

# 2021

## Annual Report

unicef   
for every child





# BACKGROUND

**Kosovo<sup>1</sup> remains one of the poorest places in Europe, with an estimated 23 per cent of the population living in poverty.** Kosovo's GDP per capita is just one-quarter of the European Union average. Kosovo spends just 8.5 per cent of its GDP on social protection, compared to an average of 28 per cent in the EU. As a result, children's access to health, education and other social services remains limited, especially for the most disadvantaged. Children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are particularly underserved, as are those who have disabilities or who live in rural areas.

**The COVID-19 pandemic continued throughout 2021, putting an unprecedented burden on Kosovo's health system and other social services.** Kosovo experienced its fourth and most severe wave of the pandemic to date during August and September 2021. About 165,000 cases and 3,000 COVID-19 related deaths have been registered since the onset of the pandemic, despite mitigation measures and some of the highest vaccination rates in the Western Balkans, with almost half of the population being fully vaccinated (43.5 per cent).

Even before COVID-19, Kosovo's health sector faced serious structural challenges. The child mortality rate is four times higher than the EU average (eight times higher in Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities).

---

<sup>1</sup> All references to Kosovo should be understood in reference to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)

Disparities in access to health services are striking, with only 38 per cent of children under-2 fully immunized for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities (compared to 73 per cent among the general population).

Disruption of routine immunization services and other maternal and child health care services due to the pandemic has only made the situation worse.

COVID-19 disrupted education throughout 2021, with a late start of the academic year and schools operating in shifts and using blended learning. These disruptions are expected to exacerbate existing learning inequalities and negatively affect basic reading and numeracy skills among children.

The pandemic has also resulted in job losses. In 2021, the youth unemployment rate increased to 48.6 per cent overall (53.5 per cent for women). Nearly 30 per cent of 15-year-olds were not in employment, education or training, an increase of 10 per cent in 2021. Adolescent girls became at high risk of anxiety, depression, sexual and reproductive health concerns and unequal gender roles at home, while boys were at risk of engaging in child labour to contribute to family income.

*UNICEF responded to these challenges by helping multi-sectoral COVID response efforts to reach the most vulnerable, continuing its advocacy for increased funding for social protection and expanding the use of technology for health care and distance learning in schools.*

# UNICEF KOSOVO PROGRAMME

2021 was the first year of the UNICEF Kosovo 2021-2025 programme, which is focused on three main areas:

## Supporting the development of young children

*("The first decade of life")*



## Promoting empowerment and skills development for adolescents and young people

*("The second decade of life")*



## Social inclusion and child rights monitoring for the most vulnerable children across the life cycle



During 2021, UNICEF raised an additional US\$6.6 million in funding, a 59 per cent increase compared to 2020. These additional resources, mostly linked to the COVID-19 pandemic response, allowed the Kosovo programme to expand the scale of its support to partners and advance the child rights agenda for all vulnerable children in Kosovo.

The 2021 programme was implemented in cooperation with key line ministries and institutions, municipalities, academia, civil society organisations and the private sector.



# THE FIRST DECADE OF LIFE: SUPPORTING PARENTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

## *Healthy babies, thriving children*

Young children survive and thrive if they and their families have access to health advice, vaccinations, breastfeeding and proper nutrition, and are given opportunities for early learning.

Home visits by health workers from primary health care centers for pregnant women and children aged 0-3 is an important programme of the Ministry of Health which aims to bring key maternal and child health interventions closer to families and children and is supported by UNICEF in 27 municipalities in Kosovo. The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted face-to-face visits in 2021, but UNICEF supported health workers to begin providing telehealth counselling, using mobile phones. This increased the number and frequency of contact between families and nurses, who were able to carry out 25,000 consultations and visits with pregnant women and parents of young children. Through these visits and consultations, in 2021, the **home visiting program reached over 14,000 children aged 0-3 and about 2,500 pregnant women.**



6 per cent of these children were from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

Being fully vaccinated is critical to children's survival. In 2020 routine immunization services were interrupted, and health workers were re-deployed to respond to the COVID pandemic. Therefore in 2021, UNICEF set up a programme to identify children who missed out on their vaccinations, supporting a door-to-door campaign with a focus on communities



with historically low vaccination rates. **5,877** children were vaccinated in catch-up immunization sessions.





## Early education, lifelong success

Access to quality early education services narrows the development and learning gaps for children from disadvantaged family backgrounds. In 2021, UNICEF worked with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to finalise an important law and action plan on Early Childhood Education which will improve the quality and expand the coverage of early childhood education services, and that should be adopted by the Kosovo Assembly in 2022.

The biggest changes to children's brains happen from when they are born up until they turn two. Children learn best through play, and their first play experiences occur at home. In 2021, UNICEF worked with partners to create a distance-learning Early Childhood Education platform which provides activities for parents to help young children learn at home and for educators

to use in the classroom. **24,000 children aged 0-6 and 147 educators benefited from online learning through this platform.** Early childhood is also a key moment to influence social norms and behaviors and change stereotypes to promote gender equality: UNICEF also helped develop a training module for educators to facilitate fathers' engagement in early education, through activities like storytelling, singing songs, reading books or simple games.



Children who go to preschool are less likely to drop out or repeat grades at school, however only 15 per cent of children aged 3-4 years in Kosovo attend any form of early childhood education. In 2021, UNICEF helped establish two new Early Childhood Development centres and continued to support 14 other centres in underserved and rural areas. Overall, **405 children aged 3-5 attended pre-school learning programmes** at these centres, 11 per cent of whom were from Roma, Ashkali or Egyptians communities. These centres serve as a model for community-based early learning. UNICEF's long-term goal is that they will be integrated into municipalities' budgets and programs and thus scaled up throughout Kosovo.



Children with disabilities often need specialised support to succeed at school. Through a small pilot program, UNICEF showed how placing teaching assistants with children with disabilities in the classrooms can be a sustainable way of making schools more inclusive. In 2020-2021 UNICEF trained 35 teacher assistants, placed them in schools and paid their salaries. After the program ended, seven of these assistants were kept on their school's payroll, with their wages covered by local authorities.

**Kosovo authorities have now committed to increasing the number of teacher assistants by 100 in 2022 while pledging an additional 300 assistants by 2025.**



## Protecting communities and children from COVID-19

UNICEF supported the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine by training 200 health professionals, setting up a digital vaccination registration system, and supporting establishment of vaccination sites in 30 out of the 38 municipalities in Kosovo. The digital system helped collect real-time data on the number of vaccinations based on gender, age, and target groups.



**A total of 739,620 donated vaccines were delivered through the COVAX facility,** enough to fully vaccinate 21 per cent of the total population. Additionally, 1.3 million syringes, 16 new refrigerators for Kosovo's aging cold chain infrastructure and other critical equipment were procured and distributed. Around 14,000 masks were delivered as emergency response to healthcare facilities across Kosovo.

UNICEF also worked with the Ministry of Health to increase demand for COVID-19 vaccinations, especially among the most marginalized and vulnerable people.

**About 27,000 people received COVID-19 vaccination information through door-to-door campaigns,** resulting in the vaccination of 2,731 people from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities (48 per cent female and 52 per cent male).





# THE SECOND DECADE: EMPOWERMENT AND SKILLS FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

## *Ensuring continuity of learning in the COVID-19 period*

Even before the pandemic, the education system in Kosovo struggled with many capacity gaps, including low capacity among teachers and school personnel, limited access to the internet and technology, and a lack of a comprehensive strategy for digital transformation of the school system. Given the immediate challenges posed by the rapid transition to online learning due to the pandemic, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology continued to roll-out [shkollat.org](https://shkollat.org), a Kosovo-wide e-learning platform that includes a digital library and video lessons for all subjects in Grades 1–9 and 21st-century skills-based programmes to meet the needs of adolescents and youth in Grades 10–12. Last year, about **200,000 students accessed online learning through the 8,458 video classes available on [shkollat.org](https://shkollat.org).**



Despite these efforts, distance learning in Kosovo was hampered during the pandemic by a lack of infrastructure and low teacher capacity. To address this, UNICEF providing training



on shkollat.org for 2,000 teachers, connected 13 schools to the internet and, together with public and private sector partners, provided **305 laptops to teachers and 629 tablets to vulnerable children and adolescents.**

No digital solution can completely replace face-to-face interaction with teachers and peers. Getting safely back into classrooms was critical for learning and psycho-social wellbeing of children in Kosovo. In 2021 UNICEF continued to advocate for timely and safe re-opening of schools, helped the authorities to develop health guidelines and decision-making tools, and

**distributed masks and disinfectant to 95% of schools in Kosovo. These efforts promoted a safe return to classrooms for more than 300,000 students.**



## *Empowering adolescents and youth*

UNICEF supports a range of programmes that develop life skills among adolescents and youth, using empowering and youth-led approaches. These programmes prepare them to participate meaningfully in economic and social life as young adults. This is particularly important in Kosovo, where young people often leave the education system without skills which prepare them for work and match the needs of the labor market, and where traditional social norms mean that young people are often not consulted about their future or included in decision-making.

Linking learning to community engagement encourages adolescents and youth to develop important, 21st century skills while becoming social change agents. UNICEF's flagship youth programs UPSHIFT, PONDER and PODIUM challenge young people to design their own solutions to community problems.

These three programmes are now available online, which means they can reach more young people. UNICEF and partners are also piloting the integration of skills-based learning into the school curriculum, with these programs now being taught in six upper secondary schools by specially trained teachers. In 2021, **6,785 young people completed UNICEF's 21<sup>st</sup> century skills-based programmes** and 1,027 of these adolescents and youth implemented 64 youth-led initiatives on issues such as the environment, gender equality, mental health and digital learning. Development of specialized skills was also supported through the Techstitution programme, which trained 541 adolescents and youth in ICT skills and then helped them utilize their new knowledge to develop digital solutions to social issues.



Youth unemployment in Kosovo is among the highest in the region, and opportunities to gain work experience are scarce, especially for the most marginalized young people. UNICEF continued to work with public and private sector partners to bridge the school to work transition through Kosovo Generation Unlimited (K-GenU), with a focus on internship and mentorship opportunities. Through K-GenU in 2021



**644 young people completed three-month paid internships in a total of 146 different companies and organizations.**

**Nearly a quarter of these young people were successfully employed after their internships ended.**

UNICEF also used its global youth engagement platform, U-Report, to connect and empower young people in Kosovo. **A total of 1,760 new users signed up for U-Report Kosovo in 2021, bringing the total to 11,689 U-Reporters in Kosovo.**



U-Report polls this past year covered a wide-range of issues, such as COVID-19 and vaccine acceptance, social inclusion, and climate change. Feedback from U-Reporters also informed the important policy documents and the Development Strategy 2022-2030.





# ACHIEVEMENTS IN SOCIAL INCLUSION AND CHILD RIGHTS MONITORING

UNICEF works to strengthen the child and social protection system in Kosovo, which is currently under-resourced and fragmented, and struggles to deliver critical services to the poorest and most at-risk children and families at the local level. In 2021 UNICEF strengthened the normative framework in child and social protection by contributing to draft laws on Social and Family Services and Local Government Finance, and the supported the harmonization of 10 administrative instructions to improve the child protection system.

UNICEF also advocated for increased funding for social protection, through the creation of a specific grant for social services under the Law on Local Government Finance.



**UNICEF provided technical assistance to review the draft Law on Categorization of Persons with Disabilities,** identifying

investments and improvements that will strengthen the capacities of the multidisciplinary teams to identify and support children with disabilities.

UNICEF worked with partners to ensure that the needs of children, marginalised young people and vulnerable families were reflected in the planning for the Development Strategy 2022-2030. UNICEF provided disaggregated data that identified geographical and demographic inequities to inform planning, and supported consultations with adolescents and youth so they could express their concerns and priorities directly to policy-makers.

UNICEF worked with multiple institutions to address information and capacity gaps which limit the availability of data on children in Kosovo, **UNICEF is supporting the development of a database for child rights monitoring and reporting.** The Kosovo Agency of Statistics was supported to collect and report data on child mortality. The Ministry of Health also digitalised immunisation data under the Health Information System. Similarly, UNICEF Kosovo supported the Ministry of Education to align the pre-university education system and upper-secondary education programs with international standards.



In order to protect the rights of refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking children, UNICEF, together with UNHCR and IOM, supported the Ministry of Internal Affairs to develop Best Interest Assessment and Best Interest Determination Guidelines, in compliance with international protection standards. UNICEF also provided psycho-social support and educational activities to all 41 children registered in the Asylum Centre and their 69 parents and trained social workers, police officers, customs officers, Asylum Centre staff and teachers on integrating services for children on the move.

# LESSONS LEARNED



**Digital transformation needs strategic and sustained investment:** UNICEF's work creating digital learning platforms for children and students affected by school closures supported the digitization of education, which was a goal pre-pandemic. However, significant and structural obstacles to distance learning included a lack of infrastructure and low teacher capacities. After identifying this gap, UNICEF worked with partners to supply devices and internet connectivity to some schools and students. This experience highlighted the need for a comprehensive, well-resourced and strategic approach to digital transformation in education. UNICEF is now working with the Ministry of Education and other partners to develop such an approach within the Kosovo Education Sector Strategy, currently under development.



**Tele-health approaches increase coverage and access to key services:** The adoption of tele-consultations for the home visiting programme during the COVID-19 pandemic enabled nurses to reach more pregnant women and young children than they had previously reached with traditional means and increased the frequency of communication. UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Health and other partners to explore how tele-health could complement traditional in-person home visits beyond the pandemic, as a cost-effective way to scale up and sustain this important programme.



**Work experience can lead to work:** Encouraging results from 2021, with 24 per cent of young interns employed after completing the UNICEF-supported Kosovo Generation Unlimited programme, demonstrate that work experience is an important investment to improve the employability of young people, including from marginalized groups. Bridging the school to work transition sustainably and at scale will require expanded partnerships with a wide range of public and private organizations and businesses.



**Long-term, joint advocacy works:** Frequent changes in authorities posed a risk to the implementation of large-scale programmes and policies. Long-term engagement with institutions, technical staff and other stakeholders helped ensure continuity of political priorities. Joint advocacy with civil society also proved instrumental to maintaining key issues on the agenda and continuing work on legal frameworks.



**Capacity building changes priorities:** UNICEF's support evaluating the Development Strategy (2016-2021) helped instil a culture of evaluation in Kosovo institutions. Capacity building sparked interest across institutions and line ministries in integrated planning, monitoring and evaluation of strategies and policies. Engaging key institutions in data collection and analysis activities also helped reveal gaps in existing data systems and led to the identification of key priorities for data quality improvement.

# PARTNERSHIPS

The programme results described in the report were made possible thanks to the generous support of the following partners:

 <p>European Union</p>	 <p>GAVI The Vaccine Alliance</p>	 <p>Government of Austria – the Austrian Development Agency</p>
 <p>Government of Japan</p>	 <p>Government of Luxembourg (Grand Duchy of Luxembourg)</p>	 <p>Government of the Netherlands</p>
 <p>Government of Sweden - The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</p>	 <p>Government of the United Kingdom</p>	 <p>Government of the United States of America- U.S. Agency for International Development</p>
 <p>United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund</p>	 <p>UNICEF Netherlands</p>	 <p>Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo</p>

UNICEF Kosovo would also like to recognize the many Governments and other partners that contribute core and thematic funding to UNICEF globally, as these flexible resources have been instrumental in achieving the results described in this report.





for every child,  
**opportunities**

unicef  | for every child

**UNICEF Kosovo**

“Pejton, Ramiz Sadiku Building”, C3/2A  
Prishtine/ Kosovo

**Web:** [www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme](http://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme)

**Facebook:** UNICEF Kosovo Programme

**Instagram:** unicefkosovoprogramme

**Twitter:** UNICEFKosovo