# Social Cohesion in Kosovo: Context review and entry-points

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# 1.INTRODUCTION

In light of rising tensions in the Western Balkans region in general, and Kosovo[1] in particular, analysis of potential conflict triggers and flashpoints, and identification of risks as well as opportunities for social cohesion programming, has become all the more important.[2] A conflict-related development analysis for Kosovo was undertaken in 2012 by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) but has not been updated since; and there is limited available research from other sources exploring conflict dynamics and issues. Political developments particularly since 2012 call for a review of dynamics and potential triggers as well as entry-points for constructive change. This analysis has been undertaken in order to expand the perspective of UNDP as well as the wider UN and broader stakeholder community on conflict dynamics in Kosovo through a multi-stakeholder social cohesion analysis process.

In situations that are not in outright armed conflict but where citizens and political actors are dealing with the legacies of previous cycles of violence; or where political appetite to talk of peacebuilding or reconciliation is low, working to advance social cohesion can provide an important avenue for contributing to the wider goal of Sustaining Peace agenda set by the Secretary General's Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, or Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, on 'peace, justice and inclusion'. The concept is defined by UNDP as:[3]

*'A property of a society reflecting the extent of trust, interdependence and economic exchange, and interpersonal interaction together with sense of shared or common destiny. Social cohesion leads to willingness to participate collectively in search of shared peace and development goals and to cooperate and engage with the state in mutually reinforcing state-society relations of trust and loyalty.'*[4]

This paper brings together the findings of a series of facilitated workshops that aimed to capture different perspectives and dimensions relevant to social cohesion in Kosovo which took place in October 2018, along with secondary literature and analysis. It has been undertaken through partnership between UNDP and the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA). FBA supported the UNDP-led workshop process, providing workshop planning, design and facilitation support as well as financial support to the process. The collaboration was part of FBA's broader cooperation with the UN, particularly the UNDP-DPA Joint Programme on Strengthening National Capacities for Conflict Prevention.

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[1] References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

[2] See for instance: Rising Tensions between Pristina, Belgrade Threatening Efforts to Forge Lasting Peace in Kosovo, Special Representative Tells Security Council, United Nations Security Council. 14 May 2018, https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13335.doc.htm.

[3] UNDP has a number of programming initiatives that are designed to contribute to enhanced social cohesion and sustained peace in Kosovo, in light of the, and Goal 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Previous engagement has consisted of a range of successful interventions, as part of governance and peacebuilding; environment, climate and disaster resilience; and sustainable development portfolios. These are summarized in Annex 1 to this document.

[4] UNDP (forthcoming). *Strengthening Social Cohesion for Sustaining Peace - A Guidance Note for Assessment and Practice.*

*Summary of methodology*

Convening experts, practitioners, members of the public, civil servants and CSO representatives, the methodology for the workshops was built around the UNDP definition of social cohesion (above), and focused on identifying both *connectors* and *dividers* related to social cohesion in Kosovo, as well as possible avenues for strengthening social cohesion and future scenarios.[5] The content of the workshops was developed by FBA and was built on interactive exercises and facilitated discussions. The workshops aimed at identifying strengths and weaknesses in the current context in relation to issues linked to trust, interdependence, economic exchange and interpersonal interactions. The facilitated workshops took place in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Gjilan/Gnjilane, and Prishtinë/Priština municipalities to reflect differing perspectives from different geographies and the views of different ethnicities.

The workshops discussion framework and key questions sought to:

- *Reflect on the extent of trust, interdependence, economic exchange, and interpersonal interaction existing in Kosovo*

- *Explore horizontal and vertical dimensions of, and barriers to, social cohesion*

- *Understand connectors that lead to willingness to participate collectively in search of shared peace and development goals.*

The workshops were attended by a total of 32 people representing Kosovo institutions, civil society, community representatives and international organisations. Although small in number overall, participants demonstrated a high level of engagement throughout the discussions particularly in Prishtinë/Priština and Mitrovicë/Mitrovica where numbers were higher (with just 8 participants mobilized in Gjilan/Gnjilane). Over half of the participants were women. In Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, the majority of the participants represented the Serbian speaking community and in the other workshops, the majority represented the Albanian speaking community. The workshops lacked participation from other Kosovan minorities. A number of representatives from the international community were also present. A small number of participants represented youth. No religious representatives were present at any of the workshops.[6]

As the three workshops differed in composition both in numbers and representation, some exercises were slightly amended to fit the size of the audience. However, the basic format was that each workshop started with a facilitated exercise introducing a number of questions exploring with participants where social cohesion was strongest and weakest; where participants viewed the greatest willingness to collectively strengthen trust between all Kosovans and its institutions; and which actors were the most important to strengthen social cohesion in Kosovo. This was followed by a facilitated context scan discussion on social cohesion in Kosovo, with the view to jointly discuss important aspects of social cohesion. A session where UNDP's commissioned desk study on social cohesion was

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[5] *Conflict Analysis Framework Field Guidelines and Procedures,* Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, 2016
[6]. See Agenda at Annex 2.

presented along with a discussion by the author and a possibility for the participants to analyze, respond and problematize around the research findings also took place. Next, a working session in groups was held with the objective of identifying insights into both risk factors and opportunities to advance social cohesion. The group work was followed by a plenary discussion and an attempt to discuss potential future scenarios.

The process was further informed by a number of bilateral smaller meetings, held in parallel to the workshops. These meetings included central institutions in Prishtinë/Priština, representatives from civil society, academia, religious communities, and political observers. This report weaves the discussions at the workshops with secondary source literature and available analysis to triangulate and build a larger picture. The report also feeds from a desk study on social cohesion in Kosovo commissioned by UNDP, an analysis on Conflict Prevention/Social Cohesion undertaken by UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub (IRH) on the northern municipalities in Kosovo[7], together with earlier work on conflict related development analysis undertaken by the UNKT and further supported by literature on political environment and conflict dynamics in Kosovo.

As the scope of the consultations has been limited, this paper is offered as a snapshot arising from the methodology employed. While the conclusions presented cannot be taken to be representative of the population of Kosovo and its stakeholders, they nonetheless provide insights that will contribute to UNDP's identification of future areas of programmatic engagement to strengthen social cohesion. The following discussion triangulates observations shared during the workshops, with background data from the available literature and secondary sources as well as the bi-lateral consultations held as part of this process.

To strengthen the report findings, a validations process was undertaken. Participants from the original workshop were invited to a series of validation workshops to discuss the report´s key findings and conclusions.  The discussion of the validation workshop can be found in annex 3.

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[7] Understanding the Linkages between DRR and Conflict Prevention/Social Cohesion in Kosovo: A Review of the "Confidence and Trust Building through Disaster Risk Reduction and Gender Mainstreaming", IRH Mission Report, Kosovo, August 2018

# 2. CURRENT CONTEXT IN RELATION TO SOCIAL COHESION IN KOSOVO – KEY FINDINGS FROM THE UNDP/ FBA RESEARCH

Kosovo has travelled a long way over the past two decades, from violent conflict, to international intervention with the establishment of United Nations Civil Administration to Kosovo (UNMIK), and the transatlantic military presence NATO-KFOR, to a unilateral declaration of independence accepted by International Court of Justice in the Hague, contested by Serbia. It also has deepening links with the European Union (EU) and signed the Stabilization Association Agreement in 2015 and is as such a potential candidate for EU membership.

Kosovo has a population of approximately 1.8 million[8]. More than half of the population is under 25, making it the youngest population in Europe. The last census in Kosovo took place in 2011, excluding north Kosovo. According to the Kosovo Statistics Agency, 92.9 percent of the population is Albanian, 1.5 percent is Serbian and 5.6 percent are other minorities.[9] There is as a result some disagreement over the accuracy of the data, especially among Serbian communities.[10] Ethnic Albanians, mainly belonging to the Islamic confession and Albanian-speakers, form the overall majority with 92.9 percent.[11] Serbs form the largest minority group in Kosovo, speak Serbian and are predominantly Orthodox Christians. According to estimates based on 2010 and 2013 OSCE data, the Serbian community makes up 7.8 percent of the total population.[12] Within Serbian settlements, Albanians are effectively a minority. Smaller communities in Kosovo include Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Bosniaks, Turks, and Gorani.

Political achievements, reforms, legislation in line with EU-standards, and the establishment of central institutions all point to significant progress since the conflict. Kosovo signed the Stabilization Association Agreement in 2015 and is as such a potential candidate for EU membership. At the political level, the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue conducted with EU mediation since March 2011 focused mostly on technical arrangements for day-to-day relations, expanding into high-level political talks from late-2012 and leading to the Brussels Agreement in 2013. This process has, in some respects, enabled Serbia and Kosovo to move more constructively than hitherto towards a normalization of socio-political issues particularly those affecting northern Kosovo. However, sensitive areas such as security, rule of law, the competences of local authorities, and border control have not been resolved and have worsened in the last few years. In 2018, the Kosovan and Serbian presidents floated the idea of a 'border correction', possibly involving the exchange of northern Kosovo for Albanian-majority Serbian districts.[13] The proposal has been criticized as threatening wider

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[8] *Kosovo Agency of Statistics*. http://ask.rks-gov.net/en/add-news/vler%C3%ABsimi-i-popullsis%C3%AB-2018/
[9] *Kosovo Agency of Statistics*. Kosovo in Figures 2017. Information retrieved in March 2019 from http://ask.rks-gov.net/media/4404/kosovo-in-figures-2017.pdf
[10] These estimates may under-represent Serb, Romani, and some other ethnic minorities because they are based on the 2011 Kosovo national census, which excluded northern Kosovo (a largely Serb-inhabited region) and was partially boycotted by Serb and Romani communities in southern Kosovo
[11] Bertelmann Stiftung, Country Report, Kosovo, 2018
[12] A much larger proportion than the 1.5% estimate in the 2011 census.
[13] European Parliament (2018), Serbia-Kosovo relations Confrontation or normalisation. Information retrieved March 2018 from http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635512/EPRS_BRI(2019)635512_EN.pdf

instability in the Western Balkans and there is also strong domestic opposition to the move in both Kosovo and Serbia.[14]

The Brussels Agreement has faced sustained criticism from within both communities. Implementation of the measures agreed has been partial and obstructed by many civic and political protests. Despite growing pressure on both sides to finally reach a deal that could unlock the door to EU membership, relations remain tense and progress towards normalisation is currently at a standstill.[15] Regional meetings are also often fraught with problems related to Kosovo's status and Serbia often refuses to attend meetings where Kosovo has been invited, which sometimes leads to Kosovo being left out of regional meetings and initiatives. Since November 2018, trade relations are at their lowest due to the import tax that Kosovo has imposed on Serbian goods. Kosovo raised customs tariffs on Serbian and Bosnian goods from 10 to 100 percent after Serbia blocked Kosovo from joining Interpol, the international police organization.[16]

Political, administrative and social divisions continue to be strongly present along ethnic lines in Kosovo, as in the rest of the Western Balkans. Tensions between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians are most visibly manifested in northern Kosovo, in the municipalities of North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Zubin Potok, Zveçan/Zvečan and Leposaviq/Leposavić; though are also apparent elsewhere. Occurrence of certain incidents such as the launch of a 'provocative' Serbian train has continually led to intensified new tensions among Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians.[17]

## Key structural factors

Many of these background dynamics were referenced during the workshops, which served to identify an interplay of dividers and structural factors undermining social cohesion in Kosovo. As indicated by the very different perspectives of the three sets of workshop participants, different narratives co-exist with regards to perceptions about social cohesion in Kosovo. These narratives influence all aspects of life in Kosovo and are being shared with younger generations which in turn contributes to further polarization between communities.

Two key structural factors continue to drive tensions in Kosovo: (i) unresolved political status and; (ii) lack of a comprehensive 'Dealing with the Past' process. Further, three main themes emerged, both derived from and impacting (for the most part negatively) the structural factors. These three themes were identified in all workshops (albeit with different perspectives) as central to social cohesion in Kosovo. They are: i) quality of political leadership; ii) stagnation in relation to the economy, governance and social services; and iii) possibilities to coalesce for change. As such they serve as the framework in this report to structure the reflections and input from the social cohesion workshops. As indicated in the color-coding in Figure 1, the preponderance of these factors was identified as negative in

[14] Ibid.

[15] European Parliament (2018), Serbia-Kosovo relations Confrontation or normalisation. Information retrieved March 2018 from http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635512/EPRS_BRI(2019)635512_EN.pdf

[16] Reuters (2018). Kosovo hits Serbia, Bosnia with 100 percent customs fees after Interpol snub. Information retrieved in March 2019 from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-serbia-trade/kosovo-hits-serbia-bosnia-with-100-percent-customs-fees-after-interpol-snub-idUSKCN1NQ29W

[17] BBC (2017) Train row almost pull Kosovo and Serbia off the rails, information retrieved January 2019 from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38666279

relation to social cohesion and sustained peace in Kosovo by participants. However, the commonly shared challenges across citizenry was also identified as offering the *potential* for building connections and bridges across divides in advancing positive change.

**Figure 1: Interplay of dividers and structural factors affecting social cohesion in Kosovo**



Workshop discussions underscored that Kosovo's population remains deeply divided along ethnic lines. Different understandings of how to interpret social cohesion in Kosovo and narratives surrounding it depended on the regional setting of the workshop. For example, in one context the community were concerned with discussions on 'how' to advance social cohesion, whereas in another context a different community would not subscribe to the same notion of social cohesion and would ask 'social cohesion – with whom?'. Recurrent among older participants was the point that social cohesion had been stronger in the past, during the time of Yugoslavia, with a feeling of nostalgia for an idealized age of economic growth and full employment where divisions among communities were non-existent.

The unresolved political status of Kosovo was highlighted as a deeply polarizing issue, maintaining a situation of political confusion and a *status quo* that severely constrains Kosovo's development. During the workshop in north Mitrovicë/Mitrovica it was pointed out that Prishtinë/Priština is not able to exercise full sovereignty in north Kosovo. While it is understood that municipalities, often delegated from ministries, provide public services, participants in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica were quick to point out that education, health care and garbage removal was being provided by Serbia. In the two other workshops, it was remarked that Belgrade is providing political, financial and administrative support to Kosovo Serbs and that there are elements (individuals and groups) within north Kosovo that manipulate the north Kosovo community for political purposes.[18] Indeed, several individuals based in north Kosovo openly voiced a profound sense of alienation from, and skepticism about, Prishtinë/Priština's intention towards them as citizens. Even if they were seen to be more benevolent than not by some individuals residing in north Kosovo, they questioned Prishtinë/Priština's capacity to navigate complex regional, national-political, accountability

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[18] According to a UNDP study, residents in the northern municipalities generally report lower trust levels in institutions than counterparts elsewhere in Kosovo. UNDP (2015). Kosovo Mosaic, 2015. Information retrieved January 2019 from http://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/library/democratic_governance/kosovo-mosaic-2015.html

and resource-based constraints to effectively protect and provide for them the basic functions of institutions. While the statements in the workshops underlined the mutual lack of trust between the communities, members of both communities were united in expressing a degree of shared skepticism regarding the interests of the political representatives in Prishtinë/Priština and Belgrade engaging in negotiations about Kosovo's status.

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**Unresolved status issue as a structural factor**

While the 2008 declaration of independence has been recognized internationally by upwards of 100 states and enjoys overwhelming support among Kosovo´s majority Albanian-speaking population, it is strongly contested by Serbia as well as its influential international allies and is opposed by most within Kosovo´s Serbian-speaking communities. Fundamental differences have been in evidence at a political level throughout the duration of the talks. For Prishtinë/Priština, negotiation has aimed at winning Serb acceptance of the Ahtisaari Plan (the framework devised originally by Martti Ahtisaari, the former UN special envoy – that established Kosovo's internal structure and statehood). For Belgrade, talks have been focused in attempting revision or improvement of agreements that it considers flawed or unacceptable (including the Ahtisaari Plan).[19] The political environment in relation to the rhetoric and discourse around many issues remains highly contested. Meanwhile there are internal divisions on both sides that were highlighted during the review as further factors influencing current turbulence.

Tensions between Kosovo and Serbia at the highest political levels, notably over the status of Kosovo and the implementation of the 2013 Brussels agreement, contribute to negative effects at the local level. In this context, conflict-affected communities have remained largely separated, geographically, culturally and politically. While some degree of political integration has been achieved, social, cultural and economic integration has been minimal. Communities live side by side, rather than together. There have been some attempts to establish a comprehensive 'Dealing with the Past' process, however the results were limited, and reconciliation remains elusive. Divisive conflict narratives continue to dominate political and social discourse. This persistence has been compounded by the words and actions of political and community leaders who derive their political legitimacy from the conflict, as perpetuation of conflict narratives has repeatedly been mobilized to consolidate domestic constituency.

The contested status of Kosovo's sovereignty thus remains a structural factor of conflict. The status question continues to impact the ability of Kosovans to benefit from international arrangements enjoyed by the rest of the Western Balkans – for example, Kosovo does not enjoy the visa liberalisation that was granted to the rest of the Western Balkans.

Rising dissatisfaction on both sides of the original conflict divide results from the partial realization of Kosovo's independence aspirations. Since Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence, the Albanian-speaking majority population has become increasingly frustrated by the perceived failure of Kosovo leaders and institutions to deliver on promises of sovereign independence, and the perception of unpopular concessions to the Serbian political agenda. The Serbian-speaking minority population is increasingly alarmed by what it perceives to be the unopposed consolidation of Kosovo sovereignty.

Generally, the implementation of agreements between Kosovo and Serbia is lacking, which raises further questions about the signing of the final agreement and whether if signed it will be enforced. Reaching a political consensus in Kosovo for the signing of this final agreement

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[19] ICG (2013), op. cit.

becomes harder with the possible implementation of the conditions that potentially could threaten Kosovo's sovereignty.[20] Statements during 2018 regarding correction of the border have opened discourse of the possibility of a 'land swap'.

Irrespective of formal recognized status, north Kosovo functions in many regards as an integral part of the Republic of Serbia, with the institutions of north Kosovo receiving funding support from Serbia. The Serbian Dinar currency is used and the government in Serbia appoints a Minister for 'Kosovo and Metohija' with portfolio responsibilities for regional developments in Kosovo.[21] Additionally, the Kosovo-Serb community has been continuously threatened and prevented from actively engaging in politics. According to the European Union Institute of Security Studies, 'this was particularly emphasized before and during the national and local elections in Kosovo, when local Serb politicians, as well as employees in (Serbian) public institutions, were threatened or even attacked for participating in the electoral process or supporting candidates who ran independently from the 'Serbian List' – the Belgrade-controlled political organization of Kosovo-Serbs'.[22] While the Kosovo Serb communities in south Kosovo, to a large extent accept and interact with post-independence Kosovo institutions, they nonetheless remain socially isolated, living in mono-ethnic communities or in mixed communities with the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians. There are a few examples that exist of Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians living in mutual proximity, displaying day-to-day interaction, but genuine integration in Kosovo institutional structures are still not the reality.

While some say that dual structures, dual funding streams, dual hierarchies and to some extent dual realities are ever present, the situation has in many respects advanced beyond outright 'dual sovereignty'.[23] The picture emerges of a complex governance context, with citizens facing overlapping and competing bureaucratic systems that are often contradictory and Kafkaesque in their demands.

Civil society organizations from Serbia and Kosovo wrote an open letter to the European Union leadership against the division of Kosovo or the exchange of territories between Kosovo and Serbia, stating that 'redrawing the borders sends a very dangerous message to the citizens of Serbia and Kosovo, as well as to the entire region, that there is a real possibility of legitimizing a dangerous propaganda of ethnic ownership over the territory – a principle that has pushed the region on several occasions into bloody conflicts'.[24] In Kosovo, thousands of protesters organized by the opposition party Vetëvendosje (VV) gathered against the border correction proposal of the President.[25] According to polling in June 2018, 65.2% of citizens think that the final agreement with Serbia should not be signed, if this agreement does not include the recognition of Kosovo by Serbia.[26]

Mistrust between communities persists, as does a disconnect and distrust between the population and institutions of governance, an increasing distrust of international policy and intervention, and an increasingly evident divide between the conflict generation preoccupied with issues of identity, sovereignty and state-building, and a post-conflict generation that is

[20] Democracy for Development (2018) Final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. Information retrieved January 2019 from: www.d4d-ks.org/en/infographics/final-agreement-kosovo-serbia-konacan-sporazum-kosova-srbije/

[21] http://kim.gov.rs/eng/v526.php

[22] European Union Institute for Security Studies (2018). Pristina and Belgrade lost in normalization, information retrieved January 2019 from https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%205%20Belgrade%20and%20Pristina.pdf

[23] 'Dual Sovereignty' was the title of a 2011 ICG report. ICG (2011). North Kosovo: Dual Sovereignty in Practice.

[24] European Western Balkans (2018) Open letter to Federica Mogherini from Serbia's and Kosovo's CSOs against the division of Kosovo. Information accessed on October 2018 at www.europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/08/07/open-letter-federica-mogherini-serbias-kosovos-csos-division-kosovo/

[25] Balkan Insight (2018) Thousands in Kosovo Protest Against 'Border Correction' Proposals. Information retrieved on October 2018 from http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/thousands-citizens-protest-against-kosovo-president-09-29-2018

[26] Democracy for Development (2018) Final agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. Information retrieved at www.d4d-ks.org/en/infographics/final-agreement-kosovo-serbia-konacan-sporazum-kosova-srbije/

internationally isolated, burdened by a sense of identity derived from the past. The post-conflict generation in Kosovo, fueled by conflict narratives that are typically presented as absolute truth, and with severely limited interaction across the original conflict divide that might provide empirical observation to challenge the dominant narratives, is at the same time vulnerable to inherited prejudice.

Both Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs view themselves as victims of aggression perpetrated by the other community, and as a result, inter-ethnic animosity and distrust are ever-present. In a small society such as Kosovo, the conflict touched most inhabitants directly at personal level, and diametrically opposed perspectives concerning the past have never been dealt with in a rooted Kosovo wide dialogue to address experiences and perspectives with the view to healing the society. Many workshop participants confirmed that the legacies of conflict are kept alive through constant memorialization and a political culture that deliberately *'keeps wounds fresh'*. During the workshops, it was also said that cleavages in the education system keep communities divided and symbols of conflict on all sides are ever-present. According to the participants, school textbooks and teaching material contain elements of nationalism and prejudice, fueling a separate understanding and narrative about the context. This only serves to strengthen divisions, stereotyping and victimization[27], and is a key factor preventing Kosovo from healing as a nation. As one workshop participants expressed it: *'It is the 21St century and 20 years later- and we are still stuck in between war and peace.'*

Although actual violence over the past decade has been limited to short-lived, sporadic waves of ethnically-motivated attacks, the presence and maintenance of the symbols of the conflict enable political stakeholders to appeal to and there is a risk that these could also be used to reignite violence. Symbols of conflict and ethnicity mentioned by the participants were, for example, UCK graveyards and memorialization sites, Orthodox crosses in schools, national flags etc. This symbolism has important implications for resolution after a conflict. A recent study found that six to eleven-year-olds in Kosovo can readily and accurately perceive common social markers – such as icons or images – associated with conflict-related groups (i.e. either as being Albanian or as being Serb).[28] Given that children in Kosovo are brought up in divided schools, with minimal or no inter-ethnic contact, hence removing the possibility to interact with children from the other ethnic groups and witness first-hand how the 'other' really is, as they already have pre-conceived notions of the 'other'. More importantly, how children identify with one group also affects their attitudes and behaviors toward 'others', which influences future generations and future social cohesion.[29]

With no apparent political outcome acceptable to all parties, the uncomfortable maintenance of the political *status quo*, and the absence of a successful Dealing with the Past process, the situation in Kosovo continues to resemble a frozen conflict. While workshop participants said that interpersonal exchanges between communities do take place as part of day-to-day life, examples of social cohesion at a deeper level are rare and

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[27] Council of Europe (2017) Justice, social cohesion and media freedom remain top challenges in Kosovo*. Information retrieved in October 2018 from www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/justice-social-cohesion-and-media-freedom-remain-top-challenges-in-kosovo-?desktop=true
[28] Helping Kids (2019) How and when do Children Understand Conflict Related Groups. Information retrieved March 2019 from https://helpingkidsqub.com/2019/03/04/how-and-when-do-children-understand-conflict-related-groups/. As cited in
Pristina Insight (2019). The Colors that Divide, information retrieved March 2019 from https://prishtinainsight.com/the-colors-that-divide/
[29] Ibid.

according to the participants, attitudes towards each other have in some cases hardened. Workshop participants said that interpersonal interactions between ethnic communities take place in the domains of trade, economy and work  - as well as in some cases criminal networks. In essence, they are based on needs, short-term interests and the desire to find practical solutions to everyday problems. As such, it was pointed out by workshop participants, that they should not be mistaken as an indicator for social cohesion or improved intercommunity relations at a deeper level. Frozen divisions in society were described as a bloc that prevents positive developments at the grassroots level from getting a systematic or strategic hold at the political level. The picture presented during the workshop process is that while there is no appetite for a return to conflict among communities, citizens are at the same time *'far from embracing each other'* with occasional spikes of tension and the risk of small-scale clashes between communities, as was mentioned by participants in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and Gjilan/Gnjilane

It was noted that an Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Dealing with the Past and Reconciliation, established to deal with gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law during Kosovo's conflict, which was active between 2012-217, did not succeed in developing a strategy on transitional justice.[30] According to a review of the process, lack of political will, leadership, effective management, and limited representation from minority communities were all reasons for the lack of progress.[31] The President of Kosovo has more recently initiated the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which aims to provide the basis for dialogue among Kosovo's communities. The Commission will not be led or coordinated by the international community and is described as a domestic process.[32] The planning process and the preparation for the Commission carried out by a technical committee that was set up in May 2018 was criticised by the workshop participants for lacking in transparency and community involvement.[33] There were also questions raised during the sessions around the intentions of the President, given his own military background.

> **Lack of progress with transitional justice**
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> The issue of relations between Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serbian communities is strongly associated with a lack of effective and successful transitional justice processes. In the view of many who survived the conflict, there was no justice, no acknowledgement, compensation or reparation for war crimes. The Humanitarian Law Center Kosovo Memory Book states that during the 1999 Kosovo armed conflict a total 10,812 Kosovo Albanians were killed. Nineteen years after the conflict, more than 1,600 persons are still missing[34], mainly due to challenges of political interference, lack of accountability in the judiciary, and lack of exchange of information.[35] The Humanitarian Law Center has consistently reported the failure of authorities to prosecute war crimes, mainly due to lack of political will to face the past, glorification of war criminals and

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[30] https://www.paxforpeace.nl/publications/all-publications/kosovos-framework-for-dealing-with-the-past-at-a-turning-point
[31] ibid
[32] https://www.president-ksgov.net/en/news/the-president-established-the-preparatory-team-for-the-truth-and-reconciliation-commission
[33] In a Key Stakeholder Interview, it was also observed that the limited transparency and community-level involvement may simply reflect the early stage in setting up the process.
[34] International Committee of the Red Cross (2018), Kosovo: 19 years after conflict, over 1,600 people still missing. Information retrieved October 2018 from www.icrc.org/en/document/kosovo-19-years-after-conflict-over-1600-people-still-missing
[35] Dardan Berisha (2017), Challenges of Finding Missing Persons – Kosovo, United Nations Development Programme.

inefficiency on the part of the prosecution authorities.[36] According to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, prosecution and effective sanction of all persons involved in war crimes; clarification of the fate of missing persons; provision of war victims with adequate reparation; and facilitation of the voluntary return of displaced persons are all pre-conditions for achieving lasting peace.[37]

Immediately following the conflict, investigations into the connection of former KLA members with the crimes committed against Serbians and Kosovo Albanians were limited, in the interests of short-term stability.[38] During 2015 the Assembly of Kosovo adopted a constitutional amendment[39] and a Law on Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutors Office[40] to prosecute and adjudicate allegations from the 2011 Council of Europe Report, which alleges serious breaches of international law by former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. While formally part of the Kosovo legal system, the Specialist Court enjoys complete autonomy from all Kosovo institutions, it is located outside Kosovo in The Hague, and it is financed by the European Union (EU). The jurisdiction of the Specialist Court
encompasses the investigation of grave cross-border and international crimes committed during and immediately after the conflict in Kosovo.[41]  In December 2017, members of the Assembly of Kosovo mostly belonging to the coalition launched an initiative to abrogate the Specialist Chambers. This initiative triggered strong and negative reactions from the international community, media and civil society, and raised serious concerns about Kosovo political leaders' commitment to ever seeing these crimes prosecuted.[42]

Further, Kosovo's youth is not adequately informed about issues of transitional justice, which translates into awareness deficit on the importance of dealing with the past. Considering that Kosovo's youth forms the majority population and are susceptible to politicised or manipulated versions of history, there is need to invest in their education and to present them with fact-based historical perspective.[43]

## Theme 1: Quality of political leadership

Disillusionment with Kosovo´s political leadership was vocalized strongly throughout the workshops. Frustrations focused on perceived failure of the political leadership to advance economic growth and improve social services. Participants were of the view that matters such as service delivery, including health, education, access to justice or public infrastructure, are deprioritized while policy goals such as EU integration or the recent discussion about a land swap between Serbia and Kosovo absorb all the attention.

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[36] Humanitarian Law Center (2017), Serbia failing to prosecute war crimes. Information retrieved on October 2018 from www.hlc-rdc.org/?p=33617&lang=de
[37] Council of Europe (2017), Justice, social cohesion and media freedom remain top challenges in Kosovo. Retrieved January 2018 from https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/justice-social-cohesion-and-media-freedom-remain-top-challenges-in-kosovo-?desktop=true
[38]  Council of Europe (2011), Inhuman treatment of people and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo, p.3
[39] Amendment of the Constitution of Kosovo, available at www.gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=10997
[40] Law No. 05/L-053 on Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office, available at www.gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=11036
[41] Pax for Peace (2017), Assessing the potential impact of the Kosovo Specialist Court. Information retrieved in March 2019 from paxreport-assessing-the-potential-impact-of-the-kosovo-specialist-court.pdf
[42] European Commission (2018), Kosovo* 2018 report, p. 17
[43] RECOM (2016) Educating about transitional Justice in Kosovo. p.5

**Pressure and polarization in the political space fueling divisions**

During 2015-17, political tensions arising from opposition to the implementation of bilateral agreements; perceived slow pace of implementation of the planned programme and key legislation resulted in a political stalemate which in turn led to early parliamentary elections in 2017.[44] Controversy over the Specialist Chambers mentioned above was a further factor fueling polarization. Civic protests reflected the political tensions. Despite the formation of a new ruling coalition, continued skepticism about certain Brussels Dialogue agreements among Kosovo's majority community, juxtaposed with the apparent political determination to proceed with and intensify the dialogue process, figured as a constant driver of these uncertainty and tensions. This context has continued to fuel animosity within communities, between communities, and between communities and their political institutions.

The inhospitable social and political context means that contention around the Specialist Chambers at the present time risks producing adverse effects such, further polarizing intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relations, undermining political stability and institutional reforms, delaying the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, while also harming Kosovo's international credibility.[45] Depending on who (if anyone) is indicted and the sequence, former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) leaders may attempt to get supporters to protest, using veterans to mobilize supporters against the court, and Kosovo Democratic Party (PDK) and other indicted parties could use threats of civil unrest as strategies for political survival.[46] Indictments are most likely to affect ex-KLA leaders in at least four political parties: PDK, Alliance for Future of Kosovo (AAK), NISMA and VV[47], which may result in a vacuum of power and shifts in the political party landscape.

Another primary issue of concern feeding political polarization is the agreement between Kosovo and Serbia on general principles of the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities.[48] The Association was opposed among the Albanian majority when the first agreement was signed in 2013, and dissatisfaction grew stronger following the 2015 general principles agreement,[49] leading even to use of tear gas by the opposition parties in the Kosovo parliament.[50] The objection is mostly due to concerns that it will divide Kosovo on the basis of ethnic communities,[51] or that the situation may evolve into an entity similar to Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Hercegovina,[52] which would permanently undermine territorial integrity and sovereignty.[53] Following the referral of the agreement to the Constitutional Court by the President of Kosovo, the Court found several provisions 'incompatible with the spirit of the constitution', but established that the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities will be established in accordance with the statute that will be reviewed by the Constitutional Court.[54]

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[44] Reuters (2017), Kosovo law makers dismiss government in no confidence motion. Information retrieved January 2019 from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-politics-idUSKBN1861NX

[45] Gezim Visoka (2017), Assessing the potential impact of Kosovo Specialist Chambers, p. 7

[46] United States Agency for International Development (2017), *Kosovo Political Economy Analysis*, p. 34

[47] United States Agency for International Development (2017), *Kosovo Political Economy Analysis*, p. 34

[48] Association/Community of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo – general principles/main elements, available at www.eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/statements-eeas/docs/150825_02_association-community-of-serb-majority-municipalities-in-kosovo-general-principles-main-elements_en.pdf

[49] Balkan Policy Research Group, *The Association of Serb Municipalities: Understanding conflicting views of Albanians and Serbs*, p. 10

[50] Kristen Chick (2015), *Tear gas becomes the norm in Kosovo parliament as lawmakers protest Serbian ties*. Information retrived on October 2018 from www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-kosovo-serbs-20151218-story.html

[51] Group for Legal and Political Studies (2018), *Linking the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue to the EU enlargement strategy - which accession prospects are at stake*, p. 8

[52] Group for Legal and Political Studies (2017), *Association of Serb Majority Municipalities in Kosovo (Association Impasse)*, p.5

[53] Balkan Policy Research Group, The Association of Serb Municipalities: Understanding conflicting views of Albanians and Serbs, p. 10

[54] Constitutional Court (2015), Case No. KO 13/15 available at http://gjk-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/vendimet/gjk_ko_130_15_ang.pdf

> Drafting the statute will require balancing between the decision of the Constitutional Court, and the interest of representatives of the Serb community. The Management team that was supposed to draft the Statute was established in 2013 after the Brussels Agreement but was not functional for a long time.[55] On 4 April 2018, Kosovo gave a mandate to the Management Team to start drafting the statute of the Association, and the issue has been live as a source of political fraction since.[56]

Concerns were raised during the workshops that politicians on all sides are purposefully maintaining the political *status quo* as it serves their political interest. It was perceived by the workshop participants that politicians and community leaders derive their political legitimacy from the ongoing conflict dynamics, as the perpetuation of conflict narratives has repeatedly been mobilized to consolidate domestic constituencies. Workshop participants were in agreement that the divisive and sometimes inflammatory language used by the political leadership, on all sides, leads to further stereotyping and prejudice. The politics of fear that sometimes are played out heighten the sense of threat, especially among non-majority communities, which creates a sense that people can only be safe by sticking to their own group. Discussions concerning 'big picture' policy goals are perceived to lack transparency, and unless individuals have close links to the circles of power there is not much information or public dialogue on these issues. Youth from both communities are disregarded and not given an opportunity to discuss or participate in any decision-making. This has, according to the voices heard at the workshops, resulted in a tangible sense of fatigue and mistrust among communities with little or no energy to rally around advocacy processes that could hold the political leaders accountable to their decisions and political leadership.

## Theme 2: Stagnation in relation to the economy, governance and social services

The perceived lack of political (and sometimes community) leadership together with a lack of transparency in political processes are, according to many of the workshop participants, the reasons for the failure to translate achieved political gains to concrete benefits for the majority of the population of Kosovo. They raised questions on where the actual peace dividends of the past 20 years are to be found.

Frustrations at the failure to consolidate gains included: failure to provide adequate social services; economic conditions for employment; progress in relation to issues related to justice; or issues pertaining to education and empowering the youth, and minority rights. There is also frustration with an increased polarization in distribution of wealth, especially when it comes to issues related to social responsibility. According to UNDP's 2018 Public Pulse Survey, more than 29 percent of Kosovans consider that the largest problems facing Kosovo today is unemployment, 14 percent noted corruption and 8 percent said poverty.[57] Respondents selected these as the biggest issues which impact their social wellbeing. These issues were also strongly stressed throughout the workshops.

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[55] Group for Legal and Political Studies (2017), *Association of Serb Majority Municipalities in Kosovo (Association Impasse)*, p.5
[56] European Commission (2018), Kosovo* 2018 report, p. 48
[57] UNDP (2018) Public Pulse XIV. Accessed in January 2019 from
file:///C:/Users/alexandra.meierhans/Downloads/Final%2520Public%2520Pulse%2520XIV.pdf

**No peace dividend**

Despite the Kosovo economy growing consistently above the Western Balkans average in the post-global crisis financial period, World Bank data shows that Kosovo remains the third-poorest in Europe.[58] Economic growth has not reduced high rates of unemployment, provided formal jobs, particularly for women and youth, or reversed the trend of large-scale emigration. Unemployment rates reach 30% and are considerably higher for women, youth and minority communities.[59] Over 30% live below the poverty line[60] though the World Bank lists Kosovo among lower-middle-income countries.[61] Unemployment is perceived as the single biggest issue impacting the social wellbeing of Kosovans, with a youth employment rate of 58 percent.[62] Nearly one in three young Kosovans is considered 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training) (31.4 percent for young women, 23.8 percent for young men).[63]

Limited and poor-quality public service delivery, stagnating economic opportunities and wider regional tensions are among several factors undermining efforts to build an integrated and cohesive society. Almost 60 percent report that they have considered leaving Kosovo.[64] Unemployment is perceived as the biggest issue impacting social wellbeing of Kosovans.[65] Quality of education also remains a major challenge in Kosovo. In the results of an international education evaluation, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Kosovo was placed in the bottom five internationally in the rankings, and in last place in the region, with its 15-year-old students' performance being at the lower end of all test disciplines.[66]

Poverty rates in Kosovo are disproportionally high among certain groups - especially children, female-headed households, and minority communities, including the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. Exclusion from full participation in Kosovo´s school, work and political life is widespread. The lack of economic opportunity and dissatisfaction with political elites have pushed citizens to seek refugee status or follow illicit emigration paths. During 2015 an estimated number of 74,434 people[67] took the illicit route to Europe through Serbia and Hungary seeking a better life.[68]

The workshops underlined that family solidarity is strong and a source of resilience across communities. Remittance from family members abroad is a crucial source of income for many in Kosovo. Some citizens also have their own pensions and other social benefits from times when they worked abroad. In 2016, remittances totaled €662.9 million, with diaspora communities mainly resident in Germany, Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries.[69] These support structures were referred to as crucial in light of deficient public services and weak economic growth. The family is also where social cohesion is the strongest according to participants. The family's strength as a factor for social cohesion is particularly salient

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[58] World Bank (2017) *Republic of Kosovo Systemic Country Diagnostic*

[59] https://tradingeconomics.com/kosovo/unemployment-rate?embed over 50% for youth http://ask.rks-gov.net/media/3989/labour-force-survey-2017.pdf

[60] World Bank (2017) *Republic of Kosovo Systemic Country Diagnostic*

[61] https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups.

[62] https://www.politico.eu/interactive/in-pictures-kosovo-10th-anniversary-future-being-shaped-by-its-youth/

[63] Labour Force Survey 2017, Kosovo Agency of Statistics, http://ask.rks-gov.net/media/3989/labour-force-survey-2017.pdf

[64] Public Pulse: Challenges and Perspectives of Youth in Kosovo, UNDP, August 2018, http://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/library/democratic_governance/public-pulse-analysis.html

[65] Public Pulse XIII, UNDP, November 2017, http://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/library/democratic_governance/public-pulse-xiii/

[66] The World Bank 2017, Education for Global Development. Accessed January 2019: http://blogs.worldbank.org/education/testing-testing-how-kosovo-fared-its-first-international-assessment-students

[67] Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2015), *Estimation of Kosovo Population for 2015*

[68] FES (2015) *The Kosovo torrent to EU, People, Reasons and Ways*, p.3

[69] https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2018/pdf/BTI_2018_Kosovo.pdf

among Albanian communities given their history of having relied on family structures to overcome historic and political hardships.[70] According to participants, the Albanian speaking community has never had fully functioning municipal or central level services and has always relied on family to fill that gap. The workshops highlighted that the family is ultimately the guarantor of everyday life, stepping in and replacing responsibilities normally attributed to the state, and finding short terms solutions to everyday life challenges. At the same time, however, participants also pointed out that this means an additional burden for families, especially women – and that strong ties at family-level does not contribute to wider inter-community social cohesion (potentially even, the reverse).

## Theme 3: Possibilities to coalesce for positive change

The failure of politicians to sincerely commit to social services and employment, together with many other civic priorities have, according to the workshop participants, led to a tangible sense of fatigue among people and communities – across divides. However, energy to rally around advocacy processes that could collectively hold political leaders accountable for their decisions and political leadership is low, in part as a function of disillusionment. Experiences of backlogs in the justice sector, lack of access to justice for women, selective implementation of laws, and failure of authorities to respond to minority rights, were voiced as concerns during the workshops. Weak implementation of laws was attributed to the political leadership of Kosovo with claims that the gap between the political elite and the people is widening. One participant said that the concerns of the elite are not the every-day concerns of ordinary people, and a number of participants claimed that there is a perception of growing impunity.

The confidence and optimism felt by Kosovo Albanians after the 1999 NATO intervention and the 2008 declaration of independence, with a view of Kosovo opening up to the world and contributing to future prosperity and security in the region, has faded. Confidence has been replaced with disillusionment with political elites and has led to a growing sense of inertia among all communities. Political participation is assessed to be low, with many complaints through the workshops that people feel politically excluded. This perception is particularly acute among youth, rural women and non-majority communities.[71]

Municipal boundaries have been drawn along ethnic lines, as part of the Athisaari plan, with the consequence that ethnic minorities elect their own representatives and organise their own political, economic and social life. It is reported that 8 of the 10 municipalities that are led by minority communities are the worst performing (lack of discussion on audit reports, financial discipline in payments, property tax collection etc.)[72] There are also arguments that the power-sharing governance structures both at the local and central level institutions in Kosovo are reproducing nationalistic politics and hindering the transition to sustainable peace.[73]

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[70] Tim Judah (2008), *Kosovo What Everybody Needs to Know*
[71] Public Pulse (2018), UNDP and USAID, http://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/library/democratic_governance/public-pulse-xiv.html
[72] Ministry of Local Government Administration (2017), Performance Indicators for Local Governance
Level For 2017, accessed in January 20-19 from: http://www.zka-rks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/RaportiAuditimit_Indikatoret-per-performance-komunale_Eng.pdf
[73] Visoka and Richmond (2017) After Liberal Peace? From Failed State-Building to an Emancipatory Peace in Kosovo.

Despite hearing similar types of needs and grievances across communities during workshop sessions, experiences were thus said to be translated differently depending on ethnic affiliations, age groups, urban/rural location, and gender. Joint advocacy to demand change and accountability from the political leadership has rarely been considered as a pathway, according to participants when asked this question. This was explained by description of a sense of fatigue and inertia, together with lack of confidence that politicians and institutions will take on real responsibility for improving the quality of life for all in Kosovo. Moreover, participants described civil society as fairly weak and often times dependent on support from international donors. As NGOs depend on donations, they tend to avoid confrontation and criticism. Media platforms are also typically highly polarized by community interest.

Any claims to hold politicians and central institutions in Prishtinë/Priština responsible for failings to deliver on policy demands, are made more complicated by the situation of north Kosovo. According to participants, the general view from south Kosovo is that the community in north Kosovo is seeking to partition Kosovo along ethnic lines. The general view from north Kosovo is that they belong to Serbia and that it is the piece of land that Kosovo Albanians did not manage to separate from the rest of Serbia through conflict. The narrative from both communities reflects a zero-sum logic, portraying one side either as the winners, the 'other', or as the victims of an 'enemy'.

The complex governance structure pertaining to the unresolved status question also deters citizens from coalescing for social change despite common grievances. Participatory processes to rally around change become quickly complex or politicised and are at best weak or too cumbersome to have much impact. Some discussions showed small changes in the nature of political process with examples from Gjilan/Gnjilane where mayors had to rally among all communities in the municipality with promises on improved social services to secure election wins. As such, they are slowly starting to include the needs of minorities in their messaging. There are also improvements in the integration of minorities within some municipalities such as in Kamenicë/Kamenica municipality. The mayor there has appointed a Serb deputy mayor to communicate not only with his employees, but also with his Serb constituents, which comprise about 5 per cent of the municipality's population.[74]

Overall much remains to be done, or to be done differently, to find pathways for bringing citizens together around shared issues of concern and interests that go beyond ethnicity. One workshop participant described the lack of appetite in terms of collectively mobilizing for change by stating that '*It is easier to control when people are fearing*' reflecting on the political situation and the narratives chosen by different political leaders. These could be plausible reasons that might explain the degree of defeatism when exploring the idea of demanding political leadership and accountability for political decision making.

## Key actors and further dynamics highlighted by the research

### *Alienation of youth*

With the youngest population in Europe, the youth base was identified by the workshop participants as an important potential factor for the success of Kosovo for inclusive

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[74] Financial Times (2019). Kosovo youngest mayor seeks to bridge ethnic divide, information retrieved in March 2019 from https://www.ft.com/content/c48ff9b2-8ff8-11e8-b639-7680cedcc421

development through increased social cohesion. For the time-being, however, Kosovo's young population mostly remains an untapped resource, with more than half considering leaving Kosovo.[75] The prospects of visa liberalization and its potential effect on young Kosovans wanting to leave Kosovo was repeatedly mentioned by participants.

Given the predominant importance of youth as a large demographic group, and therefore an important actor for social cohesion, strategic policies or interventions that could be scaled up to a transformative reach (for example targeting the problem of youth employment) have not taken place. Youth from all communities are reported to be disillusioned and demotivated about their future. Workshop participants said that there are few public platforms for sports, culture, concerts or organised meeting places for youth. Youth also perceive themselves to be excluded from political processes and lack the possibility to influence how the future is shaped. The disillusionment of the youth is a real factor that could trigger future destabilization. Marginalized youth are vulnerable to personal, social and economic risks, including low self-esteem, substance abuse, engagement with criminal elements, and increased vulnerability to radicalization and violent extremism.

Lack of engagement of youth could possibly be explained on one level by the strong family structures, which gives little space for youth to be involved in decisions regarding the family in comparison to their elders. Also, young people are seen as part of the family unit, and less attention is paid to collective platforms for youth which in turn could serve as avenues of developing social cohesion among young people in Kosovo.

An additional consideration relevant to social cohesion is that the post-conflict generation in Kosovo, are vulnerable to inherited prejudice as discussed above, fueled by conflict narratives that are typically presented as 'absolute truth', and with severely limited interaction across the original conflict divide. According to workshop participants, families have an important role in how persistent narratives are repeated and transmitted to the younger generations.

## *Gender equality*

Although legislation for equality between men and women is broadly in line with international standards and progressive policies are in place to promote the role and advancement of women, there is a pronounced disconnect between political rhetoric and the reality.[76]  Women often face gender-based violence and high discrimination in the labour market, in the judiciary, in the police, and are severely underrepresented in decision-making in both the central institutions and the municipalities.[77] Moreover, gender-disaggregated data is lacking, and gender mainstreaming in laws and policies remains poor.

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[75] Kosovo Two Point Zero (2018). No Desire to Return, accessed February 2018: https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/no-desire-to-return/.

[76] The 2016–2020 strategy and action plan on protection against domestic violence were adopted in 2016, but according to discussions shared during meetings, implementation remains weak. A national coordinator for the protection from domestic violence was appointed in 2018, which is considered a positive development.

[77] EU-Commission report on Kosovo (2018) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Communication on EU Enlargement Policy*

The importance of the family as an entity in Kosovo has consequences for how society is organized and creates unequal opportunities for different groups, not least for women. Kosovo has one of the lowest levels of female participation in the work force, sitting at just 12.7 percent, Kosovan women face the lowest employment rate for women in Europe.[78] Reasons for the prevailing lack of opportunities in public life or in the workforce for women are family responsibilities in combination with limited access to quality and affordable child and elderly care.[79] Notwithstanding the wealth of the family, women are still less likely to own houses, land or business and continue to face challenges with inheritance.[80] Workshop participants confirmed that conservative social norms and the expectation of the role of women in the family and society, together with low levels of education, also play a role. The potential for women to unite across divides to tackle these issues has not been explored to significant levels to date.

### The international community and its role

On the macro level, workshop participants shared the view that the international community bears great responsibility for some of the negative political, economic and social developments of the last 20 years. However, the international community is viewed in a much more positive light when it comes to its engagement and support on the grassroots level. According to one representative of an NGO working in the social services sector: *'Without the international community, much of our work would cease to exist'*. As such the international community was viewed to be an important actor to foster social cohesion in Kosovo, albeit many participants underlined the need for a different approach than in the past.

However, there was also criticism with regard to the lack of self-initiative and too much of an opportunistic approach of Kosovo NGOs depending on donor priorities and funding. Some workshop participants were significantly skeptical in response to questions about internationally funded projects contributing to social cohesion and their potential to positively influence political or conflict outcomes. While these projects are in many cases important and appreciated, workshop participants said that such interventions clearly cannot be expected to deliver lasting social cohesion outcomes on their own.

### Religion as a factor

Concerning religious identity, Kosovo society remains mostly secular in its attitudes and behaviour. Sunni Muslims constitute the majority within the Kosovo Albanian, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Bosniak, Gorani and Turkish communities. Yet, patterns of externally driven religious radicalization are increasingly influencing Kosovan society. Adherence to a more fundamental interpretation of the Islamic code is increasing, however, currently these individuals adopting this lifestyle remain few relative to the population of Kosovo.[81] Although the number of Kosovo citizens who have engaged in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq

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[78] Kosovo 2.0 (2017) Women out of Work, accessed in January 2019 from: https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/women-out-of-work/
[79] Ibid.
[80] EU-Commission report on Kosovo (2018) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Communication on EU Enlargement Policy*
[81] Bertelsmann Stiftung, Country Report, Kosovo, 2018. A moderate imam interviewed bilaterally as part of this research process expressed concerns of increasing conservative mosques funded and supported by external actors that seek to expand their influence in Kosovo.

has been steadily decreasing between 2012 and 2016 with no reported cases in 2017, an estimated 359 Kosovo citizens[82] left for conflict zones in the Middle East, mostly as foreign terrorist fighters.[83] A strategy and action plan to prevent violent extremism and radicalization has been in place since 2015 and significant international investment on this issue has also been seen.[84]

Whereas 5% of the population subscribe to Roman Catholicism[85], Kosovo Serbs are almost uniformly Orthodox Christian. It is worth noting that the Serbian Orthodox Church is very central to the identity of the Kosovo Serbian community, regardless of the religiosity of the individual.[86] Historically, the Serbian Orthodox church has been the only religious actor to play an outspoken political role in the political landscape. On the other hand, historically religion did not define what it meant to be Albanian as  scholars have shown that it was language that served as the single most important factor that unite Albanians, and in modern history schools played a major part in the Albanian identity in Kosovo.[87] However, workshop participants reflected a perception that religion is being mobilized and manipulated for political purposes, across the spectrum.

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[82] 255 men, 49 women and 55 children according to UNDP (2017), Understanding Push and Pull Factors, pg.7

[83] EU-Commission report on Kosovo (2018) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Communication on EU Enlargement Policy*

[84]Government of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister (September 2015), 2015-2020 Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism.

[85] http://www.balkanalysis.com/kosovo/2011/04/14/the-vatican's-growing-prominence-in-kosovo/

[86] Noel Malcom (1999), Kosovo a Short History,

[87] Tim Judah (2008), *Kosovo What Everybody Needs to Know*

# 3. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

This brief review of priorities and issues affecting social cohesion in Kosovo has demonstrated that social cohesion in Kosovo, is affected by two underlying structural conflict factors; (1) the contested status of Kosovo sovereignty and (2) the absence of a Dealing with the Past process. In the analysis of the workshop discussions, and other research inputs, a picture emerged of a cyclical image relevant to social cohesion in Kosovo. The status question and the lack of Dealing with the Past are in the center of the cycle, circled by the issue of political leadership often using narratives of division for their own political gains; which in turn perpetuates poor public service delivery and governance, contributing to a weak economy, that leads to mistrust and disillusionment among citizens preventing them from coalescing for change.

This cyclical relationship is contributing to maintaining frozen aspects of the conflict in Kosovo. As a result, political tensions have not diminished with the passage of time. The frozen layer in society was described by workshop participants as a bloc that prevents positive developments at the grassroots level from getting a systematic or strategic hold at the political level.

The three workshops demonstrated that very different narratives co-exist with regards to the perception of social cohesion in Kosovo. These narratives influence all aspects of life in Kosovo and are being reproduced and shared with the younger post-conflict generations which in turn contributes to further polarization between communities in Kosovo. The workshops also demonstrated that Kosovo remains divided along ethnic lines and that very little real and structural interaction exist among the different communities. The picture presented during the workshop process is that while there is no appetite for a return to conflict among communities, citizens are at the same time far from embracing each other.

Despite the differences in the workshops there were also a number of areas of commonality. While it could be argued that it is complicated to identify entry points for social cohesion in Kosovo, inputs made throughout the workshops and meetings, continuously expressed a need for greater inclusion beyond the circles of politicians/power as well as for dialogue between communities and the political leadership to shape the future of Kosovo. Discussions with workshop participants centered around real security and prosperity coming from long-term investments in governance and rule of law, and that it will be much more effective for Kosovo to build the resilience of society and improve human security than to continue with the narratives of rivalry power and zero-sum politics currently monopolizing the public discourse.

This reasoning is very much in line with the World Bank (WB) and the United Nations (UN) Report *Pathways to Peace,* which clearly demonstrates that 'inclusive decision making is fundamental to sustaining peace at all levels, as are long-term politics to address economic, social and political aspirations'.[88] The report argues that long term exclusion creates alienation and grievances that can lead to violently settling differences. The inclusion lens

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[88] United Nations and World Bank. *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive approaches for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict.* 2018

also reveals that when views are represented, heard and integrated, this fosters social cohesion and the perception of fairness, and therefore less likelihood of grievances feeding conflict.[89]

When considering social cohesion in Kosovo the issue of inclusion appears fundamental. Today the political dialogue, as expressed by the workshop participants, is detached from the everyday concerns of people. Despite the high number of NGOs and civil society advocacy groups, institutions rarely consult them unless their agenda is in compliance with their own.[90] The extent and manner in which the views and needs of different communities, genders, and age groups in Kosovo are represented, heard and integrated, will be a cornerstone for social cohesion in the future. Meaningful participation would thus serve as the base for social cohesion and could also potentially start challenging some of the 'frozen' aspects of the conflict in Kosovo.

Key issues of concern across communities were also identified, such as the importance of youth for strengthening social cohesion, economy and public services (education, healthcare, social services etc.). There was also a recognition in the steps that have been taken when it comes to the legal framework of Kosovo, despite all challenges related to the implementation of laws. Workshop participants also saw opportunities when it comes to economic exchange and interpersonal relations across communities and expressed possibilities and willingness for dialogue on a grassroots level.

The justice sector and media were highlighted as venues providing a conducive environment for social cohesion and providing a space for inclusive dialogue and engagement across identity groups. However, to be tapped as resources for social cohesion, significant short- and long-term investment is needed. The international community can play a role in enabling this process but should be mindful about the local context and needs and try to balance that with its own demands and obligations according to the workshop participants.

## Sectoral entry-points

### (i)    Media

Traditional media together with new technology including social media, have huge potential for increasing the transparency and interactivity of Kosovan policymaking and is also a way of facilitating more participatory decision-making processes. As the political context and agendas of political elites was, furthermore, identified by numerous workshop participants and interviewees as *the* critical factor preventing lasting transformation to sustainable peace, the use of the media as a transformative platform could be explored. The media could be a platform to discuss the rising nationalism on all sides and help move discussions back to dealing with policy solutions for everyday problems rather than identity-based issues. It could also offer a space where all communities can come together to give different perspectives and challenge the persistent prejudices that are pervasive inhibitors to peacebuilding.

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[89] United Nations. *Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict (2012):Report of the Secretary General,* UN document A/67/499/, S/2012/746
[90]Bertelsmann Stiftung (2018), Country Report, Kosovo,.

Against biases and political motivation of media, and the lack of proper training of many journalists on reporting on issues dealing with the past, media must be better trained and utilized.[91] Traditional and social media (including potentially central television) should provide space to bring citizens from various communities together to discuss common issues and common problems together and foment real cross-community interaction.

### (ii)    Justice sector

The justice sector, despite all its challenges, was seen as a space that, if correctly managed, could contribute to a conducive environment for social cohesion. Important progress has been in made, particularly with the integration of Kosovo Serb judges and prosecutors and their support staff across Kosovo in the unified Kosovo judicial system, with the investigation and prosecution of some high-level corruption cases, as well as the launch of the application process for recognition and verification of the status of victims of sexual violence during the conflict.[92] The judiciary is still vulnerable to undue political influence and rule of law institutions need sustained efforts to build up their capacities. The backlog of cases and inefficiency were voiced as major challenges. However, building on the successes of the justice sector, widening the inclusion in decision-making processes in a strategic manner could support the work to maximize the independence, accountability, professionalism and efficiency of the judiciary. On gender-based violence, it was pointed out that efforts are needed to support the weak coordination between the police, prosecutors and other players and to address the inadequate monitoring by the police and the courts of protection orders in cases of domestic violence. A legal definition of domestic violence and sexual harassment which should be introduced in the Criminal Code is also needed.[93] Civil society could be further involved in the democratic debate on the justice sector and also a contributor to the design and implementation of policy in this area.

### (iii)    Engaging key actors

During the workshop discussions, a number of actors relevant to social cohesion were identified and discussed. Politicians on all levels were viewed as negative contributors to social cohesion. The workshop participants identified a number of actors that could play a positive role for social cohesion in Kosovo. This could serve as a consideration for future thinking on social cohesion engagement. The positive actors included women and youth, both which are currently left out of political processes and decision making.

While the participants noted that the international community plays both a negative and positive role, all the workshops confirmed that there is still a valid (and needed) role for the international community to actively continue supporting Kosovo in creating a conducive environment for social cohesion. However, it was said that the international community should be mindful about the local context and needs and try to balance that with its own demands and obligations. Moreover, on a geopolitical level the international community has an important role in pushing for the clarification of the political status. Without the

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[91] Eurozine. Kosovo: Fake news in a struggling democracy, accessed in January 2019: https://www.eurozine.com/kosovo-fake-news-in-a-struggling-democracy/.
[92] EU-Commission report on Kosovo (2018) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Communication on EU Enlargement Policy.*
[93] EU-Commission report on Kosovo (2018) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Communication on EU Enlargement Policy.*

international community's support in this regard, one of the key structural factors to conflict in Kosovo will remain unaddressed.

It should be noted that the United Nations recently started the process of a Western Balkans Strategy on *Sustaining Peace through Reconciliation, Trust-building and Dialogue*. The overarching goal of the proposed Strategy is to harness concerted UN engagement, in partnership with key actors, in support of sustainable peace and reconciliation in the Western Balkans. In particular, it aims to promote regional approaches to building conciliatory and trustful relationships at all levels within and between societies and communities, bringing together for maximum effect the expertise, access, mandates and institutional knowledge across the UN system. The Strategy echoes the assessment of the UN Secretary-General in his briefing to the General Assembly on 16 January 2018, which stressed the urgency of 'a concerted effort for solutions leading to long-term stability in the Western Balkans'.

# ANNEX 1- UNDP KOSOVO PROJECTS

The initial **"Support to northern municipalities**" project (2013 – 2014) expanded to the "**Action for Municipal Leadership and Cooperation**" which ended in December 2017. The Norwegian Embassy in Prishtina was the main donor, with UNDP Kosovo cost sharing some of the project as well. , The project focused on providing technical and expert support to the civil service and to the municipal leadership, while the inter-municipal cooperation strived to establish a more formal cooperation on capacity development amongst the northern municipalities and with municipalities in the rest of Kosovo. The identification of short and medium-term development priorities, in consultation with local communities, resulted in development of several infrastructure projects which were funded by donors.

**"Support to strengthening the rule of law in Kosovo"** works towards strengthening an independent and effective justice system, which protects and promotes human rights standards with a special focus on vulnerable groups (women and minorities), ensuring better access to justice for all citizens. The citizen's increased awareness on mediation and free legal aid has ensured that more citizens benefit from the justice system. The application of the human rights standards in court proceedings has also contributed to the enhanced the trust in the judicial system by all citizens.

The "**Justice 2020 Programme**" (2018), jointly implemented by UNDP, UNWomen, UNICEF & UNFPA, was based on a holistic partnership with key institutions such as the Agency for Free Legal Aid, the Academy of Justice, and CSOs to strengthen the functioning and effectiveness of the legal aid and mediation services. Pursuant to the human-rights based approach, UNDP improved access to justice, and is increased awareness of marginalized groups, including women and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) community. As such, the project contributed to the empowerment of marginalized communities to demand access to their entitled rights. The programme also addressed the Bender Based Violence (GBV) issues, by focusing on overcoming barriers to entering the labour market, finding employment and securing income for better livelihood of DV/GBV survivors and (potential) victims, working closely with local stakeholders and the DV/GBV coordination mechanisms in the four northernmost municipalities.

**"Support to Transitional Justice in Kosovo" (2014-2018)**
The Support to Transitional Justice in Kosovo (STJK) is a joint undertaking of UNDP, OHCHR, UN Women and IOM, under the umbrella of the United Nations Kosovo Team (UNKT). While the project's main activities ended in 2017, the last component "Establishing a TJ Resource Centre in the University of Prishtinë/Priština" ended in September 2018.
The project's objective focused on the enhancing of the capacities of critical institutional and civil society actors to engage in and steer and inclusive, participatory, victim-centered and gender-sensitive transitional justice process in Kosovo. This approach aimed at improving community relations, strengthen civic trust and, in the long term, contribute to reconciliation and prevention of future violence.

**"Kosovo missing person's initiative to increase stability and improve reconciliation by confronting issues from the past" (2016 – on-going)**

The project has been successful in bringing together local stakeholders and partners, developing research for policy changes and focusing on the families' associations. In close cooperation with the donor, the project has contributed to strengthening institutions' and family associations' capacities in dealing with issues related to missing persons. In addition, the project has provided concrete recommendations in terms of development and revision of legal infrastructure. Furthermore, through joint forums and conferences, the project has contributed to strengthening cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia, between family associations, in promoting the issue of missing persons as a common concern. In cooperation with ICMP, the project has achieved concrete results in analysing the DNAs and matching the post-mortem samples.

**Inter-community Dialogue through inclusive Cultural Heritage Preservation (2018 – ongoing)**

The EU-funded project "Inter-community Dialogue through inclusive Cultural Heritage Preservation" will work on further trust-building between the communities in Kosovo, through improved inter-community acceptance and respect for the cultural identity and heritage of all Kosovo communities. Cultural heritage is a crucial element of Kosovo's social reconstruction efforts ensuring a "thread of continuity" that links the post-conflict reality with a pre-conflict "normality" and supporting transition from post-conflict to sustainable development. In Kosovo, where inter-community exchange is limited and the understanding of the other's heritage is restricted, tangible and intangible cultural heritage protection may serve as an instrument to build inter-community trust. Community cohesion through both tangible and intangible cultural heritage has also value for economic development and creation of employment opportunities, especially for women and young people. This project is the follow-up phase of the initial "Confidence Building through Cultural Protection in Kosovo" project (2016-2017).

**The Integrated Territorial Development 2** project builds on the successes of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC)-UNDP "Local-level Response for Employment Generation and Integrated Territorial Development (InTerDev)" project that has been implemented in southern Kosovo's municipalities of Dragash/Dragaš and Shtërpcë/Štrpce since 2014. The overall objective of the project focuses on inclusive and sustainable income generation and job creation for women and men is improved in the municipalities of Dragash/Dragaš (Gorani community), Shtërpcë/Štrpce (Serb community), and Viti/Vitina (Albanian community).

The initial "**Kosovo Disaster Risk Reduction Initiative**" lead way to the "**Disaster Resilience Initiative Support for Kosovo**" project, working on strengthen disaster and climate risk assessment capacities and identify priorities to inform disaster risk and climate risk management strategies and programme development. The project conducted Local Post-Disaster Needs Assessment report (LPDNA) and Early Recovery Framework and Action Plan (ERFAP) after severe flooding in northern Municipalities of Leposaviq/ć, Zubin Potok and Zveçan/Zvečan in spring 2014. It also facilitated the first meeting between all fire-fighters of northern Municipalities and Head of Emergency Management Agency/Ministry of Internal Affairs.

**"Support to implementation of the forest policy and strategy in Kosovo" (completed) aimed** to increase the contribution of the forest sector to the economy through sustainable use of forest resources, taking into account the multipurpose of forestry sector, including the economic, social and environmental benefits as well as its contribution to climate change mitigation. The project was implemented jointly by Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN and UNDP. The objective of UNDP's component aimed to develop capacities for forest management in the northern municipalities as well as identify and build the skills of potential beneficiaries, private forest owners and potential entrepreneurs in the forestry sector to promote active employment measures. These measures focused on young women and men, small farmers and other vulnerable groups.

# ANNEX 2 – WORKSHOP AGENDA

**Social Cohesion in Kosovo: Identification of Conflict Risk Factors and Potential Response Pathways**
**Strategic Dialogue to Inform UNDP Conflict Analysis**
**Workshop Agenda**

| Monday, 22 October 2018, at Hotel Prishtina, | |
|---|---|
| **08:45- 09:00** | **Arrival and registration** |
| 09:00- 09:15 | Welcome<br>• Alessandra Roccasalvo, Deputy Resident Representative in UNDP Kosovo<br>• H.E Karin Hernmarck Ahliny, Ambassador of Sweden (TBC |
| 09:15-09:30 | Framing the day - Introductions |
| 09:30- 10:45 | Conflict and peacebuilding in Kosovo – context scan<br><br>*Expert panelists to share perspectives on current context in Kosovo, offering insights into both risk factors and opportunities to advance peacebuilding and social cohesion, followed by plenary discussion.* |
| **10:45- 11:00** | **Tea/ coffee** |
| 11:00- 13:00 | Thematic groups to unpack different factors (economic, social, environmental, political and regional which shape conflict and tensions in Kosovo<br><br>*As a key input to the UNDP conflict analysis, participants to work in groups identifying connectors and dividers present in different sectors in relation to conflict dynamics and opportunities for peacebuilding and social cohesion.* |
| **13:00- 14:00** | **Lunch** |
| 14:00- 15:15 | What are potential scenarios unfolding? What interventions can be envisaged to advance peace and social cohesion in Kosovo?<br><br>*Facilitated discussion identifying connectors and dividers.* |
| 15:15- 15:30 | Wrap-up and close. |

# ANNEX 3 – VALIDATION WORKSHOPS OF RESEARCH/REPORT FINDINGS

In order to validate the report findings and ensure that views were properly represented, four validation workshops were held in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, and Prishtinë/Priština, including with the United Nations Kosovo Team (UNKT).

Due to the scope of the methodology, the conclusions presented cannot be taken to be representative of the population of Kosovo and its stakeholders, however the findings nonetheless provide insights that will contribute to (UNDP/UNKT) identification of future areas of social cohesion engagement. The following discussion triangulates observations shared during the workshops and background research, with further discussion and data collected during the validation workshops held in Kosovo from 2 - 4 April 2019. FBA also supported the validation workshops, through workshop planning, design and facilitation support, as well as financial support to the process.

The observations shared during the validation workshops further build on the report and validate the findings and conclusions drawn. 41 participants representing Kosovo institutions, civil society, community representatives and international organizations attended the validation workshops. The participants from the first workshops in October were highly encouraged to attend in order to validate the data and findings from those discussions. Over 60% of the participants were women. In Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, the majority of the participants represented the Serbian speaking community and in the other workshops, the majority represented the Albanian speaking community. The workshops unfortunately lacked participation from other Kosovan minorities. A number of representatives from the international community were also present. A small number of participants represented youth. Again, no religious representatives were present at any of the workshops.

The report was presented to participants and then discussed through a facilitated discussion (example agenda of one of the workshops attached in Annex 4).

Overall, the participant agreed with the report findings, the diagram developed that describes the structural factors and themes related to social cohesion and the main obstacles as well as possible key entry points for strengthening social cohesion in Kosovo. On the structural issues of lack of Dealing with the Past processes and unresolved Kosovo status issue, participants agreed that all discussions on social cohesion and existing conflict narratives come back to one of these, if not both, intertwined issues. While the report focused on the Serbian and Albanian communities, they agreed that for both, including minority communities, conflict narratives are passed on to the younger generation. Further, the participants stated that there is a lack of genuine communication taking place between and across the communities and this often leads to false narratives being passed on. Since there has been no national, all-inclusive Dealing with the Past process, facts and objective histories have not necessarily been communicated to all parties and there has been limited effort to foster reconciliation by the central level.

Participants confirmed that work on dealing with the past and transitional justice has been undertaken, both at the grassroots level by NGO's and civil society and through international organizations. Some participants and members of these organizations felt that they did not always communicate their work well and that if no communication took place, it seems as if nothing has been done. This related to transitional justice activities, but also judicial proceedings. Participants noted that central and local institutions have also undertaken some Dealing with the Past processes, but it has been limited in scope. Participants highlighted the regional aspects of the Dealing with the Past issue and noted that while a national and systematic process is needed in Kosovo, some aspects that hinder reconciliation, such as missing persons or lack of justice, does contain regional elements that have not been fully addressed.

The participants in the workshops accepted the unresolved Kosovo status issue as a structural factor. While the issue of the Kosovo's unresolved status affects different communities differently, the participants understood that this had negative implications on all communities. Participants also agreed that political leaders appear to support the status quo, as they use the current situation to legitimize power. Most of the participants also agreed that political leaders are not viewed to improve cohesion in Kosovo and as such legitimizes and strengthen the existing conflict narrative. The participants also noted the report findings on political mistrust at the local and central level to the political leadership and agreed it being an expression of political leaders not representing citizens' views or needs. This in turn perpetuates the lack of confidence in public institutions and services. It was confirmed that there is a perception that political leaders are concerned about big-ticket items like EU integration and visa liberalization, instead of issues that affect individuals daily such as education, social services and employment.

On the three themes identified through the workshops and outlined in the report; political leadership, stagnation in relations to economy, governance and socials services, as well as the possibility to coalesce for change, some participants noted that they had always considered these issues as the structural issues, and were surprised to see lack of Dealing with the Past and Kosovo's status issue as the structural factors. This was attributed to the fact that lack of Dealing with the past and Kosovo status`s issue still represent issues that are painful to address and are often highly politicized. This has resulted in the discourse on social cohesion and conflict prevention focusing on issues related to unemployment and education, which the report identified as themes/ symptoms of the structural issues of not Dealing with the Past or the unresolved issue of Kosovo´s status.

Some participants said that discussion was needed much more on these issues, specifically Dealing with the Past, and that this would be the only way to make progress. While there was debate as to how to best proceed with Dealing with the Past and what this process should look like, overall, all participants agreed that a Dealing with the Past process was needed.

When discussing the social cohesion entry points of media and the justice sector, participants agreed that these were possible entry points for further social cohesion, but also exclaimed caution in regards to both topics. On media, the main takeaways from the discussion are that communication is key to social cohesion. As was mentioned earlier in the report, if results or work is not being communicated well with the public, it may as well not

exist. It was felt that while media, both traditional and social media could be used to foster social cohesion, CSO's/NGO's are often not given space in traditional media. With traditional media such as newspapers, some concerns were raised about ethical reporting, as traditional media is often dependent on state funding. State funded media has a much bigger public reach, often shaping public opinion. On social media, the concerns were raised about fake news and lack of control. Social media is also, according to the participants, often used to perpetuate the conflict narrative and incite hate. Participants noted that media has the potential to further social cohesion, but that training for journalists and oversight mechanisms were needed.

The participants, noting its various caveats, such as the issue of backlogs, lack of legal implementation and lack of professionalization, also validated the justice sector as an entry point for social cohesion. It was noted that while the laws are well developed and well written, the issue of implementation is an issue for all communities. Raised several times was the law on gender equality and the law on official languages, as examples of well-written laws that were not being fully implemented.

The issue of language was raised on several occasions and in relation to so many aspects, both in politics and media, as well as conflict narratives and the justice sector. Participants from both communities felt that language was a hindering factor in social cohesion. The younger generation often cannot communicate with members of the other community, which makes discussing hard issues and past narratives difficult, but the issue is much deeper than that on translation and the law on official languages. While all public documents should be available and provided in both Albanian and Serbian, participants noted that that this is often not the case. Participants openly spoke about the bad translation of some laws, court rulings and lack of municipal services available in certain languages and how is an important factor that hinders social cohesion. Participants stated that there are often not enough trained translators, as the best ones tend to go to the private sector or to international organisations, and that translation is not professionally done. They requested that translation staff, especially at the municipal and central level be further professionalized and that documents are quality checked before they are made public. Language classes, especially for the youth were also mentioned several times, and while some do exist, there seemed to be more demand than what was available. It should be noted that the report stemming from the UNMIK Trust Building Forum, which took place in Ljubljana 6-8 May 2018, states language compliance as the first six recommendations coming out of the group on Good Governance and Access to Services.[94]

While women and youth were validated as constructive actors for social cohesion, their lack of representation within the political sphere were discussed as hindering their full contribution.

The business sector was identified as a possible third entry point for social cohesion. While the business sector and economic exchange has always existed between all communities, it was suggested this is further explored and whether some of these business models could be used to foster and increase social cohesion.

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[94] Forum Report (2018) United Nations Kosovo Trust Building Forum, accessed April 2019 from:
https://unmik.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/un_kosovo_trust-building_forum_2018_final_report.pdf.

**Further Inputs**

UNHCR has suggested that in order to increase social cohesion we need to promote meaningful participation and inclusion of voluntary returnees, displaced persons, persons at risk of statelessness, refugees and marginalized communities in development programs with specific focus on provision of inclusive education, employment, economic and vocational opportunities.   Specifically, specific focus should be given on 400 persons accommodated in Collective Shelters in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and Prishtinë/Priština regions. As a result of the coexistence initiatives, for the above-mentioned categories, based on their needs, there should be equal opportunities for integration and community development projects as for the rest of the citizens. In the areas of housing, land and property, UNHCR continues to encourage adequate housing solutions through enabling meaningful choices of displaced persons to achieve durable solutions.

Various examples of already existing mechanisms that increase social cohesion were provided by the UNKT team such as the IPKO Foundation, especially DokuTech, Dokufest, Thermokiss, Prishtina Hackerspace (free language courses), FLOSK, Multiethnic Tennis Court in Çagllavicë/Čaglavica and Rock School in Mitrovicë/a.

# ANNEX 4 - VALIDATION WORKSHOP AGENDA

**Agenda**
**Social Cohesion in Kosovo: Identification of Conflict Drivers and Potential Response Pathways Phase II**

**VENUE: Hotel Sirius, Agim Ramadani, Prishtina**

| Tuesday, 02 April 2019 | |
|---|---|
| **08:45- 09:00** | **Arrival and registration** |
| 09:00- 09:30 | Welcome and Opening Remarks <ul><li>Ms. Marta K. Gazideda, Governance and Peacebuilding Portfolio Manager/Deputy Programme Coordinator in UNDP Kosovo</li><li>Ms. Helena Vazquez, Folke Bernadotte Academy</li></ul> |
| 09:30-10:00 | Presentation of final report on 'Social Cohesion in Kosovo' <ul><li>Key findings</li></ul> |
| 10:00-11:45 | Moderated discussion <ul><li>Overall feedback on findings</li><li>Response to key elements of social cohesion conceptual framework</li><li>Sharpening entry-points identified through the research</li></ul> |
| 11:45-12:00 | Wrap-up and close |