would obtain it. CSOs are in a constant count-down to the expiry of funding. Put succinctly by a stakeholder, "this makes the system for social protection unsustainable". When funding decreases or expires, CSOs are forced to scale down or to completely suspend services. Sometimes they re-establish them if they get new funding, and sometimes they do not. Specifically, at the time of this evaluation, on the grantees, PEMA, and its partner Shpresa were in the process of shutting down four-day care centers for PwDs and a child shelter in Pristina. These centers have been operating for the past 10-15 years, for a lot of this period thanks to EU funding. PEMA indicated that they have got EU funding 7 times over the past 15 years. The shutting down of services which have run for over a decade, with all the related consequences for the beneficiaries, families, and communities, as well as for the professionals which have invested themselves, is quite illustrative of the deficiencies of the system.

Over the past period public funding allocated to this end has increased. The central government at present provides 1.5 million Euros to the around 50 licensed CSOs providing social services. The amount was increased from 1 to 1.5 million Euros just recently. Many municipalities, in particular the larger and financially healthier ones, have also been increasing their support, by providing free of charge space, covering utilities, and also providing financial support. However, the public support for social services delivered by CSOs is at present not sufficient.

This issue is central to the social service delivery in Kosovo at present. In the words of a stakeholder, "*if donors were to pull out, the system would grind to a halt*".

This issue has multiple ramifications across the system, including for quality of services, standards, cooperation between government and CSOs, policy implementation and so forth. Discussing all of these issues as they relate to the financial sustainability of social services providers exceeds the scope of the report. However, the issue of sustainability of CSOs social services providers (CSO SSPs) is closely related to the question of what should the EU fund in the field of social protection in Kosovo in the forthcoming period. This is an issue of central interest to this report. Further elaborated, the question can be phrased as follows: should the EU provide more support for services or policy & advocacy? The question was systematically posed to a large number of the stakeholders who were interviewed for this evaluation and the conclusion is unambiguous. Literally all stakeholders argued that the EU should continue to support services at least over a transitional period.

Some of the stakeholders justified this with the consequences of withdrawal of donor support from social services: "*it would put the system in a state of clinical death*"; another argument was that that the county is at critical transition juncture, with the recent adoption of the LFSF, and that "*the EU should continue to fund services until the system is consolidated*".

This argument of transitional support until the system is consolidated, was put forth by quite a few stakeholders. Most stakeholders agreed that the support should be a combination of funding for services and policy. Quite a few of the stakeholders volunteered (without being elicited) a proposed ratio of support to services vs policy. In all cases the ratio was in favor of services in the order of 80:20, or 70:30. It has to be indicated that in reviewing these arguments, the evaluators had in mind the positional bias of stakeholders. It is expected that a stakeholders coming from a CSO involved in services delivery would argue in favor of support for services, and vice versa. Hence the cited ratio proposals are indicated by stakeholders who are considered to not be affected by such bias. However, the ratio expectedly derives from the experience of stakeholders who have a general understanding of the cost of services vs. policy work. Thereat, some of the stakeholders argued for efficiency in policy work. In the words of one KI, “*we do not need the same policy documents over and over again*”, and similarly, “*we got lost in an ocean of documents*”.

The argument against donor and EU support for services is clear. This creates and perpetuates government complacency. In addition, it is clear that no single donor can continue to fund the same thing permanently. It is expected that once government capacity and proper policy framework is developed, the government will take over the responsibility.

The weighing of these arguments in favor and against donor support for social services produces the stakeholder position that the EU should continue to support social services over a next transitional period. The argument being that the government is just not there yet, ready to fully take on the responsibility.

Summed up by a stakeholder, “*...there is still need for services. Ten years ago Bulgaria was similar to Kosovo today, but they resolved it. We still need support until we reach a point where we have a government budget and we can contract services; it would take 3-4 years. Until then we still need to fund CSOs.*”

6.3.1.3 Extent of Increase of Providers and Services

The EU's support has significantly increased the range of specialized services available at the local level in Kosovo, reaching out to vulnerable and marginalized individuals and promoting social inclusion. Through improved coordination between local institutions and CSOs, service gaps have been reduced and access for vulnerable groups has been enhanced.

Specifically, sub-granting schemes under EU-funded programs have supported numerous CSOs and CSWs, resulting in a network of integrated services that cater to the needs of vulnerable populations across different demographics and geographic locations.

The effectiveness of EU-funded initiatives on the quality of social protection services is evident in beneficiary feedback and project reports. Beneficiaries have expressed satisfaction with the services provided, with data indicating a notable increase in satisfaction levels over time. The KIIs confirmed the effectiveness of EU support in improving the quality and accessibility of social services in Kosovo, despite ongoing challenges related to sustainability and funding uncertainties.

6.3.2. Cooperation between Institutions and CSOs

The collaboration between CSOs and institutional bodies at the local level, particularly with CSWs and DSWs, demonstrates a notable level of effectiveness, greatly supported by EU-funded initiatives. This partnership has significantly enhanced the referral system, with CSWs efficiently directing individuals in need of services to CSOs, the primary service providers in Kosovo. Stakeholders affirm the effectiveness of this collaboration, especially in areas where CSOs are actively involved in delivering direct support services. The coordination between institutional and CSO-led services ensures timely and appropriate assistance to those in need, thereby promoting sustainability in service delivery. CSWs, recognizing their capacity limitations in providing direct services, smoothly transition into referral structures, focusing on

efficient case registration and prompt referral to CSOs. Equipped with extensive expertise in social protection, CSOs emerge as trusted partners of CSWs and municipal authorities, effectively managing approximately 90% of social services, including specialized interventions, to meet diverse needs.

Moreover, the implemented initiatives, supported by financial support to sub-grantees, have effectively strengthened the network of service providers, including CSWs and CSOs, resulting in improved case management and expanded outreach to vulnerable populations in remote areas. Coordination mechanisms such as meetings, workshops, and round tables have further facilitated collaboration between CSWs and CSOs, amplifying service delivery and outreach efforts. This underscores the effectiveness of EU-funded support in strengthening social protection mechanisms in Kosovo, ensuring that vulnerable populations receive specialized support promptly and efficiently.

6.3.3. Contribution to Capacity of Main Stakeholders

6.3.3.1 Focus on CSOs Capacity

This approach has proven pivotal in enhancing CSOs' capacities through practical learning experiences. The collaboration between main grantees and sub-grantees has played a crucial role in leveraging shared interests, exchanging knowledge, and pooling resources towards common objectives, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Both grantees and sub-grantees acknowledge the effectiveness of the program in facilitating learning opportunities and networking among CSOs, fostering connections with relevant government stakeholders at various levels and promoting collaboration among CSO partners. The significance of capacity-building components such as mentoring, training, technical assistance, and operational guidance for project implementation is emphasized as essential for sustainable civil society development.

Furthermore, specific initiatives like KOMF's Action have empowered civil society in advocating for decentralization, while efforts from organizations like Save the Children have focused on training public sector officials on gender equality and social inclusion indicators in social protection policies.

Challenges remain, including high staff turnover rates at the local level and the need for continuous support for CSO capacity improvement, covering areas such as project management, reporting, advocacy, networking, communication, and financial management.

Ensuring the provision of quality social services remains a priority, highlighting the ongoing importance of EU-funded support in addressing these challenges and fostering effective collaboration between stakeholders in Kosovo.

6.3.3.2 Focus on Municipal Capacity

Municipalities are a critical link in the system of social protection in Kosovo. With the decentralization in 2009, the competencies in social protection were given to the local level, whereas the central level retained the monitoring and inspection. The municipal directorates for health and social protection have the mandate over social protection and they are responsible for the CSWs.

The overall weakness of the social protection system is reflected at the municipal level. Stakeholders argue that municipalities do not sufficiently exercise their competencies in the field of social protection, and/or that they do not give them the proper attention.

In most of the municipalities, with the exception of a few larger ones, social protection is managed jointly with health by a Directorate for Health and Social Welfare. Stakeholders have argued that the directorates usually focus most of their energy and attention to health, thereby sidelining social protection. In the words of a KI, *"it is usually 95% health and 5% social protection"*. Stakeholders agree that the municipalities which have divided the directorate into two separate bodies, one for health, and the other for social protection, have managed to perform better in the latter. According to stakeholders, the prerogative for

dividing the directorate rests with the mayor and the division is feasible from a regulatory, procedural point of view. The argument is that a separate department for social welfare will have an exclusive focus on the key issues and priorities.

It has further been argued that in many, in particular smaller, municipalities, these departments comprise just a few staff who usually do not have the requisite background and experience in the field of social protection, and are subject to high staff turnover resulting from changes in the political leadership of the municipality. In the words of a KI, *“we try to work with the municipalities, but the mayor changes and we start all over again; a municipality which did well, backslides...”*

An argument which has been put forth by quite a few stakeholders is that many municipalities do not have clear understanding of their competencies in social protection. This lack of knowledge subsequently translates into lack of commitment and focus. As argued by a KI, *“many mayors did not even know that the CSW is under their mandate”*.

Similarly, according to another KI, *“we keep asking the municipality to create a separate budget for social services; they keep saying they do not understand their competencies in social protection; for some of the services, such as for shelters, PwDs, they keep saying the responsibility is with the central level.”*

This view has been quite consistent among stakeholders (who do not work for municipalities). As argued by another KI, the lack of municipal intervention in social protection is:

“due to lack of money, but also due to lack of will. Social services are municipal competence, and it is their discretion how much money they allocate, and [this is why] the quality of services differs across municipalities; they decide on the budgeting; they would benefit from some advice on how to budget for social services; they want to spend more money on asphalt. This is why we need a formula; then they will have to spend according to the formula.”

6.4. Impact

Overall, the impact of the EU-funded support, with a specific focus on legal and policy changes, social services provision, capacity building, advocacy, empowerment of vulnerable groups, and response to COVID-19, has been instrumental in strengthening the social protection system and promoting the well-being of all individuals, particularly during times of crisis. Policy and legal changes supported by the EU-funded interventions will have a lasting impact in favor of strengthening the social protection system in Kosovo. Support of institutions is consolidated for permanent changes addressing social protection-related issues. Lasting policies and practices for reporting, referring, and addressing cases of people in need of protection are established by institutions through EU-funded interventions. All 6 actions have deepened the cooperation of CSOs with government institutions at the central and local level.

Based on the project reports of the Actions and interviews conducted, the report concludes that the Action managed to:

- *Improve Social Services Provision:* Through EU-funded support, Kosovo has witnessed an improvement in social services provision, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding has ensured that essential social services remain accessible, contributing to better social protection for all individuals, especially during crises.
- *Increase capacities of key stakeholders:* The EU-funded capacity-building initiatives have strengthened Kosovo's social protection workforce, enhancing their skills to effectively respond to emerging challenges, such as those posed by COVID-19. Training programs have focused on prevention and protection measures and response management, enabling frontline workers to deliver quality services and support to vulnerable populations in need of protection.

- *Advocacy and Empowerment:* The EU-supported projects have empowered vulnerable groups by advocating for their rights and needs, particularly amidst the COVID-19 crisis. Advocacy efforts have raised awareness about the specific challenges faced by marginalized communities, persons with disabilities, children in need of protection, victims of GBV, the elderly, etc., leading to policy changes and measures that protect their rights and ensure equitable access to essential services. This empowerment fosters inclusion and participation, ensuring that vulnerable groups have a voice in decision-making processes.
- *Response to COVID-19:* The EU-funded interventions have enabled Kosovo to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic through targeted interventions. Adaptation of social protection programs has ensured continuity of care and support, with the introduction of innovative service delivery models such as online counselling services. Additionally, voucher support and food aid provided to families facing economic hardship due to pandemic-related restrictions have alleviated immediate needs, promoting social resilience and protection.
- *Enhanced Support for Vulnerable Groups:* The EU-funded initiatives have provided tailored support to vulnerable groups, addressing their specific needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes targeted assistance for persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, children in need of protection, and victims of GBV, ensuring they have access to essential services and support. By prioritizing vulnerable groups in response efforts, the EU-funded interventions have contributed to reducing disparities and promoting equity in social protection outcomes.

6.4.1. Main Impacts Across Levels

The past and ongoing IPA assistance in Kosovo, particularly amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, has generated significant impacts across multiple dimensions, including institutional, organizational, individual, and socio-economic levels, as follows:

- *Institutional Impact:* IPA assistance has played a crucial role in strengthening the institutional capacity of key stakeholders, particularly during the COVID-19 response. By providing technical assistance, training, and resources, IPA support has enabled government ministries, agencies, and local authorities to effectively coordinate and implement pandemic response measures. This has included strengthening the social protection system, enhancing emergency response mechanisms, and ensuring the continuity of essential services amidst the crisis.
- *Organizational Impact:* Amidst the pandemic, IPA assistance has empowered CSOs to play a pivotal role in advocacy and service provision. Through capacity-building initiatives focused on pandemic response, CSOs have been equipped to advocate for the rights and needs of vulnerable populations, provide essential services such as food aid, and psychosocial support, and foster community resilience during the COVID-19-related challenges.
- *Individual Impact:* IPA assistance has directly impacted individuals by addressing their urgent needs and vulnerabilities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through targeted interventions in social services provision, vulnerable individuals and communities have received essential support, including access to food assistance and emergency relief. Additionally, capacity-building efforts have empowered individuals to adapt to new challenges and uncertainties, enhancing their resilience and ability to cope with the impacts of the pandemic.
- *Socio-economic Impact:* The socio-economic impacts of IPA assistance have been particularly pronounced amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. By supporting economic recovery initiatives, livelihood restoration programs, and social protection measures, IPA assistance has contributed to mitigating the adverse effects of the pandemic on livelihoods, employment, and household incomes. Additionally, investments in infrastructure and digital connectivity have facilitated remote work and online service delivery, supporting economic resilience and recovery efforts. By persistently prioritizing the enhancement of national social protection policies, supporting systemic capacity-building and evidenced-based advocacy initiatives, and refining the quality of social

service provision, IPA interventions can consistently generate favorable outcomes in further strengthening the social protection of vulnerable and marginalized communities.

6.4.2. Key Aspects to Promote

The key aspects of the EU-supported interventions that should be promoted, replicated and sustained in the new social protection strategy, policies, initiatives and procedures, include the following:

- *Provision of social services in continuity.* Continuity in the provision of social services is crucial for maintaining stability and safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable populations. It ensures consistent access to essential services, prevents long-term consequences, fosters trust in service providers, and promotes economic stability by offering vital support during times of crisis or uncertainty. Considering that the majority part of social services is provided by CSOs and the current level of CSO-delivered social services available in Kosovo is to a significant extent thanks to donor funding, a reduction or suspension of donor funding will directly result in a reduction of interruptions of social services delivered by CSOs. In this sense, donor investment in social services should continue at least over the midterm, transitional period, until the Kosovo government, both central and local, is available to scale up its support. These investments should primarily support proven, long-standing service delivery programs.
- *Ensure a focus on policy support.* Ensuring a focus on policy support is paramount for effective implementation and coordination in addressing societal challenges. It fosters accountability, transparency, and adaptability to change, all of which are essential for achieving lasting social impact and promoting sustainable development in social protection initiatives. Considering the development in Kosovo, the focus of the policy support should be for the implementation of the new LSFS. Significant training and capacity building will be required to kick-start the implementation of the law.
- *Targeted and holistic approach:* Best practices indicate that targeted interventions are more effective in reaching vulnerable populations and addressing their specific needs, while integrated support programs generate better outcomes by addressing multiple dimensions of vulnerability simultaneously. By focusing resources on those who are most in need and providing a holistic package of services, we can maximize the impact of social protection programs, ensure that limited resources are utilized efficiently, address the underlying causes of poverty and vulnerability, and promote long-term resilience. This can be achieved by conducting thorough needs assessments and utilizing data-driven approaches to identify and prioritize target groups.
- *Coordination and Collaboration:* The importance of coordination and collaboration among relevant stakeholders at various levels is crucial in avoiding duplication of efforts, maximizing synergies, and ensuring coherence and complementarity of interventions. Working more consistently with institutions at the national level to identify more sustainable ways and modalities for providing direct support services; maintaining the provision of services provided by the Program's support and gradually handing over such services to the relevant institutions would be important. By fostering partnerships and coordination mechanisms, the EU interventions can leverage expertise, resources, and networks to achieve greater impact and sustainability.
- *Capacity Building:* Best practices highlight the critical role of capacity building in strengthening the institutional and human resource capacity of relevant stakeholders to effectively deliver and manage social protection programs. By investing in training, technical assistance, and institutional strengthening initiatives, the EU interventions can enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of social protection efforts.
- *Evidence-Based Decision Making:* Best practices underscore the importance of evidence-based decision-making in guiding the design, implementation, and evaluation of social protection interventions. By collecting and analyzing data on program performance and impact, the EU interventions can identify what works, what doesn't, and why, allowing them to make informed decisions, optimize resources, and improve outcomes over time.

- *Community Engagement:* Best practices emphasize the importance of community engagement in ensuring the relevance, acceptability, and sustainability of social protection interventions. By involving local communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs, the EU interventions can tailor initiatives to meet their specific needs and preferences, build trust and ownership, and enhance the effectiveness of interventions.
- *Flexibility and Adaptability:* the EU-funded interventions confirmed that flexibility and adaptability are key to ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of social protection interventions in dynamic and evolving contexts. By designing programs with built-in flexibility, monitoring changing needs and circumstances, and making timely adjustments as necessary, it can be ensured that interventions remain responsive and adaptive to the needs of beneficiaries.
- *Innovation and Learning:* Fostering a culture of innovation and learning in social protection interventions remains important in continuously improving effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance. By piloting innovative approaches, and systematically capturing and disseminating lessons learned, the EU interventions can drive continuous improvement and innovation in social protection programming.

6.5. Sustainability

Cooperation and coordination between institutional bodies responsible for social protection and CSOs in Kosovo have significantly improved with EU-funded support, resulting in more robust and sustainable social protection outcomes. Factors contributing to this improvement include advancements in legal and policy frameworks, institutional support, capacity building, and transparent communication. However, challenges such as limited resources, power imbalances, resistance from certain stakeholders, and changes in political leadership persist, affecting the sustainability of cooperation efforts. Clarity regarding roles and responsibilities is identified as crucial for better coordination and increased accountability.

Regarding the main impacts of past and ongoing IPA assistance in Kosovo, particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a lasting impact across various levels—institutional, organizational, individual, and socio-economic. IPA assistance has strengthened institutional capacity, empowered CSOs, addressed urgent needs at the individual level, and mitigated socio-economic impacts by supporting economic recovery initiatives and social protection measures. To promote sustainability, advocacy efforts, ongoing capacity-building initiatives, integrated service delivery models, and empowerment principles should be prioritized in the new social protection strategy. These strategies will advance policy agendas, optimize resource allocation, and ensure the meaningful inclusion of vulnerable groups, fostering long-term sustainability in Kosovo's communities.

6.5.1. Main Lasting Impacts

As outlined above in the impact section (EQ6), the past and ongoing IPA assistance in Kosovo, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, has left a lasting impact across various dimensions, institutional, organizational, individual, and socio-economic levels. From the perspective of sustainability:

- *At the institutional level,* the IPA assistance has been instrumental in strengthening the institutional capacity of key stakeholders. The EU-funded interventions have enabled government ministries, agencies, and local authorities to not only effectively coordinate but also sustain elements regarding the social protection mechanism and response measures. This sustained capacity building ensures that institutions remain resilient, allowing for continued effective response and service delivery.
- *At the organizational level,* the EU-funded interventions have further empowered CSOs to step into crucial roles in advocacy and service provision. Capacity-building initiatives have equipped CSOs to advocate for vulnerable populations and deliver essential services. By strengthening their

operational capacity and resilience, IPA support has laid a foundation for sustained organizational effectiveness in addressing societal needs beyond the immediate crisis.

- *At the individual level*, the IPA assistance has directly impacted individuals by addressing urgent needs and vulnerabilities, including the ones exacerbated by the pandemic. Through targeted interventions in social services provision, vulnerable individuals and communities have received vital support, improving their well-being. Moreover, capacity-building efforts have empowered individuals to adapt and cope with uncertainties, fostering long-term resilience and self-sufficiency in the face of ongoing challenges.
- *At the socio-economic level*, the IPA assistance has significantly mitigated the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic by supporting economic recovery initiatives, livelihood restoration programs, and social protection measures. By investing in economic resilience, IPA interventions have laid the groundwork for sustained socio-economic stability and growth. Additionally, the focus on enhancing social services provision ensures continued access to essential services, further increasing socio-economic resilience in the long term.

In conclusion, by focusing on capacity building, advocacy, and social services provision, IPA interventions can continue to drive positive impact and foster long-term sustainability in Kosovo's communities.

6.5.2. Key Aspects to Promote

Advocacy has emerged as a cornerstone for promoting sustainability in Kosovo's social protection landscape, with EU-funded interventions driving policy reforms, legal enhancements, and resource allocation. To ensure sustainability, the upcoming strategy should prioritize advocacy efforts, leveraging evidence-based research, strategic partnerships, and innovative communication methods to champion policies that uphold the needs and rights of vulnerable populations. Additionally, sustained capacity-building initiatives are essential, focusing on areas such as case management, digital service provision, and adaptive programming to address evolving social protection needs effectively, including during emergencies.

Integration of social services is pivotal for comprehensive social protection systems, facilitated by EU interventions that have expanded service delivery across sectors. Moving forward, the new strategy should consolidate integrated service delivery models, fostering collaboration among state agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and community-based groups to optimize resource utilization and service accessibility. Moreover, empowering vulnerable groups remains central to sustainable social protection, with EU initiatives prioritizing capacity-building, advocacy, and community mobilization efforts. The upcoming strategy should embed empowerment principles across interventions, ensuring meaningful participation and inclusion of vulnerable groups in decision-making processes and program activities, thus reinforcing sustainability efforts in Kosovo's social protection domain.

6.6. EU Added Value, Gender, Principles: SDGs, LNOB, HRBA

EU-supported interventions in Kosovo's social protection sector have showcased significant added value across various dimensions, effectively mobilizing resources, enhancing operational capacity, and improving service accessibility and quality. These interventions have elevated the technical proficiency of local stakeholders, leading to enhanced program efficacy and streamlined service delivery, while fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and adherence to EU standards. By strategically aligning with EU values and engaging stakeholders, these interventions have advocated for the rights of vulnerable groups and promoted sustainable development in Kosovo, positioning the country closer to EU membership.

Furthermore, the EU's comprehensive approach, encompassing financial assistance, technical expertise, policy alignment, capacity building, advocacy, and service provision, has effectively addressed diverse needs, promoting long-term sustainability and resilience. By prioritizing gender mainstreaming and inclusion, these interventions have empowered marginalized groups and promoted gender equality, aligning

with SDGs, Leave No One Behind (LNOB), and the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA). Through sustained efforts in capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and data-driven monitoring, the EU-supported interventions have contributed to inclusive, equitable social protection systems that advance well-being and empowerment for all individuals in Kosovo.

6.6.1. Added Value of EU Support

The EU-funded interventions in Kosovo, particularly in the area of social protection, have demonstrated remarkable added value across various dimensions. They have effectively mobilized substantial resources, strengthened operational capacity, and enhanced the accessibility and quality of services. Moreover, these interventions have elevated the technical proficiency of local stakeholders, resulting in improved program efficacy and streamlined service delivery. By fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and adhering to EU standards and norms, they have increased credibility, legitimacy, and institutional convergence, thereby advancing Kosovo's social welfare objectives and EU integration aspirations.

Furthermore, the strategic alignment of these interventions with EU values, coupled with effective stakeholder engagement and synergy utilization, underscores their significant contribution to advancing social protection in Kosovo. By promoting robust partnerships and engaging national and local authorities, these interventions amplify their reach and impact, effectively addressing the needs of vulnerable groups of society. Additionally, coordination with other EU-funded initiatives and international organizations further enhances their efficiency and impact, particularly in addressing challenges exacerbated by external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the EU-funded interventions played a pivotal role in improving the well-being of Kosovo's citizens and fostering sustainable development in the region, positioning the country closer to EU membership while aligning with European frameworks and objectives.

The EU's support in Kosovo's social protection sector has been marked by a comprehensive approach that encompasses various critical elements, including financial assistance, technical expertise, policy alignment, capacity building, advocacy, social service provision, economic empowerment, and response to COVID-19. This holistic strategy has effectively addressed the diverse needs of vulnerable populations, promoting long-term sustainability and resilience. Moreover, the EU's sustained funding and commitment have provided stability and continuity, facilitating strategic interventions and the development of resilient social protection systems. Through emphasis on capacity building and institutional strengthening, the EU has significantly enhanced the skills and capabilities of local stakeholders, fostering local ownership and ensuring sustainability. Additionally, alignment with international standards and best practices has reinforced principles of equity, inclusivity, and human rights, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of service delivery.

6.6.2. Comparison to other Donors

Compared to other donors, the EU-funded interventions in Kosovo stand out in several key areas. *Firstly*, they have promoted effective coordination and collaboration among diverse stakeholders in the social protection sector, ensuring a more cohesive and integrated response. *Secondly*, the EU's support has prioritized expanding and improving social services, particularly in response to the pandemic, thereby strengthening accessibility and quality. *Thirdly*, through targeted advocacy efforts, EU-supported initiatives have effectively advocated for the rights and needs of vulnerable groups, leading to policy changes and equitable access to essential services. *Lastly*, by providing substantial capacity-building assistance, the EU has strengthened Kosovo's social protection system, ensuring a more efficient and coordinated response to social protection-related issues.

6.6.3. Gender

In the context of Kosovo's social protection sector, robust implementation arrangements and initiatives are crucial for addressing gender and inclusion imbalances and ensuring sustained progress. The Evaluation team has assessed that the EU-funded support (all 6 actions) has effectively embraced the principles of

gender, fostering a more equitable society, reducing discrimination, and ensuring that development interventions effectively meet the needs of all individuals, regardless of gender identity. Relevant data confirms and describes the projects' specific efforts to integrate gender, with some focusing primarily on women, such as those implemented by KWN, most KNW sub-grantees, and many of Save the Children sub-grantees.

Further, major interventions closely integrated gender, such as in voucher distribution where gender was a strong selection criterion. Gender was consistently applied as a criterion across sub-granting, and implementation was closely monitored, even when facing challenges from prevailing cultural norms.

Each of the 6 actions has been designed to acknowledge and address the specific needs, priorities, and experiences of individuals based on their gender identities. Right from the outset, these actions have demonstrated a commitment to understanding and challenging prevailing gender norms, roles, and relationships. This involves conducting thorough gender analyses and baseline assessments to inform targeted interventions. Gender-sensitive objectives have been set across the respective projects, with some actions specifically focusing on empowering women and challenging gender stereotypes. Gender-responsive measures have been integrated into each intervention, encompassing tailored services and training programs that address the diverse needs of men, women, and minorities. Collaboration with relevant stakeholders has been instrumental in advancing gender equality goals.

The EU-funded support has been closely aligned with the EU Gender Action Plan 2021 – 2025, focusing on accelerating access to social services and empowerment practices for women, girls, boys, and men in Kosovo, including addressing gender-based violence and mitigating the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, particularly supporting survivors' independent living.

Several key strategies have demonstrated effectiveness in redressing gender imbalances and can be further strengthened to ensure their sustainability within Kosovo's social protection sector. Gender mainstreaming in policies and programs, policy advocacy and awareness-raising on gender and inclusion, community-based approaches to social protection, empowerment of marginalized groups, and data collection and monitoring for gender and inclusion are crucial elements. To enhance sustainability, continuous capacity-building initiatives on gender mainstreaming should be provided, along with efforts to institutionalize advocacy mechanisms, build alliances with key stakeholders, and strengthen data collection mechanisms while integrating gender-sensitive indicators into monitoring and evaluation frameworks within social protection programs.

6.6.4. Contribution to Social Cohesion

Key KIIs and project documents confirm the effectiveness of EU-funded support in enhancing social inclusion, cohesion, reintegration, and empowerment among targeted vulnerable groups. Through six EU-supported Actions, the specific needs of vulnerable populations have been effectively addressed, showcasing tangible effectiveness in fostering social inclusion and cohesion. These interventions have embraced comprehensive and integrated approaches, ensuring increased efficacy in reaching vulnerable populations.

Furthermore, tailored assistance has been provided to address the diverse needs of different vulnerable groups. By comprehensively understanding the specific challenges faced by various communities, these interventions have effectively tackled barriers to social inclusion and facilitated empowerment among the targeted populations.

Active community engagement and participation have been integral components throughout the implementation of the six actions. By actively involving local communities in decision-making processes and project design, EU-funded interventions have cultivated a sense of ownership and responsibility, thereby amplifying effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes. By using participatory approaches such as community meetings, focus groups, and participatory assessments, these interventions have ensured

responsiveness to local needs and expectations. Community-based organizations have played a pivotal role in fostering dialogue, mobilizing resources, and fostering social cohesion within local communities.

EU-funded interventions have not only effectively promoted social rights but have also facilitated equal access to essential services for vulnerable populations in Kosovo. By systematically addressing barriers to access and advocating for the rights of marginalized groups, these interventions have significantly contributed to reducing poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, thereby amplifying their overall effectiveness.

6.6.5. Principles: SDGs, LNOB, HRBA

The EU-funded support has effectively integrated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 3, 5, 10, 16), the principle of Leave No One Behind (LNOB), and the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) within social protection interventions. Most interventions, including the six grants and respective sub-grants, closely integrated the LNOB principle, targeting vulnerable people such as persons with disabilities (PwD), Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, women victims of violence, single mothers, and other marginalized groups. Efforts also aimed at integrating the HRBA, enhancing stakeholder skills, amplifying marginalized communities' voices, improving service delivery, and adapting programs to emerging needs.

Capacity-building initiatives provided targeted training in social protection and COVID-19 response management, empowering frontline workers to uphold human rights principles effectively. The interventions amplified marginalized communities' voices, advocating for policies protecting their rights and ensuring equitable access to services. Enhanced provision of essential social protection services, including COVID-19 response, strengthened accessibility and social cohesion, aligning with HRBA principles.

Gender-responsive actions supported by EU interventions aligned with SDGs, LNOB, and HRBA, addressing women and girls' specific needs while promoting their empowerment and gender equality. Stakeholder engagement initiatives with a gender focus facilitated collaboration, addressing gender disparities in social protection. Capacity-building programs mainstreaming gender considerations into program design enhanced practitioners' skills, ensuring interventions effectively addressed women and girls' needs.

Prioritizing gender-disaggregated data collection and monitoring enabled evidence-based interventions promoting women's empowerment and gender equality within social protection programs. Integrating a focus on gender equality alongside SDGs, LNOB, and HRBA is vital for promoting inclusive, equitable social protection systems that advance well-being and empowerment for all individuals, regardless of gender.

7. Overall Assessment

The overall assessment of this report is that the EU support to social protection in Kosovo in the previous period was effective and it produced relevant impact. The EU support was channelled in two main areas, social services and policy and advocacy. Impact is evident in both of these areas.

In addition, there is evidence that EU support was relevant and well-targeted to the most vulnerable categories of citizens. The emergency assistance which was allocated in response to the Covid pandemic was significant and it was particularly well targeted to reach the SAS beneficiaries who were most in need, with particular focus on persons from non-majority communities, and women-led households.

The evidence further indicates that the EU support was allocated efficiently, in a timely manner and based on the principle of good value for money. There is no evidence of major delays which resulted with significant cost increases. Many of the grantees demonstrated cost-efficiency principles in their work.

The EU support produced a number of results which are sustainable in particular at policy level. However, sustainability in the field of service delivery remains a challenge. Many of the around 50 licensed CSO social service providers (CSO SSPs) struggle with financial sustainability as they are to a large extent dependent on donor funding. They also benefit from central and local government funding, and this funding has marked a gradual increase over time, however it is still far from sufficient to maintain the current social service levels.

The new LSFS does involve a number of social service models which are hoped to improve the financial sustainability of CSO SSPs. The key mechanism is the contracting for social services, of which there are high hopes in the professional community. However, even though changes in the financing models may bring some improvements, they cannot in of themselves substitute the lack of government funding.

The position of this report is that the key to the financial sustainability of the social service provision in Kosovo is the increased government funding.

A significant share of the EU support for social services was delivered via sub-grants provided by two EUOK grantees, Save the Children and KWN. Specialized services were provided from sub-grantees to support various vulnerable and marginalised groups. The key stakeholders at local level confirmed that the EUOK funding has made possible to extend the typology of specialized services provided at local level (reaching out vulnerable and marginalised people and supporting their social inclusion).

There is evidence that the sub-granting was managed effectively; it strengthened the capacity of the sub-grantees, and that it expanded the availability, reach, and accessibility of social services across Kosovo. Sub - grantees confirmed that they have further increased their capacities, i.e. grant management, advocacy and lobbying, communication and visibility, etc; They have particularly highlighted the importance of capacity building elements provided (mentoring, training, technical assistance, counselling orientation, guidance for project operations etc.).The sub-granting model combined with relevant elements of capacity building of the CSO SSPs, which evidently leads to improved services quality, is an identified best practice.

The interventions which aimed at supporting the system for social protection and specifically the CSWs were relevant. They included physical renovations, partial support to digitalization, paid internships for social work students, and related support. This support directly improved a number of services CSWs deliver to beneficiaries, and it should also be considered a good practice which needs to continue. The chapter on recommendations below provides specific indications of improvements needed by CSWs.

The interventions have also had impact in further strengthening system coordination. Local stakeholders confirmed the improvements in referral processes in the areas where CSOs have been operating and providing direct support services. There has been also improvement in regard to case management, mainly in the cases of children in need of protection and victims of violence.

The program has contributed toward the reduction of service gaps and improvement of access for underserved groups due to improved coordination between institutions at local level and CSOs.

A key finding of this report, which has been supported by the majority of stakeholders is that the EU should continue the support for social services in Kosovo over a midterm transitional period, at least until the implementation of the new LSFS has come fully into effect. Withdrawal of EU support from the field of social services would result in the suspension of the work of services providers and relevant service gaps. Thereat most stakeholders agree and this report subscribes to this position is that the EU support in the field of social protection in Kosovo in the next period should be balanced between services and policy.

The EU support to policy development has been particularly effective and has contributed significantly to the recent (December 2023) adoption of the new LSFS. The law represents a significant upgrade of the legislative framework in the field. At present, the AIs to the law, which should enable its implementation, are under preparation.

Supporting the implementation of the new law early in the process and comprehensively, would contribute to more effective outcomes resulting from the work of all relevant stakeholders, including national and local authorities. The support to implementation would involve training, guidelines, monitoring, coordination, and related work.

The evaluation has found an overall good cooperation between the key actors in the system, the CSO and the CSWs. It has also found that the capacity of the municipalities in the field of social protection needs to be supported significantly. Many municipalities still need support to competently exercise their competencies in this area.

A number of stakeholders have indicated to the need of a new national strategy in the field of social protection, which should be supplemented with local action plans. This would enhance the accountability of municipalities in the field, as well as provide clear priorities and direction for their efforts.

In sum, the EU support in the field in the previous period has been effective and it has resulted with relevant impact. EU support over the next period should be combination of measures in both services and policy.

The EU should continue to support social services in Kosovo over the midterm, during the transition to the full implementation of the new legislative framework in the field.

8. Conclusions

8.1. Brief Introduction

The conclusions are organized into 5 (five) clusters, following the four DAC evaluation criteria plus the criterion of EU added value, which were the focus of this evaluation. There are 10 conclusions in total divided per cluster as follows:

- 2 (two) conclusions for the efficiency;
- 3 (three) conclusions for the effectiveness;
- 3 (three) conclusions for the impact;
- 1 (one) conclusions for the sustainability; and
- 1 (one) conclusion for the EU added value, Gender, SDGs, LNOB, HRBA

8.2. Cluster 1. Efficiency

8.2.1. Conclusion 1. Efficiency of EU Support

Main conclusion: The evaluation indicates that the implementation of EU-funded support by grantees was highly efficient.

Grantees managed to adhere to approved agreements, achieve set goals, and utilize resources effectively. Best practices in project management ensured transparency, effectiveness, and timely delivery of outputs. Efficient communication, coordination, and collaboration with stakeholders facilitated smooth implementation, despite challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability.

This conclusion is based mainly on **EQ 5 & EQ8**

The evaluation highlights the high efficiency in implementing EU-funded support, with grantees adhering to approved agreements and achieving set goals. Grantees demonstrated transparent project management practices, ensuring timely delivery of services and resources in line with objectives. Despite challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability, grantees efficiently managed resources and maintained stakeholder engagement to deliver social protection services effectively.

Grantees displayed resilience by promptly adjusting implementation strategies and reallocating budgets in response to challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and political uncertainties. Despite disruptions, grantees ensured uninterrupted support to vulnerable populations through online modalities, demonstrating a commitment to

safeguarding social services. Collaborative efforts with stakeholders and proactive measures underscored grantees' adaptability, reflecting a dedication to maintaining social protection mechanisms despite external adversities.

Grantees engaged in collaborative partnerships with CSOs, international actors, and other stakeholders to advance sustainable social inclusion. Through knowledge exchange and capacity building, grantees strengthened service delivery and advocacy efforts, contributing to the enhancement of social protection systems. Collaborative initiatives facilitated policy dialogue and advocacy, ultimately benefiting marginalized communities and promoting inclusive social protection initiatives.

8.2.2. Conclusion 2. Enhancing Social Protection System Efficiency

Main conclusion: Coordination among stakeholders is crucial for enhancing system efficiency, while aligning SAS with social service delivery policies is key to maximizing impact. Challenges regarding data availability and digitalization underscore the need for ongoing efforts to streamline operations and improve service delivery mechanisms. Effective coordination among stakeholders and alignment with broader social protection policies are essential moving forward, alongside prioritizing digitalization of CSWs' work processes to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in social service delivery.

This conclusion is based mainly on **EQ 5 & EQ8**

Social Protection System efficiency refers to resource utilization and distribution for optimal results. Reform efforts, like the current SAS reform led by the World Bank aims at addressing critical deficiencies and inefficiencies in the SAS model, such as suboptimal benefit distribution and disincentives for labor market participation, optimizing resource utilization and distribution for optimal results. Coordination among stakeholders is identified as a crucial factor in enhancing system efficiency, as it helps avoid service overlaps, ensures targeted support, and promotes sustainability. Additionally, aligning SAS with social service delivery policies is highlighted as a key strategy to maximize impact and strengthen the overall system's efficiency and effectiveness. However, challenges remain, particularly regarding data availability and digitalization of CSWs' work processes, underscoring the need for ongoing efforts to streamline operations and improve service delivery mechanisms.

Moving forward, the effective coordination among stakeholders and the alignment of SAS reform efforts with broader social protection policies and strategies remains important. Attention to data collection and analysis is imperative to inform evidence-based policy development and ensure efficient resource allocation. Furthermore, prioritizing the digitalization of CSWs' work processes post-project completion is crucial for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in social service delivery. By addressing these considerations and implementing clear strategies to enhance system efficiency, the project holds promise for achieving its objectives of promoting labor market activity, reducing poverty, and strengthening social protection mechanisms in Kosovo.

8.3. Cluster 2. Effectiveness

8.3.1. Conclusion 3. EU Support for Strengthening the Social Protection System

Main conclusion: Overall, the effectiveness of EU interventions in strengthening Kosovo's social protection system is evident through tangible legislative reforms, collaborative efforts, capacity-building initiatives, expanded service provision, and improved service quality. While challenges remain, particularly regarding the capacity of government institutions, these interventions have laid a solid foundation for sustained progress in addressing social protection needs in Kosovo.

*This conclusion is based mainly on **EQ1***

The effectiveness of EU-funded support in strengthening Kosovo's social protection system is evident across key areas. Firstly, significant progress has been made in enhancing the legal and policy framework, with pivotal legislation such as the LSFS and the draft LLGF being developed. These legislative reforms mark tangible progress toward decentralizing social services and improving the overall system. Crucially, the effectiveness of this intervention can be attributed to robust collaboration and advocacy efforts undertaken by grantees (i.e. KOMF and Save the Children). Through close cooperation with government-related structures and stakeholders, this initiative has successfully advocated for legislative changes conducive to strengthening social protection.

Moreover, the effectiveness of the EU-funded support is underscored by their focus on *increasing capacity building and providing technical support*. By equipping local stakeholders and institutions with resources and expertise, these interventions have empowered them to enhance service delivery effectively.

In terms of service provision, the interventions have demonstrated notable effectiveness by *increasing the number of service providers* and *expanding service coverage*. Sub-granting schemes have played a pivotal role in supporting CSOs and service providers, leading to improved coordination and better access for vulnerable groups.

Importantly, the effectiveness of the interventions is reflected in the *enhanced quality of social services* provided. Beneficiary satisfaction surveys and project reports confirm the improved quality of services, indicating that the interventions have successfully met the needs of beneficiaries and delivered impactful outcomes.

8.3.2. Conclusion 4. Cooperation between Institutions and CSOs

Main conclusion: The cooperation between institutional bodies and CSOs at the local level, supported by EU-funded initiatives, has significantly enhanced social protection mechanisms in Kosovo, ensuring timely assistance through streamlined referral systems and coordinated service delivery. CSWs effectively refer individuals to CSOs, while CSOs manage a majority of social services, demonstrating reliability and proficiency. Additionally, EU-supported coordination mechanisms have amplified collaboration between CSWs and CSOs, highlighting the effectiveness of collaborative approaches in promoting the well-being of communities.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQ4

The cooperation between institutional bodies and CSOs at the local level, notably supported by EU-funded initiatives, has significantly enhanced the effectiveness of social protection mechanisms in Kosovo. Through streamlined referral systems and coordinated service delivery, this partnership ensured timely and appropriate assistance to those in need, promoting sustainability in service provision. CSWs efficiently referred individuals to CSOs, the primary service providers, while CSOs, equipped with extensive expertise, effectively managed a majority of social services, demonstrating their reliability and proficiency in meeting diverse needs. Moreover, the financial support provided to sub-grantees has strengthened the network of service providers, resulting in improved case management and expanded outreach to vulnerable populations in remote areas.

Furthermore, the coordination mechanisms facilitated by EU-supported initiatives, such as meetings and workshops, have amplified collaboration between CSWs and CSOs, enhancing service delivery and outreach efforts. This underscores the effectiveness of EU-funded support in fostering partnerships between institutions and CSOs, ensuring that vulnerable populations receive specialized support promptly and efficiently. Overall, the cooperation between institutional bodies and CSOs, bolstered by EU initiatives, stands as a strong evidence to the effectiveness of collaborative approaches in strengthening social protection mechanisms and promoting the well-being of communities in Kosovo.

8.3.3. Conclusion 5. Capacity Building of Key Stakeholders

Main conclusion: The effectiveness of the EU-funded support is evident in its ability to facilitate learning and networking among CSO beneficiaries, while also establishing meaningful connections with government stakeholders at local and central levels.

The sub-granting scheme has emerged as a pivotal tool in enhancing the capacities of CSOs, particularly in areas such as grant management, advocacy, lobbying, communication, and visibility. Through a collaborative effort between the grantees and sub-grantees, a conducive environment has been fostered to share experiences, resources, and mutual interests, thereby working towards common objectives and promoting continuous learning.

Moving forward, the success of this initiative highlights the importance of ongoing support and investment in empowering CSOs to drive positive change within their communities.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQ4

CSOs have further increased their capacities, mainly the ones benefiting from the sub-granting scheme, i.e. grant management, advocacy and lobbying, communication and visibility, etc;

The sub-granting scheme is considered a very important tool for furthering CSOs' capacities as well as via a learning by doing approach. The main grantee and the sub-grantees have worked cooperatively to build upon mutual interests and share experiences and resources to work toward common objectives as well as foster further learning. The grantees and sub-grantees have confirmed that the program has been very effective in furthering learning and networking among the CSOs beneficiaries and more specifically establishing connections and relations with relevant local and central government stakeholders as well as forging ties among respective CSO partners. They have particularly highlighted the importance of capacity-building elements provided (mentoring, training, technical assistance, counselling orientation, guidance for project operations etc.).

8.4. Cluster 3. Impact

8.4.1. Conclusion 6. Strengthening Social Protection

Main conclusion: Overall, EU-funded interventions in Kosovo have strengthened the social protection system and enhanced the well-being of individuals, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through legal and policy changes, improved social services provision, capacity building, advocacy, empowerment of vulnerable groups, and targeted responses to COVID-19, these interventions have effectively addressed the needs of marginalized communities and promoted equity in social protection outcomes.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQ3 & EQ4

The impact of EU-funded support in Kosovo, focusing on legal and policy changes, social services provision, capacity building, advocacy, empowerment of vulnerable groups, and response to COVID-19, has been profound in strengthening the social protection system and promoting the well-being of all individuals, particularly during crises.

The policy and legal changes supported by EU-funded interventions are expected to have lasting effects, consolidating institutional support for permanent improvements in addressing social protection-related issues. These changes establish enduring policies and practices for reporting, referring, and addressing cases of individuals in need of protection.

Moreover, the collaboration between CSOs and government institutions, facilitated by EU-funded projects, has deepened, enhancing cooperation at both central and local levels.

The EU-funded initiatives have achieved several key outcomes, including improvements in social services provision, increased capacities of key stakeholders, advocacy and empowerment of vulnerable groups, effective response to COVID-19, and enhanced support for marginalized communities.

By improving social services provision, enhancing capacities, advocating for the rights of vulnerable groups, and tailoring support to their specific needs during the pandemic, EU-funded interventions have played a pivotal role in reducing disparities and promoting equity in social protection outcomes in Kosovo. These efforts have not only strengthened the social protection system but have also fostered resilience and inclusion, ensuring that all individuals, especially the most vulnerable, are supported and protected, even in times of crisis.

8.4.2. Conclusion 7. The Impact of EU Support

Main conclusion: In conclusion, the IPA assistance provided in Kosovo, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, has generated significant impacts across institutional, organizational, individual, and socio-economic levels. Notably, it has strengthened institutional capacity, empowered CSOs, addressed individual vulnerabilities, and mitigated socio-economic challenges exacerbated by the pandemic.

Moving forward, sustaining and enhancing these efforts through continued focus on policy improvement, capacity-building, and evidence-based advocacy will be pivotal in further strengthening social protection for vulnerable and marginalized communities in Kosovo.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQ6

The IPA assistance in Kosovo has been pivotal, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing significant impacts across institutional, organizational, individual, and socio-economic area.

Institutionally, IPA support has strengthened the capacity of key stakeholders, enabling effective coordination and implementation of pandemic response measures, including strengthening the social protection system and ensuring continuity of essential services.

Organizationally, IPA assistance has empowered CSOs to advocate for vulnerable populations and provide critical services, fostering community resilience amidst pandemic-induced challenges.

Moreover, at the individual level, targeted interventions have directly addressed urgent needs, such as food assistance and emergency relief, while capacity-building initiatives have enhanced resilience and adaptive capabilities.

Socio-economically, IPA assistance has contributed to mitigating the pandemic's adverse effects on livelihoods, employment, and incomes through economic recovery initiatives and infrastructure investments.

Sustaining and amplifying these impacts necessitates a continued focus on enhancing social protection policies, fostering capacity-building, and advocating evidence-based approaches, ensuring ongoing support for vulnerable communities in Kosovo.

8.4.3. Conclusion 8. Key Aspects to Promote and Replicate

Main conclusion: Emphasizing continuity in services, policy support, targeted approaches, collaboration, capacity building, evidence-based decisions, community engagement, flexibility, gender sensitivity, inclusion and innovation is essential for sustained success. These aspects are vital for ensuring effectiveness, efficiency, and resilience in social protection efforts, benefiting vulnerable populations in Kosovo.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQ7

The key aspects of EU interventions in social protection that should be promoted, replicated, and sustained revolve around continuity in service provision, policy support, targeted and holistic approaches, coordination and collaboration, capacity building, evidence-based decision-making, community engagement, flexibility and adaptability, and innovation and learning.

The impact of EU-supported initiatives on social protection in Kosovo highlights several key aspects that should be promoted, replicated, and sustained in future strategies. First and foremost, ensuring continuity in the provision of social services is essential for maintaining stability and safeguarding vulnerable populations. This requires continued donor investment to prevent interruptions in service delivery by CSOs, especially during transitional periods until government support is scaled up. Additionally, focusing on policy support, particularly for implementing the new LSFS, and adopting a targeted and holistic approach that prioritizes vulnerable populations and addresses their specific needs, are crucial for maximizing the impact of social protection programs.

Furthermore, promoting coordination and collaboration among stakeholders, investing in capacity building, prioritizing evidence-based decision-making, fostering community engagement, and maintaining flexibility and adaptability are vital for enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of social protection interventions. By fostering a culture of innovation and learning, the EU interventions can drive continuous improvement in social protection programming, ensuring that interventions remain responsive and adaptive to the evolving needs of beneficiaries. Gender sensitivity is also a key aspect to be promoted. Ensuring that social protection programs are gender-sensitive is crucial for addressing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women, girls, and other marginalized gender groups. By integrating gender-sensitive approaches into program design, implementation, and evaluation, the EU supported interventions can promote gender equality, empower women and girls, and enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of social protection initiatives. Promoting gender sensitivity is essential for achieving equitable and sustainable social protection outcomes in Kosovo.

8.5. Cluster 4. Sustainability

8.5.1. Conclusion 9. Advancing Sustainability

Main conclusion: The collaboration between institutional bodies responsible for social protection and CSOs, supported by EU-funded assistance, has led to substantial enhancements and more sustainable outcomes in Kosovo's social protection programs.

Strengthened legal and policy frameworks, institutional capacity-building, and transparent communication channels have all played crucial roles in reinforcing cooperation mechanisms and fostering effective partnerships.

While **challenges such as limited resources and clarity regarding roles persist**, addressing these systematically while leveraging the successful strategies and lessons learned from past interventions will be vital.

By prioritizing sustainability and promoting inclusive collaboration, Kosovo's social protection programs can continue to evolve and effectively address the evolving needs of its population, ultimately promoting the well-being and empowerment of individuals and communities alike.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQ2, EQ6 & EQ7

The collaboration and coordination between institutional bodies responsible for social protection and CSOs, facilitated by EU-funded support, have generated significant improvements and more sustainable outcomes in Kosovo's social protection programs. Through streamlined communication channels and enhanced capacity-building initiatives, the allocation and utilization of resources have become more efficient, ensuring that interventions are targeted and sustainable. Enhanced legal and policy frameworks, institutional support, capacity-building initiatives, and transparent communication channels have all contributed to strengthening cooperation mechanisms and promoting effective partnerships.

At the institutional level, IPA assistance has strengthened the capacity of governmental institutions to coordinate and sustain social protection mechanisms effectively. This sustained capacity-building ensures resilience in institutions, enabling continued effective response and service delivery.

Organizational empowerment of CSOs has been an important focus of EU-funded interventions, facilitating their pivotal roles in advocacy and service provision. By enhancing operational capacity and resilience, IPA assistance support has laid a foundation for sustained organizational effectiveness in addressing societal needs.

At the individual level, IPA assistance has directly improved well-being by addressing urgent needs and vulnerabilities, empowering individuals to adapt and cope with uncertainties, fostering long-term resilience.

At the socio-economic level, IPA assistance has significantly mitigated the impacts of the pandemic by supporting economic recovery initiatives and social protection measures, laying the groundwork for sustained stability and growth.

Challenges such as limited resources (both human and financial) at the institutional level, and lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of institutional bodies in the social protection sector still remains significant.

It is essential to address these challenges systematically while building upon the successes and lessons learned from past interventions. By prioritizing sustainability and fostering inclusive and transparent collaboration, coupled with ongoing capacity-building initiatives, Kosovo's social protection programs can continue to remain responsive to the evolving needs of the population, ultimately enhancing the well-being and empowerment of individuals and communities in Kosovo.

8.6. Cluster 5. EU Added Value, Gender, Principles: SDGs, LNOB, HRBA

8.6.1. Conclusion 10. EU Added Value, Gender, Principles: SDGs, LNOB, HRBA

Main conclusion: EU-supported interventions in Kosovo's social protection sector have significantly enhanced resource mobilization, capacity-building, and service accessibility, aligning with EU values and standards. By prioritizing gender equality and inclusion, these initiatives have not only aligned with EU values and standards but also advanced (SDGs) LNOB and HRBA principles, fostering long-term sustainability and resilience in Kosovo's social protection systems.

This conclusion is based mainly on EQ9 & EQ10

In conclusion, the EU-supported interventions in Kosovo's social protection sector have demonstrated significant added value, particularly in terms of resource mobilization, capacity-building, and service accessibility and quality. By aligning with EU values and standards, these interventions have not only enhanced the technical proficiency of local stakeholders but also fostered cross-sectoral collaboration and adherence to international norms, thereby advancing Kosovo's social welfare objectives and EU integration aspirations. Moreover, the holistic approach of EU interventions, encompassing various critical elements such as financial assistance, policy support, targeted

advocacy, and gender mainstreaming, has effectively addressed diverse societal challenges, promoting long-term sustainability and resilience in Kosovo's social protection systems.

Compared to other donors, the EU-funded interventions have excelled in promoting coordination, expanding social services, advocating for vulnerable groups, and strengthening the social protection system's capacity. By prioritizing gender equality and inclusion, EU-supported initiatives have embraced comprehensive strategies to address gender inequalities and promote women's empowerment, aligning with the EU Gender Action Plan and advancing SDGs, LNOB, and HRBA principles. Additionally, the contributions of EU interventions to social cohesion, through tailored assistance, community engagement, and equal access to essential services, have contributed toward reducing poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, amplifying their overall effectiveness and impact in Kosovo's communities.

9. Recommendations

9.1. Introduction

The chapter on recommendations includes the specific priorities in the field of social protection, as they relate to social service provision.

These priorities have emerged from the extensive consultations with stakeholders and beneficiaries. From among the large number of ideas, suggestions, recommendations indicated by the various groups of stakeholders, the table includes those which have been subject to broadest agreement among stakeholders, have been filtered for bias, and have been corroborated by additional data sources such as reports, analyses, etc. In addition, they have been subject to additional analysis for relevance, importance, and feasibility.

Further, some recommendations derive directly from the analysis conducted by the evaluators based on the indications of needs and challenges in the field.

It should be noted that the recommendations differ in scope and specificity. The responsibility for some of them can be explicitly located with a level of government/institution, whereas for some of them that is less possible, as they obviously require cooperation between the central level, and local level, and civil society.

This said, there are various cooperation formats possible in the implementation of certain recommendations. Even when a recommendation indicates to an individual action, such as for example developing a local municipal action plan, it is important that it is considered in a context of coordination, such as with other municipalities in the same region, with the central level, with established service providers.

Even though this report is tasked with considering the priorities the EU should support in the field of social protection in Kosovo in the next period, the recommendations are not defined in terms of what the EU should support, but in terms of what are the key priorities of the system overall. They are defined as country priorities. (However, Annex 3 includes an extended discussions of additional, broader, long term recommendations with particular focus on the role of the EU).

The priorities are divided based on time period in which they could be implemented. This categorization takes into account a number of principles.

First, it considers the sequence of specific tasks, for ex. local action plan should preferably be done after the mapping of needs, so that they can benefit from quality data. It is of course possible that some of them preceded the mapping (so-called soft sequence logic) however, the alternative is preferable. The same can be said about the sequence between the national strategy and the local action plans.

Second, the categorization takes into account the relative priority or urgency of specific tasks, their importance, as well as feasibility. For example, many specific tasks can be planned and scheduled, but they will generally require financial resources in order to be implemented. If the financial resources have not previously been secured, specifically by increasing the national level funding in the field of social protection, the completion of the tasks will be either unfeasible or irrelevant.

The table listing the priorities is followed by a short narrative explanation of each priority.

Annex 3 of this report discusses the priorities in a broader context and essentially has a longer term view. It groups them into broader categories called clusters, and it discusses the related context, activities, and roles of various stakeholders, with particular focus on the role for the EU support over the next period.

9.2. Summary of Specific Recommendations

The first part of the chapter serves the purpose of a specific recommendations summary, similar to the executive summary of the report, for readers who do not necessarily have the time to consult the full report. The tables below, copied from the executive summary (and hence preserving the numbering from that section) present the short term, medium term, and the long term recommendations. The recommendations are numbered for easier referencing. The numbering does not indicate an order of importance. The subsequent sections provide a short narrative discussion for each of the recommendations.

Short term recommendations/STRs (Table 1 copied from executive summary section)

Recommendation	Field of action	Responsibility
STR1. Increase national government funding for social protection services delivered by CSO SSPs to ensure long-term sustainability and prevent service suspension.	Policy	Central level
STR2 .Increase specialist staff in CSWs to address the systematic neglect and ensure effective delivery of services.	Capacity	Central/local level
STR3. Increase CSW staff salaries to address the lack of competitiveness compared to other civil servants, improve motivation, facilitate recruitment.	Policy	Central level
STR4. Continue the renovation of CSWs and upgrade of equipment to address the inadequate facilities and lack of essential resources such as family rooms, child rooms, accessibility for PwDs, and modern equipment.	Capacity	Central/local level
STR5. Allocate support to CSO Social Service Providers (SSPs) via longer term grants (3-4 years) to mitigate funding voids and ensure service sustainability.	Policy	Central level
STR6. Conduct a comprehensive mapping of needs and available services, centrally coordinated to ensure consistency, comparability, and integration with other data sources.	Policy	Central/local level/CSOs
STR7. Develop a national strategy (and costed action plan) for social protection in Kosovo.	Policy	Central/local level/CSOs
STR8. Finalize the Administrative Instructions (AIs) for the recently adopted LSFS in order to commence the effective implementation of the law.	Policy	Central level/CSOs
STR9. Organize training sessions for stakeholders to facilitate the effective implementation of the LSFS.	Capacity	Central/local level/CSOs
STR10. Adopt the LLGF as it is essential for the effective implementation of the LSFS.	Policy	Central level

Medium term Recommendations/MTRs (Table 2 copied from executive summary section)

Recommendation	Field of action	Responsibility
MTR1. Continue the digitalization of CSW case management	Policy/Capacity	Central level
MTR2. Promote CSW staff specialization, addressing the need for specialized skills in various areas of social work.	Policy/Capacity	Central/local level/CSOs
MTR3. Promote the establishment of separate municipal directorates for social welfare, where feasible, to enhance institutional focus, channel efforts effectively, and potentially increase budgets for social protection.	Policy/Capacity	Local level
MTR4. Clarify roles and competencies in social protection at central as well as between central and local levels.	Policy	Central/local level/CSOs
MTR5. Develop local action plans for social protection (based on the national strategy).	Policy	Local level/CSOs
MTR6. Promote inter-municipal cooperation in social services to address capacity limitations, enhance specialization of staff, and effectively deliver the full range of services, particularly in small municipalities.	Capacity/Coordination	Central/local level/CSOs
MTR7. Promote effective social service contracting as part of the LSFS to ensure sustainability for CSO social service providers (CSO SSPs) by establishing clear funding criteria	Policy	Central level
MTR8. Strengthen the capacity of municipalities in social protection by investing efforts to enhance knowledge, understanding of competencies, recruitment of qualified staff, and prioritization of social protection within municipal agendas.	Capacity	Local level
MTR9. Continue to invest in the social service delivery capacity of CSO SSPs (building on the significant contributions made by previous EU support.	Capacity	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR10. Promote mental and emotional health initiatives for frontline workers, recognizing the significant stress and burnout they experience from daily exposure to human suffering.	Capacity	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR11. Promote the implementation of quality standards across all social services	Policy/Services	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR12. Systematically address barriers to access and advocate for the rights of marginalized persons in the field of social protection.	Policy	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR13. Promote women's empowerment and gender equality within social protection programs.	Policy/Services	Central/local level/ CSOs

MTR14. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with gender-sensitive indicators and expand collaboration with diverse stakeholders to ensure services reach women.	Policy/Services	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR15. Expand the service typology and coverage and improve service quality, to maximize impact for vulnerable groups.	Policy/Services	Central/local level/ CSOs
MTR16. Ensure closer coordination between the CSW SAS and social services components.	Policy/Capacity	Central/local level

Long term recommendations/LTRs (Table 3 copied from executive summary section)

Recommendation	Field of action	Responsibility
LTR1. Promote stronger coordination and synergies between social protection policies, particularly social services, and education and health policies	Policy/Coordination	Central/local level/ CSOs
LTR2. Enhance the prevention role of CSWs	Policy/Capacity	Central/local level/ CSOs

The key actionable recommendations are included under the short term and the midterm recommendations (Tables 1 and 2 above). The long term recommendations presented in Table 3 do not include proposals for specific actions. They represent more general consideration for further development of the overall system of social protection over the long term. They should be subject to additional elaboration through a process of debate involving key stakeholders. In addition, Annex 3 to the report includes additional cluster recommendations which provide a detailed discussion/considerations of the potential long-term priorities of the social protection system with particular focus on the role of the EU.

The following sections provides short rationales for the indicated priorities:

9.2.1. Specific Short-Term Recommendations

Increase national government funding for social protection services delivered by CSO SSPs

The national government provides annual funding for the licensed CSO SSPs. Most recently this funding has been increased from 1 to 1.5 million Euros, which was also noted as progress in the annual EC report on Kosovo. However, there is general consensus that this funding is far from sufficient to maintain the services delivered by CSO SSPs, and that the largest share of these services are sustained by donor funding. In a circumstance of reduced donor funding, a large number of these services would have to shut down. This is likely to happen in the next 1-2 year period given that the EC funding for social services will likely be at a lower level compared to the previous pandemic and post-pandemic period. A lot can be said on models which can strengthen the sustainability of social services, however the bottom line is that the most effective way to ensure sustainability is through increasing government funding, which will be longer term, stable, and predictable.

Increase staff in CSWs and raise awareness on need for specialized staff

CSWs have been subject to systematic neglect over the past decade and longer. This neglect has not been deliberate; it likely resulted from under-prioritization. However, there is strong evidence that it has been

consistent. One consequence of the neglect has been the continuous decrease of staff in the CSWs. Retired staff are not replaced and many current staff are close to retirement age. Concurrently, CSW responsibilities are increasing. New legislation assigns ever more new competencies to them. The situation is not tenable. It's essential to address this issue urgently and raise awareness about the need for specialized staff to fulfill the growing demands placed on CSWs.

Increase CSW staff salaries

The stakeholder accounts concerning the disadvantageous position of CSW staff have also indicated to the uncompetitive salaries of CSW staff compared to other civil servants and their status in the public administration. Data indicated to general lack of motivation among CSW staff, and in difficulties in hiring of new staff. Some CSWs indicated they have open positions they cannot fill. Increasing CSW staff salaries is an important aspects of the overall effort of building the capacity of CSWs.

Continue renovation of CSWs and upgrade of equipment

CSW facilities are in many cases not adequate for the services that are delivered there. There is a lack of adequate spaces for counseling with family members, including children (child – friendly spaces are completely missing), lack of access for PwDs, rooms that allow private communication. In addition, CSWs lack vehicles, even though a large share of their work is in the field, up to date computers, cell phones and the like.

Some of the EC support channeled through the program (the 6 grants) subject to evaluation, has been allocated for renovation of CSW facilities. In addition, the large World Bank SAS reform program aims to further invest in CSW equipment. Given the extent of need, investment in CSW facilities and equipment should continue also after the completion of the World Bank project, in order to ensure generally consistent conditions for work and quality of services across CSWs in Kosovo.

Allocate support to CSO SSPs via longer term grants (3-4 years)

At present the government grant support to the licensed CSO SSPs is allocated via annual calls for proposals. The grants are generally of 1-year duration. The duration is short, subject to annual renewal and often result with funding voids, periods during the year when the service providers do not have funds to deliver services. Sometimes the government intervenes with emergency funding in order to prevent shutdown of services. This was also the case at the beginning of 2024. Longer term grants would help service sustainability and would allow providers to plan for the midterm.

Conduct comprehensive mapping of needs and available services

As already indicated in the previous discussion, there is general stakeholder agreement that more and better data on the social service needs are needed, in particular at local level. In addition, data on available services are needed. Such data is needed to prevent overlap and therefore inefficiencies, ensure there are no major gaps, as well as to plan intervention over the short and midterm. Whereas stakeholders primarily indicated the need of data as a local level need, the position of this report is that mapping should be centrally coordinated in order to ensure consistency of variables and data, relevant data series, comparability over time, as well as integration with data from other sources (databases, etc.)

Develop a national strategy for social protection and budget action plan

Kosovo's previous strategy for social welfare has expired and at present the country does not have a national document setting the priorities over the midterm. A number of stakeholders have indicated to the need of such a strategy. Even though not a legally binding document, the strategy influences decisions and funding allocations and has to potential to drive and coordinate national effort in the field. The strategy also serves as basis for local level planning in the field, it informs and guides local authorities and other local stakeholders.

Finalize AIs for the LSFS

The evaluators have been informed that following the recent adoption of the new LSFS, the work on the AIs elaborating the specifics for the implementation of the new law has started. Reportedly, the work on the AIs has been divided between a number of stakeholders, including CSOs. The expectation is that the work on the AIs should be completed by the end of 2024, however delays are possible. The AIs need to be finalized as soon as possible, and delays with the completion of particularly critical AIs should be prevented in order to start the effective implementation of the law as soon as possible.

Invest in training needed for the implementation of the LSFS

The new LSFS is a significant regulatory upgrade compared to the ex-ante. It introduces a number of new concepts and solutions, it adds competencies and responsibilities across institutions, it foresees new services. The implementation of the law, after the AIs have been developed, will require significant amount of preparation, coordination, and learning by institutions and their representatives. It is important that preparing the stakeholders starts as soon as possible in order to prevent delays and ensure effective implementation.

Support the adoption of the Law on Local Government Finance (LLGF)

The effective implementation of the LSFS depends on the adoption of the LLGF. The LLGF includes the provisions on the specific grant for social services which would basically make clear how much budget the municipality has to spend in the field. At present such a grant does not exist and social services are funded from the general grant. There are specific grants for education and health. Stakeholders expect the introduction of the specific grant for social services to improve the overall situation. The draft law has been developed but it is delayed in Parliament. The adoption of the LLGF and the introduction of the specific grant should be supported.

9.2.2. Specific Medium Term Recommendations

Continue CSW digitalization

As already discussed earlier in the report, part of the EU support in social protection in the previous period (component of the UNDP grant) was used for partial digitalization of CSW case management. The World Bank SAS reform project aims to fully digitalize the work processes related to the SAS. This process should continue until comprehensive digitalization of the case management is also achieved, and the two parts of the system are digitally connected. This is a large-scale intervention and it should preferably not be done piecemeal. Instead a thorough overhaul should be considered, involving all related elements, such as equipment, training, data collection processes, and related.

Ensure closer coordination between the CSW SAS and social services components

At present, the two parts of the CSWs work, on the SAS and the social services are starkly disconnected. They report to different ministries, in addition to the local level. Stakeholder accounts indicate there is very little communication between them even though they are in the same office. This is a missed opportunity for more integrated services, which would enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, as well as the final social outcomes produced by the social protection system.

Promote CSW staff specialization

In many cases CSW staff lack the proper educational background. This is also due to the fact that until recently the social worker qualification was not available at university level in Kosovo. In addition, CSW staff do not specialize. The same CSW staff would do all the services the institution is mandated to do, from foster care, adoption, disability, to DV. A number of stakeholders have indicated that specialization of CSW staff is needed in order to ensure effectiveness and better quality services.

Promote separate municipal directorates for social welfare (where possible)

In most municipalities in Kosovo there is a single directorate which is in charge for both health and welfare. A few larger municipalities have separated this department and instituted a separate department for welfare/social protection. There is general stakeholder agreement that this is a more optimal solution for

managing social protection at the local level. The arguments are that when there is a single department, social protection is regularly dominated by health. It is also argued that a separate department allows for institutional focus on social protection, it channels the effort more effectively, and it often results with increased budget for social protection. This option may not be possible for very small municipalities whose department is also small (just 1-2 persons). But there are municipalities which should consider this option. The feedback from the municipalities which have done this is generally positive.

Clarify roles and competencies in social protection at central as well as between central and local level

At present there is lack of clarity about institutional roles and competencies in the system for social protection in Kosovo. Some stakeholders have indicated that part of the lack of clarity derives from the 2009 decentralization, whereby some municipalities still do not have clear understanding of the full extent of their competencies. This was subject discussion also earlier in the text. The recent institutional reform involving the shutting down of the MLSW and the division of its competencies between the MFLT and the MoJ has further reduced clarity. This was a recent change and some departments are still waiting on specific work descriptions. It is possible that if the new LSFS is implemented in this context of lack of clarity, the situation may worsen. Hence a comprehensive national dialogue is required to clarify roles and responsibilities and ensure effective institutional coordination.

Develop local action plans for social protection (based on the strategy)

At present only a few municipalities in Kosovo have action plans (LAPs) for social protection. This essentially means that there are no priorities or interventions which have been defined in writing, and that action is ad hoc and unsystematic. A number of stakeholders indicated that such LAPs are needed as they would promote participation in the decision making on the social protection priorities, they would guide the effort, and they would ensure accountability. Such LAPs should ideally be adopted following the adoption of the national strategy and they should be informed by it. They should also be preceded by mapping of needs and available services.

Promote inter-municipal cooperation in social services

Small municipalities have CSWs and directorates with limited capacity. For them it is difficult to cope with the increasing competencies and responsibilities, to ensure specialization of staff, and effectively provide the full range of services. For this reason, inter-municipal cooperation in the delivery of social services should be promoted and actively coordinated.

Promote effective social service contracting (part of LSFS)

There is high enthusiasm in the professional community over the new model for social service contracting foreseen with the new LSFS. It is argued that the contracting would establish clear criteria for funding CSO SSPs based on the number of services provided and beneficiaries served, and that it would help the sustainability of SSPs who will no longer depend only on short term grants, but will be funded in continuity based on the services they provide. Whereas social contracting is a promising model, its effectiveness will depend on the implementation. Regional experiences indicate that implementation is not necessarily effective. Some stakeholders have indicated the model remained a paper exercise in some countries; in others the service price was set so low that it was not feasible for providers to use the model. Kosovo stakeholders should make sure the model can be effectively implemented.

Strengthen the general capacity of municipalities in social protection

Stakeholders proposed relevant indications that many municipalities do not have sufficient capacity. They lack knowledge of the field, understanding of the competencies, they lack qualified staff, and often they do not consider social protection to be a priority. Effort should be invested to strengthen the capacity of municipalities.

Continue to invest in the capacity of CSO SSPs

The EU support in social protection in the previous period contributed significantly to the capacity of the licensed CSO SSPs. There is evidence that the sub-granting via Save the Children strengthened their procedures, accountability, institutional memory, as well as contributed to the quality of their services. In the words of stakeholders, “some of the smaller ones did not even have computers”. The opposite is also true. Some of the sub-grantees demonstrate enviable capacity. Work in this direction should continue.

Promote mental and emotional health for frontline workers

A few stakeholders indicated that at present the mental and emotional health of frontline is not a major priority in the field. Frontline workers experience stress and burnout from the day-to-day exposure to human suffering. There is growing recognition that prevention and protection of their mental and emotional well-being is needed. Effort should be invested in this direction.

Promote service quality and social service standards

EU support in the previous period contributed to improving service quality. The new LSFS will set standards of quality (to be defined with some of its AIs). Effort will be needed to ensure proper implementation of the standards of quality across the full range of social services. This will require training, mentoring, as well as monitoring.

9.2.3. Long Term Recommendations

Promote coordination with labour market, education, and health policies

The collected data indicated that at present there is very little coordination of the policies in social protection with relevant policies concerning the labour market, education, and health. The SAS reform is expected to transform the relationship in particular with the labour market. Efforts are needed to strengthen coordination and synergies between social protection and in particular social services with education and health.

Promote CSW prevention role

A number of stakeholders have indicated that there was very little focus on prevention in the field of social protection under the previous legislation. The previous law did not even use the term prevention. By a common account, CSWs engage in very little prevention activity, usually in coordination with CSOs. Work should continue on promoting the CSW prevention role.

Table 3. Prioritisation of the short and medium term recommendations

Time horizon	Recommendation	Importance (1=low, 4=high)	Urgency (1=low, 4=high)
Short term	Increase national government funding for social protection services delivered by CSO SSPs	4	4
	Increase staff in CSWs	4	3
	Increase CSW staff salaries	4	2
	Continue renovation of CSWs and upgrade of equipment	3	1
	Allocate support to CSO SSPs via longer term grants (3-4 years)	4	3
	Conduct comprehensive mapping of needs and available services	3	3
	Develop a national strategy for social protection	4	2
	Finalize AIs for the LSFS	4	4
	Invest in training needed for the implementation of the LSFS	4	2
Support the adoption of the Law on Local Government Finance (LLGF)	3	3	

Time horizon	Recommendation	Importance (1=low, 4=high)	Urgency (1=low, 4=high)
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Medium term	Continue CSW digitalization	4	1
	Ensure closer coordination between the CSW SAS and social services components	4	2
	Promote CSW staff specialization	4	2
	Promote separate municipal directorates for social welfare (where possible)	3	1
	Clarify roles and competencies in social protection at central as well as between central and local level	4	3
	Develop local action plans for social protection (based on the strategy)	3	2
	Promote inter-municipal cooperation in social services	3	1
	Promote effective social service contracting (part of LSFS)	4	3
	Strengthen the general capacity of municipalities in social protection	4	2
	Continue to invest in the capacity of CSO SSPs	3	2
	Promote mental and emotional health for frontline workers	3	2
	Promote service quality and social provider standards	4	2

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11. Annex 1. Evaluation Matrix

<p>EQ1 – To what extent have the EU interventions contributed to strengthening the social protection system that was in place (policy, legal framework, delivery procedures, cooperation and complementarity between the institutional and CSOs-led services, etc.)? What were the main factors contributing to this enhancement?)</p>
<p>Rationale and coverage of the EQ:</p> <p>The first EQ is broad and overarching, pertaining to the overall system of social protection in the Republic of Kosovo. It is the core EQ which is interested in the effects for the overall system.</p> <p>The challenges in the field of social protection in Kosovo are succinctly indicated in the ToR. The discussion in the ToR is consistent with the findings of the most recent EU 2023 Kosovo Report. Given the importance of these findings, the respective section from the report is cited here in its entirety:</p> <p>“On social inclusion and protection, Kosovo’s spending on social assistance scheme amounts to 6% of GDP, but <u>less than 0.5% of GDP</u> is allocated to the most deprived as most of the amount is spent on war veterans’ pensions. On 4 April 2023, the Assembly has ratified an agreement with the World Bank to conduct thorough reforms in the social assistance system. Kosovo made <u>no progress to provide funding allocation</u> for social services. The draft law on local government finances is not part of the 2023 legislative plan raising concerns as to the sustainability of financing for social services. For 2023 the government fund dedicated for licensed NGOs to provide social services <u>increased by 50%</u> (from EUR 1 million to 1.5 million); this does not address fully the funding situation for the provision of quality social services at the local level. Municipalities should make effort to improve service planning and delivery, data collection and integrated care. <u>Care for the elderly</u> remains a serious issue. Around 18% of Kosovo's population lives below the poverty line (EUR 45 per month, with 5.1% percent of the population living below the extreme poverty line). <u>Children from poor households, and those with special needs</u>, lack equal access to vital and quality health and education services. Children represent half of those benefiting from social assistance, but less than 10% of them are with special needs. <u>Children with disabilities</u> lack adequate health and rehabilitation services, social services and assistive equipment from state institutions. Most of them lack proper access to education facilities. <u>Around 9% of children are involved in work</u>, of whom 5.6% working under hazardous conditions, an issue being particularly evident among the Roma and Ashkali communities.</p> <p>Kosovo has to intensify efforts to address discrimination against women in employment and social policy, particularly during hiring procedures, promotion and pay.... Women face discrimination also when they are pregnant or wish to have children; <u>limited access to childcare</u> and flexible working arrangements, as well as regulations that discourage the recruitment of women are important barriers. Other challenges faced by women, especially in rural areas, are <u>the lack of care for the elderly</u>, discrimination in the access to property, and <u>gender-based violence</u>.”³⁰</p> <p>In addition, the EU 2023 Report notes that “an overall poorly targeted system of social assistance <u>creates disincentives to joining formal employment</u>”³¹ and it emphasizes that Kosovo should “pursue thorough reforms in the area of the social assistance schemes to <u>ensure better targeting and impact, and improve access to social services, in particular for children</u>.”³²³³</p>

³⁰European Commission Kosovo Report 2023, p.101, available at https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2023_en

³¹ ibid, p. 66

³² underlines in this section are added

³³ ibid

This section from the EU 2023 Kosovo report effectively sums up the key challenges to the overall system for social protection in Kosovo. It does not provide specific comments on the municipal Centres for Social Work (CSWs) which are the key frontline institutional actors, but it does indicate that both the funding and the delivery of the social protection services at the local level (by the CSWs) should be improved.

EQ1 refers to the effects on the social protection system overall, thereby indicating to the regulatory/policy aspects (laws, policies), delivery which is related to the actual providers of social services, primarily the CSWs and the CSOs (including international organizations), as well as their cooperation and complementarity. Further elaborated, this EQ is concerned with the following: Did the EU support help improve the legal and the policy framework? Did it help strengthen the providers of the social services? Did it help improve their cooperation?

Given its key importance and hence scope, this question to some extent subsumes some of the additional EQs which form the evaluation framework, such as for example EQ2 referring to cooperation between CSOs and institutions, EQ4 referring to the capacity of the main stakeholders, and so forth. This is not a methodological challenge; it merely reiterates the logical association between the key EQs.

Evaluation criteria covered:

Effectiveness

Judgement criteria and indicators

JC1.1 Extent of improvement of legal and policy framework

(Y/N) = qualitative indicator

11.1.1 Laws, bylaws, policy and strategic documents produced with support from the interventions

Evidence gathered/analysed

The new draft Law on Social and Services was approved in December 2023. One of the grantees, KOMF, had an instrumental role in the process of adoption of the law. In addition, EU support also contributed to the new draft Law on Local Government Finance, specifically the provisions relating to the specific grant for social protection. The draft law is developed but adoption is delayed. The collected evidence indicates to additional contributions the EU support made to strengthening the policy framework. KOMF produced decentralization monitoring reports; UNDP produced administrative instructions (AIs) promoting partial digitalization of the CSW case management; some of the KWN sub-grantees succeeded in making local level policy changes. The major outcome was the adoption of the new LSFS. In sum, the conclusion is that the EU support contributed significantly to positive change, as measured by 11.1.1.

11.2.1 Key stakeholder confirmation/agreement that the produced laws, bylaws, policy and strategic documents strengthen the social protection system (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

The KIIs with stakeholders provided strong confirmation that the legislative changes, specifically the new LSFS, is expected to strengthen the social protection system in Kosovo. What more, there is high enthusiasm in the professional community that the new law has the potential to promote significant positive change in the field. In the views of stakeholders, the new law represents a significant policy upgrade compared to the ex-ante, and it promotes a number of policy solutions which are expected to improve the overall system. In sum, the indicator value is yes (Y); there is strong stakeholder agreement in this sense.

JC1.2 Extent of increase of number of social protection service providers, and amount of services provided

11.2.1 Amount of services delivered (reach, coverage, inclusion of vulnerable categories)

Evidence gathered/analysed

The collected data confirms strong delivery against this indicator. Most of the EU support (the 6 grants) was allocated for services, including the crisis support during the Covid pandemic, which included food vouchers, and heating, power, and water subsidies (around 9.500 families, of which 3.000 from non-majority communities, received food vouchers for a 6 month period; 6.500 from UNDP, and 3.000 from IOM); Save the Children provided sub-grants of up to 60.000 Euros to 47 licensed CSO SSPs, who in turn delivered services to large numbers of beneficiaries; the KWN provided 27 sub-grants; IOM provided biz support to a number of start-ups and existing businesses run by non-majority communities; part of the UNDP support also supported women-run businesses; PEMA operated day centers for children with disabilities; its partner Shpresa ran a children's shelter. The sub-grants channelled via Save the Children provided support to women's shelters, child centres, and other service providers throughout the country; the mobile clinics operated by UNDP provided services to hard to reach persons. There is evidence that in many cases the support expanded the reach and coverage, promoted new services, and promoted the inclusion of vulnerable categories. In conclusion, the data confirms strong delivery against 11.2.1.

11.2.2 Number of providers supported in response to local needs

Evidence gathered/analysed

Ibid as above; the evidence confirms that the EU funded supported a large number of providers who responded to relevant local needs. The EU funding specifically contributed to supporting 47 out of the 50 licensed CSO SSPs in the country. The evidence indicates to sound delivery against this indicator.

JC1.3 Extent of improvement of quality of social protection services

11.3.1 Rate of beneficiary satisfaction across supported services (assessed from available secondary data, i.e. project records, surveys, etc.)

Evidence gathered/analysed

The available data from the narrative reports of the grantees indicate to general beneficiary satisfaction with the services. And to the contrary, the data collected directly by the evaluators did not provide any indications of possible dissatisfaction of certain categories of beneficiaries.

JC1.4 Extent of improvement of access to social protection services to socially excluded categories

11.4.1 # of beneficiaries helped with the supported services

Evidence gathered/analysed

Ibid as 11.2.1 above; the evidence indicates that significant numbers of beneficiaries were reached; that services helped expansion and reach.

11.4.2 Availability of services (supported by the projects) for underserved, vulnerable categories

Evidence gathered/analysed

The available data indicates to strong delivery against 11.4.2. Most of the services delivered with the help of the EU support were aimed for the most vulnerable categories of citizens. For illustration only, the crisis support (vouchers, etc.) targeted SAS beneficiaries, and within this group they further targeted families from non-majority communities, single parent families, women-led families, etc. The services delivered both via the grants (PEMA, UNDP, IOM), as well as the sub grants managed by Save the Children and KWN targeted vulnerable categories of beneficiaries.

EQ2 Has cooperation/coordination between institutional and CSO-led services improved and to what extent is it sustainable? What were the main factors contributing to this improvement and its sustainability?

Rationale and coverage of the EQ:

The focus of EQ2 is on the cooperation between the institutional and CSO-led services. The institution providers are primarily the CSWs, and indirectly the municipalities who are in charge of the CSWs following the decentralization in 2009.

As noted earlier in this section, the ToR indicates the importance of CSOs who are the “forefront to compensate institutional limitations and cover many needs.”

The ToR further notes that the EU support in part works through funding the work of CSOs active in “assisting disadvantaged children, women and families including from non-majority communities and/or not officially registered in the social welfare system”, thereby noting that “until a more sustainable state solution is in place, critical support will still be needed at community level for vulnerable children, women and families in need of social protection to prevent further exclusion.”³⁴ The ToR basically argues that until the government provision of social services improves, CSOs will have to fill the gaps by providing services which the CSWs cannot deliver.

EQ2 essentially asks the following: what are the positive changes (if any) in this domain of cooperation between institutions and CSOs?

What produced these positive changes?

And what are the sustainability prospects of the services provided by CSOs?

As indicated in the ToR, and subject of common knowledge, sustainability is a key challenge to CSO programs, since they primarily depend on donor funding which is usually project—based and limited in time. Interruption in donor (and government) funding can completely halt the needed and good quality services provided by CSOs. One model for improving sustainability is stronger government financial support. The importance of this question is seen also from the fact that it is noted in the EU 2003 progress report.

Whereas funding is of central importance, it does not exhaust the entirety of the issue. Both effectiveness and sustainability can result from improved models of communication, cooperation, the development of referral systems, the exchange of data, and so forth. All these issues will be subject to assessment.

Evaluation criteria covered:

Effectiveness and Sustainability

Judgement criteria and indicators

JC2.1 Extent of established and improved coordination between sectors and fields where it was previously lacking (i.e. social protection, social assistance, employment, etc.)

³⁴ ToR, p. 4 and 5

<p>I2.1.1 Key stakeholders identify and describe (improvements in) processes of coordination (Y/N)</p> <p><u>Evidence gathered/analysed</u></p> <p>Key stakeholders from CSO SSPs and from CSWs consistently confirmed the good cooperation which exists between them. The conclusion from KI accounts is that this cooperation is traditionally good. Improvements are possible thanks to the EU support but there is no major change in the relationship CSO SSPs – CSWs resulting from the support. It can be argued that improvements derived from those project components which were directly focused on supporting the CSWs, such as the renovations. In addition, some of the projects, specifically Save the Children, worked on improving the referral processes between CSO SSPs and CSWs. The evidence did not indicate to any major systemic cross-sectoral improvements, such as for example between social protection and employment.</p> <p>However, at the level of individual sub-grantees (47 via Save the Children and 28 via KWN) there are indications of processes of cooperation across sectors and institutions, such as for example with the police (shelters), health (shelters), employment agencies (shelters), schools (child centres, day care centres for children with disabilities), etc. In conclusion, it can be argued that the EU support promoted cross-sectoral cooperation.</p>
<p>I2.1.2 Relevant stakeholders describe the improvements in coordination as meaningful and indicate specific benefits from such improvements (Y/N)</p> <p><u>Evidence gathered/analysed</u></p> <p>There is some evidence of direct results from coordination specifically in the policy area, and it concerns the recent adoption of the new LSFS. The evidence points that the effective coordination between CSOs under KOMF leadership, as well as the coordination between the political factors promoted by KOMF, resulted with the adoption of the law. There is also evidence that there was good coordination between the 6 EUOK grantees, under EUOK leadership, especially as regards the crisis response. As regards the traditional cooperation between CSO SSPs and the CSW, there is some evidence that the work on improvement of referral processes did contribute to cooperation, which was nonetheless existing. None of the projects had as its major focus improvements of cooperation which was previously considered as weak. Thus, there is no evidence of some major breakthrough in coordination, but it could be argued that incremental improvements are indicated.</p>
<p>JC2.2 Extent of established and improved case referral processes</p>
<p>I2.2.1 Relevant stakeholders describe the improvements in referral processes (Y/N)</p> <p><u>Evidence gathered/analysed</u></p> <p>There is some evidence of improvement in referral processes between CSO SSPs and CSWs, resulting from work done by Save the Children. Key stakeholders both on the part of CSWs and CSO SSPs, generally tend to describe the cooperation, including referrals, as traditionally good.</p>
<p>JC2.3 Extent of reduction of service gaps and improvement of access for underserved groups due to improved coordination between institutions and CSOs</p>
<p>I2.3.1 Relevant stakeholders describe meaningful improvements in reducing service gaps and improving access for underserved groups(Y/N)</p> <p><u>Evidence gathered/analysed</u></p> <p>There is evidence that the EU support contributed to reducing service gaps, as well as preventing the emergence of service gaps due to lack of funding.</p> <p>There is also evidence that service providers managed to expand reach and access.</p> <p>There is rather strong evidence that the sub-granting and the related capacity building support, strengthened smaller local CSO SSPs and helped them expand reach.</p>

The crisis support (food vouchers) was a large part of the overall EU support (over 9.500 families over a six-month period). This support targeted the most vulnerable, and was implemented in close cooperation of UNDP and IOM with the CSWs, as well as the competent ministries. It thus serves as evidence of coordination. Coordination was not the goal of the intervention, but was only possible through this coordination.

I2.4.1 Confirmation and detailed accounts by relevant CSO stakeholders (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

Ibid as I2.3.1

EQ3 To what extent have the EU interventions contributed to greater social inclusion, cohesion, reintegration and empowerment of the vulnerable people targeted? What were the key factors contributing to this enhancement?

Rationale and coverage of the EQ:

Whereas EQ1 was focused on the system overall, and EQ2 on the cooperation between institutions and CSOs, EQ3 has its focus on beneficiaries, specifically on the most vulnerable. As such, it is broad in scope, and it also intersects with EQ1 and EQ2, as well as other key evaluation questions.

If understood to also include the impacts resulting from an improved system of social protection, EQ3 in addition to effectiveness also considers the final impacts of the intervention. However, the understanding of this report is that it aims to cover interventions which were not specifically designed to target the system, but to deliver direct support to beneficiaries. Significant part of the total interventions had a relief and recovery nature, prompted by the emergency created by the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, some interventions focused on job creation through business start-up (IOM, UNDP), others provided food vouchers (UNDP), or subsidized utility costs for households (UNDP). These interventions do not directly target the social protection system, even though they indirectly support it by relieving beneficiary demand. However, their aim is not to improve the system, but to provide direct assistance to beneficiaries. The same argument goes for some of the other services funded by the EU support, which had direct focus on beneficiaries. This question places the focus on the beneficiaries, and asks what improved in people's lives as result of the EU support. Some of this improvement may have come from the improvement in the system, but some has also come from the direct service delivery.

At this point it is pertinent to indicate to a methodological restriction (limitation perhaps being too strong a word). The whole program involved thousands of beneficiaries over a period of several years. For example, the beneficiaries of vouchers and utility subsidies were in the thousands; the expected number of jobs to be created through some of the interventions were also beyond a thousand.

The evaluation will assess these interventions based on existing secondary data. This is project data, reports, surveys, beneficiary registries and so forth, as well accounts of KIs involved in these interventions. The evaluation effort is not designed to include direct surveys of these categories of beneficiaries. Such surveys, if they are to be scientific, would exceed the scope of this assignment both time-wise and financially. Hence, in the assessment of these aspects, the evaluation effort will rely on secondary data.

In this sense, it is also important to indicate that the evaluation effort is not a verification of facts. That is, no effort will be invested to verify the accuracy of data and facts reported in documents, databases, etc., nor is such an effort plausible. They will be considered a given. The evaluation will of course extensively interpret and analyse both the reported facts as well as views, positions, opinions, and so forth.

The specific social outcomes which will be used to respond to EQ3 will be primarily the planned/expected outcome defined in the respective interventions (activities, project components, etc.). They are usually defined in terms of income, jobs, personal safety, health, education, and so forth. In this sense, the specific questions which elaborate EQ3 will correspond with the outcomes as defined by the projects (6 grants) and they will be different for the different organizations and KIs. Adapting the specific questions to the role, knowledge, perspective, responsibilities, etc. of the individual KI, is a standard approach in qualitative evaluation and more broadly qualitative social research.

Evaluation criteria covered:

Effectiveness

Judgement criteria and indicators

JC3.1 Extent of improvement of economic situation, income, employment/labor market prospects for relevant beneficiary categories

I3.1.1 The extent to which the data provided by the key stakeholders confirm meaningful improvements in income, employment, housing, etc. of relevant categories of beneficiaries (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

There is clear evidence that the interventions which aimed to provide additional income (vouchers, subsidies) to the most vulnerable families during the Covid pandemic, were strongly effective. Support was provided to over 9.500 families recipients of SAS, with particular focus on women-led, single-parent households.

The evidence also indicates that the interventions which aimed to provide employment for beneficiaries (part of IOM project, part of UNDP project) were effective.

Stakeholders generally agree that the improvements resulting from these interventions were meaningful. Indicator value = Y.

JC3.2 Extent of improved protection, safety, well-being of relevant beneficiary categories, with particular focus on most vulnerable groups (children at risk, PwDs, women at risk of violence, etc.)

I3.2.1 The extent to which data provided by key stakeholders confirm meaningful improvements in provision of protection (shelter, etc.), day-care, psycho-social etc. services for relevant categories of beneficiaries (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

The data indicates to relevant improvements in outcomes for key categories of beneficiaries. The EU support covered all licensed CSO SSPs in Kosovo for a period of 1.5 – 2 years during the critical time of the pandemic and in its follow up. In many cases, the EU support precluded decline in social outcomes for beneficiaries which would have resulted from discontinued services in the absence of EU support.

The data indicates that most of the services provided by the CSO SSPs were well-subscribed, and often oversubscribed. Many of the services managed waiting lists of beneficiaries.

There is absolutely no evidence which would put in question the relevance or the effectiveness of any of the services.

Indicator value = Y.

EQ4 To what extent have the EU interventions contributed to enhance the capacities of the main stakeholders (CSOs, Ministries, Centres for Social Work, municipalities, etc.)? What was missing or what should be continued?

Rationale and coverage of the EQ:

EQ4 has a very specific focus on the strengthened capacity of the key stakeholders, including CSOs and CSWs as the main direct providers of social services, as well as municipalities, ministries, etc. which also have various roles, such as funders, regulators, quality controllers, policy makers.

Enhanced capacity essentially means being able to do things better, to provide more and/or better quality services, to organize the work processes so that effectiveness is improved and so forth. Interventions usually entail combinations of skills development, provision of equipment (and software), improvement of infrastructure (offices, etc.), organizing better division of responsibilities hence improving coordination, or better defining certain processes (for ex. via regulation).

To the extent that improvements in the regulatory/policy framework are also taken into account as factor of improved capacity, aspects of EQ4 intersect with aspects of EQ1 and EQ2, and potentially other EQs. This is consistent with the nature of qualitative questions as intersecting as opposed to mutually exclusive.

The key focus nonetheless is on improved skills, and improved work processes, the latter deriving from a combination of various factors such including skills, equipment, infrastructure, all of which are inputs in the process of social service provision.

Evaluation criteria covered:

Effectiveness

Judgement criteria and indicators

JC4.1 Improved skills in relevant areas (i.e. related to key services/tasks, previously deficient skills, etc.)

I4.1.1 The extent to which data provided by the intervention confirm key stakeholders have benefited from skills development (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

Available data indicates that part of the projects involved components which directly aimed at strengthening the skills of key institutional stakeholders: Save the Children, UNDP, KOMF provided training, UNDP worked on partial digitalization of case management in CSWs; UNDP also provided volunteers in the CSWs; the policy work conducted by KOMF involved either direct or indirect education on key novel concepts from the new LSFS. Indicator value=Y.

I4.1.2 Key stakeholders and beneficiaries confirm and describe (how) their skills have improved benefit the interventions (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

There is sufficient data which confirms skills improvement resulting from training. In particular, Save the Children regularly use as indicator for evaluating training the rate (%) of skills/knowledge change. In general, all training delivery includes assessment of satisfaction and feedback by beneficiaries. The evidence indicates that the delivered training was relevant (needed) and effective. Indicator value = Y.

JC4.2 Extent of improvement of work processes, methodologies (due to intervention in regulation, equipment, infrastructure, etc.)

I4.2.1 The supported interventions provide data to confirm meaningful improvements in work processes(Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

Available data confirms relevant improvements in work processes, as defined by the indicator. Part of the interventions (UNDP) invested in infrastructure, renovations of CSWs (family rooms, child rooms, etc.). Part of the interventions invested in improving regulation (KOMF, Save the Children, UNDP, some of the sub-grantees at local level). Some of this regulation is yet to start producing effect; some of the policy work (monitoring, advocacy, etc.) have been producing results already in the previous period. The evidence generally indicates that these interventions were effective and they produced results. Conversely, no relevant evidence emerged to indicate lack of effectiveness in design or implementation. Indicator value = Y.

I4.2.2 Key stakeholders and beneficiaries confirm and describe (how) their work processes have been improved benefit to support from the interventions (in regulation, equipment, infrastructure, etc.) (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

Ibid as I4.2.1 above. Available data confirms that work processes and quality of services of CSWs has improved benefit to renovations, and investment in regulation (AIs) and partial digitalization. For a relevant part of the policy (regulation) work, the effect (implementation of new LSFS) has yet to materialize. Data confirms that the stakeholders consider the new law to be a major step in the reform of the system and have high expectations. Indicator value = Y.

EQ5 Which factors critically influenced the efficient implementation/delivery of the EU-funded support? Which potential actions would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of future interventions, including actions on the administrative and organisational setting?

Rationale and coverage of the EQ:

EQ5 is designed to focus primarily on efficiency. Efficiency is defined as “extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.”³⁵

As evident from the definition of the criterion, efficiency is primarily concerned with aspects of cost and time. Aspects of costs include for example value for money, control of expenses, etc.

The aspect of time is concerned with presence of significant delays, since delays result with increased costs for unit of delivery, thereby negatively impacting efficiency.

However, the scope of EQ4 is broadened with aspects of effectiveness, which is the extent to which the intervention achieves the expected results. This is logical since these two criteria are closely correlated between themselves, as well as with the criterion of impact. Improved effectiveness can (but not always) positively affect efficiency and vice versa.

Overall, the specific questions to elaborate EQ4 will look into aspects of cost, value for money, and timely delivery. These questions will work differently for the different interventions, hence they will be adapted to the specific projects and KIs.

Evaluation criteria covered:

Efficiency

Judgement criteria and indicators

³⁵ ToR, p. 31

JC5.1 Extent to which the EU-funded support was delivered efficiently: in a timely manner, with due attention to aspects of cost and value for money

I5.1.1 There is evidence, from project data and KI accounts concerning timeliness, possible delays, and the effects thereof (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

No relevant evidence emerged on any of the 6 projects to indicate lack of efficiency. Some of the projects did suffer delays due to external circumstances such as conditions related to Covid, and delays in the implementation of legislation (the new LSFS). These delays can be expected to have reduced the efficiency of the respective activities. Conversely, there is evidence of adaptability on the part of the grantees, which is evidence of efficiency, in addition to effectiveness.

Some of the projects benefited from efficiencies related to their procurement regulation (UNDP); they could use regular suppliers hence save the cost on procurement procedures in the difficult pandemic times.

The VAT exempt status (policy environment) also resulted with savings which were significant in some activities, specifically vouchers, allowing to reach more beneficiaries.

In many cases sub-grantees benefited from efficiencies resulting from various types of financial and non-financial support from local authorities.

For many of the CSO SSPs the good cooperation with local stakeholder, such as CSWs, police, schools, municipality, was a factor of efficiency. They could do things in timely manner and without delays.

Stringent admin and financial reporting requirements by the EUOK, and even more so by the Save the Children, were perceived by smaller sub-grantees as factors of inefficiency, in that they required a lot of time and energy from them. To the contrary, it could be argued, and it was argued by some stakeholders, that this was an essential component of their capacity building. In the words of a KIs, “some small sub-grantees were not even used to working on a computer”. The issue of the evolving bureaucracy in development programs is subject to a broader debate, which as such exceeds the scope of this report. Indicator value = Y.

I 5.1.2 There is evidence, from project data and KI accounts concerning aspects of costs and value for money (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

Ibid as I5.1.1 above.

EQ6 What have been the main impacts (at institutional, organisational, individual, socio-economic level) of past and on-going IPA assistance? Are there any elements which are/could hamper or boost the impact and/or sustainability of the assistance?

Rationale and coverage of the EQ:

EQ6 is designed to explore the aspects of impact. Impact is defined by the OECD DAC as the “extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.”³⁶ Evaluation is of course primarily concerned with identifying the positive effects, however it also keeps an open-eye to the possible downsides. The definition indicates that impact is about the “higher-level” effects, that is effects at the top of the results hierarchy. In other words, the inquiry into impacts is concerned with the positive and durable/sustained changes attributable to the intervention.

³⁶ ibid

EQ6 is concerned with impacts across the spectrum, including but not limited to impacts on the overall system, the specific institutions/organizations, the impacts on individual beneficiaries, all of which accrue at socio-economic level.

The assessment of impacts has to start from the planned/expected impacts of the individual interventions, as defined in the respective project proposals, and subsequently described in the project reporting. However, this evaluation, as discussed at the kickoff meeting, is not primarily concerned with comparing the separate impacts of the individual interventions in terms of more or less impactful, but in the key impacts of the program as a whole.

In this sense, the assessment of the multitude of various impacts the different intervention components will have had across the spectrum also has to be guided by the key interest/objective of the effort, and that is the improvement of the overall system of social protection.

In turn, the key purpose of this system is to produce specific outcomes for the final beneficiaries. These outcomes are defined in terms of reduced (risk of) poverty, income, employment, education, housing, health, safety, empowerment, and related.

Evaluation criteria covered:

Impact and Sustainability

Judgement criteria and indicators

JC6.1 Social well-being of key categories of beneficiaries, with particular focus on (previously) underserved categories, sustainably improved

I6.1.1 Project data, documents, and KI accounts confirm that the expected project outcomes (of the six grants) aimed at improved beneficiary well-being (defined in terms of income, employment, housing, health, safety, etc.) have materialized (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

Ibid as below

JC6.2 Quality and effectiveness (incl. reach, access, coverage) of social protection services sustainably improved

I6.1.1 Project data, documents, and KI accounts provide evidence of beneficiary satisfaction with service quality and effectiveness (assessed from available secondary data, i.e. project records, surveys, etc.) (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

No evidence emerged whatsoever on a possible lack of beneficiary satisfaction in any of the 6 grants and the sub-grants.

There is evidence that the services provided via the grants and the sub-grants were relevant/needed, and that they were well-subscribed and over-subscribed. There is evidence of waiting lists for services in a number of cases.

Secondary data record beneficiary satisfaction. There is evidence of robust policies for collecting beneficiary feedback, promoted in particular by Save the Children. Given that they managed the largest part of the sub-granting (47 licensed CSO SSPs), indicates that such policies were effectively promoted and that significant feedback was collected.

There is evidence that the sub-granting policies, in particular of Save the Children, contributed to services quality and effectiveness.

Indicator value = Y.

I6.1.1 Project data, documents, and KI accounts provide evidence that services have reached more people and that access for underserved categories has improved (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

Available data provides sufficient evidence that the requirements of I61.1 have been met.

Some of the interventions directly aimed to reach the most vulnerable and underserved (vouchers, subsidies, mobile clinics, non-majority communities, women, single parent families).

A number of the interventions were designed with the specific aim of expanding access and reach (mobile clinics, home care services, etc.).

There is ample evidence that the priority target population for most of the service interventions were the underserved, and that the EU support improved access.

Indicator value = Y.

EQ7 What are the key aspects of the EU interventions that should be promoted, replicated and sustained in the new social protection strategy, policies, initiatives and procedures? In responding, you will justify why and how to do so based on best practices seen, comments received or lessons learned resulting from the different interventions.

Rationale and coverage of the EQ:

EQ7 has its focus on the identification of best practices/models which can be “promoted, replicated, and sustained” at a policy level, that is, by including them in the new policy documents in the field of social protection. It is therefore to an extent concerned with what has worked well as a model, and at the same time with innovation, that is, were there any new solutions or approaches developed in response to needs in the field. As such, EQ7 intersects with most of the other questions in the evaluation framework, in particular with the questions concerned with effectiveness and impact.

Evaluation criteria covered:

Impact and Sustainability

Judgement criteria and indicators

JC7.1 Good practices have resulted from the supported interventions, and they are identifiable

I7.1.1 Project data and KI accounts indicate good practices (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

Data indicate to a number of effective practices which have been implemented. The evidence consists of converging views of stakeholders from different provenances. Non exhaustively: the sub-granting involving all licensed CSO SSPs done by a reputable organization (Save the Children), the support to CSWs, which have by a common account been subject to systematic neglect over the past decade, the renovation of CSW facilities, the CSW internships inserting young social workers, helping both the CSO and the licensing of young cadre, the digitalization, the CSO networking in the LSFS advocacy, etc. All of these practices have been considered effective and their continuation has been recommended.

Indicator value = Y.

JC7.2 There are clear and consistent views among key stakeholders on the most effective aspects of present and future EU support, and clear rationales for such views

I7.2.1 Project data and KIs provide confirmation, descriptive detail, and rationale (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

There is stakeholder agreement on certain key issues. For example that a combination of services and policy work should be supported, that CSWs should be supported, that larger government budget for social protection should be advocated, that the clarification of roles and responsibilities between the

central and local level should be supported, that the implementation of the new LSFS should be strongly supported.

At the same time there is no evidence of major stakeholder polarization over key issues. Most stakeholder, regardless of provenance and affiliation (central government, local government, CSO) hold consistent views on many key issues. This is relevant evidence of stakeholder agreement.

Indicator value = Y.

JC7.3 There are feasible recommendations for future interventions which can be effectively integrated with strategic and policy documents

I7.3.1 Project data and KIs provide confirmation, descriptive detail, and rationale (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

The available data do confirm the existence of feasible recommendation for future intervention. In the policy area this is first and foremost the implementation of the new LSFS. As regards institutional capacity, it is he further support to CSWs including equipment, digitalization, infrastructure, staffing, etc. Continued support for CSO SSPs is also recommended by majority stakeholders. Overall, there is clear data indicating to a general stakeholder agreement concerning future intervention.

Indicator value = Y.

EQ8 Which implementation arrangements or initiatives allowed to best redressing gender imbalances and what should be done to ensure their sustainability?

Rationale and coverage of the EQ:

EQ8 is primarily concerned with the issue of gender. However, the question original formulation in the ToR also extends to “inclusion” imbalances.

Adding the concept of inclusion, which is much broader, possibly dilutes the focus on gender. Thus, it is the **recommendation of this report** that the question is formulated to omit the concept of “inclusion” and hence keep an exclusive focus on gender.

That would sharpen its focus and result with more specific findings. Aspects of inclusion, understood as social inclusion, are already included in several of the EQs constituting the evaluation framework. The evaluation of gender, most commonly understood in terms of women equality, rights, empowerment, is a mandatory component of evaluation work, same as it is the integration of gender in development intervention.

Hence, the evaluation effort will look into how the EU funded interventions (6 grants) have integrated the issue of gender.

As a minimum this includes the gender numbering, that is, ensuring equitable participation by women, as well as integration of gender in the all monitoring, measurement and evaluation by having gender-disaggregated data (indicators).

It further includes meaningful gender responsiveness, in that it looks into whether the interventions go beyond mere numbers and consider the specific needs of women and girls, and equitably distribute the benefits.

The issue of gender will play out differently in the different interventions. Some of them were designed to benefit primarily women and girls (KWN), some benefited households, some provided services to individuals, and yet others promoted policies.

Therefore, the evaluation of gender will start from how these interventions were originally designed to integrate gender and will subsequently adapt the specific inquiries to the specifics of the interventions.

Evaluation criteria covered: Efficiency and Sustainability
Judgement criteria and indicators
JC8.1 Extent to which the interventions have integrated gender
<p>I8.1.1 Project data and KI accounts confirm that planned gender-related outcomes have materialized (Y/N)</p> <p><u>Evidence gathered/analysed</u></p> <p>There is relevant data which confirms and described the projects' specific efforts to integrate gender. Some of the project implemented by both grantees and sub-grantees focused first and foremost on women (KWN, most of the KNW sub-grantees; many of the Save the Children sub-grantees, etc.). Some of the projects had components which primarily targeted women (UNDP grant's biz support component for women; IOM's biz support for women from non-majority communities, etc.). Further, data confirms that other major interventions closely integrated gender; in the voucher distribution, gender was a strong selection criterion (advantage was given to women-led households). Data further confirms that gender was consistently applied as a criterion across the sub-granting, and implementation was closely monitored (for ex. sub-grantees had to elaborate what specific efforts they made to design gender-relevant services, make sure the services are relevant for girls, etc.). The efforts of sub-grantees to integrate gender were documented even when the work was not fully effective as it countered prevailing cultural norms (parent's would let boys into programs but not girls despite strong efforts by the implementer).</p> <p>In sum, there is relevant evidence that gender was consistently integrated across all the supported programs. Indicator value = Y.</p>

EQ9 What is the added value of IPA EU interventions, compared to what could be achieved by the Civil Society Facility and by the State alone, and what should be continued, discontinued or enhanced in both cases?
<p>Rationale and coverage of the EQ:</p> <p>EQ9 is one of the two questions, together with EQ10, which is concerned with the criterion of EU added value. The criterion of EU added value is defined as “the extent to which the intervention brings additional benefits to what would have resulted from Member States' interventions only in the partner country.”³⁷</p> <p>EQ9 has two sub-questions. The first one refers to added value from EU IPA interventions compared to what would have been achieved by the Civil Society Facility; the second refers to EU IPA interventions compared to what would have been achieved by the government alone.</p> <p>At conceptual level both sub-questions refer to the hypothetical counterfactual of <u>what would have happened in the absence of the EU IPA support</u>. The response to those questions automatically produces the answer on what is the EU added value.</p>
Evaluation criteria covered: EU Added Value
Judgement criteria and indicators
JC91. Extent to which the EU IPA intervention achieved results which in its absence would not have been possible

³⁷ Tor, p. 31

I9.1.1 KIs confirm there was no relevant substitute for IPA EU intervention (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

The available data confirm this indicator. The size of the EU support subject to evaluation, the number of beneficiaries it served, services it made possible, CSOs, CSWs and other organizations and institutions it supported, etc., in the overall context of social protection in Kosovo, all indicate that there was no relevant substitute.

There are other donors in the field of social protection. The World Bank works on reforming the SAS and it will invest significantly in support to CSWs. The around 50 licensed CSO SSPs benefit from support from a variety of other donors, including also from central government funding and additional local government support. The large international CSOs which are active in social protection, such as Save the Children, Tdh, as well as the multilaterals (UNICEF, UNDP, IOM) channel additional funding in the field.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the results achieved in the field of social protection in Kosovo in the previous period would not have been possible in the absence of the EU support. This supports the argument that no relevant substitute was possible. Indicator value = Y.

EQ10 What is the added value of EU support compared to what other donors have done or plan to do in the sector?

Rationale and coverage of the EQ:

EQ10 is a continuation of the previous EQ9. It asks what is the added value of the EU support compared to what other donors contribute. Thereat, the question asks that the analysis involves what other donors have done in the field in the previous period as well, what they plan to do.

The data required for the first sub-question is easier to obtain, as it refers to past activity. This can be collected from both KIs, as well as secondary data from many different sources.

The second sub-question on what other donors plan to do relies for data on more limited sources. The secondary data would include strategic documents of other donors, to the extent that they are public. The primary data would include KIIs with donor representatives.

The criterion of EU added value is fairly consistent with the criterion of coherence, which has therefore been omitted from the ToR. At conceptual level this question also refers to the hypothetical counterfactual of what would have happened in the absence of the EU IPA support. However, its exploration can also indicate to possible gaps or overlaps both in the past as well as in the future. Nonetheless, the power of the evaluation effort to provide precise indications for the future is limited by availability of data.

Evaluation criteria covered:

EU Added Value

Judgement criteria and indicators

JC10.1 Extent to which the EU IPA intervention achieved results which in its absence would not have been possible

I10.1.1 KIs confirm there was no relevant substitute for IPA EU intervention (Y/N)

Evidence gathered/analysed

Ibid as I91.1.1 above.

EQ11 Which implementation arrangements or initiatives most effectively integrated the relevant SDGs, the principle Leave No One Behind, and the Human Rights-Based Approach
Rationale and coverage of the EQ: EQ11 is the only evaluation question added by the consulting and this is done merely for reasons of format. These principles are already required by the ToR. The exploration of this issue will start from the design of the separate project (six grants) and will then look into the process of implementation.
Evaluation criteria covered: Effectiveness and Impact
Judgement criteria and indicators
JC11.1 Extent to which the interventions have included the indicated principles in their planning and implementation
I11.1.1 Project data and KI accounts provide confirmation and description (Y/N) <u>Evidence gathered/analysed</u> The available data indicates that most of the interventions comprising the six grants and the respective sub-grants had closely integrated the LNOB principle. The evidence clearly confirms that most of the interventions were designed to reach and support the most vulnerable, hard to reach, underserved segments of the population, including but not limited to PwD and in particular children with disabilities, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians and in particular RAE children, women victims of violence, single mothers, elderly without care, other victims of abuse, and so forth. The evidence also indicates that to a significant extent the interventions aimed to integrate the HRBA. Indicator value = Y.

Summary of the Data Collection Process for EQ 1-11

Judgement criteria information availability	
JC1.1 Extent of improvement of legal and policy framework	2
JC1.2 Extent of increase of number of social protection service providers, and amount of services provided	2
JC1.3 Extent of improvement of quality of social protection services	2
JC1.4 Extent of improvement of access to social protection services to socially excluded categories	2
JC2.1 Extent of established and improved coordination between sectors and fields where it was previously lacking (i.e. social protection, social assistance, employment, etc.)	2
JC2.2 Extent of established and improved case referral processes	1-2
JC2.3 Extent of reduction of service gaps and improvement of access for underserved groups due to improved coordination between institutions and CSOs	1-2

JC3.1 Extent of improvement of economic situation, income, employment/labor market prospects for relevant beneficiary categories	1-2
JC3.2 Extent of improved protection, safety, well-being of relevant beneficiary categories, with particular focus on most vulnerable groups (children at risk, PwDs, women at risk of violence, etc.)	2
JC4.1 Improved skills in relevant areas (i.e. related to key services/tasks, previously deficient skills, etc.)	2
JC4.2 Extent of improvement of work processes, methodologies (due to intervention in regulation, equipment, infrastructure, etc.)	2
JC5.1 Extent to which the EU-funded support was delivered efficiently: in a timely manner, with due attention to aspects of cost and value for money	2
JC6.1 Social well-being of key categories of beneficiaries, with particular focus on (previously) underserved categories, sustainably improved	2
JC6.2 Quality and effectiveness (incl. reach, access, coverage) of social protection services sustainably improved	2
JC7.1 Good practices have resulted from the supported interventions, and they are identifiable	2
JC7.2 There are clear and consistent views among key stakeholders on the most effective aspects of present and future EU support, and clear rationales for such views	2
JC7.3 There are feasible recommendations for future interventions which can be effectively integrated with strategic and policy documents	3
JC8.1 Extent to which the interventions have integrated gender	3
JC9.1 Extent to which the EU IPA intervention achieved results which in its absence would not have been possible	3
JC10.1 Extent to which the EU IPA intervention achieved results which in its absence would not have been possible	3
JC11.1 Extent to which the interventions have included the indicated principles in their planning and implementation	2
Legend: 0 (no evidence), 1 (some evidence), 2 (sufficient evidence), 3 (conclusive evidence)	

12. Annex 2. Detailed Findings per Clusters and Evaluation Questions

12.1. Efficiency

12.1.1. Factors of Efficiency

This section answers the following Evaluation Questions (EQ):

EQ 5. Which factors critically influenced the efficient implementation/delivery of the EU-funded support? Which potential actions would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of future interventions, including actions on the administrative and organizational setting?

Overall, the implementation of the EU-funded support is assessed at a high level of efficiency. According to data collected from grantees' reports and KIIs, the 6 (six) grantees have managed to implement their actions in line with the respective approved agreements with EUOK. The outputs were attained, and resources were used according to the goals set.

The grantees have developed best practices to ensure transparent, effective and efficient project management with high quality and timely delivery of the project outputs. The grantees were mobilized and regularly consulted all relevant stakeholders to mitigate potential challenges in the delivery of the outcomes of the respective Actions.

There were capable teams on board at each of the grantees' sides for the implementation since the start of the EU-funded actions. The good communication, coordination and defining of the roles and responsibilities among the project partners along with the good collaboration with the main stakeholders (state and non-state ones.) made implementation easier.

The availability and interest of the key stakeholders have been satisfactory based on the high attendance at all events and activities (on-site and online). The key stakeholders have closely cooperated with the implementing team and have provided the necessary inputs for the completion of activities.

The funding and the budgetary modalities were adequate to cover the implementation needs and human and financial resources were assigned in a balanced way. All parties made available their resources, including human ones, data, and reports on the state of affairs of social services. Spending overall was in line with the budget.

The Covid 19 pandemic and the tense and volatile political situation in the country were two main factors that influenced the implementation/delivery of the EU-funded support bringing some challenges to the implementation of the EU-funded supported project.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, no substantial issues have occurred in implementing the activities. Overall, the EU-funded supported actions have responded timely and accordingly to the COVID-19 pandemic by introducing modified implementation methods and budget reallocations. Interviews with Grantees and sub-grantees confirmed that there is no evidence of a break in the provision of support services from grantees/sub-grantees during COVID-19, primarily due to their flexibility and quick response after the pandemic's outbreak.

The KIIs confirmed the commitment and willingness of grantees to adjust activities to the new situation and to ensure that the actions assist the most vulnerable end users. The grantees showed a high level of adaptability to these new circumstances. They quickly adapted to the online modality of delivering training sessions, providing remote assistance to sub-grantees, and organizing high-level events and conferences online, which is assessed as efficient.

The political situation in the country throughout the implementation of the EU-funded support was an important factor that influenced the implementation of the EU-funded actions and caused some challenges.

The emerging political shifts and changes in government structure, the transition of MLSW within the MFLT and MoJ, as well as municipal elections led to significant changes in the responsible structures, and staff turnover that influenced the regular flow of the Actions.

The frequent change in the high-level management of the Ministries was not a facilitating factor. These changes affected particularly the work related to the support for the development/review of the legal framework (i.e. LLGF and LSFS) and advocacy-related activities.

The two general elections held during the implementation period made it difficult for the grantees to effectively lobby and advocate with the Members of Parliament and to progress with the approval of the two laws during the first couple of years of the intervention.

For example, there were some delays in the implementation of UNDP-planned activities due to the elections of October/November 2021. These delays include the digitalization of case management derived from Administrative Instructions and suspension of identification of beneficiary households for the Voucher Support Scheme, and the establishment of the National Council for approval of social workers' licenses.

The administrative delays by the government to finalize the new LSFS and the draft LLGF affected various consecutive interdependent processes related to these two policymaking processes.

Also, some of the priorities of the MFLT for 2021 were announced to the Save the Children project team, and were presented to EU representatives as well to be implemented in advance of the initial plan. Considering the importance of adapting the course of action in line with the needs of beneficiaries and institutional capacities of the duty-bearers, the Action agreed to support also some activities that were not initially planned – i.e. the capacity-building training of formal and informal service providers, as well as the representatives of the General Council for Social and Family Services; CSWs.

Nevertheless, the grantees managed to ensure that activities were carried out regardless of government changes by continuous “pressure” on management structures and these challenges didn't affect the achievement of EU-funded support results.

The grantees were able to intensify communication with international actors and the parliament. The grantees, i.e. KOMF, Save the Children managed to successfully approach the new Government with recommendations for improving social protection, particularly for the most vulnerable and marginalized ones affected by the pandemic and established a partnership with the newly formed Council of Ministers as well as the high-level management of line ministries. The Grantees managed to closely coordinate the resources, communication and workflow with all key stakeholders (state and non-state ones), thus reaching the final outcome targets of the EU-funded support.

Close, constant, and very effective cooperation and consultation were held by EUOK with Grantees and sub-grantees. Input from them is taken into account for national initiatives, management (No-Cost Extension and reallocation of funds), mitigation strategies for working under COVID-19 circumstances, etc.

The grantees and SG established and enhanced cooperation with other local CSOs working in the same field by advancing their capacities in supporting end beneficiaries and trust building. Reports and interviews indicate very significant support for CSOs that serve the most vulnerable groups - rural women, ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities.

There is evidence of efficient cooperation between civil society both at the national and local level through exchanging experiences and best practices. The cooperation is assessed as very helpful to local organizations (ones with less experience) in framing and implementing the activities, cooperation with partners and better outreach.

The EU-funded support has invested in efforts to involve all relevant institutions in its implementation process. Significant efforts have been made to bring the topic of social protection, social care services and social inclusion into the focus of institutions.

It is assessed by the evaluation that the Grantees used a fine mixture of local and international expertise. International expertise was engaged when different and new perspectives, methodologies, and practices were considered beneficial for the advancement of knowledge and information of local stakeholders. Meetings and participation in several conferences and regional events are reported with the presence of diverse international actors where the Actions, research findings and recommendations were promoted and opportunities discussed for cooperation on joint advocacy related to social protection.

The review of relevant documents provided by grantees and sub-grantees informs that project activities were mostly implemented in compliance with the proposed and amended budget. Some necessary reallocations were supported by some of the grantees, which provided organizations (sub-grantees) with professional support in the process of budget restructuring.

Interviews held and data collected from KIIs informed that financial procedures (which are based on the European Commission's requirements) were too demanding for some CSOs. All SG interviewed (through KIIs) highlighted the valuable support from Grantees, i.e. KWN, and Save the Children in terms of financial management and reallocations.

Considering the complexity of reallocation procedures (following the European Commission's rules and procedures), several grantees and sub-grantees had to elongate the period of implementation of the planned activities. Nevertheless, this did not have a significant impact on the overall success of the project implementation. The evaluation confirms that Grantees are well-capacitated organizations that managed to be flexible (as much as the procedures allowed) so that project activities would not be delayed due to procedural reasons. This understanding was especially expressed during unforeseen COVID-19 circumstances.

12.1.2. Considerations of System Efficiency

The issue of system efficiency, or in other words the overall efficiency in the system of social protection, has to do with the amount of resources spent for achieving results. It is also about the optimal distribution of the current/available resources in the system. There are factors which can increase system efficiency, that is, make the system produce the same results with less resources. And vice versa. Several issues are worth mentioning in this regard.

The current reform of the SAS lead by the World Bank, is expected to increase system efficiency. It is common knowledge that at present the cash benefits are not distributed in the optimal way and that the current model discourages labor market activation of the vulnerable recipients. In simple terms, many persons who should be in the labor force, choose to stay out of it just to preserve the SAS benefits. People decline job offers because they would lose the SAS. This is only one aspects of the inefficiency of the current SAS model. SAS reform would propel people into the labor force and concurrently reduce the number of SAS beneficiaries. This would release resources which could be spent elsewhere in the system.

There is stakeholder recognition that social services sometimes overlap. For example, a city may have several day centers for children with disabilities, or a region may have several women's shelters. The opposite is of course also both possible and likely. That a town or a region does not have a provider of a critically needed service. Most of these services are donor funded and the overlap results from lack of coordination. Of course, having two provides of the same service in a city is not necessarily overlap. Sometimes maybe even two providers are not enough to meet all the need. However, overlaps are possible and this produces inefficiency. Planning the amount of service needed at local and regional level, can

contribute to improved efficiency. It can also improve sustainability. For example, if a region instead of 3-4 shelters has one larger shelter, which is sufficient to meet the needs, more resources will be available for this shelter, and the services it provides will be more sustainable. **The core argument is that efficiency can be improved through coordination and planning based on relevant data.**

Some stakeholders have indicated that certain services can have counter-effect, specifically point to the proliferation of kitchens for the poor. Their argument is that such a service (free food) if not targeted carefully can cause dependency and prevent work-able poor from looking for work. Whereas this is a delicate argument, since depriving the most vulnerable of a meal is not an optimal solution, it indicates to the balances at stake when designing and delivering services.

Stakeholders indicate the lack of coordination in the system, related to the lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities of key actors. This is subject to a discussion at several times throughout this report since it is a critical issue. The concern is that of effectiveness. A system which is poorly coordinated does not work well. However, a related issue is that of efficiency. Such as system does not allocate resources efficiently. Thus, **improving the coordination with the system, and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of specific actors would lead to improved efficiency.**

The model of splitting the municipal directorates for health and welfare into two separate bodies is discussed in this report as a good model which strengthens the effectiveness of municipal work in social protection. However, this model can be considered from the point of view of efficiency. Increased effectiveness will often (but not always) result with improved efficiency as well. A separate body for social protection has stronger focus on key priorities, which can be expected to result with improved action. In a final run more will be achieved with the same resource, which is a definition of efficiency.

In conclusion, the preceding section discusses several unrelated issues which emerged from the discussions with the stakeholders. Some of them are observations of specific realities in the field at present. Some of them have the nature of recommendations or considerations, both general and more specific. The common tenet is that all of them have to do with efficiency in the system of social protection in Kosovo.

12.1.3. Focus on World Bank Work on SAS Reform

The current World Bank project for reform of the SAS is aimed at complete overhaul of the social protection transfers. Around 22 thousand families in Kosovo who benefit from the Social Assistance Scheme (SAS). By a common account, the current SAS model suffers from a number of shortcomings which prevent labor market activation of the vulnerable groups, specifically the requirement to suspend the cash benefit even if the SAS beneficiary obtains short-term or seasonal employment. This model perpetuates the labor market inactivity of the poor, even though the labor market would benefit from higher activity rates. The current SAS model suspends the cash assistance for families as soon as their children reach the age of five, thereby encouraging families to have small children all the time, which clearly exacerbates the poverty severity of already poor families, and it further precludes the women labor market activity. These are just a couple of the deficiencies of the SAS model in Kosovo which are well-recognized in the public debate.

The World Bank project whose implementation is expected to be completed by the end of 2026, will expectedly result with a thorough reform of the SAS, which will in turn promote labor market activity and employment of the most vulnerable citizens.

The World Bank project also aims to fully digitalize the SAS process, whereby applicants and beneficiaries will only be required to present an ID, as opposed to the abundant paperwork they need to collect at present.

In addition, the World Bank project will invest in the capacity of the CSWs in Kosovo. It will provide vehicles, equipment, and will temporarily pay for additional staff.

Given the scope of the World Bank project, which is full overhaul of the SAS, and its size (est. 47 million Euros), it is important that related interventions in the field of social protection are coordinated with it in order to prevent overlap.

The other key issue is the coordination of the SAS with the social protection policy concerning services, and the delivery of social services themselves. The EU support in the field of social protection in Kosovo in the previous period has been channeled in service delivery and in policy and advocacy which have also mainly focused on social services.

The key issue is how to coordinate the social transfers (SAS) with social services. It is clear that the SAS recipients, as the poorest social strata in the country, are likely candidates for other social services, which they may not receive due to the lack of coordination with the SAS. It is also clear that **the effects of the cash transfer would be better if it is complemented with services which, for example, promote enrolment and performance of children in education, support the elderly, prevent and protect from DV, and related.** These are only some of the arguments related to the issue of coordinating the SAS with social services.

At present, by a common account of most stakeholders, such a coordination does not exist or it exists sporadically and from case to case. Even the two parts of the CSWs, the one dealing with the SAS and the other, working on social services, generally have very little coordination. This has been confirmed by a number of KIs across the spectrum and it is generally undisputed. There is also no evidence of systematic coordination between the CSO service delivery and the SAS.

Promoting coordination between the (reformed) SAS and the social services has the potential to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall system. As such, this issue needs to be high on the policy agenda.

This issue is connected to a number of related issues such as the **digitalization of the social services work of the CSWs, the effective mapping and documenting of needs and available services at the local level, the prioritization of social protection interventions at the local level, the coordination between the different parts of the social protection system, including the CSWs, CSOs, municipalities, and ministries.**

12.1.4. Focus on Need of Data

At present Kosovo does not have a national strategy for social protection, since the previous one has expired. Most of the municipalities in Kosovo, with the exception of a few larger ones, do not have local strategies and or action plans for social protection. Some of the stakeholders indicated that a positive trend has been observed in the recent period whereby municipalities have started producing local plans to guide their effort in social protection.

The need of a national strategy and local action plan for social protection have been indicated by a number of stakeholders. The belief is that this would define priorities and coordinate the effort at both national and local level. In addition, it is expected that it would increase the commitment of local government to social protection and possibly augment resources.

Related to the issue of lack of strategic documents, a number of stakeholders indicated to a lack of data in the field of social protection. This lack of data concerns both data on needs as well as data on available and delivered services.

According to a stakeholder, “every municipality should have an action plan for a 4-5 year period; the majority do not have them; in order to produce an action plan, they first need to map the needs which exist.”

Similarly, “...we need action plans for each municipality, and based on these action plans they should prioritize the measures. Somewhere it may be disability, elsewhere it may be violence, or the elderly...; and we need better data, evidence; we cannot design policies without it.”

According to another view, “...we need to know the needs in each municipality...there is data on the 22 thousand families who benefit from the SAS, but there is not data on social services; we do not know if they need houses for the elderly, ...the needs can be different, it can be GBV, elderly, disability....” And in a consistent view, “data are the key problem, how do you develop a policy if you do not have data...”.

Overall, there is clear recognition in the professional community of the need of better data and evidence as basis for policy development.

The argument about the need of data is commonly associated with the local, municipal level. The argument is that the data is needed to know the situation locally. This somewhat spontaneously indicates that the data mapping should be done locally. This may be interpreted that each municipality does it on its own, that is, that each local mapping is independent of others.

This report **recommends that a nationally coordinated mapping is considered**. This would ensure that it is done consistently, based on the same variables, across all municipalities. It would also ensure a central dataset which could then be periodically updated with data. Should the need arise to add or change variables, that could also be done centrally and apply to all municipalities. The model would also allow the inclusion of variables which are municipality – specific, in that they are of relevance to only certain municipalities. This model of course does not preclude individual efforts at municipal level, but it has the advantage of comprehensiveness and efficiency. This effort could be a part of the broader effort to develop the national strategy, or it could be a separate exercise.

To the extent possible this data should be integrated or be consistent with the data collected by the CSWs in their regular social services delivery work.

12.1.5. Focus: CSW Digitalization

A specific area of need of concern to the CSWs is the digitalization of their work processes in service delivery. Whereas the World Bank SAS reform project will digitalize the SAS-related work processes, the CSW work related to the social services is not part of this. According to stakeholders, digitalizing the case management of the CSWs will improve their efficiency.

Stakeholder accounts indicate that at present a significant part of the work processes are not digitalized, that records are paper-based which makes tracking and searching difficult, that the databases which do exist are not connected, and that the digital templates which do exist are often not used.

Part of the UNDP project which is subject to this evaluation did have a component which aimed to promote partial digitalization of the case management work of CSWs. This is a further confirmation of the need. The project supported the development of the required AIs, whereas the software was to be subsequently developed by the government.

Digitalization of the CSW case management work is a relevant need and it would significantly contribute to the overall efficiency of the system of social protection.

The recommendation is that the options for digitalization of the CSW case management are explored after the completion of the World Bank project.

Digitalization is related to other aspects of the system, such as number of staff in the CSWs, equipment, trained staff, and so forth. Thus, all of these aspects need to be assessed before digitalization is pursued. Ideally, the effort for digitalization should not be partial but comprehensive.

12.1.6. Gender

EQ 8. Which implementation arrangements or initiatives allowed to best redressing gender imbalances and what should be done to ensure their sustainability?

The Evaluation team has assessed that the EU-funded support (all 6 actions), has effectively embraced the principles of gender. All 6 EU-funded actions have been instrumental in fostering a more equitable society, reducing discrimination, and ensuring that development interventions effectively meet the needs of all individuals, regardless of gender identity.

There is relevant data which confirms and described the projects' specific efforts to integrate gender. Some of the project implemented by both grantees and sub-grantees focused first and foremost on women (KWN, most of the KWN sub-grantees; many of the Save the Children sub-grantees, etc.).

Some of the projects had components which primarily targeted women (UNDP grant's biz support component for women; IOM's biz support for women from non-majority communities, etc.).

Further, data confirms that other major interventions closely integrated gender; in the voucher distribution, gender was a strong selection criterion (advantage was given to women-led households).

Data further confirms that gender was consistently applied as a criterion across the sub-granting, and implementation was closely monitored (for ex. sub-grantees had to elaborate what specific efforts they made to design gender-relevant services, make sure the services are relevant for girls, etc.).

The efforts of sub-grantees to integrate gender were documented even when the work was not fully effective as it countered prevailing cultural norms (parents would let boys into programs but not girls despite strong efforts by the implementer).

In sum, there is relevant evidence that gender was consistently integrated across all the supported programs.

Each of the 6 actions has been carefully designed to acknowledge and address the specific needs, priorities, and experiences of individuals based on their gender identities. Right from the outset, these actions have demonstrated a commitment to understanding and challenging prevailing gender norms, roles, and relationships. This involves conducting thorough gender analyses and baseline assessments to inform targeted interventions.

Collecting sex-disaggregated data and examining how the project may affect gender roles, access to resources, power dynamics, and social norms has been part of the design process for the majority of the grantees. This understanding has helped them identify potential inequalities or disparities that may arise due to gender.

Inclusivity has been a cornerstone of these initiatives, with all grantees striving to ensure that individuals of all genders have an equal say in the design and implementation processes. Gender-sensitive objectives have been set across the respective projects, with some actions specifically focusing on empowering women and challenging gender stereotypes.

Furthermore, gender-responsive measures have been integrated into each of these interventions, encompassing tailored services and training programs that address the diverse needs of men, women, and minorities. Robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks, incorporating gender-sensitive indicators and methodologies, have been put in place to track progress and identify areas for improvement.

Several grantees, including organizations such as KWN and Save the Children, have undertaken proactive measures to enhance the understanding of gender issues among project staff and partners. This has facilitated the mainstreaming of gender considerations into all aspects of project design, implementation, and evaluation.

Collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, CSOs, and community groups, has been instrumental in advancing gender equality goals. **By leveraging expertise and resources, at both International and national level, these actions have been able to amplify their impact and advocate for policy changes that promote gender equality, i.e. joint thematic forums, conferences, capacity building programs, etc.**

The EU-funded support has been closely aligned with the EU Gender Action Plan 2021 – 2025, focusing on accelerating access to social services and empowerment practices for women, girls, boys, and men in Kosovo. Efforts have also been directed towards addressing gender-based violence and mitigating the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, with a particular emphasis on providing support for survivors and promoting their independent living.

12.2. Effectiveness

12.2.1. Contribution to Strengthening the Social Protection System

EQ 1. To what extent have the EU interventions contributed to strengthening the social protection system that was in place (policy, legal framework, delivery procedures, cooperation and complementarity between the institutional and CSOs-led services, etc.)? What were the main factors contributing to this enhancement?

EQ 1 is further elaborated through several interrelated questions:

12.2.1.1 Extent of Improvement of the Legal and Policy Framework

The EU-funded support has played a significant role in improving Kosovo's legal and policy framework relevant to social protection, with significant contributions from both KOMF and Save the Children. Particularly, KOMF has been instrumental in advancing the legal framework by collaborating with the MLSW and the MoF from 2019 to 2021 to draft two key pieces of legislation governing social services: the LSFS and the draft LLGF (KOMF's involvement supported the incorporation of the Specific Grant for Social Services). These laws represent crucial milestones in Kosovo's social services decentralization process, focusing on reforming the social services system and decentralizing the budget for social services.

All of KOMF's efforts regarding the legal framework stem from a comprehensive analysis conducted early in the project's implementation.

In 2018, KOMF conducted an in-depth analysis of social services, drafting a baseline "Research Report on the Impact of the Decentralization Process" to serve as the first step for the advocacy initiatives.

Several workshops with the assigned working groups for drafting the respective laws have been supported with technical resulting in the development of the preliminary version of the LSFS and a specific article for the establishment of a Special Grant for Social Services proposed to be incorporated in the draft LLGF.

Due to ongoing political instability, national elections, and delays in forming a new government, the approval of the LSFS was delayed for approximately four years, finally receiving approval in December 2023. Furthermore, the combination of the tense political situation and the pandemic hindered the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare from advancing the finalized draft LLGF.

However, with the installation of a new government and president political stability in the country was improved. Consequently, the KOMF's focus shifted towards lobbying Members of Parliament to include the two draft laws on the agenda of parliamentary committees and plenary sessions for approval.

KOMF played an important role in advocating with the central government authority during 2022, respectively the MFLT, to proceed with the approval of the legislation, for the completion of the decentralization process.

Furthermore, KOMF has also supported during 2022 the drafting of the social services contracting scheme instruments and tools, to ensure capacity building of local stakeholders for the implementation of the new legislation.

KOMF has also supported the development of annual monitoring reports on the implementation of the social services decentralization process which were considered strategic documents that stand at the core of the advocacy efforts to move forward the improvement of the legal and policy framework. In this frame, annual monitoring reports on social services decentralization were produced regarding the implementation of the social services decentralization process in 7 targeted municipalities³⁸, including the Municipal Department for Health and Social Services and CSWs and civil society in each of them as well as representatives of central level from Ministry of Labour and Social welfare.

Save the Children has also been a key player in the improvement of the legal and policy framework relevant to social protection in the country. During 2020 - 2021, in close cooperation with MFLT, Save the Children has provided support to develop the draft Administrative Instruction (AI) on Monitoring and Controlling Social and Family Services and the draft Project Regulation for the Unit of Social and Family Services within the DSFP of MFLT.

The current draft Administrative Instruction and draft Project Regulation consisted of the relevant articles from the new LSFS. As such, the MFLT has committed to aligning the key social service principles among these three legislative pieces, to reflect the required sectoral coordination necessary for the delivery of services and shared responsibilities of mandated duty-bearers. Manuals for Foster Care, Kinship Care, Adoption and Residential Housing for the MFLT were also developed in 2022 as part of the Action implemented by Save the Children.

Additionally, the Action contributed to the process of digitalization of the case management procedures, by drafting four Operational Manuals and Working Forms for four Administrative Instructions for Foster Care, Kinship Care, Adoption and Residential Housing.

The main factors contributing to the above-mentioned enhancement of the legal and policy framework include the provision of technical resources and expertise and guidance on best practices from the grantees; collaboration with the key stakeholders; advocacy and lobbying efforts; comprehensive analysis and research; adaptation to political context; and capacity building.

There is evidence of the confirmation/agreement by the key stakeholders that the produced laws, policies and strategic document will further strengthen the social protection system.

The new changes in the LSFS are considered very important making the law quite advanced and in line with the best practices of other countries in the region and Europe. The following are considered the most important changes made in this law which are expected to further strengthen the social protection system in Kosovo, respectively:

- Defining the types of social services, empowering prevention and integration services - the LSFS envisages a reform regarding the provision of social services, by defining the prevention, protection, rehabilitation and reintegration services, as well as by classifying them into three categories/ levels, thus guaranteeing the right to social services for all children and persons in need of social services, regardless of the level of urgency or risk;

³⁸ Including: Prsitina, Fushe Kosova, Lipjan, Ferizaj, Prizren, Peja and Kamenica

- Organizing social and family services (empower an open-type scheme for offering of services between the public and non-governmental/private providers): This is expected to particularly bring changes regarding sub-contracting and/or outsourcing of alternative care services toward non-governmental and private institutions and pursuing the partnership development policy between the service providers coming from public authorities and the non-governmental organizations, thus establishing an open-type and sustainable scheme of cooperation and funding for social services.
- Integration of social and family services with health and education services. This will result in increased collaboration between the social and healthcare sectors—more focus will be on identifying and recording vulnerable cases within the municipality. Professional social workers are also expected to be hired within educational and health institutions and/or a number of current health and educational professionals specialize in social areas through training and capacity building.
- Developing and empowering family services and community-based services, reforming the types of protection. This is expected to positively impact the development and strengthening of the family services and community-based services, as well as increase the forms of protection by i) Developing foster care after reaching the age of 18; ii) Developing the protection form of “Supervised Independent Living”.
- Increase the quality of services. It is expected that the new LSFS category of service beneficiaries; ii) Accreditation of programs for social services training and continued education, according to the profiling; iii) Licensing of public services offered by CSW, licensing of entities (non-governmental and private sector) and social workers.
- Accountability, the new LSFS envisages: i) a clear definition of reporting and monitoring mechanisms; ii) empowering of inspection/establishing independent inspection; applying measures, fines and sanctions; iii) monitoring and external evaluation made by the nongovernmental and private sector.

The draft LLGF is expected to support funding of social services; establishing the Specific Grant for Social Services, financing according to the social indicators and the number of beneficiaries.

While all key stakeholders agree that the new amendments to both laws represent progress and will further strengthen Kosovo's social protection system, concerns persist regarding the current capacities of both national and local governments. These concerns relate to both human and financial resources necessary to effectively implement the new legislation, especially regarding the LSFS.

12.2.1.2 Focus: Services vs Policy

The EU support for social protection in Kosovo in the previous period was a combination of measures supporting services and policy & advocacy. The significantly larger share of the total support was allocated for supporting services. The projects implemented by PEMA, UNDP, IOM, KWN, and Save the Children, predominantly involved support for services. The project implemented by KOMF, and smaller parts of the projects implemented by UNDP, KWN, and Save the Children had focus on policy & advocacy. A strict distinction between a service and a policy component within a project is possible but it is not always relevant. Projects which are predominantly services oriented might have an intertwined policy focus. In some cases, the delivery of services, for example training, and the policy work may be fully blended, such as for example when the training aims to prepare organizations and institutions to implement a certain policy. In sum, the largest part of the EU support subject to this evaluation was allocated for services.

A key question of interest for the forthcoming period is how much of the EU support should be for supporting policy vs. services.

A basic finding of the evaluation is that a significantly large share of the social services delivered in Kosovo are funded by international donors. This includes women’s shelters, day centers for persons with disability, various child centers, services for the elderly, various services for marginalized persons, services for victims of abuse, and so forth. Whereas quality is expected to differ across providers, the finding of this evaluation

is that many of these services, including those which have been partially or fully funded through the EU support for social protection, are of high quality.

The key shortcoming of this model of social services delivery is of course the lack of sustainability. Donor funding is time-bound, often short term, and cyclical. It is often allocated through a competitive process, which requires the CSOs which provide social services, to dedicate resources to apply for funding in continuity, without a guarantee that they would obtain it. CSOs are in a constant count-down to the expiry of funding. Put succinctly by a stakeholder, “this makes the system for social protection unsustainable”. When funding decreases or expires, CSOs are forced to scale down or to completely suspend services. Sometimes they re-establish them if they get new funding, and sometimes they do not. Specifically, at the time of this evaluation, on the grantees, PEMA, and its partner Shpresa were in the process of shutting down four-day care centers for PwDs and a child shelter in Pristina. These centers have been operating for the past 10-15 years, for a lot of this period thanks to EU funding. PEMA indicated that they have got EU funding 7 times over the past 15 years. The shutting down of services which have run for over a decade, with all the related consequences for the beneficiaries, families, and communities, as well as for the professionals which have invested themselves, is quite illustrative of the deficiencies of the system.

Over the past period public funding allocated to this end has increased. The central government at present provides 1.5 million Euros to the around 50 licensed CSOs providing social services. The amount was increased from 1 to 1.5 million Euros just recently. Many municipalities, in particular the larger and financially healthier ones, have also been increasing their support, by providing free of charge space, covering utilities, and also providing financial support. However, the public support for social services delivered by CSOs is at present not sufficient.

This issue is central to the social service delivery in Kosovo at present. In the words of a stakeholder, “if donors were to pull out, the system would grind to a halt”. This issue has multiple ramifications across the system, including for quality of services, standards, cooperation between government and CSOs, policy implementation and so forth. Discussing all of these issues as they relate to the financial sustainability of social services providers exceeds the scope of the report. However, the issue of sustainability of CSOs social services providers (CSO SSPs) is closely related to the question of what should the EU fund in the field of social protection in Kosovo in the forthcoming period. This is an issue of central interest to this report. Further elaborated, the question can be phrased as follows: should the EU provide more support for services or policy & advocacy? The question was systematically posed to a large number of the stakeholders who were interviewed for this evaluation and the conclusion is unambiguous. Literally all stakeholders argued that the EU should continue to support services at least over a transitional period. Some of the stakeholders justified this with the consequences of withdrawal of donor support from social services: “it would put the system in a state of clinical death”; another argument was that that the county is at critical transition juncture, with the recent adoption of the LFSF, and that “the EU should continue to fund services until the system is consolidated”. This argument of transitional support until the system is consolidated, was put forth by quite a few stakeholders. Most stakeholders agreed that the support should be a combination of funding for services and policy. Quite a few of the stakeholders volunteered (without being elicited) a proposed ratio of support to services vs policy. In all cases the ratio was in favor of services in the order of 80:20, or 70:30. It has to be indicated that in reviewing these arguments, the evaluators had in mind the positional bias of stakeholder. It is expected that a stakeholder coming from a CSO involved in services delivery would argue in favor of support for services, and vice versa. Hence the cited ratio proposals are indicated by stakeholders who are considered to not be affected by such bias. However, the ratio expectedly derives from the experience of stakeholders who have a general understanding of the cost of services vs. policy work. Thereat, some of the stakeholders argued for efficiency in policy work. In the words of one KI, “we do not need the same policy documents over and over again”, and similarly, “we got lost in an ocean of documents”.

The argument against donor and EU support for services is clear. This creates and perpetuates government complacency. In addition, it is clear that no single donor can continue to fund the same thing permanently. It is expected that once government capacity and proper policy framework is developed, the government will take over the responsibility.

The weighing of these arguments in favor and against donor support for social services produces the stakeholder position that the EU should continue to support social services over a next transitional period. The argument being that the government is just not there yet, ready to fully take on the responsibility.

Summed up by a stakeholder, "...there is still need for services. Ten years ago Bulgaria was similar to Kosovo today, but they resolved it. We still need support until we reach a point where we have a government budget and we can contract services; it would take 3-4 years. Until then we still need to fund CSOs."

12.2.1.3 Extent of Increase of Providers and Services

A significant share of social services was facilitated through sub-grants allocated by two EUOK grantees, namely Save the Children and Kosovo Women's Network. These sub-grants enabled specialized services to be provided to assist different vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Local stakeholders confirmed that EUOK funding expanded the range of specialized services available at the local level, thereby reaching out to vulnerable and marginalized individuals and promoting their social inclusion.

The program played a pivotal role in reducing service gaps and enhancing access for underserved groups by fostering improved coordination between local institutions and CSOs.

Sub-grantees have also acknowledged a notable enhancement in the delivery of specialized social services to diverse vulnerable and marginalized groups—a provision that was previously lacking prior to EU support.

As of September 1st, 2022, KWN reported a total of 997 beneficiaries were reached, comprising 785 women/girls and 212 men/boys. Among these beneficiaries, 39% were youth (under 30), 1% were people with disabilities, 46% were living in rural areas, and 25% belonged to ethnic minorities. This achievement indicator is calculated based on data provided by 11 organizations³⁹ that submitted mid-term reports by September 1st, 2022.

Based on the reports submitted by all sub-grantees as part of the Save the Children's Action, a total of 8,182 people: 3,225 children (1,520 girls and 1,705 boys) and 4,957 adults (3,369 women and 1,588 men) received psychological and psychosocial services, counselling, physiotherapy, group therapy, parent support, recreational activities, cognitive and educational support, as well as shelter; 2,548 people with disabilities: 1,021 children (372 girls and 649 boys) and 1,527 adults (769 women and 758 men) received professional services while 1,472 survivors of violence; 723 children (380 girls and 343 men) and 749 adults (697 women and 52 men) amidst safe sheltering enhanced their psychological wellbeing.

The sub-granting scheme implemented as part of the EU-funded support (mainly from KWN and Save the Children) supported a total number of 74 CSO service providers in their efforts to respond to local needs, as follows:

39 NGO Violete, NGO Medica Kosova, NGO Femrat Aktive te Gjakoves, Organizata për Hulumtime Juridike dhe Sociale-OMNES, Shoqata për Edukim dhe Përkujdesjen e Familjes-SHEPF, NGO CECD Friends, Handikos Mitrovica, Institute for dialogue and non-discrimination-IDND, NGO Zana, NGO Foleja, and Center for Protection and Rehabilitation of Women and Children-Liria)

- 28 CSOs have been supported by KWN, from which 17 were CSOs, 9 shelters, 2 focused on disability rights and 5 focused on minorities (directly linked to GAP III, objectives 3 and 7 indicators).
- 47 eligible CSOs - social service providers were supported by Save the Children.
- 40 CSWs were also supported by Save the Children's Action to strengthen their working relationships with the CSOs/service providers.

As a result, they improved their ways of working in the joint provision of social services, as a network of integrated services that responds to the needs of persons living in the most vulnerable conditions and remote locations.

Extent of improvement of quality of social protection services

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with beneficiaries have confirmed that they have benefited from high-quality social services.

Additionally, project reports highlight the enhancement in the quality of social services, as perceived by beneficiaries. For instance, data from the baseline study conducted by Save the Children indicates that 58% of social service beneficiaries expressed satisfaction with the services provided. Furthermore, end-line reports reveal a notable increase in beneficiary satisfaction levels regarding the quality of social services.

12.2.2. Cooperation Between Institutions and CSOs

EQ 2. Has cooperation/coordination between institutional and CSO-led services improved and to what extent is it sustainable? What were the main factors contributing to this improvement and sustainability?

The effectiveness of collaboration between CSOs and institutional bodies at the local level is remarkable. CSOs have a very good partnership with CSWs and the Directorates of Social Services (DSWs) at the municipal level.

The EU-funded support has been instrumental in fostering a robust collaboration between CSOs and CSWs, resulting in a streamlined and improved referral system. CSWs primarily serve as efficient referral points, referring cases in need of services to CSOs, the primary service providers in Kosovo.

Local stakeholders widely confirmed the effectiveness of the enhancements in referral processes, particularly in areas where CSOs are actively engaged in delivering direct support services. The coordination between institutional and CSO-led services is considered not only effective but also sustainable, ensuring that individuals in need receive timely and appropriate assistance.

CSWs, recognizing their limited capacity to provide direct services, have effectively transitioned into referral structures, focusing on efficient case registration and prompt referral to CSOs. These CSOs, equipped with extensive expertise in social protection, have become trusted partners of CSWs and municipal authorities, ensuring a high level of effectiveness in service delivery.

The KIIs confirmed that approximately 90% of social services, including specialized interventions like specialized therapies, etc., are effectively managed by CSOs, demonstrating their proficiency and reliability in meeting diverse needs.

CSWs efficiently fulfil their role as custodians/guardians, effectively handling procedures related to adoption, child welfare, and family law matters. However, for cases requiring specialized expertise, such as child labor, abuse, violence, and drug abuse, CSWs demonstrate effectiveness by promptly referring individuals to CSOs, ensuring that vulnerable populations receive the specialized support they require

Furthermore, through financial support provided to sub-grantees, the implemented initiatives have effectively strengthened the network of service providers, including CSWs and CSOs, resulting in improved case management and expanded outreach efforts to vulnerable populations in remote areas.

Coordination meetings, workshops, and round tables have effectively facilitated collaboration between CSWs and CSOs, contributing to broader service delivery and outreach efforts, and further demonstrating the effectiveness of EU-funded support in strengthening social protection mechanisms in Kosovo.

12.2.3. Contribution to Social Cohesion

EQ 3. To what extent have the EU interventions contributed to greater social inclusion, cohesion, reintegration and empowerment of the vulnerable people targeted? What were the key factors contributing to this enhancement?

Key KIIs and project documents confirm the effectiveness of EU-funded support in enhancing social inclusion, cohesion, reintegration, and empowerment among targeted vulnerable groups.

Through six EU-supported Actions, the specific needs of vulnerable populations have been effectively addressed, showcasing tangible effectiveness in fostering social inclusion and cohesion. These interventions have embraced comprehensive and integrated approaches, ensuring increased efficacy in reaching vulnerable populations.

Furthermore, tailored assistance has been provided to address the diverse needs of different vulnerable groups. By comprehensively understanding the specific challenges faced by various communities, these interventions have effectively tackled barriers to social inclusion and facilitated empowerment among the targeted populations.

Active community engagement and participation have been integral components throughout the implementation of the six actions.

By actively involving local communities in decision-making processes and project design, EU-funded interventions have cultivated a sense of ownership and responsibility, thereby amplifying effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes. By using participatory approaches such as community meetings, focus groups, and participatory assessments, these interventions have ensured responsiveness to local needs and expectations. Community-based organizations have played a pivotal role in fostering dialogue, mobilizing resources, and fostering social cohesion within local communities.

EU-funded interventions have not only effectively promoted social rights but have also facilitated equal access to essential services for vulnerable populations in Kosovo. By systematically addressing barriers to access and advocating for the rights of marginalized groups, these interventions have significantly contributed to reducing poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, thereby amplifying their overall effectiveness.

12.2.4. Contribution to Capacity of Main Stakeholders

EQ 4. *To what extent have the EU interventions contributed to enhance the capacities of the main stakeholders (CSOs, Ministries, CSWs, municipalities, etc.)? What was missing or what should be continued?*

CSOs have significantly enhanced their capacities through EU-funded support, particularly those benefiting from the sub-granting scheme, which includes grant management, advocacy, lobbying, communication, and visibility efforts.

This scheme is considered pivotal in increasing CSOs' capacities through a hands-on learning approach. Collaboration between the main grantee and sub-grantees has been instrumental in leveraging mutual interests, sharing experiences, and pooling resources towards common goals and fostering continuous learning.

Both grantees and sub-grantees affirm the program's effectiveness in facilitating learning and networking among CSOs. It has facilitated connections with relevant government stakeholders at local and central levels and fostered cooperation among CSO partners. The importance of capacity-building elements such as mentoring, training, technical assistance, and guidance for project operations cannot be overstated.

In particular, KOMF's Action has played a vital role in empowering civil society to advocate for the decentralization process. Beyond advocacy and communication capacities, the Action has supported The GCP in fundraising and volunteering, aiming for sustainable civil society development. Technical support provided to the Association of Kosovo Municipalities, focusing on the Collegium on Health and Social Welfare and League of CSWs, as two important actors in the decentralization process and being important partners of the consortium advocating for the decentralization, has been significant.

KWN's capacity-building efforts with sub-grantees encompass various areas including project cycle management, monitoring and evaluation, communications, financial management, advocacy, and resilience to emergencies like COVID-19.

Save the Children has also contributed to capacity-building by training public sector officials on gender equality and social inclusion indicators in social protection policies and supporting MFLT in digitalizing case management processes.

While the EU-funded support has invested in enhancing the capacities of state authorities, challenges persist, especially regarding high staff turnover rates at the local level. Additionally, continuous support for the capacity improvement of CSOs is also essential, covering areas such as project management, reporting, advocacy, networking, communication, financial management and other related technical with a specific focus on the provision of quality social services.

12.2.4.1 Focus on Municipal Capacity

Municipalities are a critical link in the system of social protection in Kosovo. With the decentralization in 2009, the competencies in social protection were given to the local level, whereas the central level retained the monitoring and inspection. The municipal directorates for health and social protection have the mandate over social protection and they are responsible for the CSWs.

The overall weakness of the social protection system is reflected at the municipal level. Stakeholders argue that municipalities do not sufficiently exercise their competencies in the field of social protection, and/or that they do not give them the proper attention.

In most of the municipalities, with the exception of a few larger ones, social protection is managed jointly with health by a Directorate for Health and Social Welfare. Stakeholders have argued that the directorates usually focus most of their energy and attention to health, thereby sidelining social protection. In the words of a KI, "it is usually 95% health and 5% social protection". Stakeholders agree that the municipalities which have divided the directorate into two separate bodies, one for health, and the other for social protection, have managed to perform better in the latter. According to stakeholders, the prerogative for dividing the directorate rests with the mayor and the division is feasible from a regulatory, procedural point of view. The argument is that a separate department for social welfare will have an exclusive focus on the key issues and priorities.

It has further been argued that in many, in particular smaller, municipalities, these departments comprise just a few staff who usually do not have the requisite background and experience in the field of social protection, and are subject to high staff turnover resulting from changes in the political leadership of the

municipality. In the words of a KI, “we try to work with the municipalities, but the mayor changes and we start all over again; a municipality which did well backslides...”

An argument which has been put forth by quite a few stakeholders is that many municipalities do not have clear understanding of their competencies in social protection. This lack of knowledge subsequently translates into lack of commitment and focus. As argued by a KI, “many mayors did not even know that the CSW is under their mandate”. Similarly, according to another KI, “we keep asking the municipality to create a separate budget for social services; they keep saying they do not understand their competencies in social protection; for some of the services, such as for shelters, PwDs, they keep saying the responsibility is with the central level.” This view has been quite consistent among stakeholders (who do not work for municipalities). As argued by another KI, the lack of municipal intervention in social protection is “due to lack of money, but also due to lack of will. Social services are municipal competence, and it is their discretion how much money they allocate, and [this is why] the quality of services differs across municipalities; they decide on the budgeting; they would benefit from some advice on how to budget for social services; they want to spend more money on asphalt. This is why we need a formula; then they will have to spend according to the formula.”

12.2.5. Critical Factors Influencing Implementation

EQ 5. Which factors critically influenced the efficient implementation/delivery of the EU-funded support? Which potential actions would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of future interventions, including actions in the administrative and organizational setting?

Two main factors influenced the efficient implementation/delivery of EU-funded support, respectively Covid 19 pandemic and tense and unstable political situations.

The COVID-19 pandemic situation caused several challenges for the implementation of 6 Actions, i.e. some delays in the implementation of projects due to lockdowns, travel restrictions, and disruptions to supply chains could have caused delays in the implementation of projects; adaptation of project activities to comply with COVID-19 – restrictions, reallocation of funds, as well as some challenges regarding stakeholders’ engagement such as local communities or government officials due to restrictions on gathering or limited access to certain areas.

The tense and unstable political situation in Kosovo has also influenced the implementation of EU-funded projects, affecting policy stability, operational effectiveness, social cohesion, security, cooperation, and governance capacity.

Recent changes in central-level structures, specifically at the ministry level, have received criticism from almost all related actors, both at the central and local level as well as CSOs. The restructuring of central-level institutions has not only created a sense of uncertainty and dissatisfaction among stakeholders but also disrupted established procedures, particularly those directly impacted by social protection measures. Some of the local government bodies and CSOs feel excluded from the decision-making process regarding these changes, with no consultation or communication provided to the general public.

The decision to close down the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) is perceived as a not good decision, which is expected to affect the reduction of focus on social protection initiatives. Transferring social protection responsibilities to the Ministry of Justice is seen as problematic, considering the complex challenges faced by Kosovo's justice system. This decision is anticipated to have adverse effects, particularly on the support received by CSOs in terms of financial assistance and the monitoring of social services quality.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice now faces the additional burden of managing social protection issues with limited staff, potentially compromising the quality of services provided.

As per the information received from the KIIs, changes in administrative structures (mainly the ones related to the transfer of the social assistance scheme to the Ministry of Finance) have also led to alterations in procedures, particularly concerning the distribution of social assistance. This lack of synchronization with government information has caused numerous issues for community members relying on social assistance schemes.

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from government authorities, CSOs, donors, and international partners to ensure there are clear roles and responsibilities of each involved party as well as ensure that social protection initiatives effectively reach those in need despite the prevailing political context.

12.2.6. Added Value of EU Support

EQ 9. What is the added value of IPA EU interventions, compared to what could be achieved by the Civil Society Facility and by the State alone, and what should be continued, discontinued or enhanced in both cases?

The available data confirm the added value of the EU support. The size of the EU program subject to evaluation, the number of beneficiaries it served, the services it made possible, CSOs, CSWs and other organizations and institutions it supported, etc., in the overall context of social protection in Kosovo, all indicate that there was no relevant substitute.

There are other donors in the field of social protection. The World Bank works on reforming the SAS and it will invest significantly in support to CSWs.

The around 50 licensed CSO SSPs benefit from support from a variety of other donors, including also from central government funding and additional local government support.

The large international CSOs which are active in social protection, such as Save the Children, Tdh, as well as the multilaterals (UNICEF, UNDP, IOM) channel additional funding in the field.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the results achieved in the field of social protection in Kosovo in the previous period would not have been possible in the absence of the EU support. This supports the argument that no relevant substitute was possible

Overall, the strategic alignment of all 6 actions with EU values, effective stakeholder engagement, and leveraging of synergies reflect their significant EU-added value in advancing social protection in Kosovo.

The Action has demonstrated significant EU-added value through its establishment of robust partnerships, efficient knowledge transfer, and strategic stakeholder engagement. This has been particularly evident in its ability to align with the EU's core values, fostering civil society empowerment and policy dialogue with state institutions. By building upon previous efforts and avoiding duplication of activities, the Action has effectively maximized the impact of EU funding.

The EU-funded support has acted as a catalyst for increased engagement from national and local authorities as well as other key related stakeholders in Kosovo, amplifying the project's reach and effectiveness. Moreover, the Action's coordination with other EU-funded initiatives, such as those implemented by IOM, UNICEF and the World Bank, highlights its ability to leverage synergies and optimize resources to address pressing societal challenges, especially those exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the collaboration among the 6 supported actions as well as with other agencies underscores its commitment to coherence and synergy, further enhancing the impact of EU program funding in Kosovo. By addressing gender-based violence and supporting gender-responsive budgeting initiatives in alignment with the EU's Gender Action Plan III, the EU funded support demonstrates its commitment to advancing EU priorities and values.

12.2.7. Comparison to other Donors

EQ 10. What is the added value of EU support compared to what other donors have done or plan to do in the sector?

The added value of EU-funded support stands out in several key areas compared to other donors, as follows:

Response Coordination and Collaboration: The EU-funded interventions promoted effective coordination and collaboration among various stakeholders involved in the social protection area in Kosovo. By establishing coordination mechanisms and facilitating information sharing and joint planning, EU-supported initiatives ensured a more cohesive and integrated response.

Expansion and improvement of social services – The EU-funded support has been particularly focused on ensuring basic services; strengthening accessibility to social services and personal protective equipment for front-line workers to mitigate the effect of the pandemic; strengthening the financial and institutional system and legal framework to improve the quality and accessibility of social services; strengthening social cohesion and minority inclusion; support to women, making this intervention comprehensive and significantly effective particularly in regard to provision of tailored and qualitative social service.

Advocacy for Vulnerable Groups: The EU-funded Actions have effectively advocated for the rights and needs of vulnerable groups. Through targeted advocacy efforts, EU-supported initiatives raise awareness about the unique challenges faced by marginalized communities, persons with disabilities, children in need of protection, survivors of GBV, the elderly, etc., contributing to policy changes and measures that protect their rights and ensure equitable access to essential services. This advocacy enhances the effectiveness of interventions in addressing the specific needs of vulnerable populations.

Capacity Building for Effective Response: The EU-funded support provided significant capacity-building support to strengthen the social protection system. By offering tailored capacity-building training and enhancing the technical skills of social workers and frontline personnel in providing effective responses to people in need of protection, EU-funded capacity-building initiatives ensure a more efficient and coordinated response to social protection-related issues.

12.2.8. Principles: SDGs, LNOB, and HRBA

EQ 11. Which implementation arrangements or initiatives most effectively integrated the relevant SDGs, the principle Leave No One Behind, and the Human Rights-Based Approach?

The EU-funded support has been effective in integrating the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 3, 5, 10, 16), the principle of Leave No One Behind (LNOB), and the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) within the context of social protection interventions related to capacity building, advocacy, service provision, empowerment and response to the COVID-19 situation.

The available data indicates that most of the interventions comprising the six grants and the respective sub-grants had closely integrated the LNOB principle.

The evidence clearly confirms that most of the interventions were designed to reach and support the most vulnerable, hard to reach, underserved segments of the population, including but not limited to PwD and in particular children with disabilities, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians and in particular RAE children, women victims of violence, single mothers, elderly without care, other victims of abuse, and so forth.

The evidence also indicates that to a significant extent the interventions aimed to integrate the HRBA.

By enhancing the skills of stakeholders, amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, improving service delivery, and adapting programs to meet emerging needs, the EU-funded initiatives have contributed to building inclusive and resilient social protection systems that uphold the rights and dignity of all individuals in Kosovo. More specifically:

By providing targeted and tailored capacity-building training in social protection-related issues and response management, these initiatives enable the related stakeholders, mainly the frontline workers to effectively respond to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and social protection-related issues while upholding human rights principles, thus contributing to the effectiveness of social protection interventions.

The EU-funded interventions have managed to effectively amplify the voices of marginalized communities, including the ones most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, advocating for policies and measures that protect their rights and ensure equitable access to social protection services. Through targeted advocacy campaigns and engagement with policymakers, these efforts promote inclusivity and leave no one behind, enhancing the effectiveness of social protection interventions in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations.

The effectiveness of EU-funded interventions is demonstrated through the improved provision of essential social protection services, including the ones in response to the COVID-19 crisis. By funding the provision of basic services, the EU-funded initiatives ensure timely and adequate support to vulnerable populations, strengthening accessibility to social services as well as Strengthening social cohesion and minority inclusion.

Regarding the human rights-based approach (HRBA) principles, the following can be concluded:

- **Participation:** Inclusive meetings for possible beneficiaries to engage with the EU-funded interventions have enhanced participation and provided citizens with access to information. Local organizations have been targeted for the promotion of multi-stakeholder participation as well as women and men.
- **Accountability:** A systematic publication of information on websites, social media, TV is recognized as important to enhance accountability. Engagement of CSOs in monitoring the implementation of legislation, and ensuring that indicators reflect human rights, are ways of strengthening an accountability focus.
- **Transparency:** All 6 Actions, mainly the ones applying the sub-granting scheme, demanded a high level of internal transparency of its partners. In combination with the application of sound tender processes and procurement procedures, this facilitates the promotion of transparency. A constant flow of information and news on websites and social media helped promote transparency (and accountability).
- **Non-discrimination:** A specific focus on being inclusive is a way of addressing non-discrimination, e.g. efforts to include socially excluded target groups, i.e. minorities and people with disabilities. Keeping the focus on human rights, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable people, and direct support to cases in need, facilitated a focus on non-discrimination. The evaluation found a proactive approach to ensure the participation of ethnic minorities too.

12.3. Impact

12.3.1. Introduction

Overall, the impact of the EU-funded support, with a specific focus on legal and policy changes, social services provision, capacity building, advocacy, empowerment of vulnerable groups, and response to COVID-19, has been instrumental in strengthening the social protection system and promoting the well-being of all individuals, particularly during times of crisis.

Policy and legal changes supported by the EU-funded interventions will have a lasting impact in favor of strengthening the social protection system in Kosovo. Support of institutions is consolidated for permanent changes addressing social protection-related issues.

Lasting policies and practices for reporting, referring, and addressing cases of people in need of protection are established by institutions through EU-funded interventions. All 6 actions have deepened the cooperation of CSOs with government institutions at the central and local level.

Based on the project reports of the Actions and interviews conducted, the report concludes that the Action managed to:

- **Improve Social Services Provision:** Through EU-funded support, Kosovo has witnessed an improvement in social services provision, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding has ensured that essential social services remain accessible, contributing to better social protection for all individuals, especially during crises.
- **Increase capacities of key stakeholders:** The EU-funded capacity-building initiatives have strengthened Kosovo's social protection workforce, enhancing their skills to effectively respond to emerging challenges, such as those posed by COVID-19. Training programs have focused on prevention and protection measures and response management, enabling frontline workers to deliver quality services and support to vulnerable populations in need of protection.
- **Advocacy and Empowerment:** The EU-supported projects have empowered vulnerable groups by advocating for their rights and needs, particularly amidst the COVID-19 crisis. Advocacy efforts have raised awareness about the specific challenges faced by marginalized communities, persons with disabilities, children in need of protection, victims of GBV, the elderly, etc., leading to policy changes and measures that protect their rights and ensure equitable access to essential services. This empowerment fosters inclusion and participation, ensuring that vulnerable groups have a voice in decision-making processes.
- **Response to COVID-19:** The EU-funded interventions have enabled Kosovo to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic through targeted interventions. Adaptation of social protection programs has ensured continuity of care and support, with the introduction of innovative service delivery models such as online counselling services. Additionally, voucher support and food aid provided to families facing economic hardship due to pandemic-related restrictions have alleviated immediate needs, promoting social resilience and protection.
- **Enhanced Support for Vulnerable Groups:** The EU-funded initiatives have provided tailored support to vulnerable groups, addressing their specific needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes targeted assistance for persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, children in need of protection, and victims of GBV, ensuring they have access to essential services and support. By prioritizing vulnerable groups in response efforts, the EU-funded interventions have contributed to reducing disparities and promoting equity in social protection outcomes.

12.3.2. Contribution to Social Cohesion

EQ 3. To what extent have the EU interventions contributed to greater social inclusion, cohesion, reintegration and empowerment of the vulnerable people targeted? What were the key factors contributing to this enhancement?

The EU-funded interventions have led to measurable advancements in the social inclusion of vulnerable people, such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, victims of GBV, children in need of protection, etc. Through targeted social protection programs, these groups have experienced enhanced access to essential services like psycho-social support, specialized therapies, etc. resulting in increased participation in social and economic spheres.

There is clear evidence that the interventions which aimed to provide additional income (vouchers, subsidies) to the most vulnerable families during the Covid pandemic, were strongly effective. Support was provided to over 9.500 families recipients of SAS, with particular focus on women-led, single-parent households.

The evidence also indicates that the interventions which aimed to provide employment for beneficiaries (part of IOM project, part of UNDP project) were effective.

Stakeholders generally agree that the improvements resulting from these interventions were meaningful.

The data also indicates to relevant improvements in outcomes for key categories of beneficiaries. The EU support covered all licensed CSO social service providers (CSO SSPs) in Kosovo for a period of 1.5 – 2 years during the critical time of the pandemic and in its follow up. In many cases, the EU support precluded decline in social outcomes for beneficiaries which would have resulted from discontinued services in the absence of EU support.

The data indicates that most of the services provided by the CSO SSPs were well-subscribed, and often oversubscribed. Many of the services managed waiting lists of beneficiaries. There is absolutely no evidence which would put in question the relevance or the effectiveness of any of the services.

These interventions have increased social cohesion by fostering intergroup solidarity and cooperation among diverse communities in Kosovo. By facilitating social dialogue mechanisms and community engagement initiatives, EU-supported interventions have mitigated social divisions and fostered a sense of social solidarity, thereby fostering greater unity and inclusivity within society.

The EU-supported capacity-building and skill-enhancement initiatives have effectively facilitated the reintegration of marginalized individuals into the societal framework. Through targeted economic empowerment actions, vulnerable populations have been equipped with the requisite skills and competencies to reintegrate into the labor market, fostering economic self-sufficiency and social inclusion.

Empowerment of vulnerable groups is also ensured by advocating for their rights and enhancing their participation in decision-making processes. By supporting policy reforms and legislative measures that safeguard the rights of vulnerable populations, the EU-supported initiatives have empowered individuals to assert their rights and demand equitable access to social protection services and opportunities.

The EU-supported initiatives have increased the accessibility of social services and infrastructure for vulnerable groups. By strategically allocating resources to community centers, educational institutions, and infrastructure, these efforts have notably improved access to vital services for vulnerable communities. Consequently, their resilience and overall well-being have been enhanced, enabling them to better confront socio-economic obstacles.

12.3.3. Contribution to Capacity of Main Stakeholders

EQ 4. To what extent have the EU interventions contributed to enhance the capacities of the main stakeholders (CSOs, Ministries, CSWs, municipalities, etc.)? What was missing or what should be continued?

Available data indicates that part of the projects involved components which directly aimed at strengthening the skills of key institutional stakeholders: Save the Children, UNDP, KOMF provided training, UNDP worked on partial digitalization of case management in CSWs; UNDP also provided volunteers in the CSWs; the policy work conducted by KOMF involved either direct or indirect education on key novel concepts from the new LSFS.

As described above (in the effectiveness section), the EU-funded interventions have significantly enhanced the capacities of key stakeholders, including CSOs, Ministries, CSWs, municipalities, and other relevant institutions. The impacts of these interventions on capacity enhancement can be observed as follows:

- **Strengthened Institutional Capacities:** EU-funded interventions have led to a notable strengthening of institutional capacities among stakeholders. Through targeted capacity-building initiatives and technical assistance, the line ministries, CSWs, and municipalities have enhanced their ability to design, implement, and monitor social protection programs effectively. This has resulted in more efficient service delivery and improved responsiveness to the needs of vulnerable populations.
- **Enhanced Collaboration and Coordination:** By facilitating joint initiatives, working groups, and task forces, the EU-funded interventions have promoted a culture of cooperation, leading to improved information sharing, resource mobilization, and joint problem-solving. This collaborative approach has **resulted in more cohesive and integrated social protection strategies and interventions.**
- **Improved Policy Dialogue and Advocacy:** Through platforms for dialogue and engagement, CSOs, line ministries, and other institutions have been able to advocate for policy reforms, address emerging challenges, and promote the interests of vulnerable populations more effectively. This has **resulted in the development of more inclusive and rights-based social protection policies and practices.**
- **Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups and Local Institutions:** Through capacity-building initiatives, advocacy support, and investment in community-led initiatives, CSOs, municipalities, and other stakeholders have been empowered to advocate for the rights of vulnerable populations, strengthen their organizational capacities, and promote community participation and accountability. This has resulted in **more inclusive and sustainable social protection interventions tailored to the needs of local communities.**

Despite the progress being made, more needs to be done for the improvement or continuation of the capacity-building of main stakeholders in the social protection area, particularly regarding the sustainability of capacity-building efforts; tailored training programs; focus on emerging issues and best practices; promotion of leadership and innovation.

12.3.4. Critical Factors

EQ 5. Which factors critically influenced the efficient implementation/delivery of the EU-funded support? Which potential actions would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of future interventions, including actions on the administrative and organizational setting?

Please refer to EQ5 under the Efficiency and Effectiveness section.

12.3.5. Main Impacts Across Levels

EQ 6. What have been the main impacts (at institutional, organizational, individual, and socio-economic level) of past and on-going IPA assistance? Are there any elements which are/could hamper or boost the impact and/or sustainability of the assistance?

The past and ongoing IPA assistance in Kosovo, particularly amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, has generated significant impacts across multiple dimensions, including institutional, organizational, individual, and socio-economic levels, as follows:

- **Institutional Impact:** IPA assistance has played a crucial role in strengthening the institutional capacity of key stakeholders, particularly during the COVID-19 response. By providing technical assistance, training, and resources, IPA support has enabled government ministries, agencies, and local authorities to effectively coordinate and implement pandemic response measures. This has included strengthening the social protection system, enhancing emergency response mechanisms, and ensuring the continuity of essential services amidst the crisis.
- **Organizational Impact:** Amidst the pandemic, IPA assistance has empowered CSOs to play a pivotal role in advocacy and service provision. Through capacity-building initiatives focused on pandemic response, CSOs have been equipped to advocate for the rights and needs of vulnerable populations, provide essential services such as food aid, and psychosocial support, and foster community resilience during the COVID-19-related challenges.
- **Individual Impact:** IPA assistance has directly impacted individuals by addressing their urgent needs and vulnerabilities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through targeted interventions in social services provision, vulnerable individuals and communities have received essential support, including access to food assistance and emergency relief. Additionally, capacity-building efforts have empowered individuals to adapt to new challenges and uncertainties, enhancing their resilience and ability to cope with the impacts of the pandemic.
- **Socio-economic Impact:** The socio-economic impacts of IPA assistance have been particularly pronounced amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. By supporting economic recovery initiatives, livelihood restoration programs, and social protection measures, IPA assistance has contributed to mitigating the adverse effects of the pandemic on livelihoods, employment, and household incomes. Additionally, investments in infrastructure and digital connectivity have facilitated remote work and online service delivery, supporting economic resilience and recovery efforts.

By persistently prioritizing the enhancement of national social protection policies, supporting systemic capacity-building and evidenced-based advocacy initiatives, and refining the quality of social service provision, IPA interventions can consistently generate favorable outcomes in further strengthening the social protection of vulnerable and marginalized communities.

12.3.6. Key Aspects to Promote

EQ 7. What are the key aspects of the EU interventions that should be promoted, replicated and sustained in the new social protection strategy, policies, initiatives and procedures? In responding, you will justify why and how to do so based on best practices seen, comments received or lessons learned resulting from the different interventions.

The key aspects of the EU-supported interventions that should be promoted, replicated and sustained in the new social protection strategy, policies, initiatives and procedures, include the following:

- **Provision of social services in continuity.** Continuity in the provision of social services is crucial for maintaining stability and safeguarding the well-being of vulnerable populations. It ensures consistent access to essential services, prevents long-term consequences, fosters trust in service providers, and promotes economic stability by offering vital support during times of crisis or

uncertainty. Considering that the majority part of social services is provided by CSOs and the current level of CSO-delivered social services available in Kosovo is to a significant extent thanks to donor funding, a reduction or suspension of donor funding will directly result in a reduction of interruptions of social services delivered by CSOs. In this sense, donor investment in social services should continue at least over the midterm, transitional period, until the Kosovo government, both central and local, is available to scale up its support. These investments should primarily support proven, long-standing service delivery programs.

- Ensure a focus on policy support. Ensuring a focus on policy support is paramount for effective implementation and coordination in addressing societal challenges. It fosters accountability, transparency, and adaptability to change, all of which are essential for achieving lasting social impact and promoting sustainable development in social protection initiatives. Considering the development in Kosovo, the focus of the policy support should be for the implementation of the new LSFS. Significant training and capacity building will be required to kick-start the implementation of the law.
- Targeted and holistic approach: Best practices indicate that targeted interventions are more effective in reaching vulnerable populations and addressing their specific needs, while **integrated support programs** generate better outcomes by addressing multiple dimensions of vulnerability simultaneously. By focusing resources on those who are most in need and providing a holistic package of services, we can maximize the impact of social protection programs, ensure that limited resources are utilized efficiently, address the underlying causes of poverty and vulnerability, and promote long-term resilience. This can be achieved by conducting thorough needs assessments and utilizing data-driven approaches to identify and prioritize target groups.
- Coordination and Collaboration: The importance of coordination and collaboration among relevant stakeholders at various levels is crucial in avoiding duplication of efforts, maximizing synergies, and ensuring coherence and complementarity of interventions. Working more consistently with institutions at the national level to identify more sustainable ways and modalities for providing direct support services; maintaining the provision of services provided by the Program's support and gradually handing over such services to the relevant institutions would be important. By fostering partnerships and coordination mechanisms, the EU interventions can leverage expertise, resources, and networks to achieve greater impact and sustainability.
- Capacity Building: Best practices highlight the critical role of capacity building in strengthening the institutional and human resource capacity of relevant stakeholders to effectively deliver and manage social protection programs. By investing in training, technical assistance, and institutional strengthening initiatives, the EU interventions can enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of social protection efforts.
- Evidence-Based Decision Making: Best practices underscore the importance of evidence-based decision-making in guiding the design, implementation, and evaluation of social protection interventions. By collecting and analyzing data on program performance and impact, the EU interventions can identify what works, what doesn't, and why, allowing them to make informed decisions, optimize resources, and improve outcomes over time.
- Community Engagement: Best practices emphasize the importance of community engagement in ensuring the relevance, acceptability, and sustainability of social protection interventions. By involving local communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs, the EU interventions can tailor initiatives to meet their specific needs and preferences, build trust and ownership, and enhance the effectiveness of interventions.
- Flexibility and Adaptability: the EU-funded interventions confirmed that flexibility and adaptability are key to ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of social protection interventions in dynamic and evolving contexts. By designing programs with built-in flexibility, monitoring changing needs and circumstances, and making timely adjustments as necessary, it can be ensured that interventions remain responsive and adaptive to the needs of beneficiaries.

- **Innovation and Learning:** Fostering a culture of innovation and learning in social protection interventions remains important in continuously improving effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance. By piloting innovative approaches, and systematically capturing and disseminating lessons learned, the EU interventions can drive continuous improvement and innovation in social protection programming.

12.3.7. EU Added Value

EQ 9. What is the added value of IPA EU interventions, compared to what could be achieved by the Civil Society Facility and by the State alone, and what should be continued, discontinued or enhanced in both cases?

IPA EU interventions in Kosovo, with a particular focus on social protection, have demonstrated significant added value in several key areas. Firstly, **they have mobilized substantial resources, enhanced the operational capacity of social protection initiatives and improved service accessibility and quality.** Secondly, these interventions have **advanced technical capacity and expertise among local stakeholders, leading to improved program efficacy and service delivery efficiency.** Thirdly, **they have fostered cross-sectoral collaboration, promoting synergistic partnerships and comprehensive service provisioning models.** Additionally, IPA EU interventions have **aligned Kosovo's social protection programs with EU standards and norms, strengthening credibility, legitimacy, and institutional convergence.** Overall, these interventions have contributed substantially to Kosovo's social welfare objectives and EU integration aspirations, positioning the country closer to EU membership while significantly improving the well-being of its citizens through enhanced social protection measures.

12.3.8. Comparison to Other Donors

EQ 10. What is the added value of EU support compared to what other donors have done or plan to do in the sector?

The EU's support in Kosovo's social protection programs has had a profound impact, adopting a holistic approach that encompasses various critical elements such as financial assistance, technical expertise, policy alignment, capacity building, advocacy, social service provision, economic empowerment, and response to COVID-19.

This comprehensive strategy has effectively addressed the diverse needs of vulnerable populations, promoting long-term sustainability and resilience within the sector. Additionally, the sustained funding and commitment from the EU support have provided stability and continuity, facilitating strategic interventions and the development of resilient social protection systems, thereby enabling economic empowerment initiatives for vulnerable groups.

Moreover, the EU's emphasis on capacity building and institutional strengthening within Kosovo's social protection sector has significantly enhanced the skills and capabilities of local stakeholders, enabling them to design, implement, and evaluate programs more effectively.

This focus on capacity building has fostered local ownership and ensured the sustainability of interventions over time. Furthermore, alignment with international standards and best practices has reinforced principles of equity, inclusivity, and human rights, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of service delivery.

Through substantial financial resources and responsive measures to COVID-19, the EU's support has **catalyzed transformative changes within Kosovo's social protection sector, driving sustainable development and fostering inclusive growth.**

12.3.9. Principles: SDGs, LNOB, HRBA

EQ 11. Which implementation arrangements or initiatives most effectively integrated the relevant SDGs, the principle Leave No One Behind, and the Human Rights-Based Approach?

The EU-funded interventions have had a significant impact in supporting gender-responsive actions, aligning with SDGs, the principle of Leave No One Behind, and the Human Rights-Based Approach. These actions have ensured that social protection programs effectively address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls while promoting their empowerment and gender equality.

Moreover, initiatives fostering stakeholder engagement with a gender focus have played a pivotal role in integrating SDGs and the principle of Leave No One Behind. By facilitating collaboration among government agencies, CSOs, international partners, and affected communities, these initiatives have addressed gender disparities in social protection policies and programs.

Capacity-building programs focusing on gender mainstreaming within the social protection sector, supported by EU interventions, have been instrumental in integrating SDGs and human rights principles. By enhancing practitioners' skills and capabilities to mainstream gender considerations into program design, implementation, and monitoring, these programs have ensured that interventions effectively address the specific needs of women and girls, thus promoting their empowerment. These initiatives have ensured that interventions are gender-responsive, effectively address gender inequalities, and promote women's empowerment at the grassroots level.

Furthermore, prioritizing gender-disaggregated data collection, analysis, and monitoring of social protection indicators, as supported by EU interventions, has been crucial for identifying gender disparities and tracking progress on gender equality goals. This approach has enabled the design of evidence-based interventions that effectively promote women's empowerment and gender equality within social protection programs.

Overall, integrating a focus on gender equality alongside SDGs, the principle of Leave No One Behind, and the Human Rights-Based Approach is essential for promoting inclusive, equitable, and rights-based social protection systems that advance the well-being and empowerment of all individuals, regardless of gender.

12.4. Sustainability

12.4.1. Cooperation Between Institution and CSOs

EQ 2. Has cooperation/coordination between institutional and CSO-led services improved and to what extent is it sustainable? What were the main factors contributing to this improvement and sustainability?

Cooperation and coordination between institutional bodies responsible for social protection and CSOs, facilitated by EU-funded support, has significantly improved, leading to more robust and sustainable social protection outcomes. This advancement is evidenced by increased collaboration in delivering social services, joint advocacy campaigns to address social protection-related issues, and collective strategies aimed at promoting gender equality and social inclusion.

The following factors influenced the sustainability of cooperation and coordination mechanisms between institutional bodies and CSOs within Kosovo's social protection programs:

- **Legal and policy frameworks:** The EU-funded interventions have continuously advocated and supported the improvement of the legal and regulatory frameworks that recognize the role of CSOs in social protection, mainly in the provision of social services, ensuring the sustainability of cooperation initiatives by further improving the social protection system.

- **Institutional Support:** The EU-funded interventions ensured strong support to governmental institutions for establishing sustainable partnerships with CSOs by advocating for more sustainable allocated resources and establishing formal cooperation frameworks that prioritize social protection objectives.
- **Capacity Building:** The capacity building initiatives equipped both institutional bodies and CSOs with the necessary skills and expertise to further improve social protection policies, programs, and service delivery mechanisms.
- **Transparent Communication:** Transparent communication channels fostered by the EU-funded interventions have facilitated meaningful dialogue and cooperation between institutional bodies and CSOs, enabling them to address social protection-related issues, gender disparities and promote women's empowerment.

Despite progress, challenges persist in ensuring the sustainability of cooperation and coordination between institutional bodies and CSOs within Kosovo's social protection programs.

Limited financial and human resources pose challenges to sustainable cooperation efforts, particularly for CSOs working in the social protection area. Power imbalances between institutional bodies and CSOs may hinder sustainable cooperation, necessitating efforts to address unequal power relations and promote inclusive decision-making processes.

Resistance from certain institutional stakeholders to prioritize social protection and engage with CSOs may impede sustainable cooperation efforts, underscoring the need for continued advocacy and capacity-building initiatives.

Changes in political leadership or priorities may disrupt cooperation efforts, particularly those focused on strengthening the social protection system, highlighting the importance of sustained advocacy and policy engagement to maintain momentum.

Additionally, improved clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of institutional bodies in the social protection sector ensures better coordination, effective and efficient interventions, sustainable collaboration, and increased accountability, achieving in this way better outcomes for the communities they serve.

12.4.2. Main Impacts

EQ 6. What have been the main impacts (at institutional, organizational, individual, and socio-economic level) of past and on-going IPA assistance? Are there any elements which are/could hamper or boost the impact and/or sustainability of the assistance?

As outlined above in the impact section (EQ6), the past and ongoing IPA assistance in Kosovo, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, has left a lasting impact across various dimensions, institutional, organizational, individual, and socio-economic levels.

From the perspective of sustainability:

- At the institutional level, IPA assistance has been instrumental in strengthening the institutional capacity of key stakeholders. The EU-funded interventions have enabled government ministries, agencies, and local authorities to not only effectively coordinate but also sustain elements regarding the social protection mechanism and response measures. This sustained capacity building ensures that institutions remain resilient, allowing for continued effective response and service delivery.
- At the organizational level, the EU-funded interventions have further empowered CSOs to step into crucial roles in advocacy and service provision. Capacity-building initiatives have equipped CSOs to advocate for vulnerable populations and deliver essential services. By strengthening their operational capacity and resilience, IPA support has laid a foundation for sustained organizational effectiveness in addressing societal needs beyond the immediate crisis.

- At the individual level, IPA assistance has directly impacted individuals by addressing urgent needs and vulnerabilities, including the ones exacerbated by the pandemic. Through targeted interventions in social services provision, vulnerable individuals and communities have received vital support, improving their well-being. Moreover, capacity-building efforts have empowered individuals to adapt and cope with uncertainties, fostering long-term resilience and self-sufficiency in the face of ongoing challenges.
- At the socio-economic level, the IPA assistance has significantly mitigated the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic by supporting economic recovery initiatives, livelihood restoration programs, and social protection measures. By investing in economic resilience, IPA interventions have laid the groundwork for sustained socio-economic stability and growth. Additionally, the focus on enhancing social services provision ensures continued access to essential services, further increasing socio-economic resilience in the long term.

In conclusion, by focusing on capacity building, advocacy, and social services provision, IPA interventions can continue to drive positive impact and foster long-term sustainability in Kosovo's communities.

12.4.3. Key Aspects to Promote

EQ 7. What are the key aspects of the EU interventions that should be promoted, replicated and sustained in the new social protection strategy, policies, initiatives and procedures? In responding, you will justify why and how to do so based on best practices seen, comments received or lessons learned resulting from the different interventions

From a sustainability perspective, advocacy has played a significant role in shaping policy discussions and driving positive changes in Kosovo's social protection landscape. EU-funded interventions have supported advocacy initiatives aimed at promoting policy reforms, strengthening legal frameworks, and enhancing resource allocation for social protection.

To foster sustainability, the new strategy should continue prioritizing advocacy efforts, utilizing evidence-based research, strategic partnerships, and innovative communication strategies to advance policy agendas that prioritize the needs and rights of vulnerable populations.

EU interventions in Kosovo's social protection sector have strategically focused on building lasting capacities among key stakeholders, including both governmental and non-governmental actors. Through tailored training programs and knowledge-sharing platforms, these interventions have equipped stakeholders with improved skills in program management, policy analysis, and service delivery.

To sustain these achievements, the new strategy should prioritize ongoing capacity-building initiatives, particularly in areas such as case management, digitalization of services, and adaptive programming to effectively respond to emerging social protection needs, including emergencies.

The integration of social services has become essential for social protection systems. The EU-funded interventions have significantly increased service delivery across sectors, ensuring access to vital services like healthcare, education, and employment for vulnerable populations.

To promote sustainability, the new strategy should consolidate integrated service delivery models, fostering collaboration among state agencies, CSOs, and community-based organizations to optimize resource allocation and service accessibility.

Empowering vulnerable groups is crucial for sustainable social protection systems. The EU-funded interventions have prioritized empowering women, children, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities through targeted capacity-building initiatives, advocacy campaigns, and community mobilization efforts.

To sustain these efforts, the new strategy should embed empowerment principles across all interventions, ensuring the meaningful participation and inclusion of vulnerable groups in decision-making processes and program activities.

12.4.4. Gender

EQ 8. Which implementation arrangements or initiatives allowed to best redress gender imbalances and what should be done to ensure their sustainability?

In the context of social protection, robust implementation arrangements and initiatives are crucial for addressing gender and inclusion imbalances and ensuring sustained progress in Kosovo's social protection sector.

Several key strategies have demonstrated effectiveness in redressing these imbalances and can be further strengthened to ensure their sustainability:

- **Gender Mainstreaming in Social Protection Policies and Programs:** Implementation arrangements that prioritize gender mainstreaming across social protection policies and programs have proven effective in addressing gender imbalances. This includes integrating gender analysis into policy development, ensuring gender-responsive budgeting for social protection initiatives, and promoting gender-sensitive service delivery mechanisms. **To enhance sustainability, continuous capacity-building initiatives on gender mainstreaming should be provided to stakeholders, accompanied by clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms to institutionalize gender equality principles within the social protection sector.**
- **Policy Advocacy and Awareness-Raising on Gender and Inclusion:** Implementation arrangements prioritizing policy advocacy and awareness-raising on gender and inclusion issues are effective in catalyzing change at the institutional and societal levels within social protection systems. This includes advocacy campaigns, public awareness programs, and partnerships with media and CSOs to promote gender equality and social inclusion. To ensure sustainability, efforts should be made to further institutionalize advocacy mechanisms within social protection systems, build alliances with key stakeholders, and leverage international commitments and frameworks to **advance gender and inclusion objectives.**
- **Community-Based Approaches to Social Protection:** Implementation arrangements that prioritize community-based approaches to social protection have shown promise in addressing inclusion imbalances by directly engaging with local communities and grassroots organizations. These approaches involve participatory decision-making, community-led initiatives, and capacity-building at the local level to address social protection challenges. To sustain these efforts, investments should be made in further building the capacity of community-based organizations, promoting local ownership of social protection programs, and establishing mechanisms for ongoing dialogue and feedback between communities and policymakers.
- **Empowerment of Marginalized Groups:** Initiatives focusing on empowering marginalized groups, such as women, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities, are instrumental in fostering inclusion within the social protection framework. This involves providing targeted support for economic empowerment, education, and leadership development programs tailored to the specific needs of these groups. To ensure sustainability, efforts should be made to strengthen the participation and representation of marginalized groups in decision-making processes, institutionalize inclusive practices within social protection organizations, and foster partnerships with grassroots organizations working directly with these communities.
- **Data Collection and Monitoring for Gender and Inclusion:** Effective implementation arrangements include robust data collection and monitoring systems that capture gender-disaggregated data and monitor the impact of social protection interventions on marginalized groups. This enables

evidence-based decision-making and ensures accountability for addressing gender and inclusion imbalances. To enhance sustainability, investments should be made in strengthening data collection mechanisms, building the capacity of stakeholders in data analysis and interpretation, and integrating gender-sensitive indicators into monitoring and evaluation frameworks within social protection programs.

12.5. EU Added Value

12.5.1. EU Added Value

EQ 9. What is the added value of IPA EU interventions, compared to what could be achieved by the Civil Society Facility and by the State alone, and what should be continued, discontinued or enhanced in both cases?

Overall, the IPA EU interventions in Kosovo not only contributed significantly to the country's social welfare objectives but also brought it closer to EU membership by aligning with European standards and values.

Through their multifaceted approach and strategic utilization of resources, these interventions play a pivotal role in improving the well-being of Kosovo's citizens and promoting sustainable development in the region. The EU-funded interventions in Kosovo in the social protection sphere offered substantial added value across various critical aspects.

Firstly, these interventions effectively pool resources, thereby boosting the operational capacity of social protection initiatives and significantly enhancing the accessibility and quality of services.

Secondly, they play a pivotal role in elevating the technical proficiency and know-how among local stakeholders, resulting in enhanced program efficacy and streamlined service delivery.

Thirdly, EU-funded initiatives fostered robust cross-sector collaboration, fostering synergistic partnerships and comprehensive service provisioning models tailored to diverse needs.

Moreover, the EU-funded interventions have contributed toward aligning Kosovo's social protection programs with EU standards and norms, thereby increasing credibility, legitimacy, and institutional convergence. By adhering to EU benchmarks, these interventions not only have contributed toward elevating the quality of services but also paved the way for smoother integration with European frameworks.

The strategic alignment of EU-funded interventions with EU values, coupled with effective stakeholder engagement and synergy utilization, underscores their significant added value in advancing social protection in Kosovo. Through efficient knowledge transfer, robust partnerships, and strategic stakeholder involvement, these interventions demonstrate a clear commitment to EU principles and objectives.

Furthermore, the EU-funded interventions have acted as a catalyst for increased engagement from national and local authorities, as well as other key stakeholders in Kosovo. This amplified engagement extends the reach and impact of social protection initiatives, ensuring that they effectively address the needs of the most vulnerable segments of society.

In addition, coordination with other EU-funded initiatives, such as those implemented by international organizations like IOM, UNICEF, and the World Bank, further enhanced the efficiency and impact of social protection interventions in Kosovo. By leveraging synergies and optimizing resources, these collaborations maximize the effectiveness of EU funding, particularly in addressing challenges exacerbated by external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

EQ 10. What is the added value of EU support compared to what other donors have done or plan to do in the sector?

The EU-funded interventions in Kosovo bring remarkable added value compared to other donors, as evidenced by several key areas:

- **Enhanced Response Coordination and Collaboration:** EU-supported initiatives have significantly contributed to fostering effective coordination and collaboration among diverse stakeholders in Kosovo's social protection sector. Through the establishment of coordination mechanisms and the facilitation of joint planning and information sharing, these interventions ensured a more cohesive and integrated response to societal needs.
- **Expansion and Improvement of Social Services:** EU-funded support has prioritized expanding and enhancing basic social services, with a particular focus on mitigating the effects of the pandemic. This included strengthening accessibility to services and providing necessary equipment for frontline workers. By strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, EU interventions have significantly contributed toward further elevating the overall quality and accessibility of social services, promoting inclusivity and cohesion within the society.
- **Advocacy for Vulnerable Groups:** EU-funded actions effectively advocated for the rights and needs of vulnerable populations, such as marginalized communities, persons with disabilities, survivors of gender-based violence, and children in need of protection. Through targeted advocacy efforts, these interventions raised awareness about specific challenges faced by these groups, leading to policy changes that protect their rights and ensure equitable access to essential services.
- **Capacity Building for Effective Response:** EU-supported interventions have provided substantial capacity-building assistance to strengthen Kosovo's social protection system. By providing tailored training and enhancing the technical skills of social workers and frontline staff, these initiatives ensured a more efficient and coordinated response to social protection-related issues.

13. Annex 3. Detailed Recommendations per each Cluster

13.1. Cluster 1. Efficiency

13.1.1. Recommendation 1. Enhancing the Efficiency of EU Support

<p>Main recommendation: Recognizing and sustaining the efficiency of EU-funded support is paramount for ensuring that future ? resources are utilized optimally, leading to tangible and timely outcomes in addressing social protection-related concerns.</p>	
<p><i>This recommendation is linked to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusion 1 • Conclusion 2 	
<p>Main implementation responsibility: The EUOK, particularly the team in charge for the implementation of the EU-funded support on social protection.</p>	
<p>Main associated actors: 6(six) grantees that were responsible for the implementation of the actions as well as other related institutional bodies, MoJ, and MFTL as the responsible bodies covering social protection-related interventions.</p>	
<p>What works and should continue?</p> <p>The grantees have efficiently implemented EU-funded support despite challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and political instability. They've demonstrated transparent project management practices and resilience by promptly adjusting strategies.</p> <p>Recognizing their achievements, disseminating best practices, fostering collaboration through knowledge exchange, advocating for policy change, and highlighting the impact on vulnerable populations is a part of work that should continue.</p> <p>Ensuring the <u>continuation of the support for local CSOs through sub-granting</u> schemes remains pivotal in strengthening CSOs efforts aimed at addressing social protection-related concerns.</p> <p>Sub-granting via CSOs experienced in and qualified for sub-granting is important for reaching CSOs that struggle to apply directly for EU funds (EU).</p> <p>Collaboration with diverse stakeholders should be expanded for further strengthening synergies, amplifying the impact of social protection initiatives (including initiatives to address gender inequality and social exclusion) and leveraging collective expertise and resources.</p>	
<p>What should be strengthened (or discontinued)?</p> <p>Three main elements are advised to be further strengthened, as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Further promoting successful approaches from EU-funded actions can facilitate cross-learning. 2. Longer-term projects for SG and more funding are recommended, if possible, with EU funds and within sub-granting limitations, which can enable local organizations to better deliver results and reach more sustained and long-term changes. 3. Expand collaboration with diverse stakeholders to further strengthen synergies, amplifying the impact of 	<p>How should this be done?</p> <p>Further promoting successful approaches <i>Support/establish platforms for knowledge sharing and exchange</i> where successful approaches and best practices from EU-funded interventions can be showcased and disseminated. These platforms could include workshops, seminars, conferences, and online webinars where the main stakeholders can learn from each other's experiences.</p> <p><i>Documentation and Dissemination:</i> Ensure that successful approaches and lessons learned from EU-funded interventions are documented, packaged, and disseminated effectively. This can involve producing case studies, reports, policy briefs, and multimedia materials that highlight key achievements, challenges, and</p>

social protection initiatives (including initiatives to address gender inequality and social exclusion) and leveraging collective expertise and resources.

recommendations for the use of those best practices in any future EU support.

Longer-term projects for sub-grantees and more funding are recommended

To the extent possible, **grants to CSO SSPs should be of longer duration** for example. 3-5 years, renewed annually if needed. These grants should primarily support proven, long-standing service delivery programs.

Extend collaboration with diverse stakeholders:

Foster partnerships and networks to facilitate dialogue, information sharing, and joint problem-solving.

Encourage the pooling of resources, expertise, and networks among stakeholders to maximize efficiency.

Coordinate activities to avoid duplication and streamline collaboration efforts.

Develop/provide guidance materials, toolkits, and resources specifically tailored to incorporating gender-sensitive indicators into monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

These resources should be easily accessible and practical, offering step-by-step guidance on how to integrate gender considerations throughout the monitoring and evaluation process.

13.2. Cluster 2. Effectiveness

13.2.1. Recommendation 2. Maximizing the Effectiveness of EU Support

Main recommendation: Support the enhancement and implementation of *the* legal and policy frameworks to maximize the effectiveness of EU-funded interventions in social protection. Additionally, efforts should be directed toward expanding the coverage of services and improving their quality. By prioritizing these actions, we can ensure that interventions are highly effective in addressing social protection needs and achieving their intended outcomes.

This recommendation is linked to:

- Conclusion 3
- Conclusion 4
- Conclusion 5

Main implementation responsibility: The EUOK, particularly the team in charge for the implementation of the EU – funded support on social protection, Ministries in charge for social protection: MoJ, MFTL, local authorities, including municipalities.

Main associated actors: CSOs, CSWs and other institutions relevant to the provision of integrated services, i.e employment offices, health care and education institutions, etc.

What works and should continue?

Enhancing and **implementing the legal and policy framework** is pivotal for advancing Kosovo's social protection system, The LSFS and the draft LLGF mark vital milestones in the decentralization of social services and the overall reform of social protection system. Prioritizing the enhancement of the legal framework is essential for nurturing a resilient social protection system in Kosovo. It not only facilitates systemic reforms but also fosters

collaboration, advocacy efforts, and alignment with best practices and stakeholder needs. The engagement of CSOs in enhancing the legal framework through partnerships with government ministries underscores the significance of continuing the advocacy in shaping legislation conducive to strengthening social protection.

CSO SSPs' involvement in the provision of social services, particularly specialized ones have been very important. Considering that the majority of social services are provided by CSOs and the fact that the current level of CSO-delivered social services available in Kosovo is to a significant extent thanks to donor funding, **reduction or suspension of donor funding will directly result with reduction of social services**. In this sense, **donor investment in social services should continue at least over the midterm**, transitional period, until the Kosovo government, both central and local, is available to scale up its support.

What should be strengthened (or discontinued)?

Three main elements are recommended to be further strengthened, as follows:

1. Support the implementation of the new LSFS and the LLGF (when it is approved).
2. Address the **lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities** of the central government authorities which came as a result of the latest changes in the structures at the central level.

Without clear delineation, there's a risk of inefficient resource allocation, duplication of efforts, and gaps in service delivery. It hampers accountability mechanisms and strategic planning, hindering effective coordination and implementation of social protection initiatives.

Unclear roles impede collaboration among stakeholders, both within ministries and across government departments, undermining the overall effectiveness of social protection efforts.

Strengthening monitoring and evaluation mechanisms with gender-sensitive indicators and expanding collaboration with diverse stakeholders to amplify the impact of gender equality initiatives.

3. Expand the service typology and coverage and improve service quality, to maximize impact for vulnerable groups.

How should this be done?

Support the implementation of the new LSFS and the LLGF

EU-funded support can provide technical assistance and capacity-building initiatives to relevant stakeholders involved in the implementation process. This includes government ministries, local authorities, CSOs, and other key actors. Training programs, workshops, and mentoring sessions can be organized to enhance understanding of the new laws, improve administrative skills, and build capacity for effective implementation.

Specific grants or funding mechanisms can be established to support local governments in fulfilling their financial responsibilities outlined in the LSFS and the draft LLGF, particularly regarding the establishment of social services, i.e. community-based services.

Facilitate the establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress and assess the impact of the new laws. This could involve the development of indicators, data collection tools, and reporting systems to measure the effectiveness of social protection interventions.

Support advocacy efforts and promote stakeholder engagement to create awareness about the new laws and support for their implementation. This could involve organizing public awareness campaigns, stakeholder consultations, and engagement platforms to encourage participation, address concerns, and foster ownership of the implementation process.

Address the lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities of the central government authorities

Support for the development of a National Social Protection Strategy is crucial.

Such a strategy would define clear objectives, priorities, and outcomes, ensuring alignment of roles and responsibilities with overarching goals. It would promote collaboration and coordination among ministries and stakeholders, fostering synergies and joint decision-making.

Moreover, the strategy would establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating progress, enhancing accountability and enabling adjustments as needed.

The National Social Protection Strategy would provide the necessary guidance and direction to optimize social protection efforts, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for vulnerable populations in Kosovo.

Expanding coverage of social services and improving the quality

Providing financial support to service providers can enable them to expand the typology of provided services, extend their reach and improve the quality of their services.

Considering that the social services are currently focused on the provision of emergency protection services, providing prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration services, which are most needed for the welfare of children and persons in need of social services would be highly recommended.

Integrated social services and support for the development of integrated protocols for referral and treatment of cases would be recommended.

The support for the development of a National Electronic System for Social Services, with the opportunity to be integrated with other services like Employment and Health would further support the implementation of the integrated social services.

The establishment of mechanisms for quality assurance and monitoring of social services.

This includes reviewing and streamlining the existing standards for social services, developing guidelines, and tools for their implementation, as well as strengthening data collection, monitoring, and inspection systems to track progress and outcomes.

Provide training and capacity-building support to social service professionals, including social workers, psychologists, educators, etc. Training programs focus on enhancing skills in areas such as case management, interagency collaboration, needs assessment, and person-centered approaches to service delivery.

Knowledge Exchange and Learning: Fosters knowledge exchange and learning between Kosovo and other EU member states or countries with relevant expertise in integrated social service provision., including study visits, and peer-to-peer exchanges has been part of the project enabling the Kosovo stakeholders to learn from international best practices and adapt them to the local context.

13.3. Cluster 3. Impact

13.3.1. Recommendation 3. Maximizing Impact

<p><i>Main recommendation:</i> Sustain and amplify the impactful EU-funded support in Kosovo across institutional, organizational, individual, and socio-economic levels, by focusing on sustaining legal and policy changes, enhancing social protection policies, fostering capacity-building, and promoting advocating evidence-based approaches.</p>	
<p><i>This recommendation is linked to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusion 6 • Conclusion 7 • Conclusion 8 	
<p><i>Main implementation responsibility:</i> EUOK, Grantees <i>Main associated actors:</i> Central and local government authorities, CSOs</p>	
<p><i>What works and should continue?</i></p> <p>It is crucial to continue and expand EU-funded support in Kosovo, particularly focusing on sustaining legal and policy changes, enhancing social services provision, and strengthening collaboration between CSOs and government institutions. By prioritizing these areas, we can ensure lasting improvements in the social protection system, promote the well-being of all individuals, and enhance resilience and inclusion, especially during crises like COVID-19.</p>	
<p><i>What should be strengthened (or discontinued)?</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Further enhance coordination and collaboration among stakeholders to ensure that interventions are well-aligned and synergistic, maximizing their collective impact on social protection outcomes. 2. Fostering greater community engagement to amplify the reach and relevance of interventions, ensuring they address the most pressing needs of vulnerable populations effectively. 3. Promoting innovation and learning is essential to continuously improve interventions and adapt them to changing circumstances, ultimately enhancing their long-term impact. 4. Increasing capacity-building efforts can empower local actors to implement interventions more efficiently and maximize their positive impact on individuals and communities. 	<p><i>How should this be done?</i></p> <p>Further enhance coordination and collaboration Establish clear communication channels, foster regular dialogue, and facilitate joint planning sessions. <i>(Please refer to the efficiency cluster for more guidance on how to further enhance coordination and collaboration among stakeholders).</i></p> <p>Fostering greater community engagement This can be achieved through initiatives such as community forums, participatory workshops, and citizen advisory boards, ensuring that interventions are responsive to the specific needs and priorities of the communities they serve. Additionally, building partnerships with local organizations and leaders can help facilitate meaningful engagement and promote ownership of interventions within the community.</p> <p>Promoting innovation and learning This can be achieved through initiatives such as pilot projects, innovation labs, and regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms. By fostering a dynamic environment that values creativity and</p>

adaptability, interventions can meet evolving needs and challenges, ultimately maximizing their long-term impact.

Increasing capacity-building efforts of local actors

Provide training, resources, and mentorship to local actors, enabling them to enhance their skills, knowledge, and capabilities, i.e. integrated social services, child protection services and family support programs; elderly care, gender equality and empowerment, etc.

Promote best practices and learning - promotion of more success stories and dissemination of them widely in country.

13.4. Cluster 4. Sustainability

13.4.1. Recommendation 4. Prioritizing Sustainability

Main recommendation: By prioritizing sustainability and fostering collaborative efforts, Kosovo can ensure that its social protection programs continue to evolve and adapt, effectively meeting the needs of its population and promoting long-term resilience and empowerment.

This recommendation is linked to:

- Conclusion 9
- Conclusion 10

Main implementation responsibility: Central and local government authorities Grantees

Main associated actors:, EUOK

What works and should continue?

From a sustainability perspective, the collaboration between institutional bodies and CSOs in Kosovo's social protection programs has generated significant improvements. To sustain and enhance these the following are recommended to be continued:

Institutional Capacity Building: Continue supporting governmental institutions to effectively coordinate and sustain social protection mechanisms, ensuring they remain resilient and responsive to evolving challenges.

Empowerment of CSOs: Maintain efforts to empower CSOs in advocacy and service provision, enabling them to address societal needs effectively over the long term.

Individual Well-being and Resilience: Prioritize initiatives that directly improve the well-being of individuals, fostering their long-term resilience and ability to adapt to uncertainties.

Socio-economic stability: Sustain support for economic recovery and social protection measures, laying the groundwork for sustained stability and growth in communities.

Promotion of Best Practices: Promote, replicate, and sustain successful strategies such as advocacy efforts, capacity-building initiatives, integrated service delivery models, and empowerment principles.

Addressing Challenges Systematically: Systematically address challenges like limited resources and lack of clarity regarding institutional roles and responsibilities, fostering inclusive and transparent collaboration.

Moreover, to address gender and social exclusion sustainably, multifaceted strategies including gender mainstreaming, policy advocacy, community-based approaches, empowerment of marginalized groups, and gender-sensitive data collection are essential. Ensuring ongoing capacity-building, institutionalized advocacy, investment in community organizations, empowerment of marginalized groups, and continuous improvement of data systems are vital for sustainability. By prioritizing these strategies, Kosovo can achieve significant and lasting progress toward gender equality and social inclusion in its social protection framework, benefiting all citizens.

<i>What should be strengthened (or discontinued)?</i>	<i>How should this be done?</i>
<p>1. Long-term Funding Commitments: Ensure sustained and predictable funding for both governmental institutions and CSOs engaged in social protection activities. This includes exploring diversified funding sources and advocating for continued government investment in social welfare initiatives.</p> <p>2. Capacity Building for Innovation: Invest in capacity-building programs that foster innovation and adaptability within institutional bodies and CSOs.</p> <p>3. Partnership Development: Strengthen partnerships between institutional bodies, CSOs, and other stakeholders involved in social protection. This includes fostering collaboration with academia, private sector entities, and international organizations to leverage expertise, resources, and networks for more comprehensive and sustainable solutions.</p> <p>4. Community Engagement and Empowerment: Prioritize community engagement and empowerment strategies to ensure that social protection programs are responsive to the needs and priorities of local communities. This involves fostering participatory decision-making processes, community-led initiatives, and mechanisms for feedback and accountability.</p> <p>5. Evidence-Based Policy and Practice: Promote the use of evidence-based approaches in policymaking and program implementation. This includes investing in research, data collection, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to inform decision-making, measure impact, and continuously improve the effectiveness of social protection interventions.</p>	<p>Long-term funding commitments: To the extent possible, grants to service providers should be of longer duration for example. 3-5 years, renewed annually if needed. These grants should primarily support proven, long-standing service delivery programs.</p> <p>Combining the EU support for social services with the government support, and in the process encouraging the government to increase the funding, through some sort of matching, could be an option to consider.</p> <p>Develop principles and practices for financial resource allocation to local governments and other implementing agencies; strengthen public finance management at the level of local governments about different types of social care services.</p> <p>Advise on practices for commissioning, purchasing, and providing services, and outsourcing service provision, with the involvement of non-profit and for-profit providers in the delivery of social care services and the design of electronic manual with templates (terms of reference, service specification, price indicators, service quality indicators, performance indicators, model contracts etc.) for service provision.</p> <p>Provide training and capacity building to the implementing agencies and local governments on commissioning and outsourcing social care services based on models; quality assurance, monitoring and inspection in close collaboration with the national government authorities and other relevant agencies.</p> <p>Explore alternative channels, attract international donors, engage the private sector, and promote innovative financing.</p> <p>Capacity Building for Innovation: Providing training on, data analysis, and innovative approaches to service delivery, enabling stakeholders to respond effectively to evolving challenges.</p> <p>Partnership Development: Fostering collaboration with academia, private sector entities, and international organizations to leverage expertise, resources, and networks for more comprehensive and sustainable solutions.</p>

	<p>Community Engagement and Empowerment: Fostering participatory decision-making processes, community-led initiatives, and mechanisms for feedback and accountability.</p> <p>Evidence-Based Policy and Practice: Investing in research, data collection, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to inform decision-making, measure impact, and continuously improve the effectiveness of social protection interventions. Gender and social inclusion aspects need to be integrated into all above-mentioned actions.</p>
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13.5. Custer 5. EU Added Value

13.5.1. Recommendation 5. Aligning with EU Standards

<p><i>Main recommendation:</i> Prioritize the continuation and enhancement of EU-funded interventions in Kosovo's social protection sector, given their significant contributions to aligning with European standards and values while advancing social welfare objectives and facilitating the country's path toward EU membership.</p>	
<p><i>This recommendation is linked to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusion 10 • Conclusion 11 	
<p><i>Main implementation responsibility:</i> Central and local government authorities</p> <p><i>Main associated actors:</i> EUOK</p>	
<p><i>What works and should continue?</i></p> <p>From the perspective of EU added value in social protection program, it is paramount to underscore the continuation and enhancement of EU-funded interventions in Kosovo. These interventions have significantly strengthened Kosovo's social protection sector by aligning with European standards and values, thereby advancing the country's social welfare objectives and facilitating its path toward EU membership.</p> <p>Through strategic resource allocation and comprehensive approaches, EU interventions have notably strengthened the operational capacity of social protection initiatives, enhancing service accessibility and quality while fostering collaboration across sectors.</p> <p>Notably, the EU's emphasis on stakeholder engagement, synergy utilization, and capacity building has further enhanced the impact of these interventions, ensuring they effectively address the needs of vulnerable populations and contribute to long-term resilience within Kosovo's social protection framework.</p> <p>By maintaining a steadfast focus on cohesion, accessibility, and equity, the EU can continue to play a pivotal role in fostering sustainable development and improving the well-being of Kosovo's citizens, thereby reinforcing Kosovo's integration into European frameworks, particularly in the realm of social protection.</p>	
<p><i>What should be strengthened (or discontinued)?</i></p> <p>1. Ensure closer alignment of interventions with European standards and values to further advance Kosovo's social welfare objectives and facilitate its integration into EU frameworks.</p>	<p><i>How should this be done?</i></p> <p>Ensure closer alignment of interventions with European standards and values Conduct a Comprehensive Assessment of Kosovo's current social welfare policies, programs, and practices to identify areas where alignment with European standards and values is lacking or could be improved.</p>

Engage with EU Experts and Institutions that have experience in implementing social welfare policies aligned with European standards. This collaboration can provide valuable insights and best practices for Kosovo to adopt.

Provide training and capacity-building programs for government officials, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders to familiarize them with European standards and values in social welfare.

Implement robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress and ensure compliance with European standards over time. Regularly assess the effectiveness of interventions and make adjustments as needed to maintain alignment with EU frameworks.

Foster dialogue and collaboration among government agencies, CSOs, international partners, and other stakeholders to ensure buy-in and ownership of initiatives aimed at aligning Kosovo's social welfare sector with European standards and values.

15. Annex 4. List of Key Informant Interviews

	Name	Position/Role	Organization/Institution	Organization Role	Date
1	Klevis Vaqari	Project Manager	Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection in Kosovo (KOMF)	EUOK grantee	18 Jan 2024
2	Adelina Berisha	Executive Director	Kosova Women's Network (KWN)	EUOK grantee	18 Jan 2024
3	Nicole Farnsworth	Lead Researcher	Kosova Women's Network (KWN)	EUOK grantee	18 Jan 2024
4	Durim Gashi	Project Manager	Save the Children, Kosovo	EUOK grantee	19 Jan 2024
5	Gani Mustafa	Head of Office	Center for Social Work, M. Mitrovica	Stakeholder	19 Jan 2024
6	Liridona Zokaj	Executive Director	PEMA	EUOK grantee	22 Jan 2024
7	Fejzullah Abdulahu	Programme Team Leader	IOM, Kosovo	EUOK grantee	12 Feb 2024
8	Gentiana Murati Kapo	Capacity Development Expert	Kosova Women's Network (KWN)	EUOK grantee	12 Feb 2024
9	Donjeta Kelmendi	Executive Director	Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection in Kosovo (KOMF)	EUOK grantee	12 Feb 2024
10	Durim Gashi (2nd KII)	Project Manager	Save the Children, Kosovo	EUOK grantee	13 Feb 2024
11	Arzana Mulolli	Awards Coordinator	Save the Children, Kosovo	EUOK grantee	13 Feb 2024
12	Premtim Fazliu	Coordinator for Project and Activities	Directorate for Social Welfare, M. Pristina	Stakeholder	13 Feb 2024
13	Liridona Zokaj (2 nd KII)	Executive Director	PEMA	EUOK grantee	14 Feb 2024
14	Valbona Citaku	Executive Director	Shpresa	EUOK grantee (partner)	14 Feb 2024
15	Elza Luzha Bacaj	Project Coordinator	The Ideas Partnership	KWN sub-grantee	14 Feb 2024
16	Mirlinda Gerguri	Staff	The Ideas Partnership	KWN sub-grantee	14 Feb 2024
17	Donika Iseni	Staff	The Ideas Partnership	KWN sub-grantee	14 Feb 2024
18	Almedina Ajvazi	Staff	The Ideas Partnership	KWN sub-grantee	14 Feb 2024
19	Zana Hamiti	Executive Director	Centre for Protection of Women and Children	KWN sub-grantee	14 Feb 2024
20	Pajtim Neziri	Executive Director	Terre des Hommes (TdH), Kosovo	Stakeholder	15 Feb 2024
21	Mentor Morina	Director	Department for Social Services, Ministry of Finance, Labor, and Transfers (MFLT)	Stakeholder	15 Feb 2024
22	Blerim Shabani	Director	Centre for Social Work, M. Pristina	Stakeholder	16 Feb 2024
23	Fitore Rexhaj	Staff	Department for Social Services and Child Protection,	Stakeholder	16 Feb 2024

			Ministry of Justice, Inspection Unit		
24	Marta Gazideda	Program Coordinator	UNDP, Kosovo	EUOK grantee	16 Feb 2024
25	Salihe Aliu	Staff	Directorate for Social Welfare, Municipality of Gjilan	Stakeholder	20 Feb 2024
26	Leonora Bunjaku Morina	Deputy Major	Municipality of Gjilan	Stakeholder	20 Feb 2024
27	Myrsel Zymberi	Head of Office	Centre for Social Work, M. Gjilan	Stakeholder	20 Feb 2024
28	Igbale Imeri	Regional Coordinator	IOM Kosovo	EUOK grantee	20 Feb 2024
29	Sladjana Lazic	Staff	Municipal Office for Communities and Return, M. Fuche Kosova	Stakeholder	20 Feb 2024
30	Miroslav Jovanovic	Beneficiary (IOM)	Village of Bresje, M. Fushe Kosova	/	20 Feb 2024
31	Arlinda Murtezi	Beneficiary (IOM)	Municipality of Fushe Kosova	/	20 Feb 2024
32	Nusret Shilova	Executive Director	Club House “Deshira”	KWN sub-grantee	21 Feb 2024
33	Shqipe Kosunaj	Geographic Coordinator	Save the Children	EUOK grantee	21 Feb 2024
34	Dervish Tahiri	Head of Office	Centre for Social Work, M. Gjakova	Stakeholder	21 Feb 2024
35	Trumza Lila Ukmata	Advisor (social issues)	Municipality of Gjakova	Stakeholder	21 Feb 2024
36	Isak Skenderi	Executive Director	Voice of Roma, Ahkali, and Egyptians (VORAE),	Stakeholder	21 Feb 2024
37	Bedri Bahtiri	Professor (expert)	University of Pristina	Stakeholder	21 Feb 2024
38	Burim Behluli	National Programme Development Director	SOS Children’s Village	Stakeholder	21 Feb 2024
39	Lirika Begoli	Regional Coordinator Peja	Save the Children	EUOK grantee	22 Feb 2024
40	Teuta Kusori	Project Manager	Women’s Wellness Centre, Peja	Save the Children sub-grantee	22 Feb 2024
41	Drita Kelmendi Kuaj	Head of Office	Center for Social Work, M. Peja	Stakeholder	22 Feb 2024
42	Arijana Avvdijaj Basha	Manager	DPM Peja	Save the Children sub-grantee	22 Feb 2024
43	Kujtum Sarabregu	Finance Officer	DPM Peja	Save the Children sub-grantee	22 Feb 2024
44	Fatmir Shullani	Executive Director	Handikos, M. Gjilan	KWN sub-grantee	23 Feb 2024
45	Mirlinda Sada	Executive Director	Medica, M. Gjakova	KWN sub-grantee	23 Feb 2024
46	Fjolla Raiffi	Project Manager	UNDP, Kosovo	EUOK grantee	23 Feb 2024

47	Dren Rexha	Social Policy Specialist	UNICEF, Kosovo	Stakeholder	23 Feb 2024
48	Gani Mustafa	Head of the Office	Center for Social Work, M. Mitrovica	Stakeholder	26 Feb 2024
49	Drita Ibrahim	Director	Directorate of Social Welfare, M. Mitrovica	Stakeholder	26 Feb 2024
50	Pascale Shnitzer	Task Team Leader	World Bank, SAS Kosovo Reform Project	Stakeholder	26 Feb 2024
51	Syzana Bytyqi Jagxhiu	Staff	European Union Office in Kosovo	Contractor	27 Feb 2024
52	Ardonita Hyseni	MEAL Coordinator	Safe the Children	EUOK grantee	27 Feb 2024
53	Remzije Krasniqi	Advocacy Director/ National Education Advisor	SOS Children's Village Kosovo	Stakeholder	27 Feb 2024
54	Adelina Sahiti	Director	Directorate for Social Welfare, M. Pristina	Stakeholder	27 Feb 2024
55	Adile Shaqiri	Director	Department of Social and Family Policies, Ministry of Justice	Stakeholder	27 Feb 2024

16. Annex 3. Terms of Reference

The Terms or References are enclosed as a separate document.