
APPENDIX 1

REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE STANDARDS BY THE RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITIES IN KOSOVO

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I. Introduction

1. Kosovo is the only democratic country in Europe which is not yet part of the Council of Europe. Joining the organisation is a key priority for Kosovo institutions considering the significant positive impact that the accession will have on further advancement and international supervision of democracy, rule of law, human rights, and minority rights.
2. Following Kosovo's expression of interest to join the Council of Europe in 2022, the procedures to assess its application *vis-à-vis* the Statute of the organisation are currently underway. The application is presently under review by the responsible committees of the Parliamentary Assembly, following the Committee of Ministers' request to provide an Opinion in accordance with the Statute rules and past accession practices.
3. The aim of the present document is to highlight the efforts and achievements of Kosovo authorities in meeting the recommendations specified in various reports produced by the Council of Europe bodies (including recommendations stemming from the Report of the Eminent Experts), as well as to note the areas where work is continuing in view of implementing these recommendations.
4. In view of the importance of the accession endeavour, in July 2023, the Kosovo Government established a high-level Coordinating Group for the Accession of Kosovo to the Council of Europe. This high-level group is composed of permanent representatives of all branches of government, including the Constitutional Court, the Ombudsperson, the Agency for Gender Equality, and independent human rights experts. Other *ad-hoc* members to the group are added depending on the need to address specific issues pertaining to the ongoing accession procedure.
5. The main responsibilities of the Coordinating Group include: (i) coordination of inter-institutional cooperation; (ii) tracking of the fulfilment of recommendations deriving from different Council of Europe monitoring bodies or any other future reports that will be endorsed throughout the accession procedure; (ii) ensuring a smooth accession process and effective implementation of all recommendations/commitments stemming from this process.
6. Since its establishment in July 2023, the Coordinating Group has gathered inputs from all relevant institutions and has tracked all achievements records. While many recommendations have been successfully implemented, there are a few recommendations that posed difficulties in the implementation process due to various reasons. However, the implementation data that will be presented in a narrative form below will evidently show the proactive and positive implementation practices sought by the responsible Kosovo authorities.

II. Recommendations stemming from Council of Europe bodies and the corresponding implementation actions taken by Kosovo authorities

A. Protection of the National Minorities

7. In 2023, the Secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) published its Report titled: "Fifth Opinion on Kosovo by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities".
8. The Report in question recognised that Kosovo has a solid legal and policy framework for the protection of persons belonging to national minorities. It also recognised numerous achievements of the Kosovo authorities related to regulatory framework on the return of displaced persons, new policies, and higher funding for the protection of minority cultures, efforts to integrate the judiciary and the establishment of a multi-linguistic Balkanistics programme at the University of Prishtina.
9. Nevertheless, the Report also pointed certain challenges that need addressing, including those related to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians; transitional justice; education; language rights, etc. For addressing these challenges, the Report proposed several recommendations for immediate action and some further recommendations that need to be considered by the responsible authorities in Kosovo.
10. Before enumerating the actions undertaken by the Kosovo authorities in view of implementing the recommendations stemming with the Council of Europe reports, some background information regarding the framework for the protection of national communities/minorities in Kosovo is needed.
11. The Constitution of Kosovo makes a direct reference to the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Rights in proclaiming that the "Republic of Kosovo shall promote a spirit of tolerance, dialogue and support reconciliation among communities" in line with the norms set in these two instruments.
12. The third Chapter of the Constitution is specifically dedicated to the protection of the rights of communities and their members. Article 59 consists of fourteen paragraphs entailing specifically tailored rights that the members of communities are entitled to enjoy individually or in community.
13. Kosovo authorities have undertaken several actions in view of swiftly addressing the recommendations of the Advisory Committee. The national Coordinating Group for Kosovo's accession to the Council of Europe has identified every specific recommendation and has followed up their implementation in continuity, while encouraging the

responsible authorities to tackle the remaining recommendations efficiently and expeditiously.

14. In December 2023, the Government of Kosovo adopted the Decision No. 20/178 to approve the Human Rights Indicators Framework in Kosovo. This framework, an essential component of the Human Rights Program, evaluates the alignment of criteria with those of the European Union and the Council of Europe, facilitating alignment with European and international human rights standards. It also serves to update and improve national systems monitoring the implementation of human rights. The Human Rights Indicators Framework not only assists Kosovo in achieving comprehensive and accurate oversight of meeting human rights obligations but also provides an effective mechanism for identifying issues and their causes and taking necessary measures for their resolution. These measures encompass policies, strategies, and detailed national or local action plans.
15. In the same month, the Government also approved the Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Community Rights and their members 2023-2027. The strategy falls under the Ministry for Communities and Returns, although the drafting and consultation process lasted more than a year, involving participation from political representatives, the Deputy Prime Minister for Minority Affairs and Human Rights, the Office for Community Affairs, the Office for Good Governance, the Office of the Language Commissioner and relevant ministries in the Government.
16. The strategic objectives outlined in this Strategy are intrinsically tied to the themes of reconciliation and the socio-economic advancement of the Serb community, and it involves collaboration with several line ministries, including the Office of the Prime Minister, and operates at the local level as well.
17. The purpose of this Strategy is to strengthen protection and provide sustainable solutions as part of the collective response of relevant actors in support of displaced persons and voluntary returnees. In this vein, the Strategy's overarching goal is the integration of communities in various aspects, encompassing education, employment, social welfare, housing, property matters, language utilization, and healthcare.
18. From 2022 to 2023, the Prime Minister has conducted regular meetings (three times a year) for the 38 Municipal Officers for Communities and Returns of Kosovo. These officers represent Bosniak, Egyptian, Serbian, Albanian, and Turkish communities. These meetings provide an opportunity for sharing best practices, informing about central-level initiatives, and identifying challenges that can be jointly addressed. In these meetings, in addition to the participation of the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister for Minority Affairs and Human Rights, the Minister for Communities and Return, the Office for Community Affairs, and the Office for Good Governance have participated.

19. From 2022-2023, the Prime Minister has organized conferences for donors who are active in non-majority community issues. These conferences are held approximately every six months and involve around 25 donor organizations, together with Deputy Prime Minister for Minority Affairs and Human Rights, the Minister for Community and Return, the Office for Community Affairs and the Office for Good Governance. The presentations were from the communities themselves, where the primary needs of the communities were presented.
20. The Government of Kosovo has approved the Strategy for the Advancement of the Rights of Romani and Ashkali Communities in the Republic of Kosovo 2022-2026 and the Action Plan 2022-2024.
21. The Ministry for Communities and Returns (MCR), based on Article 22 (Inter-institutional Cooperation in the Return Process) of Regulation - No. 01/2018 on the Return of Displaced persons and sustainable Solutions, takes the following steps:
 - (i) Coordination and collaboration between MCR and the local level are conducted through designated regional coordination officials;
 - (ii) In accordance with this regulation and Article 57 of Law No. 03/L-189 on the state administration of Kosovo, cooperation, coordination, and effective communication are ensured between MCR, the Municipal Office for Communities and Returns, and respective municipal directorates;
 - (iii) MCR provides guidance and advice to municipalities regarding developing policies, strategies, and projects for return, as well as ensuring effective communication between central and municipal structures to facilitate the contribution of all actors in this process;
 - (iv) MCR has appointed Municipal Coordinators in all municipalities of Kosovo. Additionally, MCR collaborates with central-level institutions and other institutional mechanisms such as the Office for Community Affairs, the Language Commissioner, the Consultative Council for Communities, and international mechanisms like IOM, UNHCR, OSCE etc;
22. The Government has specifically articulated in its Rule of Law program, its commitment to enact a Transitional Justice Strategy. Within this comprehensive framework, the Government will identify and advocate for a range of processes designed to ensure that all victims of war crimes are afforded their rights to truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence. Central to this commitment is the establishment of a reparative platform aimed at quantifying the human and material harm inflicted during the war. This effort represents a sustained commitment by the state institutions to address grave human rights violations, confront war crimes and infringements upon values protected by international law, and provide redress to victims.

23. The forthcoming Transitional Justice Strategy will constitute a comprehensive approach to addressing the legacy of human rights violations, facilitating political, legal, socio-cultural, and economic transformations, and thereby consolidating peace and fostering an inclusive society. The approach to transitional justice will be attuned to Kosovo's unique context, historical backdrop, cultural milieu, and localized priorities, with particular consideration given to the expectations of victims. The Strategy is expected to be built on the following foundational principles and values: (i) a victim-centric approach; (ii) an inclusive methodology; (iii) gender sensitivity; (iv) alignment with international norms and standards; (v) integrity and impartiality; (vi) engagement of all victims, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders.
24. In pursuit of a more professional handling of inter-ethnic cases, the Kosovo Police undertook several measures. It promulgated its Standard Operating Procedure titled "Prevention of Ethnic Crimes and Hate Crimes". Subsequently, in line with the objective to efficiently address hate-motivated crimes and to foster inter-institutional coordination in the planning and execution of practical initiatives, a collaborative agreement was reached between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Kosovo Police, the Office of the State Prosecutor, and the Kosovo Judicial Council. Furthermore, the Department for Operations, with the aim of advancing the comprehensive approach to the treatment, investigation, and prosecution of hate crimes, promulgated the Guidelines for the Handling of Hate Crimes. Moreover, the Kosovo Police has maintained the Police Information System (SIPK) since 1999, a system designed for the registration and retention of records pertaining to all cases, including hate crime cases.
25. The statistics on hate crime cases also speak to the work and dedication of the Kosovo Police in handling these cases. Out of the total number of cases reported nationally during this time period in 2023, which stands at 13 cases, when compared to the overall number of cases, which is 26,757, shows that only approximately 0.05% of the cases are potentially interethnic hate crimes. This illustrates the efficiency of domestic policies in addressing hate crimes as well as Kosovo Police's commitment to combating such crimes.
26. The UNMIK Report of April 2023 primarily relies on data published on the so-called "Office for Kosovo" website within the Government of Serbia, and many claims published on this website have never been substantiated or confirmed. However, Kosovo has an independent mechanism separate from the police force, the Kosovo Police Inspectorate (KPI), that handles citizens' allegations of violations of human rights by police officials.

27. In 2023, the KPI has addressed all allegations of violations of human rights from the Serbian community in the north of Kosovo, totaling 29 complaints from North Mitrovica that the KPI processed until December 2023. Meanwhile, the total number of complaints from the Serbian community in 2023 (until December) is 50. Compared to the previous year, there has been a decrease in the number of complainants from this community, especially from North Mitrovica (last year, the KPI processed 59 complaints from this area, whereas this year, until December 13, 2023, there have been 29 complaints).
28. Nevertheless, the Kosovo Police and the Kosovo Police Inspectorate carefully handle every report of exceeding police authorizations, and in all cases where such occurrences have been verified, appropriate measures have been taken, including the arrest of police officials.
29. In 2023, the Kosovo Police announced two (2) job positions explicitly targeting minority groups to fill vacant positions within the Regional Police Directorate in the North. The initial competition attracted 75 candidates who formally contracted for the 58th cohort, completing their fundamental training on July 14, 2023. The subsequent competition, exclusively designated for minorities, engaged 107 candidates set to integrate into the 59th cohort of the Kosovo Police following the verification and successful conclusion of psychological and medical evaluations. Additionally, a third competition, announced in June 2023, was held as a general competition inviting all interested candidates from minority communities for police officer roles, and 28 candidates were enrolled. These candidates will become part of the 59th cohort after successfully completing these evaluation stages. The Kosovo Police affirmed its commitment to voluntarily integrate minority officers into Special Units, either through publicly announced competitions or internal transfer processes.
30. The organizational structure of the Kosovo Police includes not only patrol and general units but also envisages rapid response units reporting directly to the respective Regional Directorates. This unit has been functional in the North Mitrovica Regional Directorate, the composition of which has been based on the population, i.e. mainly composed of officials from the Serbian community. According to assessments by the Kosovo Police, citizens have started to gain trust in the Kosovo Police, demonstrating the courage to report cases they previously refrained from reporting due to fear of reprisal. According to assessments by the Kosovo Police, citizens have started to gain trust in the Kosovo Police,

demonstrating the courage to report cases they previously refrained from reporting due to fear of reprisal.

31. The Kosovo Police have never aimed to replace the resignation of Serbian community police officials with Albanian community police officers. However, they have tried to fill the security gap created after the resignation of Serbian community police officers by assigning regular patrolling officers, especially in mixed-population areas. Their goal has been to mitigate the security gap caused by extremist and criminal groups who have organized attacks against police officers. These attacks have involved physical assaults, the use of strong weapons, shocking bombs, and firearm assaults, such as the case in Serbovc village, Zveçan, where a police officer was attacked with firearms.
32. Despite indications of possible attacks against security institutions and the police, media, and civilians, the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo and the Kosovo Police have agreed to implement an agreement to reduce the presence of special units in the north of Kosovo. This decision came despite increasing risks, evidenced by the attack against the Kosovo Police after the arrest of a suspect on June 13, 2023, the discovery of a weapons arsenal in Zveçan on June 23, 2023, and the confiscation of the number of weapons in Zveçan, on September 5, 2023.
33. The state curriculum of schools in Kosovo has been translated into the Serbian language, except for some specific national subjects for which there were difficulties to ensure full involvement of all interested communities. All general subjects have been translated. Additionally, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, in collaboration with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, has established a working group with representatives from all communities, including the Serb community, where a manual for inter-culturalism that will be used by teachers in school was drafted.
34. To offer school texts for all children, especially those from minority communities, as well as to adopt measures for multilingual education and inter-community dialogue, MESTI has taken the following steps:
 - (i) education in Kosovo at all levels is conducted in Albanian, Serbian, Turkish, and Bosnian languages;
 - (ii) implementation of the Administrative Instruction and Guidelines on the Establishment and Functioning of Educational Centers (since the establishment of the Learning Centers in 2018, these centers have contributed to supplementary education in schools);

- (iii) allocation by MESTI of a total of 200,000 Euros in the last three years (7 NGOs have benefited from 24 educational learning centers and there are a total of 52 registered Learning Centers, and applications for registration are ongoing);
- (iv) the Serbian language curriculum has been translated (although it has not been accepted for usage by the Serb community in Kosovo);
- (v) MESTI has formed a central-level team to prevent school dropout and nonenrolment, which has subsequently developed policies and other documents related to preventing and responding to school dropout, including work that needs to be done to enhance the capacity of municipal teams and school teams;
- (vi) affirmative measures have also been taken to support socially vulnerable categories, such as providing transportation from municipalities or other measures that facilitate regular school attendance, which contributed in decreasing school dropouts;
- (vii) MESTI has provided free school textbooks from first grade to ninth grade for all students from Romani, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, while free school textbooks have been provided in Bosnian and Turkish languages for students from these two communities;
- (viii) adoption and entry into force of the Administrative Instruction 09/2016 - Application of Affirmative Measures and Reserved Places for Registration of Candidates from non-majority Communities in Higher Education Institutions;
- (ix) continuation of the scholarship program for high school students from minority communities, which has been ongoing since 2014 (for the academic year 2023/2024, the planned amount of scholarships for 500 candidates is 150,000.00 Euros; the application form is online through e-Kosova portal; the scholarship amount is 30 Euros per month or 300 Euros per academic year);
- (x) MESTI, through its mentoring and tutoring program, conducted in collaboration with civil society organizations, consistently provides support to increase the inclusion and prevent dropout among children from Romani, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities (at least 250 children with learning delays benefit from this program each school year);
- (xi) from second grade to ninth grade, there are curriculum plans for the Romani language (there are three school textbooks for teaching the basic level of the Romani language; additionally, MESTI is working on developing Romani language textbooks for other levels as well as to to expand the teaching of the Romani language in municipalities where there is an interest in learning this language);
- (xii) MESTI monitors the organization of supplementary education for the language and culture of the Romani community students (supplementary education is organized in four schools in Prizren and approximately 100 students attend supplementary education);
- (xiii) Together with the Ministry of Local Government Administration, MESTI allocated 57 scholarships for Romani, Ashkali, and Egyptian community students for the academic year 2022-2023;

- (xiv) MESTI also offers scholarships from elite scholarship schemes for students from all communities;
 - (xv) along with the OSCE, MESTI has launched a manual for Interculturalization in Education and the organization of training sessions in this field is in process;
 - (xvi) the 2022-2026 Education Strategy foresees language clubs in schools.
 - (xvii) a regulation that will enable the verification of school documents provided by the parallel Serbian system is under process (while verification of higher education diplomas is conducted for the University of Northern Mitrovica).
35. For the implementation of the Strategy for the Advancement of the Rights of Romani and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo 2022-2026 and the Action Plan 2022-2024 at the municipal level, Municipal Action Committees have been established in 20 municipalities to coordinate and institutionalize collaboration. Throughout the year 2024, to strengthen these local structures, regular coordinating meetings will be organized to enhance coordination and collaboration at both central and local levels of governance.
36. To ensure effective access to quality primary and secondary education, especially for children with disabilities, MESTI has taken the following steps:
- (i) Resource Centers provide books with enlarged letters;
 - (ii) individualized plans are implemented for children with special needs, constituting a unique form of education for these children;
 - (iii) ongoing activities include the professional development of local assessment teams for the pedagogical evaluation of children with disabilities; enhancing the professional capacities of resource centers dedicated to the education and training of children with disabilities;
 - (iv) improving existing infrastructure in regular schools, along with offering specialized training for educational staff in this field;
 - (v) employment of 180 assistants in regular schools and resource centers to support children with disabilities.
37. Based on Administrative Instruction No. 19/2016 on the Inclusion of Children in Pre-school Institutions in Kosovo, Article 4.5, the registration of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities is to be specially facilitated. Municipalities are obliged to ensure a place in pre-school institutions for children applying from these marginalized groups. Regarding the inclusion of students from these communities in higher secondary education, registration for students from the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities are approved without considering their success or results from the student achievement test.

38. Furthermore, the MESTI allocates 500 scholarships each school year for students from these communities in high secondary schools. Additionally, through the project "INCLUDE" with Kosova Education Centre, two non-governmental organizations have implemented a mentoring and tutoring program for high school students, including scholarship recipients.
39. The responsible Commission of MESTI for the registration of educational centres continues to accept and review applications from educational centres. So far, 52 educational centres have been registered. The Ministry plans to allocate a budget for three consecutive years for subsidizing non-governmental organizations managing educational centres, with a planned budget of EUR 200,000.00 per year. In 2023, 7 non-governmental organizations have won, totalling 21 educational centres.
40. The verification process for diplomas obtained at the University of North Mitrovica was halted due to expiration of the mandate of the Commission for the Verification of Diplomas from the University of North Mitrovica. However, the Commission is now functional since February 2023 and continues to operate in accordance with the Regulation No. 21/2015 on Procedures and Criteria for Issuing Certificates to Citizens of the Republic of Kosovo who have obtained Diplomas from the University of North Mitrovica. The purpose of this Commission is to facilitate employment applications and the issuance of licenses and professional examinations in public institutions. The Commission has held 15 meetings since February 2023. Starting from 7 March 2023, diplomas have been accepted at the responsible Ministry for verification, and agreements have been reached with the municipalities of Ranillug, Gračanica, and North Mitrovica for the acceptance of diplomas there, as a measure to facilitate the practical procedures for citizens in these areas. The tendering process has also been completed for a platform that will enable online submissions. MESTI has appointed a full-time staff member to work in the Commission's secretariat. During this period, from February 22, 2023, the acceptance of applications has commenced. From March until now, 63 applications have been received.
41. The implementation of the Law on the Use of Languages continues to pose certain challenges as noted by the respective Report of the Council of Europe. In view of moving forward with the implementation of the applicable legislation, the Government rendered a decision to establish a Language Control and Harmonization Unit within the Office of the Prime Minister, in accordance with the provisions of Law No. 06/L-113 on the Organization and Functioning of Government Administration and Independent Agencies. The mission of this unit

is to enhance the capacity and quality of the translation of legal and sub-legal acts into both official languages. The Administrative Instruction No. 01/2022, which outlines the Procedures for the Implementation of the Law on the Use of Official Languages in Municipalities, has been circulated to all municipalities in Kosovo for the purpose of its efficient enforcement. Its implementation is monitored by the Ministry of Administration and Local Government, as well as the Office of the Commissioner for Languages.

42. As part of the monitoring of the public consultation platform launched at the municipal level, 17 recommendations have been communicated to municipal officials. These recommendations have been primarily issued due to non-compliance with Law No. 02/L-37 on the Use of Languages and the principles of public consultation outlined in Administrative Instruction No. 06/2018 on minimum standards for public consultation in municipalities.
43. The Ministry for Communities and Returns, within the scope of its mandate and based on the Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and their Members 2023-2027, has set a strategic objective that addresses the development of mechanisms and services for the use of languages, with specific goals aimed at improving bilingual harmonization during the drafting of legislation in Kosovo. Within the framework of this objective, the following activities are foreseen: (i) advancement of mechanisms and services for language use by ensuring adequate translation equipment; (ii) advancement of the actions of mechanisms related to bilingual harmonization during the drafting of legislation in Kosovo; (iii) establishment of a unit for translation, language control, and harmonization.
44. The non-implementation of the Romani language in the Municipality of Graçanica and Prizren as a language in official use was initially discussed in two meetings (at the Ministry of Communities and Returns and the Office of the Language Commissioner). The Office of the Language Commissioner organized a joint inter-institutional meeting (with relevant institutions) on September 6 to address this issue. As a result of these meetings, IOM, in collaboration with the Office of the Language Commissioner, announced a competition, and two Romani language translators were recruited, one in Prizren and the other in Graçanica (expected to start working in 2024).
45. The Commissioner for Language, has sent a recommendation to the Office of the Prime Minister that reports and announcements for journalists and the public be

made in the Serbian language as well. The recommendation is being implemented.

46. The Office of the Language Commissioner, in collaboration with IOM, is preparing to offer a Serbian language course for interested government officials (initial interest has come from officials of the Anti-Corruption Agency). Thirty-two civilian officials interested in attending the Serbian language course, which is expected to commence in 2024, has been announced.
47. The Director of the Anti-Corruption Agency has requested the Office of the Language Commissioner to review the language aspects (the Serbian language version) of access to the system. After verification, the Serbian language version has been adjusted in detail.
48. The staff of the Office of the Language Commissioner and representatives of the Prime Minister Office (Legal Office, Budget and Finance Sector, and Human Resources) have strengthened collaboration with the counterpart agency for the implementation of the languages of the Republic of North Macedonia. During the three-day visit to the neighboring state, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the Office of the Language Commissioner and the Agency.
49. The accredited four-year BA Balkanistic program at the University of Prishtina by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency aims to ensure that students become professional translators for the official languages in Kosovo. Additionally, the program seeks to enhance interlingual and intercultural communication in Kosovo and the Western Balkans region. Lectures began in October 2021, and the opening of this program was supported by IOM, OSCE, and OLC. The Office for Community Affairs, under the Office of the Prime Minister, is supporting the Balkanistics programme at the University of Prishtina by awarding five scholarships to students from minority communities. Additionally, the IOM has offered an additional eight scholarships for enrolled students.
50. The Secretariat of the Kosovo Judicial Council presently maintains a total of 62 fully staffed translator positions, which are distributed across all courts in Kosovo, including the Secretariat. This number has undergone a substantial increase when compared to previous years and is anticipated to further expand to 70 positions in the future. The translators have conducted a series of training sessions for court translators. Upcoming training sessions regarding the use and

standardization of legal terminology and addressing errors in the translation of legal texts have been scheduled.

51. During July 2023, the Donors' Coordination Meeting for the support of translation and interpretation services organized by EUKOJUST was held. In this meeting, 25 recommendations from the assessment report on translation and interpretation services were discussed, of which 78% of the recommendations have been implemented by the Translation Office at the Secretariat Kosovo Judicial Council.
52. The Chairman of the Consultative Council for Communities has been appointed as a member of the Population and Housing Census Central Commission. The Chairman regularly reports to the members of the Council regarding the work and plans of the commission for the population census.
53. The Kosovo Agency of Statistics is preparing for the population census. The census tools (applications/forms, video tutorials, awareness materials, contests, etc.) are being prepared in two languages: Albanian and Serbian, with key tools also available in Turkish language. Additionally, the Kosovo Agency of Statistics plans to engage 9 members from non-majority communities in census activities at its central offices, while also 10 non-governmental organizations (8 of which from non-majority communities) are expected to be involved. All citizens will have the opportunity to respond in the language that they choose/speak, considering that the Kosovo Agency of Statistics has managed to ensure that the interviewers come from the community that speaks the respective language. The census form/application enables free declaration for every community residing in Kosovo.
54. The Office of the Prime Minister/Good Governance Office has enhanced the monitoring efficiency of the Ombudsperson's recommendations and has raised the overall rate of the implementation of the recommendations within the prescribed time. For instance, in the last reporting period, out of 110 recommendations that were addressed by the Ombudsperson, only three remain unimplemented, while the remainder have been fully or partially executed.
55. The Constitution of Kosovo guarantees that all citizens are equal before the law. Everyone enjoys the right to equal legal protection without discrimination. Furthermore, the Anti-Discrimination Law defines the general framework for preventing and combating discrimination based on nationality or national origin,

race, ethnic origin, colour, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, religion, age, political affiliation, and any other ground. The Government of Kosovo has continued its systematic efforts to combat discrimination and racism through the development and implementation of comprehensive policies at all stages and levels of policies, programs, and projects.

56. To combat discrimination and ensure equal access to justice for all, the Academy of Justice has organized continuous professional training for judges and state prosecutors, as well as for the judicial and prosecutorial support staff. The Academy of Justice has also provided training for state attorneys, lawyers, notaries, private enforcement agents, mediators, and administrators.
57. Kosovo authorities have developed comprehensive policies and measures aimed at preventing early marriages and addressing gender-based violence. According to the draft Civil Code, nobody can enter into marriage before reaching the age of 18, a provision that aligns the domestic law with European standards. To promote institutional coordination in preventing early marriages, MESTI, and Innovation has developed a set of modules designed to raise awareness among parents and children regarding the prevention of early marriages. These modules are rooted in the National Strategy for Protection against Family Violence and Violence against Women 2022-2026, along with the associated Action Plan. Additionally, the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation has crafted a plan for informative sessions involving students and parents. The information sessions will initially target students and parents with the aim of preventing early marriages. Subsequently, information sessions will be initiated within marginalized groups and communities in regions where the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities are situated and active. Additionally, a comprehensive research study is presently underway, concentrating on the prevention of family violence through pre-university and university education.
58. A new Law on Social and Family Services has been drafted and is expected to be approved by the Government. This law aims to influence the reform of social and family services, advance child protection measures, integrate social services, improve quality and accountability, and ensure sustainable financing of social services. Additionally, a draft law for the Social Assistance Scheme reform has also been prepared. Based on a study and a concept document approved by the Government of Kosovo, the reform includes the elimination of certain categories and exclusion criteria for accessing social assistance.

59. Kosovo has established a relatively robust legal framework concerning Sexual and Reproductive Health rights. This framework incorporates the principles of various international instruments and agreements on human rights that are directly applicable in Kosovo. The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Kosovo Institute of Public Health, the Primary Care Division as well as local and international organizations, has successfully achieved the inclusion of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in accessing healthcare services. As part of the home visit program for children aged 0-3 from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, a total of 1,538 visits were conducted for the first time. Additionally, 206 pregnant women from the Ashkali and Egyptian Roma communities received their first visits.
60. The data generated by the Ministry of Health shows that there has been an increase in awareness regarding reproductive health and mammogram examinations among women from the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. According to data from the OSCE, a total of 390 women from non-majority communities in Kosovo participated in various health activities, including regular mammography screenings, prevention of sexually transmitted infections, healthy pregnancies, childbirth, and healthy menopause. Out of these, 116 women received free mammograms with detailed results and recommendations from radiology specialists. A survey conducted before each health session demonstrated that 78% of the participating women from non-majority communities in Kosovo had never undergone breast mammography screening. Additionally, nearly half of the women, approximately 46%, had not received regular gynaecological examinations. The qualified gynaecologist conducted reproductive health sessions, which were attended by 390 women and girls belonging to the Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, and Bosniak communities.
61. In recent years, particularly through the implementation of community-specific policies, there has been improvement in the accessibility of healthcare services for the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. It is pertinent to emphasize that Kosovo has not yet established a comprehensive health insurance system. However, these communities receive social assistance, which means that public healthcare services are provided to them without additional costs.
62. The Office for Good Governance/Office of the Prime Minister organized a meeting of the Technical Working Group for Coordinating the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on May 2023. This mechanism consists of various ministries

and agencies within Kosovo's institutions. Its purpose is to coordinate the implementation process of recommendations arising from the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. This platform serves as the coordinating body of the Technical Group for the implementation of the recommendations of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe. By the end of September 2023, it plans to develop a detailed Work Plan for the implementation of the remaining recommendations outlined in Opinion Fifth Final for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe.

63. Throughout 2024, the Prime Minister will conduct annual meetings with each community individually. The Prime Minister will directly listen to community members and subsequently seek actions from responsible institutions in accordance with existing laws and policies. In 2024, the Prime Minister will organize meetings (three times a year) for the 38 Municipal Officers for Communities and Returns of Kosovo. These municipal officers represent Bosniak, Egyptian, Serbian, Albanian, and Turkish communities.
64. Throughout 2024, the Prime Minister will continue organizing Conferences for donors active in non-majority community issues. These Conferences will be organized every six months, with the participation of around 25 donor organizations or even more.

B. Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

59. In September 2022, the Secretariat of the monitoring mechanism of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence published its Report titled: "Assessment of the alignment of Kosovo's laws, policies and other measures with the standards of the Istanbul Convention".
60. The Report in question recognised that Kosovo has made commendable efforts to devise comprehensive laws and policies that aim to address violence against women and domestic violence. The Reports explicitly commended the adoption of the National Strategy on the Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women 2022-2026 and the fact that the new Strategy has a broader scope than its past version while aligning the implementation of gender-sensitive measures with the Istanbul Convention. As good examples, the Report also referred to the introduction of new criminal offences of sexual harassment and female genital mutilation by the Criminal

Code; existence of several mechanisms to promote multi-agency cooperation in crafting policies to prevent and combat violence against women, with a particular focus on domestic violence; etc.

61. While welcoming the adoption of the aforementioned national Strategy, the Report stipulated that its adequate implementation and monitoring will be essential to ensure that it can contribute to improving the response of Kosovo authorities to violence against women and domestic violence. In this vein, the Report also highlighted a number of recommended actions that should be taken by the domestic authorities in order to be fully aligned with the Istanbul Convention standards.
62. Kosovo authorities have undertaken several measures to address the recommendations stipulated in the Council of Europe reports related to violence against women and domestic violence.
63. First and foremost, it is noteworthy to mention that the Ministry of Justice has initiated various legal initiatives in view of aligning domestic laws and practices with the Istanbul Convention. These initiatives include, *inter alia*: the draft Criminal Code; amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code; amendments to the Civil Code (prohibition of early marriages under 18 years); amendments to the Law on Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence, Against Women and Gender – Based Violence; amendments to the Law on Free Legal Aid; amendments to the Law on Compensation for Crime Victims; draft Law on Social and Family Services; approval of the National Strategy for Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women 2022-2026; launching of the Guide for the Functioning of the Local Coordination Mechanism for Domestic Violence Protection; approval of the State Protocol for the Treatment of Cases of Sexual Violence in Kosovo; approval of the curriculum for the training of professionals for the provision of programs for domestic violence perpetrators, etc.
64. The Law on Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence, Violence Against Women, and Gender-Based Violence was approved by the Assembly in September 2023. Within 6 months, the Government will enact the necessary by-laws that will serve better and more efficient implementation of the newly enacted law. The forthcoming regulations will address, among others, the responsibility and functioning of the emergency telephone line (which the new law specifically regulates) and it will be established by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.
65. In accordance with Article 11 of the Law on Gender Equality, the Government adopted the Kosovo Program on Gender Equality 2020-2024, under the leadership of the Agency for Gender Equality - Office of the Prime Minister. This strategic document is based on a situation analysis conducted through an inclusive drafting process involving non-governmental organizations as well as local and international partners. The program

comprises of three pillars: (i) economic empowerment and social well-being; (ii) human development, roles, and gender relations; and (iii) women's rights, access to justice, and security. The program integrates gender-related sustainable development goals indicators into its objectives and activities, thus aligning with the goals of sustainable gender-related development.

66. The Office of the President, as part of the Summit for Democracy commitments, has established the “Council for Human Rights and Democracy” as well as a Gender Cohort as part of the Council. One of its key tasks is to initiate proceedings which will ensure the harmonization of the relevant laws with the law on Gender Equality, with the aim to ensure a greater representation and participation of women in all walks of life, but particularly, in public engagements. The first phase of this project has been concluded, with a policy paper being drafted and having identified the suitable mechanism to guarantee a rightful procedure for the amendment of relevant laws. The second phase of the project will reconvene in the last quarter of 2023. It is relevant to mention that members of the Gender Cohort include members from the Agency for Gender Equality, Policewomen, representatives of civil society organisations working on women empowerment and gender equality, etc.
67. Another important outcome of the work of the Council for Democracy and Human Rights established by the Office of the President is a policy document that summarizes the relevant actions that relevant institutions must take with the ultimate aim of tackling and prevention all forms of violence against women, with a particular focus on domestic violence. The document serves as a reference point, based on which the Office of the President assesses the progress marked by each institution on a semi-annual basis. The policy action points are aligned with the objectives and definitions as provided by the Istanbul Convention, but also with the best international practices.
68. On top of prioritizing funding for NGOs that lead grassroots prevention efforts related to all forms of violence against women, the President of the State and her cabinet engage in direct consultations with NGO representatives to discuss challenges and concerns, with the aim of channelling their recommendations into relevant domestic policies. These discussions are also part of the agenda during the meetings of the Council for Democracy and Human Rights, as well as the Gender Cohort. In both of these bodies, relevant NGO representatives are seated and qualified as regular members. To further help with addressing challenges faced by NGOs that operate shelters for victims of sexual violence, funding for all of them is listed among top priorities for the year 2023.
69. The Office of the President, on an annual basis, launches a subsidy scheme for financing of projects implemented by local NGOs. For three years now, the support of women led NGOs has been one of key priorities and the support for these projects has been prioritized, with over 30% - 40% of the available funding being allocated for projects

focused on promoting gender equality, providing specialist support services to victims of violence against women, offering sheltering, etc.

70. Considering the importance of the Law on Protection Against Discrimination, the Office of the Prime Minister acknowledged that there is a need to conduct an *ex-post* evaluation. The main aim of this endeavour is to identify the challenges in the implementation of this law and to determine the necessary steps to strengthen its enforcement. The findings of this forthcoming evaluation report will serve to enhance the effective enforcement and strengthen the capacity of the responsible institutions for its implementation.
71. Promoting and protecting the rights of individuals belonging to the LGBTI community is an integral responsibility of all institutions in Kosovo. Prioritizing and systematically assessing challenges and fulfilling the rights of this community has been part of the agenda in regular meetings of the Government Advisory and Coordinating Group for the Rights of the LGBTI Community. The coordination group is a high-level institutional mechanism established by the decision of the Prime Minister and is led by the Office of the Prime Minister in cooperation with civil society organizations. Its composition includes key institutions involved in protecting the rights of the LGBTI community and partners from international organizations operating in the country. Through this coordination mechanism, all institutional initiatives and actions are coordinated and implemented, including events like IDAHO, Pride Week, and other activities within the working plan of the Coordinating Group.
72. In view of implementing and monitoring policies for preventing violence against women, several institutional measures have been taken. These measures aim to achieve long-term coordination in the prevention of violence against women, more specifically through the: (i) functionalization of the Inter-Ministerial Group for Monitoring and Implementation of the National Strategy on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women 2022-2026; (ii) establishment of Local Coordination Mechanisms; (iii) definition of duties and responsibilities of the Municipal Coordination Mechanisms through the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women and Gender – Based Violence; (iv) definition of Standard Operating Procedures.
73. The annual support from the central-level budget continues for NGO-s - shelters for victims of domestic violence, child protection, and victims of human trafficking. The support is provided in accordance with the Regulation No. 04/2027 of the Ministry of Finance, which outlines the criteria, standards, and procedures for public funding of these NGOs.
74. Concerning shelters and their institutional support, in 2022, the Government approved a decision to allocate a financial grant in the amount of EUR 500,000.00 to NGO-s

providing social and family services, including shelters for the protection of victims of domestic violence and trafficking. The implementation of this decision began in January-April 2023. Furthermore, the Government, through its decision for the period of January-April 2023, provided support in the amount of EUR 200,000.00 to licensed shelters. In May 2023, the Ministry of Finance opened a public call for financial support for legal entities and NGO-s licensed in the field of social and family services for the period of May-December 2023 - February 2024. This call benefited 41 legal entities (shelters, NGOs), including 10 specific shelters. From the Ministry of Finance budget for the period of May-December 2023/February 2024, the cumulative funding allocated for shelters amounted to EUR 692,000.00.

75. Consequently, the overall financial support designated for shelters, whose mission is provision of shelter, rehabilitation, and social reintegration of victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence, is EUR 892,000.00. These data reflect a substantial increase in funding compared to previous years, where the financial allocations in respect of shelters stood as follows: in 2020: 10 shelters, with a total allocation of EUR 495,000.00; in 2021: 10 shelters with a total receiving of EUR 455,000.00; in 2022: 10 shelters with a total budget of EUR 400,000.00.
76. Kosovo is the only country in the region that possesses a State Shelter, known as the "Centre for Shelter, Protection, and Rehabilitation of Victims of Human Trafficking." This Centre, operating within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, can house up to forty (40) victims of trafficking. It operates 24 hours a day and provides shelter to high and medium-security risk victims of trafficking. The Centre accommodates both male and female victims, including minors, and adults (local or international). The Centre adheres to Standard Operating Procedures for Trafficked Persons in Kosovo and the Unified Standard Operating Procedures for Transnational Cooperation on Case Management, ensuring that all individuals, whether local or foreign citizens, receive equal and effective protection, free from any discrimination based on factors like race, colour, gender, language, regional affiliation, social status, or any other ground.
77. In 2023, the Ministry of Justice published the "Annual Report on the Implementation of the National Strategy on Protection Against Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women (2022 – 2026)." The report adheres to established reporting standards for strategic documents in compliance with Administrative Instruction No. 07/2018 governing the Planning and Preparation of Strategic Documents and Action Plans. Furthermore, it adheres to the Manual for Planning, Preparation, and Monitoring of Strategic Documents and their Action Plans. The preparing of the said report also involved the application of a comprehensive methodology for monitoring the implementation of the Strategy for the Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women. This methodology was based on the "Monitoring Framework for the year 2022," a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Justice and the Working Group responsible for overseeing the implementation of the strategic

document. Subsequently, in June 2023, the reporting instrument was finalized through consultations with the relevant institutions responsible for reporting on the progress of the National Strategy on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women (2022-2026). This instrument serves as a transparent and comprehensive overview of the implementation of the Strategy and greatly aids the Ministry of Justice in its monitoring endeavours and evidence-based decision-making processes.

78. In 2019, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the Ministry of Justice, the Kosovo Judicial Council, and other relevant institutions with the view to cooperate on integrating data for the identification of domestic violence cases. Based on the latest reports from the Kosovo Police, the Kosovo Judicial Council and the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council, the number of cases registered in the national database on domestic violence is relatively low.
79. The Kosovo Police possesses a comprehensive database known as the SIPK (Police Information System of Kosovo), where all criminal cases initiated by the Kosovo Police are registered. These records are categorized by gender, age, ethnic affiliation, perpetrator/victim, and the location of the offense. The electronic data system enables the accurate and rapid processing, generation, and retrieval of data based on user needs. In addition to the "Case Management Information System," the Police also contribute with data to the national domestic violence database, which is highly advanced.
80. In partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology and Innovation, a project has been developed and finalized with the aim of organizing awareness campaigns for the prevention of domestic violence. The primary objective of this project is to design and implement a culturally and socially tailored campaign to raise awareness among various target groups about violence against women, its causes, and consequences. This project is closely linked to the actions for the implementation of the strategic objectives, namely: (i) prevention and identification of violence, and specific objective; and (ii) changing behaviours, attitudes, roles, and gender stereotypes that justify violence. It is also linked to indicators regarding the percentage of girls subjected to sexual violence by different individuals or intimate partners.
81. To further consolidate everyday efforts to raise awareness against gender-based violence, but particularly, to further advance public engagement towards promoting gender equality, the President of Kosovo launched an international forum centered on enhancing efforts to implement the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda. This international Forum, which reconvenes in 2023 for its second edition, hosts discussions and events focused on promoting gender equality, but particularly, raising awareness on the challenges faced by victims of sexual violence, especially during the war. Understanding the importance of tackling and thoroughly elaborating this topic,

conflict related sexual violence will be one of the two key themes of the Forum this year. It is important to mention that the Forum provides an ideal platform to bring politicians, civil society, experts, academics, researchers, journalists, etc. together to discuss these timely and profoundly relevant topics. Yet, equally so, it serves as a platform to further raise awareness on these topics and bring people together to discuss best ways to address these challenges in the future. With more than 500 participants and more than 130 speakers from almost 40 countries, the international Forum also places Kosovo on the international map of discussions and collective efforts to raise awareness and act against all forms of violence against women.

82. The "16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence" campaign is being organized by the Ministry of Justice for the first time, in collaboration with strategic partners, civil society, and with the support of international embassies in Kosovo. The overarching goal of this campaign is to raise awareness among the public and society as a whole, ensuring that everyone can live in safety and equality, free from the fear of violence. The primary objective is to prevent violence, protect victims, empower them, and establish accountability.
83. In an effort to combat gender stereotypes and enhance women's property rights, the Government has, over the years, enacted affirmative measures, based on a proposal from the Agency for Gender Equality, allowing for the free registration of property in joint ownership without administrative fees. This affirmative measure, known as the "Administrative Instruction on Special Measures for Registration of Joint Immovable Property on Behalf of Both Spouses" has been extended for an additional year, spanning from April 2022 to April 2023. During the reporting period, which ran from January to October 2022, 3,560 couples have availed themselves of this opportunity, resulting in a total of 11,727 couples who now jointly hold property titles in their names.
84. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology and Innovation has introduced topics against violence within the educational environment and has incorporated the subject of violence prevention into the Civic Education curriculum, applicable across all educational levels. Additionally, the Life Skills subject includes a dedicated chapter on "How to Remove Violence from My Life." Through teacher training programs in various subjects, the responsible Ministry has provided both curricular and extracurricular access to preventing negative phenomena, including different contexts of violence. Furthermore, based on the current legislation, the Ministry has created opportunities for the reintegration of victims into the education system. Within this awareness campaign, classroom hours should be planned in accordance with the students' age, and the information and discussions should be linked to education on the values of democratic citizenship, peace, tolerance, respect for cultural diversity, gender equality, and healthy interpersonal relationships in schools, families, and society. Alongside such information and discussions, there should be a focus on reporting negative incidents and promoting healthy behaviours and relationships

among peers and in other relationships. Educational activities may also include addressing these topics through essays, drawings, group discussions, presentations, or other methods chosen by the teachers in their respective subject areas. The Ministry has also developed a school information booklet outlining standard procedures for protection against domestic violence, which can be used by teachers to discuss the school's role in preventing and referring domestic violence.

85. By a decision of the Minister of Justice, an all-inclusive Working Group has been established, comprising relevant institutions, including civil society, to develop the National Program for the Treatment of Perpetrators of Domestic Violence. In this context, the Ministry of Justice is currently developing the First National Program for the Treatment of Perpetrators of Domestic Violence. The drafting of the Program is being carried out by the all-inclusive Working Group, composed of relevant institutions, including civil society. As part of this program, a Database for the Treatment of Perpetrators of Domestic Violence is being established. The Program will be finalized by September 2023, and its pilot implementation will be conducted by March 2024. The pilot will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that the National Program is implementable, effective, and provides long-term change.
86. During September and October 2023, three modules were developed for the integrated database on cases of domestic violence. All three modules are interconnected with service provision (the program for treating perpetrators of violence against women and free legal aid). From the initial six reporting institutions, there are now nine institutions generating data for the integrated database. The new reporting institutions are the Correctional Service, the Probation Service, and Free Legal Aid.
87. The draft National Program encompasses the minimum standards prescribed by the Istanbul Convention and guides the courts in providing alternative sanctions for domestic violence perpetrators during and after serving their sentences. The evaluation and monitoring of the program's implementation, in addition to competent institutions, are also envisaged to be conducted by a group of external professionals. In addition to the relevant institutions that will offer the program for the treatment of domestic violence perpetrators, it is foreseen that this program will also be offered by licensed NGOs approved by the Ministry of Justice. The program for the treatment of domestic violence perpetrators includes advanced and intensive training within institutions, such as prisons, social service centres, as well as licensed NGOs. The curriculum is one of the most important national documents in this field, serving as the foundation for the establishment and provision of programs for perpetrators of violence in Kosovo, in line with the Istanbul Convention and other international standards. Service providers from various backgrounds have been trained. For the first time in Kosovo, a curriculum on the Development of Programs for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women has been approved.

88. In January 2023, the Kosovo Police approved the Standard Operating Procedures for the Execution of Protective Orders, which prescribes the reaction manner in favor of the protected party. During the year 2022, Kosovo Police executed 382 protective orders rendered by the domestic courts. In addition, Kosovo Police is also in the process of approving the Standard Operating Procedures for the prevention, treatment and investigation of the criminal offences related to sexual violence.
89. The Free Legal Aid Agency implements a communication strategy to improve legal knowledge and empower citizens, especially those in disadvantaged positions. They have created informative materials in four languages (Albanian, Serbian, Turkish, and English) such as brochures, posters, and flyers, distributed to institutions and citizens. The Agency will run awareness campaigns like "Free Legal Aid Week" with the motto "Defend your rights" and the "16 Days of activism against gender-based violence" in December. They collaborate with victim protection offices, Kosovo Police, and shelters to inform victims about their rights in respect of free legal aid. The Agency is also part of Municipal Coordinating Mechanisms against Domestic Violence and holds informative meetings in the local languages. They use various channels like a free phone number, website, social networks, promotional videos, and annual reports to reach out to citizens and promote their services.
90. In March 2022, Law No. 08/L-035 which Amends and Supplements Law No. 04/L-017 on Free Legal Aid, was enacted. According to this Law, special categories of individuals are entitled to free legal aids without having to meet the criteria outline in Article 8 and 9 of the basic law. These special categories of beneficiaries are: 1.1. Sexual Violence victim during the war in Kosovo in 1998-1999; 1.2. Victims of domestic violence; 1.3. Victims who witness violence, who are dependent on victims of domestic violence; 1.4. victims of gender-based violence; 1.5. victims of any type of sexual violence, including sexual harassment; 1.6. victims of human trafficking; 1.7. minor victims; 1.8. children living in social care institutions; 1.9. to children under guardianship seeking to initiate proceedings without the consent of their legal guardian or against their legal guardian; 1.10. persons whose rights have been violated through an action or inaction that constitutes discrimination, based on the decision of the competent body according to the law in force on protection from discrimination.
91. The draft Law on Social and Family Services is expected to be voted by the Assembly in 2023 and come into effect in 2024. The said law is expected to address the issue of sustainable financing of social and family services through a contracting process. Service contracting will ensure sustainable, prompt, and long-term services for victims of violence and people in social need.
92. In June 2023 the Government adopted the Administrative Instruction, No. 04/2023 for the Medical and Psychological Treatment of Children Victims of Abuse, which is designed to help those in need in the rehabilitation process and to re-integrate them

into society. Through this by-law, the medical and psychological treatment of the child victim of abuse is determined as a first step which then helps them to regain physical and mental health, to rehabilitate from physical and mental trauma the child may have experienced, as well as to reintegrate into society.

93. On August 3, 2023, the Law No. 08/L-219, which amends the Laws No. 04/L-054 and No. 04/L-172 regarding the status and rights of Martyrs, Invalids, Veterans, Members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, Sexual Violence Victims of the War, Civilian Victims and their families, came into effect. These amendments extend to the application period for recognizing the status of victims of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo for an additional two years, until May 15, 2025. As of July 2023, a total of 1939 cases have been applied, out of which 1567 cases have been granted recognition as victim of sexual violence. Among the approved cases 1486 are women, while 81 are men.

C. Actions against Trafficking in Human Beings

94. In October 2021, the Secretariat of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA and Committee of the Parties) published its Report titled: "Second report on the compliance of Kosovo with the standards of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings".
95. This Report recognised that progress has been made since the first assessment by GRETA of the compliance of Kosovo with the standards of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. In particular, the Report acknowledges (i) the amendment of the legislative framework; (ii) the implementation of measures related to GRETA's recommendations; (iii) the organisation of a number of awareness raising and training activities; (iv) adoption of unified indicators for the identification of victims and potential victims of trafficking; (v) appointment of human trafficking coordinators at prosecutor's offices, etc.
96. While recognizing these achievements, the Report also urged the Kosovo authorities to take further specific steps in ensuring full implementation of the Council of Europe standards in the field of human trafficking.
97. The Report noted specific measures that should be taken, for example, in the area of compensation of victims, number of prosecutions for human trafficking violence, preventing trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, risk assessment methodologies to be applied by shelter staff etc. The domestic authorities have already completed some of these recommendations – while several are still under implementation phase or planned to be implemented in the near future.

98. To maintain a comprehensive and coherent statistical system on human trafficking, a database has been constructed and is expected to become operational in October 2023. This database will not only provide a current view of cases and victims, facilitating coordination among institutions, but will also ensure a clear summary of current trends and guidelines for strategic actions in the future.
99. The Office of the National Coordinator Against Human Trafficking in Kosovo coordinates all awareness-raising activities based on the scope of action of all institutions under the National Authority. Specifically, during the awareness month (October of each year), the following activities are conducted: (i) distribution of informative materials addressing topics such as reporting cases, different forms of exploitation, the issue of impunity, potential compensation for victims, and distinctions between trafficking and smuggling; (ii) development and dissemination of awareness-raising spots that have been prominently featured on the Ministry of Internal Affairs' website, the Kosovo Police's website, and within educational institutions, with additional broadcast on television; (iii) hosting of television programs aimed at educating the general public about every aspect of human trafficking.
100. Kosovo has regulated the treatment and provision of services to trafficking victims and potential victims through Standard Operating Procedures, without distinguishing between local or foreign victims. All services are provided based on individual needs while respecting human rights.
101. The National Coordinator Against Human Trafficking is trusted to the Minister of Internal Affairs, due to the importance of the role and more specifically for the following reasons: (i) ensuring alignment of anti-trafficking actions and policies with the government's priorities; (ii) facilitating coordination among responsible institutions for the implementation of actions; (iii) ensuring the efficient utilization of existing resources and structures in the fight against human trafficking; (iv) coordinating and collaborating with all responsible institutions, along with regular reporting. Since the appointment of the National Coordinator, there has been stability and effective coordination of actions, resulting in numerous accomplishments in this field.
102. In addition to existing structures such as the Training Department within the Kosovo Police and the Justice Academy that provide continuous training, some other specific training sessions have been outlined in the National Strategy Action Plan. During the period of 2021-2023, the following training sessions have been conducted: (i) prevention and identification of human trafficking; (ii) early indicators for the identification of trafficking victims; (iii) criminal investigations of organized crime groups involved in migrant smuggling; (iv) early indicators for the identification of trafficking victims; (v) the use of social media in human trafficking investigations; (vi) early indicators for the identification of trafficking victims etc.

103. In view of preventing human trafficking, training sessions have also been organized for education professionals, and a handbook has been launched for teachers and education professionals. Administrative Guidelines for the prevention and prohibition of hazardous forms of child labour and other guidelines deriving from the Law on Child Protection are currently under development.
104. The victims of human trafficking are promptly informed about their rights and the process, as regulated by the Standard Operating Procedures. During their stay in trafficking victim shelters, victims are informed about their legal rights and the respective judicial and administrative procedures they will follow during this period. The Centre for Shelter, Protection, and Rehabilitation of Victims of Human Trafficking also informs trafficking victims about their right to compensation as stipulated by Law No. 08/L-109 on Compensation of Crime Victims. With the amendment to the Law on Compensation of Crime Victims last year, the procedures have been streamlined, ensuring immediate compensation for trafficking victims. Additionally, victim advocates provide continuous guidance and represent the victim's rights during investigations and legal proceedings, offering support until compensation is obtained.
105. In order to register, provide temporary accommodation and identify potential trafficking victims among migrants, in June 2022, the Minister of Internal Affairs signed Decision No. 04/90 to establish the Temporary Reception Center for Migrants. This Reception Center is now included as an organizational structure in the Internal Organization Regulation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which was approved in March 2023. The registration process for individuals accommodated at the Center is managed by police officials, specifically, by the Directorate for Migration and Foreigners. Based on established procedures, police officials profile and refer registered migrants to the Center.
106. The Centre for Shelter, Protection, and Rehabilitation of Victims of Human Trafficking in cooperation with the Social Services Center in Prishtina and the Municipal Directorate of Education in Lipjan, has provided non-formal education for child victims (up to 18 years old). A separate classroom has been allocated within the Center for regular teaching, four hours a day, which is conducted by a dedicated teacher. This service is being provided with the support of the International Organization for Migration.
107. In 2022, the Ministry of Justice, through the General Council for Social and Family Services, organized a training program for trainers with the aim of enhancing the professional capacities of professionals providing social and family services. A total of 15 professionals were certified to conduct further training for all providers of social and family services on the management of child labor in hazardous and dangerous work. In 2022, the Social Services, developed and validated the list of dangerous forms of child labor. The Administrative Guidance document for the prevention and

elimination of hazardous and dangerous forms of child labor in Kosovo is currently in its final stages of completion.

108. Despite the fact that the Centers for Social Work fall under the jurisdiction of municipalities, given their importance in the chain of institutions dealing with gender-based and domestic violence cases, the Ministry of Justice, as the drafter of social policy legislation, has conducted an analysis of the functionality of the Centers for Social Work from both a legal and institutional perspective. The main findings of the analysis were the lack of human and financial resources. These findings have been reflected in the draft Law on Social and Family Services, which addresses the following: (i) increasing the number of social workers within the Centers for Social Work based on the population (planning for an additional 100 workers in the first year and 100 in the second year after the approval of the new law); (ii) increasing the funding for the Centers for Social Work through municipal budgets, which is planned to be around 3.5 million euros as the total budget dedicated to quality social services in the first year after the approval of the law; (iii) regulating the funding for the Centers for Social Work through a specific grant allocation formula for social service funding.
109. The General Council for Social and Family Services, in accordance with the profession standards developed and approved by the National Qualifications Authority, has created 24 training modules for providers of social and family services. Within these modules, a specific module titled "Working with Migrants, Refugees, and Repatriated Individuals in Kosovo" has been developed with the support of the Kosova Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims. This module has been designed, validated, and training-of-trainers sessions have been organized on issues related to the treatment of refugees, migrants, and repatriated categories, with a focus on women and young girls.
110. The Free Legal Aid Agency ensures the provision of free legal aid to citizens of Kosovo who meet the criteria defined by law, and at the same time ensuring that the legal aid offered is efficient, comprehensive, flexible and sustainable. In this way, equal access to justice is provided to everyone who meet the criteria defined by law. The Agency created awareness raising campaigns with the aim of protecting the interests of all individuals, who due to the lack of material resources have been denied equal access to justice, especially vulnerable groups (children, minorities/members of non-majority communities, victims of domestic violence, the elderly, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, victims of human trafficking, etc.), through the provision of free legal aid.

D. Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

111. In September 2021, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment published its Report titled: "Report to UNMIK on the visit to Kosovo carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)".
112. This Report examined the treatment and safeguards afforded to persons deprived of their liberty by the Kosovo Police; the situation in several prisons in Kosovo, in the immigration detention facility, psychiatric establishments and the social welfare institution. The Report commended the welcoming and the cooperation received by the Kosovo delegation throughout the experts' visit.
113. While noting several positive aspects related to the respect of fundamental rights and freedoms related to deprivation of liberty as well as the respect of other Council of Europe standards in this field, the Report also provided very specific recommendations that ought to be followed by the Kosovo authorities in order to better align their practices with the CPT standards.
114. Acting on these useful recommendations, Kosovo authorities have undertaken several measures to address them and thus ameliorate further the implementation record in the area of CPT standards.
115. For instance, the Council of Europe standard of the necessary space of at least 4 m² for placing prisoners in the Dubravë Correctional Center has been fulfilled. In cells with multiple people, a maximum of 4 persons are placed, and they have sufficient space according to housing standards. All common rooms are equipped with tables and static chairs in proportion to the number of prisoners in the room. The sanitary annexes in Dubravë Correctional Center in all pavilions are separated by walls up to the ceiling and in accordance with the protection of the inmates' privacy in the room. All prisoners take a warm shower at least twice a week, and those engaged in work have access to a shower every day.
116. During 2023, in each pavilion, prisoners have been provided with new mattresses and blankets, as well as sheets, which are cleaned every two weeks. In the courtyards of most pavilions, several benches have been placed, and plans are made to increase the number of benches and cover those areas with shelters. In the High Security Prison, a canopy has been installed in the exercise yard to protect them from weather conditions.
117. The Institution for treatment of persons with special needs is now function since beginning of 2023. There are two consultant psychiatrist and two clinical psychologists working for this institution and providing services related to mental health issues. With a capacity of 81 places, 20 are reserved for psychiatric cases. The staff has increased, with 11 additional nurses, 2 doctors and 1 psychologist.

118. The recommended Substitution Program with Methadone Maintenance Program is established completely at all facilities. At all prison health institutions there is 24/7 medical care. The medical file is opened immediately after the admission of the inmate. The so-called Block 8 is now an institution for special needs which is located at the ground floor. Block D is equipped with an elevator with sufficient space for a patient bed as well and the doors of the rooms are large enough for wheelchair movement and other needed activities. The beds are medical beds which allow for movements of the patient as needed.
119. At all institutions there is a full-time psychologist, and psychiatrist. Some are employed full time, and some are undergoing the specialization process. There is a plan to increase the capacities of the Forensic Psychiatric Institution but in the meantime the capacities will be increased at the existing institutions until the existing building is expanded and enlarged.
120. Kosovo Correctional Service has established the Assessment and Classification Unit, trained its staff with appropriate training (both within and outside the country), which are organized and supported by EULEX Mission in Kosovo. Procedures for the assessment and classification of convicts have also been standardized. Each accepted convict in the assessment and classification unit is assessed based on their needs and risks, and an individual sentencing plan is drawn up for them. To implement the individual sentencing plan, the convict is placed in the correctional institution that suits this plan.
121. The Kosovo Correctional Service continuously takes measures to prevent corruption and, with the aim of increasing efficiency in combating this phenomenon, has established an Intelligence Unit which has yielded results in preventing and combating corruption in the prison system. From 2021 to the present, sixteen officials have been removed or suspended from their positions.
122. The Kosovo Correctional Service exercises oversight through ongoing inspections and in collaboration with the Ombudsperson, ensuring the functioning of the complaint mechanism to create security for prisoners to report. Kosovo Correctional Service has conducted administrative investigations for any claims raised, but so far, there have been no cases of misconduct found.
123. In 2022, the Minister of Justice approved the revised plan for rehabilitation programs and developed an action plan for the implementation of rehabilitation and professional development programs. Currently, 502 prisoners are employed within the institution, and 33 outside the institution. In the last three months, 83 prisoners have been trained for professional skills in metalworking, plumbing, electrical installation, construction, IT, printing, cooking, and tailoring.

124. In order to provide as much time outside the cells for prisoners as possible, internal regulations for the treatment of prisoners have been approved, ensuring that prisoners are allowed to stay outside the cells depending on the treatment provided.
125. Regarding the recommendation about TB and HIV/AIDS testing, all necessary measures have been taken and implemented according to national protocols for the above-mentioned issues. The procedure is also harmonized with the Recommendations of the Council of Europe through the second project, which is in place from 2022 until 2025.
126. Concerning pepper spray within the prisoner housing areas, Kosovo Correctional Service has initiated an order for not keeping pepper spray in closed housing areas but placing it in separate locations. In respect of disciplinary measures for prisoners for simultaneous offenses (committed at the same time), the law on the Execution of Criminal Sanctions is utilized. A prisoner cannot stay in solitary confinement for more than 15 days without interruption. All decisions now include legal counsel, and the restriction of contact with family is only applied when it is related to the criminal act they have committed, hindering investigations and the development of criminal procedures. In addition to telephone booths, prisoners can now also use the Skype platform for telephone calls.
127. The Kosovo Police Inspectorate, with its specific preventive aim through continuous inspections, has conducted inspections of the Kosovo Police regarding the treatment of detainees in detention centers. In 2023, four inspections in police stations were conducted, where in each of them, we inspected cases of the treatment of detainees in detention centers, as well as the physical conditions and security under which detainees are held. In the four inspections conducted this year regarding the assessment of the performance of police stations in Obiliq, Gjakova, Ferizaj, and Klinë, the areas of arrest and the use of force were addressed. In some cases, it has been recommended to conduct analyses and assessments of the factors that have influenced the increase in the number of arrests and reported cases of the use of force. Furthermore, the Investigations Department, in cases where investigators go to the scene of incidents involving abuse by police officials, advises them not to use force unnecessarily as it is in violation of the applicable criminal law and international standards in this field.
128. In order to implement the recommendations of the CPT, an Action Plan has been created within the Kosovo Police. All Regional Police Directorates have been informed of the CPT recommendations, and management staff and police officers' supervisors have been requested to conduct regular internal training at police stations to reiterate the fundamental rights of individuals during the arrest procedure and during the 48/24-hour detention period in the detention center to prevent violations of their rights.

129. According to CPT recommendations, steps have been taken for supervisors to oversee the actions of police officers so that all persons detained by the police - for any reason - are fully informed of their fundamental rights from the beginning of their deprivation of liberty in verbal form during the arrest, as well as when they are required to stay at the police station. Arrested or detained persons also have the right to complain since police stations are equipped with complaint boxes and are monitored by the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture by the Ombudsperson. This matter is regulated by the Regulation for the Operations of the Kosovo Police dated April 11, 2017, as well as all applicable laws in Kosovo drafted in accordance with international conventions, and all police officials have access to read and stay informed about all updates regarding the respect of fundamental rights for arrested and detained persons.
130. For every police action taken by police officers, they must always adhere to applicable laws, international conventions, and standard operating procedures that also outline the fundamental rights and freedoms of the detained individuals, as well as the duties and responsibilities of police officers who are obligated to rigorously enforce applicable laws and conventions in Kosovo. The Regulation for Operations of the Kosovo Police defines the authorizations and actions that must be taken, as well as the duties and responsibilities of police officers. Additionally, annual training is provided for all police officers where arrest procedures are continuously reiterated.
131. Regarding cases initiated by Police Inspectorate of Kosovo since 2018, the data is as follows: In 2022, 11 criminal cases were registered, with 6 filed as criminal charges, 4 as special reports, and 1 as an informative report in competent prosecutors' offices. In relation to these cases, 4 police employees were suspended, and 2 were arrested. Furthermore, 3 of these cases were dismissed by competent prosecutors. In 2023, 14 criminal cases have been registered, with 4 filed as criminal charges, 6 as special reports, and 4 of them are still under investigation. In connection with these cases, 12 police employees were suspended.
132. Based on the Article 11 of the Law on the Protection of Whistleblowers No. 06/L-085 and Article 7 of the Regulation on the Handling of Whistleblowing Cases No. 03/2021, the Kosovo Police has created technical and technological opportunities for responsible whistle-blowers, such as: (i) dedicated workspace in a secure location; (ii) a computer protected from access by other individuals; (iii) an integrated printer in the office with restricted access; (iv) a dedicated fixed telephone number only for whistleblowing with limited access; (v) a mobile phone (device) with a unique number (SIM card) specifically for whistleblowing with limited access; (vi) a dedicated email address only for whistleblowing; (vii) a mailbox exclusively for the responsible officer; (viii) the possibility of confidential meetings with whistle-blowers in secure spaces (inside and outside police premises); (ix) ensuring the confidentiality of the whistle-blower's workplace outside the range of cameras; (x) the use of secure communication channels to prevent unauthorized wiretapping; (xi) Ensuring documented procedures for the

handling of reports and whistle-blowers, including but not limited to the policy manual for whistleblowing and practical guidelines; (xii) creating protocols for the receipt and delivery of mail for whistle-blowers and the responsible officers, etc.

133. Additionally, all individuals falling into the category of whistle-blowers are provided with an easy and confidential reporting mechanism, along with practical guidance on how to report, the means and methods of reporting, and the legal guarantees for protecting the whistle-blower's identity and the report.
134. All Regional Directorates of Police have been informed of the CPT's recommendation and the steps they should take to ensure that all persons detained by the police - for any reason - are fully informed of their fundamental rights from the moment their liberty is deprived. This is ensured by providing clear verbal information at the outset and is supplemented as soon as possible (i.e., immediately after the arrival of the detained persons at the police station) with an information sheet containing their rights in languages they understand. These individuals should be asked to sign a statement confirming that they have been informed of their rights and have understood them. Persons who are arrested or detained are allowed to keep a copy of the information sheet or the signed statement. This statement contains information only about their rights but also about being checked and treated by a doctor in accordance with Criminal Procedure Code and Standard Operating Procedures for Detention Centers.
135. The Standard Operating Procedures for Detention Centers in Section D - Procedures, point 1.16, require police officers to register detained minors in the format of the Detention Center and never allow the possibility for the minor to be interviewed without legal counsel, without the presence of a parent, or the Social Work Center, as provided for by Article 65 of the Juvenile Justice Code.
136. From the General Director of Kosovo Police, inspections have been conducted at Detention Centers, and preliminary measures for improvement have been initiated in all Detention Centers in accordance with the recommendations from the Police Inspectorate of Kosovo. According to applicable contracts for the renovation of Detention Centers, the renovation has been completed on several locations and the detention centers in the following Police Stations have been made functional: Deçan, Gjakova, Rahovec, Lipjan, Drenas, Gjilan, Podujevo, Peja, Mitrovica South and Mitrovica North.
137. Procurement requests have been initiated in July 2023 as follows: (i) the installation of an electric calling bell system for all detention centers (only the placement and activation of these systems remain); (ii) water and sewage system improvements are planned for implementation in Suharekë, Pejë, Skenderaj, Mitrovicë South, Klinë, Istog, Drenas, and Prizren; (iii) in the detention center in Podujevë, renovation work will

begin, including painting the interior spaces of the facility, painting the doors, and fixing the ventilation in one of the rooms.

138. In Pejë Detention Center, the complete renovation of the facility's roof will take place, as it is currently covered only with sheet metal and lacks insulation. Interior and exterior lighting will be adjusted to ensure adequate illumination, and other improvements will include the renovation of the bathroom, replacement of the water heater (boiler), sink. The Istog Detention Center will undergo grill adjustments on windows and improvements in lighting. In Klinë, there will be grill adjustments and lighting improvements, while Gjakovë will see the replacement of toilet tiles and lighting improvements. In detention centers in Prizren, Mitrovicë, Vushtrri, Gjilan, Viti, and Rahovec, lighting improvements will be made. In Suharekë Detention Center, improvements will include the installation of dividing walls and lighting, while the Skenderaj Detention Center will also have tile adjustments. The Zveçan Detention Center will undergo roof replacement and lighting improvements, and Klllokot will see adjustments to internal protective nets and lighting improvements. In Ferizaj, a new floor and iron door will be installed.
139. With the amendments to the Law on Foreigners, measures for alternative custody arrangements for vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied children, are envisaged, following the principle of the best interests of the child. The Detention Centre for Foreigners has a children's room equipped with toys for children. With the introduction of alternative measures, placing children in the Detention Centre for Foreigners will no longer be practiced.
140. The Detention Centre for Foreigners does not have an on-site doctor, but all migrants accommodated at the Detention Center for Foreigners are provided with medical check-ups conducted at the Emergency Department. Based on the doctor's recommendation, foreigners also receive other medical services, including psychiatric or psychological support and prescribed therapy. According to the recommendation of the Ombudsperson in 2020, the Detention Centre for Foreigners has established separate records where records are kept for all services and other aspects related to the foreigners accommodated at the center.
141. The Detention Centre for Foreigners has prepared an informative brochure about the rights and obligations of the migrants accommodated from their admission to the center until the day of their departure. Additionally, the foreigner must sign a declaration after being informed about their rights by the center's officer, as evidence that the foreigner has been informed about their rights. Regarding the right to have visits, a considerable number of foreigners have accepted visits from their family members. For those foreigners whose family members have not visited, there have been cases where their lawyers have visited them.

142. The right to have visits is stipulated in the internal rules at the entrance of the facility where foreigners are accommodated and is also mentioned in the informative brochure. Center officials inform each foreigner of such a right. Every foreigner has the right to use the fixed telephone for free for 5 minutes per day and has the right for others to call them on the fixed telephone from outside. This right is legally guaranteed and provided in brochures. As part of the ongoing amendment to the regulations, there will be additional communication conveniences placed in the center, including external communication and use of personal communication devices.
143. With Regulation No. 04/2018 on the Functioning of the Detention Center for Foreigners, disciplinary measures have been foreseen for accommodated foreigners who disrupt the order and discipline in the Detention Centre for Foreigners. Upon the recommendation of the Ombudsperson in 2021, a physical register has been established for each isolation of a foreigner in a separate room. These data are also stored electronically.

E. Other relevant achievements in different fields relevant to Council of Europe standards that Kosovo adheres to

144. The Ministry of Justice has undertaken numerous new initiatives within its jurisdiction to combat corruption. Over the past two years, significant laws have been drafted and passed in this area, including the new Code of Criminal Procedure, the Law on the Anti-Corruption Agency, the Law on the Declaration, Origin, and Control of the Assets of Public Officials, the Concept Document for the Confiscation Fund, and Regulations outlining the procedure for receiving and handling reports in public institutions and private entities.
145. The Government of Kosovo is currently establishing an Anti-Corruption Task Force and a joint investigation team dedicated to sensitive cases involving organized crime and corruption. This specialized task force will be responsible for investigating and prosecuting such cases. Government efforts in policy-making and the implementation of legislation in law enforcement and anti-corruption measures have already yielded significant results, which are being reflected and acknowledged in credible international reports.
146. As part of the efforts to enhance judicial reform, at the beginning of 2022, a Joint Commitment Declaration was endorsed by the Minister of Justice and the leaders of the Justice Sector, including the Kosovo Judicial Council, the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council, the Supreme Court, and the Chief State Prosecutor. This was done in response to specific recommendations arising from the revised Rule of Law Strategy, as outlined in the latest European Commission's country report and the relevant Opinion of the Venice Commission. These recommendations call on the Justice institutions to clarify

and strengthen the legal framework that regulates the work of the Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils, the functioning of the courts, prosecutor's offices, as well as mechanisms for performance verification, assessment, discipline, transparency, integrity, professionalism, efficiency, and accountability of judges, prosecutors, departments, and respective units of both Councils.

147. After the submission of the Constitutional amendments regarding the Vetting process to the Constitutional Court, which has granted the green light for these changes to proceed, consequently, after approval in the Assembly, the process of temporary integrity checks for the members of the Constitutional Court, members of the Prosecutorial Council, Presidents of all Courts, and all Chief Prosecutors, as well as candidates for these positions, will commence.
148. Simultaneously, within this reform process, along with other justice institutions such as the Constitutional Court, Prosecutorial Council, Supreme Court, and the Office of the Chief State Prosecutor, a Joint Declaration of Commitments has been signed, thereby initiating necessary legal amendments to strengthen the existing mechanisms of performance, integrity, and discipline for judges and prosecutors. Both of these interlinked processes, the vetting through constitutional amendments and necessary legal changes to reinforce existing mechanisms, will further enhance the professional standards of judges and prosecutors, their accountability, transparency, and the public's trust in the justice system. This entire reform will be conducted in close collaboration with international mechanisms, fully respecting the standards set by the Council of Europe.
149. The Ministry of Communities and Return has supported projects for providing of assistance and activities that promote the rights of communities and their members in Kosovo. The said Ministry, based on its mandate, for each fiscal year allocates from its budget financial means for promotion, stabilizing and re-integrating communities, and strengthening the economic sustainability, in the following areas: (i) strengthening of economic sustainability; (ii) promotion of tolerance; (iii) dialogue and coexistence in Kosovo; (iv) research and training; (v) sports, culture and agriculture.
150. The Ministry of Communities and Return has initiated the procedure for the approval of Regulation No. 01/2018 for the return of displaced persons - which aims to create the necessary conditions for achieving sustainable solutions for displaced persons within Kosovo and in the region (from February 28, 1998 to March 31, of 2004). This bylaw defines the responsibilities of the competent decision-making bodies, procedures and criteria for assistance. In order to implement this Regulation and fulfill its mandate, the Ministry has provided assistance in return projects, including the construction of houses for returnees, renovation and the rental scheme. With the aim of creating economic sustainability, the Ministry in cooperation with the EU has implemented two

projects: (i) Return and Reintegration in Kosovo, within which the returnees have been supported with the construction of houses and aid packages to generate income and economic development; (ii) the Community Stabilization Program, which is designed to address the needs of the non-majority population and returnees to generate income and improve their living conditions, through individual start-up projects. The Ministry, within the framework of the Inter-Institutional Initiative for Displaced Persons, founded the Technical Working Group for Property Rights of Displaced Persons, whose mandate is to cooperate closely with the Kosovo Property Comparison and Verification Agency to ensure access and return in the property.

151. Since 2008, the Kosovo Police has provided physical security 24/7 for 24 Orthodox religious objects, primarily churches and monasteries, while in various operational ways, it ensures the security and protection of around 170 other Orthodox objects. The objects protected 24/7 have been under the supervision of a police unit specifically established for the Protection of Religious Cultural Heritage since March 2013. The same unit was formed as part of the Brussels Agreement between the representatives of the Government Kosovo and the Government of Serbia, mediated by the EU. For the security of Religious Cultural Heritage objects, the Kosovo Police has engaged around 200 officers from different communities, including: 70% Albanians; 16% Serbs; 14% from other non-majority communities.
152. The operational order for the protection of Serbian Orthodox Heritage is being implemented in continuity by all Regional Police Directorates and the Unit for the Security of Religious Cultural Heritage. Additionally, an update of the Standard Operating Procedure was issued for the Units for the Security of Religious Cultural Heritage Sites in 2022. The Kosovo Police conducts risk assessments for the country's Orthodox heritage objects every six months, each year. These risk assessments are objective tests based on the risk exposure for each object, always taking into consideration the potential risk to the members living or operating within these objects. Risk levels are categorized as low, medium, and high, and the operational protective responsibilities are oriented accordingly, based on the specific risk to a particular religious object.
153. Most aspects concerning the functioning of media in Kosovo are regulated by at least eight laws (or specific provisions within certain laws). This legal framework has been developed under strict oversight from the international community. Some of these laws include the Civil Defamation and Insult Law, the Law on Access to Public Documents, the Law on Copyright and Related Rights, the Law on the Protection of Journalism Sources, the Law on the Independent Media Commission, the Law on the Radio Television of Kosovo, Law on the protection of whistle-blowers and the Criminal Code (articles related to the safety of journalists). In terms of the Ministry of Justice's responsibilities, the most crucial development in this area in the past years has been the decriminalization of defamation and insult and its treatment only as a civil issue.

154. The institutions of Kosovo have taken concrete measures to prevent and combat the spread of extremist ideologies, especially in preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism. With the assistance of the United States, the institutions of Kosovo have undertaken two additional operations to return Kosovar citizens from the conflict zone: (i) Operation Return II in July 2021, which resulted in the return of 11 citizens from conflict zones (6 men, 1 woman, and 4 children); and (ii) Operation Return III in May 2022, which resulted in the return of 2 citizens (men) from conflict zones.
155. All those returned from the conflict zones (Syria and Iraq) have undergone programs related to de-radicalization, reintegration, and resocialization, which were designed and implemented with the support of international partners. These programs have been implemented starting from the pre-trial period and throughout the period of serving sentences (for those that were sentenced in accordance with the criminal legislation). Special rehabilitation and reintegration programs as well as continuous psychological and mental health support have also been offered to other affected individuals, especially women and children.
156. In the context of regional cooperation, since Kosovo was among the first countries in the region to systematically repatriate its citizens from conflict zones, it has shared its experience, expertise and documents during bilateral meetings with other regional countries. Although there have been no reported cases of recidivism among individuals returned from the conflict zone, all returnees continue to be considered individuals of interest to security institutions. Therefore, their activities are monitored by security institutions, as well as through rehabilitation and resocialization programs, with the aim of disconnecting them from violence and extremist ideologies.
157. In addition to the engagement of institutions of Kosovo in strengthening institutional mechanisms and involving civil society in preventing the spread of violent extremism and radicalization, other necessary measures have been taken by security institutions to minimize the threats posed by violent extremism and terrorism. From 2012 until now, the Kosovo Police have initiated criminal investigations against more than 350 individuals, with over 230 individuals arrested. This includes individuals who directly participated in foreign terrorist organizations, those who recruited or facilitated the travel of individuals to conflict zones, individuals who facilitated travel in various ways or actively promoted and called on Kosovo citizens to join the conflict in Syria and Iraq. As a result of the engagement and measures taken by security institutions, several planned attacks have been successfully prevented in their early stages, resulting in the arrest and prosecution of individuals involved in these plans. Since 2016, there have been no reported cases of Kosovo citizens traveling to conflict zones.
158. The national counterterrorism strategy revised in 2023 is harmonized with EU and international standards and includes four main pillars, namely: prevention,

prosecution, protection, and preparedness & response. The 2023-2028 Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism also includes the prevention field, which until 2020 was a separate strategy (the Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020).

159. The International Law Enforcement Cooperation Directorate (ILECU) communicates with INTERPOL through the official liaison officer of UNMIK-INTERPOL in Prishtina for communication with other states in the exchange of information related to cases within INTERPOL's scope of activities (extraditions, red notices, blue notices, diffusions, etc.). As for Europol, Kosovo has signed a working agreement on July 2020, and subsequently, in 2021, reached annex arrangements, specifically for the police liaison officer, the secure communication channel known as "Siena," and the exchange and protection of classified information.
160. The Kosovo Police signed a cooperation agreement on March 2022 with the Government Commission for Missing Persons and the Institute of Forensic Medicine of Kosovo. This agreement involves the scanning and digitization of case files, as well as the donation of software for the storage of scanned data/files at the Institute of Forensic Medicine for missing persons. In March 2023, the Kosovo Police established the Directorate for the Investigation of War Crimes within the framework of the Investigations Department, as part of the organizational restructuring of the Kosovo Police. With this organizational change, the Kosovo Police will now have more investigators and increased capacity in the field of war crimes investigations.

Ends.