

2022

Kosovo Programme

ANNUAL REPORT







BACKGROUND

UNICEF continued its support to children and families in Kosovo¹ in 2022, working to ensure that the rights of children are respected and that all children, adolescents and youth are healthy, protected, and included so they can reach their full potential.

With an average age of 26 years Kosovo has the **youngest population in Europe**. This “demographic dividend” is potentially a powerful accelerator of social and economic development. However, access to quality health, education and other social services remains limited for many children and youth, particularly the most vulnerable, resulting in poor outcomes for many children.

Nearly 23 per cent of children in Kosovo live in poverty, and 7 per cent live in extreme poverty. These children and their families were put under even more pressure in 2022, when they suffered from an inflation surge. Inflation increased to more than 14 per cent, with the price of bread and cereals, meat, dairy products and baby food particularly affected.

Despite a recent increase in the budget for primary health care, children’s health indicators in Kosovo remain among the worst in the region. **The child mortality rate is four times higher than the EU average;** and eight times higher than the EU average in Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, where rates of immunisation are also low and access to clean water and sanitation is limited.

¹ All references to Kosovo shall be understood in the context of UNSCR 1244 (1999)

Most children in Kosovo are still not getting the right start to learning, with **only 15 per cent of children aged 3-4 years attending early education programmes**. Quality of education also remains a concern in both primary and secondary levels, with only **41 per cent of children aged 7-14 years demonstrating foundational reading skills and 42 percent demonstrating foundational numeracy skills**. This proportion is even lower in the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, at 18 percent and 13 percent respectively.

Children with disabilities suffer a from a lack of early identification and support by the health and education systems, as well as widespread exclusion from school: while **8 per cent of children have a functional difficulty in at least one domain**, only 3,965 children with disabilities are attending primary education in the formal education system currently.

Low learning outcomes and limited skills continue to negatively impact school to work transitions for youth, with **31.7 per cent of those aged 15-24 not in employment, education or training in 2022**.

UNICEF continued to support Kosovo institutions and civil society organizations in their efforts to address these important challenges facing children throughout 2022, as described in the following section.





UNICEF KOSOVO PROGRAMME

In the second year of the UNICEF Kosovo Programme 2021–2025, work to achieve results for children continued in three key 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 2022 UNICEF's programme delivery amounted to US\$6.7 million, a 35 per cent increase from 2021. Generous contributions from our partners have allowed UNICEF in Kosovo to invest in longer-term systems strengthening for health, education and social services, as well as to provide adolescents and youth with transferable skills and opportunities for meaningful work and engagement with their communities.



ACHIEVEMENTS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Healthy babies, thriving children

In 2022 UNICEF helped increase access to critical services for pregnant mothers and young children. The UNICEF-supported Home Visiting programme for pregnant women and new parents was expanded into seven new municipalities, making it a Kosovo-wide programme a year earlier than planned. **Nurses performed 37,355 visits in 2022, a 35 per cent increase compared to 2021.**

Home visiting has also made maternal and child health services more inclusive and equitable, with one in 10 children reached by the program from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. With the support of UNICEF's evidence and advocacy, the authorities granted EUR3.2 million to sustain and enhance the Home Visiting programme for 2023.

UNICEF also continued its collaboration with the National Institute of Public Health to increase vaccination coverage. A key achievement was the renewal of the entire vaccine cold chain system across Kosovo. To address the drop in routine childhood vaccinations during the pandemic, **UNICEF also supported a door-to-door catch-up vaccination campaign, which led to the vaccination of 2,203 children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.** UNICEF continued to support Kosovo authorities in their efforts to increase demand for COVID-19 vaccination. Ten thousand people living in vulnerable communities were reached with COVID-19 related information through a door-to-door campaign.

Supporting children with disabilities remained a key focus for UNICEF. Identifying children who need extra support and providing early intervention, ideally as soon as possible after birth, is key to their future success. UNICEF finalized a Situation Analysis on Early Childhood Intervention that identified key system level bottlenecks to identifying and supporting children with disabilities. This study will contribute to the design and financing of early intervention programmes going forward.



Investments in early learning

Momentum for investment in early childhood education continued to build in 2022, with multiple stakeholders prioritizing expansion of access to services for young children as a key accelerator for economic and social development. **With support from UNICEF, early childhood education was included as a key pillar in the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2022-2026 and the early childhood education law was introduced in the Assembly of Kosovo.** Budget allocation for early education for 2023 was also increased by EUR5.8 million. UNICEF helped the Ministry of Education prioritise how and where to invest this allocation for new preschool facilities, based on population projections and best practice from other settings.

UNICEF and its partners also continued to make community-based early childhood education available for more children at the municipal level, with 617 children regularly attending 18 centres and 17,674 young children reached through online and home-based support.

Parental education and involvement is essential in the early years. Active caregiver engagement – especially by fathers- was promoted during information sessions attended by 510 people (40 per cent male). **Around 10,000 people downloaded the new mobile application “Foleja,” which was developed by UNICEF in Albanian and Serbian languages and which provides critical information on health, care, parenting and education for parents of children aged 0-6.**

Successful early learning also depends on the skills and capacities of educators. UNICEF provided training to educators on quality, inclusive and gender equitable early children education programmes.



ACHIEVEMENTS FOR ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG PEOPLE

More than 10,600 young people were reached through different youth empowerment initiatives in 2022. UNICEF in Kosovo uses special partnerships and strategies to reach youth from marginalized communities and invests in programming with youth from different backgrounds to build social cohesion.

Transforming online education

UNICEF leveraged momentum from the pandemic to build broader support for a transformative and structured approach to digital teaching and learning. Recognizing the need to scale up digital learning solutions to improve quality and support individualized learning for children, **with support from UNICEF the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2022-2026 has for the first time included a pillar on the digital transformation of pre-university education.** This strategy provides a road map for investment around six areas of digital learning: digital learning platforms, content, teacher upskilling and support, connectivity, devices, and institutional support.

To further contribute to the improvement of digital infrastructure at schools, UNICEF distributed laptops for school use and provided internet connectivity for 39 schools in target municipalities. In addition, a total of 1,398 teachers from target municipalities have been trained on digital technology and inclusive pedagogy.

UNICEF also continued to support the Ministry of Education to institutionalize Shkollat.org, Kosovo's version of the Learning Passport, which combines the largest repository of curriculum-aligned video learning content in Kosovo with communication tools to engage students inside or outside the classroom.

The right skills for life and work

UNICEF further strengthened the rollout of its youth skills development programs in formal education. UPSHIFT is a social innovation initiative which supports adolescents and youth to become a force for positive social change, building transferable skills and creating opportunities for reaching community members with various interventions in the form of products or services. PONDER aims to improve critical thinking skills, with a focus on information and messages that adolescents and youth receive from social and traditional media. PODIUM is a social advocacy workshop that teaches youth and adolescents how to advocate for the rights of their communities.

Integrating these youth-led skills-building programmes into the school setting means they will be available to all high school students in Kosovo. Building on the lessons learned from a 2021 pilot, in 2022 UNICEF and the Ministry of Education revised the implementation guidelines for these three skills-building programmes to further strengthen implementation, monitoring and institutionalization. 2,763 adolescents (61 per cent girls) benefited from these skills-building programmes in schools.

Kosovo Generation Unlimited, a flagship public-private partnership platform for youth skills and employability, got a major boost in 2022. While 220 young people – 10 per cent from non-majority communities and 5 per cent with disabilities – completed internships, a new implementation model was operationalized under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers to scale up and co-finance paid internships, mentorship and training for 10,000 young people over the next two years.

A [K-GenU online platform](#) was developed to match young people seeking work experience with companies, NGOs, and public institutions. **As of end 2022 9,401 young people and 532 companies were registered in the platform.**

Expanding civic engagement opportunities for young people was another important focus of UNICEF's work in 2022. Innovation Hubs in five selected municipalities allowed 2,486 adolescents and youth (58 per cent girls) to participate in skills development programmes, and as part of the Science for Change initiative, 250 young people designed and implemented awareness raising campaigns in their communities to address the issue of air pollution. The [Kosovo Volunteers](#) platform was also upgraded to better support youth volunteerism.





ACHIEVEMENTS IN SOCIAL INCLUSION AND CHILD RIGHTS MONITORING

In 2022, UNICEF continued to support efforts to address child poverty and inequality and worked to strengthen systems that protect children most at risk of violence and abuse. UNICEF also supported public institutions to generate quality data on children and better monitor progress on child rights in Kosovo.

Improving services for at-risk children

In 2022 UNICEF supported the development of five new Administrative Instructions for the Law on Child Protection and the establishment of Child Rights Teams in 11 municipalities. **UNICEF also supported training for 402 child protection and other front-line workers on the implementation of the Law in 28 municipalities.**

A mental health for children training package was created to improve the skills of Kosovo's 210 social welfare workers. An online learning platform for social work was developed and UNICEF donated 230 tablets to help workers access the training. UNICEF also supported the development of a Foster Care and Adoption Programme guideline in 2022, for social workers to be aware of changes in the system.

Seventy children placed in family-based care benefited from professional psychosocial services. UNICEF also supported integrated educational and psychosocial services in Pristina for 63 children living in street situations.



Inclusion of children with disabilities

UNICEF helped create the final draft of the Law on Evaluation, Status Recognition, Benefits, and Services for Persons with Disabilities. The Law advocates for needs-based individual plans and services that are in line with international standards. UNICEF directly supported 12 NGO-run community-based rehabilitation centers for children with disabilities.

Improving financing and coordination for child rights

In its five focus municipalities UNICEF helped develop joint workplans to improve the coordination of services delivered to the most marginalized and at-risk children and youth. Trainings on planning, monitoring, and costing was held for 170 municipal officials.

UNICEF supported the Kosovo authorities to analyse budget implications for draft laws and cost new social services so that municipalities are adequately and sustainably financed to support marginalised children. UNICEF has joined forces with the Coalition of NGOs on Child Protection to advocate for the passage of the Law on Local Government Finance which includes a provision for increased funding to municipalities to provide child protection and other social services.

Better data for children

For the first time, the United Nations estimated child mortality rates for Kosovo as part of a global effort. As a result, the Kosovo Agency of Statistics enhanced its capacity to produce timely estimates of child mortality. UNICEF did an assessment of the quality and availability of administrative data related to children with disabilities and those at risk of violence and abuse within the education, health and justice sectors. This assessment also provided recommendations to the relevant authorities to improve the quality and disaggregation of data on vulnerable children. Such evidence will help pave the way to strengthen administrative data systems in the coming years.





LESSONS **LEARNED**

UNICEF Kosovo is committed to learning from both successes and challenges and adapting its programmes in response to the evolving context. This section focuses on major lessons learned over the past year.

In 2022 UNICEF noted that low capacity to manage funds for social services at municipal level has become a persistent bottleneck across sectors. At the same time, the health team found that a costing tool they helped create for the Home Visiting programme had proved useful to the health authorities and had contributed to increased public funding for the programme. As a result, UNICEF proposed to the Ministry of Health to use the same tool to support budget planning. In 2023 such support in budget planning and execution will be extended to other sectors such as education, where available budgets for specific areas such as early education or children with disabilities have to date not been requested or remain unused due to limited capacity to plan for and absorb funds at the local level.

MICS data shows that around 8% of children in Kosovo have difficulty in at least one functional domain. Yet the numbers of children identified as having developmental delays during their early years, particularly age 0-3, remained extremely low in 2022. Early intervention is essential to supporting children to reach their fullest potential, but it seems that the increased coverage of primary health outreach through home visits had not yet led to better screening of developmental delays. To respond to this

challenge UNICEF and health authorities have agreed to develop a standardized child developmental monitoring tool in 2023, which will be integrated into the primary health care system.

UNICEF also worked to document learning on vaccine uptake from its work on COVID-19 vaccine promotion. Building on this experience UNICEF, together with the health authorities, developed a Risk Communication and Community Engagement Action Plan, whose key elements are now included in the National Immunization Plan. In this way lessons learned from the pandemic will be leveraged to enhance demand immunization more broadly, including for new vaccines which will be added to the routine immunization programme in Kosovo in coming years.

With the evolution of the pandemic UNICEF in Kosovo also learned important lessons about the development of digital ecosystems in schools. In 2022 the use of Shkollat.org and other digital education tools decreased due to the return to in-person schooling, the lack of digital infrastructure in schools, the limited pedagogical and ICT skills of teachers, and the perception that digital learning was only an “emergency” measure. For sustainable digital transformation, it is critical to work closely with education authorities at multiple levels to strengthen the enabling environment for digital and blended learning by influencing policies, while also promoting awareness and providing direct upskilling and support to teachers. Promoting the involvement of children and adolescents in the process is key, especially considering their strong engagement and interest in digital skills.

Still in the education sector, an end of project assessment found that integrating UNICEF’s skills-based programmes into the upper-secondary school curriculum provided a good foundation for scaling up the programmes and building awareness of the importance of this kind of learning. However, the assessment recommended the use of additional entry points, such as specific skills-based subjects and skills-based extra-curricular activities, to further strengthen the expansion of UNICEF’s flagship youth programmes PONDER, UPSHIFT and PODIUM in the school setting. This recommendation will be taken forward in 2023 and beyond.

The declaration of the Year of Persons with Disabilities by the authorities in Kosovo in 2022 was a welcome initiative which increased awareness and understanding about inclusion of children with disabilities. However, increased resources and capacities are required to translate this significant political commitment into sustained results. UNICEF therefore provided support to help young activist Rijad Mehmeti create “Team Rijad,” an advocacy platform which brought together high-level political figures, influencers, journalists and private companies to mobilize all sectors of society for concrete actions towards the inclusion of children living with disabilities.

In its first year Team Rijad partnered with 10 private businesses to install ramps and build accessible toilets at schools. It also brought greater awareness of the need for more teaching assistants in schools. This multi-stakeholder advocacy initiative was a success that UNICEF can build on in the future to ensure equality for children of all abilities.





PARTNERSHIPS

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

		
		
		

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 our results for children.



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for every child,
every right



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