

Conception strategy in Kosovo

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...)

As ancient as it may seem, child marriage is still a persisting issue in Kosovo. While the Kosovo Family Law forbids marriages for people under the age of 16, early marriage remains a common practice in Kosovo that disproportionately affects the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

The lack of official data on such issues, especially within minority communities, remains one of the challenges in tackling this issue. Early marriages are rarely registered, since the administrative procedure to legalize a marriage for children above the age of 16 is costly and time-consuming. However, if these procedures are not followed or if the child is below the age of 16, families can face legal consequences. Thus, spouses often refrain from officially registering their marriage until they turn 18. Besides the above-mentioned Kosovar law on family, there are other documents forbidding child marriage, such as Convention on Consent to Marriage, Age for Marriage and Registration of marriage, Universal declaration of human rights, Convention on the rights of the child and the Istanbul Convention, however the application of these laws remains limited.

2. Current situation

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

According to the latest survey conducted by the Network of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Women's Organizations of Kosovo (NRAEWOK), 1 in 25 women and 1 in 50 men (aged 20-24) were married before 18 years of age. Children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities have even more worrying statistics, where 1 in 3 women and 1 in 10 men (aged 20-24) were married before 18 years of age.

The factors contributing to child marriage are poverty in the affected communities, often forcing families to wed their daughters as early as possible to eliminate care for them or transfer it to their husbands and their families. This factor is also closely related to gender inequality, which is persistent in Kosovo as well as other countries of Balkan. The inequality stems out from obsolete cultural norms that are still in place in rural areas and socially excluded locations.

Child marriage often leads to limited opportunities and limited education, it enhances health risks especially for female children, contributes to domestic violence and altogether strengthens the vicious circle of poverty and exclusion.

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 objective of this strategy is targeted at the most pressing aspects of child marriage in Kosovo. First, the public has to be aware of the issue and of the consequences of such issue, as educated society is society emphasizing on eliminating undesirable phenomenon, therefore awareness raising is a primary goal of the strategy. With widespread knowledge on the topic, the cultural norms can be changed to be aligned with international obligations that Kosovo is adhering to.

The other objective is to provide widespread support for children as victims of child marriage as the support in individual cases is important for decreasing the incidence of this phenomenon.

As awareness-raising is targeted mainly at the public, the other goal is to change policies accordingly and implement them properly and effectively in the society. We want to achieve for the topic of child marriage to be of government priority.

Secondary objective that we are hoping to achieve as a side-product of obtaining the above-mentioned goals is decrease in the violence against children in general, as it occurs widely within cases of child marriage.

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.

The awareness-raising campaign is supposed to be initiated on social networks. Furthermore, we shall spread the awareness via traditional media. The campaign will be divided into two parts; first part shall inform on the issue of the child marriage, of the factors contributing to child marriage occurrence and also the effects child marriage has on the society in general. Second part of the campaign will produce real-life stories of victims of child marriage and will also present the lobbying attempts and present the outcomes of data collection obtained during monitoring.

For the support of the victims of child marriage we intend to cooperate with local non-governmental organizations, such as UNICEF Kosova Programme for every child, Save the Children, Religious Institutions, The Office for free legal advice and of course NRAEWOK. Furthermore we expect to include commercial lawyers, prosecutors office, Social Work Centre, and health workers to assist with the support to the victims, as the negative effects of child marriage mentioned above affect various aspects of the victims' lives.