

National Democratic Institute

SUCCESS STORIES

FROM TOMORROW'S LEADERS



Working for Democracy and Making Democracy Work

Pristina, Kosovo

National Democratic Institute

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December, 2016

PREFACE

Since 1999, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Kosovo has helped citizens and political leaders at all levels build a strong civic culture by establishing comprehensive and durable democratic institutions. *Democracy depends on such institutions—the voice of an informed citizenry—to connect citizens to their government and to one another by providing avenues for participation in public policy.*

Citizens enjoy many benefits and rights guaranteed in a democracy but often do not fully understand their responsibilities as citizens to safeguard and exercise those rights. Among these responsibilities are the acts of self-organization, engagement, participation, and advocacy in political processes to ensure greater representation, inclusion, and social justice, which are necessary for citizens to understand as obligations to achieve the lasting benefits of a democratic system. On the other hand, political parties need to be organized and willing to act as a vehicle to channel policy to government institutions, and be proactive in encouraging greater participation of citizens in the political process, ensuring policies are reflective of their concerns and interests.

In this booklet, NDI is proud to present the accomplishments of a remarkable group of Kosovars, women and youth activists, who have embraced their civic responsibilities, helping raise citizens' concerns within their political parties and to other decisionmakers in order to bring about change in their communities. Since 2013, NDI has provided skills-building training in effective political engagement and advocacy to these individuals, through its Women's Leadership Academy (WLA) and New Media School (NMS), with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Beyond training, the programs provided these emerging community leaders with opportunities to network and connect with each other, across party, geographic, and ethnic lines, learning about common concerns and developing shared strategies to approach them.

Through the WLA, women from all walks of life and political parties across the political spectrum, committed their time to learn policy development, public speaking, advocacy, time management, and communication skills, but most of all they learned how to work together. Through the NMS, young activists from political parties and civil society learned about using social media and new communication technologies to develop political and advocacy campaigns, focusing on message development, research, and effective outreach. In addition to structured training, both groups received regular mentoring and coaching from NDI staff and international experts to enable all participants to put into practice everything they have learned.

The initiatives that follow in this publication are the results of these emerging leaders' strong commitment, hard work and willingness to stand up for their communities and take part in determining Kosovo's future. The issues addressed by these initiatives were motivated by community needs and interests, and the results presented here represent their first victories in what we hope is just the beginning of these leaders' activities. They were made possible by the support of USAID and the tireless efforts of NDI staff to see these initiative and new leaders succeed.

These women and youth are an inspiration to all. They show us a new Kosovo, where no matter who you are or what you do, we can work together for the good of all. They prove that people - of any age, gender or ethnicity - can make a difference, and that change, even if small, is possible when there is a strong community desire and will from decision makers to make it happen. We hope you enjoy reading about these initiatives as much as NDI did supporting these amazing individuals, and hope their examples serve as inspiration to others to take the first step to making a difference in Kosovo.

Alexander Chavarria
Senior Resident Director
National Democratic Institute-Kosovo

December 2016

INTRODUCTION

In nearly a decade since its declaration of independence, Kosovo has achieved significant progress in consolidating democratic institutions and political processes based on democratic values and principles. Political parties have begun developing policies that are more responsive to citizens' priorities; election processes are becoming more transparent and less vulnerable to irregularities; the Assembly is strengthening its capacities to adopt quality legislation and exercise greater oversight of the executive; and civil society organizations are becoming more effective in articulating the needs of citizens and building sound advocacy initiatives.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization engaged in strengthening and advancing democracy worldwide, has been present in Kosovo since 1999. With the support of USAID, NDI has worked with Kosovars every step of the way as they have built their democracy from the ground up, focusing primarily on political party development and internal democratization; election monitoring and citizen participation; building and strengthening effective, transparent and accountable institutions; and advancing monitoring and advocacy capacities of civil society organizations. NDI also works to open avenues for cross-ethnic dialogue to facilitate efforts directed towards conflict transformation and lasting ethnic reconciliation.

Currently, NDI is implementing a Political Processes and Parliamentary Support Program in Kosovo, funded by the United States Agency for International Development. The overall goal of the program is to strengthen linkages between citizens, parties and institutions, in order to incentivize and orient the government to be more responsive to public interest. One way the Institute is working to achieve this is by fostering the meaningful participation of women, youth, and minorities in politics as community activists, political party members, and elected representatives.

NDI believes that Kosovo's democracy will be strengthened when civic and political activists, particularly women, youth, and minorities, are empowered to identify, conduct and ensure the implementation of issue-based advocacy; to transform advocacy initiatives into effective policies; and to increase pressure on legislatures to hold the executive accountable at the local and central level.

As part of its support to political parties, NDI has been working with their leadership to foster internal democracy, with a particular focus on opening more space for women and youth to take leadership roles and invest in increasing their capacities. The Women's Leadership Academy and the New Media School are two examples that illustrate NDI's methodological approach of bringing together women and youth in cross-party settings to learn new skills and techniques that will enhance their abilities and turn them into valuable resources for their respective political parties. By working to empower new leadership and establishing linkages with political representatives, NDI can encourage national and branch leadership to be inclusive of those individuals emerging from the grassroots and ensure they are fully engaged in political processes.



The city of Ferizaj, a small, idyllic town located in southern Kosovo, is a symbol of religious tolerance with its Big Mosque of Mulla Veseli and St. Uroš Cathedral standing side by side. The city also boasts a rare natural phenomenon called bifurcation, with the Nerodime River, which runs through the town, branching into two separate streams.

Over the years, the river has been severely degraded, at risk of running dry from overuse and disregard. In 2015, Herolind Zariqi decided to do something about it.

"I decided to deal with this issue since I come from the city of Ferizaj, and because [bifurcation] is both a natural phenomenon and a national interest, I wanted to deal with it seriously," said Zariqi.

Zariqi, a participant of NDI's New Media School, founded the initiative 'Bifurcation' and set out on a journey to save and protect the River Nerodime.

"I was the only member of the initiative, but with the support of NDI, I didn't have many problems," Zariqi said. "I contacted the right people and addressed the issue at the Local Assembly of Ferizaj," Zariqi said.

During September 2015, Zariqi established contacts with the Ferizaj municipal assembly to present his proposal. "I began by contacting municipal assembly counselors belonging to the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) in Ferizaj, who agreed to address the issue at



BIFURCATION

the municipal assembly. Subsequently, the mayor of Ferizaj welcomed the idea and, in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment, started a process of revitalizing the bifurcation phenomenon."

"I couldn't use social media as much as I wanted to because the initiative was only known locally, and many people from other municipalities had not heard what this [bifurcation] phenomenon meant," Zariqi said.

After a long process of advocating and meeting with municipality officials, the Municipal Assembly of Ferizaj approved decision 01/No.96 and declared an area of 15 hectares as a temporary protected zone as a Monument of Nature.

"I felt great when the decision was approved, but I can't call it a true success since every once in a while new problems arise due to people misusing the river or damaging it, which goes unpunished," Zariqi said.

After the decision was approved, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning began procedures to prepare and approve the necessary legislative framework to declare the zone a special protected area.

The entire restoration and conservation process by the Ministry of Environment was finalized on June 5, 2016, World Environment Day, and was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Kosovo, the Minister of Environment, and the Mayor of Ferizaj.



Zariqi urges Kosovar youth to be as active as they can because, according to him, effecting change is easier than people may believe.

"I want youth to be as active as they can in different initiatives because thanks to organizations like NDI, the chance to solve problems and accomplish objectives in our communities has never been higher," he said.

This initiative was conducted by New Media School participant Herolind Zariqi.





 /edukimperpunesim

Sustainable development is not achieved through political regulations alone. It requires quality education and ample employment opportunities. As the youngest European state, Kosovo also has the youngest population in Europe, with 53 percent of its citizens under the age of 25. It also has one of the highest unemployment rates in the region at 35 percent, and unemployment rates among youth run as high as 60 percent.

In 2015, youth who attended NDI's New Media School hypothesized that for such high unemployment rates and employers' professed dissatisfaction with applicants' qualification, there must be a gap between what Kosovo's education system offers and what employers seek in potential employees.

"It was a hypothesis at first, based on little information and the perceptions of some of our contacts," says Dren Dushi, one of the youth. "The hypothesis was that the job market in our country was not in accordance with our education system. Then we began our research to explore that."

The group founded the "Education for Employment" initiative to research ways to bridge the gap between labor market needs and the education system in Kosovo.

"The first step was to research the structure of our education system and the history of education reforms," says Dushi. "To do this, we talked with professors since they are the ones charged with building a healthy education system. Then we surveyed local businesses to find out what professions, skills, and specializations businesses expect from potential employees."

During the preliminary stages of research, the group pinpointed a number of subjects missing from the national curriculum, such as soft skills on public speaking, information and communication technology skills, as well as communication and debate skills. The group also found that the poor condition of facilities like labs and sports halls and political influence in universities were major problems.

University professors observed that the overall quality of students is decreasing, and expressed concerns about their students' preparedness for higher education. The group's research also noted issues with a lack of libraries, professors and students skipping lectures, and students' low motivation for their field of study since it doesn't match with potential opportunities for employment.

"One of the problems is a high number of students majoring in one particular field, and a very small number in others where there is a high demand, like information technology (IT) and agriculture," says Dushi. "We believe that these professions need to be promoted based on what the market needs." The initiative additionally noted that professors are over worked and underpaid, where many of them have second jobs at private universities.

The initiative went on to conduct research with more than 100 local businesses, looking for employment trends in Kosovo. The overwhelming majority of businesses expressed that the main skills a potential employee should have are calculating skills, proper spelling and grammar, and the ability to work in groups. The research also highlighted that potential employees who have previous job experience, foreign language abilities, and IT skills have an advantage.

More than 30 percent of the businesses surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with potential employees having been educated in the Kosovo education system, and 60 percent were only somewhat satisfied with job applicants.

"All of the statistics we have derived are important, because they are inter-connected with one another," said Valmir Gashi, another member of the initiative. "But the key findings are the ones that pertain to the high demands that the job market has for new generations of employees.... There is a dissatisfaction with what the education system is currently producing."



EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT


The initiative concluded that the education system needs to undergo a radical change to fit labor market needs, and members firmly believe that to make this overhaul happen, education needs to become a priority for the government and receive more financial support. The initiative's members wanted to make their findings clear to the Ministry of Education, so they organized a meeting with the Minister of Education, Arsim Bajrami, presenting their research on the state of Kosovo's education system. The initiative offered a list of recommendations and concrete steps to be taken to improve schools, including enriching the curriculum with skills needed by the labor market, such as IT proficiency, debating skills, foreign languages, and communication skills. The Minister of Education invited the initiative to the National Convention of Education, where different businesses and

university officials will be present. There, the initiative is expected to present their findings and recommendations.

Initiative members expressed that linking the education system and the labor market is not a small task, but feel they are on the right track. "Our work has just begun," says Gashi. "Linking the education system with labor market needs is an extremely complex matter, but we will continue to work to pinpoint specific recommendations that are, above all, viable and implementable so they can be applied sooner rather than later."

Members of the initiative:


Dren Dushi, Valmir Gashi, Garip Sahiti, Fidane Hasani, Tringa Kasemi




To have greater alignment between university offerings and labor market needs in order to support youth employment



Ministry of Education and Ministry of labor should review curricula and university accreditations



Gather online and institutional support



Roundtable with stakeholders is organized;



Government institutions start reviewing university programs and education curricula



 /facedogkosova

Kosovo has a serious stray dog problem. Currently, there are no figures to indicate the number of stray dogs in the country, but their abundance is visible. There is a lack of awareness for the process of adopting them and a shortage in regional dog shelters all around the country. More often than not, stray dogs in Kosovo are abandoned, underweight, abused, tethered, and sometimes killed under state institutions.

Even though Kosovo's legislation prohibits the killing of stray animals, in 2013 almost all municipalities authorized euthanasia, often announcing ads for companies to perform the service.

Filled with indignation, Fitim Sylejmani came together with six friends and founded "Face-dog Kosova," a volunteer initiative as part of NDI's New Media School, to carry out a campaign advocating for taking immediate measures to put an end to the practice of euthanizing stray dogs in Kosovo.

Executed through Facebook and Twitter, their campaign was also set to raise awareness on adopting stray dogs, promoting the opening of regional dog shelters and urging the inauguration of centers for temporary treatments for stray dogs.

"The initiative was created by a group of animal-lovers; the goal was to stop the euthanasia, advocate in different municipalities for a professional treatment of stray dogs, and hold different awareness campaigns," Fitim says.



FACEDOG KOSOVA

When the initiative was formed, there were no functional animal shelters in Kosovo. The initiative vehemently lobbied for the creation of shelters in municipalities around Kosovo, as they thought it would invariably increase the safety of citizens and would contribute to a more humane treatment of animals.

A year later, shelters like these were opened in some municipalities, but in November 2014, leaked pictures revealed that what started as a shelter in the municipality of Peja had become a slaughterhouse.

"We felt really bad when we saw those pictures. We first reacted in the media, and asked for a meeting with the mayor," Fitim says. " [The meeting] happened a few days later and the situation improved."

The initiative fiercely condemned abusive acts on street animals and made their statements public. They continued carrying out activities in an awareness-building effort and met with municipal leaders to propose key recommendations on how to improve the handling of stray animals from an institutional standpoint.

As part of their awareness-building activities, the initiative marked International Stray Animals Day. In order to mark this day, Facedog Kosova collaborated with other animal rights organisations in Kosovo.

"Some of the most important activities we did on this day were the feeding of stray dogs on the streets of Kosovo by activists and citizens, handing out flyers, and press releases and conferences where we opposed the euthanasia of street dogs," Leonidë says. "Our activities were covered by local media as well."

The funds were collected as individual donations, and the initiative invited people all around Kosovo to join them on their endeavor.

More than 100 pictures depicting the feeding of stray animals made their way onto social media. "It was a very successful action. We became part of organizing a world-wide effort on this day," Fitim says.

Three years later, the general handling of stray dogs has improved and municipalities have begun to allocate

funds for a better treatment of strays. The initiative still continues to closely monitor municipalities and react whenever they undertake an unlawful action against stray dogs.

Arber Salihu, a member of the initiative, says that although there is a lot more to be done, he is happy with what their group has achieved in their stride towards a better treatment of stray dogs.

"At the very least, we have made it possible that the treatment of stray dogs became a topic of discussion. We are happy that every day new initiatives for the protection of animals and stray dogs in particular come into being, whereas when we started the initiative there were only a few of those," Arber says. "Some years ago there was only one municipality which prohibited the euthanasia of stray dogs; today municipalities discuss the best ways to build new shelters."

Members of the Initiative were:

Fitim Sylejmani, Isuf Zejna, Leonidë Molliqaj, Rumir Zhuniqi, Shkumbin Hyseni, Arbër Salihu, Arjetë Fetahu





 /RightRepresentation

In 2013, a youth group attending NDI's New Media School decided to conduct research to shed light on the extent of women's under representation in politics, especially at the local level in Kosovo.

"Given reported non-compliance with the Law on Gender Equality and other laws that deal with the position of women in society, we decided to approach the issue of 'Women in decision-making at the local level' with the aim of improving the current situation," says Saranda Bllaca, a member of the initiative.

Soon after, the youth group founded the initiative 'Half of the Population Right Representation' and began a campaign focused on raising awareness towards equal gender representation in local institutions.

In addition to creating a Facebook page and Twitter profile to raise public awareness, the group members conducted research on gender representation in all leading structures at the municipal level, including mayors, deputy mayors, heads of municipal assemblies, directors of departments, and members of permanent committees in municipal assemblies.

"We conducted research on all municipalities in Kosovo based on their webpages. Almost half had not updated the web pages with this data. So some municipalities we visited ourselves, and others we asked for information from the respective offices," Bllaca says.

Herolind Rama, another member of the initiative, says that the research was conducted over a period of several months, and the group was discontent with the results.

"The percentage of women's representation at the local level was not high enough," he said. "Seeing this, we visited several MPs, including Lutfi Haziri, Alma Lama, Jeton Svirca



and Teuta Sahatqija, who promised us that this climate of unequal gender representation will be addressed in the upcoming electoral lists.”

Nevertheless, according to the group, the research revealed that the situation was severe; one of their main findings was that some municipalities had violated the Law on Gender Equality several times by including less than 40% of women in assembly committees.

“What these violations mean is that municipalities are not giving sufficient space and positions to women in decision-making processes,” Bllaca says. “And the situation was the same across all municipalities.”

The main findings included that in the municipal assemblies of Drenas, Fushë Kosovë, Gračanica, North Mitrovica, Peja, and Skënderaj, female members constituted less than 30 percent of the Municipality Assembly, which is in violation of the Law on Gender Equality. Additional findings included:

- of 38 municipality mayors, only one was a woman;
- of 39 deputy mayors, there were no women;
- of 38 municipal assembly chairs, only two were women; and
- there were no women directors of departments in 11 municipalities; and
- no women members in permanent committees in another five municipalities.

“It was extremely important to make these statistics public, so that citizens become informed and could start raising the issue for discussion so that the situation can be improved,” Bllaca said. “If the population is gender-balanced, with 50

percent being men and 50 being women, we need to have a gender-balanced government as well.”

The initiative made its findings public through TV debates, traditional media, and especially social media. The initiative also pressured municipalities to improve women’s representation in their municipalities.

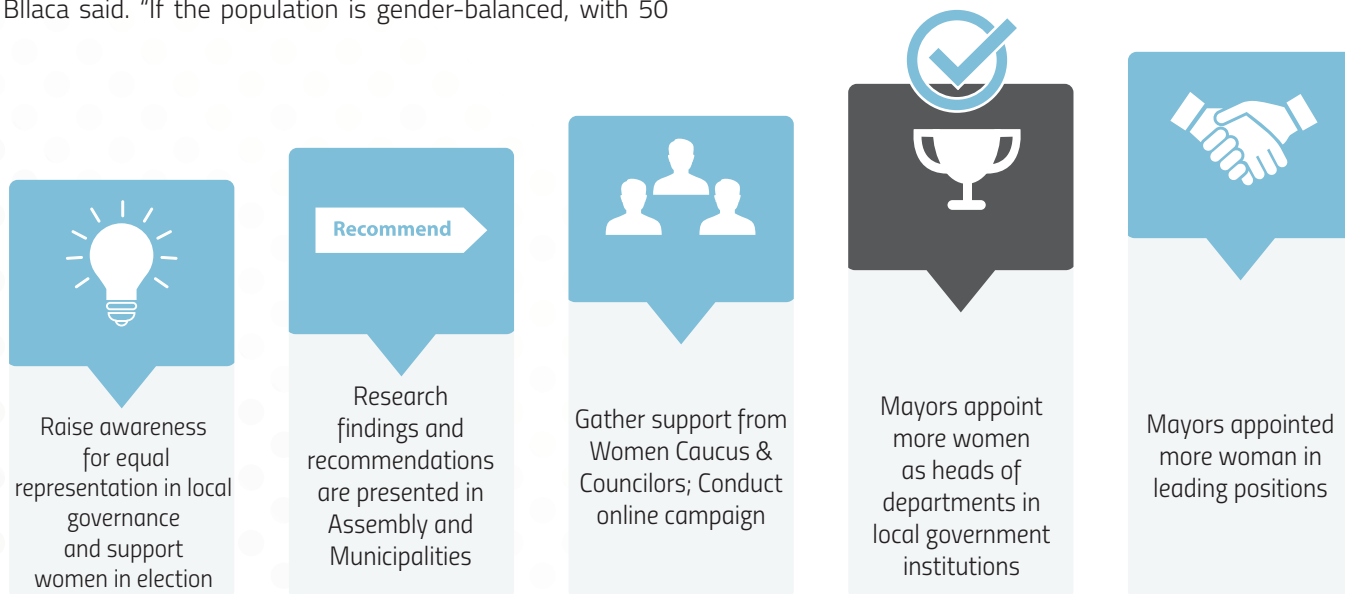
“I think that part of our aim, which was to inform Kosovo’s population about gender representation at the local level, has been accomplished,” Bllaca said. “But we need more time to improve this inequality. Some things cannot change overnight, and political parties that do not provide women with enough space to attain national leadership positions are also thwarting women at the local level.”

Herolind Rama, on the other hand, thinks that the changes are already evident. “The situation has somewhat improved, but it’s still dissatisfactory in regards to our expectations,” he said. “Nonetheless, we still hope that in the near future, women’s representation will continue to improve because this will be a proof of our internal democracy. Until then, we will not cease our efforts in making that happen.”

The initiative believes that instating gender-balanced local assemblies is extremely important to reflect and better represent their local populations. The initiative said that it will continue to work until the goal of equal gender representation is reached.

Members of the initiative:

Saranda Bllaca, Herolind Rama, Edona Thaçi, Gent Jusufi, Dardan Rama





 /kosovabike

To many young Kosovars, cycling in the city has always been virtually impossible. Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, has only a few cycle tracks - separated paths exclusively designated for bicycles. Traffic congestion and overcrowding of streets is high in the city, and while cycle tracks could provide a safer solution, there have been few efforts to improve the situation in the past decade.

A youth group who attended NDI's New Media School wanted to reduce the danger associated with biking in the city. The group's initial idea was to use social media tools to raise awareness of the benefits of cycling to citizens and institutions in Kosovo.

"I wanted to advocate for this since I myself am a biking and sports enthusiast," says Genc Jaha, a member of the initiative.

"The idea was to build cycle tracks in municipalities that have the most suitable terrain for them, so that we can [reduce pollution from cars and] help citizens have a cleaner environment."

The initiative decided to advocate for local institutions in the municipalities of Ferizaj, Gjakova, Gjilan, and Mitrovica to create cycle tracks on existing roads and to plan for their inclusion in all future infrastructure projects.

"We wanted to make sure that if our proposal is not approved, then the municipalities will at least make plans to build cycle tracks in the near future," says Jaha. "We picked these municipalities because of their suitable geography, so we knew that cycle tracks could be built in them."



KOSOVA BIKE

The initiative members drafted a one-page argument which they presented to the Department of Infrastructure in the aforementioned municipalities. The initiative argued that adopting new policies for the creation of cycle paths was extremely important for municipalities, as they would positively impact the environment, reduce traffic on overcrowded roads, and contribute to health benefits through increased exercise.

The initiative met with the Director of the Department for Urbanization in Mitrovica to present its ideas for the creation of cycle tracks. The Director told the initiative that it was the first group to advocate for cycle tracks and expressed that he was eager to start working on delineating cycling tracks on the main streets in Mitrovica.

After meeting with officials from the municipality of Gjilan, the initiative found that cycling tracks were in the process of being created on Gjilan's main roads. The initiative is now holding talks with the Urbanization Department of Ferizaj, who promised to start construction of the first bike paths in Ferizaj soon, and it plans to continue its efforts persuading Gjakova to adopt the same policies.

Genta Domi, another member of initiative, says that it is extremely important for municipalities to adopt proposals to ensure the safety of cyclists. "Adopting our recommendations is vital for the municipalities, because it is necessary that cyclists have their own path in order to avoid accidents, which are very common these days," she said.



The initiative expressed that its goals thus far are being realized, because the municipalities have already begun to plan the creation of cycle tracks for upcoming infrastructure projects. "In the near future, we plan to meet with the rest of the municipalities to advocate for our cause, and see how much has been done by the municipalities which have pledged to build the tracks," Domi said.

Members of the initiative:

Fixhirije Dragaj, Dhuratë Ukshini,
Genci Jaha, Genc Mustafa, Shkumbin Nebihu,
Kujtim Bajrami, Genta Domi





Even though the Tobacco Control Law in Kosovo prohibits smoking in all closed public spaces, the law is often not enforced or respected in cafes and restaurants. Discontent with the situation, Selvije Kurti and four other youth decided to do something about it.

"Considering the consequences of smoking, I am very much against this habit, which often proves to be deadly," says Kurti. "Additionally, the extent to which legal and social norms are respected and implemented reflects the level of a country's willingness to develop a healthy society. So I wanted to contribute to a society where the welfare of citizens is a priority."

In 2013, Kurti and four other youth participants founded the initiative "Mos e Dhez," or "Don't Smoke", as part of NDI's New Media School. The goal of the initiative was to advocate for better implementation of the Tobacco Control Law.

Using social media channels, the initiative engaged and informed citizens about the importance of this new law and conducted public opinion research in order to strengthen its cause.

"Since one of our main goals is exerting public pressure for respecting the Tobacco Control Law, we needed a clear picture of the obstacles for enforcing it," says Kastriot Muçolli, another member of the initiative. "We decided to ask a number of questions to respondents regarding how much the Tobacco Control Law is being respected, and who the biggest violators are."

The group found that 85% of respondents did not believe that the Tobacco Control Law was respected, and 64% never reported an observed violation of the law. According to survey respondents, after cafés and clubs, violations of the law happened most frequently in government buildings and the parliament.

Based on these findings, the initiative composed a list of recommendations which included enacting tougher penalties for violators of the law through larger fines, holding awareness-building campaigns in schools and universities, and monitoring the law's inspectors, who allegedly rarely fine café owners with whom they are acquainted.



MOS DHEZ



In 2016, three years after its induction, the initiative held a conference to launch an online platform for reporting violations of the Tobacco Control Law. Launched one day prior to the International Day Against Smoking, the online platform was made available for everyone to access and report violations of the law.

“The event where we made our findings public and launched our online platform went according to plan,” says Muçolli. “Media coverage was high, which in turn helped promote the platform and increased the number of reports of violations.” At the launching event, officials including the Minister for Health, ImetRrahmani, and the Chair of the Committee for Health, Labor and Social Welfare, Flora Brovina, expressed that it was concerning that the places where the law was passed are among those where it is least respected. Further, they called on the country to develop a better culture of health. To do this, both officials agreed that implementation of this law needs to be a major focus.

The initiative said that it will continue to make public spaces in Kosovo healthier for everybody. “We consider this initiative to have been a bold one, and one of the first ones that raised discussion regarding an issue that has often been disregarded by the relevant institutions themselves,” says Kurti. “We aim to raise our voice against violators and to monitor the enforcement of this law. There is a lot more to be done, but we are committed to accomplish the mission of our initiative ‘Mos e Dhez.’”


The platform for reporting violations of the Tobacco Control Law can be accessed at www.mosedhez.com

Members of the initiative:

Kastriot Muçolli, Selville Kurti, Labinot Beqa, Ilirjana Perteshoni (R.I.P), Ramadan Mramori, Ilirjana Dukaj





 /Ruaje-tënden

Kosovo's capital, Pristina, has existed as a small town since the 9th century. As a place where people have dwelled for centuries, Pristina has inherited numerous cultural, archaeological, and architectural artefacts, many of which were destroyed during Kosovo's communist era. Kosovo's Old Bazaar, considered one of the most beautiful in southeast Europe, was ruined after World War II, leaving behind only a few objects such as its 600-year old hamam, or Turkish bath.

After years of disregard by authorities, the Municipality of Pristina attempted to restore the hamam in 2006, but inexperienced renovations damaged the historical authenticity of the building. In 2015, a group of youth who attended NDI's New Media School formed the initiative "Ruaje Tënden" or "Save Yours" to advocate for the preservation of the Hamam and raise awareness about the issue on social media.

"Having heard about the hamam's high degree of degradation, the moment the group came together, we knew immediately that this is what we wanted to advocate for, and that we needed to save this important cultural heritage site," said Donjetë Ahmetaj, a member of the initiative. After conducting field research, meeting with officials from the Ministry of Culture and cultural heritage organisations like Cultural Heritage Without Borders (CHwB), the initiative drafted a research report. The findings confirmed that the hamam was deteriorating.

"We started by visiting the hamam as a group to confirm what we had heard from many people about the state that it was in. Officials from the Department of Culture informed us about what had been done so far and its costs," said Ahmetaj. "The Executive Director of the Kosovar Council for Cultural Heritage and the organization CHwB also shared ample information about their research with us, and most of the damage was done during the restoration efforts."

The initiative's research found that problems began in the restoration project's second phase in 2009. The first problem arose with the company contracted to do the restoration, when, according to CHwB, the company did not have sufficient experience to conserve and restore the hamam, and the work that had been done was not in compliance with the



plan. Disregarding criticism from the experts, the restoration continued until 2013, when the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports decided to stop the project. “Finishing our research was only a minor task,” said Fatir Berzati, a member of the initiative. “The next steps were to keep raising awareness and to be as active as possible until we had a decision from the Ministry of Culture.”

The group took to social media to increase public awareness of the issue and raise popular demand for government action. The initiative expressed that cultural heritage is a vital source of a nation’s identity, linking the present to the past, and urged people young and old to protect Kosovo’s heritage and report defilements of important sites. Subsequently, in April 2016, “Save Yours” organized a meeting with the Assembly of Kosovo’s Committee on Culture, where it presented findings and pushed for immediate action to save the hamam from further damage.

“The fact that the issue of the hamam was featured in the media—both on TV and in print—and in the Assembly, is a success,” Berzati said. “We spoke about our research, the harm done to the hamam by previously contracted companies, and members of the [Assembly] Committee [on Culture] supported our initiative by saying that the work that we had done is important for Kosovo’s society.”

The initiative shared a list of recommended steps to be taken, which included making public the report created by experts to evaluate the restoration; creating a committee of experts to provide feedback on how future restoration should proceed; and immediately drafting a new plan for the conservation and restoration of the hamam. The Assembly Committee on

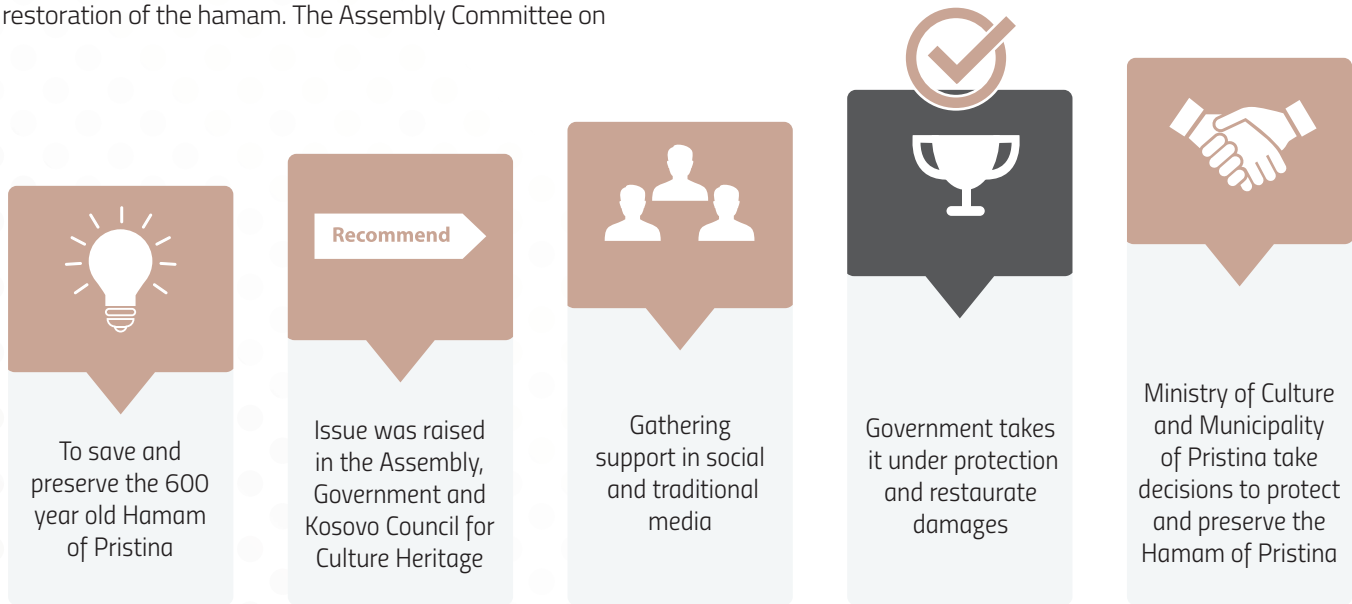


Culture officially appealed to the Kosovo Council for Cultural Heritage and to the Ministry of Culture to act immediately to prevent further degradation of the Great Hamam of Pristina.

“We are still waiting for concrete measures to be taken to salvage the site, so until then, I can’t say that all our objectives have been reached,” says Ahmetaj. “The ‘executive phase’ raising the issue to the parliamentary level to remind our leaders what needs to be done, has been completed; now we need to continue advocating to the people to increase the pressure.”

Members of the initiative:

Donjetë Ahmetaj, Fatir Berzati,
Bestrim Alijaj, Besfort Gashi,
Rexhep Avdo, Fahri Jashari





f /rritushnetshem

The consumption of energy drinks in Kosovo is growing. Energy drinks are available everywhere: in cafes, clubs, supermarkets and even on the streets. The ubiquity of these drinks is not coincidental. There is a high demand for them from both adults and children.

This demand is mainly attributed to the fact that energy drinks offer the promise of an increase in energy levels, in what is actually a temporary stimulation as a result of excessive caffeine and sugar. But ingredients like taurine, caffeine, guarana and creatine commonly found in energy drinks are extremely harmful, especially when unregulated, and the risk they pose is even higher for children.

Realizing that many people were not aware of the health implications of energy drink consumption, a group of participants attending NDI's New Media School founded the initiative "Rritu Shnetshëm" or "Grow Up Healthy" to raise awareness of the negative health effects and to advocate for restricting the sale of energy drinks to children.

"When we chose to tackle this issue, we only had very basic information about what

energy drinks do to children, which was nonetheless very concerning to us," said Afrim Berisha, a member of the initiative. "We were confident that we could improve the situation through cooperating with institutions."

The initiative opened a Facebook page and Twitter profile, posting regularly on health-related risks that energy drinks pose. The initiative also surveyed more than 1,000 Kosovar children and parents on energy drink consumption habits. The group found that 74 percent of children respondents consume energy drinks on a weekly basis, and 85 percent of parent respondents agreed that the government should restrict the vending and consumption of energy drinks to children under the age of 18.

"The main findings we discovered through the survey were the high level of energy drink consumption and how little children were aware of the harm that energy drinks do to their health," Berisha says. "This was when we also decided to advocate for organizing awareness-building campaigns in primary schools in Kosovo about the health implications of energy drinks."



GROW UP HEALTHY



The initiative researched international practices and legal frameworks for regulating energy drinks and consulted local nutritionists. They looked to Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, and Sweden as examples of countries that either adopted laws prohibiting the vending of energy drinks to children, or imposed strong restrictions on companies selling these drinks.

"We looked to other countries to show that we were not the first to deal with this issue," said Berisha. "We wanted to make it clear that we were not asking for an extraordinary change and there were numerous countries which had limited consumption and vending of these drinks due to the health risks. We took the best practices of these countries and incorporated them into our research paper."

The initiative pursued state institutions to legislate and enforce the use of health warning labels on energy drinks, organizing a meeting with the Assembly of Kosovo's Committee on Health, Labor and Social Welfare.

Arben Imeri, another member of the initiative, said they organized the meeting to show the Committee the seriousness of the health effects caused by excessive energy drink consumption among children. "The Committee welcomed our research and recommendations, saying that they will push to address the problems that children face due to energy drink consumption," Imeri said.

The committee agreed to review legal frameworks and propose amendments to address the initiative's recommendations.

"I think that our short-term goals have been accomplished; we prepared a research paper on the topic, went to talk shows to raise awareness about the issue, and presented everything in front of a legislative body," Imeri said. "As for our long-term goals, we are optimistic, and the initiative will continue working to address concerns on energy drinks."

Members of the initiative:

Blerinë Ukshini, Linda Shahini, Afrim Berisha, Arben Imeri, Valentina Gërzhaliu, Aldisa Morina, Ismail Halili





 /Shpëto-Shpellën

The Gadime marble cave in Lipjan, Kosovo is a beautiful natural phenomenon and one of the most visited attractions in Kosovo. Its low walls arch into an astounding variety of stalactites, stalagmites and aragonites. The cave was discovered in the late 1970s and has been an important geological site ever since it opened for visitors. But in recent years, the cave had been severely damaged and degraded by mismanagement, and it was in dire need of proper preservation.

In 2013, a group of youth decided to do something about the cave's deterioration. Together with four of her peers from NDI's New Media School, Erina Rrahmani created the "Save the Cave" initiative to bring attention to the awe-inspiring cave, the damages inflicted on it due to mismanagement, and the immediate need for its preservation. "Our main objectives were to inform the public that the Gadime Cave was in a miserable state, and we did this through our Facebook page and local news shows," Rrahmani said.

After consulting experts from Slovenia, the group came to the conclusion that

the destruction of the cave was more serious than they realized. A detailed report documented that artificial lights were changing the temperature of the cave, and a water reservoir constructed above the cave by the municipality of Lipjan was damaging also damaging it. Overall, it assessed management of the cave's features as poor. The initiative sought to have the government of Kosovo take up protection and management of the cave, refurbish it, and invest in making it attractive for tourists. "All the group members had the same volition to see change happen through our initiative," Rrahmani explained. "It was this common goal that made us become real friends."

After the group introduced them to the initiative, a group of opposition members of parliament read the group's statement at a plenary session in Kosovo's assembly and demanded accountability from the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MMPH) about the grave situation of the cave.

As a result of the campaign's efforts, the MMPH took measures to create a special

Save the Cave - Shpëto Shpellën

SAVE THE CAVE





unit for the management and preservation of the cave. They also designated the cave a national protected area.

"Today I'm very happy that all of this was achieved thanks to our initiative," Rrahmani said. "I couldn't be happier about the condition that the cave is in today...The best things are the moments when people from abroad are impressed by the beauty of the cave, but also the moments when people I know praise us for the work that our initiative has done."

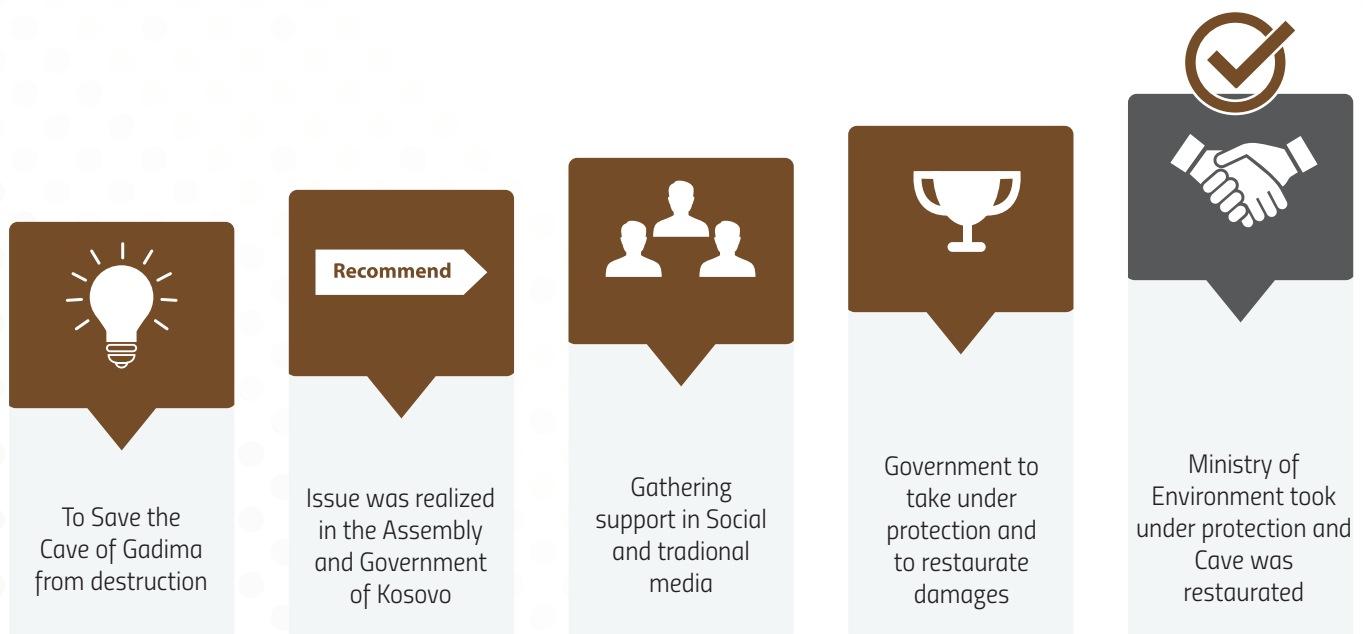
The initiative's push for a legalized and formalized management of the cave under state institutions has resulted in improved overall administration and proper management of

ticket proceeds. The MMPH and French Embassy in Pristina undertook joint preservation and restoration efforts. More eco-friendly lights have been installed; management of the cave has increased with additional employees, including four official guides; and the number of visitors has swelled, with 70,000 visiting the cave in 2015 alone.

Today, the cave is a protected area and will be a legacy for generations to come.

Members of the initiative:

Erina Rrahmani, Rezarta Delibashzade, Fillojetë Konjuhi, Petrit Beqiri, Xhevat Dervishi





Kosovo's education system includes an informal sector known as "night schools," which is largely unregulated, inundated with corruption, and considered an ineffective form of schooling. Some schools have no licenses for conducting educational programs; in other instances, students simply pay to receive a diploma without attending any lectures.

After hearing about so many of the problems surrounding informal education, a group of women from civil society and political parties who attended NDI's Women's Leadership Academy, founded an advocacy initiative called "Against Corruption in Education". The group works toward improving the field of education as an integral part of promoting societal development in the Balkans' youngest country.

While Kosovo possesses strong legislation regarding education, enforcement is an issue, so this initiative set out to ensure the implementation of the Law for Adult Education and Training, specifically focusing on the regulation of informal education in Kosovo.

"The first meetings we held were at vocational schools that offered informal education, and they were extremely unsatisfactory with the way how the process has been managed so far," said initiative member Vjollca Shyti. "But even in the beginning, it was apparent that our meetings were having an impact, and the education inspectors of Gjakova told us that after our meeting the vocational school requested a license to utilize informal education."

The initiative proceeded to conduct research in three municipalities to examine the extent of violations in informal education procedures. The research was conducted in Gjakovë, Malishevë, and Pejë, three municipalities that have the necessary state license to utilize informal education in schools. "What we found was that there was great dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching in informal education," Shyti commented. The initiative's findings reinforced the notion that misconduct and a lack of transparency in how payments were made are common in informal education. Additionally, the group found that classes



AGAINST CORRUPTION IN EDUCATION

were being held in schools that were not licensed; students did not complete the number of hours required to receive a high school diploma - with most showing up only for the final exam; and there was a lack of oversight of the material taught in these informal schools.

The initiative, together with NDI, organized official meetings in the three municipalities following its initial research to meet with the directors of education and principals of the schools to ask for their official stance on correcting the quality of informal education. "The directors of education had the will to cooperate with us and gave their support," Shyti said. "They also told us that they passed information regarding the problems with informal education to the Ministry of Education, but nothing has been accomplished; change does not come easy."

The Director of Education and the Inspector of Education in the municipality of Peja specified that one of the reasons why informal education has not improved over the years is because there is no proper monitoring process due to the low number of education inspectors. There are only four inspectors who cover the Peja region and are responsible for inspecting primary schools, middle schools, and universities.

Shyti also met with the Inspector of Education in the municipality of Gjakova, Zef Osmani, who agreed that the process of the informal education has many gaps, which need improving. The Office of the Inspectorate of Gjakova then sent out a recommendation to the mayors of Gjakova, Malisheva, and Rahovec, as well as the municipalities' directors of education, to immediately draft school regulations regarding

the criteria for payment of candidates for exams, re-exams, and diplomas. The Office of the Inspectorate asked that all schools respect the laws and regulations for the organization of exams.

Two years since its inception, the initiative has seen progress in addressing problems that plagued informal education in Kosovo. Through its work, the initiative changed institutional behavior to allocate more time and resources towards informal education.

"Due to the support of NDI, our efforts were successful in the end, but this is not enough; there's a lot more to be done," said Shyti. "I think it is up to the Ministry to create mechanisms to improve the shortcomings of informal education highlighted by our research. We are aware that the education system in Kosovo is not perfect, so our group is planning to hold meetings with Ministry of Education officials."

Starting in September 2016, the initiative, together with the Director and Inspectorate of Education in the municipality of Gjakova, commenced a project to monitor the process of student and professor recruitment in schools where informal education is employed. The initiative will continue working to pursue long-term goals in this field.

Members of the initiative:

Drenusha Mula, Mevlyde Idrizi,
Qendresa Kastrati Hoxha, Vjollca Shyti





It is not difficult to meet a resident in Pristina who complains about the city's quality of air. Air pollution is mainly the result of coal power plant five kilometers from the city. Along with unregulated waste disposal and unclean water, air pollution is a serious environmental issue that Kosovo needs to address. Kosovo's legal framework regulates the collection of a road and ecological tax and, on paper, these taxes are meant to go towards investments in the environment. In reality, the collected funds go to the general state budget, without clear budget allocations for environmental protections. Angered by the degradation of Kosovo's environment Burbuqe Bakija Deva and five other participants of NDI's Women's Leadership Academy formed the "EKOSOVA" initiative, which aims to increase Kosovo's investments in the environment through enforcement of the laws on road and ecological taxes.

"It always bothered me that there's an attitude that women have to mainly deal with women's issues, or with things that are perceived as women's issues," Deva said. "Women have skills and capacities to deal with other problems that plague society, and seeing that the situation related to our environment is grave, and that this problem is not a priority for the government, our group decided to deal with the environment."

Intending to shed light on how little the ecological and road taxes were being implemented, members of the "EKOSOVA" initiative collected and analyzed data over a period of three months. The initiative members divided research assignments, which would ultimately be compiled into policy proposals. They found that only 0.7 percent of Kosovo's budget is allocated exclusively for the environment, and that environmental concerns were raised by MPs only nine times during 2015. Additionally, municipal investments in the environment typically go towards investments in infrastructure and are often too generalized, and many municipalities have no officials that deal with the environment.

In contrast with poor government attention to the issue, in an online survey, the group found that 74 percent of respondents were not at all happy with the situation of the environment in Kosovo. Furthermore, there was little public understanding about the ecological tax: while



73 percent of respondents said they own a vehicle and 70 percent said they knew about the ecological tax, 52 percent did not know its purpose.

"I was responsible for researching opinions of Assembly personnel o, and in the Kalabria neighborhood [of Pristina]," initiative member Shpresa Gosalci said. "I came to the conclusion that most people know why the ecological tax is collected, but they do not know whether that money goes towards the environment."

Wanting to raise awareness among Kosovar citizens and institutions about the country's environmental problems, "EKOSOVA" organized a painting exhibition on the premises of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, featuring the work of middle and high school students centered on how they saw Kosovo's environment. Fifteen students had the opportunity to express their environmental concerns through art.

Together with the paintings, the results of the research were presented in a policy paper during a roundtable discussion held on International Earth Day in Kosovo's Assembly with members of the Committee of Agriculture, Forestry and Spatial Planning; members of parliament; local and national government representatives; and civil society representatives. Based on its findings, the initiative proposed specific recommendations for institutions, ranging from increasing the budget allocated for the environment and establishing a budget line of subsidies within the Ministry of Environment, to making sure that municipalities have officials dealing explicitly

with the environment. The initiative also called for an increase in active citizens demanding accountability for government spending on the environment.

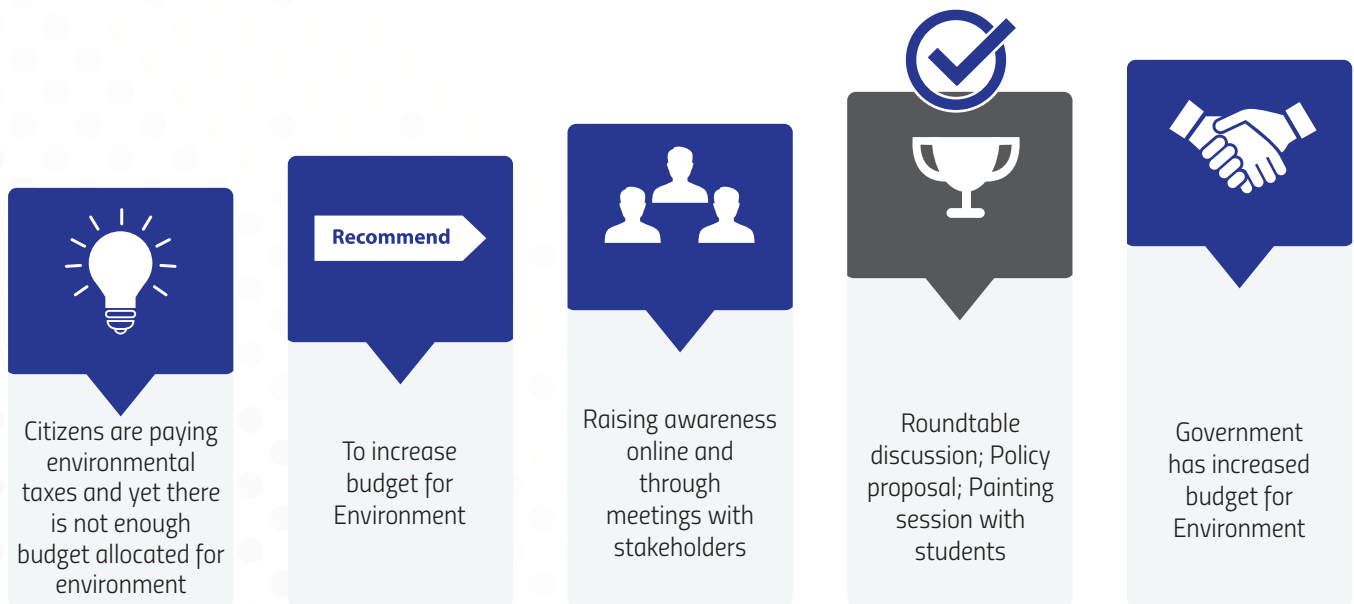
The "EKOSOVA" initiative was met with support from governing institutions. "Whenever we wanted to meet someone, especially for our research, we were warmly accepted, especially in the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning and at the Assembly," Gosalci noted.

As environmental issues in Kosovo are serious, the initiative plans to continue working on the subject. "The fact that our first project caught the attention of so many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) gives us the power to continue working," Deva said. "The members' exemplary cooperation, even though we all come from different political backgrounds, further strengthens our drive to keep working."

For some members, this initiative helped them fulfill a long-time dream, and though they have a tough road ahead, they are excited about their results thus far. "[An initiative like] EKOSOVA is one of my long-time wishes, and our desire to be incessantly involved in this activity, I hope, will lead to achieving our main aim: for EKOSOVA to become an NGO for the protection of the environment," Gosalci said.

Members of the initiative:

Burbuqe Bakija Deva, Blerinë Ukshini,
Esma Bunjaku, Krenare Sopjani,
Shpresa Gosalci, Shefkije Mehmeti, Vjollca Nagavci Roka





 /firstaidawareness

Kosovo's rural population ranks highest among the Balkan countries, with more than 60 percent of the country's 1.9 million people residing in rural areas.¹ Many people living in remote, secluded areas have no access to primary health-care, and their freedom of movement is severely limited. Primary healthcare facilities are often miles away from villages. With no reliable transportation to or from medical facilities, many in those villages turn to traditional medicine instead, often putting patients at risk. This traditional approach to medicine, combined with a lack of proper education and information, poses a great risk to the lives of many people living in secluded areas.

In 2015, eight women alumni of NDI's Week of Women and Women's Leadership Academy launched an initiative to ameliorate the health-care predicament rural communities face in Kosovo. "Healthcare is one of biggest issues that our people deal with everyday," said Edita Veseli, a member of the "First Aid Awareness" initiative. "We often hear about cases where a child's health deteriorates as a result of improper medical treatment. In our society, women take care of the family, so teaching them, especially those living in rural areas, how to properly give first aid was extremely important to us."

The initiative's main goal was to educate 100 women from remote village areas in Ivaje and Gajre, part of the Municipality of Kaçanik, to provide proper first aid, and mobilize representatives of relevant institutions to expand first aid training to women in rural areas. The eight women contacted the Ministry of Health for assistance, which directed them to several nongovernmental organizations, including Caritas and Women for Women International (WfW), to organize a series of training sessions for approximately 100 women participants on first aid techniques. Representatives from Caritas led the trainings, which focused on addressing common health problems such as fever, vomiting, burns, and other bodily injuries. They also provided first aid kits with bandages, iodine, hydrogen peroxide, and a thermometer to every woman at the training.

¹ <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/khdr2014english.pdf>



WfW identified some of the country's most secluded villages in need of community members trained in first aid, and helped to select women from these villages for the trainings.

"The women really valued what we were doing with them, and this was evidenced by high numbers of participants," Veseli said. "They were also very grateful for the trainings and noted how hard it is for them when one of their family members is in need of medical attention."

Xhejlan Spahiu, a participant who attended the training held in Gajre, expressed her appreciation. "I learned a lot of new information in this training. For example, now I know that I shouldn't use butter to heal burns," Spahiu said.

"Our goal has been achieved because we believe that all the women who took part in the training sessions gained the new skills we wanted them to learn. The women who were taught how to give first aid really came from some of the most remote areas of some municipalities," Veseli said.

Afërdita Këqiku, a nurse and one of the training series' eight organizers, added that the initiative's accomplishments are incredibly important. "During the trainings, we saw how necessary this actually is for rural areas," Këqiku said. "In these areas, ambulances are too far away. During the winter, roads are impenetrable and sick people cannot be transported to hospitals so women have to take care of them. Our plan for the future is to scale up and expand our activities; we aim to include aspects like family planning, oral hygiene, medication usages and protection against sexually-transmitted diseases," Këqiku added.



While there is much more to be done, the women have achieved significant results thus far. With the help of Caritas, WfW and NDI, the group was able to counsel women in basic healthcare practices, and ultimately contribute to making rural Kosovo a safer place than it was before.

Members of the initiative:

Afërdita Halili Këqiku, Edita Veseli, Marigona Kelmendi, Sevdie Haziri Musliu, Sadete Popaj, Qendresa Sahitaj, Vjosa Sheholli, Vlora Veseli





Inheritance & Property

f /rightforproperty

Women have been historically deprived of their right to property inheritance, and while Kosovo's legal framework regulates women's property rights, women still do not fully enjoy this basic right. The realization of a woman's right to property is inextricably linked to enhancement of a woman's position within the family, increased economic power, new opportunities for self-employment and business development, and an overall improvement of her position in society.

Current law provides full equality in inheritance, yet practice shows that when a woman is heiress, these rights are not enforced in court. Only a small percentage of women in Kosovo have realized their right to property.

Determined to rectify this inequality, in 2015, a group of women from different political backgrounds founded the initiative 'Women's Right to Property' with the aim of increasing the number of women who understand and put to use their right to property.

"Women's property rights is a topic that is not frequently discussed in our society; there are still prejudices surrounding it and sometimes it is even considered taboo," said Nita Luzha, a member of the initiative. "We consider protecting women's property rights to be extremely important to empowering women in our society."

As Kosovo's legislation already guarantees gender equality on property rights, the initiative set out to change social behaviors and attitudes towards women's property rights rather than focusing on new policy proposals.

In collaboration with USAID's Property Rights Program, the initiative organized peer-to-peer discussion sessions on 'Building Awareness on Property Rights' with women and students from nine different municipalities. The women came from all communities, including representatives of NGOs, beneficiaries of social assistance, single mothers, and women with disabilities. The initiative is targeting 450 women as part of the plan.



WOMEN'S RIGHT IN PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE



"The awareness-building activities, organized in the form of discussions, were held to start talks and debates on women's property rights," Luzha said. "People shared experiences, challenges, and also success stories, but what's important is that the women really understood that women's property rights are guaranteed by Kosovo's laws."

During each session, special importance was put on legislation that guarantees gender equality on property rights, and the necessity to change the social behaviors and attitudes towards women's property rights. Most students participating in the discussions agreed on the need to share property with their sisters and brothers equally, making the prospect of a better future for women more palpable.

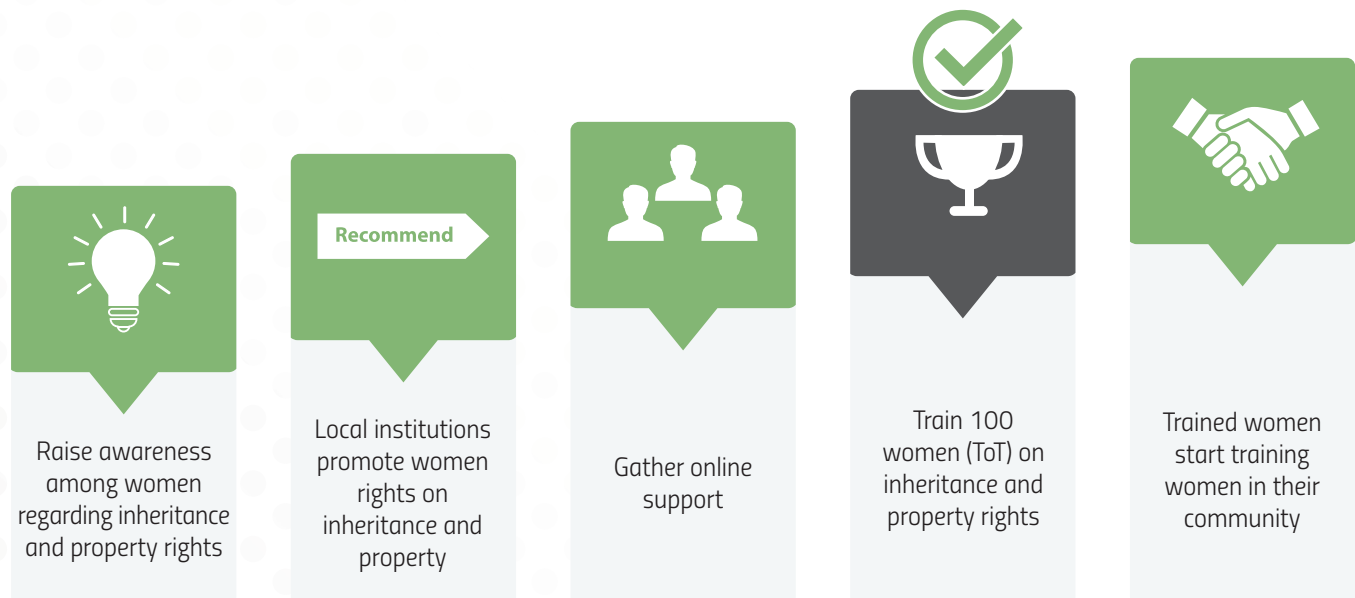
After concluding the discussions, the initiative is in the process of conducting extensive trainings for another 100 selected

women on property inheritance rights in nine different municipalities.

Between the group's discussions and training sessions, which were held almost every month, hundreds of women have learned about their rights and, in turn, are teaching other women about it. This new generation of educated and informed women is already leading to increased numbers of women vocally claiming the rights guaranteed to them by law. As Luzha put it, "Change starts when you start to talk about change, and by starting the discussion in different municipalities, we have already started the change."

Members of the initiative:

Besa Veseli, Drita Millaku, Nita Luzha Rudi, Majlinda Ostroglava, Violeta Berisha, Shpresa Veliqi, Xhevrie Peci



SINGLE MOTHER INITIATIVE

f /singlemother

When a trainer asked single mother Arta Tahiri, "What kind of program would help single mothers most?" she immediately replied "Free child care!"

In 2012, a Women's Leadership Academy participants from different parties and civil society organizations founded the advocacy initiative "Single Mothers" to identify the main challenges that single mothers face, and find ways to resolve those issues.

"We thought of starting this initiative to help and support single mothers," Tahiri, a local councilwoman in Ferizaj, said. The initiative set out to raise government and popular awareness, about the difficulties that single mothers face on a daily basis.

When Tahiri went to her city's office for social services, she found that more than 100 single mothers in Ferizaj could benefit from free child care.

"The opportunity to secure free child care in Ferizaj arose when I met Muharrem Sfarqa, the Mayor of Ferizaj, and proposed the idea and ways to implement it," Tahiri says. "The mayor immediately submitted a written request to two kindergartens in Ferizaj to make child care free for all single mothers, and also stated that from then on, single mothers' children would be of first priority in admissions processes."

When Arta Sylejmani, whose husband had recently passed away, heard about the free child care program, she was happy to finally be able to send her daughter to play with other children every day. "For a single mother with three children, to have someone help even half an hour makes such a difference. To be out from the morning until the afternoon is a miracle," said Sylejmani.



SINGLE MOTHER INITIATIVE

"It also benefits my daughter," she said. "When she is isolated in the house for 24 hours, it is impossible for her to not miss her father. When she has the chance to be with other children, she forgets her pain."

The initiative proceeded to meet with local organizations that dealt with women's issues, members of parliament, political party women's caucuses, and mayors in different municipalities to evaluate next steps for bringing access to free child care to all single mothers in Kosovo.

"We got the biggest support from civil society organizations," says Merita Mustafa, a member of the initiative. "I believe our initiative was successful precisely because we have combined the forces of women and worked passionately on a topic that was quite personal to us, since we have also been affected by such injustices or have a family member who was."

The initiative's cooperation with civil society included working with NORMA, an association of lawyers for women's rights, to organize a series of roundtables in seven regions of Kosovo, titled "Single Mothers and Children Who Are Under Their Custody: Challenges on the Implementation of the Family Law."

"Our cooperation with NORMA was extraordinarily fruitful, especially because they had expertise in the legal aspect, whereas we had the passion and will to help single mothers and their children," Mustafa said. Through the roundtables, many local stakeholders were able to share best practices and harmonize institutional responsibilities to address challenges in the law's implementation.

In 2016, four years since its inception, the initiative's initial goals to make the issue relevant to institutions and public have been largely achieved. For the first time, single mothers are a part of the advocacy agenda of the European Commission. As a result, two nongovernmental organizations in Kosovo have received grants to conduct research on single mothers. Moreover, the Women's Caucus in the Assembly of Kosovo offered its full support for the initiative by raising the topic in parliament and including it in their work-plan and commended the WLA graduates for raising this issue.

Furthermore, the municipality of Lipjan became the second municipality in Kosovo to adopt the initiative's policy of free daycare for children under the custody of single mothers, and the initiative continues its work to make this a reality for all municipalities of Kosovo.

Although pleased with the results so far, Tahiri says that there is still a long way to go for the initiative. "Our project will be complete when all municipalities embrace our idea of free child care," Tahiri says. "So our plan for the future is to have the Ministry of Education issue administrative instructions that would make all single mothers exempt from paying fees for child care in Kosovo."

From September 2016, Ministry of Education adopted an administrative instruction enabling children from marginalized groups, including children with single parents, to be exempt from payment. These children will be a priority when enrolled in the public day care institutions, that way ensuring access to education for all.





Smaller classrooms - Better education

f /smallclassedu

The Ministry of Education in Kosovo issued an administrative instruction in June 2013 to limit the number of students to 35 per classroom, but many stakeholders still find this number too high for quality education to take place. Furthermore, this instruction is rarely respected, with many schools in municipalities like Pristina and Fushe Kosove filling classrooms with up to 40 students.

In 2014, a group of women activists wanted to do something about these overcrowded classrooms. The women, participants of NDI's Women's Leadership Academy, decided to put their new communication and public policy development skills to work, forming the advocacy initiative "Smaller Classrooms, Better Education."

Saranda Billaca, a member of the initiative, said that the reason for forming the initiative was the low quality of education in Kosovo. "We decided to advocate for this issue with the aim of changing the administrative instruction regulating classroom size, since 30 to 35 students per classroom does not promise an increase in the quality of education," she says. Many school officials agreed with the initiative that smaller class sizes are linked to more positive educational outcomes for students, from improved test scores to fewer dropouts and higher graduation rates. These improvements are accredited to teachers' ability to provide more individualized attention to students' learning needs, and students' increased attention in smaller group settings.

As the initiative leaders strongly believed that the administrative instruction should be reduced to a maximum of 20 to 25 students to improve the quality of education in Kosovo. They are building public support to advocate for the change and are conducting meetings with Members of Parliament, members of the Committee on Education of Kosovo's assembly, Ministry of Education, education departments in local level and other local stakeholders working with education sector.



**SMALLER CLASSROOMS,
BETTER EDUCATION**

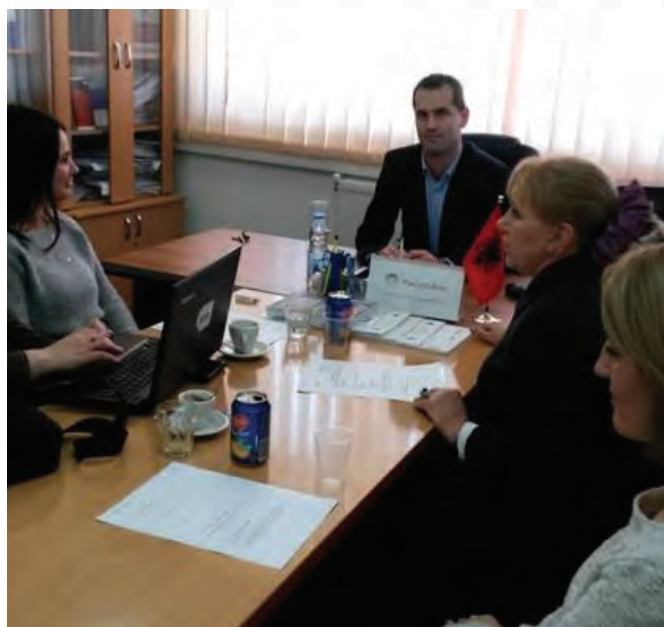
To better understand the situation, the initiative conducted field visits in ten schools in seven municipalities, in Gjiilan, Viti, Gjakovë, Prishtinë, Fushë Kosova, Mitrovicë and Hani Elezit. After assessing these classrooms, members found that overcrowding was worse than anticipated, with most of the visited classrooms violating the administrative instruction. Later, the initiative organized visits in education departments in several municipalities in Kosovo.

Elvire Bushi, a member of the initiative, said that the field visits reassured them that parts of the education system really needed to change. "All of the people we spoke to encouraged us to continue our work," she said. "[During the visits] I learned about different problems that schools face every day, and that decreasing the number of students per class would have a direct impact on the quality of education."

Numerous directors of education departments, school principals, and teachers expressed their willingness to help the initiative accomplish its goals. The initiative will continue its advocacy activities in the upcoming months to hold a joint public meeting with the Committee of Education of Kosovo's Assembly to present its findings and provide recommendations for rectifying classroom overcrowding.

"The main recommendation we intend to present in front of the Committee for Education," said Bllaca, "is that the Committee revise the administrative instruction because it has not improved the quality of education, and is presently not being implemented and respected."

"Reducing the number of students is a necessary prerequisite to have quality education," Bushi explained. "When you work in groups, when you implement contemporary teaching

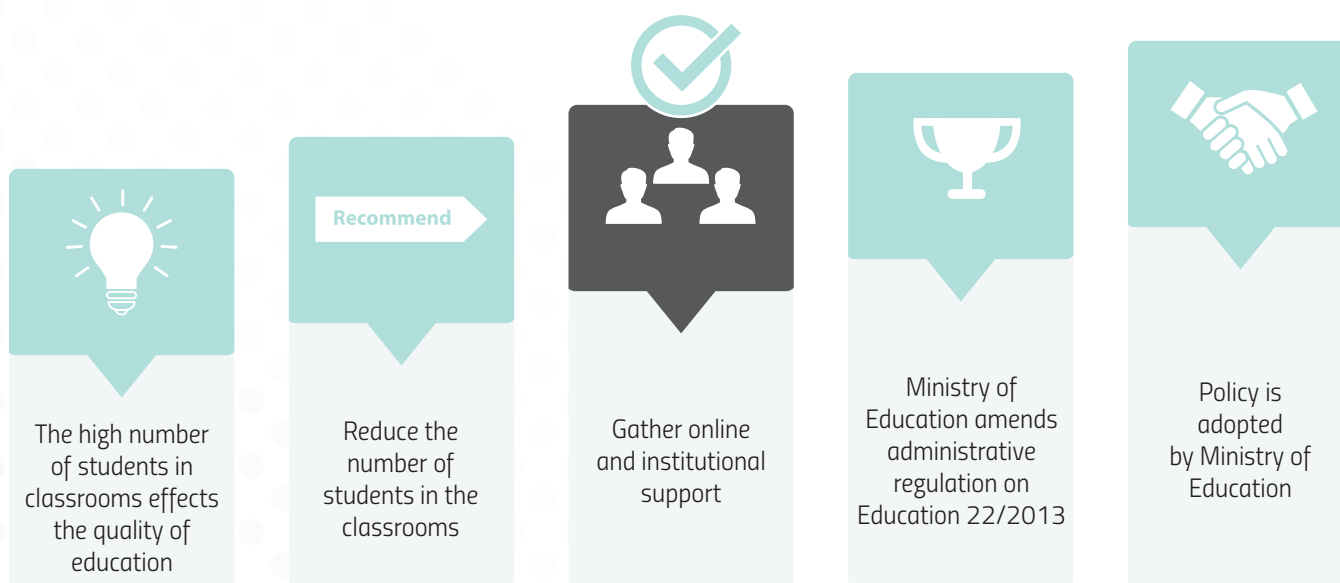


methods, it is impossible to work with a large number of students. I think that changes should happen as soon as possible in this regard."

The initiative expressed that with improved educational outcomes, future generations will have better job opportunities and will be economically better-off, so the initiative will continue to work until its goal is reached.

Members of the initiative:

Ajnishahe Haziri, Elvire Bushi, Jetmira Rexhepi, Mirlinda Sopi, Saranda Bllaca



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