

COVID-19 IN KOSOVO AND THE UN KOSOVO TEAM (UNKT) RESPONSE

MARCH 2021

The Way Forward

The COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health and socio-economic crisis of our time. The pandemic is putting stress on every society it touches and creating health and social effects that will leave lasting scars and change the concept of vulnerability as we know it. Kosovo is no exception, facing unprecedented burdens on its health, socio-economic and social protection systems.

For the year 2020, Kosovo¹ recorded 51,144 cases and 1,332 deaths for a population of approximately 1.8 million. **Its health care resources have been stretched**, starting the struggle against the virus with one of the lowest ratios in Europe of doctors, nurses and beds per person. Considering these numbers, the system has handled the challenge remarkably well. Yet it remains vulnerable to increases in critical cases and collapse. Measures aimed at reducing transmission will continue to be key, allowing to maintain surge capacity for increased demand. At the same time, essential health services need to be guaranteed, especially for particularly vulnerable sections of the population.

COVID-19 has **exacerbated the pre-existing fragility of Kosovo's economy**, which is estimated to have contracted by 8.8 per cent in 2020. Kosovo's weak labour market records are expected to worsen and affect both women (who have pre-existing vulnerabilities in the labour market) and men (who will be most affected by job losses). A recent UN rapid socio-economic assessment showed that the sectors hardest hit by the March to May 2020 economic shutdown (construction and infrastructure) were those employing one-fifth of main household income earners. An April 2020 needs assessment conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) found that the pandemic is significantly impacting people on the move. The pandemic and resultant lockdown have also increased the risk of sexual and gender based violence for vulnerable groups and for women and girls.

At the onset of the pandemic in 2020, the UNKT developed a **Socio-Economic Response Plan to COVID-19 (SERP)** focused on five pillars. Over the next five years, the UNKT will deliver its support under a comprehensive umbrella, the **United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021-2025 (UN Cooperation Framework)**, which sets out the UN's approach to ensure efficiency, leverage synergies and enhance impact by engaging with local institutions and partners.

6 MAJOR LEVERAGE POINTS

In addition to a troubling insight into what our new normal could look like, COVID-19 represents an opportunity for choosing new pathways and priorities for development. It is opportune that this rethinking takes place at a time when Kosovo is preparing its 10-year "National Development Plan 2021-2030," which coincides with the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals. This is a unique moment to build forward better, while systematically addressing the underpinning factors that accelerated the impact of the pandemic in Kosovo and across the Western Balkans. This will require bold decisions, systemic changes, and leadership to find the right incentives, shape social norms, and insist on investment in human capital and nature-based solutions.



































¹All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).



To support an accelerated transition in Kosovo, the UN Kosovo Team (UNKT) will pursue the following six leverage points in both the short- and longer-term response to the pandemic under the umbrella of the UN Cooperation Framework:

- 1 HEALTH SYSTEM STRENGTHENING – COVID-19 HAS HIGHLIGHTED SYSTEM WEAKNESSES**
 - Continue supporting the health system to maintain essential health services and ensure it will not be overwhelmed by the additional demand for services generated by the pandemic.
 - Continue identifying and supporting the weak areas of the health system to ensure resilient, sustained services that are more accessible, qualitative, and effective, especially for vulnerable groups and excluded groups, at the heart of recovery efforts.
- 2 SOCIAL PROTECTION – COVID-19 HAS COMPOUNDED GAPS FOR TARGETING, AGILITY AND EXECUTION**
 - Strengthen the ability of the social protection system to respond rapidly to shock.
 - Ensure social protection services, including social services (education), are more accessible, qualitative, and effective, especially for vulnerable groups and excluded groups.
- 3 GREEN ECONOMY – COVID-19 PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RESILIENT GREEN GROWTH**
 - Support the strengthened alignment of economic support packages with principles of “Build Forward Better” and localisation through a whole of government and society approach.
 - Ensure that economic recovery and development is associated with policies aiming to promote environmental benefits; more responsible, sustainable and resilient business practices; as well as labour markets more inclusive of gender equality, youth and human rights.
- 4 INNOVATION AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION – COVID-19 OPENS UP NEW POTENTIAL**
 - Support, through smart tools and digital innovation, the adaptability required of service providers to accommodate increased demand while ensuring transparency and equal access.
 - Leverage the potential for Kosovo to leapfrog socio-economic dividends through a digital transformation that ensures key principles of LNOB and gender responsiveness.
- 5 GOVERNANCE – COVID-19 HIGHLIGHTS NEED TO ADDRESS WIDENING HORIZONTAL/ VERTICAL INEQUALITIES**
 - Accelerate safe, transparent and agile response to immediate needs through e-based tools that enhance the quality and transparency of service delivery, particularly enabling persons in vulnerable situation to access user friendly tools.
 - Ensure that public institutions are more transparent and meritocratic, inclusive, gender-responsive and effective in designing public policies (administering services and enhanced accountability while delivering justice and ensuring equality and participation for all).
 - Ensure regional cooperation across Western Balkans to boost socio-economic recovery and convergence with the EU on an integrated regional approach.
- 6 GENDER EQUALITY, YOUTH, VULNERABLE GROUPS – COVID-19 HAS PUT AN UNPROPORTIONATE STRAIN ON MARGINALIZED GROUPS**
 - Ensure all women and men in Kosovo, particularly young people, vulnerable groups, communities, and displaced persons claim their rights and fulfil civic responsibilities.
 - Ensure labour markets are more inclusive and respective of gender equality and human rights.
 - Accelerate development of digital platforms to support more inclusive education and learning.

The pillars constituting this package are:

UN COOPERATION FRAMEWORK PRIORITY AREA 2021-2025	UN SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESPONSE PLAN TO COVID-19	EXPECTED OUTCOMES: BY 2025...	SDGs
I. Accountable governance	1 HEALTH FIRST: Protecting health services and systems during the crisis 	1. ... all women and men in Kosovo enjoy more accountable, effective, transparent, and gender-responsive institutions at all levels ensuring access to justice, equality and participation for all.	   
II. Inclusive and non- discriminatory social policies and services	2 PROTECTING PEOPLE: Social protection and basic services 	2. ... all girls and boys, women and men, particularly the most marginalised have improved access to and utilize equitable, qualitative, integrated social protection, universal health services and quality education.	      
III. Resilient, sustainable and inclusive economic development	3 ECONOMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY: Protecting jobs, small and medium- sized enterprises, and the informal sector workers 	3. ... women and men in Kosovo, particularly youth and vulnerable groups, have increased access to decent work and benefit from sustainable and inclusive economic development that is more resilient to impacts of climate change, disasters, and emergencies.	         
IV. Social cohesion	4 MACROECONOMIC RESPONSE AND MULTILATERAL COLLABORATION 	4. ... all communities in Kosovo benefit equitably from inclusive engagement and greater social cohesion.	   
V. Cross-cutting: Increased gender equality and rights- holders' participation, empowerment, and civic engagement	5 SOCIAL COHESION AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE  + Gender Equality  + Environmental Sustainability 	5. ... all women and men in Kosovo, particularly young people, vulnerable groups, and displaced persons, increasingly achieve gender equality and claim their rights and fulfil civic responsibilities.	   

Implementation of these priorities will be guided by the overarching principles of leaving no one behind (LNOB); a human rights-based approach; gender equality and women's empowerment; resilience; sustainability and accountability. UNKT support will be focused on the provision of policy advice, technical assistance, capacity development, leveraging partnerships and resources, social mobilization, brokering knowledge, and piloting and scaling up innovations based on evidence.