

Introduction

This profile summarizes the legal and social context affecting persons with disabilities in Kosovo. Data were collated through research on country reports, articles, and published papers from supporting partners, government, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).¹ This profile first discusses disability statistics and then analyzes the constraints that persons with disabilities face in accessing services such as health, education, employment, and social protection. To conclude, it describes the legal and policy frameworks that guide Kosovo's commitments to persons with disabilities and identifies the main government and non-government actors and donors working on disability-related issues in the country.

Background

The census of the population of Kosovo was conducted in 2011. The census recorded a total of 93,288 persons with disabilities in Kosovo at the time.² Data on persons with disabilities are divided into six categories: 1) deafness or severe hearing impairment, 2) blindness or a severe visual impairment, 3) basic physical disability, 4) learning or intellectual disability, 5) long-standing psychological or emotional difficulty, and 6) other, including any long-standing illness. People classified as having a 'basic physical disability' constituted the largest share of persons with disabilities – 33.8 percent (31,567 people). In terms of gender, 46.4 percent were found to be male (43,378 people) and 53.6 percent female (49,910 people).

Several factors limit the quality of demographic data for persons with disabilities. There are multiple definitions of disability in use by multiple institutions and stakeholders and there is no cohesive and unified system, criteria, or methods for identifying disability.³ Thus, knowledge about the real situation of persons with disabilities in Kosovo remains incomplete and outdated.

Kosovo is a partially recognized state and not a member of the United Nations (UN), and therefore cannot become a party to UN conventions. However, the national legislation concerning persons with disabilities is being reviewed to align with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).⁴ Handikos, a local Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPD), recently conducted a study on the consistency of national disability legislation with international disability

¹ For inquiries on this brief or disability inclusion, please contact the World Bank's Global Disability Advisor, Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo cmcclainnhlapo@worldbank.org and her team through the World Bank's project/country social development specialists.

² Kosovo Agency of Statistics, https://askdata.rks.gov.net/pxweb/en/ASKdata/ASKdata_Census%20population_Census%202011_2%20Republic%20of%20Kosova/census45.px/table/tableViewLayout1/, accessed on May 1, 2022

³ *Situation analysis: children with disabilities in Kosovo*, UNICEF and European Union Kosovo, 2017

⁴ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

laws such as the CRPD.⁵ They found that so far only 30.7 percent of international standards related to disability have been fully translated into national legislation.⁶

Table 1. Degree of compatibility of Kosovo legislation towards UN CRPD, Handikos, 2020

Category	Full Standard	Partially Addressed	Missing Standard
<i>Right to life and Justice</i>	21.42%	64.29%	14.28%
<i>Independence, privacy, family and life in community</i>	27.27%	54.54%	18.18%
<i>Accessibility</i>	6.77%	79.67%	13.55%
<i>Education</i>	41.66%	50%	8.33%
<i>Freedom, protection from torture, integrity and mobility</i>	68.42%	----	31.57%
<i>Equality, non-discrimination (women and children)</i>	60%	40%	----
<i>Health</i>	66.66%	8.33%	25%
<i>Employment and social care</i>	38.88%	44.45%	16.66%
<i>Public participation</i>	20%	20%	60%
<i>Statistics and international cooperation</i>	----	----	100%

In Kosovo, the constitution and law prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities and provide for equal access to education, employment, and other state services. This includes those with physical, sensory, intellectual, and mental disabilities. The Anti-Discrimination Law of 2004 specifically protects the rights of persons with disabilities. The National Action Plan for Persons with Disabilities, which was approved in 2009, is the first attempt to align policy to the principles of the CRPD. A committee was also established in 2009 to monitor the implementation of the plan and included representatives from civil society.⁷

In 2013, the National Strategy on the Rights of People with Disabilities for 2013-2023 was developed under the leadership of the Office of the Prime Minister/Office of Good Governance of Kosovo. It provides a vision and framework for coordinated actions and mechanisms based on the principles of the CRPD.⁸ The strategy is overseen by the National Disability Council to ensure equal opportunities, full participation, and social inclusion for persons with disabilities, taking into consideration their

⁵ Research report: *International standards on disability issues – Where does Kosovo stand?* Handikos, 2020, http://handi-kos.org/wp-content/uploads/2004/05/Report_ENG-_29_04_20_1_395212.pdf

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Disability Rights in the Western Balkans*, SIDA, 2014

⁸ *National Strategy on the Rights of People with Disabilities in the Republic of Kosovo 2013-2023*, Office of the Prime Minister/Office for Good Governance, https://childhub.org/sites/default/files/library/attachments/national_strategy_on_the_rights_of_persons_with_disabilities_in_the_republic_of_kosovo_2013-2023_2.pdf

needs and interests in government decisions that impact them.⁹ The mandate of the 2009 committee has been renewed to monitor and report on the progress of implementation of the National Action Plan and National Strategy.¹⁰ However, there have been numerous showings that legal provisions are not effectively enforced and that persons with disabilities continue to face discrimination in access, for example to education and hiring.¹¹

Gender

- Women with disabilities experience higher levels of exclusion in Kosovo, especially those living in the rural areas. This stems from both structural and cultural factors, as traditional gender roles, which impose additional challenges on women with disabilities, are more prevalent in rural than in urban areas.¹²
- According to the *Multidimensional Poverty Analysis Kosovo 2017*, 33 percent of women with disabilities have never been enrolled in school, as compared to 23 percent of men with disabilities.¹³
- Gender-based disparity between men and women with disabilities is also obvious in the distribution of disability pensions (see Figure 1 below).¹⁴ Over a five-year period (2012-2017), the total amount of money provided in pensions to women with disabilities each year was consistently lower than provided to men, despite there being more women (53.6 percent) than men with disabilities (46.4 percent).¹⁵
- A 2019 OSCE survey report on violence against women indicates that, on average, 41 percent of women with disabilities from Kosovo experienced abuse in the 12 months prior to the survey.¹⁶ There is some evidence showing that women with intellectual disabilities may be particularly vulnerable. The court in Gjilan/Gnjilane sentenced a police officer for sexually assaulting a female minor with intellectual disabilities, according to the Human Rights Report of the US Department of State for 2021.¹⁷ Evidence also shows that not all licensed shelters for victims of domestic violence are accessible to women with disabilities.¹⁸

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Kosovo*, U.S. Department of State – Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2020

¹² Vjollca Krasniqi, *Disability, Politics and Culture in Kosovo*, *Socialno delo*, 53 (2014), 3: 169-182

¹³ *Multidimensional poverty analysis Kosovo 2017*, Embassy of Sweden, 2017,

<https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2020/12/01095837/kosovo-mdpa.pdf>

¹⁴ *Statistics of Social Welfare, 2012 – 2017*, KAS

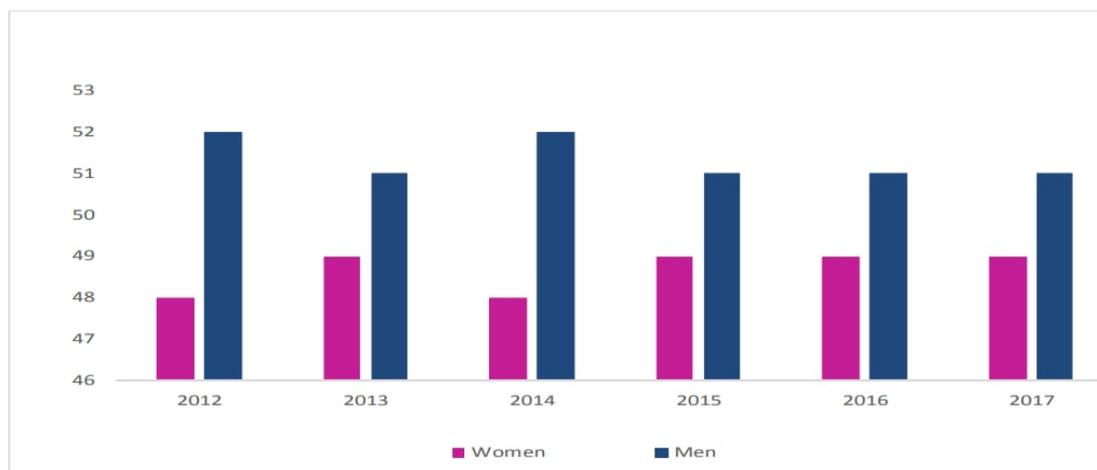
¹⁵ [Kosovo Agency of Statistics data](#), accessed on May 1, 2022

¹⁶ *OSCE-led Survey on the Well-being and Safety of Women*, OSCE, 2019,

www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/2/413237_0.pdf

¹⁷ *Kosovo 2021 Human Rights Report*, United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

¹⁸ https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/ewl-kosovo_report_web.pdf

Figure 1. Gender distribution of persons living with disabilities, 2012-2017

Data source: *Statistics of Social Welfare, 2012-2017, KAS*

Ethnic minority groups

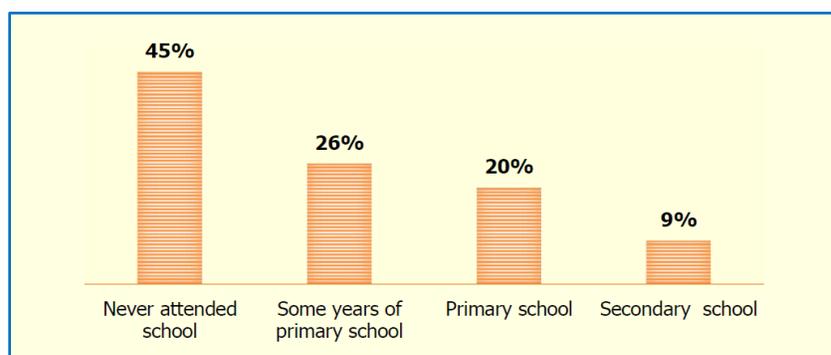
In Kosovo the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities are the most marginalized communities in the country, as highlighted by all social and economic indicators. In most cases, they live in extreme poverty, face multiple types of discrimination, have lower levels of education, and face higher unemployment rates. Moreover, the risks of vulnerability for children with disabilities from these communities are exceedingly high.¹⁹

The three communities differ from each other in terms of place of origin and language. Roma people are mainly Muslim and speak the Roma language (Romani), with Albanian or Serbian as their second language. The Ashkali and Egyptian communities are mainly Muslim and speak Albanian. According to the 2011 census, there were 35,784 people from the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities living in Kosovo, around 2 percent of the total population. This consisted of 8,824 Roma, 15,436 Ashkali, and 11,524 Egyptians.²⁰ Children with disabilities from the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities are at exceedingly high risk of vulnerability.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Strategic Regional Policy Analysis in Western Balkans and Turkey: Early Childhood Development and Primary Education*, Rima Education Fund, 2022

²¹ *Situation analysis: children with disabilities in Kosovo*, UNICEF and European Union Kosovo, 2017

Figure 2. Survey on school enrollment of children with disabilities

Source: Voice of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians, 2018

- As seen in Figure 2, 26 percent of persons with disabilities from the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities finished some years of primary school, 20 percent were primary school graduates, and only 9 percent finished secondary school. Almost half (45 percent) never attended school.²²
- Around 29 percent of the school-aged children with disabilities from the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities are enrolled in school and the majority of these (80 percent) attended inclusive classrooms. The main barriers to education are poverty (58 percent), inadequate learning materials at their school (17 percent), schools being located too far away (16 percent), and schools not accessible for persons with disability (11 percent).²³
- The Law on Pre-University Education requires municipal schools to provide free, safe, and suitable transportation for children with disabilities. However, in contravention of the law, a study on the inclusion of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children with disabilities found that 65 percent of those surveyed were not provided with free transportation.²⁴
- The same study found that 58 percent of surveyed Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children with disabilities have been refused entry into school during their education period because of their disability. Of these, 13 percent were able to enroll in school despite the refusal. Reasons cited for refusing children with disabilities included language barriers, referral to a special school, a lack of staff qualified to work with students with disabilities, lack of school capacities to provide support for students with disabilities, and a lack of accessible school infrastructure.²⁵
- According to the survey, 93 percent of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian persons with disabilities were found to be unemployed. Forty-five percent cited their disability as a key obstacle to employment and 9 percent cited ethnic discrimination during the recruitment process.²⁶

²² *Inclusion of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian girls and persons with disabilities in education and employment in Kosovo*, Voice of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians, 2018

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

- Of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian persons with disabilities that were employed, 9 percent reported being exposed to discrimination at their jobs by their coworkers or employers on the basis of disability; 18 percent reported being exposed to discrimination because of ethnic characteristics.²⁷
- The Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian families have the most limited access to key services such as daycare centers and therapy. Most parents are unaware of the existence of state benefits and, even within their own extended families, children with disabilities can be exposed to mockery and ostracization.²⁸

Public attitude

- Persons with disabilities, especially persons with mental disabilities, may face harsh discriminative treatment. Stereotypical views hold that persons with disabilities are unfit for independent living and they may also be seen to have mental health challenges, be “sick,” and be asexual.²⁹
- A special residential institution in Shtime, Pristina, is home to over 60 persons with disabilities who live segregated from the wider community.³⁰ The majority are Albanian (42 people) and the remaining 18 belong to various other ethnic groups.³¹
- Often persons with disabilities may be confined to the private domain and live in isolation – increasing their vulnerability. The stigma associated with disability in Kosovo is strong and persons with disability, especially children, are hidden from the public eye.³² Further, a UNICEF study found that the “excluding mentality of the society” was the biggest barrier for children with disabilities.³³
- Employers in Kosovo often reveal their unconscious biases about the ability of persons with disabilities to perform certain work tasks, arguing that the skills required for a given position are beyond the capabilities of persons with disabilities.³⁴

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Everybody counts: A situation analysis of the inclusion of children with disabilities in the Western Balkans and Turkey*, UNICEF, 2018

²⁹ Vjollca Krasniqi, *Disability, Politics and Culture in Kosovo*, *Socialno delo*, 53 (2014), 3: 169-182

³⁰ Series 5: Social Statistics, Social Welfare Statistics Q4 2020, Ministry of Finance, Republic of Kosovo

³¹ Ibid.

³² Vjollca Krasniqi, *Disability, Politics and Culture in Kosovo*, *Socialno delo*, 53 (2014), 3: 169-182

³³ *Estimated 38,000 children with disabilities in Kosovo are not attending school*, UNICEF Kosovo Programme, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/press-releases/estimated-38000-children-disabilities-kosovo-are-not-attending-school>

³⁴ *Study report: Needs assessment study on the employability of youth with disabilities in Kosovo*, Save the Children, 2021.

Accessibility

- Ensuring persons with disabilities are able to access public spaces in Kosovo is regulated by Administrative Instruction (AI33/2007), which is based on the Law on Construction. However, accessibility, universal usage, and universal design for persons with disabilities are not mentioned at all in the Law on Construction, nor in other laws covering construction and the environment. AI33/2007 remains the basic document on national standards for providing access.³⁵
- A study comparing UN CRPD and Kosovo's disability legislation found that only 6.77 percent of accessibility standards of the CRPD are fully reflected in national legislation.³⁶
- A study on the accessibility of primary and lower secondary school buildings found a host of issues, including ramps with non-standard slopes, a lack of handrails, the absence of accessible toilets, and a lack of elevators. Such issues we found to have contributed to school infrastructure being unwelcoming to children with disabilities.³⁷
- As of 2019, persons with disabilities were found to continue to face barriers to realizing their right to information. Institutions rarely publish announcements and decisions in Braille to ensure they can be accessed by persons with vision impairments. Similarly, persons with hearing disabilities were not able to follow the televised debates that were held in the lead-up to the October 2019 elections because certified sign language interpreters were not provided.³⁸ The voices of individuals with disabilities were found to be marginal in decision-making processes, due to insufficient efforts to ensure the public engagement of persons with disabilities.

Education

- According to a UNICEF study, only around 12 percent of school-age children with disabilities are actually in school in Kosovo (5,300 out of estimated 43,000 children).³⁹
- Children with disabilities are estimated to comprise roughly 2.1 percent of all students in school. Based on global estimates for the prevalence of disability, however, they make up around 15 percent of the population.⁴⁰ This gives a rough idea of the extent to which they are excluded.
- Students with disabilities are identified via three main sources: 1) school directors provide information on students to the Education Management Information System; 2) children are registered when attending classes or visiting Resource Centers; and 3) Pedagogic Evaluation Commissions, which are usually composed of psychologists, pedagogists, social workers, health

³⁵ *Report on the Accessibility of Primary and Lower Secondary School Buildings for Children with Disabilities in Kosovo*, Handikos and UNICEF

³⁶ *Research report: International standards on disability issues – Where does Kosovo stand?* Handikos, 2020

³⁷ *Report on the Accessibility of Primary and Lower Secondary School Buildings for Children with Disabilities in Kosovo*, Handikos and UNICEF

³⁸ *Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo in 2019*, UNMIK

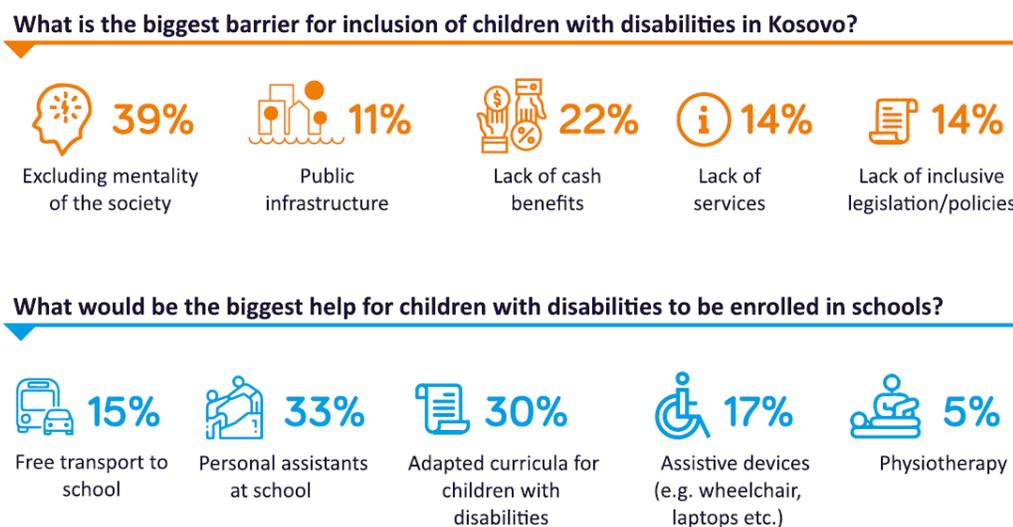
³⁹ *Estimated 38,000 children with disabilities in Kosovo are not attending school*, UNICEF Kosovo Programme, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/press-releases/estimated-38000-children-disabilities-kosovo-are-not-attending-school>

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

professionals, and support teachers.⁴¹ This identification approach informs school policies, plans, and resources.

- Laws and pedagogical documents in Kosovo pertaining to educating children with disabilities in ways that are inclusive are grounded in, and aligned with, international conventions on disability and child rights, as well as other international documents. However, there are major shortcomings in the implementation of inclusivity. Also, teachers who often have little or no formal (or informal) training in inclusive education may lack a good understanding of its essence. They perceive inclusive education as a “humane action” rather than a professional responsibility.⁴²
- UNICEF conducted research examining the barriers to inclusion in Kosovo schools and identifying ways they could be overcome, seeking to quantify each by the number of children affected (see Figure 4). It identified social norms and attitudes towards children with disabilities as a leading barrier, affecting 39 percent of children. Hiring personal assistants at school (33 percent) and adapting curricula for children with disabilities (30 percent) were found to be among the leading factors to improving inclusivity.⁴³

Figure 3. The barriers to inclusive education in Kosovo and factors that help overcome them



Source: UNICEF Kosovo, 2019

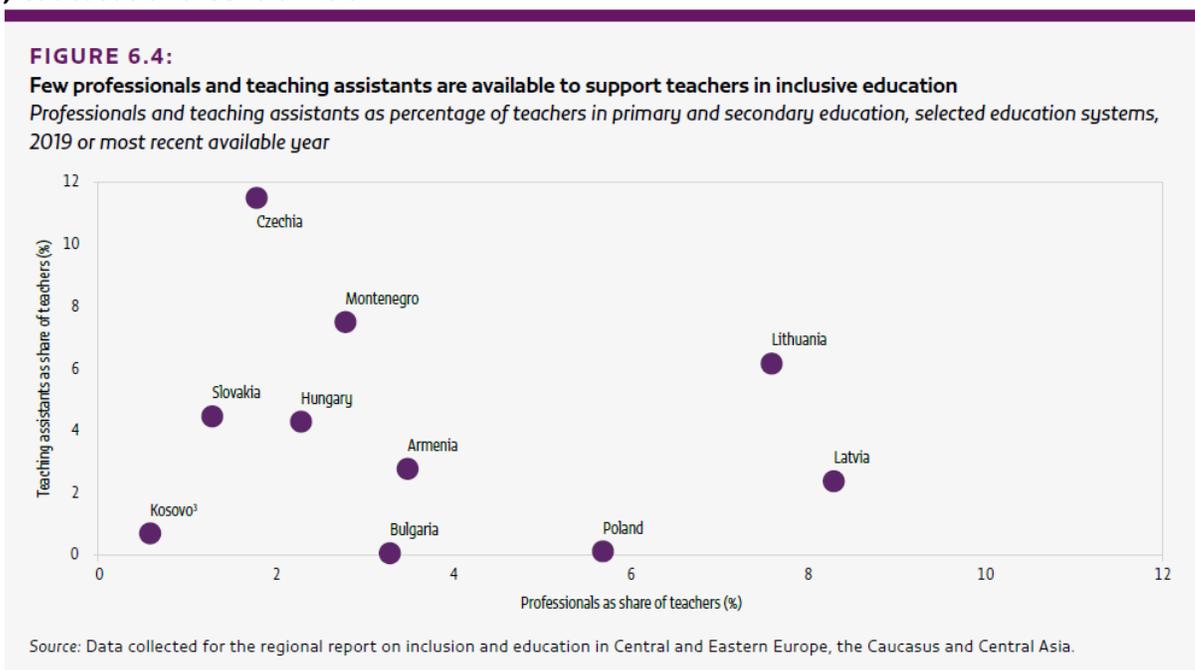
⁴¹ Administrative instruction (MEST) No. 16/2017 professional assessment of children with special instructive educational needs, <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/12/16-ua-masht-nr-16-vleresimi-pedagogjik-i-femijeve-me-nevoja-te-vecanta-arsimore.pdf>

⁴² Naser Zabeli, Blerta Perolli Shenu, Jeffrey A. Anderson, *The Understanding of Inclusive Education in Kosovo: Legal and Empirical Argumentation*, CEPS Journal, Vol.11, No. 3, 2021

⁴³ UNICEF Kosovo, 2019

- Inclusive education is often understood as the provision of education to children with disabilities (i.e. enrolling children with disabilities in regular schools) as opposed to ensuring the conditions for such children to fully participate in the learning environment. There is no common understanding of inclusive education among stakeholders and thus no agreement on how to develop inclusive practices. Early childhood development, school-readiness, pre-school, and kindergarten are not included within the broad understanding of inclusive education and are not taken into consideration when developing education plans.⁴⁴
- Other factors that hinder the development of inclusive education in Kosovo include a lack of professionals and teaching assistants. Figure 5 below shows how, compared to its neighbors, Kosovo is the least developed in terms of the availability of inclusive education professionals and teaching assistants.⁴⁵

Figure 4. The availability of disability professionals and teaching assistants in Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia



Source: Global Education Monitoring Report 2021, Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia – Inclusion and Education: All means All.

- In classrooms that are often over-crowded, teachers cannot attend to the specific needs of children with disabilities. This makes the presence of personal assistants crucial. Insufficient funding has meant that such assistants have not been hired in most schools. Parents who want

⁴⁴ Situation analysis: children with disabilities in Kosovo, UNICEF and European Union Kosovo, 2017

⁴⁵ Global Education Monitoring Report 2021, Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia – Inclusion and Education: All means All. UNESCO, 2021

to ensure education for their children must pay teaching assistants themselves. Widespread unemployment and poverty mean they often cannot afford to.⁴⁶

- At the moment, inclusive education policies are not well implemented. There is a lack of action plans and individualized development policy plans for students with disabilities in higher education.⁴⁷
- A lack of accessible learning materials and infrastructure at higher education institutions, including accessible toilets and alternative pathways to classrooms, such as ramps and elevators, are some of the key barriers for young persons with disabilities in pursuing their higher education. Inadequate transportation is another barrier for youth with disabilities interested in higher education, especially for students from rural areas.⁴⁸
- Some evidence shows that there were limited resources for ensuring accessible and effective distance (online) learning for children with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁹

Employment

- The Law on Vocational Ability, Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities requires every public and private employer to employ one person with a disability per every 50 employees, and to provide them with appropriate working conditions.⁵⁰ However, when an international assessment team monitored central- and local-level public institutions it found none adhered to this mandatory quota. Civil society organizations reported the situation being worse in the private sector.⁵¹ Table 2 shows that, as of 2017, there were 476 employers with 50 or more employees. The law requires that these entities hire 3,414 persons with disabilities or pay the state €130 each month (the equivalent of minimum wage) for each worker with disabilities that the organization should be employing. This would yield €5,325,840 a year.⁵²

“It is easier for employers to pay sanctions than to employ persons with disabilities”

– Representative of OPD

⁴⁶ *Gender, LGBTI, Persons with Disabilities Assessment*, USAID Kosovo, 2018

⁴⁷ Naser Zabeli, Fjolla Kacaniku & Donika Koliqi, 2021, *Towards the inclusion of students with special needs in higher education: Challenged and prospects in Kosovo*, Cogent Education, 8:1

⁴⁸ *Report: Access and Inclusion to Higher Education for youth with disabilities in Kosovo*, Handikos & EU, 2019

⁴⁹ <https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/stories/assistive-technology-ensured-inclusion-children-disabilities>

⁵⁰ [Law on Vocational Ability, Rehabilitation, and Employment of People with Disabilities](#)

⁵¹ *Gender, LGBTI, Persons with Disabilities Assessment*, USAID Kosovo, 2018

⁵² Aliu, Y & Bushi, P. (2019). *Employment Policies for People with Disabilities in Kosovo. Thesis*. Vol. 8, No. 2. (207- 232).

Table 2. Estimates of the number of persons with disabilities to be employed as per the quota system in 2017 in Kosovo

	Number of employers	Number of declared employees	Number of people with disabilities who should be employed according to the law	The financial amount you have to pay if you do not employ people with disabilities
State	1	77,956	1,559	2,432,040
Sector - Ministry of Finance				
Over 500 workers	29	37,385	747	1,165,320
500 - 400	7	3,451	69	107,640
400 - 300	12	4,416	88	137,280
300 - 200	41	10,441	208	324,480
200 - 100	126	11,632	232	361,920
100 - 50	260	25,572	511	797,160
In total	476		3,414	5,325,840

- Legal sanctions are also foreseen for companies that do not comply with the law; however, monitoring mechanisms are not yet in place and sanctions are barely implemented. Even though the employment policies in Kosovo are closely aligned with European standards and principles, in practice persons with disabilities remain severely underemployed.⁵³
- As of 2019, 85 percent of persons with disabilities in Kosovo are unemployed. The process is negatively impacted by several factors, such as the limited availability of the labor market to integrate and accommodate persons with disabilities and the lack of opportunities for youth with disabilities to advance their professional skills.⁵⁴
- According to the survey on labor market inclusion of persons with disabilities conducted by UNDP in Kosovo, overall, there is a low inclusion of this community in the labor market, with only 15 percent being employed. However, 37 percent of those who were employed reported facing no challenges in their workplace.⁵⁵
- One study on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the private sector shows that 75 percent of firms do not provide for persons with disabilities in their working conditions, which affects their inclusion in the labor market. Business owners rarely discuss disability issues with their

⁵³ *Study report: Needs assessment study on the employability of youth with disabilities in Kosovo*, Save the Children, 2021

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Labor market inclusion of persons with disabilities*, UNDP Kosovo, 2019

employees, with 91 percent of businesses reporting "Not to my knowledge" when asked if any of the company's current employees have a physical or mental disability. One in two businesses (46 percent) suggested short-term assistance on the job, with an outside job coach, as one strategy for improving inclusion.⁵⁶

- Another study on the employment of persons with disabilities found that excessive sympathy or pity from people in their surrounding environment, including colleagues, could feel discouraging for persons with disabilities, particularly for young people. Colleagues that focused on their disability rather than their work made these youths feel even more marginalized, even if they were doing so out of sympathy.⁵⁷

Health

- The Law on Health provides for persons with disabilities to access healthcare on an equal basis with all citizens and residents of Kosovo.⁵⁸
- The law does not require health services to identify children with disabilities at early stages in their lives and medical diagnosis is usually made for the purpose of qualifying for state benefits. This approach fails to ensure that plans to help children fulfill their potential are developed. Most children with disabilities reach school age before they are diagnosed, which is often too late for any intervention to assess a child's development needs.⁵⁹
- A study comparing Kosovo's disability legislation with the CRPD found national health legislation to be 66.7 percent compatible with the health category of the CRPD. Around 25 percent of the discrepancies relate to a lack of rehabilitation programs for all disability groups, a lack of community-based rehabilitation services, and a lack of opportunities for OPDs to develop and assess rehabilitation programs.⁶⁰
- There are no public rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities in Kosovo. OPDs and private service providers remain the only service providers.
- The cost and quality of healthcare services are highly questionable. A shortage of medications, a lack of accessible facilities, and long wait times often drive families to seek private specialized services at an additional financial cost.⁶¹
- A lack of medical personnel with appropriate training and skills has led to frequent misdiagnosis of both physical and intellectual disabilities, followed by inadequate treatment and prescriptions.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *Study report: Needs assessment study on the employability of youth with disabilities in Kosovo*, Save the Children, 2021

⁵⁸ *Law on Health, 04 / L-125, 2013 Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo*

⁵⁹ *Everybody counts: A situation analysis of the inclusion of children with disabilities in the Western Balkans and Turkey*, UNICEF, 2018

⁶⁰ *Research report: International standards on disability issues – Where does Kosovo stand?* Handikos, 2020

⁶¹ *Everybody counts: A situation analysis of the inclusion of children with disabilities in the Western Balkans and Turkey*, UNICEF, 2018.

Moreover, general medical facilities do not offer rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities.⁶²

- Persons with mental disabilities face additional challenges. Mental healthcare services are underutilized because of the widespread stigma surrounding mental health and the belief that mental health practitioners do not respect confidentiality. A lack of social workers, therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists at mental health facilities also undermines the quality of mental health services in the country.⁶³

Social support

- The social support system in Kosovo includes various types of pensions for different groups. Persons with disabilities are categorized differently under different pension mechanisms.
- There are drawbacks to the implementation of such a multidimensional pension policy. Specifically, the Law on Disability Pensions has vague language, placing persons with disabilities at risk of not qualifying for a disability pension. The stringent criteria also exclude several persons with disabilities from receiving support. Permanent disability pensions are provided to those who are nationals of the Republic of Kosovo, possess identification documents, and who are of age 18 to 65.⁶⁴ To qualify for a disability pension, however, a person needs to be “totally and permanently disabled and incapable of any form of occupational activity.” People with partial disabilities (i.e., individuals with a disability level below 100 percent), however, do not qualify for benefits.⁶⁵ For instance, a person who is deaf does not qualify for any state support.⁶⁶
- Disability benefits for veterans or civilians affected by war use substantially more permissive criteria than those for standard disability benefits, granting eligibility to disability levels of between 20 and 100 percent. They are also more generous, with payments being three to six times more than other schemes.⁶⁷
- Besides the pension-based benefits under the social support system, residential care for older persons and persons with disabilities is also provided. These include housing for elderly persons without family care, providing one facility for 65 residents; and community-based housing, providing three facilities for 43 elderly residents without family care. There are also residential

“If you have a disability of 70 percent, then you do not receive any compensation. The qualification criteria for pensions are way too high. They exclude many people who depend on state support.”

⁶² *Gender, LGBTI, Persons with Disabilities Assessment*, USAID Kosovo, 2018

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Series 5: Social Statistics, Social Welfare Statistics Q4 2020, Ministry of Finance, Republic of Kosovo

⁶⁵ Kosovo – *Technical Assistance Report – Enhancing Social Protection Cash Benefits*, International Monetary Fund, 2016

⁶⁶ *Gender, LGBTI, Persons with Disabilities Assessment*, USAID Kosovo, 2018

⁶⁷ Kosovo – *Technical Assistance Report – Enhancing Social Protection Cash Benefits*, International Monetary Fund, 2016

facilities for adults and children with mental disabilities, including a special institute in Shtime, providing one facility with 62 residents; and community-based housing, providing eight facilities with 80 adults and 10 children with disabilities.⁶⁸ Research indicates that the leading reasons for institutionalizing adults are 1) the absence of close relatives, 2) a family that is not prepared to look after the person, 3) socio-economic vulnerability, and 4) inadequate family care.⁶⁹

- With the support of international development agencies, local ODPs, such as Handikos, provide community-based services to persons with disabilities through community-based rehabilitation programs. These include community outreach activities, disability awareness events, training and workshops, legal aid for persons with disabilities, physical and social rehabilitation services, day care services, independent living services, and distribution of assistive devices such as wheelchairs, toilet chairs, crutches, and walkers, which are based on projects and are not sustainable.⁷⁰
- Individualized healthcare/social and physical development plans for children with disabilities are carried out mostly by ODPs (e.g. Handikos, Down Syndrome Kosova), whose work is mainly supported by international donors. However, due to limited staff and funding, ODPs are only able to attend to the health needs of a limited number of children and for a limited number of disability types. Moreover, they are usually located in urban areas and are therefore not easily accessible by people residing in rural ones.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Series 5: Social Statistics, Social Welfare Statistics Q4 2020, Ministry of Finance, Republic of Kosovo

⁶⁹ *Study on Deinstitutionalization of children and adults with disabilities in Europe and Eurasia: Final Report*, USAID, 2013

⁷⁰ *Annual Report 2020*, Handikos – Association of Paraplegics and Paralysed Children of Kosovo

⁷¹ Ibid.

Legal and Policy Frameworks

Kosovo is not a member of the United Nations and, therefore, cannot sign or ratify UN treaties and international conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). However, many of the international conventions are enshrined in Kosovo's national legislation.

National Laws:

- The [National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Kosovo 2013 – 2023](#) is a strategic document that serves as guidance for the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo to work within non-discriminatory principles, respecting the inherent dignity, and individual autonomy toward the advancement, empowerment, protection, and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. The National Strategy is an “important mechanism to ensure that principles that are embodied in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities are incorporated in local policies and programs that have an impact on the lives of persons with disabilities in Kosovo.”⁷²
- Kosovo is currently developing a General Law on disability that will address all disability groups and replace existing legislation. The law is in its final stage and is expected to be approved during 2022.
- The Child Protection Law (2019) has several provisions for children with disabilities.
- The [Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo](#) (Article 24.2) guarantees equality before the law, legal protection, and the absence of discrimination for citizens from all backgrounds, including persons with disabilities.
- The [Law on Disability Pensions, no. 2003/23](#) is adopted to provide a social safety net within the broader context of the social protection system in Kosovo and alleviating poverty by providing disability pensions to those who are unable to work and to provide for themselves.
- The [Law on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo](#) (Article 40) outlines the principles of inclusive education in accordance with international norms set out in the Convention on Rights of Child, the Salamanca Statement, and the CRPD.
- The [Strategic Plan for Organizing Teaching for Children with Special Educational Needs 2016-2020](#) defines the goals and directions for the development of learning of children with special educational needs in this period of time.
- The [Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021](#) and its action plan - is a five-year plan that connects lifelong learning with inclusion in education and a model to reach all students and offers equal opportunities in quality education for all.
- KSPE 2017-2021 and its action plan- is a five-year plan that connects lifelong learning with inclusion in education and provides a model to reach all students and offers equal opportunities in quality education for all.

⁷² <https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/media/216/file/KOS-SITAN-ENG.pdf>

- The [Law for Blind Persons](#) regulates the legal status of blind persons, their rights and benefits, and determines the criteria for the categorization of blind people.
- The [Law on Construction](#) determines the main requirements for design, construction, and use of construction materials, professional supervision, as well as procedures for construction permits, use permits and building inspection, including the accessibility provisions.
- The [Law No. 06/L-084 on Child protection](#) provides a milestone achievement in the protection of children's rights by establishing a comprehensive, legal framework for guaranteeing and protecting children from all forms of abuse, exploitation, neglect, physical and mental violence, or other that could endanger children's life, safety, health, education, or development. The law has several provisions for children with disabilities.
- The [Law on Health](#), Article 5 – *The principles of implementation in healthcare* assures the accessibility of healthcare facilities for persons with disabilities to be able to use the healthcare services equally with all citizens and residents of Kosovo.
- The [Law on the Status and the Rights of Persons with Paraplegia and Tetraplegia](#) regulates the status and rights of persons who due to illness or injury have lost permanently the opportunity of relocation and movement of lower extremities or persons who due to illness or injury have lost permanently the possibility of relocation and movement of upper and lower extremities.
- The [Law on Pension Schemes Financed by the State of Kosovo](#) forth all criteria, the application and appeals processes, and the institutions and mechanisms responsible for providing disability pensions.
- The [Law on Vocational Ability, Rehabilitation, and Employment of People with Disabilities](#) determines the conditions, rights, and forms of rehabilitation employment, and vocational ability of PWD to encourage their integration into the labor market. The law prohibits employers from discriminating against and excluding persons with disabilities from the labor market.
- The [Law on the Protection from Discrimination](#) is aimed at establishing a general framework for prevention and combating discrimination based on nationality, or in relation to any community, social origin, race, ethnicity, color, birth, origin, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, citizenship, religion and religious belief, political affiliation, political or other opinion, social or personal status, age, family or marital status, pregnancy, maternity, wealth, health status, disability, genetic inheritance or any other grounds, in order to implement the principle of equal treatment.
- The [Law on Material Support for Families of Children with Permanent Disability](#) regulates the right to financial support for families with, and/or who care for, children who have permanent disabilities. The law defines children with "permanent disabilities" as children who are blind or who have conditions that prevent them from moving independently, using tools, or conducting daily activities independently, such as eating, dressing, or maintaining personal hygiene or physiological needs.

Local Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)

[Kosovo Disability Forum](#) (KDF) is a non-profit umbrella organization and a representative mechanism of OPDs in Kosovo. KDF has been established under close assistance of the European Union Office in Kosovo, as an organization that uniformly represents, defends, and promotes the rights of persons with disabilities.⁷³

[Handikos](#) (Association of paraplegics and paralysis of children in Kosovo) The main objective of this Association is "improving the rights and living standards of persons with disabilities in Kosovo" through action in the field of health, social protection, and employment.⁷⁴

Other OPDs include:

- Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Blind Women's Committee of Kosovo
- Down Syndrome Kosovo
- Handicap Kosovo
- Independent Initiative of Blind People
- Kosovo Association of the Deaf
- Kosovo Organization of Persons with Muscular Dystrophy (OPDMK)
- Little People of Kosovo
- National Association of Autism of Kosovo

NGOs/Funds

[DVV International](#) is the Institute for International Cooperation of the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. (DVV), the German Adult Education Association. In cooperation with the Kosovo Disability Forum (KDF) they support the development of Information and Communication Technology literacy of persons with disabilities.⁷⁵

[Finnish Association of the Deaf](#) (FAD) has collaborated with the Kosovo Association of the Deaf for years in developing local sign language and training local sign language interpreters through, for instance, the [KAD Advocacy, Organizational, Sign Language and Interpreter Training Project](#). FAD also supported the government of Kosovo and local NGOs in conducting a survey on the [status of Deaf People in Republic of Kosovo](#).

⁷³ <https://www.edf-fepoh.org/our-members/kosovo-disability-forum/>

⁷⁴ <https://handi-kos.org/en/history/>

⁷⁵ <https://www.dvv-international.ge/kosovo/news/article/training-of-persons-with-disabilities-on-information-and-communication-technology>

[Kosovo Women's Fund](#) (KWF) of the KWN provides small grants to women's organizations that do not have access to other sources of funding and who seek to work for women's rights, especially for groups working in rural areas and/or marginalized persons.

[Save the Children](#) in Kosovo (SCiK) has been consistently supporting the social inclusion of children with disabilities in Kosovo. The project "Promoting the prevention of violence against children with disabilities in all settings in Kosovo" is one of such initiatives implemented in 2017-2021. The project aimed to promote and address the needs of children with disabilities (CWD) by improving cross-sectoral coordination and promoting inclusive measures to create a safer environment and free of physical punishment and humiliation for children with disabilities, including and targeting all actors who play a role in a child's life - from families, peers and their representatives, communities, service providers, professionals and institutions to the general public.

[Threshold Association](#) has implemented many disability projects in the country together with local organization of persons with disabilities, including the "[Independent Living and Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)" project.

Development Partners

[European Union](#): EU-funded *Education for All* project focuses on the right to equal education for children and adolescents with special needs and those such as the Roma coming from vulnerable communities. Funded under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the project is implemented by the Czech NGO, People in Need, in partnership with Kosovan NGOs Autizmi Flet and The Ideas Partnership.⁷⁶

[Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#): Provides education and professional development learning programs on sign language interpretation and code of ethics and professional conduct to support the social inclusion of the persons with hearing impairment and deafness.⁷⁷

[UNDP](#): Through labor market programme, UNDP studies the labor market situation, challenges, and opportunities for the employment of persons with disabilities. Also, to improve the healthcare service accessibility for persons with disabilities, supported the local healthcare facilities with mobile clinics to serve the persons with disabilities.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ European Union

⁷⁷ <https://www.osce.org/kosovo/96678>

⁷⁸ <https://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2021/11/25/eu-and-undp-hand-over-two-mobile-clinics-to-help-provide-service.html>

UNICEF: in collaboration with the national government and OPDs, supports the education of children with disabilities through trainings, providing assistive devices for mobility and learning.⁷⁹

USAID: Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations are supported by the USAID political participation development programs to encourage the political participation of persons with disabilities in Kosovo through empowerment activities and facilitation collaboration between OPDs and electoral commissions.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ <https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/topics/children-disabilities>

⁸⁰ <https://www.usaid.gov/results-data/success-stories/improving-access-political-process-persons-disabilities-kosovo>

Glossary - empower with words

- Language used on disability varies across countries and cultures. It is useful to ask persons with disabilities in the country context what they prefer to use as language. It is also important to find out whether an individual is willing to disclose their impairment. When describing an individual, do not reference his or her disability unless it is clearly pertinent to the issue or story.
- It is recommended to use ‘person-first language’, which puts the person before his or her impairment (a person who uses a wheelchair, a person with visual impairment) which is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).
- The use of terms such as “handicapped”, “a person suffering from...”, “mentally retarded”, “able-bodied/normal”, “the disabled”, “the blind”, “paraplegic”, “wheelchair-bound” are not recommended. Disability is not an illness and hence it is important to refrain from using terms such as healthy versus sick.
- The Disability Advisor can provide a more detailed glossary of terms on request (McClain-Nhlapo cmclainnhlapo@worldbank.org)

The following brief glossary provides guidelines for portraying individuals with disabilities in a respectful and balanced way by using language that is neutral:
Person(s)/people with disabilities
Person who is blind/ or person with visual impairment(s)
Person who is deaf/ person who is deaf or hard of hearing/ person with hearing impairment: Many people in the Deaf community prefer the use of a lowercase “d” to refer to audiological status and the use of a capital “D” when referring to the culture and community of Deaf people.
Person who is deafblind
Person(s)/people with disabilities
Person who is blind/ or person with visual impairment(s)
Person with mobility/physical impairment(s)
Person using a wheelchair/a wheelchair user
Person with intellectual/developmental impairment(s)
Person with albinism
Person with short stature or little person
Person with a mental health problem
Person with Down syndrome
Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)
Assistive devices (white cane, hearing aid, wheelchair, tricycle).