



# Project Information Document (PID)

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Concept Stage | Date Prepared/Updated: 05-May-2023 | Report No: PIDC35141



## BASIC INFORMATION

### A. Basic Project Data

Country Kosovo	Project ID P179656	Parent Project ID (if any)	Project Name Early Childhood Development for Kosovo's Human Capital Project (P179656)
Region EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	Estimated Appraisal Date Sep 29, 2023	Estimated Board Date Mar 20, 2024	Practice Area (Lead) Education
Financing Instrument Investment Project Financing	Borrower(s) Ministry of Finance, Labor, and Transfers	Implementing Agency Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovations	

### Proposed Development Objective(s)

The project's development objective is to improve equitable access to and quality of early childhood development services in Kosovo.

## PROJECT FINANCING DATA (US\$, Millions)

### SUMMARY

<b>Total Project Cost</b>	20.00
<b>Total Financing</b>	20.00
<b>of which IBRD/IDA</b>	20.00
<b>Financing Gap</b>	0.00

### DETAILS

#### World Bank Group Financing

International Development Association (IDA)	20.00
IDA Credit	20.00



Environmental and Social Risk Classification

Moderate

Concept Review Decision

Track II-The review did authorize the preparation to continue

## B. Introduction and Context

### Country Context

1. **Since the end of the war in June 1999, Kosovo has made considerable progress in overcoming legacies of socialism, ethnic discrimination, neglect, and war, although political volatility remains.** It has consolidated the functioning of its democratic institutions, including the rights of different ethnic and religious communities. The legal framework in Kosovo provides a range of obligations on institutions to safeguard and promote communities' equal participation in governance. However, since 2017, there have been four governments, pointing to a still volatile political context. The current Government of Kosovo (Government), formed in March 2021, is the first to win a post-independence election with over 50 percent of the parliamentary vote. The previous instability of the Government contributed to a declining trust in the country's main institutions, which is among the lowest in the Western Balkans (after Bosnia and Herzegovina).<sup>1</sup> Recent country-level polling, however, provides some encouraging early signs for a possible reversal in the declining trend of trust in institutions.<sup>2</sup>
2. **While Kosovo has made steady economic progress, the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the upward economic trend and the elected Government of 2021 set out a reform agenda aimed at igniting economic growth and ensuring a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the pandemic.** In the decade leading up to the pandemic (2010-2019), Kosovo's economy grew by an average of 4.6 percent a year, which translated into an almost 50 percent increase in per capita income and a 35 percent reduction in the poverty rate, even as several structural weaknesses continued to impede higher growth and faster poverty reduction. Following the onset of the pandemic, in 2020, the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contracted in real terms by 5.3 percent - the country's first recession since independence - driven by the collapse in diaspora-related exports of travel services and investment despite a sizeable fiscal response package, a surge in remittance inflows, and higher base metal prices. Like many others around the world, Kosovo's health system was unprepared to handle the virus and was overwhelmed at the onset of the pandemic. This situation is expected to further undermine the human capital accumulation in Kosovo, which already showed a large deficit before the pandemic. After having increased from 28.9 percent in 2019 to 32.4 percent in 2020, the poverty rate is estimated to have fallen back to 25.0 percent in 2022 and 23.3 percent in 2023. While recovery is underway, downside risks remain high and underscore the urgency of structural reforms. Exports of merchandise, albeit from a low base, have increased at record rates since 2020, fueled by the global pickup in demand and nearshoring opportunities. However, pandemic-associated risks to the outlook remain, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine will weigh on Kosovo's growth outlook and push inflation sharply higher. Continued upwards pressure on import prices, particularly for energy and food, will almost certainly lead to further increases in inflation,

<sup>1</sup> Balkan Barometer. 2020, <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/95/balkan-barometer-2020-public-opinion-survey>

<sup>2</sup>According to the results of the May 2021 Public Pulse poll conducted by UNDP and USAID,

[https://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/library/democratic\\_governance/public-pulse-xx.html](https://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/library/democratic_governance/public-pulse-xx.html)



affecting consumption (especially of the poor), fiscal balances, and Kosovo's competitiveness.

3. **As part of its reform, Kosovo is implementing an ambitious state-building agenda driven partly by the aspiration for membership in the European Union (EU).** In recent years, the Government has prioritized building strong human capital to address its economic challenges. The National Development Strategy features human capital as one of the four strategic pillars by 2030 and increasing children's participation in quality early childhood development (ECD) is presented as one of the targeted national indicators. The Government's Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2022-2026 also lists ECD as the first pillar with the aim of increasing the number of preschool institutions, developing the new curriculum for ECD, improving quality of service provision, and enhancing cross-sectoral support of quality ECD services.<sup>3</sup>
4. **Kosovo's pressing environmental and climate change challenges pose significant risks to the sustainability and inclusiveness of growth.** The main impacts of climate change in Kosovo include an overall average increase in temperature, a decline in summer rain with more frequent droughts and forest fires<sup>4</sup> projected, and an increase in winter rain resulting in more frequent spring flooding. Reflecting its commitment to addressing climate challenges, during the 2021-2025 period, the Government plans to draft the Law on Climate Change and prepare an inventory of greenhouse gas emissions, taking economic recovery as an opportunity to focus on a greener and more environmentally friendly economy.<sup>5</sup> Ensuring disaster recovery solutions and maximizing digital development and delivery of e-governance services will be critical and supported through specific project activities. High levels of air pollution in Pristina city may also be detrimental to child development as many studies confirm the negative impact of air pollution on child outcomes. All aspects of air pollution and extreme weather protection should be considered for any new and existing infrastructure for children. The country may also strengthen the green content of curriculum and security training for staff and children as well as equip the facilities with capabilities to serve as shelters for the local community in case of extreme weather.

#### Sectoral and Institutional Context

5. **International assessments confirm low foundational skills among Kosovo's young children.** A child born in Kosovo today can expect to achieve just 57 percent of their human capital potential.<sup>6</sup> Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 and 2018 show that high school students in Kosovo, across all income levels, are behind those in most Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, including peers in the Western Balkans (see Figure 1). In the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2019<sup>7</sup>, Kosovo was among the ten poorest performers. Students in grade 4 with preschool education scored higher in all learning domains assessed in TIMSS-2019 (grade 8 students were not tested in 2019). After controlling for age, gender, and socio-economic background, the regression analysis revealed that students with preschool education scored higher by around ten test points for every year spent in preschool. Thus, students with three or more years of preschool education scored 30 test points higher than their peers with no ECD experience, which is

<sup>3</sup> Kosovo Education Strategy 2022-2026. June 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Climate Change Risk Profile Fact Sheet, United States Agency for International Development.

<sup>5</sup> The Republic of Kosovo. *Program of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo, 2021-2025*. May 2021.

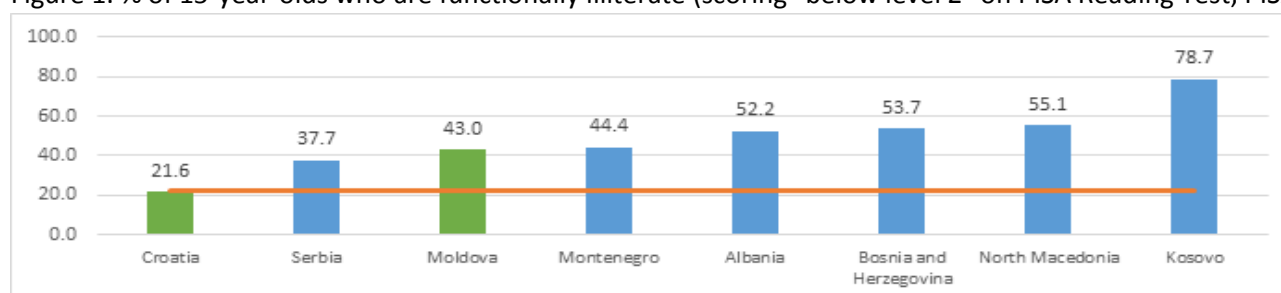
<sup>6</sup> World Bank, HCI, 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/HD.HCI.OVRL?locations=XK>

<sup>7</sup> <https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2019/encyclopedia/pdf/Kosovo.pdf>



equivalent to one year of schooling<sup>8</sup>. Recent data collected via the Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI)<sup>9</sup> witnessed that although the ECDI total score for Kosovo has increased between the last MICS evaluations, showing some overall improvement in early child development outcomes, the developmental outcomes for literacy and numeracy remain alarmingly low for the general population at 23.3 percent, and even lower for ethnic minority communities at 7.4 percent.

Figure 1. % of 15-year-olds who are functionally illiterate (scoring "below level 2" on PISA Reading Test, PISA 2018)



Source: OECD PISA 2018

- The current Early Childhood Development (ECD) service provision in Kosovo has not yielded positive child development outcomes in Kosovo, and the sector faces numerous challenges.** Less than 5 percent of children in Kosovo have access to preschool and care centers, and 77 percent of children entering pre-primary<sup>10</sup> are below benchmarks for literacy and numeracy. In Kosovo, many children, especially those from vulnerable communities, lack foundational education support early in life. For many, low levels of foundational literacy and numeracy can trigger a life-long struggle to catch up or embark on a productive career. Low access to early childhood education in the country and low quality of services negatively impacts the development of school readiness and the establishment of foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Among other issues are a lack of infrastructure that is suitable for the children's age, a lack of didactic materials and materials needed to organize activities that enable learning through play, financial aspects, and quality assurance of services provided by preschool institutions.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, migration trends towards cities and fewer students of school age in rural areas create more opportunities for arranging ECD centers in those areas. Some of the primary schools, especially in rural areas, are becoming emptier, creating the opportunity for opening preschool/ECD services with minimal repurposing of spaces. Moreover, there is a lack of professionals engaged in ECD and training opportunities for ECD staff. In Kosovo, there are insufficient numbers of professional associates, support educators, and assistants working within the educational system. There is no specific training course for teachers of 0-3 year-olds. The level of education for teacher/nurse educators of ages 0-3 years remains the most underdeveloped segment in ECEC. There is no system in place for training nurse educators. Therefore, the design and implementation of a retraining program for nurse educators is necessary to develop their professional capacities.
- The Government of Kosovo understands those challenges and continues to work towards strengthening the legal framework supporting ECD, which has become a high priority for the Government in the last decade. The latest strategic documents highlight its importance<sup>12</sup>.** Several pieces of legislation promote ECEC from birth and ensure

<sup>8</sup> Woessmann, L. (2016), "The importance of school systems: Evidence from international differences in student achievement", *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 30/3, pp. 3-31, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/jep.30.3.3>.

<sup>9</sup> MICS 2019-2020 <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5729/kosovo-2019-2020-mics-snapshot-ecd.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> In Kosovo, this means one year before primary school. This pre-primary year is provided in primary schools of the country, while younger children attend kindergartens.

<sup>11</sup> MESTI, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Such as *The Strategy for Children's Rights 2019 – 2023*, *The National Development Strategy – 2030*, *The Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2022-2026*.



pre-primary education beginning at age 5. The Law on Pre-university Education, No. 04/L-032, 2011, promotes early childhood education starting from birth. The recent Law on Child Protection 06/L-084 aspires to align institutional efforts in the protection of children, as well as to plan and allocate resources to enhance children's well-being. An important step towards the general development of the educational, social, and health system is the Law on Early Childhood Education (ECE), aiming to stimulate the healthy growth and achievement of children's potential. The Draft Law on ECE was approved by the Government in 2022 and has gone through the first hearing in the parliament. It regulates all forms of provision of education services for children from birth until entering the first grade of primary school, makes pre-primary education compulsory, and provides for integrated services in early childhood among the sectors of education, health, and social welfare. Approval of this Law by the Parliament expected in 2023 will unlock multi-sectoral interventions toward ECD reform in Kosovo<sup>13</sup>.

8. **The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of the Republic of Kosovo (MESTI) is currently reviewing the ECE curriculum framework and revising it to be more flexible and promote playful learning.** The curriculum for ECE is regulated by the Curriculum Framework, adopted in 2011 and revised in 2016. According to the framework, ECE includes the period of child development from birth to the preprimary class (age group 0 to 3 and 3 to 5 years). Age of preprimary class is 6 and in Kosovo it is taken care by the formal school education system. In this preparatory level, children are supported in their early personal development, including to: develop the ability to communicate in mother tongue through activities that help in proper articulation of words, enrich the vocabulary and exercise the ability to listen to others; develop thinking, problem solving, understanding of concepts, information processing, and general intelligence; and encourage and enable them to engage actively in practical activities, assess risks and respect the basic rules of hygiene and safety. However, the current curriculum framework relies on early learning standards, which have not been used nor monitored properly. The development of the learning environment could also support the Ministry's aspiration to promote playful learning. The design of spaces for small children in Kosovo is defined by a series of regulations in education, sanitation, and construction, entirely missing any pedagogical programming. Traditionally in Kosovo, preschools and schools are defined by sanitation and construction standards leaving educational programming behind. Public kindergartens in Kosovo feature a traditional corridor design, underutilize circulation spaces, and rarely feature central space concepts or multifunctional spaces for children. Zoning of the playgroups includes different centers of activity and may benefit from specially arranged areas for children, like zones for privacy. Global evidence shows that learning environments may play a role as a "third teacher"<sup>14</sup>, helping children develop their motor skills, agency, and executive function<sup>15</sup>. Climate-smart and effective architectural designs<sup>16,17</sup> also help support the learning and developmental outcomes of children<sup>18,19</sup>.
9. **Digitalization of the ECE sector in Kosovo accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic.** As with most countries, Kosovo closed schools and ECD centers as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Distance education was organized for ECE by launching the first online platform, "Distance Education – Care, Development and Early Childhood Education for 0–6-year-olds". The platform enabled parents and caregivers to access educational materials and activities supporting ECEC of children 0-6 years.<sup>20</sup> The Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2022-2026 provides a

<sup>13</sup> The World Bank's new Development Policy Operation will feature the enactment of the ECE law by the government.

<sup>14</sup> The definition of the third teacher also comes from the ECD sector, as introduced by Loris Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia, Italy. (Gandini, L. (1998). Educational and caring spaces. In C. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach—Advanced reflections* (2nd ed.) (pp. 161-178). Westport, Connecticut: Ablex Publishing)

<sup>15</sup> Janet Bagby, Lucy Barnard-Brak, Tracey Sulak, Natalie Jones & Mary Walter (2012) The Effects of Environment on Children's Executive Function: A Study of Three Private Schools, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 26:4, 418-426, DOI: 10.1080/02568543.2012.711431

<sup>16</sup> <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/32312>

<sup>17</sup> <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/674861555132593197-0080022019/related/613Tigran0Shmis0Dushanbe0Conference.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Maxwell, L. E. (2007). Competency in Child Care Settings. *Environment and Behavior*, 39(2), 229–245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916506289976>

<sup>19</sup> <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/30920>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/media/1661/file/Early%20Childhood%20Development%20-%20Kosovo%20Case%20Study%20.pdf>



roadmap towards a system-wide digital transformation and prioritizes five main areas: (i) the adoption of an inclusive and centralized digital platform; (ii) the development of multi-dimensional and qualitative digital teaching materials; (iii) the provision of quality internet infrastructure and necessary technical equipment at schools; (iv) the development of digital competences for teachers, school personnel and students; and (v) the creation of institutional mechanisms to coordinate the digital transition and the use of technology in education. Meaningful digitization that can aid ECE provision and collect and analyze critical information on child development will be necessary for successful and equal ECE in Kosovo.

- 10. Inadequate distribution of preschool institutions in the country contributes to Kosovo's status of having the lowest enrolment in ECE in the Western Balkans, and access to quality ECE is even more limited for vulnerable groups and children from rural areas.** Only 33.9 percent of children aged 3-6 have access to ECD programs.<sup>21</sup> Enrollment rates in ECE for children ages 0-5 are very low (6.7 percent). At the pre-primary level (age 6) the situation is significantly better where the gross enrolment rate of children is 88 percent.<sup>22</sup> In general, only 19.5 percent of children are included in preschool education, which is well below the OECD average<sup>23</sup> (over 87 percent for children 3-5 and 36 percent for children 0-2)<sup>24</sup>. Kosovo has a small number of public preschool institutions (only 49 public preschool institutions nationwide), and only 23 out of 38 municipalities in Kosovo have at least one public preschool institution for children up to 5 years old, which contributes to inequity of access to early learning for all children. The most vulnerable groups are also the most deprived of these educational opportunities, with just 1 in 10 children from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities and among those from rural areas attending an early education program. Children under 5 years old in rural areas are involved in ECE three times less than their peers in urban areas because these services in rural areas are almost non-existent. In urban areas, 25.5 percent of children aged 3-5 attend preschool, whereas in rural areas, only 7.9 percent have the opportunity to receive preschool services.<sup>25</sup> Priority enrollment to public preschool is given to children whose parents are both employed, which disadvantages low-income unemployed parents, who lack the support to integrate into the workforce.

<sup>21</sup> UNICEF Kosovo Program <https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/>

<sup>22</sup> MESTI, 2022

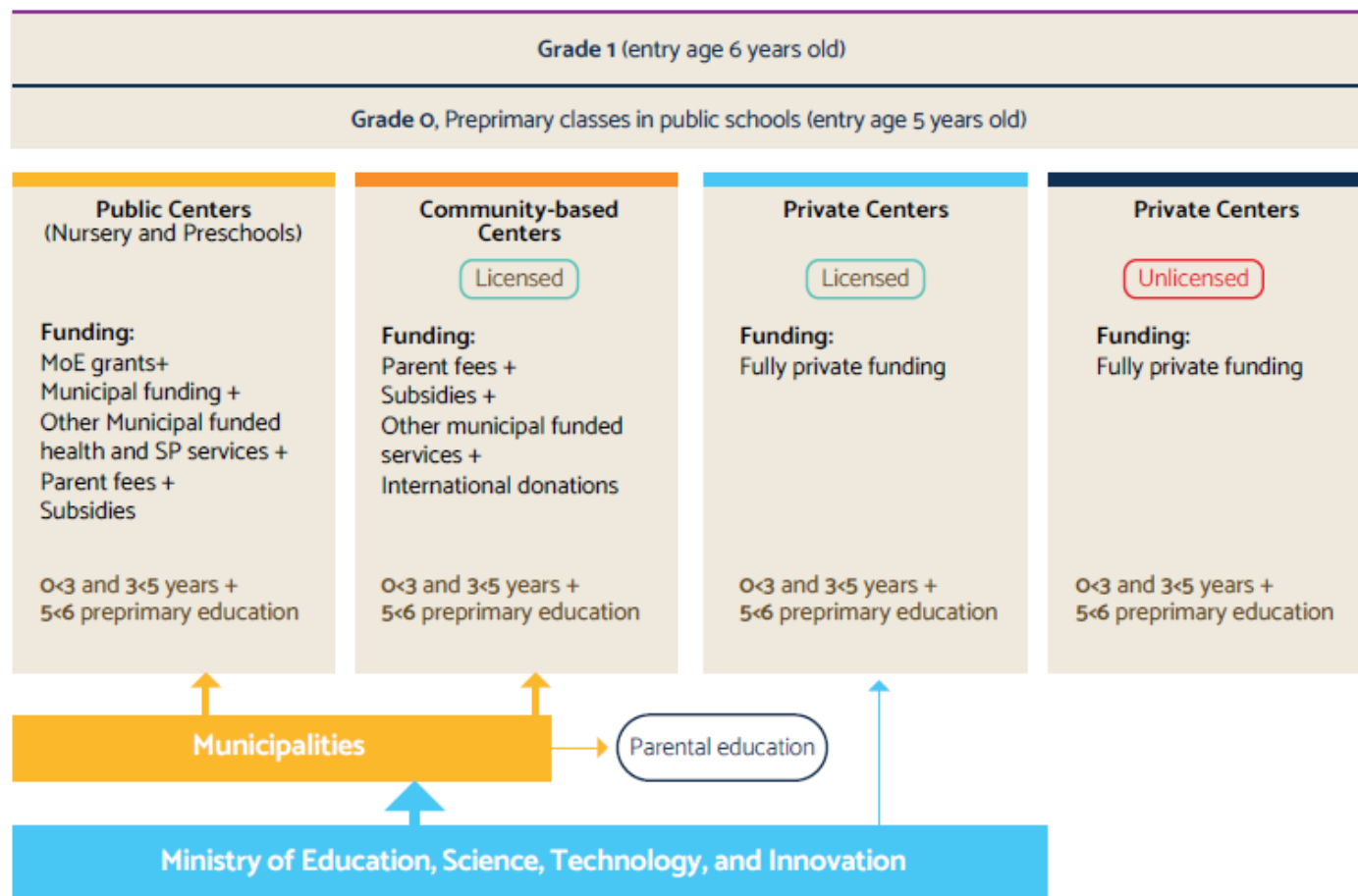
<sup>23</sup> Education Statistics in Kosovo 2020-2021 [https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6293/education-statistics-in-kosovo\\_2020-21.pdf](https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6293/education-statistics-in-kosovo_2020-21.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF3\\_2\\_Enrolment\\_childcare\\_preschool.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF3_2_Enrolment_childcare_preschool.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> A Situation Analysis of ECD Services in Kosovo, World Bank, 2021.



Figure 2. Early Childhood Education and Care Services in Kosovo



Source: World Bank. A Situational Analysis of Early Childhood Development (ECD) Services in Kosovo. 2021.

- A large number of unlicensed private ECD providers in Kosovo have the potential to play an important role in service provision.** Unlicensed private centers (see Figure 2) are thought to be double the number of licensed private providers, but the lack of data leaves only estimates of coverage and no information on their quality. Earlier Bank estimates showed that such unlicensed centers served up to 8,000 children, which was 30 percent higher than the licensed, private provision in Kosovo. While little is known about these services - their quality, safety measures, and minimum standards – it would be important for the Government to ensure such providers are in line with the national policies and minimum standards. Legalizing such private centers and assuring the quality of their services may solve the issue if the Government could define a set of incentives for the providers.
- The quality of health services is influenced by low breastfeeding, vaccination rates, and preterm deliveries, which also worsen inequities in early childhood health outcomes and Maternal and Child Health (MCH) indicators.** MCH indicators remain amongst the poorest in the region and Europe. By 2019, 16 children under five years of age died per 1,000 live births.<sup>26</sup> This number is almost twice higher for children from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian households, with 27 children dying per 1,000 live births. As of 2019, only 29 percent of children under six months of age were exclusively breastfed, which marks a decrease from 40 percent in 2014.<sup>27</sup> While moderate and severe stunting for children under 5 is low in the general population, it poses a serious risk to vulnerable communities. Stunting is





concentrated in the poorest quintiles in both ethnic majority and minority groups and reaches 15 percent in Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian households. Moreover, while nearly three-quarters of children in Kosovo 24-35 months old are fully immunized, just 38 percent of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children are.<sup>28</sup>

13. **The provision of social services to vulnerable children and their families in Kosovo faces a number of challenges,** including the absence of a poverty-targeting mechanism to reach the most vulnerable. Nearly 20 percent of large households in Kosovo live in poverty, but only between 5 to 8 percent of them receive social assistance scheme (SAS) benefits. Stringent eligibility requirements exclude many poor families with children, though the strong potential for change lies in ongoing planned reform to the SAS benefit scheme.<sup>29</sup> Social services are managed and provided by professional staff (social service officers) working at the Centers for Social Work (CSWs). The CSWs lack proper mechanisms for planning, monitoring, inspection, and service quality assurance and investment in human capacity development.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the absence of informational campaigns for families and at-risk communities limits the already modest reach of families served by social services.
14. **Exceptionally low employment for women paired with poor access to child- and eldercare poses one of the fundamental obstacles to improving women's participation in the workforce.** Across the EU, the existence of ECE services is considered a key indicator of women's labor force participation. In Kosovo, while the overall employment rate in 2019 was 30 percent for all registered 15–64 year-olds, employment for women was just 14 percent. Barriers to working-age women's participation in the labor market include family responsibilities, limited access to quality and affordable child and eldercare, conservative social norms, high costs of maternity leave for employers, and women's limited access to assets and productive inputs. This trend generates a vicious cycle of low female labor market participation and, in turn, drives less demand for early childhood education and care services. Women playing a prominent caretaker role also increases their economic vulnerability and raises other gender-based inequalities. This is particularly relevant for working mothers without easy access to childcare.
15. **Despite the policy efforts to coordinate ECD across sectors, Kosovo still lacks a multi-sectoral strategy and a sustainable financing approach in ECD.** The country lacks a comprehensive and connected system for data collection, analysis, and evaluation of early childhood development programs to inform policymaking. Moreover, public expenditure on ECD is also difficult to measure, as spending on young children is generally not disaggregated from sectoral budgets. The lack of a lead institutional anchor across the health, nutrition, education, and social protection sectors limits the achievement of shared goals and makes it difficult to leverage resources. The budgeting process in ECD is kept separate in each of the sectors (education, health, and social protection) with no cross-sectoral coordination. The health budget is planned as per capita funding throughout the country, with children being accounted for in the population size in that municipality but without featuring the dimension of ECD. The education budget is planned at the central level and channeled to municipalities through specific municipal grants on a yearly basis. It uses a per capita school financing formula for financing pre-university education in municipalities, and preschool is also included. For social protection, the Government allocates funding annually for a range of social assistance programs which is based on need and is eligible for any person and household that is entitled to receive support. Kosovo continues to spend less on education as compared to other regional and EU countries. The level of public spending on education in 2020 was 4.7 percent of GDP or 11.3 percent of total Government spending.<sup>31</sup> Even

<sup>26</sup> MICS, 2019-2020.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Demas, Angela, Mrike Aliu, Sarah Coll-Black, Aglaia Zafeirakou, Aline Hankey, and Boryana Gotcheva. 2021. A Situational Analysis of Early Childhood Development (ECD) Services in Kosovo. The World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> EU, 2021. <http://www.kec-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Policy-brief-Kosovo-ENG-Final.pdf>



though the amount as a percentage of GDP is comparable to EU countries, per capita spending is considerably lower, which derives as a result of a low level of GDP base and Government budget, and the significant number of pupils per total population as compared to other EU countries. The lack of investment in public preschools resulted in an almost stagnant number of public preschools over the last 5 years, and investment was limited mainly to urban areas, further widening access opportunities.

#### Relationship to CPF

16. The proposed Project is fully integrated into the Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for 2023-2026. Specifically, the Project will contribute to the CPF's High-Level Outcome 1 (HLO 1) – Greater public service efficiency and quality, and specifically to Objective 1.3: Increase access to public services by minority and marginalized groups; and High-Level Outcome 2 (HLO 2) – More formal private sector jobs, and linked Objective 2.3: Remove barriers to economic empowerment of women and youth. Two indicators of the CPF will be informed by the Project - Indicator 1.3.2: Children ages 3 to 4 attending early childhood education programs, including children from families representing marginalized groups, and Indicator 2.3.2: Number of women employed in ECD services (private or public).
17. The Project will also interact with the Development Policy Operation (DPO) series prepared by the Bank with the Government. The DPO's Pillar A on Enhancing the effectiveness of fiscal policy, features the prior action on approval and adoption of the new national Early Childhood Education Law. The indicative trigger for the prior action is the implementation of the sub-legal act to the named law.

#### **C. Proposed Development Objective(s)**

18. The proposed project's development objective is to improve equitable access to and quality of early childhood development services in Kosovo.

#### Key Results (From PCN)

Indicator 1: Increased access to ECD services: enrollment rate for 0-6 year old – disaggregated by gender, age, minority group

Indicator 2: Improved quality of ECD services as measured by TEACH ECE – disaggregated by type of institution and urban/rural

Indicator 3: Improved regulatory environment for affordable and quality childcare for children (Nutrition, Learning Environments, Quality Assurance, Targeting, Inclusion)

#### **D. Concept Description**

19. The proposed Project will be organized around four key components which relate to improving access, quality, equity, and cross-sectoral coordination of ECD services.

Component 1: Strengthening the Quality and Equity of ECD Services in Kosovo

Component 2: Increasing Access to ECD Services

Component 3: Improving the Availability of Health and Nutrition Services for Children

Component 4: Project Management and Monitoring & Evaluation



20. The objective of the first component is to improve the regulatory, operational, and implementation capacity of Kosovo to ensure the quality of ECD services across the education system. Component 2 will focus on supporting the Government's priorities to increase access to preschool services for families and increase enrollment rates through constructing, refurbishing, and repurposing facilities for the provision of ECD services, innovative equipment of the kindergartens and provision of teaching and learning materials, and supporting alternative forms of ECD provision. The third component will focus on supporting the Government in addressing child outcomes, particularly decreasing infant mortality and stunting rates, as well as supporting early child development from prenatal to childcare range of services. Component 4 will support the day-to-day management of project implementation, the monitoring and evaluation of its implementation, and technical assistance and operational support for MESTI. In addition, this component will support the implementation of the package of the evaluation and assessment instruments (TEACH ECE, ECD assessments), the design of an impact evaluation study, and its implementation throughout the project duration.

Legal Operational Policies	Triggered?
Projects on International Waterways OP 7.50	No
Projects in Disputed Areas OP 7.60	No

Summary of Screening of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts

21. The overall Environmental and Social Risk Classification level is proposed moderate.

22. The environmental risk is proposed moderate. The anticipated risks are expected to be moderate since the project is financing medium-scale activities, the rehabilitation, and the repurposing of existing spaces as well as the construction of new kindergartens, most of which will not be identified until implementation begins. The environmental risks associated with the implementation of these civil works are expected to have moderate impacts which can be easily avoided or minimized with the application of the World Bank (WB) Environmental and Social Standards (ESSs), WB Group Environmental Health and Safety Guidelines, and Good International Industrial Practices. Since the details of the activities are not known at this stage, the client will prepare the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF), that covers applicable ESSs, namely ESS 1 "Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts", ESS 2 "Labor and Working Conditions", ESS 3 "Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention and Management", ESS 4 "Community Health and Safety", ESS 5 "Land Acquisition, Restrictions on Land Use and Involuntary Resettlement", and ESS 10 "Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure".

23. The social risk of the project is proposed moderate. Considering the fact that the project will finance civil works related to the rehabilitation and repurposing of existing spaces as well as the construction of new kindergartens, and the locations of the new constructions are yet not known, thus, ESS 5 is relevant, and the client is expected to prepare a Resettlement Framework (RF) to guide the project in dealing with land acquisition, restrictions to access, or any economic and/or physical displacement. Civil works activities are expected to have labor risks, mostly concerning occupational health and safety (OHS) issues. The labor issues are expected to be mitigated through the ESMF and through Labor Management Procedures with a dedicated Grievance Redress Mechanism for project workers. The major social project risk is related to the possibility of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups being excluded from the project benefit. This risk will be addressed through adequate mitigation measures, consequently integrating the



representatives of these groups into project designs and through the stakeholder engagement processes. In order to ensure that the project is inclusive, the project will prepare a robust stakeholder engagement plan (SEP) in proportion to the nature and scale of the project and its associated risks and impacts.

24. The ESF capacity of the MESTI is weak since the previous WB-supported education project "Kosovo Education Improvement Project" followed the World Bank's safeguards policy, and did not contain an infrastructure component. The existing environmental and social capacities at the Ministry would need to be strengthened for the Project implementation phase.
25. Stakeholder risks are assessed as moderate. The project will ensure the planning and monitoring of activities across all interested parties at the central and local levels. A comprehensive SEP will be developed to mitigate the risks.
26. The climate risks identified for Kosovo will be addressed across the components. The initial assessment of the climate risk is low to moderate. However, several components will feature climate-smart interventions, specifically in physical infrastructure sub-components and teacher training sub-components.

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### Borrower/Client/Recipient

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### Implementing Agencies

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**APPROVAL**

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