Evaluation of the Youth Empowered Through Inclusive Schools and Societies (YESS) Project

Project was implemented by UNICEF and IOM in Kosovo between January 2024 and January 2026.
Evaluation was commissioned by UNICEF and IOM in Kosovo

Final Report

Alvin Leung, Ph.D.
International Consultant

Hanë Ilazi
Local Consultant

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Acronyms

CSO	Civil society organisation
EQ	Evaluation question
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus group discussion
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JSC	Joint steering committee
KII	Key informant interview
MED	Municipal education director
PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
SDG	Sustainable development goal
ToC	Theory of change
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
USD	United States Dollar
YESS	Youth Empowered Through Inclusive Schools and Societies

The content and views expressed in this report are those of the experts engaged in the evaluation and do not necessarily represent the views of UNICEF.

Executive Summary

Introduction and Background

The Youth Empowered Through Inclusive Schools and Societies (YESS) project was a joint initiative implemented by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Kosovo[1] from January 2024 to December 2025, funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) with a budget of USD 2.5 million.

Kosovo faces persistent ethnic tensions and social divisions, with young people often feeling disconnected from decision-making processes and having limited interactions with those from other communities. The project was designed to empower girls and boys, and young women and men, to become agents of change who promote tolerance, diversity and social cohesion within and between communities. The project aimed to contribute to two key United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) outcomes on inclusive social services and social cohesion promotion while also advancing towards Sustainable Development Goals 4, 6 and 10.

The project was implemented in 11 municipalities in Kosovo, including 4 Serbs-majority municipalities. It was structured around two outputs: Output 1 focused on strengthening capacities of schools and local authorities to foster peaceful, inclusive learning and community environments, while Output 2 focused on promoting sustainable youth-led initiatives and creating mechanisms for enhanced collaboration between young people and local actors in peacebuilding and community development.

Methodology

This final project evaluation was commissioned by UNICEF and IOM and took place between September 2025 and December 2025. It was a mixed-methods evaluation, incorporating utilisation-focused, participatory and theory-based approaches with the use of contribution analysis. The evaluation assessed the degree to which the project has met its intended peacebuilding outcomes, objectives and results. It aimed to provide key lessons about successful approaches and operational practices. It served both summative and formative functions. It covered the period of project implementation from January 2024 up till November 2025, one month before the formal conclusion of the project. The key intended users of this evaluation are UNICEF, IOM and other UN agencies operating in Kosovo; central and local authorities involved in the YESS project; and the Peacebuilding Commission.

Data collection was guided by a comprehensive evaluation matrix based on the project's theory of change and encompassed 13 evaluation questions organised across the evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. Primary data were collected from 131 individuals using key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with a wide range of stakeholders, namely: children, young people and teachers who took part in project activities; central and local authorities; implementing partners; and UNICEF and IOM personnel. Secondary data collected and reviewed included project document and reports, project monitoring data, and baseline and end-line study reports. The evaluation processed the data through systematic coding, triangulated findings across multiple sources, and used contribution analysis to assess how

[1] All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

observed results were achieved. The evaluation was conducted in full accordance with international ethics guidelines.

Key Findings on Relevance

The YESS project was highly appropriate and strategic in addressing peacebuilding goals and challenges in Kosovo. The project design was informed by comprehensive conflict analysis and evidence-based assessment of contextual factors affecting social cohesion, including ethnic tensions, language barriers, gender inequalities and limited inter-community interactions. The project explicitly adopted a conflict-sensitive approach, reflected in careful framing of activities to avoid them being politicised and in meaningful engagement with Serbian communities and Serbian-curriculum schools.

The project activities were relevant to children and young people and have met their needs. The activities also developed children's and young people's knowledge and skills that could support peacebuilding priorities. The project's relevance was maintained throughout its implementation period, despite numerous challenges within the operational environment.

While the project's theory of change has clearly described how its approach and most of its components were expected to produce the desired change, the underlying assumptions for inducing a change were less clear. The strategic connections between the two project outputs were not sufficiently clear to project team members and implementing partners, limiting opportunities for complementary engagement with children, youth and other stakeholders. While the project's theory of change clearly described most intended pathways of change, the underlying assumptions were not sufficiently articulated, limiting its usefulness as an operational tool for adaptive management.

Key Findings on Effectiveness

Most project objectives and targets were achieved. Evidence across pre- and post-activity assessments, baseline and end-line study, and qualitative data from KIIs and FGDs indicates that project activities generated substantial learning gains across the two Outputs.

Output 1 activities primarily in formal education settings produced some of the strongest results. Peer mediation clubs emerged as the most effective component. Students reported that training provided practical tools to manage disputes constructively, and mediation clubs successfully resolved conflicts in schools while fostering more inclusive environments in Kosovo-curriculum schools, though formal establishment of such in Serbian-curriculum schools proved constrained by contextual factors. Skills-based training successfully reached 6,000 students. Teacher training was delivered in an effective manner to more than 700 teachers in both Kosovo- and Serbian-curriculum schools, and those interviewed in this evaluation highly commended the content and the delivery of the training. The teachers who received training based on the MovieEQ methodology used the learnings to organise workshops for more than 4,000 students.[2]

Support to student councils showed mixed results. Those in Kosovo-curriculum schools organising cultural and awareness-raising events that improved school engagement, but most activities tended to respond to school requests or logistical needs rather than address themes directly tied to social cohesion. Those in Serbian-curriculum schools achieved more limited outcomes due to contextual

[2] This activity was under Output 2, as it fell under IOM's remit, even though it occurred in schools.

governance constraints. Municipal-level student council activities were carried out to promote inclusion and diversity, but the evidence of them being led by students was thin.

Output 2 activities primarily in non-formal education settings also achieved most objectives. Language camps, despite limited scale, generated transformative experiences, with participants demonstrating increased language competencies, higher empathy levels and more positive attitudes towards inclusion. Youth-led grant schemes successfully implemented community-based initiatives explicitly designed to promote inclusion and social cohesion, with participants describing improved confidence to engage with municipal actors. Nonetheless, the number and profile of youth reached by grant-funded activities could not be fully established due to missing participation data, and the depth and sustainability of youth-municipality engagement varied across locations.

Several project components under Output 2, including employability skills training, language classes and clubs, and media training, contributed more indirectly to peacebuilding by developing enabling skills and confidence rather than explicitly fostering inter-ethnic dialogues or community interaction. As currently designed, these developed-oriented activities strengthened young people's skills, networks and confidence but only indirectly contributed to peacebuilding outcomes, as they were not systematically linked to structured inter-group interaction or follow-up cohesion initiatives.

Regarding monitoring and data quality, project monitoring data largely enabled systematic determination of results achievement. Most components consistently utilised pre- and post-activity assessments, and implementing partners submitted clear reports aligned to the performance monitoring framework. Field monitoring by UNICEF and IOM staff was regular and appreciated by implementing partners. However, disaggregated data collection—particularly by ethnicity and for tracking repeat participant exposure—was inconsistent, limiting the project team's ability to fully monitor equity dimensions and participant engagement breadth. Baseline and end-line studies provided useful insights but fell short of providing conclusive multi-municipality-level evidence of early impact. In addition, the findings of the baseline study were not systematically shared with all implementing partners, which reduced opportunities to use this evidence to fine-tune targeting and activity design.

Equity and inclusion findings demonstrate that despite contextual and systemic challenges, the project effectively reached children and young people from Serbian communities in Kosovo. The project also engaged minority ethnic groups, such as Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, and demonstrated systematic integration of equity considerations across selection, participation and engagement processes. Gender parity targets were largely met in many activities, but engagement with boys and young men could be improved, as available data showed they were less involved and less expressive about participation. While geographical targeting was appropriate and Kosovo-curriculum school selection reflected project beneficiary distribution, some implementing partners' reliance on social media for recruitment and certain schools' use of academic performance criteria for selection risked excluding more marginalised youth who might have benefited most from participation.

Key Findings on Sustainability

The project achieved partial sustainability, with the strongest outcomes in initiatives embedded within school structures. Peer mediation clubs in Kosovo-curriculum schools demonstrated resilience, benefiting from visible results and sustained commitment from students and teachers. Accreditation of selected teacher training modules also contributed to long-term sustainability. Student councils/parliaments were likely to continue operating, as their existence is mandated by legislation in both Kosovo- and Serbian-curriculum schools and they draw on membership from multiple student cohorts, which supported knowledge transfer. The results achieved by these components contributed to the early institutional anchoring of peacebuilding efforts.

However, activities outside formal school settings, particularly under Output 2, face significant challenges as they depend primarily on securing continued financial support. Non-formal education interventions lack the institutional infrastructure ready to embed activities into permanent structures. Civil society implementing partners expressed strong motivation to continue cross-community initiatives, but without predictable funding or formalised partnerships with municipalities or other institutions, most non-formal activities will be difficult to sustain beyond the project cycle. The relatively short project implementation period also limited the possibility of contributing to an institutional structure to sustain activities in the non-formal settings.

At the institutional level, early consultation with authorities did not generate lasting ownership. Despite alignment with the youth development strategy, municipal officials recognised activity value but maintained focus on core education services without committing to integrating project initiatives into future planning. Schools were exceptions, demonstrating openness to sustaining initiatives, though they emphasised that ongoing training and support would be essential for successful continuation. The project also contributed to selected Kosovo and local policy frameworks, including specific objectives of the Strategy for Youth 2024-2032 and the Education Strategy 2022-2026.

Lessons Learned

The evaluation identified three key lessons learned that merit attention in future peacebuilding programming.

First, strategic connections between project components and between project outputs must be explicitly mapped and consistently communicated to project team members and implementing partners to enhance complementarity across components and outputs.

Second, conflict-sensitive implementation within Serbian-curriculum schools and Serb-majority communities requires sustained engagement, time investment and experienced implementing partners with established credibility in sensitive settings; materials and approaches not sufficiently adapted through stakeholder collaboration risk undermining professional relationship and trust.

Third, municipal leadership transitions and broader political dynamics influence sustainability; while the project strengthened school-based outcomes through direct partnership, more explicit and consistent communication with municipalities about project identity and outcomes could improve institutional visibility and enhance prospects for collaborative continuation beyond the project timeline.

Recommendations

The evaluation, supported by the findings and conclusions derived from the evidence collected and analysed, presents 5 overarching recommendations and proposed actions.

Recommendation 1 (High Priority) directs UNICEF and IOM to build on YESS success by including the most effective components (i.e., peer mediation clubs, teacher training and workshops, and language camps) in future peacebuilding projects. Future programming should establish clear change pathways connecting components, align activities with emerging youth needs, ensure engagement of all genders (particularly boys and young men), and continue conflict-sensitive approaches in Serb-majority municipalities and Serbian-curriculum schools.

Recommendation 2 (Medium-to-High Priority) calls for UNICEF and IOM to align future activities with the Strategy for Youth 2024-2032 and, where possible, with formal curricula to enhance authorities' ownership and reduce aid fragmentation. This includes accrediting teacher training modules not yet formally recognised to support wider adoption and sustainability.

Recommendation 3 (Medium-to-High Priority) emphasises the need for UNICEF and IOM to align future local-level activities with stakeholder needs and local development agendas while advocating for the importance of child and youth participation in local governance through established structures such as student councils.

Recommendation 4 (Medium Priority) specifically addresses IOM's responsibilities to expand beyond contract management to ensure robust coordination of implementing partners, strengthen strategic connections between project components, reduce the number of implementing partners if feasible, and provide support for more effective outreach to marginalised populations.

Recommendation 5 (Low Priority, conditional) recommends that, assuming no second project phase, UNICEF and IOM should integrate remaining project initiatives into existing programmes and school structures. UNICEF should integrate support to school councils and peer mediation clubs into broader education work, while both agencies should use project results for ongoing peacebuilding advocacy.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the Youth Empowered through Inclusive Schools and Societies (YESS) project. The evaluation was commissioned by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Kosovo[3]. The evaluation was conducted by one international consultant and one local consultant, who are collectively referred to as the 'evaluation team' in the report.

The report is organised as follows: Chapter 1 outlines the context of Kosovo and introduces the YESS project. Chapter 2 discusses the evaluation's objectives, purposes, scope, and key questions. Chapter 3 describes the design and methodology of the evaluation process. Chapter 4 details the evaluation findings. Chapter 5 summarises the main conclusions, and Chapter 6 offers recommendations based on these findings and conclusions.

3.1. Context[4]

Kosovo has experienced deep-rooted ethnic tensions over the years, which culminated in the 1998–99 conflict, the legacy of which continues to hinder both inter-community relations and long-term political stability. Despite the existence of a legal framework that recognises the multi-ethnic character of Kosovo and the rights of all communities, and notwithstanding efforts by civil society organisations and the international community to help build trust and promote inter-ethnic reconciliation, Kosovo society remains divided along ethnic lines, predominantly between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs. While the polarisation between these communities constitutes the biggest challenge to peaceful cohabitation, the marginalisation of the Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Bosniak, Turk, and Gorani communities further contributes to a highly divided society[5]. Moreover, Kosovo—recognised for having Europe's youngest population with 55 percent of citizens under 30 and over a third under 18—faces significant societal challenges regarding youth unemployment, which stands at 29 percent, with higher rates among women, marginalised groups, and non-majority communities. There is a notable disparity between young women's and men's participation in the labour market, with respective employment rates of 22.5 percent and 41.9 percent. Over a third of young people aged 15–24 are not engaged in employment, education, or training (32.7 percent of young women compared to 30.8 percent of young men). Only 33 percent of young people find the quality of education satisfactory. As a result, young people often feel disenfranchised, with only 10 percent believing their interests are well represented in decision-making. Nonetheless, when divided by ethnicity, it becomes evident that unemployment rates are significantly higher within the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, which constitute less than 2 percent of the population. Even

[3] All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

[4] Adapted from the 'Peacebuilding Context and Rationale for PBF Support' section of the project document of the Youth Empowered through Inclusive Schools and Societies project. Only a small number of spelling changes were made so that there is a consistent use of British spelling in the report.

[5] Instances of segregation also exist within the two educational systems in Kosovo between Serbian, Albanian and Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian children. An example of segregation within the parallel educational structures, funded by the Serbian education system, is the separation of Serbian and Roma/Ashkali children at the Branko Radičević Elementary school in North Mitrovica. There are similar practices in at least five other communities across Kosovo (for more reference KEC Report 2019, https://kosint2020.net/site/assets/files/1466/thematic_report_on_the_difficulties_that_students_of_roma-_ashkali_and_egyptian_communities_encounter_in_education.pdf) or https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/ghost-schools-ghetto-schools-and-segregated-shifts/

though the situation of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities has improved over the years, they continue to remain among the most marginalised groups in Kosovo with high unemployment rates and low educational attainment. The lack of access to education and subsequent shortage of appropriate skills and qualifications, compounded by external factors such as discrimination and stigma, hinder the inclusion of these communities in the labour market, leading to a continuous cycle of inequity.

Youth and women in particular face different barriers that lead to their social exclusion from all areas of life. Recent data reveals that the unemployment rate of youth from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities is estimated to be as high as 75 percent[6]. Youth unemployment can influence social cohesion by creating economic gaps among younger generations, potentially diminishing their trust in societal institutions. It can lead to feelings of detachment and reduced community engagement. Additionally, if certain subgroups within the youth demographic experience higher unemployment rates, it might contribute to perceived disparities. The primary social challenges, especially those associated with social welfare, gender disparities, and economic instability, are evident across the main ethnic groups; these challenges are not exclusive to one group, emphasising the universal aspects of these issues. Recognising common struggles could provide a basis for collaboration and mutual interest. Despite youths' eagerness for civic involvement, local decision-making often overlooks their needs, and societal stigmas deter their participation. Rural youth and young women face additional challenges, as participatory activities are mostly urban-centred and these groups confront societal prejudices. Youth engagement in dialogue processes remains limited, yet they hold potential as agents of democratic growth and bridge-builders between ethnic divides.

Gender inequality and discrimination are especially pronounced among minority groups, with lower school enrolment rates for girls. They also face compounded barriers to political participation and engagement, as well as limited access to cross-cultural opportunities extending beyond labour market statistics. The Strategy for Integration of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian Communities indicates that the unemployment rate in these communities is higher than in other communities. The causes for gender disparities in employment in these communities include early marriage of girls, lower levels of education compared to males, and gender stereotypes that assign women responsibility for home and family care. In general, the limited involvement of minority girls and women in the labour market not only restricts their opportunities but also hinders cross-cultural understanding. Their absence from workplaces deprives them of economic and personal growth and denies society potential spaces for intercultural exchange.

In early 2023, Pristina and Belgrade endorsed the EU-facilitated "Agreement on the path to the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia" and its Implementation Annex. However, renewed optimism that the Agreement would contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation was soon tempered by the eruption of violence in northern Kosovo following heightened rhetoric by both parties. The lack of progress in implementing EU-facilitated agreements, coupled with divisive narratives and security incidents[7], continues to shape social attitudes and increase inter-ethnic tensions. There is therefore a pressing need for communities to increase their resilience to the conflict dynamics that surround them. This remains challenging as Kosovo is still highly segregated

[6] GAP Institute (2021). Inclusion of Women, Youth and Non-Majority Communities in the Economic Recovery Package.
https://www.institutigap.org/news/2695#:~:text=According%20to%20an%20OSCE%20assessment,Egyptian%20communities%20is%20around%2075%25

[7] Violent acts against citizens, KFOR troops, law enforcement, and media in the north of Kosovo in late May 2023: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/06/03/statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-kosovo-and-latest-developments/

by ethnicity, with communities mostly living in separate areas[8], receiving segregated services, and having limited daily interactions in public spaces[9]. Social cohesion remains elusive, as conflicting narratives exacerbate divisions. Lack of inter-ethnic trust and discrimination has also fuelled rampant hate speech on social media, particularly along inter-ethnic lines and against women and members of the LGBTQ+ community[10]. There is currently no central-level monitoring of hate speech in social media and no anti-hate speech and human rights education within schools, leaving it often unchecked and viral online and within schools.

Education is fundamental to protecting and advancing the rights of all communities, including the right to receive public education in their own language. This right is yet to be fully attained, as education in minority languages is not yet widely available at all levels of pre-university and university education[11]. Education is a key vehicle for promoting social inclusion and integration, yet a particular feature of Kosovo's post-conflict landscape is that students in different locations follow different education curricula, namely the Kosovo and the Serbian education curricula, which lack inclusive approaches and multi-ethnic perspectives[12]. Additionally, diplomas acquired from the Serbian education system are not automatically recognised by Kosovo institutions. Consequently, graduates of high schools operating in Kosovo under the Serbian system face barriers in accessing higher education at the University of Pristina and similar institutions. In this regard, it is worth noting the recent re-establishment of the Diploma Recognition Commission (supported by IOM), which restarted the process of verification of diplomas issued by the University of Pristina in North Mitrovica. Additionally, the schools do not acknowledge each other, and there is no institutional cooperation or coordination between them, thereby limiting opportunities for interaction between children of different ethnic groups. There are approximately 130 schools that follow the Serbian education curriculum (out of 1,407 pre-university educational institutions in total). There are also "mixed" schools in several municipalities where both the Kosovo and Serbian curricula are offered. However, even within these mixed schools, which share either single or multiple buildings or typically a common schoolyard, interaction remains minimal between students and staff from the two different educational curriculum schools. This limited interaction within a shared space highlights the deep-seated divisions and the challenges in fostering integration and mutual understanding. The dualism of education is among the conflict drivers in Kosovo as it perpetuates existing ethnic divisions and language barriers and fuels segregation among students, teachers,

[8] Ethnic communities in Kosovo, like Bosnians, Turks, and Roma, face challenges in accessing quality education, despite legal provisions that recognise the right to receive public education in one of the official languages or their mother tongue. Issues include outdated textbooks and a shortage of qualified teachers. Education in Serbian is unavailable within Kosovo's institutions, and higher education in Bosnian and Turkish is challenging to access.
[9] Human rights education is incorporated in several human rights instruments that are observed in Kosovo namely Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 26); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (art. 7); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 13); the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (art. 10); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (art. 10); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 29).
[10] UNMIK monitors systematically the prevalence of this harmful phenomenon in social media. According to a hate speech monitoring exercise conducted between July – December 2021, UNMIK observed inter-ethnic hate speech to be the most prevalent source of hate speech in social media fora in Kosovo, with K-Albanian and K-Serbs targeting one another with insulting and deeply degrading language online; homophobia is the second highest source of hate speech in social media in Kosovo. (More reference on http://ilga-europe.org/press-release/trans-intersex-rights-positive-change-rainbow-map/).
[11] Ethnic communities in Kosovo, like Bosnians, Turks, and Roma, face challenges in accessing quality education, despite rights to instruction in their languages; issues include outdated textbooks and a shortage of competent teachers. Education in Serbian is unavailable within Kosovo's institutions, and higher education in Bosnian and Turkish is challenging to access.
[12] Noteworthy is the unique situation of Turkish language schools in areas like Mamusha, Prizren, and Gjilan/Gnjilane, as well as the experiences of minority groups attending Serbian or Albanian schools.

and the broader communities. In addition to the polarisation between the Kosovo-Albanian and Kosovo-Serb communities, the marginalisation of the Kosovo-Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities further contributes to a highly divided society. Schools fall short in adopting inclusive approaches for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children, who continue to face various forms of discrimination from both school staff and fellow students, which significantly impacts their right to access quality and inclusive education[13].

More specifically, children are separated from a young age and are exposed to different historical and political narratives contributing to tense relations between different ethnic groups living in Kosovo. While some degree of political integration has been achieved, social and cultural integration, including at the community level, has remained minimal. Young people are particularly vulnerable to negative stereotypes promoted by the media and fuelled by political discourse as well as their social interactions, including friends, family, and even school. This is particularly evident among young Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian communities. Memories of past conflicts (33 percent) and the influence of older generations (29 percent), such as parents and teachers who have experienced the conflicts and convey their prejudices and mistrust to young people, contribute to existing tense inter-ethnic relations[14]. The legacy of all these factors leads to a persistent distrust between communities and of institutions.

As a result, interaction, dialogue, and collaboration with people of different backgrounds is very limited, with most young people confirming that they know people from other ethnic communities but have no meaningful relationships whatsoever. This is particularly noticeable among Kosovo-Albanians and Kosovo-Serbians who reported that they were less likely to be friends with each other as compared to other ethnic communities[15]. Almost 60 percent of Kosovo-Albanians, 67 percent of Kosovo-Serbs, and 61 percent of other minorities think the current tense relations will either continue or increase[16].

In addressing these issues, young people have emphasised the importance of fostering tolerance and mutual understanding (42 percent), ensuring equitable access to engagement in ongoing political, economic, and social activities (30 percent), engaging in shared initiatives (18 percent), and acquiring familiarity with each other's languages (18 percent)[17]. Such challenges affect all communities on both sides and thus present an opportunity to bring people together around shared concerns and interests. Given that Kosovo has one of the youngest populations in Europe, harnessing the potential of young people and providing them with the opportunities to participate more in decision-making is vital for any long-lasting peace efforts. Youth engagement is important because young people who come from different ethnic backgrounds can challenge ideas and speak up against unjust systems, thereby shaping a more harmonious future.

Language barriers are seen as another major factor hindering reconciliation. Yet policies and tools that promote multilingualism and social cohesion, such as the Law on the Use of Languages[18], are

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Youth challenges and perceptions in Kosovo. UNDP, 2021. Last retrieved on 14 August 2023. https://www.undp.org/kosovo/publications/youth-challenges-and-perspectives-kosovo

[15] Analysis: Social Inclusion in Kosovo. IOM, 2020. Last retrieved on 14 August 2023: https://kosovoteam.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/Social per cent20Inclusion per cent20Assessment per cent20Report-2020_ENG_0.pdf

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Official languages in Kosovo are Albanian and Serbian and adheres to the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Additionally, Bosnian, Turkish, and Romani hold official status or are languages in official use at the municipal level. The law on the use of languages further mandates the compulsory utilisation and preservation of these languages, including within municipalities.

not fully implemented[19]. The use of the Serbian language in official communications is not uniformly honoured, and the quality of translations, especially legal texts, often falls short of the required standard. Compounding these challenges is the lack of qualified translators and a structured training process for them. A survey conducted in June 2023[20] among Serbian speakers revealed that almost 80 percent of respondents experienced difficulties when requesting services in public institutions. This is mainly due to the lack of civil servants fluent in Serbian, limited availability of interpretation services, and lack of documents in the Serbian language. Similarly, municipal websites demonstrate the predominance of Albanian language materials, posing challenges for Serbian language users, as the information is often only partially translated or not provided at all.

1.2.1. Implication of Context on Implementation[21]

The complex socio-political and institutional context in Kosovo significantly shaped the design and implementation of the YESS project. Deep-rooted inter-ethnic divisions, parallel education systems, language barriers and periodic security incidents required a conflict-sensitive and adaptive implementation approach throughout the project lifecycle.

First, ethnic segregation and parallel governance structures, particularly in Serb-majority municipalities and Serbian-curriculum schools, influenced the choice of delivery modalities. Direct inter-ethnic dialogue activities were approached cautiously, with an emphasis on transferable skills (e.g. conflict resolution, critical thinking, mediation, language learning) rather than overt peacebuilding narratives.

Second, language barriers and limited institutional bilingualism affected both participation and outreach strategies. Activities were delivered in Albanian and Serbian, often through separate but parallel formats, and required trusted implementing partners with established access to Serbian-curriculum schools. This shaped partner selection, slowed initial implementation in some municipalities and constrained opportunities for joint activities across curricula.

Third, institutional fragmentation influenced coordination and sustainability prospects. While municipal authorities and education directorates generally supported project activities, their engagement remained largely facilitative rather than programmatic. As a result, YESS emphasised working through schools and civil society partners for implementation or long-term integration.

Fourth, security incidents, political developments and heightened rhetoric during the implementation period periodically disrupted activities, particularly in northern municipalities. These dynamics necessitated flexible scheduling, low-visibility implementation and adjustments in sequencing, including postponement or relocation of activities when tensions escalated.

3.2. About YESS Project (Object of Evaluation)[22]

The project ‘Youth Empowered through Inclusive Schools and Societies’ was funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund and **implemented jointly by UNICEF (as convening agency) and IOM** to address persistent social divisions and marginalisation in Kosovo by leveraging the critical role of schools and communities as platforms for young people’s engagement and empowerment.

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[19] Ombudsperson Annual Report 2021 accessible here: Annual report 2021 – Ombudsperson Institution (oik-rks.org)

[20] An assessment Challenges in implementing the Law on the Use of Languages (2006) in Kosovo and the implications for human rights was conducted by Prof.ass.dr Uranela Demaj within an IOM/UNMIK project.

[21] This analysis draws on evidence presented in Sections 1.2, 4.1, 4.2, and qualitative findings from key informant interviews.

[22] Adapted from the terms of reference for this evaluation, with edits made.

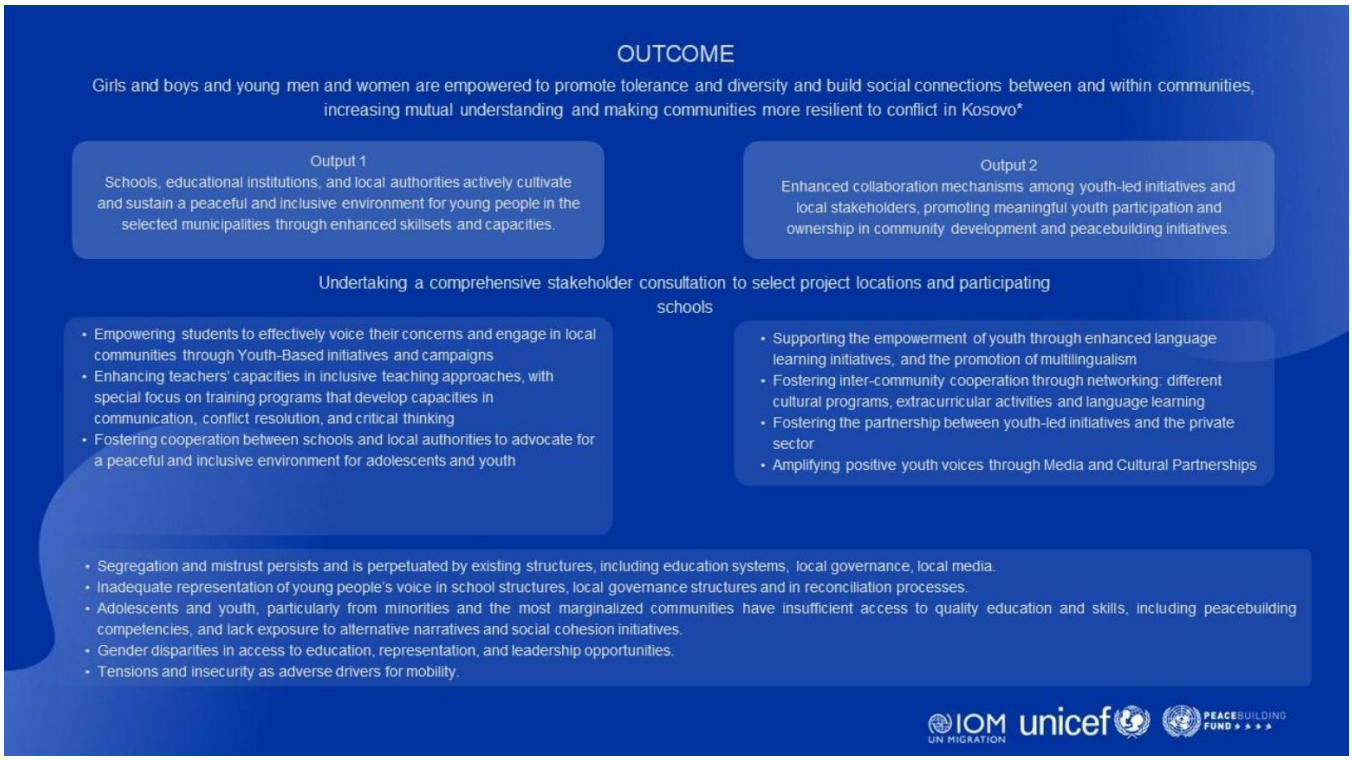
The implementation period of the project was **January 2024 to 9 January 2026**. It had a budget of **USD 2.5 million**. It aimed to contribute to the UNSDCF outcomes 2 and 4 on inclusive social services and promotion of social cohesion as well as to SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Building on the successes and lessons from previous Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) projects in Kosovo and the region, YESS incorporated practices from the Youth for Change and Reconciliation initiative by fostering inter-community dialogue and relationship-building among youth from diverse backgrounds. Its central objective was to empower girls and boys, and young women and men, to become agents of change who promote tolerance, diversity, and social cohesion within and between communities.

The joint project integrated a wide spectrum of formal and non-formal education interventions, youth-led initiatives and capacity-building activities that promoted critical thinking, cooperation and conflict resolution skills. A strong emphasis was placed on inclusive education, the promotion of gender equality, and meaningful youth participation in local governance and media spaces.

The project's **theory of change** (see Figure 1) built on the idea that when young people are equipped with relevant skills and provided with inclusive environments and platforms for engagement, they are more likely to challenge stereotypes and prejudices, engage constructively across ethnic lines, and contribute to more cohesive and peaceful communities. Thus, the project sought to institutionalise inclusive practices in schools and enhance collaboration between youth and local stakeholders. The project was structured around two main outputs.

Figure 1 Theory of Change of YESS project



Output 1: Inclusive Schools and Communities – Strengthening the capacities of schools, educational institutions, and local authorities to foster peaceful, inclusive learning and community environments. Under this output, key interventions focused on empowering the entire school community, including teachers, students, administrators, and local authorities by promoting mutual understanding, respect, and inclusion. The project supported the establishment and strengthening of student councils and peer mediation clubs, developed conflict resolution and critical thinking skills among students, and provided skills-based programs to enhance youth

engagement. It also trained teachers in inclusive education approaches, engaged parents, and supported cooperation between schools and local authorities to foster joint initiatives. These efforts aimed to equip girls and boys with the knowledge, skills, and information needed to engage in constructive dialogue, collaborate effectively, and lead initiatives that would strengthen social cohesion and promote youth participation in policymaking and advocacy, while integrating peacebuilding into the school environment.

Output 2: Youth Participation and Collaboration – Promoting sustainable youth-led initiatives and creating mechanisms for enhanced collaboration between young people and local actors in peacebuilding and community development. Under this output, non-formal education programmes and youth-led activities that fostered collaboration among different communities, universities, the private sector, and the broader community were supported. Youth was empowered through language courses, clubs, summer camps and seminars that aimed to promote multilingualism and improve employability. The project also aimed to foster intercommunity cooperation through networking and support for inter-ethnic youth-led initiatives, build partnerships between these initiatives and the private sector to promote diversity, and amplify positive youth voices through media and cultural partnerships, encouraging inclusive dialogue and strengthening social cohesion.

At the time of evaluation, the project was being **implemented** in the following **municipalities** of Kosovo: Gracanicë/Gračanica; Gjilan/Gnjilane; Kamenicë/Kamenica; Obiliq/Obilić; Mitrovica North; Lipjan/Lipljan; Shtërpce/Štrpce; Prizren/Prizren; Zubin Potok/Zubin Potok; Mitrovica South; and Dragash/Dragas[23]. The project was being implemented in both urban and rural contexts; see Section 3.2.2.1 for details.

Based on the project documents, the evaluation team identified that, in the context of this project, **rightsholders** were children and youth in Kosovo while **duty bearers** were schools, teachers, parents as well as central and local authorities.

As mentioned, the project had two outputs, and it used the **performance results framework** presented in Table 1. The colour scheme used for the status-quo is: green for met/exceeded; purple for not met; and orange for 'questionably met' as this evaluation found irregularities (provided in footnotes). The overall gender balance target[24] was 60% girls and young women, but the evaluation team could not assess whether that was achieved due to incomplete disaggregated data.

Table 1 Project performance results framework

Output indicator	Baseline Value	End-of-Project Target	Results Achieved as of 12 December (green for met/exceeded; purple for not met; orange for questionably met with remarks in footnotes)	
Output 1: Schools, educational institutions, and local authorities actively cultivate and sustain a peaceful and inclusive environment for young people in the selected municipalities.				
1.1.1. Number of student councils established and undertaking activities that involve boys and girls from all representative ethnic groups	0	54	54	24 of which use Serbian curriculum

[23] The Joint Steering Committee requested Dragash/Dragas be included in the project. The request was accepted, and Dragash/Dragas and the participating schools in the municipality were accordingly included in the project.
[24] The project does not have specific gender balance targets for its components. The performance results framework nonetheless states that all participation data should be disaggregated by gender, age, municipality and other factors.

(disaggregated by municipality and education level)				
1.1.2. Number of students (disaggregated by identity, gender) participating in consultation and collaborative processes initiated by the student councils (disaggregated by gender and ethnicity)	0	500	736	Incomplete disaggregated data showed 61% female participated. Data were disaggregated by ethnicity, but the disaggregation showed irregularities.
1.1.3. Number of peer-mediation clubs established and functional	0	50	62[25]	/
1.1.4. Number of students participating in conflict resolution skills training (disaggregated by gender and ethnicity)	0	500	574	Incomplete disaggregated data showed 64% female participated. Data were not disaggregated by ethnicity.
1.1.5. Number of students participating in skills-development programmes (disaggregated by gender, and ethnicity)	0	6,000	5,064	Incomplete disaggregated data showed that 57% female participated and that 37% Albanian, 54% Serbs and 6% others participated.
1.1.6. Number of teachers trained on inclusive teaching approaches (disaggregated by gender and ethnicity)	0	280	644	Incomplete disaggregated data showed that 64% female participated and that 31% Albanian, 64% Serbs and 5% others participated.
1.1.7. Number of teachers who have successfully finished training for facilitators in critical thinking using MovieEQ methodology (disaggregated by gender, age and municipality)	0	120	134	Complete disaggregated data showed that 66% female participated and that 88% Albanian and 12% Serbs participated.
1.1.8. Number of monitoring reports on the implementation on inclusive education developed by students' councils	0	10	10	/
1.1.9. Number of advocacy initiatives/campaigns organized at municipal level by students' councils	0	10	10[26]	/
Output 2: Enhanced collaboration mechanisms among youth-led initiatives and local stakeholders, promoting meaningful youth participation and ownership in community development, social cohesion and peacebuilding initiatives.				
1.2.1. Number of people in language classes supported by the project	0	300	313	Complete disaggregated data showed that 58% female

[25] The evaluation found that peer mediation clubs were not formally established in Serbian-curriculum schools due to contextual constraints specific to working with such schools and the presence of existing school-based violence prevention mechanisms. UNICEF staff clarified that, in view of the constraints, the focus of working with these schools in this regard was to strengthen mediation capacities and embedding peer mediation principles within existing mechanisms. While these constraints and revised focus were established in the first months of the project, the results framework were not modified. With the above considered, the evaluation team was obliged to consider that this number provided by the project team is questionable.

[26] The evaluation could not found evidence of such initiatives/campaigns organised in the Serbian-majority municipalities in the monitoring reports submitted for the Serb-majority municipalities (indicator 1.1.8). By contrast, the 6 reports on participating Albanian-majority municipalities excluding Dragash/Dragaš contained details on such initiatives/campaigns.

(disaggregated by gender, age and ethnicity)				participated and that 30% Albanian, 22% Serbs and 50% others participated.
1.2.2. Number of participants in languages clubs and events which promote multilingualism (disaggregated by gender, age and ethnicity)	0	600	638	Complete disaggregated data showed that 49% female participated and that 25% Albanian, 36% Serbs and 39% others participated.
1.2.3. Number of youths participating in critical thinking training through direct and Tot Mechanism (disaggregated by gender, age and municipality)	0	4,320	4,037	Incomplete disaggregated data showed that 63% female participated.
1.2.4. Percentage of youth who showed improved critical thinking skills (disaggregated by gender, age and municipality)	0	70%	100%	/
1.2.5. Number of young people participating in language camps (disaggregated by gender, age and ethnicity)	0	160	160	Incomplete disaggregated data showed that 48% female participated and that 51% Albanian, 22% Serbs and 28% others participated.
1.2.6. Percentage of participants in grant schemes showing increased positive attitudes towards members of different communities	0	70%	Unknown[27]	/
1.2.7. Number of youths participating in employability skills training (disaggregated by gender, age and municipality)	0	100	107	No disaggregated data provided.
1.2.8. Number of private sector representatives taking part in seminar on diversity and inclusion (disaggregated by gender, municipality and sector)	0	50	51	No disaggregated data provided.
1.2.9. Extent to which private sector representatives incorporate diversity related policies in their work	2	3	3	/
1.2.10. Number of participants in media training that have shown increase in knowledge regarding the use of social media as a tool for inclusivity disaggregated by gender, age and ethnicity)	0	100	101	Complete disaggregated data showed that 57% female participated and that 68% Albanian, 14% Serbs and 18% others participated.
1.2.11. Number of people reached the messaging developed and implemented during the media training (disaggregated by language)	0	10,000	113,310	No disaggregated data provided.

[27] No supporting data were made available to the evaluation team.

3.1.1. Stakeholder Mapping[28]

The YESS project was implemented through a multi-stakeholder partnership model involving UNICEF and IOM, implementing partners, public institutions, schools and private sector actors. While the project documentation refers to these actors throughout the report, this section consolidates and clarifies stakeholder roles, responsibilities, and relationships to strengthen transparency, accountability, and understanding of implementation arrangements.

At the strategic level, **UNICEF and IOM** jointly served as implementing UN agencies under the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), with UNICEF acting as the convening agency. UNICEF led engagement with formal education institutions and child-centred programming (primarily under Output 1), while IOM led non-formal education interventions, youth-led initiatives and private-sector engagement (primarily under Output 2). Both agencies shared responsibility for strategic oversight, coordination, monitoring, and reporting to the donor.

Implementation was carried out through a set of **implementing partners**, each responsible for specific components aligned with their comparative advantages and existing access to schools, communities and youth networks. These partners delivered training, facilitated youth-led initiatives, supported school-based structures and conducted outreach to marginalised communities.

Central-level institutions, including line ministries and relevant public bodies, played an enabling and oversight role, providing policy alignment and legitimacy but with limited operational engagement. **Municipal** authorities and Municipal Education Directorates (MEDs) supported local-level implementation by facilitating access to schools, endorsing activities, and participating in selected coordination and consultation processes.

At the school level, **school management and teachers** functioned as key duty bearers responsible for institutionalising inclusive practices, supporting youth participation and sustaining selected interventions beyond the project lifecycle.

The **private sector** contributed primarily under Output 2 through participation in diversity and inclusion seminars and engagement with youth-led initiatives, supporting employability skills development and awareness of inclusive workplace practices.

Children and young people, as the primary rights-holders, were not only beneficiaries but also active contributors to project outcomes. Through student councils, peer mediation clubs, youth-led initiatives and media activities, they played a central role in shaping interventions, leading community actions and promoting social cohesion.

Table 2 presents a consolidated overview of key stakeholders, their roles, contribution and accountability relationships within the YESS project.

Table 2 Stakeholder mapping

Stakeholder	Primary Roles	Key Contribution	Accountability / Relationships
UNICEF	Convening and implementing UN agency	Strategic leadership; coordination with education institutions; oversight of school-based interventions (primarily under Output 1); coordination of IPs; monitoring and reporting	Accountable to PBF; co-led Joint Steering Committee with IOM
IOM	Implementing UN agency	Oversight of non-formal educational activities, youth-led initiatives, language learning activities and private sector engagement (primarily under Output 2);	Accountable to PBF; co-led Joint Steering Committee with UNICEF

[28] This is based on the Project Document as well as primary qualitative data collected in key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

Stakeholder	Primary Roles	Key Contribution	Accountability / Relationships
		coordination of IPs; monitoring and reporting	
Peacebuilding Fund (PBF)	Donor	Financial support; strategic peacebuilding mandate	Receives narrative and financial reporting from UNICEF and IOM
Joint Steering Committee (JSC)	Governance and oversight	Strategic guidance; review of progress; coordination between agencies	Chaired by UN agencies; advisory and oversight function
Implementing partners (IPs)	Operational implementation	Delivery of project activities, including trainings, youth activities, school-based support and community outreach	Contracted by UNICEF and/or IOM; accountable for results and reporting
Central-level authorities	Legitimacy and facilitation; institutional duty bearers	Strategic guidance; review of progress; high-level facilitation of project activities	Consultative role; limited operational accountability
Municipal authorities / MEDs	Local facilitation and support; institutional duty bearers	Access to schools; coordination at municipal level; participation in consultations	Informal accountability through coordination mechanisms
Schools (management and teachers)	Facilitation; institutional duty bearers	Hosting activities; supporting student councils and peer mediation clubs; applying inclusive teaching practices	Accountable to education authorities; indirect accountability to project
Private sector actors	Enabling partners	Participation in diversity and inclusion seminars; engagement with youth initiatives	Voluntary engagement; no formal accountability
Children and youth	Rights-holders and agents of change	Participation in activities; leaders of initiatives; promotion of social cohesion	Central rights-holders; no formal accountability obligations

2. Evaluation Objectives, Purpose, Scope and Questions

2.1. Purpose, Objectives and Scope

This final project evaluation **assessed the achievements of the project 'Youth Empowered through Inclusive Schools and Societies' (YESS) in an inclusive way and determined its overall added value to peacebuilding in Kosovo**. In assessing the degree to which the project has met its intended peacebuilding outcome, output, objectives and results, the evaluation aims to provides key lessons about successful approaches and operational practices, as well as highlight areas wherein the project performed less effectively than anticipated. The purpose and objectives were set in the evaluation's terms of reference and remained unchanged.

The evaluation serves both **summative** and **formative** functions. As a summative evaluation, it examines the results of the project and addresses accountability requirements[29]. As a formative evaluation, it aims to identify lessons that may inform the planning and implementation of future programming, including those for the Peacebuilding Fund.

As part of the project implementation, a baseline study was conducted in 2024, and its findings served as a reference point to measure the effectiveness and impact of the project by comparing them with the results of the end-line study which was concluded in November 2025 when primary data collection for this evaluation took place. In view of that, this evaluation is equally about accountability as well as learning. This evaluation provides the project management and implementation team with lessons learned, good practices and recommendations to improve the implementation of similar projects.

The evaluation **covered the period of the project implementation** that dated back in 2024 and the full project implementation scope (January 2024 to December 2025), including its programmatic focus and the review of relevant strategies relevant to the project. However, as primary data was collected in November 2025, the very small number of project activities implemented after 25 November 2025 (cut-off date[30]) were not assessed in this case.

The **key intended users**, and their uses, of this evaluation are provided in Table 3.

Table 3 Key intended users, and their uses, of evaluation

Key Intended User	Use(s)
UNICEF and IOM	○ Review results of project and address accountability requirements. ○ Inform decisions on whether to launch a new phase of the YESS project and, if yes, on the planning of the new phase. ○ Improve future planning, programming and operation of their wider work.
Other UN agencies	○ Inform efforts around education, youth participation and peacebuilding.
Central and local authorities involved in the YESS project	○ Review results of projects. ○ Inform policy making and efforts around education, youth participation and peacebuilding.
Peacebuilding Commission	○ Review results of project and address accountability requirements. ○ Add to the wider evidence base of peacebuilding efforts.

[29] Since the evaluation is conducted before the end of the project implementation period (December 2025), it will not be possible for it to fully capture the results achieved. Certain targets may not have been met by the end of the evaluation. It is nonetheless worth noting that there are only a few project activities planned for December 2025.
[30] The window for primary data collection was extended from early November to late-November to allow flexibility. In particular, a language camp was held later than planned due partly to local elections, and an evaluation team member attended the camp and collected data. In addition, several invitees did not respond to multiple invitations from the evaluation team. Please see Table 6 for details.

2.2. Evaluation Questions

The **13 questions** of the final project evaluation are list in Table 4, organised by evaluation criteria. No change was made to the questions by the evaluation team; in other words, the evaluation team accepted the questions provided in the Terms of Reference.

An **evaluation matrix** (see Annex B), with assessment criteria, was developed in the inception phase based on the initial review of project documents and data as well as on the inception interviews with UNICEF and IOM personnel. The assessment criteria in the matrix provide a more granular understanding of the evaluation questions and have been used to structure and guide data collection and analysis.

Table 4 Evaluation questions

Relevance	
1.	How relevant and responsive has the project been to supporting peacebuilding priorities in Kosovo?
2.	To what extent was the project appropriate and strategic to peacebuilding goals and challenges in Kosovo at the time of the project's design? Did relevance continue throughout implementation and did the project have an explicit approach to conflict-sensitivity?
3.	To what extent were the joint project objectives and results informed by evidence?
4.	Did the project's theory of change clearly articulate assumptions about why the project approach is expected to produce the desired change?
Effectiveness	
5.	To what extent have the project results been achieved against the objectives and targets set in the joint project proposal?
6.	To what extent is data generated and field monitoring enabling a systematic determination of results achievement and effectives of the joint project?
7.	Has gender, and other equity measures (minorities, youth with disabilities, those living in rural areas and others) been effectively mainstreamed throughout the project implementation and, if not, how could it be done better? Did girls, boys, women and men equally benefit from the project?
8.	How appropriate and clear was the project's targeting strategy in terms of geographic and beneficiary targeting?
9.	What were the factors that facilitated or hindered the achievement of the intended results of the project?
Sustainability	
10.	Were central and local stakeholders sufficiently consulted and involved throughout the project cycle?
11.	To what extent did the project contribute to the broader strategic outcomes identified in local and centrally owned strategic plans, legislative agendas and policies?
12.	Did the intervention include an appropriate sustainability and exit strategy (including promoting central/local ownership) to support positive changes in peacebuilding after the end of the project?
13.	How strong is the commitment of the authorities and other stakeholders to sustaining the results of PBF support and continuing initiatives?

4. Evaluation Design and Methodology

4.1. Evaluation Approaches

The evaluation employed a **utilisation-focused approach** that was designed and implemented to maximise the utilisation of its findings. It also used a **participatory approach** whereby the evaluation team ensured continued engagement with key intended users of the evaluation to support ownership and usability of the evaluation with a focus on users' needs for decision making. In the inception phase, the evaluation team met with UNICEF and IOM personnel to better understand the project designs and implementation as well as their needs regarding the evaluation. Priorities raised in these inception interviews were used to further focus data collection and analysis.

The evaluation used a **theory-based approach** combined with **contribution analysis** (also see Section 3.2.3) to support a systematic approach to understanding the extent to which and ways in which programme activities have contributed to programming results. The approach was guided by the theory of change of the project (see Section 1.3; no changes were made by the evaluation team) as well as the evaluation matrix (see Annex B) to demonstrate and elaborate on relationships and connectivity between elements of the YESS project. The evaluation team was aware that the **change logic of the project** was not only captured in the theory of change but also elaborated in **narratives** in the Project Document, which have been considered in use of contribution analysis in this evaluation.

The evaluation adhered to the participatory approach throughout all its phases as a key element in **quality assurance**. Regular scheduled consultations within the evaluation team as well as between the team, the manager of the evaluation and the YESS project coordinator were held. The evaluation team leader provided internal quality assurance oversight to the team through review of all deliverables.

Whilst the evaluation was theoretically overseen and supported by the Evaluation Reference Group[31] to ensure its rigour and relevance of findings and analyses at key juncture throughout the process, no meetings were held with the Evaluation Reference Group. This was regrettably outside the evaluation team's control.

4.2. Evaluation Methodology

4.2.1. Data Collection

The evaluation used a **mixed methods approach** to collect qualitative and quantitative data to inform analysis. Data were collected and evidence generated, with the aim to answer the evaluation questions.

The evaluation drew on **secondary data** that included project documents and data as well as the baseline and end-line studies (see Section 3.2.1.1). The evaluation team collected **primary data**

[31] The Joint Steering Committee of the YESS project will act as the Evaluation Reference Group for this evaluation. The Joint Steering Committee is composed of: the Deputy Prime Minister for Minority Issues and Human Rights; the United Nations Development Coordinator; the Head of Office of UNICEF in Kosovo; the Chief of Mission of the IOM in Kosovo; the Minister of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation; the Swedish Ambassador to Kosovo; the Senior Human Rights Officers of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; the Executive Director of the CSO Santa Marija; the Executive Director of the CIVIKOS; and the Youth Reference Group Representative of UNICEF in Kosovo.

using key informant interviews and focus group discussions (see Section 3.2.1.2). The evaluation team planned to collect primary data also using an online survey, which had to be discontinued (see Section 3.2.1.3).

4.2.1.1. Document and Data Review

The evaluation team reviewed the following project documents and data throughout all stages of the evaluation.

- **Project document**: The Project Document; donor reports; and implementing partner reports.
- **Project data**: Pre- and post-tests results; and project monitoring data.
- **Baseline and end-line study reports,** conducted separately by a consulting firm.
- **Other documents and data**: Strategies and relevant policies of Kosovo, including the 'State' Strategy for Youth 2024-2032, Education Strategy 2022-2026, and 'National' Development Strategy and Plan 2030.
- **Relevant UNICEF guidance notes**, such as UNICEF Kosovo Programme 2021-2025, Child and Youth Councils: Guidance to Support Meaningful Participation, UNICEF Peacebuilding Programming Framework, Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement.
- **Relevant IOM strategic document**, such as the IOM Kosovo Strategic Approach (2022-2025) and the IOM Strategic Plan 2024-2028.

4.2.1.2. Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

The evaluation team conducted key informant interviews (**KIIs**) and focus group discussions (**FGDs**) with the following stakeholder groups to collect primary data for the evaluation. Each stakeholder group was assigned a number for easier reference in this document and annexes.

1. FGDs with representatives of student councils
2. FGDs with representatives of peer mediation clubs
3. FGDs with youth organisers of advocacy initiatives and campaigns[32]
4. FGDs/KIIs with participants in: (a) language clubs and events; and (b) language camps
5. KIIs with teachers who received training
6. KIIs with people in the private sector engaged in the project
7. KIIs with municipality representatives
8. KIIs with central level stakeholders
9. KIIs with implementing partner representatives
10. KIIs with UNICEF and IOM personnel

The KIIs and FGDs **did not cover all project components**, for there was limited time and resources to do so. Two components not covered by the KIIs and FGDs were the skills-development programmes (under indicator 1.1.5) and the employability skills training (under indicator 1.2.7), both were of relatively short durations of training. The results achieved by these components were nonetheless assessed using secondary data such as pre- and post-tests and feedback forms available.

The evaluation team **sent invitations** via email to the prospective **adult** interviewees and discussants (stakeholder groups 6 to 10). The Child Rights Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist at UNICEF, the project coordinator and IOM representatives sent emails introducing the evaluation

[32] This stakeholder group referred to those who organised campaigns outside of the student council and peer mediation club structures. The evaluation team understood that support to this stakeholder group was provided by the IOM via 19 local youth-led organisations, also referred to as implementing partners here in this report.

and the evaluation team prior to that. The purposes of the evaluation and the rights of interviewees and discussants were explained in the invitations. While written consent forms were not needed, interviewees' verbal consent were asked for and recorded in the interview.

As for **children, youth participants and teachers in schools** (stakeholder groups 1, 2 and 5), the **invitations** were sent by the project coordinator and the implementing partners to the selected participating schools. For children and youth participants in non-formal education settings (stakeholder groups 3 and 4), the invitations were sent to the prospective discussants directly by the project coordinator and the implementing partners. In both cases, the evaluation team did not have any personal information of these individuals. A document with information on the purposes of the KIIs and FGDs and on the evaluation, together with consent forms, were provided to the project coordinator and the implementing partners; the forms, available in Albanian, English and Serbian, were included in the invitations.

All KIIs and FGDs were **semi-structured**, guided by the evaluation matrix and the project's theory of change. Lasting **30 to 60 minutes**, the KIIs and FGDs served to elaborate on the evaluation evidence gathered through the document and data reviews. Information from KIIs and FGDs deepened understanding of the perspectives from key stakeholders and provide greater nuance to findings. Annexes C1 to C10 provide the data collection tools used in these KIIs and FGDs, with notes to facilitator detailing the intention of questions and with suggested follow-up questions.

KIIs and FGDs were conducted by the Local Consultant in **Albanian** and by the International Consultant in **English** supported by **English-Serbian** interpreters. All but two KIIs and FGDs were **audio-recorded**; the audio recordings were only for the consultants' use and were never shared with UNICEF and IOM. For FGDs with children and youth, no questions about personal information were asked, and the recording only started after discussants introduced themselves to each other. In short, no recording contained personal information. Software packages that auto-transcribe KIIs and FGDs were used to facilitate the production of summaries. All data were saved in password-protected devices and cloud services. See Section 3.2.4 and Annex E for further information regarding data privacy and protection.

All **venues** for data collection were child-friendly, neutral and conducive to open discussion without the presence of teachers or project staff.

4.2.1.3. Online Survey (Discontinued) and End-Line Study

An **online survey** was distributed to all the 54 **student councils** established as part of the YESS project, including those that were sampled for interviews. The survey, available in Albanian, English and Serbian, was distributed by the evaluation team through two implementing partners coordinated by the project's coordinator at UNICEF/IOM.

During a three-week period of data collection, two follow-up reminders were sent after the initial invitations. Only one response was received. After consulting with UNICEF (which managed the evaluation), the evaluation team agreed to **discontinue** the survey. The team respected the choices of student council members and followed ethical guidelines, ensuring participation in the evaluation was completely voluntary.

It is important to note that the **end-line study** (independent of this evaluation) conducted **surveys** with children and young people in 10 participating municipalities (alongside 3 control municipalities and excluding Dragash/Dragaš) one month before the evaluation team distributed its survey. This prior activity may have contributed to the notably low response rate observed. According to the team who conducted the end-line study, around 25% of the respondents to the end-line survey participated in one or more project activities.

Findings drawn from the **end-line study** were considered in this evaluation and used to triangulate the evaluation's findings, particularly those regarding project's results at the community level. It is important to note that the evaluation team identified the following **limitations** in using the findings of the end-line study:

- The evaluation team was not granted access to the raw data from the end-line study, primarily due to data privacy concerns. Additionally, analysing the study's raw data did not fall within the scope of the evaluation team's responsibilities.
- The end-line study included a treatment group comprising the 11 participating municipalities, alongside a control group of 3 additional municipalities. However, it did not distinguish between Albanian-majority and Serb-majority municipalities. This limitation reduced the evaluation's ability to attribute observed changes specifically to project activities, as the implementation of these activities varied between the two contexts.
- The end-line study was designed to measure multi-municipal level changes. Only around 25% of respondents took part in any activities of the YESS project. This limitation also reduced the evaluation's ability to attribute observed changes specifically to project activities.

4.2.2. Sampling

4.2.2.1. Municipality and School Characteristics

The YESS project was implemented in **11 municipalities** representing Kosovo's major linguistic, ethnic, and geographic typologies: Gracanicë/Gračanica, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Kamenicë/Kamenica, Obiliq/Obilić, Mitrovica North, Lipjan/Lipljan, Shtërpce/Štrpce, Prizren/Prizren, Zubin Potok, Mitrovica South, and Dragash/Dragaš.

To ensure a balanced and contextually meaningful sample, municipalities were grouped according to demographic composition, education systems, geographic characteristics and socioeconomic conditions. Municipality selection also considered urban and rural representation, the level of project achievement and implementation challenges, and inclusion of areas with significant minority populations. This combination ensured that the evaluation captured variation in both contextual factors and project performance across Kosovo.

Within these municipalities, school selection was guided by diversity in curriculum (Albanian/Serbian), geographic setting (urban/rural), level of functionality and activity of student structures, and socioeconomic variation among schools. Approximately 44 percent of the sample for student councils, peer mediation clubs, youth advocacy groups and language activities will be drawn from schools following the Serbian curriculum, mirroring their projected share among project beneficiaries.[33] The sample also includes schools with differing levels of implementation progress. This ensures that the sampling framework reflects the full range of operational contexts in which the project has been implemented and supports comparative analysis of factors influencing effectiveness and inclusivity.

The evaluation team placed the 11 participating municipalities into **3 groups**:

1. **Serb-majority municipalities**: Mitrovica North, Zubin Potok, Shtërpce/Štrpce, Gracanicë/Gračanica. These municipalities operated largely under the Serbian education system, with parallel institutional structures and limited cross-community cooperation. Their inclusion allowed the evaluation to examine how YESS interventions performed in complex administrative and political environments and whether activities effectively promoted inter-ethnic collaboration.

[33] Projected share, in lieu of actual share, of beneficiaries was used because the evaluation team only received disaggregated participation data one month after primary data collection.

2. **Albanian-majority and mixed municipalities**: Gjilan/Gnjilane, Lipjan/Lipljan, Obiliq/Obilić, Mitrovica South, and Prizren/Prizren. These localities had greater inter-ethnic contact and a mix of socioeconomic profiles. They offered insights into how inclusive education and youth participation mechanisms functioned in more integrated, urban or semi-urban contexts.
3. **Peripheral and rural municipalities**: Dragash/Dragaš[34], Kamenicë/Kamenica. These represented geographically more isolated areas with multi-ethnic populations (Albanian, Gorani, and Serbian). Their participation in the sample enabled analysis of accessibility, participation barriers, and adaptation of project modalities in less resourced and rural settings.

The evaluation team proposed the following 6 municipalities (in Table 5) for primary data collection, which was completed as planned. The sample size for collecting primary data was set based on available resources and approved by UNICEF and IOM.

Table 5 Municipality selection

Group 1: Serb-majority municipalities	Group 2: Albanian-majority and mixed municipalities	Group 3: Peripheral and rural municipality
Gracanicë/Gračanica Mitrovica North	Prizren/Prizren Lipjan/Lipljan Obiliq/Obilić	Kamenicë/Kamenica

4.2.2.2. Achieved Sample

The evaluation applied a **purposive stratified sampling strategy** to guarantee representation of all stakeholder groups and ensure meaningful participation of different beneficiary types, genders, and ethnicities. The sampling design presented in Table 6 is guided by the following principles:

- **Inclusiveness and representativeness**: Capturing the diversity of beneficiaries by curriculum type, geography, gender and ethnicity.
- **Comprehensiveness**: Covering 6 municipalities as a representative sample, ensuring sufficient diversity of contexts and stakeholder perspectives while still allowing for deep engagement, rigorous data collection, and a manageable scope within the available resources.
- **Variation in implementation contexts**: Including schools and youth groups with different levels of engagement and maturity.
- **Ethical and logistical feasibility**: Ensuring accessibility, informed consent and safe data collection conditions for all participants.

[34] Please note that Dragash/Dragaš is officially an Albanian-majority municipality yet with a sizeable Gorani population. In the performance results framework, Dragash/Dragaš did not have municipal-level activities for indicators 1.1.8 and 1.1.9 like other participating Albanian-majority municipalities because it was added to the project later in the process following recommendations made by the Joint Steering Committee. In this report, the phrase '6 participating Albanian-majority municipalities' is used, and that does not include Dragash/Dragaš.

Table 6 Planned and actual samples

Data Collection Tool and Stakeholder	Population Size[35]	Intended Sample Size[36]	Actual Sample Size	Remarks
1. FGDs with representatives of student councils	54 student councils	12 FGDs (36 to 48 participants)	9 FGDs (30 participants, 22 of which females)	One school in an Albanian-majority municipality did not respond to multiple follow-ups, despite initial acceptance.
2. FGDs with student representatives of peer mediation clubs	54 peer mediation clubs	12 FGDs (36 to 48 participants)	9 FGDs (39 participants, 28 of which females)	
3. FGDs with youth organisers of advocacy initiatives and campaigns (IOM)	27 youth-led activities	2 FGDs (6 to 8 participants) (remote)	2 FGDs (8 participants, 7 of which females)	/
4. FGDs/KIIs with participants in: (a) language clubs and events; and (b) language camps	(a) 303 (b) 80	(a) 2 FGDs (6 to 8 participants) (remote) or 3 KIIs (remote) (b) 3 FGDs (9 to 12 participants)[37]	(a) 4 one-to-one KIIs (3 of which females) (b) 3 FGDs (12 participants, 6 of which females)	Language clubs and events participants were interviewed remotely, and KII was chosen as the modality given the timetabling challenges.
5. KIIs with teachers who received training on: (a) inclusive teaching approaches; and (b) critical thinking; and (c) teachers who are in peer mediation clubs	(a) 466 teachers (b) 118 teachers (c) 216 teachers	(a+b) 12-24 KIIs (c) 12 KIIs	13 one-to-one KIIs and 2 FGDs (in total 18 individuals, 16 of which females)	Many teachers received more than one kind of training (hence no differentiation), and schools oversaw notifying teachers to take part.
6. KIIs with people in the private sector engaged in the project	50 individuals	4 KIIs (remote)	3 KIIs (of which 1 female; all conducted remotely)	/
7. KIIs with municipality representatives	11 participating municipalities	8 KIIs	3 KIIs (0 of which female)	Multiple invitations were sent and responded[38].
8. KIIs with central level stakeholders	N/A	3 KIIs	1 KII (female)	Multiple invitations were sent and responded.
9. KIIs with implementing partner (IP) representatives	8 implementing partners[39]	8 KIIs	9 KIIs (3 of which females)	1 IP had 2 one-to-one KIIs.
10. KIIs with UNICEF and IOM personnel	N/A	5 KIIs	3 KIIs (all females)	An inception interview was conducted with 1 other UNICEF staff member
		148 to 191 people in total	131 individuals (92 of which females)	

[35] As of October 2025. At the time when this inception report was developed, some activities were ongoing while some have not started.
[36] Primary data are to be collected in person unless specified otherwise.
[37] This will take place in person in a language camp.
[38] The evaluation coincided with local elections, affecting the availability of municipality representatives for key informant interviews.
[39] The implementing partners are: Domovik; Kosovo Education Centre (KEC); Kosovar Youth Council (KYC); LENS; CSI, ACDC, Kosovo Chamber of Commerce; and Democracy Plus.

4.2.2.3. Rationale and Integration

The selected sample allowed the evaluation to assess the project's performance across differing social and institutional realities – from parallel education systems in the north to more integrated communities in central and southern Kosovo. It also facilitated triangulation between qualitative and quantitative data, enabling the analysis of behavioural and perceptual outcomes among participants.

4.2.3. Data Analysis

Data collected in this evaluation were analysed using the approach of **contribution analysis**[40] guided by the evaluation matrix and the project's theory of change, which illustrates possible result chains. Data collected were analysed to assess the strength of links in the result chains and build an understanding of why and how the observed results were achieved.

Primary qualitative data collected (i.e., KIIs and FGDs data) were processed into **summaries**. The summaries were then be **coded** by the evaluation team on a spreadsheet using a coding scheme based on the evaluation matrix. The spreadsheet was only available to the evaluation team and not shared with UNICEF and IOM. Qualitative and quantitative evidence from primary and secondary sources were combined to allow for **triangulation** to validate findings and assess strength of evidence.

The evaluation team conducted an internal **consolidation** workshop to draw up preliminary findings, which were then **presented** to the management of UNICEF and IOM on 18 November 2025 and to the implementation teams at UNICEF and IOM on 25 November 2025. Feedback and clarifications collected were used to inform the writing of this report.

In this evaluation, artificial intelligence (**AI**) was used in: (a) auto-transcribing audio-recordings using on-device AI; and (b) generating meta-summaries of the summaries entered manually by the evaluation team. The meta-summaries were only used to prompt the evaluation team to fully consider the evidence, minimising possible biases in judgement. The evaluation team can confirm that no AI-generated summaries or texts were included in this report. The summaries used on Perplexity, the AI platform used, were de-identified and never shared to train AI models.

4.2.4. Ethical Considerations

The evaluation was conducted in full accordance with the following international and regional **guidelines for research ethics and methods and personal data protection**: UNICEF Procedures on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis; UNICEF Strategic Guidance Note on Institutionalizing Ethical Practice for UNICEF Research; UNEG's Code of Conduct for Evaluations in the UN System, and UNEG's Guidance on Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation; and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), a regional law of the European Union (EU) requiring institutions to protect personal data and the privacy of EU citizens inside and outside of the EU. Also, this is a rights-based evaluation, with the Convention on the Rights of the Child observed.

[40] The advantages of this approach are that: (a) it can be used to make causal inferences when experimental and quasi-experimental designs are not possible; (b) it explores why and how the project has influenced change; (c) it addresses cases where there are numerous causal factors at work by assessing contributory cases leading to credible contribution claims. The conclusion of a contribution analysis is not necessarily a definitive proof, rather it provides evidence of a line of reasoning that the project has contributed to its observed results.

As the data collection involved working with children (i.e., those aged under 18 years), an **ethical review** was conducted by an independent body. An approval was issued on 3 November 2025 (see Annex F).

The evaluation design took into consideration how ethical concerns shall be addressed to avoid stigma, discrimination, any form of harm to children and their parents, protection of confidentiality, protection of rights, ensuring the dignity and welfare of all respondents.

The evaluation team confirmed that its two members (one International Consultant and one Local Consultant) were impartial and had no conflict of interest. The evaluation team adhered to the following principles: (a) do no harm; (b) protection of rights of children and young people; (c) ensure safety and accessibility to all participants; (d) consider welfare and wellbeing of participants; (e) preserve dignity of participants; (f) fair representation; and (g) ensure data privacy and protection.

Please see Annex E for a more detailed statement on ethical considerations.

4.3. Limitations

Table 7 provides a list of **limitations** of the evaluation; **mitigation** adopted is presented in the column of the right.

Table 7 Limitations and mitigation

Limitations	Mitigation
Due to time and resource constraints, it was not plausible for the evaluation to collect primary data for assessing all project components.	The components that were not assessed using primary data were assessed using secondary data available, such as pre- and post-tests and feedback forms. All project components were assessed using this mitigation.
Political uncertainties remained in Kosovo, a small number of municipality authority representatives and schools declined to participate in this evaluation (reported in previous section on sample).	The evaluation team worked closely with the project team to arrange KIIs as early as possible. There were fewer declinations than expected. The evaluation team adhered to the ethical considerations and respected invitees' choices. As a result, the limitation had no significant implication on the evaluation.
The evaluation relied on monitoring data collected by the project team and implementing partners being accurate and valid.	The evaluation team used primary data and other sources of secondary data for triangulation. Any incoherence found has been documented in this report.
The sample for KIIs and FGDs may be biased, as the project team and implementing partners had some control over selection of individuals.	The sampling strategy of this evaluation was devised independently of the project team and implementation partners, with clear selection criteria. Also, the evaluation team used primary data and other sources of secondary data for triangulation. Biases therefore have been kept to a minimum.
There were known issues with pre- and post-activity test data and with baseline and end-line studies. For the former, implementing partners did not use identical tests. In the case of the latter, the evaluation team had reservation over the extent to which the project could change community-level attitudes and perceptions, which the studies aimed to measure – see Section 3.2.1.3 for limitations identified.	Regarding pre- and post-activity tests, the evaluation team used primary data and other sources of secondary data for triangulation. This has allowed the team to sufficiently answer the evaluation questions. As for the baseline and end-line studies, the evaluation team fairly presented their findings that were most relevant to this evaluation. Whenever possible, the report stated the limitations on the extent to which the changes measured could be attributed to project activities. Also, the evaluation team used other data sources to triangulate such findings. The findings, as a result, are well supported by multiple sources of data.

5. Evaluation Findings

5.1. Relevance

> Finding 1: The project was appropriate and strategic to approaching peacebuilding goals and addressing challenges in Kosovo when the project was designed. It had an explicit approach to conflict-sensitivity, and its objectives and results were sufficiently informed by evidence. However, the strategic connections between Project Outputs were not consistently understood by members of the project team and implementing partners. (Responding to EQ2 and EQ3)

The YESS project was appropriate and strategic to approaching peacebuilding goals and addressing challenges in Kosovo when the project was designed, and the project objectives and results were informed by evidence. The conflict analysis conducted in the design phase of the project was comprehensive and based on ample evidence (see this report's Section 1.2 on context). It foregrounded the challenges that deep-rooted ethnic tensions brought and addressed a wide range of factors[41] that have been critical to building peace. Moreover, the analysis examined how not only ethnicity but also gender, religion, rural contexts and disabilities had an impact on social cohesion and peacebuilding. The baseline study undertaken and consultation conducted with stakeholders also helped to ensure that the project was appropriate and strategic.

The project was designed to strategically address a wide range of factors in approaching peacebuilding goals. The Project Document and the design of the project and its performance monitoring framework put together activities in schools (i.e., formal education settings) and outside schools in communities (i.e., non-formal education settings). The activities were diverse, covering those on: student councils/parliaments, peer mediation clubs and their relevant training; training on inclusive teaching and critical thinking; language learning; employability skills and private sector engagement; and media training and campaigns. This setup carefully considered the parallel education structures in Kosovo and aptly capitalised on the strengths of UNICEF in working with schools and those of IOM in implementing activities in communities.

The project had an explicit approach to conflict-sensitivity that was reflected in its focus on transferrable skills training and language learning. Informants from the project team and implementing partners fully agreed that the operational context of Kosovo necessitated extra caution in communicating project goals with some of the stakeholders, like the authorities, schools and parents. The 'framing' of the project activities and the careful management of their exposure and publicity, according to the informants, have helped the project to stay non-politicised, and thus not interrupted by political forces, while achieving its goals.

The project's approach to conflict-sensitivity could also be seen in its meaningful engagement of children and young people of Serbian communities and Serbian-curriculum schools in Kosovo. The project succeeded in implementing training and carrying out activities in 24 schools that use the Serbian curriculum, despite some challenges in the early stages of the project. The longstanding working relationship that the schools had with an implementing partner of UNICEF was a major factor contributing to the success. The implementing partner, which according to its senior staff is the only organisation that could work directly with 'Serbian schools in Kosovo', also ensured that schools were included in reviewing project activities and training materials.

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[41] These factors included: (a) segregated communities and lack of interactions between ethnic groups; (b) negative historical and political narratives; (c) language barriers; (d) low levels of trust in societal institutions; (e) gender disparities and stereotypes; (f) quality of education; and (g) job market opportunities for young people.

Outside of schools and in the non-formal education settings, the project provided opportunities in 4 Serb-majority municipalities (among 7 others), where children and young people from all communities could learn, interact and gain shared experience together.

As mentioned above, the project strategically implemented activities both in and outside schools under Output 1 and Output 2 respectively.[42] The Project Document notes that activities under Output 2 (i.e., primarily those in non-formal education settings) can 'complement the capacity development and workshops taking place inside the school [sic]' (p.22). However, interviews with staff from UNICEF, IOM and implementing partners revealed that **the strategic links between the Outputs were not consistently clear to them, leading to varying interpretations of how the Outputs complement each other**. More specifically, it remained unclear whether and how children and young people who participated in project activities in schools could benefit from also taking part in project activities outside schools, and vice versa.

Notably, **the activities under Output 2 were less strategically connected,** and the Output involved a large number of implementing partners.[43] Evidence suggests that some implementing partners had little to no knowledge about other project activities that were taking place in communities and schools in the participating municipalities, and it could be infer that children and young people would not have known from the organisers about other project activities.[44] By contrast, Output 1 activities, implemented by 5 partners, benefited from the fact that schools acted as a common ground for various activities to maximise the strategic connections between activities.

> Finding 2: The project was to a large extent relevant and responsive to supporting peacebuilding priorities in Kosovo. Evidence suggests that most project activities have met the children's and young people's needs and have developed their skills that could support peacebuilding priorities. The relevance continued throughout the implementation, despite challenges in the operational context. (Responding to EQ1 and EQ2)

Most project activities were relevant to children and young people and have met their needs. In the interviews conducted for this evaluation (which covered not all but key project components; see Table 8), project activities were consistently described as very relevant. According to interview data, activities, including training sessions, combined theoretical understanding with practical skills as well as real-life examples; trainers/organisers of multiple implementing partners were highly commended for their capabilities to engage participants and for their use of learning exercises like role-play and group discussions.

More specifically, student members of peer mediation clubs felt what they learnt in the training (e.g., types of bullying including cyberbullying, conflict resolution, active listening, effective communication) was relevant not only to their roles as club members but also to them on a personal basis. Teachers who received training agreed the topics covered (e.g., inclusion, child rights, prejudice reduction, empathy) helped them better understand their students and inform teacher-

[42]Output 1 primarily contains activities in schools and is mainly delivered by UNICEF and its implementing partners. Output 2 primarily contains activities outside schools and in communities and is mainly delivered by IOM and its implementing partners. The two Outputs, however, are not entirely separate: some indicators (e.g., Indicator 1.2.3) under Output 2 are implemented in schools.

[43] There were 1 implementing partner for language classes and camps, 1 for youth/language camps, 1 for employability-related activities, 1 for media training and campaigns, and 19 local organisations for the grant scheme, in addition to IOM who conducted training directly in schools that use the Kosovo curriculum while an implementing partner did so in schools that use the Serbian curriculum.

[44] Due to data privacy concerns, it was difficult to establish from participation data the proportion of children and young people who have taken part in more than one activity of the project.

student interactions. Language camp participants appreciated the opportunities to learn a new language (either Albanian or Serbian) and to interact with young people from other communities. Interviewees who attended language classes, clubs and events felt that learning a new language was relevant to them, as they could use it in their daily lives in Kosovo.

Monitoring data submitted by implementing partners corroborated the finding (see Table 8). Please note that not all implementing partners asked questions on relevance, in addition to the requirement of asking pre- and post-activity assessment questions.

Table 8 Relevance of project activities according to interview and monitoring data

Project Activity (and Corresponding Indicators)	Participants Confirming in KIIs/FGDs Activities' Relevance to them	Monitoring Data Confirming Relevance to participants[45]	Remarks on Monitoring Data
Student councils (1.1.1)	Yes	Not available	/
Peer mediation clubs and conflict resolution skills training (1.1.2, 1.1.4)	Yes	Partly	96% of respondents (students) in schools that use Serbian curriculum rated relevant
Skills-development programmes in schools (1.1.5)	Not covered	Not available	/
Training for teachers[46] on inclusive teaching approaches and that using MovieEQ methodology (1.1.6, 1.1.7)	Yes	Not available	/
Language camps (1.2.5)	Yes	Not available	/
Language classes, clubs and events (1.2.1, 1.2.2)	Yes	Not available	/
Critical thinking training (1.2.3)	Not covered	Not available	/
Employability skills training (1.2.7)	Yes[47]	Not available	/
Seminars for private sector (1.2.8)	Yes	Yes	89% of respondents rated 'relevant and useful'
Media training (1.2.9)	Not covered	Yes	43% of respondents (youth) rated 'extremely useful'; 37% 'very useful', and 19% 'useful'

While project activities were relevant to participants, their relevance to supporting peacebuilding priorities needs to be considered with the assumption that the knowledge and skills covered can contribute to building peace. This assumption for most project components can be ascertained. For instance, peer mediation clubs, training for teachers, language camps, language classes/clubs/events and media training all have clear connections to enhance social cohesion and building peace. Some components, such as student council and employability skills training, had

[45] Implementing partners were not required to provide feedback on relevance. The 'not available' status simply means no data was collected; it doesn't suggest any neglect of implementing partners regarding the components.
[46] The two kinds of teacher training are reported together here because, as interviews indicated that some teachers attended more than one kind of training.
[47] The interviews for this component were conducted with private sector representatives, who contributed to the training for youth and agreed, based on their observation, that the training was relevant to young people. No interview was conducted with participating youth.

less of a direct connection to building peace (also see Section 4.2.1). Therefore, with all its activities considered together, **the project was largely relevant and responsive to supporting peacebuilding priorities in Kosovo**.

The project's relevance was maintained throughout its implementation period, despite numerous challenges within the operational environment. Project documentation and key informant interviews with project staff highlighted varied levels of engagement from local institutions and authorities, with some expressing reservations regarding the project's long-term objectives. Additionally, collaborating with Serbian-curriculum schools and Serbian communities in Kosovo necessitated dedicated efforts to establish trust. Political developments, as well as their portrayal in the media, were noted by key informants as significant external challenges.

> Finding 3: The project's theory of change has described how its approach and most of its components were expected to produce the desired change, but the underlying assumptions for inducing a change were scattered. (Responding to EQ4)

The project's theory of change (ToC) has described how its approach and most of its components were expected to produce the desired change. Regarding in-school components, the ToC clearly illustrates that students would be empowered to effectively voice their concerns, contribute to solutions and engage in local communities through youth-based initiatives and campaigns. It also states that teachers' capacities in inclusive teaching approaches would be enhanced, with a focus on training programmes that would develop capacities in communication, conflict resolution, critical thinking, human rights and respect for diversity.

For Output 2 (primarily outside schools), the ToC was mostly clear. For instance, it describes that youth would be empowered through enhanced language learning initiatives and promotion of multiculturalism. It also states that language camps would be an effective platform for fostering social cohesion, mutual support and long-lasting relations. Media and cultural partnerships were described with clarity. The descriptions of activities related to employability (and private sector engagement) and youth-led activities (see Project Document pp.26-27) appeared to be broad-brushed and less clear in regards their connections to building peace. Some project staff interviewed expressed that, while these components were valuable, they felt less coherent with others.

Although the project's theory of change was clear in general, **its assumptions were scattered in various narratives in the Project Document**. There is neither a clear list of assumptions in the visualisation of the ToC (see Figure 1 on p.15 of the report) nor a section on assumptions.

3.3. Effectiveness[48]

5.1.1. Effectiveness of Output 1 Activities[49]

> Finding 4a: Most project objectives and targets under Output 1, focusing on formal education settings, have been achieved. The peer mediation clubs and their related

[48] Please refer to Table 1 on page 12 of this report for the results achieved according to the performance monitoring framework.

[49] Please note that this section contains findings of effectiveness of teacher training that used the MovieEQ methodology and of the subsequent workshops organised by trained teachers to their students. Although these activities were implemented in schools, the project performance monitoring framework placed them under Output 2 because they were within the remit of IOM.

training and support produced the most significant results, as many clubs successfully resolved school conflicts and, with student councils, fostered inclusive environments. Other trainings for teacher and workshops for student enhanced participants' knowledge and provided positive learning experience at scale, and there is evidence of teachers using the knowledge and skills learned in informing their teaching. (Responding to EQ5)

Evidence across pre-and-post assessments, end-line study and qualitative data from KIIs and FGDs indicates that activities conducted in formal education settings under Output 1 generated substantial learning gains and contributed to improving school-level practices related to communication, collaboration and conflict resolution.

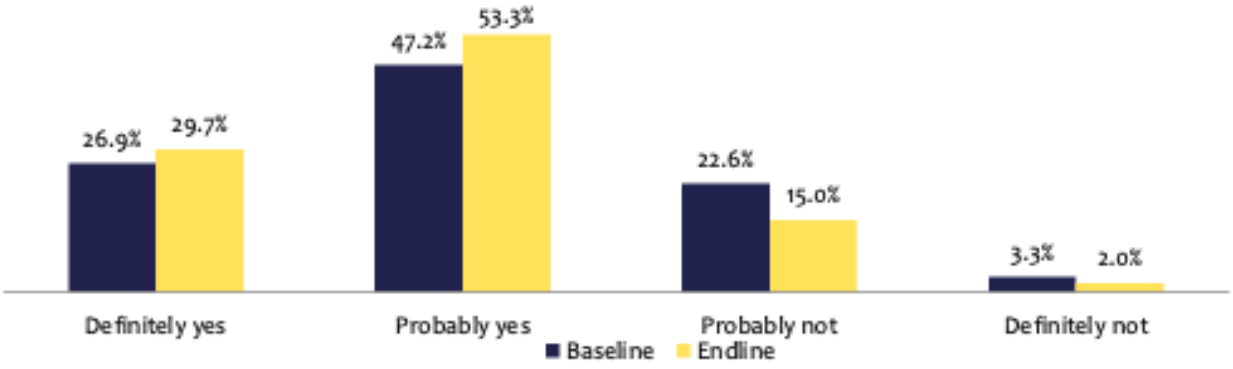
The most consistently strong results stemmed from the peer mediation component, where both students and teachers reported that the training and subsequent club activities had a direct impact on reducing tensions, promoting dialogue and equipping young people with practical tools to manage disputes constructively.

Pre- and post-training self-assessment data show substantial learning gains among students who participated in peer mediation training. Across the 7 participating Albanian-majority municipalities where assessments were conducted, average pre-test scores ranged between 16 and 41 percent, while post-test scores reached between 95 and 98 percent, demonstrating increases in knowledge and confidence related to mediation processes, empathy and constructive conflict engagement.

Qualitative findings from KIIs and FGDs conducted during the evaluation corroborate these results. Students described the training sessions as highly interactive, reporting that they enjoyed the role-play and other practical exercises and felt better equipped to support peers during conflicts. Teachers similarly emphasised that the training provided students with practical tools to de-escalate disputes and contributed to a calmer and more cooperative atmosphere in the school environment.

In many Kosovo-curriculum schools, mediation clubs became functional structures, with students reporting the successful resolution of cases and teachers highlighting calmer interactions and increased peer responsibility. These findings align with broader end-line survey evidence showing that young people became significantly more willing to intervene when witnessing unfair or discriminatory statements about other ethnic groups, with a notable increase since the baseline (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Survey results from end-line study on 'would you speak up if you heard someone saying something unfair about another ethnic group?'



Teacher training activities under Output 1 were also effective in improving teacher competencies related to inclusive and supportive classroom practices. Pre- and post-test data from 267 teachers across multiple municipalities demonstrate learning gains, with average improvements of approximately 12 to 24 percentage points across locations, and an overall increase from 66.8% to 83.7% in assessed knowledge.

Teachers participating in KIIs noted that the training was well structured and engaging, highlighting strengthened understanding of communication, conflict management, human rights and respect for diversity. Many emphasised that the materials were clear and applicable, and several expressed the need for refresher training given the relevance of the content to ongoing school challenges. The training also contributed to improved teacher confidence in facilitating discussions on sensitive topics. However, a recurrent message from interviews was that more educators within the same school should be trained to ensure consistent application of skills and to prevent reliance on a small number of trained staff.

Teachers who received training using the **MovieEQ methodology,** developed by IOM, organised workshops for more than 4,000 students. (Although these activities were conducted in school, they were placed under Output 2.) The pre- and post-workshop test data show that 100% of youth who completed both tests (with 813 completed pre/post pairs) showed improved critical thinking skills, with an average increase of 62%. The monitoring report submitted by IOM states that this reflected a measurable enhancement in critical thinking and reflective reasoning skills.

Skills-based trainings delivered to students aged 13 to 14 contributed to positive learning and attitudinal change at school level and reached a large cohort (2,960 students in Kosovo-curriculum schools and 2,400 in Serbian-curriculum schools) of lower secondary students across the targeted municipalities. While no standalone pre- and post-testing was conducted for this age group, qualitative findings from KIIs with the responsible implementing partners indicate that participating students reported increased confidence in expressing their views and greater awareness of others' perspectives.[50]

For older students aged 15–18, **thematic workshops and youth-led initiatives** were implemented at a more focused but intensive scale (630 students). Pre- and post-activity test data from participants across 7 participating Albanian-majority municipalities show an average 8 percentage-point increase in knowledge related to peacebuilding, tolerance and gender equality. Also, KIIs with responsible implementing partners indicating increased motivation and confidence among participants to engage in youth-led initiatives and community-level peacebuilding activities.

The thematic sessions delivered to student council members in schools, also contributed to measurable knowledge and attitudinal change. Pre- and post-assessment data for these participants show improvements of 14 to 22 percentage points across areas such as civic participation, empathy, media literacy, and diversity, indicating strengthened understanding of non-discrimination and cooperative problem-solving within these student leadership structures.

Qualitative findings from KIIs and FGDs similarly indicate that students valued these learning experiences, describing increased confidence in expressing their views, greater awareness of others' perspectives, and a stronger sense of responsibility in contributing to a respectful school climate. These training outcomes are consistent with end-line study findings, which show that young people increasingly perceive their communities as supportive of youth-led action and feel more encouraged by family, peers, teachers, and online networks to engage constructively in local issues (see Figure 4 on page 39).

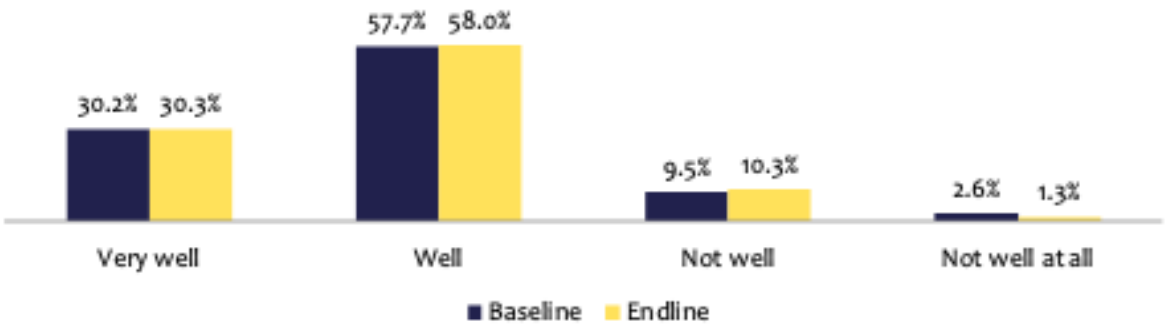
Despite these strong results, the evidence also highlights some limitations. **While peer mediation clubs were highly functional and impactful in Kosovo-curriculum schools, similar structures could not be established in Serbian-curriculum schools due to contextual constraints and**

[50] One implementing partner for Kosovo-curriculum schools and another for Serbian-curriculum schools. The evaluation did not conduct FGDs with students who took part in these trainings, as it had to prioritise activities with higher levels of input from the project.

existing violence-prevention mechanisms.[51] In these contexts, students applied mediation skills informally, mainly with their friends and families, rather than through a formal school-based mechanism.[52]

It is worth noting that **students in the participating municipalities[53] viewed their schools positively in how they taught about respect and understanding for different cultures and backgrounds and that the positive perceptions have maintained over the project's implementation period** (see Figure 3), indicating a supportive environment for conducting Output 1 activities. Although it is accurate that: (a) Output 1 aimed to empower schools to foster a culture of mutual understanding, respect and inclusion[54] and that (b) the measurable change in this regard was limited, it can be argued that baseline perceptions were already highly positive, making significant further improvement unlikely. Readers are also reminded that: (a) only around 25% of the end-line survey respondents took part in project activities and that (b) the proportion of respondents in participating schools remained unknown to the evaluation team.

Figure 3 Survey results from end-line study on 'how well does your school teach students to respect and understand different cultures and backgrounds?'



Finding 4b: Support provided to student councils[55] generated some outcomes, though their link to peacebuilding was often indirect. While the student councils of Kosovo-curriculum schools have organised events to engage the wider communities, evidence of them being led by young people was inconclusive. The support for student councils of Serbian-curriculum schools has yielded limited results, due mainly to contextual constraints. Municipal-level student councils activities appeared to have contributed to positive changes in communities. (Responding to EQ5)

[51] The 'violence prevention' mechanism was frequently mentioned by teachers in Serbian-curriculum schools interviewed for this evaluation. In August 2023, a set of amendments to education laws regarding the prevention of violence in schools was adopted following the May 2023 school shooting in Belgrade. In 2024, by-laws were amended to clarify staff responsibilities, detailed intervention steps and defined procedures for schools in crisis situations.

[52] Given the contextual constraints and that there were existing violence prevention mechanism in Serbian-curriculum schools, UNICEF staff informed the evaluation team that the focus of peer mediation workshops/training was on strengthening mediation capacities of school staff and students as well as on embedding mediation principles in existing structures.

[53] Excluding Dragash/Dragaš, which was added to the project at a later stage and thus not covered by the baseline and end-line studies.

[54] According to pages 22 to 24 of the Project Document.

[55] In Serbian-curriculum schools, student councils are referred to as student parliaments. This report uses the term 'student councils' in the main text to refer to the structures in both systems.

In many Kosovo-curriculum schools, student councils successfully organised cultural, social and awareness-raising events that improved school engagement and fostered a sense of inclusion among students. Students expressed in FGDs that they valued the opportunity to plan and coordinate activities and felt that participation increased their confidence, communication abilities, and visibility within the school. Teachers likewise noted that council structures offered a constructive space for student voices, helping to strengthen school-student dialogue on issues of everyday relevance.

Also, pre- and post-activity assessment data suggest that student council members enhanced their understanding of inclusive values, non-discrimination and constructive engagement, strengthening the foundational skills that can support more participatory and respectful school environments (already reported under finding 4a).

Despite this, **most student council activities tended to respond to school requests or logistical needs[56] rather than address themes directly tied to social cohesion, dialogue or inter-ethnic understanding**. This limited their potential to drive youth-led, peace-oriented change within their schools. As a result, the peacebuilding contribution of these efforts was generally indirect, emerging more from improved student agency and participation than from explicit engagement with conflict-sensitive topics.

In Serbian-curriculum schools, the results from support to school councils were relatively less tangible. Evidence shows that while councils were established and functional to some extent, their activities were closely tied to school-determined priorities, and the support mechanism faced contextual barriers that reduced its effectiveness. FGDs conducted during the evaluation highlight that the overall structure of school governance limited the scope for student-driven initiatives. Teachers and school staff noted that council involvement focused on supporting existing school activities or addressing administrative needs rather than fostering meaningful student agency or engaging with peace-relevant themes.

Collaboration between Serbian-curriculum school student councils and peer mediation structures, which could have reinforced student leadership and contributed to more coherent peacebuilding outcomes, was absent because peer mediation clubs were not formally established. As a result, while some benefits were observed in terms of communication and organisational skills, the broader contribution to Output 1 objectives remained modest in these settings.

Considering support to student councils in both systems together, evidence indicates that student councils contributed to youth participation and leadership development within schools but were less successful in generating intentional peacebuilding outcomes. While activities in Serbian-curriculum schools achieved less tangible results, it is key to consider that engagement with such schools was exceptionally challenging due to contextual factors.

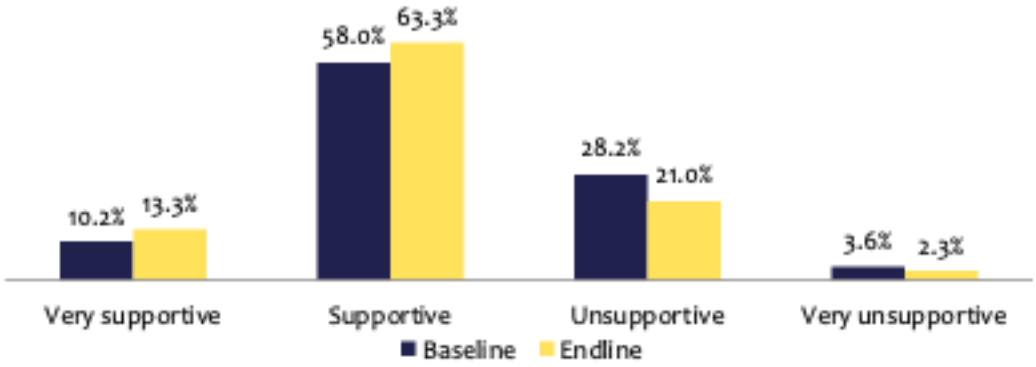
In 6 participating Albanian-majority municipalities[57], municipal-level campaigns/initiatives were organised, with most aimed at contributing to peacebuilding goals. According to reports submitted by an implementing partner, these campaigns/initiatives included: creating a ‘zone of peace’ in a public space (Kamenicë/Kamenica); film screening and creation of a mural to address harassment in schools (Lipjan/Lipljan); organising an ‘inclusion fair’ and an event that used artwork and sharing to promote diversity and peace (Mitrovica South); organising a two-day workshop and a cultural night at a public space to celebrate diversity (Prizren/Prizren); organising a ‘mini-fair of

[56] Examples of responding to school requests, given by key informants and discussants, included organising charity events and organising activities that promoted traditional cultures.
[57] Dragash/Dragaš is also a participating Albanian-majority municipality, but it did not have municipal-level initiatives/campaigns, as the municipality was added to the project at a later stage.

extracurricular activities' to promote youth participation in these activities (Obiliq/Obilić); and reactivating a space for youth and an event promoting inter-cultural dialogue (Gjilan/Gnjilane).

The reports also indicate that municipal-level student councils were established with the support of the implementing partner and that Councils for Better Education[58] were involved. While this evaluation did not collect primary data specifically on municipal-level student councils[59], the end-line study data suggest that there were desirable community-level changes[60] regarding youth participation during the implementation period (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Survey results from end-line study on 'how supportive do you feel your community is towards young people leading change?'



Overall, the evidence demonstrates that the activities delivered under Output 1 were largely effective in achieving intended results at scale. Peer mediation emerged as the most effective component, with: (a) teacher training and complementary sessions for students reinforcing inclusive behaviours and constructive communication and (b) structures established to resolve conflicts in Kosovo-curriculum schools. While contextual contrasts between education systems limited some aspects of implementation (particularly those related to student councils), the combined evidence from quantitative assessments, qualitative findings from KIIs and FGDs, and end-line survey data indicates that the project made a substantial contribution to strengthening cooperative and supportive school environments, thereby advancing the intended results.

5.1.2. Effectiveness of Output 2 Activities[61]

[58] While the compositions of the Councils for Better Education vary between Albanian-majority municipalities, they are usually comprised of school principals, teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, parents' councils' members and local CSO representatives.

[59] The evaluation prioritised data collection from school-level student councils. According to project documentation, the establishment of municipal-level student councils was not a project requirement. Rather, the implementing partner was required to organise 6 campaigns/initiatives, one in each of the 6 participating Albanian-majority municipalities (excluding Dragash/Dragaš). Performance indicators also included number of students engaged in these initiative/campaigns and number of students participating in consultation and collaborative processes initiated by (presumably school-level) student councils.

[60] The end-line study covered 10 participating municipalities (excluding Dragash/Dragaš), which included 6 participating Albanian-majority municipalities. The changes observed were not disaggregated into Albanian-majority and Serbian-majority municipalities.

[61] Please note that use of the MovieEQ methodology in teacher training – and the subsequent workshops organised by trained teachers to their students – have already been reported under Output 1. Although these activities were implemented in schools, the project performance monitoring framework placed them under Output 2 because they were within the remit of IOM.

Finding 5a: Most objectives and targets under Output 2, focusing on non-formal education settings, were successfully achieved. The language camps delivered significant results in promoting intercultural understanding and fostering positive values among participants, despite initial concerns over safeguarding and the relatively limited reach. Similarly, the grant schemes, which supported activities led by local youth organisations, generated very positive outcomes at the community level, despite the unknown number of young people reached. (Responding to EQ5)

Output 2 interventions delivered in non-formal settings achieved most of their intended results. Evidence across pre- and post-activity assessments, end-line study and qualitative data from KIIs and FGDs indicate activities under this Output generated substantial learning gains.

Language camps and youth-led grant schemes standing out as the strongest contributors to positive learning, social engagement and intercultural understanding. Unlike Output 1 in formal education settings, activities in Output 2 were conducted in settings without a clear system to support operation, such as schools; Output 2 also had a much larger number of implementing partners, which has contributed to challenges in coordinating them and maximising synergies between its components.

The language camps emerged as one of the most impactful components of this output, despite its limited reach of 160 young people. Pre- and post-activity self-assessment results show increases in both **language competencies and values-related indicators**, including tolerance, cooperation, and openness toward peers. Participants demonstrated higher confidence in communicating across language barriers and reported feeling more comfortable interacting with youth from different communities.

These findings are reinforced by qualitative feedback collected during FGDs, wherein **young people described the camps as transformative experiences** that allowed them to 'meet the other side,' challenge stereotypes and build friendships they would not have formed otherwise. Several recounted that shared activities outside the classroom – team games, cultural exchanges, and collaborative tasks – helped build trust and shift preconceptions in ways that school-based interactions rarely allow.

Although safeguarding concerns were identified at the outset of one camp cycle, these issues were promptly addressed. Improvements in supervision, clearer behavioural expectations, and stronger staff preparedness contributed to positive participant experiences in subsequent cycles. Qualitative findings from staff interviews noted that the revised safeguarding measures not only mitigated risks but also enhanced participants' sense of safety – an essential precondition for openness and engagement in mixed groups.

The youth-led grant schemes also made a direct contribution to peacebuilding, as confirmed by the FGDs conducted with youth organisations. Participants described their activities as intentionally designed to promote inclusion, dialogue, and positive interaction among diverse groups of young people. Many grant-supported initiatives explicitly addressed themes related to social cohesion, such as interethnic cooperation, challenging stereotypes, gender equality and building trust within the community. Youth reported that these projects created safe and structured opportunities to collaborate with peers they would not otherwise meet, helping them develop empathy, reduce prejudice and strengthen their sense of belonging. While the thematic emphasis varied across organisations, most activities had clear peacebuilding elements embedded in their objectives or implementation approach, demonstrating a direct contribution to peacebuilding.

Young people said in FGDs that they believed completing grant-funded activities would give them the confidence to engage more frequently with municipal actors, advocate for youth needs and

continue activities beyond the funding cycle. In some municipalities, the grants helped strengthen cooperation between youth organisations and local institutions (e.g., through organising events together and through meetings between the two), laying the groundwork for more sustainable forms of youth engagement. It is nonetheless worth noting that **the number of youth participants of grant scheme activities remained unknown** to the evaluation team, as relevant data were not available.

> Finding 5b: Private sector and employability activities yielded emerging results. Language classes, clubs and events improved learners' language skills, but their link to peacebuilding was indirect. Media training and campaigns were conducted successfully but lacked strong strategic ties to other activities in this Output. (Responding to EQ5)

Most objectives of the language, media and employability components of Output 2 were also achieved, with activities strengthening young people's communication abilities, digital competencies and overall confidence. Participants reported meaningful learning experiences across language classes, clubs, events and media trainings, and companies also noted benefits from engaging with youth. **Nonetheless, the peacebuilding relevance of these activities remained indirect, contributing more to enabling conditions than to explicit cohesion outcomes.**

Assessment data from language classes show clear improvements in learners' Albanian and Serbian language proficiency. Placement test results from one implementing cycle revealed very low baseline levels among participants, with some averages below 10 percent. Final test results demonstrated substantial gains, reaching 80 to 88 percent for most learners, indicating significant progress in foundational skills and communication confidence. KIIs with learners further support these outcomes, with youth reporting that the classes increased their comfort in engaging with online content, accessing information, and interacting with peers beyond their immediate linguistic or social circles. Although the classes were not designed as intercultural spaces, several learners noted that improved language skills helped them feel more connected to diverse online communities and enabled them to participate more confidently in shared youth spaces.

Language clubs and related events also contributed to creating positive learning environments where young people practised communication skills, collaborated on thematic projects, and supported one another's learning. Teachers and facilitators described high levels of motivation, regular attendance and an encouraging classroom atmosphere. However, the peacebuilding relevance of these activities remained indirect, as they tended to focus primarily on linguistic development rather than fostering cross-community interaction or building relationships across ethnic or cultural groups.

Media literacy trainings and the production of youth-led media content were implemented as planned and generated positive feedback from participants. Youth appreciated learning practical skills such as storytelling, content creation, responsible online engagement and identifying misinformation. Some participants reported feeling more empowered to challenge harmful narratives on social media or contribute to constructive public dialogue. Nonetheless, KIIs and FGDs suggest that these activities operated somewhat in isolation from other Output 2 components, and its peacebuilding impacts emerged indirectly through enhanced capacity for responsible communication. Without clear integration, the potential for media-related activities to reinforce peacebuilding outcomes, such as amplifying positive narratives, supporting interethnic dialogue, or strengthening youth voices, remained underutilised.

Private sector companies also benefited from their involvement in these activities, including better understanding the needs of young people and reaching young talents to support business

development. KIIs indicate that participating employers valued opportunities to interact with young people, present workplace expectations and contribute to skills development. These engagements helped build positive perceptions between youth and companies across communities, fostering trust and reducing potential biases. While the activities remained primarily developmental in nature, they contributed indirectly to peacebuilding by expanding young people's networks and creating shared spaces of cooperation around learning and work.

The results achieved by this component also strengthened the broader enabling environment for peacebuilding by equipping young people with practical competencies and greater confidence in navigating social and professional contexts. Improved English proficiency, digital and media skills, and increased participation in structured learning activities can support young people to accessing broader networks, enhance their ability to communicate effectively, and engage more fully in civic and community life. These developmental outcomes form an important foundation upon which more intentional cohesion-oriented initiatives can be built, even if the activities themselves did not explicitly target intergroup interaction.

Overall, the language, media and employability activities under Output 2 created valuable learning opportunities for participating youth. While these results contributed indirectly to the conditions that enable peacebuilding, their cohesion-related effects remained limited, as the activities were not explicitly designed to foster intergroup interaction. As currently designed and implemented, these activities strengthened youth skills and confidence, but only indirectly contributed to the conditions that enable peacebuilding.

5.1.3. Effectiveness Monitoring

> Finding 6: The data generated and field monitoring have largely enabled a systemic determination of results achievement and effectiveness of the project. A small number of components lacked reliable participation and monitoring data, whilst disaggregated data were not collected consistently. (Responding to EQ6)

The monitoring data generated by the project have enabled determination of results achievement and effectiveness of the project. Most project components consistently utilised pre- and post-activity tests to measure change of knowledge; feedback forms were also used for some components to better understand how the implementation could be improved. Reports submitted by most implementing partners were also clear and aligned to the project's performance monitoring framework. Implementing partner representatives reported in KIIs that the project team (UNICEF and IOM) regularly attended the activities. In other words, **field monitoring was conducted**, and it was appreciated by implementing partners, which commended the support provided by, and their communication with, the project team.

Gathering of participation data was largely smooth, and the reporting of such followed the project's performance monitoring framework. However, **disaggregation of participation data was not enforced to the extent required by the framework**, and for an extended period, the project team was unable to present such data to the evaluation team, suggesting that participation of groups (e.g., by ethnicity) was not monitored continuously. An implementing partner express in KII that the guidelines on reporting disaggregated data were unclear. Due partly to data privacy considerations, there was also no way to monitor whether youth participants took part in more than one activity (i.e., repeat exposure).

The project commissioned a baseline study and an end-line study to monitor change at the municipality level. While it was a good practice supporting evidence-based programming, the findings of the baseline study were not shared with all implementing partners, who could have used the findings to fine-tune their activities. The findings nonetheless were used for advocacy purposes.

Comparing the baseline and end-line offered some insight into how effective the project was, with major findings presented in this evaluation report. Still, when looking at all the changes together, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about differences across municipalities, especially given the many outside factors that could influence young people's views. For instance, the studies found that youth perceptions of inter-ethnic relationships marginally improved in the participating municipalities (see Figure 5). Over the same period, inter-ethnic interaction lessened (see Figure 6) while the proportion of respondents with friends from other ethnic backgrounds improved (see Figure 7).

Therefore, although the evaluation team collected qualitative data – corroborated by select findings from the end-line study– to assess the effectiveness of various project components, **monitoring of the project's effectiveness on peacebuilding goals – particularly inter-ethnic interactions – at the multi-municipality level proved to be challenging.**

Figure 5 Survey results from end-line study on 'how do you feel the relationship between different ethnic groups in your community are?

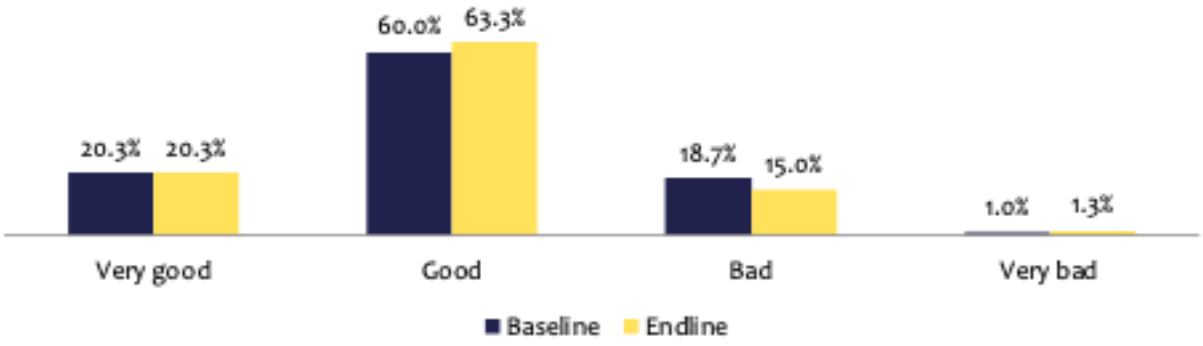


Figure 6 Survey results from end-line study on 'how often do you hang out with people with people from different ethnic backgrounds?'

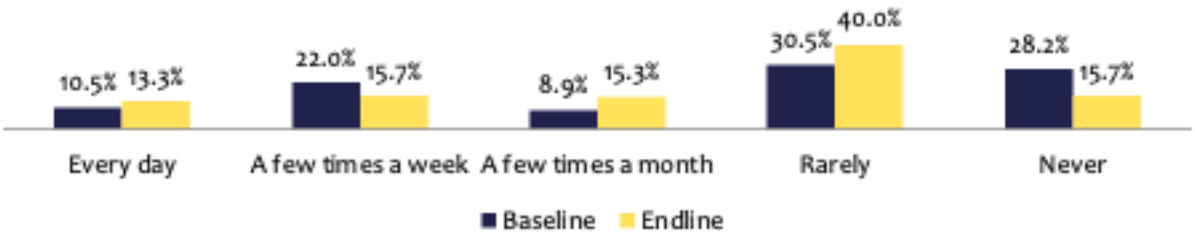
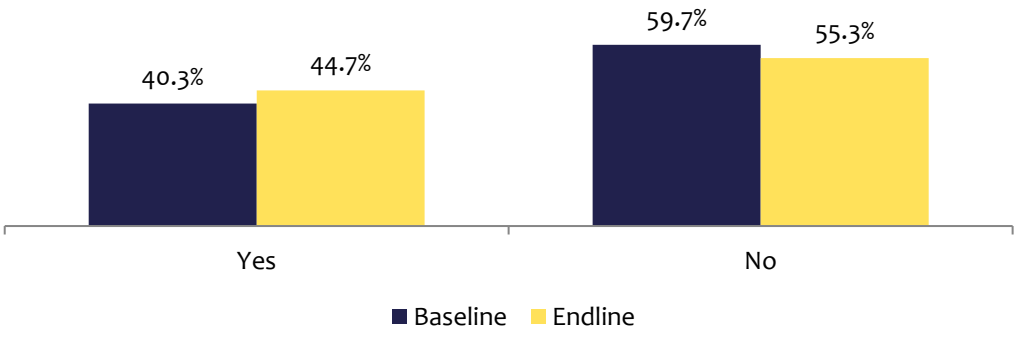


Figure 7 Survey results from end-line study on 'do you have friends from different ethnic backgrounds?'



5.1.4. Equity, Inclusion and Targeting Strategy

Finding 7: Despite contextual and systemic challenges, the project effectively included children and young people from Serbian communities in Kosovo. Children and young people of other minority ethnic groups and those with disabilities. Gender and equity measures was effectively mainstreamed, but engagement with boys and young men could be improved. (Responding to EQ7)

Equity measures for minorities, youth with disabilities, individuals residing in rural areas and other groups have been systematically integrated throughout project implementation. Evidence demonstrates that these considerations were reflected in the processes of selection, participation, and engagement. The project inherently prioritised inclusion, social cohesion and respect for diversity. The remainder of this and next section discusses in detail the various dimensions of equity: ethnic and language minorities; disabilities; gender; and rural residency.

Please see Table 1 on page 16 for disaggregated participation data made available to the evaluation team. Please note that disaggregated data for some components were incomplete; the reporting on equity in the section was thus based on incomplete disaggregated data yet supplemented by qualitative data collected in KIIs and FGDs.

Despite various contextual and systemic challenges, **the project effectively included children and young people from Serbian communities in Kosovo**. This was facilitated by collaborating with implementing partners that possessed substantial experiences working with these communities, as well as by employing a conflict-sensitive approach (refer to Section 4.1). Importantly, the project **included Serb-majority municipalities outside northern Kosovo**, wherein, according to interviewees, children and youth previously had limited opportunities to participate in similar initiatives.

Ethnic and language minorities (e.g., Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Bosnian, Goran, Turkish) were also sufficiently included, according to project monitoring data. Interviewees consistently reported that project activities included children and young people from minority communities and that they were treated equally. The utilisation of translators and staff proficient in both Albanian and Serbian during certain activities, as well as the intermittent use of English among young participants, were recognised as effective methods for addressing language barriers. While the participation of language minorities was largely ensured, language support could be improved in a small number of training sessions, wherein some Turkish- and Bosnian-speaking participants found the content in Albanian difficult to follow. Also, a few implementing partner representatives expressed in interviews that they relied on CSO networks in outreach, as the very specific targets regarding ethnicities set out by the project team were at times difficult to meet in ‘smaller’ municipalities.

The project included children and youth with disabilities. Interviewees reported that accommodations and support were made available to enable learners with disabilities to engage in activities and events, while safeguarding policies and accessible venues were identified as key facilitators. Implementing partners acknowledged limitations in measurement[62], such as recording the number of participants with disabilities, due to the sensitive and voluntary nature of disclosure.

Project engagement with boys and young men could be improved. While project activities were not designed exclusively for one gender, and both genders participated, with female participation for most components around 60% (based on incomplete disaggregated data). Beyond number of participants, it was reported that female participants were much more involved. Many respondents,

[62] The project’s performance monitoring framework did not require such measurement.

including some children and young people, attributed this to ‘cultural norms’ that boys were less expressive about emotions and were less keen on learning languages.

The project team was aware of the challenges in engaging with boys and young men, and it arranged in early phases of the project a session led by a gender consultant for implementing partners. The finding, nonetheless, suggests that further support and adaptation of activities would be needed to deepen such engagement. Several interviewed representatives from implementing partners also recommended that, going forward, relevant examples of successful practices from other countries be provided.

> Finding 8: While the project’s strategy for selecting geographic areas and beneficiaries was appropriate and clear, certain implementing partners mainly relied on social media to recruit children and young people for their activities. Meanwhile, some schools-based recruitment on academic performance, a criterion that may not always be fully appropriate. (Responding to EQ8)

The project’s geographic targeting approach was coherent and aligned with its objectives, prioritising municipalities where social cohesion challenges, ethnic fragmentation or limited youth engagement structures were present. This ensured implementation across both Albanian-majority and Serb-majority municipalities and enabled the project to reach communities where its interventions were most needed. Rural communities were incorporated into the project through targeted initiatives, thereby providing young individuals in these areas with access to participation. This approach was significant, given that, as stated in the Project Document, such opportunities have traditionally been concentrated in urban settings.

Recruitment practices used to select children and young people, however, differed substantially across implementing partners and municipalities. KIIs and FGDs indicate that several partners for Output 2 relied heavily on social media outreach, which, while effective for attracting digitally active youth, risked excluding adolescents with limited internet access, lower digital literacy, or a weaker connection to existing youth networks. Some young people reported that online announcements were the only channel they saw, suggesting that a more diversified outreach approach could have broadened participation. A few partners mentioned the use of CSO networks that they were part of, and that has helped reaching young people, particularly those of minority communities.

In Albanian-majority municipalities, schools generally applied more structured selection procedures. While these processes provided clarity, KIIs show that some schools favoured students with higher academic performance or those already active in school bodies. This practice risked excluding youth who could have benefited most from peer mediation, civic engagement or psychosocial learning opportunities. Importantly, the project did not appear to have sufficiently strengthened school administrators’ awareness of the importance of inclusive, representative student selection, resulting in selection practices that mirrored pre-existing school preferences rather than promoting broader access.

In contrast, the selection procedures in Serb-majority municipalities often lacked transparency, relying instead on informal teacher recommendations or convenience-based selection. These differences reflect contextual constraints but also indicate uneven recruitment standards between municipalities. The absence of consistent guidance and capacity-building for schools contributed to these disparities.

Despite these challenges, the project succeeded in engaging a diverse group of youth, many of whom described participating in activities in non-formal education settings for the first time. This highlights the project’s value and reach, even if recruitment practices were not uniformly inclusive.

Overall, while the targeting strategy was strong, the inconsistency in recruitment methods and the lack of strengthened school-level understanding of inclusive selection principles limited the extent to which opportunities reached less visible or marginalised young people. Clearer standards and direct support to schools and partners on inclusive recruitment would help ensure broader, more equitable participation in future projects.

5.2. Sustainability

> Finding 9: Central and local stakeholders (i.e., municipalities) were sufficiently consulted and involved at the beginning of the project; their engagement was at a moderate level throughout the project. (Responding to EQ10)

Central stakeholders were sufficiently consulted and involved at the conceptualising and inception phases of the project. According to project documentation, consultation meetings were held in the first two months of project implementation with key individuals from the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation and the Office of Prime Minister, as well as the Deputy Prime Minister and the representatives of the Serbian Education Institutions. Moreover, the Joint Steering Committee (JSC) was formed with the Deputy Prime Minister for Minority Issues and Human Rights as the co-chair, and it had its first meeting in March 2024 wherein JSC members provided feedback. One tangible outcome of the first JSC meeting was the inclusion of Dragash/Dragas as a participating municipality, demonstrating the project's willingness to respond to requests from central stakeholders.

Whilst there were efforts to continuously engage central stakeholders throughout the project, the level of their engagement appeared to be only at a moderate level. The attendance at JSC meetings, wherein project results were reported, recorded a downward trend over time (see Table 9). Moreover, 2 of 3 invited representatives from central authorities were unable to prioritise having a meeting with the evaluation team, and the only interviewed representative was not familiar with the project; this restrained the evaluation team's ability to assess stakeholder engagement comprehensively, leaving reliance on JSC attendance as the primary proxy measure. The broader political context further complicated central stakeholders' engagement as Kosovo faced difficulties in forming a government for 10 months in 2025.

Table 9 Joint Steering Committee Meetings Attendance

Joint Steering Committee Meeting	Number of Central Stakeholder Representatives Attended	Number of Other Attendees
First, 26 March 2024	4	13
Second, 27 November 2024	2	11
Third, 27 June 2025	1	10
Fourth	(planned for November 2025 but not held as of 12 December 2025)	

Consultation with local stakeholders (i.e., municipalities) was undertaken during the initial phases of the project. In May 2024, the project was presented to municipal education directors (MEDs) from the six Albanian-majority municipalities (excluding Dragash/Dragaš), who indicated their commitment to supporting its implementation. Project documentation shows that several MEDs provided feedback on the school selection process while some actively engaged schools and encouraged them to submit applications to the project team.

As for Serb-majority municipalities, UNICEF field office staff in Mitrovica North, together with its long-term implementing partner, maintained close coordination with representatives of the Serbian

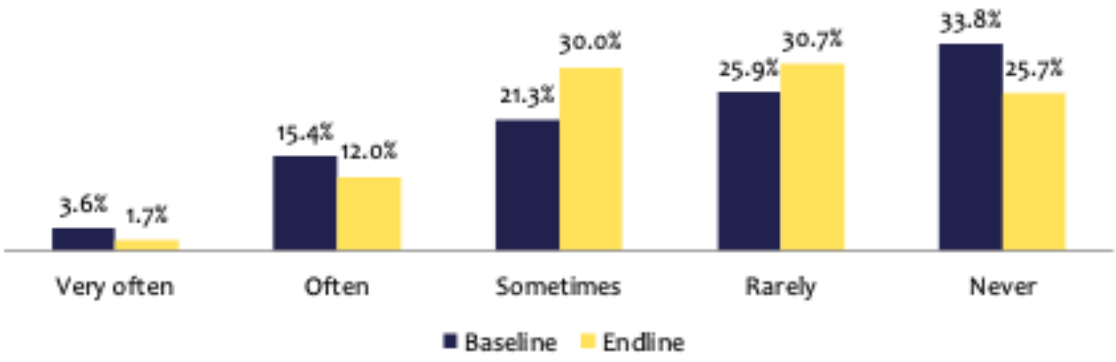
Education Institutions and with schools. Engagement with 'authorities' in this regard was extremely challenging, given the complex political contexts in these municipalities and other external factors.

Local stakeholders in the 7 participating Albanian-majority municipalities have maintained a moderate level of involvement throughout the project. The project team has consistently shared updates and results with these municipalities. Municipal student councils in 6 participating Albanian-majority municipalities organised various activities as part of the project (under Output 1; excluding Dragash/Dragaš). According to an interview with the implementing partner and its monitoring reports, MEDs and their office staff participated in some of these events. Several implementing partners (of both Outputs 1 and 2) also noted they received support from the Albanian-majority municipalities, such as access to venues for project activities and introductions to other local organisations.

However, **interviews with three MEDs presented a somewhat different view**, as these MEDs appeared less familiar with the project.[63] This might be because various implementing partners communicated directly with municipal offices, making the project's identity less clear to the MEDs. Furthermore, MEDs expressed that the administrative load of their offices was heavy, and they lacked capacity to assign dedicated personnel or to contribute beyond basic approvals. Local elections in 2025 also resulted in changes of MEDs, which might have affected the level of engagement.

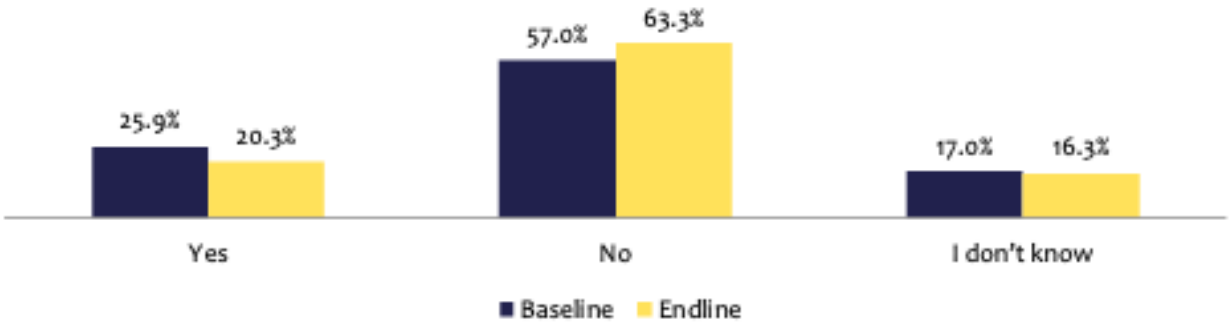
Furthermore, the project's end-line study found that, in the participating municipalities and compared to the baseline, it became less likely for young people to have talked to local authorities about community issues (see Figure 8) and that most respondents were not aware of local authorities' efforts 'to promote tolerance, diversity, foster mutual understanding and respect' in their communities (see Figure 9).

Figure 8 Survey results from end-line study on 'how often do you or your friends talk to local leaders about community issues?'



[63] The timing of the evaluation following local elections created an additional constraint: newly elected local authorities lacked institutional memory of the project, limiting the evaluation team's ability to access officials with sufficient project knowledge.

Figure 9 Survey results from end-line study on 'in the past 12 months, have you witnessed any efforts by local authorities to promote tolerance, diversity, foster mutual understanding, and respect in your community?'



In both participating Albanian-majority and Serb-majority municipalities, **schools as local stakeholders were sufficiently involved**. Interviews with teachers and informal interaction between the evaluation team and school principals indicated that schools were meaningfully engaged and took active roles in facilitating project activities. In the 6 participating Albanian-majority municipalities[64], **Councils for Better Education (KAM)[65] were also involved** in organising municipal level activities (under Output 1), according to reports submitted by an implementing partner.

> Finding 10: The project contributed to the broader strategic outcomes identified in the Strategy for Youth 2024-2032 and the Education Strategy 2022-2026. At the local level, the project worked with the administration of two Albanian-majority municipalities to develop local policies. (Responding to EQ11)

The project contributed to the broader strategic outcomes in the Strategy for Youth 2024-2032[66]. The Strategy addresses young people's wellbeing and security on pages 11-12, identifying issues such as bullying, violence, cyberbullying, discrimination, stigmatisation and sexual harassment. In response to these concerns, the Strategy highlights the importance of empowering young people, particularly girls and women, ethnic minorities, youth with disabilities, and other marginalised groups who face elevated levels of socio-economic exclusion (p.4). Additionally, it underscores the need to enhance services focused on preventing and addressing safety-related issues, including harassment and violence (p.5).

The project's contribution, identified in this evaluation, to the 3 specific objectives in the Strategy for Youth 2024-2032 is summarised in Table 10.

[64] Dragash/Dragaš is also a participating Albanian-majority municipality, but it did not have municipal-level initiatives/campaigns, as the municipality was added to the project at a later stage.
[65] While the compositions of the Councils for Better Education vary between Albanian-majority municipalities, they are usually comprised of school principals, teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, parents' councils' members and local CSO representatives.
[66] The Strategy for Youth 2024-2032 was being drafted when the project was being designed.

Table 10 Project contribution to broader strategic outcomes in Strategy for Youth 2024-2032

Specific Objective in Strategy for Youth 2024-2032[67]	Corresponding Project Contribution Identified in Evaluation
1. Empowering or equipping young people with essential life skills for a successful and prosperous life. Most relevant areas: Skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, and empathise with others.	○ Project participants gained life skills included those related to communication, critical thinking and media literacy, empathising with others, active listening, conflict resolution and living in a diverse society. ○ The project improved teachers' knowledge and skills in developing students' life skills. ○ The project developed accredited teacher training modules related to life skills.
2. Improving the availability, accessibility and quality of services and support provided to young people that effectively address their needs. Most relevant areas: mental health; prevention or reporting of harassment, bullying and violence.	○ The project provided opportunities for young people to take part in activities in communities that aimed to improve their wellbeing and meet their interpersonal needs. ○ The project established in schools peer mediation clubs that could help address issues of mental health, prevention or reporting of harassment, bullying and violence.
3. Improving youth policies and empowering young people in decision-making, policymaking and implementation of programmes aimed at society development. Most relevant areas: Student and youth councils.	○ The project provided support on student councils and provided their members with training, which could improve and continue their operation. ○ The project provided opportunities for student councils to organise community events and in some cases to be involved in policymaking.

The project also contributed to the Education Strategy 2022-2026, albeit to a lesser degree because the Education Strategy had far fewer objectives relevant to this project. The project's primary contribution was to specific objective 2.3 of the Education Strategy, which is 'increase of the involvement and active participation of pupils from marginalised groups through the creation of a stimulating and supportive climate.' Evaluation evidence shows that students from marginalised groups were actively included in multiple school-based project activities, which promoted a supportive climate.

At the local level, the project worked with the administration of two Albanian-majority municipalities to develop local policies. According to report submitted by an implementing partner, the project developed In Kamenicë/Kamenica the Regulation on the Prevention of Conflict Between Students in School, which aimed at reducing and managing student conflicts to promote a peaceful and inclusive school environment. In Obiliq/Obilić, the project developed the Regulation on the Organisation and Implementation of Extra-Curricular Activities in Secondary Schools, which aimed at enhancing inclusive education by supporting a variety of extracurricular activities that foster student participation and social cohesion. In general, though, evidence of youth participation in local governance or policymaking was thin.

Finding 11: The project included a sustainability and exit strategy, but its implementation was uneven. Project components like student councils and peer mediation clubs are

[67] The details of the specific objectives can be found on pages 18-19 of the Strategy for Youth 2024-2032. The 'most relevant areas' were that specific areas – chosen by the evaluation team – that were most relevant to this project.

more likely to have their results sustained with some continuous support, while others will require significant continuous support. (Responding to EQ12)

The project included a sustainability and exit strategy, which can be found on pages 36 and 37 of the Project Document. The strategy contains the following key elements: (a) strengthening local capacity and empowerment, particularly among youth and educational institution, through mechanisms that promote replicability; (b) engaging with authorities at both local and central levels to ensure that the acquired knowledge and skills become integrated into community development strategies and school behaviours and programmes; (c) establishing partnerships with academia and the private sector; and (d) engaging media partners. At a higher level, it mentions train-the-trainer model, standardised modules, policy integration and a community of practice.

The implementation of the sustainability and exit strategy was uneven, with several components under Output 1 more likely to have their results sustained. Student councils/parliaments were very likely to have their results sustained, as their establishment was required by laws applicable to both schools using the Kosovo curriculum and those using the Serbian curriculum. Student councils/parliaments typically comprise members from various cohorts, promoting knowledge exchange, and interviews with student council/parliament members suggest that sharing of knowledge has indeed occurred.

Peer mediation clubs in schools using the Kosovo curriculum were also likely to sustain their results, as they were established, recognised by students, and had experience in resolving conflicts. Although empowered club members might pass on knowledge to new recruits, most interviewees emphasised the need for ongoing training by the implementing partner for incoming members. For schools using the Serbian curriculum, the formal establishment of the clubs was dependent on external factors, and this evaluation had insufficient evidence to determine the sustainability of relevant results. Early evidence also suggests that, in both types of schools, teachers and staff who received peer mediation training increased their capacities of using mediation skills and principles in their work with students; such capacities were likely to sustain.

Some of the teacher training modules developed with project support achieved successful accreditation, which to some extent contributed to the sustainability of training efforts. It is nonetheless worth noting that the training using the MovieEQ methodology was not accredited.

Components under Output 2 would require continuous support to sustain their results, as, unlike in the formal education settings, there were few well-established mechanisms for sustaining results. The relatively short implementation period also limited the possibility of the project creating such mechanisms. It is nonetheless worth noting that the civil society organisations involved (i.e., implementing partners) expressed strong motivation to continue initiatives and maintain cross-community networks.

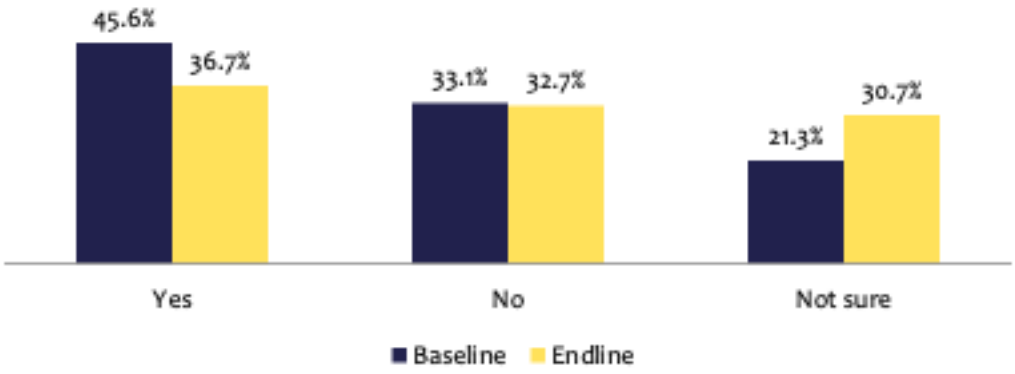
Finding 12: Authorities showed little commitment to sustaining the results of PBF support and continuing initiatives. This partly stems from Kosovo's protracted political deadlock and challenges in consistently engaging with authorities on peacebuilding priorities. Schools, however, were exceptions, demonstrating willingness to continue the project-supported initiatives. (Responding to EQ13)

Although central stakeholders were regularly consulted and involved to some extent, there was minimal evidence that they were committed to maintaining the outcomes or carrying forward the initiatives. The evaluation team was only able to interview one central stakeholder representative, as two others declined, and this individual did not express any commitment.

Similarly, **the municipal representatives interviewed indicated that there were no plans** to sustain the project's initiatives, although they conveyed an interest in seeing the project continue. It is noteworthy that the project objectives were not closely aligned with the policy priorities identified by these representatives, which include expanding pre-primary education, digitalising teaching and learning, and enhancing literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Meanwhile, the end-line study found that most youth respondents from the participating municipalities either did not believe or were uncertain that local institutions and leaders were actively promoting an inclusive environment within schools and communities (see Figure 10)[68]. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that a majority (67.6%) of end-line survey respondents expressed confidence that local leaders treated all individuals fairly, irrespective of ethnic background.

Figure 10 Survey results from end-line study on 'do you think that local authorities (municipal education directorates and school management) are actively involved in promoting inclusive environment within schools and communities?'



Several UNICEF and IOM staff members interviewed for this evaluation indicated that the project implementation of less than 18 months was insufficient to obtain substantial commitment from authorities. Additionally, some noted frequent changes in officials at both central and local levels, which further complicated efforts to secure stakeholder engagement.

Schools stood out among all stakeholders by showing a readiness to carry on with the project's initiatives, even without ongoing support. The majority of teachers and students interviewed were dedicated to maintaining peer mediation clubs in their schools (i.e., those using the Kosovo curriculum).

5.3. Lessons Learned

The evaluation revealed no unintended effects of the project. For clarity, three principal **lessons learned** are summarised below, although they have been discussed throughout this chapter.

First, it is essential to explicitly map project component linkages, ensuring these are consistently communicated to all project team members and implementing partners (refer to Finding 1). Establishing such linkages can enhance complementarity among Outputs and across activities within these Outputs. This approach is particularly significant for projects involving multiple UN agencies.

Second, conflict-sensitive implementation within Serbian-curriculum schools and Serb-majority communities demands substantial time investment for ongoing engagement and coordination. Use of materials not sufficiently adapted together with stakeholders in such settings may risk

[68] Although this question did not ask about future commitment, the responses to it could be considered as young people's perception of near-future commitment from local institutions and leaders.

undermining established professional relationships. In this context, implementing partners with significant experience provide valuable support and expertise.

Third, political events and changes in municipal leadership can influence the effectiveness of sustainability measures. The project has proactively collaborated with schools to support the long-term impact of its outcomes. In addition, certain components have encouraged implementing partners to facilitate interactions between children, youth and municipal authorities. To further advance the project's visibility and ensure effective collaboration, more explicit communication with municipalities may be beneficial. Evidence indicates that some implementing partners communicated directly with municipalities without sufficiently highlighting the project itself, which led to ambiguity in project identification.

The evaluation identified three principal **good practices**. While they are provided below for clarity, they have been discussed throughout this chapter.

First, conflict-sensitive implementation with experienced implementing partners. The project successfully engaged Serbian communities and Serbian-curriculum schools through experienced implementing partners with established credibility and longstanding relationships. Careful framing of activities around transferrable skills, combined with meaningful stakeholder involvement in reviewing materials, enabled non-politicised implementation. This demonstrates the necessity of selecting trusted partners with proven track records and sufficient time for relationship-building in sensitive contexts to achieve meaningful reach and sustainability.

Second, effective peer mediation club model. Peer mediation clubs emerged as one of the most effective project components, with students reporting that training provided practical tools to manage disputes constructively. Clubs successfully resolved school conflicts while fostering inclusive environments. Pre- and post-training assessments showed substantial learning gains. This demonstrates the value of embedding peer-led conflict resolution within school structures. Future projects should consider prioritising structure peer mediation activities in formal education settings for impact.

Third, youth-led grant schemes for locally driven peacebuilding. Grant schemes empowered local youth organisations to design and implement community-based initiatives addressing inclusion, dialogue and inter-group interaction. Participants reported increased confidence engaging with municipal actors and some of the activities successfully engaged the wider communities. The activities were rooted in local contexts and aligned with the project's peacebuilding goals.

6. Evaluation Conclusions

This chapter presents the three evaluation conclusions that are directly derived from the evaluation findings.

> Conclusion 1: The project was strategically relevant and appropriately designed to support Kosovo's peacebuilding priorities. Its conflict-sensitive approach and evidence-informed design ensured a strong alignment with Kosovo and youth-focused needs, which remained consistent throughout implementation despite contextual and operational challenges. However, the strategic connections between the two project outputs were not sufficiently clear to project team members and implementing partners, limiting opportunities for complementary engagement with children, youth and other stakeholders. (Related findings: 1, 2 and 3)

The Youth Empowered through Inclusive Schools and Societies (YESS) project was strategically relevant and appropriately designed to support Kosovo's peacebuilding priorities. The project conducted a comprehensive conflict analysis and commissioned a baseline study to support its design that also capitalised on the organisational expertise of UNICEF in working in schools and that of IOM working in communities. Moreover, project activities were closely aligned with the needs of young people in Kosovo.

The project was designed to integrate activities within both formal and non-formal educational settings, but the linkages between these domains were not sufficiently clear to the project team (both UNICEF and IOM) and the implementing partners. Additionally, components under Output 2 exhibited reduced connections among them, as they were implemented by numerous partners and the non-formal settings provided few platforms to bring the many activities together. That said, the evaluation found evidence of significant project-level coordination efforts.

The project adopted and maintained an explicit conflict-sensitive approach. It relied on experienced implementing partners and careful framing, which emphasised skills development and learning opportunities, to enable access in politically sensitive environments and in both Kosovo- and Serbian-curriculum schools. The project's relevance remained consistent despite contextual and operational challenges.

> Conclusion 2: The project effectively delivered results in both formal and non-formal education settings, achieving most of its objectives and creating tangible outcomes for children and young people. Activities such as peer mediation clubs, language camps and youth-led initiatives (under grant schemes) fostered intercultural understanding, conflict resolution and inclusivity. Outcomes related to employability and media activities were only indirectly linked to peacebuilding. With respect to equity and inclusion, the project successfully engaged children and young people from Serbian communities in Kosovo, despite various operational and contextual challenges. However, there remains an opportunity to enhance engagement with boys and young men. Project monitoring was largely effective, yet collection of disaggregated participation data had room for improvement. (Related findings: 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6, 7 and 8)

The project effectively delivered results in both formal and non-formal education settings (i.e., in schools and in communities), with nearly all targets in the project's performance monitoring framework either met or exceeded. Monitoring data also demonstrated significant knowledge gained by children, young people and teachers across multiple project components in both settings.

Output 1 activities (primarily those in schools) produced some of the strongest results achieved at scale especially through peer mediation and teacher training. Peer mediation clubs were established in Kosovo-curriculum schools, with students reporting successful resolution of cases and teachers highlighting calmer interactions in schools. Trainers from various implementing partners, as well as the training content, were highly commended by both teachers and youth participants. Support on student councils contributed to developing leadership and organisational skills among participating students, but the extent to which the support has advanced peacebuilding outcomes was uneven. That said, municipal-level peacebuilding-related activities were successfully organised by student councils in 6 participating Albanian-majority municipalities, though with very significant input from an implementing partner.[69] Skills-based training successfully reached 6,000 children and young people in Kosovo through in-school sessions and residential workshops conducted by implementing partners, with some data indicating positive outcomes.

Output 2 activities (primarily those outside schools in communities) provided youth participation opportunities, with language camps and youth-led grants standing out. Language camps offered residential experiences for youth coming from different communities, albeit at a smaller scale; evidence suggest that they led to improved language skills, higher empathy and more positive attitudes towards inclusion and acceptance. Youth-led grants successfully tackled topics such as diversity, inclusion and gender equality through locally grounded projects. Other Output 2 components – language classes and clubs, media training and employability activities – were implemented, but they contributed less directly to peacebuilding. Teachers trained with the MovieEQ methodology held workshops that reached 4,000 students, and there were signs that students' critical thinking skills improved as a result.[70]

Monitoring and reporting were generally adequate to track most outputs, with regular use of pre-post-tests, feedback tools and field visits by the project team. Nonetheless, there were gaps in collecting disaggregated data, especially by ethnicity and repeat exposure. The baseline and end-line studies produced useful insights but fell short of providing conclusive evidence regarding the project's early impact at a multi-municipality level.

On equity, the project successfully reached into Serbian communities in Kosovo and included youth from several minority groups, often with adapted approaches. Gender parity was reached in many activities, but boys and young men were harder to engage, pointing to the need for more tailored approaches. While geographical targeting and Kosovo-curriculum school selection were appropriate, some implementing partners' reliance on social media and some schools' use of academic performance as a selection criterion risked excluding more marginalised youth who might have benefited most from the project.

> Conclusion 3: The project demonstrated partial sustainability, with certain initiatives, especially those embedded in school structures, showing comparatively more promising continuity. While the project contributed to the broader strategic outcomes, limited authority engagement and weak institutional ownership threatened the sustainability of peacebuilding outcomes. (Related findings: 9, 10, 11 and 12)

Sustainability is strongest where the project was embedded in school structures, particularly peer mediation clubs in Kosovo-curriculum schools that enjoyed visible benefits and strong buy-in from

[69] Excluding Dragash/Dragas, which was also a participating Albanian-majority municipality but was included in the project at a later stage and did not have such activities planned.

[70] These training sessions and subsequent teacher-led workshops, held in schools, were classified under Output 2 according to the performance monitoring framework. This classification was due to their alignment with IOM's remit. The 4,000 students may overlap with the 6,000 reported in the previous paragraph, as they were in the same school. Repeat exposure was not monitored by the project team.

students and teachers. Accreditation of some teacher training modules as well as knowledge and skills gained by teachers also contributed to project sustainability. By contrast, the continuation of other interventions, including those under Output 2, relies on securing future financial resources. This is especially relevant, as non-formal education settings presented limited opportunities for institutionalisation.

At institutional level, while central and local authorities were consulted during the project's design and inception, this early involvement did not translate into lasting ownership. Although the project aligned well with the existing strategy on youth development and to a lesser extent that on education, engagement from authorities remained moderate throughout implementation, and there were no strong and formal commitments from them to sustaining project initiatives. Municipal representatives acknowledged the value of the activities but continued to prioritise core education services, offering no concrete plans to integrate project activities into their future planning.

While schools indicated an openness to maintaining certain initiatives, many emphasised the necessity of ongoing training and continued support to ensure their successful implementation.

7. Recommendations

The evaluation, supported by the findings and conclusions derived from the evidence collected and analysed, presents 5 overarching recommendations and proposed actions. The rights holders of the project (i.e., children and young people) as well as other stakeholders were asked in key informant interviews and focus group discussions for their suggestions, which were considered in forming the recommendations.

On 10 December 2025, the evaluation team held a meeting with management from UNICEF and IOM to review and refine the recommendations. Their feedback was included in the final recommendations listed below, along with the designated agencies and suggested priorities for each action.

Recommendation 1: In designing the next peacebuilding project, build on the success of the YESS project by including components that have achieved most significant results on peacebuilding (e.g., peer mediation clubs, training/workshops for teachers and students, and language camps). Align components with emerging needs of children and youth, adapt activities to ensure engagement with all genders, and ensure strategic connections between components.

Priority: High
Timeframe: By March 2026, or close of application for the Peacebuilding Fund or other funding sources, whichever is earlier.
Responsible agencies: UNICEF and IOM
Related conclusions: 1, 2
Related findings: 1, 2, 3, 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6, 7, 8

Elaboration:

- Several project components have achieved more significant results regarding peacebuilding; these components included peer mediation clubs, accredited trainings for teachers, language camps and youth-led initiatives under grant schemes.
- Although other project components were also implemented effectively, their contribution to peacebuilding was less direct and their connection to other components was unclear.
- Strategic connections between components under Output 2 were relatively weak.
- There was room for improvement regarding project engagement with boys and young men beyond equal participation.
- The end-line study generated evidence that could support future programming.
- Thanks to use of a conflict-sensitive approach, the implementation in Serb-majority municipalities and Serbian-curriculum schools was largely effective, despite operational and contextual challenges.

Recommended actions and responsible agency/agencies:

- Include components that achieved most significant results in the next peacebuilding project (or other future youth participation activities). (UNICEF and IOM)
- Utilise in future planning the evidence generated in this evaluation and baseline and endline studies. In future planning, better utilise baseline study findings, which should be communicated with implementing partners. (UNICEF and IOM)
- In future projects, establish clear change pathways connecting project components. (IOM)
- Utilise established structures in schools to further youth participation in local governance (also see Recommendation 3); continue to provide support to schools to build their capacities regarding peacebuilding and skill development. (UNICEF)
- Align components and its activities with emerging needs of children and youth (e.g., mental health) using new evidence from Kosovo and the Western Balkans. (UNICEF and IOM)
- Continue use of the conflict-sensitive approach and further implementation of similar activities in Serb-majority municipalities and Serbian-curriculum schools. (UNICEF and IOM)
- Adapt activities to ensure inclusion of – and engagement with – all genders, particularly boys and young men, with use of successful examples from places in and beyond the region. (UNICEF and IOM)

Recommendation 2: At the central level, align future activities with the Strategy for Youth 2024-2032 and, if possible, with formal curricula.

Priority: Medium-to-high
Timeframe: By May 2026
Responsible agencies: UNICEF and IOM
Related conclusions: 1, 3
Related findings: 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12

Elaboration:

- While the project was aligned to the specific objectives of the Strategy for Youth 2024-2032, the alignment was not planned, as the Strategy was being drafted when the project was designed. With the Strategy now active, there are opportunities to better ensure such alignment, which could enhance authorities' ownership of future programmes/activities and reduce aid fragmentation.
- While central stakeholders were sufficiently consulted at early phases of the project and were involved throughout the project, the level of their engagement was at a moderate level.
- Some teacher training modules used in this project were not accredited. This could affect teachers' willingness to take part and may cast doubts over their alignment to formal curricula.

Recommended actions and responsible agency/agencies:

- Align future activities, both of peacebuilding project(s) and others, with the Strategy for Youth 2024-2032. (UNICEF and IOM)
- Align future activities, both of peacebuilding project(s) and others, with formal curricula such as those of civics/citizenship, if possible. (UNICEF[71])
- Accredit teacher training modules that were not accredited yet still implemented with constraints under the YESS project, if they are to be used again in schools. (IOM[72])

Recommendation 3: At the local level, align future project activities with needs of local stakeholders and advocate the importance of child and youth participation in local governance.

Priority: Medium-to-high
Timeframe: By May 2026
Responsible agencies: UNICEF and IOM
Related conclusions: 1, 3
Related findings: 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12

Elaboration:

- Although municipal authorities consented to take part in the project, their engagement was limited to a moderate extent.
- Although the Project Document referenced youth participation in local governance, there was little evidence that local authorities or stakeholders acknowledged this involvement.

Recommended actions and responsible agency/agencies:

- Analyse needs of local stakeholders/authorities and align future activities with the needs alongside local development agendas. (UNICEF and IOM)
- Whenever possible, work with municipalities to co-develop project plans to better align project objectives and needs/priorities of municipalities. (UNICEF and IOM)
- Advocate the importance of child and youth participation in local governance; use expertise in the wider organisation to inform advocacy efforts and utilise existing structures such as student councils. (UNICEF)

[71] Among the two implementing UN agencies, UNICEF has had extensive work in formal education settings not only under this project but also more widely in its education programmes.
[72] The teacher training modules that were not accredited was developed by IOM. Other components developed by UNICEF (and its implementing partners) were accredited.

Recommendation 4: Expand responsibilities beyond contract management to ensure coordination of implementing partners including their reporting of results.

Priority: Medium
Timeframe: Continuous
Responsible agencies: IOM[73]
Related conclusion: 1, 3
Related findings: 1, 9, 11

Elaboration:

- Many implementing partners had limited knowledge of others' work in the project, limiting the possibility of youth taking part in multiple components and weakening strategic connections between components.
- Some implementing partners relied heavily on use of social media in outreach.

Recommended actions and responsible agency/agencies:

- Clarify and ensure strategic connections between components of future projects. (IOM)
- Strengthen coordination to facilitate closer collaboration among implementing partners and enable more unified reporting to authorities. (IOM)
- Consider reducing the number of implementing partners involved in a project. (IOM)
- Provide support to implementing partners regarding outreach, so that those most marginalised can benefit from participating in project activities. (IOM)

Recommendation 5: Assuming that there will be no second phase of the project, integrate project initiatives into existing programmes and school structures and use results achieved for advocacy purposes as ongoing programmatic work.

Priority: Low
Timeframe: By June 2026.
Responsible agencies: UNICEF and IOM
Related conclusion: 2, 3
Related findings: 4a, 4b, 12

Elaboration:

- This recommendation applies exclusively to situation in which UNICEF and IOM are not granted a subsequent phase of the project.
- Schools showed willingness to continue some project initiatives.
- Teacher training modules developed by UNICEF and its implementing partners have been accredited; peer mediation clubs have been established in Kosovo-curriculum schools.
- UNICEF has good working relationship with schools in Kosovo.

Recommended actions and responsible agency/agencies:

- Integrate support to school councils and peer mediation clubs into UNICEF work with schools in the wider education programme. (UNICEF)
- Use results achieved and evidence generated in this project to continue advocacy on peacebuilding. (UNICEF and IOM)

[73] IOM and UNICEF had distinctively different modalities of working with implementing partners. This recommendation is based on findings relevant only to IOM.

8. List of Annexes

Please see attached documents for annexes. The annexes are:

Annex A: Terms of Reference for this evaluation

Annex B: Evaluation matrix

Annex C: Data collection tools for:

1. FGDs with representatives of student councils
2. FGDs with representatives of peer mediation clubs
3. FGDs with youth organisers of advocacy initiatives and campaigns
4. FGDs with participants in: (a) language clubs and events; and (b) language camps
5. KIIs with teachers who received training on: (a) inclusive teaching approaches; and (b) critical thinking
6. KIIs with people in the private sector engaged in the project
7. KIIs with municipality representatives
8. KIIs with central level stakeholders
9. KIIs with implementing partner representatives
10. KIIs with UNICEF and IOM personnel
11. Online survey to student councils (discontinued)

Annex D: Written consent form for parents

Annex E: Statement on ethical considerations

Annex F: Ethical review approval

Annex G: List of evaluation participants (adults only excluding teachers)