

Child abuse in the labor market in Kosovo (especially in Prishtina)

1. Topic of the strategy

Formulate and describe the topic of your strategy regarding gender mainstreaming in Kosovo (e.g. equal pay, equal parental leave, protection against gender-based violence, equal property rights, and so on...)

In 2019, the Assembly of Kosovo adopted the long-awaited Child Protection Law. The code provides a definition of child abuse and labor exploitation among other explicitly defined instances of child maltreatment and attempts to establish a legal and institutional system, intending to battle the current situation in Kosovo. The reality today is however still very grim, according to UNICEF and Kosovo Agency of Statistics, over 60% of children between ages of 1- 14 were reported to have experienced physical punishment or psychological aggression towards them. The problem is still well-rooted in the system, with inadequate institutional responses and the lack of means to protect the victims and prevent violence. This is intensified in the form of child labor, where poverty forces the children to abandon their education and pursue work from a young age, even before entering the legal age of 15 for labor. Children in Kosovo are also subjected to the worst kinds of child labor, such as begging, street work, and even commercial sexual exploitation, which in many cases leads to human trafficking.

2. Current situation

Describe the current situation relevant to your chosen topic in Kosovo. What issues does the society face concretely?

Kosovo's overall advancements in eliminating various forms of child labor and child exploitation are so far moderate and scarcely effective. According to the Bureau of International Labor Affairs 2022 research on child labor in Kosovo, approximately 9% of children aged 5-14 are not attending school and are forced on the labor market. The most common areas of child labor are Agriculture, Mining and Construction, which includes operating heavy machinery very unsuitable of such age or working in hazardous areas. Child begging and street criminality are still prevalent as one of the consequences of extreme poverty in certain areas, and the capital Prishtina is no exception. The unfulfilled material needs, lack of education and excessively large families are factors that contribute to child abuse. Due to the constant presence of these nuances in society, children are exploited as far as commercial sexual exploitation. Today, Kosovo is still a source and a destination country for child trafficking and organized criminal groups.

3. Objective of the strategy

Formulate the objective of the strategy. What do you want to achieve? Is awareness-raising your goal, or do you want to use international human rights mechanisms to push through a change? Identify the obstacles on your way to achieving your goal.

The strategy to approach this social phenomenon must reflect on its complexity and presence in various areas of life, ranging from political, through economic to social.

To tackle the immediate systematic issues, suitable conditions for accessible education, regardless of child's family financial security, must be created. Otherwise, the issues will be rooted in child's adult life. This connects to the need to strengthen legal protections by the state's institutions, to effectively address the issue legally and provide sufficient support for victims of abuse.

Furthermore, there is an objective need for promotion of ethical businesses tied with strong legal guarantees that eliminate the risk of commercial maltreatment of a child.

Last, but not least, the entire process must be based on the foundations of collective awareness-raising, where the target group should be particularly informed of the systematic means of protection.

4. Means to acquire your goal

What is the action plan? What steps do you see as necessary to reach what you have set out in the previous question? Design your campaign.

To reduce the current state of inaccessibility to education, it is essential to improve the system. Institutional collaboration with Centers for Social Work, schools, and police is essential in the attempt to make effective changes.

First, the institutions have to thoroughly identify the reasons and the children who are forced due to various factors to neglect their education. Then it is necessary to provide addressed financial support, so material needs are fulfilled, and the child is able to invest in their future.

This can be done through raising awareness, especially in the targeted group, of the means of protection and prevention and institutions standing behind it. The problem should be openly discussed within society, by creating campaigns and specialized courses in school.

To achieve a real change, there is also a real need for strengthening the legal protections and making the law enforceable against the people causing the abuse. In support of the victims, cooperation with national and international non- governmental organizations must be established and deepened, in the provision of free legal assistance.