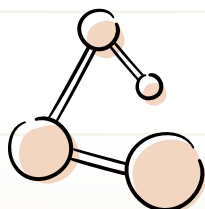
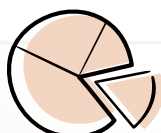
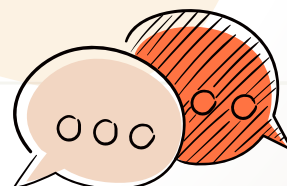


Youth voices

from

KOSOVO



FOREWORD

Thank you for joining the children and young people of Kosovo and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in observing World Children's Day on 20 November 2021.

This is a special World Children's Day for UNICEF, marking 75 years since the organization was founded to work for the rights and well-being of every child, everywhere. We celebrate this important milestone during the Covid-19 pandemic, the first truly global crisis most of us have experienced in our lifetimes. No matter where we live, the pandemic has affected all of us – and our children most of all. Too many have missed out on their education, their access to basic health services, and their right to be safe and protected. COVID-19 has undone decades of development progress and has widened inequalities everywhere. Unfortunately, the social, economic and health impacts of the pandemic will continue to reverberate and threaten child rights for years to come.

Children and young people are concerned about the quality of their education and about marginalized children who face prejudice, discrimination, and violence in school. Students worry about having missed out on learning during the pandemic. They also believe that gender stereotypes still affect equality of opportunities in today's Kosovo.

On this World Children's Day, it is therefore more critical than ever that **adults listen to the voices of children and young people, take their advice, and take action.**

In this context we are pleased to share the report of Youth Voices from Kosovo, a summary of a series of consultations conducted by UNICEF and its partners in 2021 to hear the perspectives of children and young people on issues that matter to them, from mental health and well-being to education and gender equality. These inputs were collected, along with views of children and young people from around the world, as input to the new global UNICEF Strategic Plan for 2022-2025. We believe however that these thoughts and suggestions are also important to share with decision makers, civil society organizations, development partners – all of us working with and for children and young people in Kosovo.

In this Youth Voices from Kosovo report young people tell us what they think, and they tell us what they want. We hope you will join us in listening to their voices and supporting their priorities as we continue promoting every right, for every child, in Kosovo and beyond.


Nona Zicherman
Head of Office
UNICEF Kosovo



Youth voices from Kosovo*

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

November 2021

“Empowering youth to participate in decision making and including them in these processes from an early age, whether in school councils or other mechanisms where they can speak up, teaches them that their voice is important, and this is something that stays with them in the future.”

**Young adult,
20- to 24-year-olds group**

UNICEF Kosovo undertook two consultation processes with children and young people aged **10 to 24 in early 2021** to listen to **what they have to say** and to what they want for their education, their wellbeing, gender equality, their engagement in society, and their **participation in decision-making** processes.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

OF WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SAY



- School does not prepare young people adequately for life and work. The overburdened curriculum, the emphasis on theoretical knowledge and the lack of skills development opportunities result in stress and unpreparedness for the world of work.
- Marginalized children continue to face prejudices, discrimination and sometimes violence in education: boys and girls from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, poor children and children with disabilities.
- Students have significantly missed out on their learning during the pandemic.
- Precarious living conditions remain for marginalized children, particularly those from poor rural families and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.
- Gender stereotypes limit their opportunities in life and work.
- Children's and youth's views are not respected by adults and they are often excluded from decisions that have an impact on their lives in the home, school, and society.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

OF WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WANT



- Greater consideration for their specific life situations and more support for completing their education all the way to the end of secondary school.
- Less discriminatory, more inclusive and more responsive schools that also address their psychosocial and wellbeing needs.
- Being equipped with skills for life and work, including digital, socio-emotional, communication, and critical thinking skills.
- Making gender equality more visible in the curriculum and in youth engagement activities.
- Their voices to be heard at school, including in school councils, and better preparation for their meaningful participation in school and in national debates on public policy development.

OVERVIEW

A note on methodology

Consultation for UNICEF's Global Strategic Plan (2022-2025)

Six Focus group discussions were conducted with 36 children and young people aged 10 to 24 (one focus group for children aged 10 to 14 years old, three focus groups for teenagers aged 15 to 19 years old and two focus groups for young people aged 20 to 24 years old).

Participants were from rural and urban areas in several municipalities of Kosovo. Groups were gender balanced and included children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and children with disabilities. Some of the young people were selected from a list of participants in a UNICEF youth skills development programme.

UNICEF Kosovo supported two consultation processes with children and young people in early 2021:

- One consultation process to contribute to the development of UNICEF's global strategic plan (2022-2025), and
- Another consultation process to inform the development of the European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

UNICEF Kosovo believes that the valuable messages expressed by children and young people participants in the consultations are to be shared with Kosovo institution representatives and policy makers in Kosovo to inform national policy debates and the development of Kosovo national strategies.



Consultation for the European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child

The consultation was organised by UNICEF, World Vision and Save the Children with 29 children and young people aged 11 to 17 years from three different municipalities. Three focus groups were organised with young boys and girls (i) from families living in poverty (ii) with disabilities, and (iii) from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

The thematic focus of the consultations was as follows:

- Education, online learning, skills development, gender equality and youth engagement for the consultation for the UNICEF Global Strategic Plan, and
- Rights, education, health care, living environment, children's voices and safety for the European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

Sixty-five (65) children and young people aged 10 to 24 years took part in the consultations overall.

This document summarises **what children and young people say** and describes **what children and young people want.**



WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

“I don’t think that the things we learn in schools today will prepare us for our future life.”

15- to 19-year-olds group.

“There is a lot of stress because of too many classes that we have, and it doesn’t allow us to focus on what we like doing.”

10- to 14-year-olds group.

EDUCATION

Overburdened and irrelevant curriculum

Young people’s key message is that school does not prepare them adequately for life in the future. They voiced concerns about:

- The overburdened curriculum which makes learning superficial and keeps them from researching in depth subjects that they are interested in.
- The emphasis on theoretical knowledge to the detriment of concrete everyday life applications.
- The lack of support to basic life skills development in schools, particularly digital skills, critical thinking and communication skills.

“Education in Kosovo emphasizes too much memorisation of basic knowledge. Practical applications of that knowledge are very limited (...). More hands-on application of education would in my opinion be for the best.”

15- to 19-year-olds group.

Discrimination, exclusion and violence in education

Another key message is that many children face discrimination in school and are excluded from the education process.

- Some children are feeling anxious about not being able to continue their education beyond Grade 9, particularly those from marginalised or remote communities, girls from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and children with disabilities.
- The absence of school meals and the lack of school transportation are key barriers to education for the poorest children, those living in remote areas and children with disabilities.
- Marginalised students, including poor students report examples of discrimination in school and have felt discriminated for their looks (nose earring, long hair) or socio-economic status. These children feel that their participation in class is constrained and that teachers favour students whose parents have good jobs or are well known in the community. Children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities reported feeling treated differently than other children in school and raised the issue of the discrimination they are facing in the community and society at large.
- Children with disabilities shared examples of discriminatory behaviours and violence from teachers, including name calling and preventing them from participating in class activities. One child explained that one teacher continuously reminded him that he had to remain quiet and silent. Another one reported being called by a teacher “crippled and unable to do anything”.

“I lost a lot in knowledge during the past year. I think it’s the fault of the people who were supposed to transmit knowledge.”

20- to 24-year-olds group.

“I study engineering and I see students who can’t do the most basic things such as use a computer or go on Google.”

20- to 24-year-olds group.

“I wouldn’t want to go back to online learning in the future, even if it was for only a few days a week. It doesn’t have the same effect. I understand things better in class.”

10- to 14-year-olds group.

Violence in school was not a topic directly addressed in the focus group discussions, yet children with disabilities reported the need to raise awareness about school bullying and young adults said that the attention to gender-based violence in schools was insufficient. In several focus groups, young people conveyed that the mechanisms for reporting violence in school were not functional.

Lack of learning opportunities outside of school

Young people regretted the lack of learning opportunities outside of school in their communities, including for sports such as swimming, but also the lack of youth centres, or just playgrounds and green spaces. Accessibility was raised as a concern by children with disabilities.

Non-formal education is seen as a way to support skills development in the absence of strong school-based programmes, but access to non-formal education programmes is limited, particularly in rural areas.

Online learning

Students found learning under the pandemic very challenging. Not only did they miss the school environment and socialising with their peers, but they also struggled with keeping up to date with their learning.

- Students felt that they significantly missed out on their learning.
- Most students, including students with disabilities reported major issues with technology, including unstable internet connections and limited access to computers in some communities or in families with more than two children.
- Young people explained that many students lacked digital skills despite spending a lot of time online and some students felt that teachers lacked IT skills and were ill-equipped to teach remotely.

“The digitalization of books and free access to some of them was one advantage of the pandemic. Students became more independent as they were able to do scientific research properly, not just relying on media or something that was available in hard copy only.” (In response.. of the pandemic.).

20- to 24-year-olds group.

- Poor connectivity and access to IT devices has excluded groups that were already marginalised from the education process, such as poor children and children with disabilities.
- Lastly, challenges and from the diversity of on-line platforms used by teachers.

While young people expressed that they wanted to go back to face-to-face teaching, they also commented on some of the benefits of online learning. Several teenagers spoke positively of the e-books made available during the pandemic and others talked about how e-learning could support the development of their autonomy and research skills, and support students with their homework, when missing classes, or when wanting to increase their knowledge about a particular topic.



“We are too stressed in school. We should have less homework, there is too much importance placed on one test for the final grade. For many children, this stresses them more, because if there is just one test, and they don’t happen to feel well or do well on the day of that test, this can ruin their grade.”

10- to 14-year-olds group.

We are all stressed about our futures. Adults should help us focus on the present, and not stress us so much about the future and expect us to know what we want to do right now. We don’t know what we want to become when we grow up and by making us think about the future, they are de-motivating us.”

10- to 14-year-olds group.

WELLBEING

Children aged 10 to 14 years spoke about the stress they experience from the high expectations placed on them and the decisions they have to make about their future career at a very young age. Another issue is the lack of continuous learning assessments in school, and the heavy emphasis put on a single test to grade students every semester.

Older adolescents and children with disabilities also mentioned struggling with stress at times. Young people spoke highly of the psychological support that was deployed in some communities during the pandemic, including in Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Others, in particular children with disabilities, highlighted the lack of mental health information and clear publishing of where to find information and resources.

Children from poor families and from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities emphasised the precarity of their living conditions, particularly regarding housing and food, and voiced their anxiety regarding their ability to remain in school.

“During the pandemic we were in constant communication with psychologists, who were sending us homework online and we had a specific period in which we had to send back responses. They were also in communication with our parents, providing support to them in preparing documents for social assistance, legal assistance, etc. This was great help both for us and our parents.”

15- to 19-year-olds group.

GENDER EQUALITY

Gender roles, stereotypes and prejudices

Both boys and girls encounter challenges arising from traditional gender role expectations, whether at home, in school, at the workplace or in the workplace or the community.

Young people are very conscious that gender inequality starts from home and talked about the lack of parental awareness about gender stereotypes and the need to treat boys and girls the same. Some girls, including in rural areas and from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities reported having to undertake house chores because of their sex. Other young people explained that Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian girls can be discouraged to continue education beyond Grade 9 while boys are encouraged can more easily continue. Boys, however, are more prone to engage in informal labour to contribute to the family income.

There was consensus around the fact that gender discrimination appeared more prominent in rural areas, where girls might have less awareness about gender roles, gender stereotypes and gender prejudices, and be less equipped to speak up about their experiences.

Teenage girls reported misinformation and feelings of shame towards physiological changes and menstruation as the topic remains taboo in society. As for boys, they feel prejudiced in some settings, including school, and might feel pressured into masculine roles that they do not fully adhere to.

“In cities and more urban areas, there are stereotypes but there are also girls who know how to fight them, but in villages and more remote areas, girls do not even recognize gender-based discrimination or perceive it as a form of oppression.”

20- to 24-year-olds group.

“Boys are told that they should study science and engineering, and girls are told that they should become teachers because then they can have time off at the same time as their children.”

20- to 24-year-olds group.

Gender stereotypes that are perpetuated in families, schools and in the workplace are seen as detrimental by young people, particularly when it comes to education pathways and career choices. Young people would like to explore career paths based on their interest but acknowledged that professional sectors and job types were gender segregated in both the public and private sectors. Teenagers also explained that while girls might perform better in school, they tend to be more discriminated in the workplace. This has a ripple effect on the lack of successful women professional models for younger girls.

Lastly, young people pinpointed that gender discrimination and gender equality was insufficiently covered in the curriculum, little addressed in textbooks, and that teachers were not prepared for teaching or educating on the topic meaningfully.

Speaking out for gender equality

Young people perceive girls as more vocal on gender-based discrimination but underlined that boys were increasingly aware of the importance of gender equality and were not facing prejudices when speaking out against gender discrimination, unlike in the older generations.

Young people also linked improvements in gender equality and reducing gender-based violence reduction with skills development. For them, skills such as mutual respect, communication skills and the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes are all important to break stereotypes and prejudices.



“Often when we want to express our opinion as children, someone older will tell us to be quiet because we don’t know anything, and this really hurts our self-confidence.”

15- to 19-year-olds group.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Respecting the views of children and youth

Overall, young people feel that their views are not respected by adults, and that they are not being taken seriously when advocating for issues that they care about. They also feel excluded from decisions that have an impact on their lives in the home, in school and in society.

Another key message from young adults is that young people often lack awareness about their own voice and ability to become change-makers in their communities.

Social media and youth engagement

Young people marked their appreciation for organisations that were engaging them in activities and initiatives in school or locally.

All age groups highlighted the importance of outreach through social media for getting messages across to children and young people.

WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

“I think that the textbooks we have in our education system aren’t attractive, neither for formal or basic knowledge, or for things like digital skills. The textbooks should be made attractive, and the information taught in schools should be up to date and relevant to our situations or environments, including technology. I remember that we were learning in class about Microsoft 2, when Microsoft 10 was already out and being used.”

15- to 19-year-olds group.

EDUCATION

Inclusive school environments

Young people expressed the need for central and municipal authorities to better understand the living conditions and life situations of disadvantaged children, and advocated for:

- Greater help from schools for students at risk of dropping both before and after Grade 9.
- Incentives for marginalised students to continue their education and complete their secondary education.
- Making secondary school compulsory in support of both boys’ and girls’ education.
- Integrating students with disabilities in regular classrooms to avoid marginalisation. This can be done with additional support from teaching staff and the recruitment of teacher assistants.
- Making psychological support available in schools, including mental health education and socio-emotional skills development as part of the curriculum.

Teachers had difficulties switching to online learning, especially older ones who didn't know how to use computers or internet."

20- to 24-year-olds group.

"I think revitalizing school clubs [which are not functional] would help young people get various other skills that they need in life but don't necessarily get in classes."

20- to 24-year-olds group.

UNICEF could help by providing training of teachers, so that they can provide better quality of education."

15- to 19-year-olds group.

- Supporting young people facing school bullying or gender-based violence.
- Increasing non-discrimination awareness activities in schools for students and teachers.
- Including parents of children living in difficult circumstances in school activities.
- Revitalising school clubs as an avenue for skills development, peer learning and peer networking (book clubs, creative writing, debate, cooking...).
- Improving teachers' digital skills.

Developing their skills

Young people are eager to develop the skills they need for work and for contributing meaningfully to society. They proposed:

- Supporting skills development through elective classes and extra-curricular activities enabling students to explore what they like and are good at.
- Setting up internship programmes to enhance students' and young people's skills.
- Offering additional skills-based courses in rural schools so that students have opportunities to learn and strengthen new skills on a range of topics (digital skills, first aid, start-ups, etc.). Such courses could be facilitated by students who graduated these courses in previous years and youth volunteers.
- Providing community-based digital skills workshops with youth mentors from municipalities.

“It would be great if we could have elective classes in school, then we could discover what we are good at, our talents and what we like, so that we don’t lose our motivation for the future.”

10- to 14-year-olds group.

“As far as I know, schools have a class teaching digital skills only once per week. It is extremely bad for young people to be digitally illiterate in the 21st century.”

15- to 19-year-olds group.

Opportunities for learning online

While young people were eager to return to face-to-face teaching, they are also keen to make the most of online learning opportunities as a means to follow their interests and to catch up with their learning when necessary. They recommended:

- Using e-learning to complement regular education, in particular for students who need help with their homework or want to strengthen their understanding of particular subjects.
- Supporting the digitisation of education to make more education resources accessible online.
- Using one unified e-learning platform for all children and young people to access education resources.

“It would be good if it could be agreed to use one unified platform in the future, as a supplement to the regular classroom education.”

20- to 24-year-olds group.



“Schools should support this (children participating in decision-making), they should ask students what their needs are and consider students’ experiences.”

20- to 24-year-olds group.

ELIMINATING GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Young people are committed to greater gender equality and suggested:

- Organising workshops and training on gender equality for students and parents.
- Including gender equality or making it more visible in the curriculum and in school classes.
- Supporting youth who campaign for gender equality.
- Mobilizing youth and using peer to peer techniques to raise awareness on gender equality, gender stereotypes, gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence.
- Strengthening mechanisms for reporting on gender-based discrimination and violence in schools and society.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Greater student participation in schools

Young people want their voices to be heard and taken more seriously, starting with school matters. They proposed:

- Ensuring and strengthening the role of students in school councils.
- Equipping students with the necessary skills to support their full and meaningful participation in decision-making processes in schools and beyond.

“If these (school) councils were functioning properly, student representatives should be present at every meeting and participate in every policy decision. This would be a good long-term solution for incorporating young people’s opinions in decision-making.”

20- to 24-year-olds group.

“Children and young people should have their voices heard by institutions before they make decisions.”

15- to 19-year-olds group.

- Engaging students in the design process of any education or after school educational opportunity, and in the delivery and evaluation of the initiative.
- Conducting anonymous surveys in school to identify students’ needs and interests and implementing workshops and activities to respond to these.

Meaningful youth engagement in communities and national decision-making processes

Young people want to be more involved in national decision-making processes. They recommended:

- Making adults aware of the need to have youth voice advocates.
- Providing safe spaces for children and young people to discuss their issues and challenges and ensuring that marginalised children can participate.
- Developing young people’s communication skills so that they can voice their opinions and empowering them to become change makers in their communities.
- Engaging young people as mentors or volunteers on projects to contribute to their capacity development and skills building.
- Involving young people in debates and inviting them to comment and input on public policies. International organisations such as UNICEF could support such processes.
- Using social media to reach children and young people but also other channels, such as TV, so that younger children without phones or young mothers can also be reached.
- Supporting young people’s personal safety on the internet and on social media.





UNICEF Kosovo

“Pejton, Ramiz Sadiku Building”, C3/2A
Prishtine/ Kosovo

Web: www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme

Facebook: UNICEF Kosovo Programme

Twitter: UNICEFKosovo