

UNIFEM in Kosovo

The establishment of UN control over the war-torn province of Kosovo ushered in an era of new possibilities for women there. After the 1999 withdrawal of Serbian forces, and in the wake of the collapse of the centralized Yugoslav system, Kosovo's economy and political institutions had to be rebuilt almost from scratch. International support has helped create progressive and participatory new laws and structures, including those that are a great leap forward for the protection of women's rights.

UNIFEM has been instrumental in working with the [UN Interim Mission in Kosovo](#) (UNMIK) and other UN partners as well as national women's groups to advocate for women's rights and participation in the provisional government, the peace process and the economy.

New Protections for Women's Rights

At first, UNIFEM focused on supporting efforts to put in place the most basic legal and institutional foundations. Kosovo now has a national plan to achieve equality, backed by gender equality and anti-discrimination laws. A new Office for Gender Equality, which operates from the prime minister's office, manages the plan. Senior gender officers have been installed in each of Kosovo's 30 municipalities and six national ministries.

More recently, UNIFEM has emphasized ensuring that these fundamental gender equality mechanisms actually improve women's daily lives. Since even the best policies need a spectrum of people to carry them out, for example, UNIFEM has joined the Kosovo Institute for Public Administration to train civil servants. Staff from across the government are learning how to factor gender into the implementation of plans and policies, whether that means guaranteeing women have access to appropriate health care or a chance to compete in the labour market.

Widespread awareness also keeps the government committed to its promises. UNIFEM is actively supporting women's civil society groups in their efforts to raise public understanding of women's rights. The Kosovo Women's Network, an important UNIFEM partner, runs the Kosovo Wide Legal Literacy Campaign. It has rallied famous actors to perform plays and songs about real-life cases of gender discrimination, and options for resolving them.

The performances provide an opportunity to distribute a user-friendly "know your rights" brochure prepared by a group of law professionals. The brochure features details on the gender equality and anti-discrimination laws, legislation on inheritance and new policies to stop domestic violence, including where to get help for violations. Some of the domestic violence resources were created under an earlier UNIFEM project that assisted women's centres in developing services for victims. UNIFEM also published an assessment of violence against women in Kosovo in 2000 titled "[No Safe Place](#)."

Participating in Peace

UNIFEM has consistently supported women's participation in Kosovo's peace process, in line with UN Security Council resolution 1325, which stresses women's essential role in crafting peace agreements and ensuring they take root. One groundbreaking initiative has been the

Women's Peace Coalition. It pairs activists from Women in Black Serbia and the Kosovo Women's Network to advocate for negotiations that include women as equal partners. The coalition's first meeting in September 2006, in the midst of troubled international talks over Kosovo's future, brought together women from Serbia and Kosovo for the first time since the 1999 war. Despite their historical differences, they quickly arrived at common understanding on the need to increase dialogue, to protect vulnerable groups and to uphold women's human rights. The coalition is now reaching out to women in the embattled Serbian enclaves of Kosovo, aiming to advance reconciliation among women, their families and communities.

Kosovo's Association of Women Lawyers, NORMA, provides legal rights workshops for Serbian women under a complementary UNIFEM project. Serbian women's groups have travelled to Pristina, the capital of the province, to meet with people in government agencies. Many have described the experience as completely changing their perspectives on how they might work with the central government — a crucial step towards building trust and closer social integration.

With peace in Kosovo imperative for a secure future in the surrounding region, prominent women from the Balkans in 2005 requested UNIFEM support for an advocacy initiative, Women's Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice in Southeast Europe. It mixes the talents of women politicians and activists from a handful of countries, including Kosovo and Serbia. Representatives attended the international peace negotiations on Kosovo in Vienna in September in 2006, meeting with UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari to ensure women's participation in the peace talks and to stress the central importance of women's human rights for any final status outcome.

To support peace inside Kosovo, UNIFEM has aided the Kosovo Women's Lobby, which combines women from civil society, Parliament and government institutions, to participate in government deliberations on internal security. Gender training is helping the Kosovo Protection Corps to draft new regulations consistent with the gender equality law, and the police to put in place women's safety programmes.

Women in the Economy

The third prong of UNIFEM's work in Kosovo addresses the province's high rates of unemployment and poverty, both of which are more severely entrenched for women than men. A lack of systematic research to gauge women's position in the labour market prompted a comprehensive study carried out by 14 civil society groups. Women learned new skills for conducting economic research and used survey results to advocate for progressive economic policies. The study's findings will be incorporated in the Kosovo Development Strategy, the blueprint for all activities in the province from 2006 to 2013.

[A second study](#) (PDF, 603KB), carried out by the Kosovo Business Women's Association, looked at the impact of fiscal policies on women's poverty in the municipality of Gjakova. Subsequently, the municipal gender officer organized meetings between local women and government officials, which persuaded the municipal Chief Executive to invite women's groups into preparing the 2007-2008 budget. Each municipal department will have its own gender budget, and the initial report's recommendations will feed into the Gjakova Economic Development Strategy. The project's success has attracted the notice of the central government, which has expressed interest in moving forward with a gender analysis of its own budget, taking the concept to the province at large.