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# KOSOVO: INVESTING IN EARLY YEARS

Evidence, challenges, and policy  
directions for Early Childhood  
Education and Care





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# Contents

|                                                                                 |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Glossary                                                                        | 9         |
| Executive summary                                                               | 11        |
| <hr/>                                                                           |           |
| <b>1. Introduction</b>                                                          | <b>15</b> |
| <hr/>                                                                           |           |
| <b>2. Methodology</b>                                                           | <b>17</b> |
| <hr/>                                                                           |           |
| <b>3. Importance of ECEC</b>                                                    | <b>19</b> |
| <hr/>                                                                           |           |
| <b>4. ECEC Provision in Kosovo</b>                                              | <b>23</b> |
| Enrollment                                                                      | 23        |
| Service providers                                                               | 25        |
| Legislation and governance                                                      | 26        |
| Financing                                                                       | 27        |
| ECEC costs                                                                      | 29        |
| Quality of ECEC provision                                                       | 29        |
| Perceptions                                                                     | 29        |
| Outcomes and quality of ECEC                                                    | 30        |
| ECEC workforce                                                                  | 33        |
| <hr/>                                                                           |           |
| <b>5. Main challenges to ECEC provision in Kosovo</b>                           | <b>35</b> |
| Low availability and inequitable access to childcare                            | 36        |
| Supply-side constraints                                                         | 36        |
| Demand-side constraints                                                         | 37        |
| Low inclusion of vulnerable children and insufficient low-cost and free options | 38        |
| Insufficient financing to make quality childcare affordable for families        | 40        |
| Weak and unclear institutional arrangements and system coherence                | 42        |
| Lack of quality standard system and monitoring                                  | 43        |

---

|                                                                                              |           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>6. Roads to improving childcare provision and growing the childcare economy in Kosovo</b> | <b>45</b> |
| Expanding provision                                                                          | 46        |
| Selecting a provision model for expansion                                                    | 46        |
| Supporting the development of private and community-based providers                          | 49        |
| International examples of childcare expansion programs through PPPs                          | 51        |
| Considerations for implementing PPP models in Kosovo                                         | 53        |
| Improving access to children from disadvantaged backgrounds                                  | 55        |
| Addressing parental perceptions of childcare                                                 | 56        |
| Increase financing and affordability of ECEC services                                        | 58        |
| Incentivizing professional development and growing the ECEC sector                           | 59        |
| Ensuring coordination and collaboration across the sector                                    | 62        |
| Strengthening the quality assurance and monitoring system                                    | 63        |

---

|                                            |           |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>7. Operational framework for action</b> | <b>65</b> |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------|

---

|                       |           |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| <b>8. Conclusions</b> | <b>67</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------|

---

|                      |           |
|----------------------|-----------|
| <b>9. References</b> | <b>69</b> |
|----------------------|-----------|

---

|                                                                                                                                                        |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Annexes: data collection tools</b>                                                                                                                  | <b>73</b> |
| <b>Annex 1.</b> Questionnaire to parents                                                                                                               | 73        |
| <b>Annex 2.</b> Questionnaire for providers                                                                                                            | 75        |
| <b>Annex 3.</b> Interview guide for Central and local government representatives                                                                       | 77        |
| <b>Annex 4.</b> Interview guide for directors of public/private nurseries, kindergartens, community centers, NGOs and mother/child primary health care | 84        |
| <b>Annex 5.</b> Guidance for focus group discussions, parents and grandparents                                                                         | 89        |
| <b>Annex 6.</b> Guidance for focus group discussions, formal and informal paid caregivers                                                              | 92        |
| <b>Annex 7.</b> Online questionnaire to identify and engage with providers who would be interested in scaling up childcare provision in Kosovo         | 93        |

---

## List of boxes

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Box 1. TEACH ECE score components | 31 |
|-----------------------------------|----|

---

## List of figures

|                                                                                                                                                                                              |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Figure 1. Triple dividend of childcare in Kosovo                                                                                                                                             | 12 |
| Figure 2. Overview of policy goals to improve access to affordable and quality childcare                                                                                                     | 13 |
| Figure 3. Main scores across teach ECEC components                                                                                                                                           | 31 |
| Figure 4 (a). Impact on average TIMSS scores (grade 4), 2019–2023, after accounting for social factors.(b). Change in PIRLS 2021 reading score when children went to preschool (test points) | 32 |
| Figure 5. Use of childcare facilities among households with only children 0–6 (percent)                                                                                                      | 37 |
| Figure 6. Share of households not using childcare facilities (percent), by main reason                                                                                                       | 38 |
| Figure 7. Share of total enrollment of children by ethnic background in public ECEC services, other than Albanian (0–6 years old) (percent)                                                  | 39 |
| Figure 8. Childcare costs for a single parent with two children as a percentage of the income, considering no benefits designed to reduce the cost of childcare fees                         | 41 |
| Figure 9. Overview of policy goals to improve access to affordable and quality childcare                                                                                                     | 46 |
| Figure 10. Brochure for communication campaign in Kosovo                                                                                                                                     | 57 |

---

## List of tables

|                                                                                             |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Table 1. Preschool education financing as a % of GDP in Kosovo                              | 27 |
| Table 2. Financing for preschool education in Kosovo, in Euros                              | 28 |
| Table 3. Funding sources for Early Childhood Education and Care service providers in Kosovo | 28 |
| Table 4. Key constraints to the childcare market                                            | 36 |
| Table 5. Overview of main features by type of provision                                     | 47 |
| Table 6. TEACH ECE evaluation in Kosovo, 2024                                               | 48 |
| Table 7. Potential benefits and challenges of PPPs for ECEC provision                       | 54 |
| Table 8. Calculation of staff expansion estimates                                           | 60 |
| Table 9. Operational responses to actions                                                   | 65 |

# Glossary

|               |                                                               |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>ECE</b>    | Early Childhood Education                                     |
| <b>ECEC</b>   | Early Childhood Education and Care                            |
| <b>ECD</b>    | Early Childhood Development                                   |
| <b>CGDM</b>   | Child Growth and Development Monitoring                       |
| <b>KEEN</b>   | Kosovo Education and Employment Network                       |
| <b>MESTI</b>  | Ministry of Education, Science, Technology,<br>and Innovation |
| <b>MOE</b>    | Ministry of Economy                                           |
| <b>NGO</b>    | Non-Governmental Organization                                 |
| <b>PISA</b>   | International Student Assessment                              |
| <b>PPP</b>    | Public-Private Partnership                                    |
| <b>SAS</b>    | Social Assistance Scheme                                      |
| <b>UN</b>     | United Nations                                                |
| <b>UNICEF</b> | United Nations Children's Fund                                |



# Executive summary

Expanding Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Kosovo presents a powerful opportunity to achieve a triple win: increased women's employment, stronger child development, and broader economic growth (Figure 1). While recent reforms demonstrate important momentum, Kosovo's ECEC system remains constrained by limited supply, uneven quality, and affordability barriers, particularly for the most vulnerable children and families. Addressing these gaps is essential for unlocking the full social and economic benefits of early childhood services.

ECEC is one of the most effective policies for increasing mothers' participation in the labor force—an area where Kosovo faces significant challenges. Only 18.5% of women are employed, the lowest rate in the Western Balkans, and caregiving responsibilities remain a central barrier to entering the workforce. Reliable, affordable childcare is scarce: public provision meets only about 30% of current demand, with nine municipalities lacking any ECEC center. Fees in public centers (€40–€70 per month) are often burdensome for low income families, while private care, costing three to five times more, is out of reach for most households.

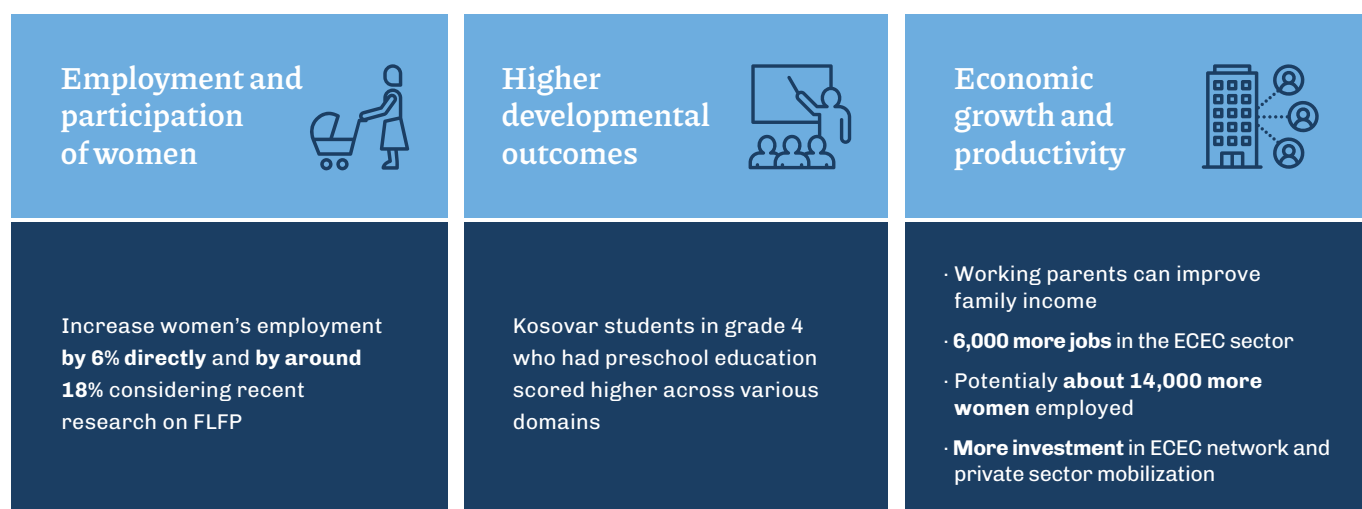
As a result, many women remain outside the labor market. Nearly 80% of families who report needing childcare do not use formal services, and almost half prefer to rely on relatives, largely mothers, reflecting persistent social norms about women's caregiving roles. Strengthening access to ECEC, particularly for younger children, would allow thousands of women to pursue employment, increase working hours, and access better quality jobs. Estimates show that increasing childcare enrollment to reach OECD levels could result in a 5% increase in female employment in the country, with spillover effects leading up to a 15% increase, implying substantial gains for Kosovo. Increased female employment would also improve household welfare, as women's earnings are often reinvested in children's health, education, and well being.

Furthermore, ECEC plays a critical role in building early cognitive, language, and socio emotional skills —skills that shape future learning, productivity, and life outcomes. Yet Kosovo’s current ECEC coverage falls far below international benchmarks. Only one in five children aged 0–6 is enrolled, and participation among children under age 3 is just 7%. Disparities are stark: enrollment for 3–4 year olds reaches 25.5% in urban areas but only 7.9% in rural communities, and the poorest children participate at rates as low as 3%. Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children face particularly low access, with only about 10% enrolled.

Quality is similarly uneven. While some classrooms exhibit supportive, stimulating learning environments, others lack adequate materials, safe infrastructure, or qualified staff. Oversight mechanisms are fragmented, and more than half of private providers operate without a license. Limited inclusion of children with disabilities further compounds early inequities. Expanding high quality ECEC is therefore essential not only for supporting early learning but also for strengthening Kosovo’s long term human capital formation.

Lastly, investments in ECEC yield broad economic returns. Enabling more mothers to work increases household income and raises overall labor force participation, supporting economic resilience with findings suggesting that removing barriers to women’s economic empowerment, like childcare, can boost long term GDP per capita by a whopping 45% in Kosovo. Furthermore, improved early childhood development ultimately strengthens workforce productivity, contributing to long term growth.

**Figure 1. Triple dividend of childcare in Kosovo**



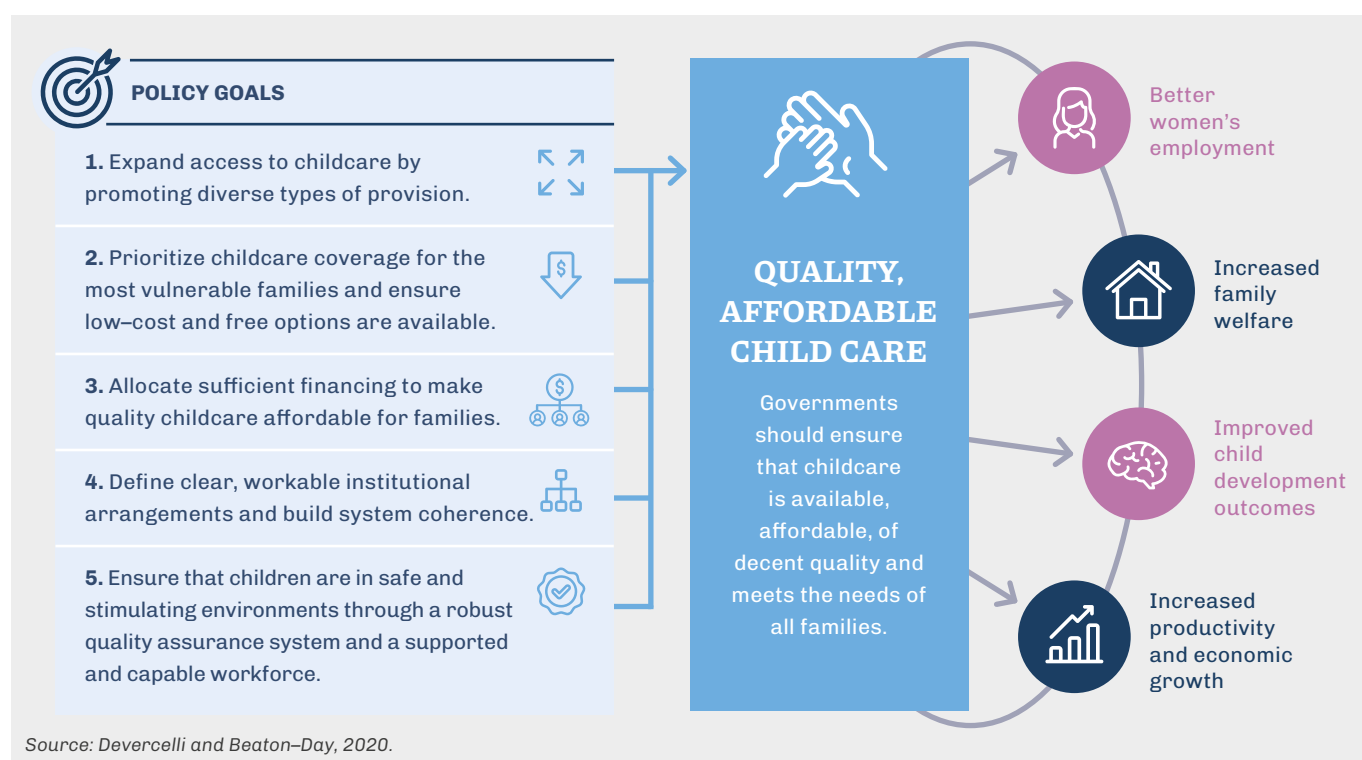
Source: Authors.

Despite recent progress, including the construction of four new kindergartens since 2021, 26 more underway, and the launch of a pilot Voucher Program for families receiving social assistance, ECEC infrastructure and financing remain insufficient to

meet demand. Public spending on ECEC stands at 0.31% of GDP, well below the OECD's recommended 1%, and most spending goes toward wages, leaving limited resources for expansion, quality improvements, and inclusion measures. A more diversified service delivery model—combining public, private, and community based providers—can help scale provision more efficiently, especially in underserved areas.

These initiatives signal an important commitment to strengthening ECEC provision, though greater investment and additional reforms will be needed to match the scale of demand and ensure equitable access and quality for all children. A practical reform package, following clear policy goals with defined target outcomes, can support Kosovo's journey to provide equitable and quality access to ECEC (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Overview of policy goals to improve access to affordable and quality childcare**



With the following recommendations at the heart of the reform agenda:

1. Expanding access by developing and upgrading centers in underserved areas, repurposing underutilized public buildings, and enabling trusted non-state providers through clear regulations and predictable support mechanisms. Public-private and community partnerships, modeled after successful approaches, can be adapted by implementing performance-based contracts, publishing transparent fee structures and quality standards, and providing capital or operational co-financing to providers who expand access in high-need areas.



**2.** Prioritizing inclusion of disadvantaged children is essential. Kosovo should ensure equitable access by focusing enrollment efforts on marginalized groups, including the poorest quintiles, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, and children with disabilities. Flexible service delivery in remote and rural areas and transport assistance can help reach these populations. Engaging families and communities through targeted communication campaigns will highlight the developmental and social benefits of ECEC for children and parents.



**3.** Lower financial barriers for families. A targeted affordability package could combine sliding-scale pricing in public centers with means-tested vouchers for accredited private community providers. Additional support for transport in rural and remote areas will ensure that cost does not prevent the most disadvantaged families from accessing ECEC services.



**4.** Fostering system coherence and sustainability involves clarifying institutional roles and responsibilities across education, health, and social protection sectors to ensure coordinated service delivery. Kosovo should develop a multisectoral early childhood strategy and establish a shared information system for monitoring access, quality, and child development outcomes. Rebalancing financing toward multi-year, predictable investments will expand access and fund essential quality inputs, such as learning materials, facility maintenance, play spaces, and developmental monitoring.



**5.** Enhancing quality and building trust across the system requires the development and implementation of a national ECEC Quality Framework aligned with the new law, as well as the expedited establishment of sub-legal standards. Strengthening inspection, licensing, and support systems will ensure all providers meet consistent safety, inclusion, and learning standards. Investing in the ECEC workforce by updating pre-service and in-service training, establishing minimum training requirements, and improving compensation and career progression to match those of primary school teachers will further support quality improvement.

# 1. Introduction

Early Childhood Education and Care refers to any publicly regulated service that provides education and childcare for children from birth to the start of primary education. ECEC, or childcare as often referred to in this report, provides numerous benefits, from enhancing children's cognitive and social development to improving school readiness and supporting parental workforce participation, particularly for women. Improving ECEC provision can help build a strong foundation for children's future learning, productivity, and overall well-being. Furthermore, investing in early education not only benefits children but also strengthens the labor market and contributes to economic growth by enabling more parents to work.

Currently, the government of Kosovo is undergoing efforts to increase its ECEC provision, which continues to need to be expanded. Since 2021, four new kindergartens have been completed, 26 are under construction, three school buildings are being adapted for ECEC use, and eight additional kindergartens are in the tendering phase. Furthermore, in 2025, the World Bank and the Kosovan Government launched a pilot for a Voucher Program aimed at increasing enrollment in ECEC institutions for vulnerable children from families receiving social assistance benefits.

Despite these efforts, Kosovo continues to face significant challenges in providing equitable and quality ECEC services. Many children, particularly those from vulnerable communities, lack access to early learning opportunities, increasing the risk of long-term developmental disparities and limiting their future career prospects. Key obstacles include inequitable and insufficient service provision, especially for disadvantaged children and families, as well as affordability and quality constraints. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring that all children, regardless of their background, can benefit from quality early education and care.

This report gathers evidence from existing literature and from surveys collected at the local level to provide a comprehensive review of accessibility, quality, and affordability of childcare in Kosovo, as well as the key challenges that the sector is currently facing in the country.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, we explore the importance of childcare and assess the current state of ECEC in Kosovo. On the supply side, the report describes the limited availability of services and evaluates the balance between various types of childcare provision. On the demand side, it assesses parents' perceptions of services and explores the market's potential. Finally, we present potential policy options and recommendations aimed at improving childcare provision and ensuring equitable access for all children in Kosovo.

1. Two firms, Civitta and WeGlobal, were engaged to collect primary data.

## 2. Methodology

The research conducted for this report integrates quantitative and qualitative methods through desk reviews and primary and secondary data collection to assess the status of ECEC services in Kosovo.

Initially, desk research was conducted to leverage existing data and documents, providing a broad overview of the ECEC landscape in Kosovo, including public perceptions and the legislative and regulatory framework. Following this, the research team developed data collection instruments (see Annex – data collection tools) and identified key stakeholders as potential information sources to collect further detailed information.

Primary data collection was participatory, engaging stakeholders in the assessment process. Interview questions, guides, and surveys were drafted, translated, and tested by the research team. These instruments were piloted with a small group to ensure clarity.

The research team established sample sizes and sampling methods for each instrument. To ensure a comprehensive sample of ECEC entities, activities were undertaken to identify all service providers for young children. Recommendations of providers to engage with were given by public officials at key ministries that fund such services, with identified providers suggesting additional respondents. Respondents were contacted via phone, email, social media, and through educator, kindergarten, and parent networks.

In general, the following interviews were conducted:

- Interviews with high-level officials and representatives from international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including officials from the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, Ministry of Health,

Social Policy Department of the Ministry of Finance, school and kindergarten directors, and the association of private kindergartens. The sampling strategy ensured comprehensive geographical coverage and accounted for urban–rural disparities in educational and job opportunities.

- Interviews with directors of Municipal Departments of Education and kindergarten directors, alongside a survey of educators and professionals in the ECEC sector. A total of 87 ECE professionals participated, predominantly women (95.3%), including educators, professional support staff, and institution managers, representing half of Kosovo's municipalities.
- Surveys with parents, involving 133 parents (58.3% women, 40.2% men), with children aged 0–3 and 3–6 years. Participants were diverse, spanning 18 municipalities and 32 professions, with 93.8% having children enrolled in some ECEC services.
- Focus groups with small, diverse groups of parents, caregivers, and community representatives, comprising two groups of 12 participants, to discuss experiences and challenges related to ECEC.

# 3. Importance of ECEC

ECEC comprises physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development services, such as: (i) early stimulation and care for ages 0–3, (ii) education services for ages 3–6, and (iv) early detection and interventions for ages 0–6 (World Bank, 2024a). Childcare, the main focus of this report, is a set of services within ECEC with the primary objective of caring for children aged 0–6 to allow parents to work, ensuring children are safe and have opportunities to learn and develop positive relationships with caregivers and peers.

Investing in early childhood education and care is crucial, as extensive evidence highlights the early years as a critical period for skill development, particularly foundational skills, when children’s brains are highly malleable and develop most rapidly. Access to quality care and education during this period is essential for providing stimulation and learning opportunities (Heckman & Masterov, 2007). High-quality learning services that promote cognitive and social skill development help children build pre-literacy and language skills (Devercelli & Beaton-Day, 2020). Moreover, children who attend ECEC programs tend to stay in school longer and are more likely to secure higher-skilled jobs (Shafiq, Devercelli, & Valerio, 2018). For illustration, students who had preschool education had higher scores across various domains compared to those who did not have such educational opportunities in the latest International Reading Literacy Study and Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (Shmis et al., 2025).

Expanding access to ECEC is essential for enabling women’s participation in the labor market and for mitigating the effects of demographic decline. The absence of affordable, high quality childcare remains one of the most significant barriers limiting the type and amount of work women can undertake globally (Halim et al., 2023; IFC, 2017; Díaz & Rodríguez Chamussy, 2013). When reliable childcare is available, women are better positioned to enter the labor market, increase their working hours, and

pursue higher quality employment opportunities. This not only allows them to secure better jobs but also broadens the range of career paths they can realistically consider. Affordable, accessible, and high quality childcare eases these constraints, enabling women to transition into more stable and rewarding jobs. Beyond labor market gains, improving women's ability to balance work and family can also help counteract demographic pressures: policies that support working parents are associated with higher fertility rates, helping soften the impacts of demographic transition (World Bank, 2025).

In fact, research indicates that increasing access to childcare can dramatically boost women's labor force participation, particularly in countries with historically low participation rates. The European Commission suggests that raising formal childcare enrollment to 50% for children under three years old could result in a participation increase ranging from 4% to 48%, and an employment rise between 2% and 32% (European Commission, 2023). This is particularly relevant for Kosovo, which has the lowest female employment rate in the Western Balkans, with only 18.5% of women employed compared to 52% of men. Many women cite their caregiving responsibilities and the lack of affordable, high-quality childcare as key reasons for not seeking employment, alongside conservative gender norms and limited job opportunities (Fruttero et al., 2026).

By providing better opportunities for parents, especially mothers, childcare provision can improve the family's income and household welfare more generally. For example, it has been found that when women earn and control their own incomes, more resources tend to be channeled to support their children's health, education, and overall family welfare. Moreover, having access to childcare might lead to benefits for other children in the household, especially for elder siblings, who are more likely to attend school when their younger siblings are enrolled in childcare (Devercelli and Beaton-Day, 2020). However, new studies confirm that cultural norms in the Western Balkans region continue to place large burdens of care on women, both in rural and urban areas, leading mostly to an informal care provision at home and to low levels of employment among women (Fruttero et al., 2026).

Lastly, expanding ECEC services presents significant opportunities for job creation and economic growth. This expansion not only facilitates greater workforce participation as more individuals enter the labor market, but the childcare sector itself offers substantial economic potential. According to a World Bank study (Devercelli and Beaton-Day, 2020), meeting the current global demand for childcare could generate approximately 43 million jobs worldwide. Furthermore, expanding the ECEC workforce in Kosovo to meet the OECD enrollment standards of 32% for children between 0 and 3 years old, and 86% for children between 3 and 6 years old, could result in the direct creation of almost 6,000 jobs in ECEC, leading to a 5% increase in total employment among women and an additional 9% (14,000 jobs) increase resulting from spillover participation. Furthermore, Fruttero et al. (2026), find that removing barriers to women's economic empowerment, like childcare, can boost long term GDP per capita by a whopping 45.4% in Kosovo (see Figure 1 above).

Despite the well-documented benefits of ECEC, Kosovo continues to struggle with providing quality and affordable childcare, with enrollment rates as low as 19.5% for children of between 0 and 6 years old (World Bank, 2024a). The situation is particularly dire for children from vulnerable backgrounds, such as Roma children, where only 1 in 10 is enrolled, and for those in rural areas, where provision remains severely limited (World Bank, 2024a). Several factors contribute to these low enrollment rates. A major issue is the severe shortage of public childcare spots, making access highly competitive. At the same time, private childcare, which serves as the primary alternative, is prohibitively expensive for many families. Other barriers include parental preferences for family-based care and concerns over the quality of available ECEC services.

Furthermore, inadequate ECEC provision negatively impacts children's long-term educational outcomes, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. While Kosovo's ECEC institutions perform well in supportive learning environments, behavioral expectations, and facilitation of learning according to a World Bank (2024b) assessment, there are significant gaps in other areas, particularly in terms of access, which result in early educational disparities persisting and widening as children progress through the school system. This decline in performance can be partly attributed to the unequal access to quality early education, as children from vulnerable backgrounds, who often lack exposure to structured learning environments, are disproportionately affected.



## 4. ECEC Provision in Kosovo

### Enrollment

According to the official statistics from the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI) for the 2023–2024 period, 32,818 children were enrolled in ECEC institutions. Of these, 12,019 were children under 5 years old and 20,799 were children aged 5–6 years old.

The overall enrollment rate for children aged 0–6 in Kosovo stands at 19.5%. However, this figure masks significant disparities across different age groups, highlighting issues of access and participation. For children aged 0–3, the enrollment rate is approximately 7%, while for those aged 3–5, it is about 24%. These figures are considerably lower than the OECD averages of 36% for children aged 0–3 and 86% for those aged 3–5 (World Bank, 2024a). Kosovo’s enrollment rates also lag behind those of other countries in the region, having the lowest enrollment for children under 3 years old, and only falling second for the group between 3 and 6 years old.

In contrast, the enrollment rate for children aged 5–6 is significantly higher (at around 86%)<sup>2</sup> and is expected to increase further. This anticipated rise is due to the introduction of the new Early Childhood Education (ECE) Law, which mandates pre-primary education for children in this age group. This legislative change aims to enhance educational access and ensure that more children benefit from early learning opportunities, thereby aligning Kosovo more closely with regional and international standards (see Section “Legislation and governance”, p. 26).

2. Estimated using MESTI (2024) enrollment statistics and UN population data (2024)

ECEC services in Kosovo are aimed at children from nine months to six years old and are offered by specialized institutions. The type of institution providing the services depends on the age of the child (Bajraktari and Hamiti, 2023). There are three primary types of services:

- **Center-Based Care Services:** Primarily for children between nine months and three years old.
- **Center-Based Care and Education Services:** For children aged between 3 to 6 years old.
- **Pre-Primary Education:** For children aged 5 to 6 years old (Grade 0), provided both at preschool and primary school institutions.

Age-wise, most children enrolled in ECE institutions are between 5 to 6 years old, making up 63% of those enrolled. In public institutions, those between 0 and 3 years old make up 8%, while those between 3 and 5 years old make up 17%.<sup>3</sup> The gender composition is quite balanced, with 48% of children being girls and 52% boys (MESTI, 2024).

According to MESTI regulations (2018), the number of children per age group per classroom is defined to range between 8 and 24, with the number increasing as children grow older, and the classroom size should be between 4 and 6 square meters per child. The ratio of children per teacher is also standardized by MESTI guidelines at 12 children per teacher; this is in line with the OECD average ratio of 14 children per teacher (OECD, 2024a). However, these ratios can vary depending on the region and the age of the children. Generally, urban areas tend to have higher ratios compared to rural areas due to increased demand in cities. Below are the standardized ratios according to age groups:

- **Children aged 9 months to 2 years:** The ratio is between 5 and 6 children per teacher.
- **Children aged 2 to 3 years:** The ratio is between 7 and 8 children per teacher.
- **Children aged 3 to 4 years:** The ratio ranges from 10 to 12 children per teacher.
- **Children aged 4 to 5 years:** The ratio is between 11 and 12 children per teacher.

It is important to note that these ratios can be higher in practice, as many public preschools work over capacity and, by regulation, they are allowed to go over capacity by about 10%. According to a World Bank survey of providers, public institutions have the highest child-to-institution ratio, followed by community-based centers, private institutions, and finally PPPs, which have the lowest ratio (Bajraktari and Hamiti, 2023).

3. Further disaggregation by age groups is not available for private providers.

## Service providers

There are a multitude of providers of ECEC services, with most of them concentrated in certain areas of the country, mostly urban (95% in 2023). Out of Kosovo's 38 municipalities, 9 do not have an ECEC center. There are basically four types of institutions providing these services, with the last one being the least present in the country:

- **Public institutions:** 54 public institutions spread across 25 municipalities. These centers are managed by the municipalities.
- **Private kindergartens:** the exact numbers are unknown, as not all of them are licensed. However, according to estimates of 2022, there are 172 licensed private ECE services in 15 municipalities. It is estimated that there are around double the number of unlicensed private preschools compared to those that are licensed. These centers are established and managed by individuals as private businesses.
- **Public Schools providing pre-primary education:** these services are targeted to children between 5 and 6 years old who are entering school in the following year. However, in selected municipalities with the support of NGOs, schools have extended ECE services also for 3 to 5 years old children.
- **Community-based centers:** 39 of these centers are located across the country, although the majority, 17 of them, are located in Pristina. In this model, a community establishes an NGO that collaborates with the municipality. Usually, these centers are available for children to attend for two to three hours a day.
- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) centers:** currently there are only 3 of them across the country. PPP institutions operate through a collaboration between a private provider and the local municipality. While they function similarly to private kindergartens, municipalities offer various forms of support, such as fee contributions or rent subsidies. Community-based kindergartens can also be defined as a subgroup within PPPs.

The provision of ECEC services for children aged 0–5 in Kosovo is evenly divided between public and private providers, with a minor portion attending alternative providers. For children aged 5–6, the majority attend pre-primary education offered by public institutions (around 87%). Despite the larger number of private institutions, public and private providers enroll a similar number of children due to the significantly larger capacity of public institutions, which accommodate more students per facility.

Moreover, the majority of ECEC institutions are located in urban areas. The majority of children are enrolled in Pristina, Prizren, Ferizaj, Gjakove, Gjilan, and Illogoc, with private providers having a large presence in Fushë Kosovë.

## Legislation and governance

Kosovo has a commendable legal framework for ECEC, strengthened by the adoption of the *Law on Early Childhood Education* in 2023. This law provides a comprehensive regulatory structure to enhance the quality of early education for children from birth to six years old. It aims to promote healthy development, maximize children's potential, and mandates pre-primary education starting at age five.

The law establishes guidelines for the operation of the ECEC system, supports diverse service delivery models, and clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders. Additionally, the *Government's Education Strategy 2022–2026* prioritizes ECEC as its first pillar, focusing on expanding access, implementing a new curriculum, improving quality, and strengthening cross-sectoral support (World Bank, 2024a).

While the ECE Law establishes a foundation for early childhood education, it defers key quality standards to sub-legal acts that have yet to be defined and implemented. For example, the transition of ECEC centers to a new curriculum framework; updating teacher professional standards; and establishing mechanisms to evaluate and assess the quality of ECEC services are being developed and yet to be implemented (World Bank, 2024a; MESTI, 2022).

At the national level, MESTI plays a central role in overseeing ECEC. It is responsible for setting strategic directions by developing policies, establishing regulations, and ensuring their implementation across the country. MESTI also defines national education standards, monitors adherence to these standards, and supports the professional growth of educators in the sector.

The management of preschool education in Kosovo has been the responsibility of Municipal Education Directorates since 2002. These Directorates ensure the smooth operation and maintenance of educational infrastructure at the local level and have the autonomy to set monthly fees for kindergarten services, which vary based on family income and the average wage in the area. The financing of the public institutions is a joint responsibility of MESTI and the municipalities (see Section “Financing”, p. 27). However, under the new ECE Law, municipalities are responsible for setting up public ECE institutions, developing mechanisms to enforce ECE policies, overseeing compliance with monitoring standards, and assessing the performance of ECE providers.

Private institutions do not fall under the Directorates responsibilities; however, they must comply with MESTI regulations and service delivery standards to obtain a license, which is subject to periodic reassessment for renewal. However, with more than half of private centers estimated to be unlicensed, consistent adherence to these standards is not guaranteed across all institutions.

## Financing

The World Bank's Public Expenditure Review for 2023 highlights that Kosovo's education spending averages 4.6% of its GDP, closely aligning with the spending levels of aspirational peers like countries in the European Union, which averaged 4.8% in 2021. Kosovo's education expenditure also exceeds that of neighboring countries such as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, which had a share of 2.7%, 4.1% and 3.2% in 2022 (World Development Indicators, 2025).

Despite this high level of expenditure, Kosovo's education budget has been exceeded in six out of the eight years between 2015 and 2023, with an average overspending of 12%. The over-execution in education primarily occurs in pre-primary and primary education, mainly due to overspending on wages and salaries (World Bank, 2023).

Education spending, particularly at the local level, is heavily focused on wage compensation. This leaves capital spending and maintenance, along with the optimization of the school network, as ongoing challenges. Investments in improving education quality also remain insufficient, as highlighted by the Kosovo Education and Employment Network (KEEN, 2019).

Furthermore, ECEC institutions receive a minimal portion of the education budget, accounting for only 0.31% of total GDP (Table 1). This allocation has doubled from 2022, but only accounts for about 9% of the total education sector budget (Table 2).

**Table 1. Preschool education financing as a % of GDP in Kosovo**

| YEARS           | 2020          | 2021          | 2022          | 2023          | 2024          | 2025           |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| GDP (nominal)   | 6,772,000,000 | 7,957,800,000 | 8,895,780,000 | 9,842,940,650 | 9,652,890,000 | 10,552,320,000 |
| Total preschool | 11,952,503    | 12,097,817    | 13,052,495    | 18,851,726    | 31,129,755    | 32,754,048     |
| As a % of GDP   | 0.18%         | 0.15%         | 0.15%         | 0.19%         | 0.32%         | 0.31%          |

Source: calculated using data provided by the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers of Kosovo.

Funding for public ECEC in Kosovo primarily comes from three sources: the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation, general government grants to municipalities, and specific government grants for ECEC services. The national government is the main financier, with limited financial contributions from municipalities. Local authorities allocate funding based on a pupil-to-capital ratio, which continues to be insufficient.

**Table 2. Financing for preschool education in Kosovo, in Euros**

|                                                             | 2021        | 2022        | 2023        | 2024        | 2025        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation   | 64,116,454  | 73,086,831  | 82,799,243  | 100,120,951 | 96,120,951  |
| Government Grants (Municipalities)                          | 194,811,904 | 211,114,774 | 255,209,999 | 273,580,001 | 288,908,964 |
| Government Grants for Preschool Education in Municipalities | 12,097,817  | 13,052,495  | 18,851,726  | 31,129,755  | 34,754,048  |
| Preschool financing as % per of the total education sector  | 4.67%       | 4.59%       | 5.58%       | 8.33%       | 9.03%       |

Source: calculated using data provided by the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers of Kosovo.

In addition, given the diverse types of provision, it is important to highlight that the different providers operate under different financing models, although parents are always required to pay a fee (unless exempt). Each financing modality is tailored to their specific needs and service provision methods (see Table 3):

- Public institutions are funded through a combination of parental fees and government contributions, which help reduce costs per child.
- Private providers operate on a market basis, being almost entirely financed by parental contributions.
- Community-based institutions receive funding from municipalities and parental contributions, with fees generally lower than those in private institutions. The financial burden on parents varies by municipality. For example, in Pristina, the municipality provides infrastructure, equipment, and learning materials, covering 50% of service costs, while parental fees cover the remaining 50%.

**Table 3. Funding sources for Early Childhood Education and Care service providers in Kosovo**

| PUBLIC CENTERS                                     | COMMUNITY-BASED CENTERS              | LICENSED PRIVATE CENTERS | UNLICENSED PRIVATE CENTERS |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| MESTI grants                                       | Parent fees                          | Parent fees              | Parent fees                |
| Municipal funding                                  | Subsidies                            | MESTI funding            |                            |
| Other municipal funding for health and SP services | Other municipal funding for services |                          |                            |
| Parent fees                                        | International donations              |                          |                            |
| Other subsidies                                    |                                      |                          |                            |

Source: Authors

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## ECEC costs

Most families are required to pay fees for childcare in both public and private institutions, unless they come from a vulnerable background, which makes them exempt. Children from vulnerable backgrounds include minorities, children with disabilities, and those belonging to low-income families.

Currently, fees range from 40 to 70 euros per month in public institutions, compared to 150 to 350 euros per month in private ones. The average monthly fee for community-based centers is around 80 euros per month.

Moreover, families often encounter additional, sometimes hidden costs, such as necessary supplies, transportation fees, and charges for extracurricular activities, adding to the total cost of ECEC enrollment. These additional costs were often referred to during interviews: “As parents we are asked to help the preschool fund by giving money for toys or other extracurricular activities”.

## Quality of ECEC provision

### PERCEPTIONS

A survey of ECEC professionals and parents reveals varied perceptions of quality across different aspects of ECEC services.

Among ECEC professionals, a majority (59.3%) rates the methods and materials used in ECEC in Kosovo as being of very high quality. However, 16.3% consider them to be of average quality, and 24.4% rate them as low-quality, indicating that while the majority are satisfied, a significant portion sees room for improvement. Regarding the physical environment and safety of ECEC facilities, over 50% view them as average or lower quality, pointing to a need for enhanced infrastructure and security measures in some ECE settings.

From the perspective of parents, the overall quality of ECEC services is viewed as high quality by 38.6% and as average by 31.8%. When it comes to the quality of educational methodology and materials, parental opinions are more varied. Here, 31.5% of parents rate them as high quality, but a slightly larger percentage, 33.8%, views them as average. Interestingly, 34.6% consider the quality to be low, indicating significant dissatisfaction with the educational methods and materials used. The survey highlights significant concerns among parents regarding the physical environment and security in kindergartens. Only 20.3% of parents rate these aspects as highly appropriate and safe. In contrast, a larger group, 33.3%, provides an average rating, and the majority, 36.4%, perceive the infrastructure and security measures as being of low quality.

Parents also have diverse perceptions when asked about the quality of public institutions versus private ones. In terms of infrastructure, respondents agreed that public kindergartens have larger facilities and more extensive infrastructure, resulting in more spacious classrooms, playgrounds, libraries, and other amenities.

Private kindergartens, however, vary widely in terms of infrastructure. Some private kindergartens have modern facilities and well-equipped classrooms, while others may operate in smaller spaces with limited resources. Some private kindergartens do not have eating areas, gardens for outdoor play, and have very small educational rooms. Regarding work and didactic materials, interviewees largely agree that some private kindergartens offer a variety of work materials and invest in high-quality materials and resources to enhance the learning experience, while others may have more limited resources. Compared to the public sector, the majority agree that private kindergartens invest more in didactic materials and toys.

Lastly, most parents, 71.9%, have confidence in educators, rating them as moderately to highly prepared for working with children. This reflects a strong parental trust in the educators' ability to effectively engage and teach young learners. Moreover, 70% of parents consider educators' communication and teaching methods to be of moderate to high quality, demonstrating a certain level of satisfaction with how educators interact with and support their children's learning.

## OUTCOMES AND QUALITY OF ECEC

Currently, there are no systematic mechanisms for monitoring child growth and development (CGDM) in Kosovo. CGDM is not assessed at the population level to determine whether children are achieving critical developmental milestones. Although educators and teachers in early childhood education centers have reference points for tracking child development, there are no comprehensive mechanisms at the national or municipal levels. Consequently, data on child development in cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional dimensions are not frequently collected (World Bank, 2021).

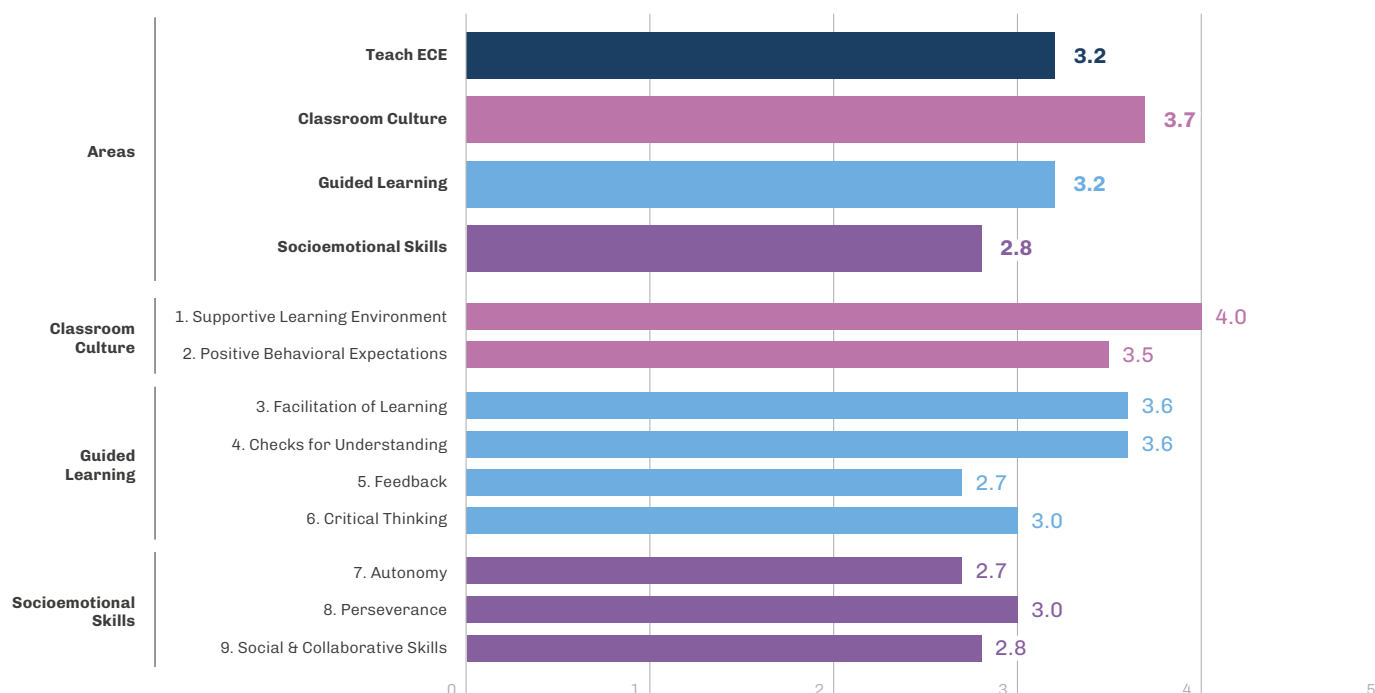
Nonetheless, a recent study<sup>4</sup> conducted by the World Bank in 2024, finds that Kosovo has commendable performance in key components of early childhood education (see Box 1). The primary objective was to evaluate and identify critical aspects of early childhood education quality within three domains: Classroom Culture, Guided Learning, and Socio-Emotional Skills. To achieve this, a team observed 124 classrooms across various early childhood education centers, including 88 private institutions, 27 public institutions, and 9 community-based centers.

Overall, the results reflect an average score of 3.2 out of 5, which is considered commendable and aligns with outcomes in other EU countries. Classroom Culture received the highest rating at 3.7 out of 5, followed by Guided Learning at 3.2 out of 5, and Socio-Emotional Skills at 2.8 out of 5 (indicating that this category is below the minimum expected level of quality). Within Guided Learning, the subcomponent Learning Facilitation achieved an average score of 3.6, suggesting that the teaching methods employed are effective in fostering student learning, and Knowledge Verification also scored 3.6, indicating that the processes for assessing students'

4. Teach ECE, a classroom observation tool designed to provide detailed insights into classroom activities.

comprehension and retention of material are fairly effective. The highest-performing sub-component, Supportive Learning environment, achieved a score of 4.0 out of 5, underscoring the nurturing atmospheres created by educators. Most other components scored around 3 out of 5, indicating robust results. (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Main scores across teach ECEC components**



Source: World Bank, 2024b.

### Box 1. TEACH ECE score components

There are three key component to the TEACH ECE assessment: classroom culture, guided learning, and socioemotional skills.

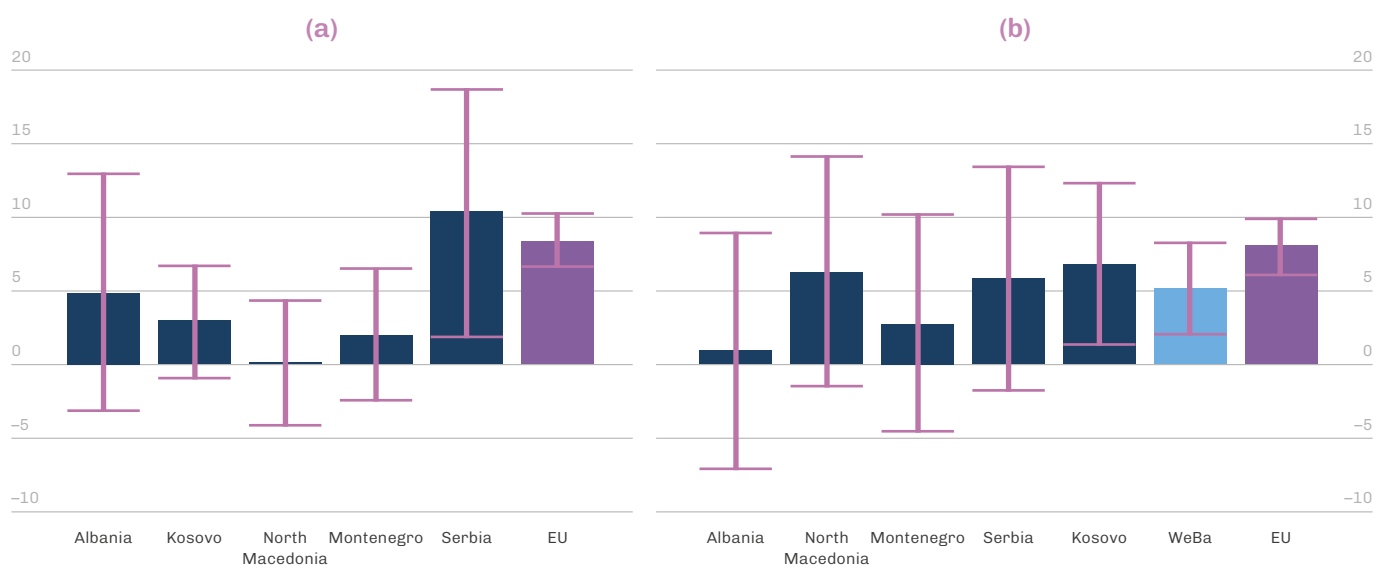
Classroom culture encompasses the shared beliefs, values, and practices that influence the behavior and interactions of teachers and students. The supportive learning environment refers to whether the teacher creates a classroom environment where children feel emotionally safe, respected and supported; while the positive behavioral expectations refer to whether the teacher sets clear behavioral expectations, acknowledges positive behavior, and effectively redirects children.

Guided learning refers to the instructional strategies that teachers use to support and enhance children's learning experiences. This evaluates whether teachers actively guide and scaffold children's learning processes, check for understanding, help them to achieve a deeper understanding of concepts and skills, provide feedback, and encourage them to actively analyze content.

The socioemotional component assesses whether teachers create environments that encourage positive interactions and model appropriate social behaviors, evaluating whether the teacher provides children opportunities to make choices and take meaningful roles; promotes children's efforts towards mastering new skills; and encourages collaboration among students.

Notably, the evidence from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) finds that there is an improvement in reading scores and mathematics for children who went to pre-school in Kosovo (Figure 4). Thus, supporting the evidence that attending preschool is beneficial for Kosovan students.

**Figure 4 (a). Impact on average TIMSS scores (grade 4), 2019–2023, after accounting for social factors. (b). Change in PIRLS 2021 reading score when children went to preschool (test points)**



Source: Author's calculations from PIRLS 2021 and TIMSS 2023 microdata.

Note: Figures are accounting for age, sex, social factors at both the individual and school level, and early stimulation.

The new law on Early ECEC has postponed several essential components, such as quality assessment, to the formulation of sub-legal acts, which have yet to be defined and implemented. Key deferred elements include the establishment of evaluation and assessment mechanisms for the quality of services provided by ECEC centers. The development of related measurement instruments across ECEC services is also pending (World Bank, 2024a).

## ECEC workforce

According to MESTI (2024), there are currently 769 teachers across regions in public ECEC institutions, from which only 3 are men. In addition to the teachers, there are 97 administrative staff, and 256 support personnel across the public ECEC centers. 26% of the teaching workforce is in Pristina, 10% in Gjakova and 9% in Gjiilan. These numbers are not aligned with the representativeness of the children's population across the country, with the exception of Pristina. According to the last census, 15% of children below 6 years old are in Pristina, followed by Prizren (9%), Ferizaj (7%), and Fushë Kosovë (5.3%), with Gjiilan coming fifth (4.9%) and Gjakova seventh (4.5%), representing the large regional disparities in ECEC availability within the country.

Interviews with ECEC professionals in public institutions indicate that turnover is generally low, although migration is a primary reason for educators leaving their positions. On the other hand, interviews with professionals in private institutions suggest that in the private sector, educators are likely to leave their jobs for better-paying opportunities or more stable positions in the public sector. Private educators in Kosovo have less job security and benefits and are not supported by the existing continuous professional development programs, except for those arranged by international development partners or by the centers themselves.

Furthermore, stakeholder interviews reveal that while public educators participate in regular training sessions, including those focused on methodological approaches and curriculum development, there is an absence of a needs assessment to inform structured capacity building or in-service professional development. Currently, training is offered based on the availability of funds and existing modules or programs, rather than being driven by evidence-based assessments of educators' needs for enhanced competence and professionalism.

According to legal requirements, educators working with children aged 3 to 6 must possess at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. This qualification is typically preceded by the completion of Pedagogical High Schools with an educator profile and/or academic studies in general pedagogy. The program spans four years and is aligned with the European Qualifications Framework, encompassing subjects such as psychology, early childhood pedagogy, and practical pedagogical activities (University of Prishtina, 2024). For educators teaching children aged 0

to 3, there are no legal requirements to hold a degree in ECEC, but educators often hold such a degree, along with additional healthcare training.

While these standards are generally adhered to in public institutions, many private kindergartens employ staff with only secondary education in unrelated fields. In unlicensed centers, there is often less transparency regarding the qualifications of the staff. Interviews with directors of 86 schools and kindergartens find that all educators employed in the system to work with children 3–6 years old hold at least a BA degree for preschool education, as required by law. In public institutions, the majority of educators working with children 0–3 years old have medical training from professional medical high schools. In private and community-based kindergartens, this age group is mainly attended to by educators holding a BA degree in education, psychology or similar degrees obtained in private universities. The survey also found that in 9% of centers only some of the educators have the required background.

The Law on Salaries in the Public Sectors sets the salary of ECEC teachers at around 572 euros, assistant teachers at 561 euros, and special teaching assistant at 550 euros (Republic of Kosovo, n.d.; Republic of Kosovo, 2025). This would be the equivalent to 90%, 89%, and 87% of the average wage in the country for 2024 (calculated using WIIW, 2024), which could weaken incentives to join the sector due to high educational requirements and low pay. Moreover, the salaries of pre-school teachers are equivalent to 93 percent of primary school teachers' salaries (616 euros in 2025 as per Republic of Kosovo, 2025).

## 5. Main challenges to ECEC provision in Kosovo

Countries worldwide, including Kosovo, encounter significant challenges in developing a robust childcare market, which consequently impedes progress toward achieving essential ECEC goals outlined in Section 3. These challenges arise from both supply- and demand-side constraints (Table 4).

On the supply side, the market struggles to offer a sufficient number of high-quality ECEC options for families. This shortage of quality childcare services limits the choices available to parents, affecting their ability to access suitable early childhood education and care for their children.

On the demand side, limited parental demand hinders the expansion and improvement of the childcare sector. Various factors contribute to this, including economic constraints, lack of awareness about the benefits of ECEC, and cultural attitudes toward childcare. These demand-side issues prevent the market from growing and evolving to meet the needs of families effectively.

Together, these barriers restrict the growth of the childcare market, making it challenging for families to access quality, affordable early childhood education and care. In this section, we will discuss both supply and demand issues and how they create constraints for Kosovo in realizing the goals outlined in Figure 2. These goals include expanding access to ECEC, prioritizing coverage for vulnerable families, securing sufficient funding, establishing clear institutional frameworks, and ensuring safe and stimulating environments for children.

**Table 4. Key constraints to the childcare market**

| SUPPLY SIDE CONSTRAINTS                                                                                                                                                               | DEMAND SIDE CONSTRAINTS                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| High operational costs and tight margins (especially for services targeting younger children due to higher caregiver-to-child ratios) make providers financially vulnerable           | High cost of services acts as a barrier for many families, especially low-income families                                                                          |
| Quality is often poor due to an undertrained and unsupported childcare and early learning workforce, a lack of guidance on quality standards, and a lack of financing                 | Poor quality means parents may not trust that their children would be safe or that they would be getting a valuable service for which they are willing to pay      |
| Operators are prevented from entering the market (particularly those serving children below age 3) due to unclear or unrealistic requirements for registration, and limited financing | Parents may not understand what good quality looks like and may demand inappropriate practices, and/or be unable to engage with providers to demand better quality |
|                                                                                                                                                                                       | Inconvenient location of services and operating hours limit uptake                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                       | Cultural and social norms against having children cared for outside of the family limit uptake.                                                                    |

Source: Devercelli and Beaton-Day, 2020.

## Low availability and inequitable access to childcare

### SUPPLY-SIDE CONSTRAINTS

Despite the government's concerted efforts to expand the number of childcare facilities, the current infrastructure meets only about 30% of the total childcare demand. Since 2021, four new kindergartens have been completed, 26 are under construction, three school buildings are being adapted for ECEC use, and eight additional kindergartens are in the tendering phase. However, despite these efforts, the expansion remains insufficient to meet the growing demand. Public provision accounts for just 23% of total demand, while private providers cover an additional 7%. As the Early Childhood Education Law does not require institutionalized preschool education, access continues to depend on available capacity rather than a guaranteed entitlement.

As of 2023, Kosovo has only 54 public kindergartens, far short of the estimated need for 162 facilities in urban areas and 65 in rural areas. Notably, nine municipalities do not have any type of ECEC facilities (World Bank, 2024a). This shortage is reflected in parental perspectives —71% of surveyed parents believe all children under six should have access to ECE services, yet 28.8% report that these services are only slightly accessible or entirely unavailable in their communities.

The World Bank has identified Kosovo as having the lowest ECEC enrollment rates in the Western Balkans, underscoring a significant challenge in the country's education sector. The current ECEC enrollment rates highlight a substantial gap compared to international standards. The situation is even more pronounced for younger age groups, with children below 3 years old being almost completely excluded from the ECEC sector.

Access to ECEC services is heavily influenced by socioeconomic factors, including household income, gender, and parental education (Figure 5). Children from wealthier families and those whose mothers have higher education levels have the highest enrollment rates, with 43% and 40% participation, respectively. On the other hand, children whose mothers have only primary education are significantly less likely to be enrolled in preschool (Demas et al., 2021).

Geographical disparities further exacerbate access issues. The 2019–2020 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey found that 25.5% of children aged 3–4 in urban areas were enrolled in preschool, compared to just 7.9% in rural areas (UNICEF, 2020). Interviews indicate that while the number of private ECEC providers is growing in urban areas, this trend has not extended to rural regions. As one interviewee noted: “While public preschools are few in number, affordable payment options are available for many families with access to public institutions, but these options are nearly nonexistent in rural areas.” This is even though school director interviews show that the demand for kindergartens in rural areas is particularly high, as most schools offer preschool education only for ages 5–6 years. The kindergarten admission process follows the established legal framework, and in smaller municipalities, most applications are typically accepted. However, in many instances, the demand exceeds the available capacity.

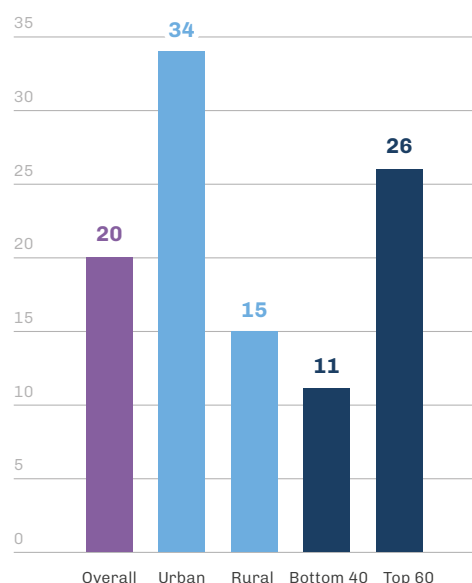
Furthermore, even when ECEC services are available, they often lack the flexibility needed to meet the diverse needs of families, especially working parents. Many participants in a parental focus group discussion expressed a need for more adaptable childcare options. Currently, public and private kindergartens typically operate from 07:00 to 17:00, while public preschools in schools and community-based centers offer services for only 2–3 hours per day.

In an interview with childcare providers, professionals were asked for their views on the challenges to accessibility and inclusion in Kosovo. Many of them mentioned the limited size and number of facilities as well as the large number of children and the insufficient number of educators as the main challenges for inclusion.

## DEMAND-SIDE CONSTRAINTS

The low enrollment rates in childcare are not solely due to a lack of supply; parental preferences and societal norms also play a significant role. Approximately 80% of families who need childcare services in the country report that they do not use any form of formal childcare, with rural and poorer households being at the forefront

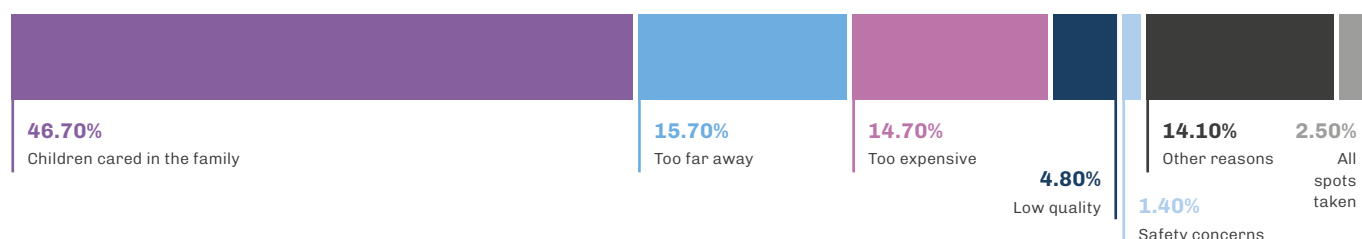
**Figure 5. Use of childcare facilities among households with only children 0–6 (percent)**



Source: Fruttero et al., 2026 using LITS IV data.

of this trend. Moreover, from that 80% nearly 47% cite family-provided care as the main reason, with the following reasons being that the childcare centers are too far away (15.7%) or too expensive (14.7%) (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Share of households not using childcare facilities (percent), by main reason**



Source: recreated from Fruttero et al., 2026 using LITS IV data.

Traditional views on child-rearing persist in the country, with 23.2% of parents believing that mothers should be the primary caregivers and 27.7% preferring family-based or nanny care. This is reflected in the fact that in Kosovo, only 18.5% of working-age women participate in the labor force, less than half of their male counterparts. The figures are starker when looking at women between 25 and 34 years old with young children, who are even more likely to be out of the workforce due to childcare duties (Fruttero et al., 2026).

Additionally, parents also face other concerns when it comes to enrolling their children in ECEC services. During a survey, 45.5% of parents stated a mistrust in the quality of ECEC services as a reason for not enrolling their children. Concerns over potential abuse and lack of proper care are some of the factors influencing their decisions. Other parental concerns include perceived inadequate infrastructure (30.4%), limited availability of kindergartens in their communities (37.5%), and low professionalism of educators (18.8%)<sup>5</sup>.

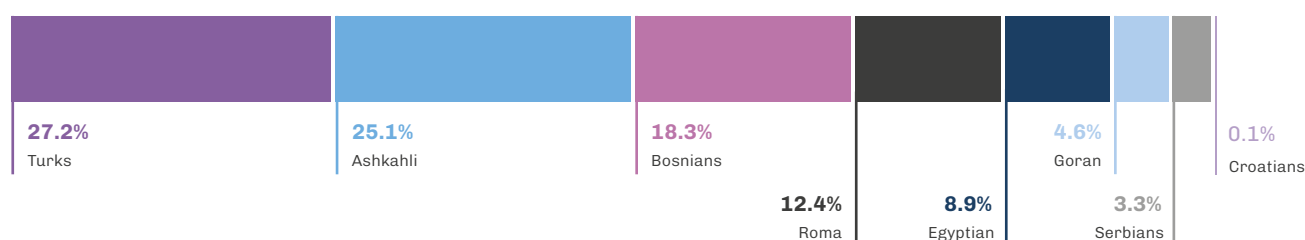
## Low enrollment of vulnerable children and insufficient low-cost and free options

Enrollment in ECEC for children varies significantly across socioeconomic and demographic groups, leading to stark inequities in access. The most disadvantaged children have the lowest enrollment rates—only 3% of the poorest children were enrolled in ECEC programs as of 2020 (Demas et al., 2021). Furthermore, only a few children with special needs are currently enrolled, with only 5 children enrolled in public institutions between the ages of 3 and 5, and 12 in pre-primary education (MESTI, 2024).

5. The survey asked parents about the main reasons for not enrolling their children in ECEC; multiple responses were allowed.

Children from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities also face lower enrollment rates than the general population, with only 10% participating in early childhood education, and making up only 3% of the total number of children enrolled in public institutions (MESTI, 2024). Among the minority groups, Ashkahlis and Turks make up 0.8% each, despite being the two groups with the largest representation (Figure 7). Interestingly, within Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, the highest enrollment rates are found among children from the poorest households, with 12% of 3–4-year-olds attending ECEC programs (Demas et al., 2021).

**Figure 7. Share of total enrollment of children by ethnic background in public ECEC services, other than Albanian (0–6 years old) (percent)**



Source: MESTI, 2024.

Note: this figure includes only children from other ethnic groups, which in total constitute 3% of total enrollment. The remaining 97% are children from Albanian backgrounds.

The primary barriers to ECEC access for disadvantaged families include high childcare costs, a lack of available ECEC centers, and an insufficient number of subsidized spots. While public kindergartens are significantly more affordable than private institutions—and children from vulnerable backgrounds are exempt from fees, the overall number of public ECEC spots remains limited, and subsidized placements are even scarcer. Private kindergartens, on the other hand, charge much higher fees, making them unaffordable for many low-income families.

Another challenge is that public ECEC centers prioritize enrollment for children whose parents are both employed. This policy disproportionately disadvantages low-income and unemployed parents, who often lack the necessary support to enter the workforce. For instance, among families receiving benefits from the Social Assistance Scheme (SAS)—who represent only 5–8% of all families living in poverty—just 10% have access to ECEC services for children aged 0–6 (Demas et al., 2021).

In 2025, the World Bank and the Kosovan Government launched a pilot for a Voucher Program aimed at increasing enrollment in ECEC institutions for vulnerable children from families receiving social assistance (SAS) benefits. The program specifically targeted children aged 3 to 5 from a SAS benefiting family, offering a monthly voucher of up to 150 euros to facilitate their enrollment in private kindergartens. Additionally, an extra subsidy for transportation was provided directly to the families.

The voucher payments were made directly to the service providers for families who chose to apply and enroll in the program. To initiate the pilot phase, the government issued a call for applications in three regions: Gjilan, Lipjan, and Prishtina. Information about the program was disseminated through various media channels, and social workers reached out to eligible SAS beneficiaries. Despite these efforts, only 10% of eligible applicants applied for the program during the month-long application period. A follow-up survey was conducted to investigate the reasons behind the low application rate, despite the program offering free childcare. Several issues were identified:

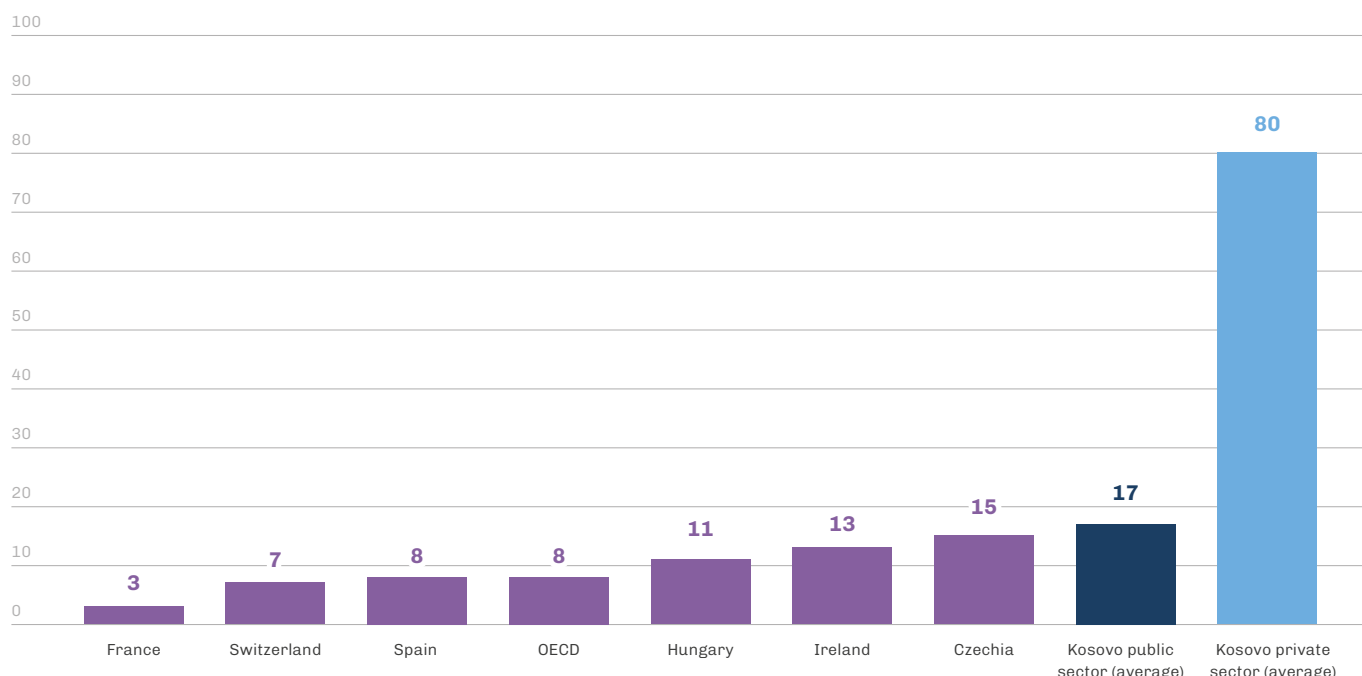
- **Information barriers:** many families were unaware of the program, while others misunderstood the application process, fearing it might affect their SAS benefits.
- **Supply-side challenges:** some providers were unable to accommodate children with special needs due to a lack of specialized teaching assistants.
- **Transportation difficulties:** although families were entitled to a transportation subsidy, many lacked private transportation options, faced inadequate public transportation, or found the commuting time too lengthy to manage effectively.
- **Demand-side barriers:** some families did not perceive the value of enrolling their children in childcare, believing that mothers should continue to care for their children at home (see Section “Addressing parental perceptions of childcare”, p. 56, for more information on social norms).

This program highlights that the low inclusion of vulnerable children is not solely due to supply-side issues. Other factors, such as the perceived importance of these programs and adjacent barriers like transportation, also need to be addressed to ensure broader accessibility and effectiveness.

## Insufficient financing to make quality childcare affordable for families

As previously mentioned, most families are required to pay fees for childcare in both public and private institutions. Currently, fees range from 40 to 70 euros per month in public institutions, compared to 150 to 350 euros per month in private ones, with the average gross salary in 2024 being 631 euros per month. For a family with one working parent and one jobseeker, who must enroll two children in private care due to the inability to access public care, the costs are significantly high. This situation would necessitate the family to allocate about 80% of their income, on average, for private childcare, assuming they have only two children under six years old (Figure 8). In contrast, if the family could access public childcare, they need to spend around 17% of their income on average. Even when accessing public ECEC services the family expenditures would be far above the OECD expenditure average of 4.5% per child with one single parent for 2022 (OECD, 2025, a).

**Figure 8. Childcare costs for a single parent with two children as a percentage of the income, considering no benefits designed to reduce the cost of childcare fees**



Source: OECD, 2025a; Ministry of Finance, Labor, and Transfers of Kosovo.

Note: latest data available. The prices for Kosovo are calculated based on the average of the fee ranges.

Given the limited availability of public childcare options, most families must resort to private providers, where high costs become prohibitive for lower-income families. This situation not only affects children who are not enrolled in the center but also forces mothers to choose between entering employment and using a significant portion of their income for private childcare or staying home to continue managing childcare responsibilities. For low-productivity workers, this trade-off may not justify paying high fees for a kindergarten. As one interviewee stated, “We need more preschools and parent financing programs to provide greater access.”

It is also important to recognize that institutional fees are not the only expenses parents face for children in ECEC age, with additional costs for extracurricular activities and transport. The need for financial subsidies to improve access to private ECEC services is evident, particularly for families from disadvantaged backgrounds who might otherwise struggle to afford these services and who are unable to secure places in public centers.

Some municipalities, such as the municipality of Pristina, allocate significant budget to subsidize ECEC provision for vulnerable groups. For example, for 2024, Pristina allocated around 100,000 euros to subsidize the education of children from these groups. This subsidized the education of approximately 120 children, with each child receiving a subsidy of around 60 euros a month, highlighting the importance of such initiatives.

However, at the national level, funding continues to be very low for ECE programs. Kosovo spends 4.6% of GDP on education, similar to other countries in the Western Balkans. However, most of this budget is allocated to other educational programs. Preschool sector only receives about 0.3% as a share of GDP, which is similar to neighboring countries such as Serbia, but significantly low compared to the OECD recommendation of minimum 1% expenditure (OECD 2006).

## Weak and unclear institutional arrangements and system coherence

Despite recent advancements in the ECEC framework for provision, including the approval of the Law on Early Childhood Education, significant gaps remain in the institutional framework, affecting the quality, accessibility, and coordination of services. Until recently, the absence of comprehensive legislation and a standardized curriculum hindered childcare provision. While the newly established Law on Early Childhood Education provides a framework for ECEC operations, it defers many critical quality elements to sub-legal acts that have yet to be defined and implemented. Key gaps that remain unaddressed include the transition of ECEC centers to a new curriculum framework, the update of teacher professional standards, the implementation of evaluation and assessment tools to measure service quality, and the revision of the regulatory framework to align learning environments with curriculum and pedagogy (World Bank, 2024a).

The fragmentation of ECEC services across different sectors also presents a major obstacle to effective service delivery. The integration of ECEC with health and social welfare services remains limited, undermining the potential for a holistic approach to early childhood development. According to a situation analysis conducted by UNICEF (2023), early childhood services in education, health, and social protection often operate in isolation, with minimal coordination among responsible institutions. This lack of cooperation results in inefficiencies in service provision and weakens the overall support system for young children and their families. The absence of a structured institutional framework for planning, implementation, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation further compounds these issues. Stakeholders interviewed as part of this research echoed these concerns, emphasizing the importance of stronger collaboration among ministries to ensure that children benefit from comprehensive care, education, and development opportunities. As one NGO representative stated: “It is certainly essential that these ministries collaborate on early childhood education. If this collaboration is in place, children can benefit from care, development, and education”.

A further challenge is the lack of a structured system for teacher training and professional development. While educators regularly participate in training programs covering topics such as methodological approaches and curriculum development,

these opportunities are not guided by a systematic needs assessment. Instead, training availability largely depends on funding and externally driven initiatives rather than a formalized framework designed to enhance educators' skills and professionalism. During interviews with providers, it was emphasized that training more individuals to join the ECEC profession is crucial. Additionally, offering professional development opportunities is essential for enhancing the quality of childcare services.

The absence of a clear structure for in-service training and continuous professional development leads to inconsistencies in teaching quality and limits the ability of educators to effectively implement ECEC standards and curricula. Without a coordinated effort to establish comprehensive training programs, the sector will continue to face challenges in ensuring that educators are properly trained for their jobs.

## **Lack of quality standard system and monitoring**

One of the major challenges in the quality of education in Kosovo lies in the inability to ensure consistent quality and accountability across institutions. The monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for ECEC services remain fragmented, insufficient, and inconsistently applied, resulting in significant disparities in service quality and educational outcomes for young children. (Demas et al., 2021).

A key issue is the limited regulation of private preschools, which, despite serving as an important alternative for families and offering flexible hours, often operate without licenses. This lack of oversight means that many private ECEC programs are not included in the government-provided resources, such as safety checks, educator training, and quality standards that could ensure uniform educational experiences (Demas et al., 2021).

Moreover, the quality assurance process in ECEC involves multiple actors, including the Office of the Regional Inspectorate, municipalities, and the MESTI, and the implementation of protocols is not always fulfilled. While regional inspectors have access to educational settings comparable to that of school directors, municipalities rely on quality coordinators, directors, and teaching staff to uphold standards. Educator qualifications are regulated by administrative instructions, and the Education Inspectorate is tasked with ensuring compliance, while the Labor Inspectorate monitors contract enforcement. However, despite these mechanisms, there have been no comprehensive evaluations of preschool staff performance to date, leaving significant gaps in accountability and professional development.

The lack of a national curriculum implementation strategy exacerbates these challenges. While a pilot phase introduced training for some inspectors to assess curriculum application, inspectors are not specialists in early childhood education, making evaluations inconsistent and potentially ineffective. Without systematic monitoring, many preschools operate without clear benchmarks for success, leading to wide variations in the quality of education and care (Demas et al., 2021). Some

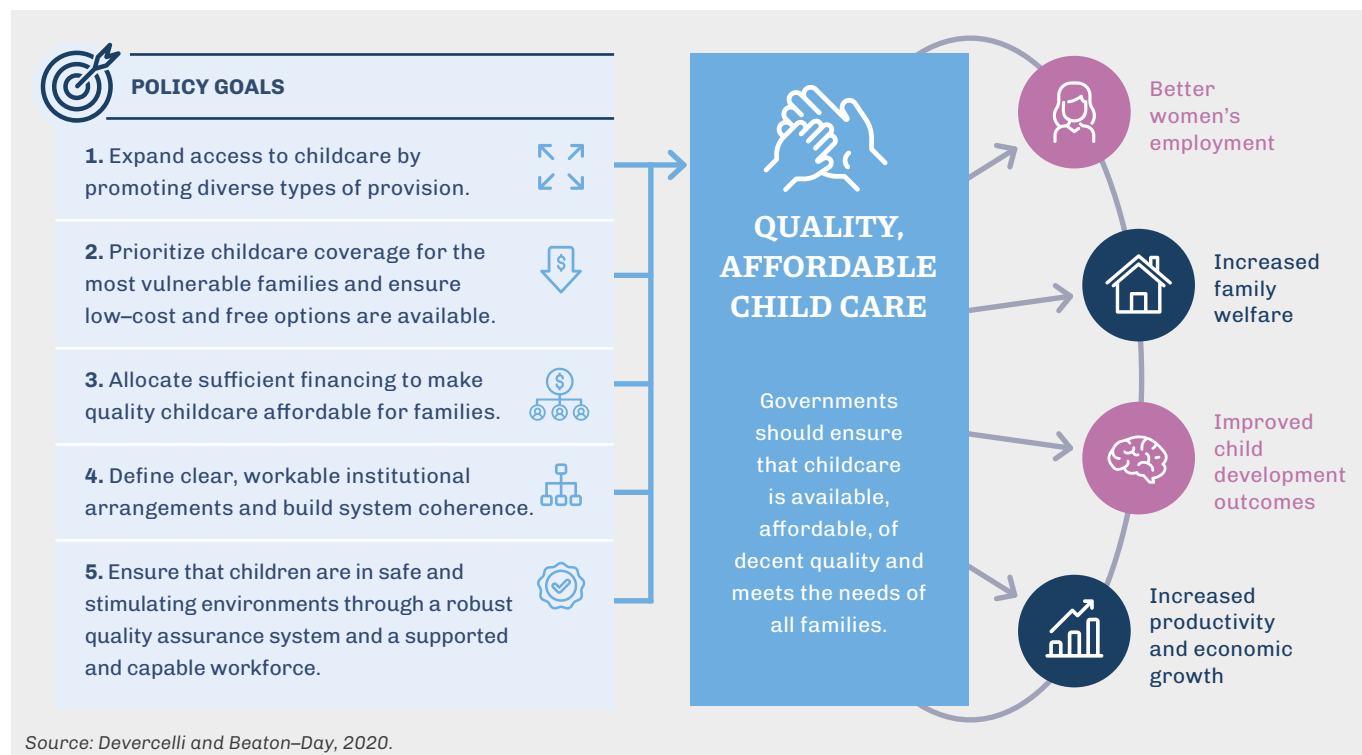
private and community-based kindergartens have taken the initiative to implement internal monitoring and teacher performance appraisals to support professional development. However, these efforts are largely voluntary and depend on individual kindergarten directors, making them unsustainable in the long term.

This landscape of ECEC monitoring and inspection has raised concerns among stakeholders, who view it as unstructured, insufficient, and ultimately ineffective. While the Education Inspectorate is responsible for overseeing quality in early childhood education, it faces major challenges, including staffing shortages and a lack of personnel specifically trained in ECEC. As a result, systematic monitoring of key quality indicators—such as child–caregiver interactions, peer engagement, and the overall learning environment—remains largely absent. Kindergarten directors report that even when monitoring visits occur, they are infrequent, sporadic, and fail to cover all service providers comprehensively. Moreover, municipal departments, which play a role in local oversight, lack the professional expertise necessary to effectively assess ECEC institutions.

## 6. Roads to improving childcare provision and growing the childcare economy in Kosovo

To improve access to affordable and quality childcare across the country, it is crucial to address the previously discussed constraints and target the policy goals necessary to meet the needs of all families and young children. Only by doing so can Kosovo provide affordable and quality childcare and ultimately enhance family welfare, improve child development outcomes, provide women with more opportunities to pursue employment and career goals, and increase the overall productivity of future generations and their families.

To provide guidance on how the government can strengthen its childcare system to achieve these goals, we focus on five policy pillars (Figure 9). First, **expanding access through diverse service provision** ensures that childcare options meet varying family needs while attracting additional stakeholders and funding. Second, **prioritizing coverage for vulnerable families** by offering low-cost or free options is critical for equitable access, requiring targeted government support. Third, **securing sufficient funding** is necessary to keep childcare affordable while maintaining quality standards. Fourth, **establishing clear institutional frameworks and system coherence** is essential to address policy fragmentation and improve planning. Finally, **ensuring safe and stimulating environments with a well-supported workforce** is key to encouraging parental uptake and maximizing the developmental benefits of childcare.

**Figure 9. Overview of policy goals to improve access to affordable and quality childcare**

## Expanding provision

### SELECTING A PROVISION MODEL FOR EXPANSION

Expanding childcare provision effectively requires ensuring that a variety of childcare options are available to meet the diverse needs of families. In Kosovo, there are three primary types of childcare providers, each with distinct strengths and weaknesses. Concentrating on expanding a single model could exacerbate the inherent risks associated with that model. Conversely, offering complementary options can deliver comprehensive support, addressing the unique needs of different families and mitigating potential risks. A comparative analysis of providers yielded several results around the main benefits and shortcomings of each approach. Table 5 provides an overview of the main features for each type of provider.

Public kindergartens are often highlighted as a more affordable option, making them accessible to a broader range of families. Parents also generally exhibit greater trust in public-sector educators, which reflects confidence in the standardized training and professional development opportunities provided to these educators. However, public kindergartens face several challenges, including outdated infrastructure and a lack of quality assurance systems, which can impact the quality of care and education, as reflected by their lower performance in the Teach assessment (Table 6). Additionally, the higher educator-to-child ratios in public settings may affect the level of attention and quality of education each child receives.

**Table 5. Overview of main features by type of provision**

| PROVIDER                                      | N°.              | TEACHER QUALIFICATION                                                                          | INFRASTRUCTURE TYPE AND SHORTCOMINGS                                                                                    | PRICE IN EURO                             | QUALITY ASSURANCE                                               | METHODOLOGY                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Public kindergartens and pre-primary programs | 54 kindergartens | 0/3 years<br>BA teachers/<br>nurses<br>–<br>3/6 and 5/6 year<br>Qualified teacher<br>BA degree | Institutional facilities with outdated infrastructure and general lack of didactic materials                            | 40 to 70<br>Pre-primary<br>free of charge | Must comply with set standards but lack a systematic monitoring | · Not specific<br>· Standard curriculum                                                          |
| Private KGs                                   | 172              | 0/3 years<br>BA degree and<br>nurses<br>–<br>3/6 year<br>Qualified teacher<br>BA degree        | Converted houses or buildings with large differences in infrastructure<br>Usually richer in didactic materials and toys | 150 to 350                                | Licensing process but no monitoring so far                      | Diverse:<br>· Montessori<br>· Curiosity approach<br>· Reggio Emilia<br>· Step by step<br>· Mixed |
| Community-based                               | N/A              | 0/3 years<br>BA degree<br>–<br>3/6 year<br>Qualified teacher<br>BA degree                      | Municipal facilities exist, good infrastructure, convenient locations, well-equipped in didactic materials and toys     | 100 to 130                                | Licensing process but no monitoring so far                      | Diverse:<br>· Montessori<br>· Curiosity approach<br>· Reggio Emilia<br>· Step by step            |

Source: Authors

Private providers, on the other hand, offer flexibility and innovation, being more responsive to market demands and providing greater variety for parents. They often have more structured methodological approaches and are better equipped with didactic materials, contributing positively to the learning environment. Additionally, interviews with educators also reveal that there is often more flexibility and autonomy in curriculum design and teaching methods within private ECEC settings, allowing for more tailored approaches based on the children. However, challenges such as affordability and accessibility remain, as high costs may limit access for some families. There is also a pressing need for standardization and licensing to ensure that all children attending private centers are prepared with a minimum quality baseline for success in primary education.

Community-based models offer several benefits, including community involvement, manageable size, and low start-up costs. These models have been shown to positively impact children's holistic development, including motor skills, literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional growth. Classroom observations indicate that community-based centers exhibit the strongest performance, excelling in supportive learning environments, positive behavior reinforcement, and effective learning facilitation (Table 6). This success is likely due to smaller class sizes and more personalized interactions in these settings. However, they also face a set of challenges, such as limited

capacity and short operating schedules, which can hinder their ability to meet the growing demand as well as the needs of working parents. Additionally, resource constraints may affect the quality and availability of educational materials and activities.

**Table 6. TEACH ECE evaluation in Kosovo, 2024**

| TEACH ECE DOMAINS               | PUBLIC | COMMUNITY-BASED CENTERS | PRIVATE |
|---------------------------------|--------|-------------------------|---------|
| Learning Support Environment    | 3.69   | 4.06                    | 3.99    |
| Positive Behavior Expectations  | 3.26   | 3.89                    | 3.41    |
| Learning Facilitation           | 3.39   | 4.11                    | 3.57    |
| Feedback                        | 2.56   | 2.67                    | 2.71    |
| Critical Thinking               | 2.7    | 3.17                    | 3.03    |
| Autonomy                        | 2.69   | 3.11                    | 2.72    |
| Insisting                       | 2.81   | 3.39                    | 2.99    |
| Social and Collaborative Skills | 2.67   | 2.83                    | 2.77    |

Source: Authors compilation.

Note: TEACH ECE scores range from 1 to 5, with 5 representing high proficiency and 1, low proficiency.

Expanding ECEC services in Kosovo requires a strategic approach that balances accessibility, quality, and financial sustainability. While constructing new public kindergartens is a favored option among parents and educators due to their potential to increase access, this approach may not be the most cost-effective or quality-effective model for expansion. Increasing the number of public kindergartens can indeed make ECEC more accessible, but it may not address underlying concerns about quality. Therefore, before considering a public-based expansion, it is essential to improve the infrastructure of existing institutions, introducing rigorous quality assurance mechanisms, and clearly defining educational methodologies.

In addition to expanding and improving public centers, it is important to consider a mixed approach that includes PPPs, community-based initiatives, and support for the private sector. This approach can leverage the strengths of various models, combining the accessibility of public institutions with the flexibility and innovation offered by private and community-based providers. Countries across Europe have successfully implemented such strategies, including Kazakhstan, Portugal, Spain, and Uzbekistan (see Section “International examples of childcare expansion programs through PPPs”, p. 51).

Similarly, the Kosovan government could provide financial incentives, regulatory support, and infrastructure investments to private and community-based providers,

encouraging them to expand their services and improve quality standards (more on this in Section “Supporting the development of private and community-based providers”, p. 49). Additionally, the government could seek opportunities to collaborate with the private sector in public–private partnerships and focus on improving and expanding current public centers. This dual approach can help meet the diverse needs of families across the country, ensuring a balanced and comprehensive expansion of ECEC across the country.

Furthermore, creating a simplified framework for licensing private and community-based organizations to offer ECEC services is crucial for increasing the licensing rate of these institutions. Such a framework would ease the entry of new providers into the market while ensuring adherence to quality standards. By providing the previously mentioned tools and incentives, providers would already have strong motivation to obtain licenses, comply with regulations, and enhance service quality. With a simplified licensing process, there would be little motivation for providers not to pursue formal recognition and compliance.

For this expansion to be successful, several challenges must be addressed. Improving quality standards across all models is vital, which includes investing in renovating outdated public centers and implementing new requirements set out in the new ECEC law. Meanwhile, the state should continue incentivizing private and community-based centers to develop and meet market demands. Actively involving community members in the planning and management of ECEC services ensures that services meet local needs and benefit from local knowledge and support. Expanding available childcare options and increasing the operating hours of existing institutions, such as community-based centers and preschool options, will provide more flexibility for working parents and better meet the needs of families.

## **SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRIVATE AND COMMUNITY-BASED PROVIDERS**

In a survey of 38 private and community-based childcare providers in Kosovo, all respondents indicated that the current demand for their services exceeds their capacity. Many of these providers have waiting lists, with some reporting as many as 200 children waiting for enrollment. This overwhelming demand highlights the urgent need for expansion. When asked about their readiness to expand, 95% of providers expressed willingness to do so, driven by high demand. However, they identified financial support, additional space, and more qualified staff as critical needs to facilitate these expansions. The recent call for a voucher program that targets private providers confirmed that, with the right incentive, the private sector in Kosovo responds quickly and positively. According to the latest numbers, the private providers across 14 municipalities were able to offer 600 places. It is important to mention that the size of the voucher is defined as an average per municipality for all private providers reporting.

Beyond vouchers, international experience points to additional instruments that governments can use to support private childcare provision, particularly in underserved areas. One widely used approach is the use of block grants or “state

purchasing” mechanisms, whereby governments finance places in existing private and community-based facilities rather than investing in the construction of new public centers. This model is especially relevant when fiscal or capacity constraints limit the government’s ability to expand the public network directly, and when a base of private providers already exists. By channeling public resources to these providers, governments can rapidly increase access to services while avoiding the high capital costs associated with new infrastructure (UNICEF, 2018).

A prominent example is Kazakhstan’s “state order” program, under which the government purchases preschool education services from non-state providers based on budget availability and local demand. The program is explicitly designed to address shortages in public kindergarten places. Children registered on waiting lists for public kindergartens are eligible to enroll in participating private kindergartens that receive public funding under the state order. The cost of preschool education is shared between the state and parents: the government covers the cost of educational services from the budget, while parents contribute to meals and, if desired, additional services. Local authorities (akimats) compile the list of participating private kindergartens, and contracts between parents and providers specify rights, obligations, and payment terms (UNICEF, 2018).

Building on both international experience and stakeholder consultations, several strategic options have been identified to support the expansion of private and community-based providers in Kosovo:

1. **Legal recognition as social businesses:** legal recognition of kindergartens as social businesses rather than purely commercial entities could open avenues for more appropriate forms of state support, aligned with their educational and social objectives.
2. **Financial support for parents:** introducing subsidies for parents can reduce out-of-pocket costs and stimulate demand for private provision. This approach would help alleviate financial barriers to enrollment, thereby increasing demand and supporting provider growth. According to the World Bank’s Women, Business and the Law (WBL) childcare data, 26 out of 95 economies provide financial support to parents for the use of childcare services. For example, in Czechia, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs offers allowances to parents whose children attend crèches or nursery schools, and in Serbia, parents are eligible for partial reimbursement of private childcare expenses when public facilities operate at full capacity (Sakhonchik et al., 2023).
3. **Use of public facilities and public-private partnerships:** Making unused or underutilized public facilities available to private and community-based kindergartens can be an effective way to expand ECEC provision while fostering public-private partnerships. This approach is particularly relevant in rural and low-density areas,

where demand is more dispersed and private investment is often less viable. As highlighted by UNICEF (2018), private sector participation in education infrastructure can take various forms, encompassing the financing, design, construction, and operation of facilities with different allocations of risk and responsibility. One of the most common models is the Build–Operate–Transfer (BOT) arrangement, under which the government typically provides land, while the private partner designs, constructs, and operates the facility under a long-term contract, often spanning 25–30 years. International experience illustrates the potential of such models: in the late 1990s, the Province of Nova Scotia (Canada) used a public–private partnership approach to deliver 39 new schools at a time of fiscal constraint, leasing the facilities back from private partners over a 20-year period in order to rapidly expand capacity and introduce modern, technology-equipped infrastructure.

4. **Subsidies and favorable loans:** Kosovo can support the operation and expansion of private ECEC providers through targeted subsidies and concessional loans. These instruments may include block grants, capital grants for facility expansion, or the provision of public land or premises to enable the scaling up of services, as illustrated above. However, international experience also highlights the importance of careful design. In Russia, for example, competitive grant schemes open to both public and private providers have become increasingly popular, yet their impact has been constrained by institutional and regulatory weaknesses. Unclear entry requirements for public–private partnerships, the absence of comprehensive normative acts governing daycare operations, and weak eligibility and monitoring mechanisms have limited transparency and reduced the ability to assess quality and learning outcomes (UNICEF, 2018), more on this will be discussed in the following section.
5. **Professional development for educators:** Providing private kindergarten staff with access to professional development programs available to public sector educators can improve quality, enhance staff retention, and attract more qualified teachers to the sector. Strengthening the skills base of educators is essential to ensure that expansion is not only rapid, but also delivers high-quality, developmentally appropriate services (for further details see Section “Incentivizing professional development and growing the ECEC sector”, p. 59).

## INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF CHILDCARE EXPANSION PROGRAMS THROUGH PPPs

Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as a significant mechanism for expanding ECEC services globally. These partnerships leverage private sector efficiency and investment to support public sector goals, enhancing infrastructure and increasing service provision. Public–private partnerships in education and early

childhood infrastructure have expanded significantly across Europe over the past two decades, with a large number of contracts signed across Member States. Countries like Portugal and Spain have successfully implemented PPPs where the government collaborates with private companies to build and manage ECEC centers. In Spain, private companies receive subsidies to provide free or lower-cost preschool education slots, effectively expanding access to quality ECEC services. Portugal follows a similar model, subsidizing the cost of ECEC provided in private institutions. These partnerships aim to meet public goals by offering services at a lower cost to the government, particularly in underserved areas, thereby improving educational outcomes (Eurydice, 2025; OECD, 2025b). Nordic countries have developed a mixed-market provision model for ECE, characterized by collaboration between municipalities and private providers. The government funds ECE services through vouchers or direct subsidies, which parents can use at both public and private institutions (Eurydice, 2025). This approach supports parental choice and encourages competition among providers, leading to innovation and high service quality. The emphasis on quality and inclusivity ensures that all children have access to high-standard educational services, fostering a diverse and competitive market environment.

Furthermore, Kazakhstan has made significant strides in ECEC services development by expanding the private sector's role in the preschool network. Key actions include abolishing license requirements for preschools and introducing per-capita financing, which facilitated rapid expansion and increased enrollment. Approximately 43% of public funding allocations in preschool institutions are directed to private preschools. Furthermore, Uzbekistan has explored several PPP models, including one where the government provides land, and a private entity designs, constructs, and operates a school under a long-term contract. Ownership of the school facility transfers to the government at the end of the concession period. This model is suitable for large projects that the private sector cannot finance wholly. Additionally, Uzbekistan has implemented a voucher program, subsidizing private institutions to enroll children at no or reduced costs, targeting specific groups such as children from poor families or minority groups (UNICEF, 2018).

In Albania, initiatives to offer tax incentives and financial support aim to encourage private sector involvement in ECEC facilities (UNICEF Albania, 2023). Although detailed implementation information is limited, these efforts seek to incentivize private investment and collaboration. Serbia is exploring PPPs as a solution to low preschool enrollment, particularly among low-income and Roma families. A UNICEF-commissioned study assessed various PPP models, analyzing legislative environments and access to preschool data (Baucal et al., 2021). This exploration highlights the potential for PPPs to increase access and improve service quality.

Empirical research on PPPs in education remains limited, but the existing studies provide some lessons. Across different models, including contract schools, government subsidies to non-state providers, and voucher schemes, the evidence suggests that PPPs can improve enrollment, management practices, and access, particularly

for underserved populations. There is some indication that contract schools and subsidized private schools can positively affect student learning outcomes in specific contexts (e.g., the US, Colombia, Venezuela, and Uganda), though the mechanisms behind these effects are not always clear, and results remain inconclusive in many developing countries. Voucher programs show mixed results: they often increase enrollment, especially among children who might otherwise remain out of school, but their impact on learning outcomes, particularly for the most disadvantaged students, is inconsistent (Aslam et al., 2018).

Overall, while PPPs appear promising in expanding access and addressing resource constraints, the evidence on their effectiveness in improving educational achievement is context-dependent, highlighting the need for careful design, monitoring, and evaluation.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING PPP MODELS IN KOSOVO

The examples above illustrate several advantages of enhancing the private sector's role in delivering education services. PPPs are grounded in the balance between autonomy and accountability. ECEC centers operating under PPP contracts may be granted greater operational and pedagogical freedom, allowing them to experiment with new teaching methods, curricula, or management practices that can enhance learning. Risk-sharing between public and private parties can also increase efficiency and attract private players to the education market. Moreover, competition among service providers promotes a transparent environment, enhancing service quality.

Nonetheless, PPPs carry significant risks that stem from the differing objectives and incentives of public and private actors. Private partners generally aim to maximize financial returns, whereas governments prioritize equitable access and quality of education. This misalignment can incentivize cost-cutting measures that negatively affect pedagogy, teacher conditions, or student services. PPP arrangements may also exacerbate inequalities if private providers engage in “cream-skimming,” selectively admitting certain children, while public schools are left to care for those with greater needs or higher vulnerabilities. Moreover, the negotiation and management of PPP contracts are complex, time-consuming, and require government capacity; without careful design and oversight, governments may inadvertently absorb financial risk or fail to enforce standards, undermining the intended benefits of the partnership (Adamson and Taneja, 2025).

To mitigate these risks, careful planning and regulatory safeguards are critical. Successful PPPs require clear contractual frameworks that delineate roles, responsibilities, performance targets, accountability measures, and sanctions for non-compliance. Governments should ensure that contracts adhere to all relevant legal, curricular, and quality standards, regulate fees to prevent profiteering, and include measures to support children from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds (Adamson and Taneja, 2025).

**Table 7. Potential benefits and challenges of PPPs for ECEC provision**

| POTENTIAL BENEFITS                                                                                                      | POTENTIAL CHALLENGES                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PPPs can help expand access to ECE services, particularly in underserved areas.                                         | PPPs involve risks for both public and private partners. It is essential to carefully assess and manage these risks. |
| Private sector efficiency and innovation can lead to improved quality of ECE services.                                  | The government needs to have the capacity to effectively implement, manage, and regulate PPPs.                       |
| PPPs can be a cost-effective way to deliver ECE services, as they can leverage private sector investment and expertise. | Attracting private sector investment in ECE may require incentives and a supportive regulatory environment.          |
| PPPs can offer greater flexibility and adaptability compared to traditional public sector models.                       | Ensuring that private sector providers meet high-quality standards is a key challenge.                               |
| PPPs can help to share risks between the public and private sectors, reducing the financial burden on the government.   | Potential risks for the cream-skimming of more capable students increase performance if not well monitored.          |

Source: Authors

PPPs are most effective when integrated into a coherent national education strategy. Governments should clearly define the role of private providers within the broader system, create a level playing field through competitive and transparent partner selection, and adopt policies that recognize and incentivize high-quality private provision (Aslam et al., 2018). Trust and collaboration between the public and private sectors are essential, with governments fulfilling their contractual obligations and facilitating private partners' contributions. Policy frameworks should also include exit strategies, contingency plans for emergencies, and mechanisms to ensure continuity of services.

Establishing clear performance indicators is also necessary to measure the success of PPPs. Monitoring and evaluation systems must capture both quantitative learning outcomes and broader indicators of quality, with disaggregated data publicly available to ensure transparency. These indicators should include aspects such as accessibility, quality, efficiency, and financial sustainability, allowing partners to assess the effectiveness of their efforts and make informed decisions for improvement. Community involvement in the planning and implementation of PPPs is also vital, as it ensures that the partnerships are responsive to local needs and supported by the community, enhancing their relevance and acceptance (Adamson and Taneja, 2025).

Furthermore, capacity building within government agencies and private providers is essential to ensure effective contract management, quality assurance, and compliance with accountability mechanisms. Mechanisms for stakeholder engagement, including parents, teachers, and communities, should be institutionalized to provide feedback, grievance redress, and oversight (Aslam et al., 2018).

Evidence from countries such as Colombia, Pakistan, and India shows that PPPs can expand access, improve management, and enhance learning outcomes, but only when carefully designed, closely monitored, and aligned with broader educational

goals. When these conditions are met, PPPs can be a strong tool to complement public provision, enhance quality, and address persistent educational inequities (Aslam et al., 2018).



## Improving access to children from disadvantaged backgrounds

Improving access to ECEC for children from disadvantaged backgrounds requires a comprehensive and strategic approach that addresses the various barriers these communities face. This involves tackling geographic, economic, and social challenges to ensure that all children can benefit from quality ECEC.

One of the primary strategies is to expand access to childcare, particularly in underserved areas such as rural communities. This can be achieved by encouraging the creation of flexible ECEC models that are adaptable to different environments, with a focus on the unique needs of rural and marginalized communities. For example, supporting the expansion of community-based kindergartens in these areas can provide accessible and responsive educational opportunities. Additionally, the government can engage with municipalities to arrange transportation options for children who live in remote areas or lack access to public transport, ensuring that distance does not impede access to education.

Another crucial aspect is improving the targeting of preschool services to the most vulnerable children and households. This involves adjusting prioritization criteria to enable participation of the very poor and minority communities, who are currently underrepresented in ECEC programs. At the same time, policymakers face a structural trade-off between prioritizing children from working families, where childcare provision supports labor force participation and reduces the care burden, and prioritizing vulnerable families. As overall supply expands, this trade-off is expected to ease; however, in the short to medium term, some rebalancing may be necessary to avoid systematically excluding disadvantaged groups. The ongoing voucher program in Kosovo seeks to address both objectives by expanding access to childcare in ways that support women's employment while also improving inclusion of vulnerable households benefiting from the social assistance scheme. In this context, innovative financing and targeting mechanisms can help reconcile efficiency and equity goals over time, ensuring that both working families and the most disadvantaged children benefit as capacity increases.

Targeting those with disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds is also essential, especially given their extremely low enrollment rate in ECEC provision. For this, the government can engage with existing learning centers that serve Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children. Currently there are 83 centers managed by civil society organizations and financially supported by international donors who provide over 5000 children with programs and after school activities (KEEN, 2021). The government should

collaborate with these centers to involve families from these communities, emphasizing the importance of ECEC and assisting them in securing kindergarten placements.

Investing in infrastructure and human resources to accommodate children with disabilities is another important step. This includes developing inclusive facilities and training educators in inclusive practices to ensure that all children can participate in ECEC programs.

Finally, implementing a voucher or subsidy program for children for vulnerable families can help overcome financial barriers for families who are unable to register their children in public centers due to limited availability. As discussed above, the Government of Kosovo and the World Bank have launched a pilot program for such vouchers, initially only targeting SAS beneficiaries. Such programs are available worldwide, with a very similar model currently operating in Ireland, for example (Citizens Information, 2025). However, these initiatives are expected to be scaled up both in size and scope to include other vulnerable groups in the coming months. Despite this positive outlook, challenges such as transportation and parental perceptions persist and must be addressed to ensure accessibility for these groups. The government is actively working on solutions to the transportation issue, recognizing its importance for the success of the voucher program. Addressing these challenges will be crucial in ensuring that the expanded services truly meet the needs of all intended beneficiaries.



## Addressing parental perceptions of childcare

As discussed above, the low childcare enrollment rate in Kosovo is influenced not only by supply-side factors but also by prevailing family perceptions and social norms. These norms often dictate that mothers should be the primary caregivers. Additionally, some parents prefer to keep their children at home until they reach a certain age, perceiving limited benefits beyond basic caregiving from ECEC services. These perceptions were confirmed by a group of parents during the piloting phase of the Voucher Program launched by the World Bank and the Government of Kosovo.

To effectively address these concerns, it is crucial to communicate the added benefits of enrolling children in ECEC programs to parents. Highlighting potential incentives, such as the opportunity for increased household income if one parent enters employment, can be particularly persuasive. Additionally, parents may feel overwhelmed or uninformed about the available childcare options. Providing comprehensive information and clear guidance on enrollment procedures can significantly encourage participation. This approach has proven effective among unemployed parents in the UK, as documented by HM Revenue and Customs UK in 2018. By ensuring parents understand both the benefits and the process, we can foster greater engagement and utilization of ECEC services.

Moreover, parents may gain confidence and trust in ECEC services by hearing testimonials from other parents who have enrolled their children. Campaigns that highlight the experiences and sentiments of other parents can be effective. Similarly,

hearing from fellow mothers or couples who have chosen childcare can incentivize uptake. Additional evidence from the UK suggests that sharing quotes and perceptions from other parents helped encourage those without children in childcare to apply for these services (HM Revenue and Customs UK, 2018).

To increase childcare enrollment, particularly under the newly launched Voucher Program, Kosovo has implemented a comprehensive information campaign to raise awareness among eligible families. The campaign provides parents with clear and accessible information on the benefits of ECEC and on how the voucher program works. To reach as many Social Assistance Scheme beneficiaries as possible, door-to-door outreach and community-based engagements have been carried out by MESTI, Centers for Social Work, and municipal teams, who jointly provide guidance, answer questions, and collect basic demographic information and concerns reported by families. A tailored brochure and an animated video were developed for this purpose, explaining the program's objectives, eligibility criteria, application steps, and available support channels, including contact details and a simple step-by-step guide for applicants. Municipal staff and Centers for Social Work also proactively assisted families in completing applications, offering hands-on support throughout the process. To ensure no eligible household missed the opportunity, additional reminder messages were disseminated shortly before the application deadline, emphasizing the importance of the program and encouraging families to apply.

**Figure 10. Brochure for communication campaign in Kosovo**



Source: Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation of Kosovo

Furthermore, all other policies outlined in this section complement these efforts by enhancing the overall provision of childcare services, improving the quality of public kindergartens, and standardizing service delivery. By making childcare more accessible and appealing, these initiatives also aim to encourage more parents to enroll their children in ECEC services. Ultimately, these combined efforts not only support the development and well-being of children but enable family welfare by allowing both parents to participate in the workforce.



## Increase financing and affordability of ECEC services

Public investment in ECEC remains low in Kosovo relative to GDP and continues to lag behind international benchmarks. Although recent increases in preschool financing are encouraging, overall spending remains far below what is required to expand access and improve quality. With a small overall government budget and a limited share allocated to education, the sector is structurally underfunded.

Given the central role of early childhood development in shaping future learning, health, and productivity, expanding public financing for ECEC is essential. Global evidence—most notably the work of Heckman—shows that investments during the early years generate the highest returns of any stage of human capital development. This is especially true for disadvantaged children, for whom access to high-quality ECEC can narrow early developmental gaps and significantly improve their long-term educational and economic outcomes. In Kosovo, where children from poor households and minority groups face extremely low enrollment rates, such investments would have particularly high social returns.

To effectively address these challenges, there are a set of reforms relevant for education funding, focusing on three key reform components (World Bank, 2024a):

- i. **Increase investments in ECEC provision:** the government should prioritize expanding ECEC spaces through a mixed provision approach, equipping service providers with necessary teaching and learning materials, and offering subsidies to families unable to secure public sector places due to capacity constraints. This will ensure broader access and alleviate financial barriers for families. A realistic medium-term goal could be to increase ECEC financing from the current ~0.3% of GDP to 0.5% within five years, as part of a longer-term trajectory toward OECD levels (around 0.8% of GDP). Achieving this requires acknowledging ECEC as a core component of the education system and of Kosovo's human capital agenda. Even within tight fiscal constraints, prioritizing early childhood is economically justified, given that returns to accessible and quality preschool.
- ii. **Establish mechanisms of access for non-government providers to public funds:** the government will need to expand the diversity of the service provision

and allow for private providers to access the public funding through various financing schemes (including the currently implemented voucher program).

- iii. **Expand services gradually and prioritize preschool readiness:** to ensure that the coverage from 3 to 6 is closer to the EU average, the government may first concentrate its resources on ages from 4 to 5 and then on ages from 3 to 4. Enrollment in ages 5 to 6 is already reaching universal levels.

To achieve these reform objectives, the Kosovo government is working with support from the World Bank, including a loan and a grant, EU IPA, and EU Growth Plan funding, to advance the necessary expansion and financial capacity. However, it is imperative to ensure sufficient budget allocation in the future to sustain these reforms and overcome current challenges in ECEC. Current efforts of the government, supported by the implementation of the Development Policy Financing of the World Bank, show promising results as they ensure steady growth of the share of the public budget on childcare and ECEC. These efforts need to be sustained over time. By investing in regulatory improvements, diversification of provision, and resource provision, Kosovo can strive to meet international standards and enhance human capital development.



## Incentivizing professional development and growing the ECEC sector

If Kosovo were to align early childhood education and care (ECEC) enrollment with OECD benchmark, 32 percent enrollment for children aged 0–3 and 86 percent for children aged 3–6, the country would need to expand its workforce substantially to meet this demand. Based on current children-to-teacher and support-staff-to-teacher ratios, achieving these enrollment goals would require the creation of almost 4,000 new teaching positions and around 2,000 additional administrative and support staff jobs (Table 8). These figures represent not only the number of positions that would be generated but also the staffing levels needed for Kosovo to reach OECD-aligned ECEC participation rates. Given that the ECEC workforce today consists of 769 teachers and 356 support workers, this expansion would represent a transformative scaling of the sector.

Because women currently make up the overwhelming majority of employees in ECEC, most of these newly created roles would likely be filled by women. According to calculations using 2024 data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, the resulting increase in education-sector employment alone could raise total female employment by roughly 5 percent.

In addition to the direct job creation effect, expanding ECEC coverage would also generate significant indirect labor market benefits for mothers. By enabling more parents, especially mothers, to enroll their children in ECEC, these policies would free up time and increase mothers' availability for paid work. Evidence from

Uzbekistan shows that approximately 12 percent of mothers enter the labor force and employment (with around 14,000 more jobs) once reliable childcare becomes available (Abdurazzakova et al., 2025). Applying this estimate to Kosovo suggests that expanded ECEC access could lift overall female employment by as much as 14.6%, assuming these mothers secure jobs. This represents a remarkable potential boost to women's labor market participation and overall employment.

**Table 8. Calculation of staff expansion estimates**

| AGE GROUP                                       | 3–5                               | 0–3                              | TOTAL                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Number of children in 2023*                     | 42,000                            | 60,000                           | 150,902                                                   |
| Current enrollment rate                         | 23.6%                             | 7.2%                             |                                                           |
| Children already enrolled                       | 9,897                             | 4,320                            | 12,019                                                    |
| Children to enroll to meet the OECD             | 28,968                            | 15,004                           | 43,972                                                    |
| Teachers needed                                 | ≈ 2,185 with<br>12:1 target ratio | ≈ 2,480 with<br>6:1 target ratio | 4,665 – 769 existing teachers<br>≈ 3,896 new teachers     |
| Other ECEC staff (around 1/2 of teaching staff) | ≈ 1,092                           | ≈ 1,240                          | 2,33 – 353 existing staff<br>≈ 1,980 new supporting staff |
| <b>TOTAL new jobs</b>                           |                                   |                                  | <b>≈ 5,876 new jobs</b>                                   |

\*Taken from UN, 2024.

However, to attract workers into this field and to effectively strengthen the ECEC workforce in Kosovo, four essential areas must be addressed: attracting candidates, preparing them with the appropriate and relevant skills, supporting them through ongoing professional development, and retaining educators by implementing minimum working conditions and promoting job satisfaction.

Enhancing the appeal of the ECEC profession begins with improving pay and opportunities. Currently, ECEC educators earn below 90% of the average wage, and there is significant variability in job standards across sectors. To attract more individuals to the profession, it is crucial to elevate working conditions by aligning salaries with those of primary educators and establishing consistent standards across ECEC centers. Lessons can be drawn from Bulgaria, where reforms introduced in 2017 significantly increased teacher salaries and provided monetary incentives for graduates to study Pedagogy, thereby boosting the supply of teaching graduates and attracting new entrants into the ECE teaching profession (Engels-Kritidis, 2024).

To ensure that educators are well-prepared for their roles, comprehensive training programs are crucial. Kosovo should focus on setting a minimum training standard for all ECEC teachers, regardless of the age group they are responsible for.

Moreover, it will be necessary to update current pre-service and in-service ECEC programs to incorporate innovative approaches to early childhood education. These programs should cover topics such as utilizing the learning environment as a teacher, fostering soft skills development, addressing disability and inclusion, early stimulation during the first 1,000 days, nutrition, early identification of developmental challenges, climate change and green education, and gender-sensitive education.

It is also necessary to improve the training, retraining, and requalification opportunities for ECEC teachers, childcare workers, municipal managers, and other decision-makers, both in the public and private sector. Capacity-building activities for decision-makers and researchers in ECEC should include information exchanges, seminars, and learning events. Strengthening the teacher training and development capabilities of the MESTI is crucial. This can be achieved by equipping an existing ECEC facility with tools to integrate training center capabilities, such as observation rooms and seminar rooms, and expanding this center to function as a recycling center for ECEC learning materials.

Retention strategies are also essential, particularly in the private ECEC sector where staff turnover is high and educators frequently move between providers. Ensuring minimum working conditions, reasonable workloads, and supportive environments is critical to job satisfaction and staff stability. Adequate child-to-teacher ratios, access to appropriate learning materials, and safe, well-equipped infrastructure are fundamental conditions for effective teaching and learning and contribute directly to educators' wellbeing. Evidence from international experience highlights that consistent, well-staffed teams create more stable and positive environments, reduce stress and burnout, and support continuous professional development, while low staff attrition helps preserve institutional knowledge and sustain quality practice over time (State of Victoria, 2024).

Leadership quality and workplace culture emerge as central determinants of retention. Skilled and supported leaders play a key role in shaping positive and psychologically safe workplace environments, setting realistic expectations, and balancing individual and organizational demands. Investing in leadership development, peer learning, and mentoring, both formal and informal, strengthens management capacity and supports educators at all stages of their careers. Peer-to-peer learning opportunities and mentoring arrangements, including cross-service exchanges and leadership forums, provide space for shared problem-solving, professional reflection, and the development of common standards and values. Such mechanisms not only enhance skills but also foster professional identity, belonging, and mutual recognition within the workforce (State of Victoria, 2024).

Furthermore, retention is further reinforced through staff recognition and opportunities for professional growth. Non-monetary recognition mechanisms, such as awards, public acknowledgement of good practice, access to additional training opportunities, and sharing positive feedback with colleagues and families, play an important role in valuing educators' contributions and strengthening motivation.

Supporting diversity, encouraging staff voice in decision-making, and creating structured opportunities for professional learning conversations signal institutional commitment to staff development. Coaching and mentoring within working hours, in particular, demonstrate investment in educators' career progression and have been shown to support retention over several years (State of Victoria, 2024).

Finally, clear role definitions, transparent performance assessment, and effective systems and processes are critical enablers of workforce stability and retention. Clearly articulated roles and expectations, manageable workloads, and appropriate support for working with children and families with complex needs improve staff engagement and wellbeing. Predictable rostering, dedicated planning time, stable team structures, and accessible HR processes support autonomy, fairness, and professionalism (State of Victoria, 2024). Importantly, establishing mechanisms to assess performance and linking advancement opportunities to competence and contribution increases transparency and fairness, while reinforcing a performance-oriented culture.

## Ensuring coordination and collaboration across the sector

International evidence shows that fragmented ECEC governance structures create barriers to access and lead to uneven quality across providers. When responsibilities for funding, regulation, curriculum, and workforce development are spread across multiple agencies without clear coordination, the result is governance instability, inconsistent standards, and slow expansion of services. Furthermore, complex or “split” governance systems produce gaps in monitoring, uneven implementation of quality frameworks, and inefficiencies that undermine cohesive service provision and parental trust, ultimately limiting both participation and equity in ECEC systems (He et al., 2026; OECD, 2025c). Thus, highlighting that governance fragmentation is a key structural constraint that depresses enrollment and contributes to the quality gaps observed in many countries—including Kosovo.

To enhance the quality and effectiveness of ECEC services in Kosovo, it is imperative to ensure robust coordination and collaboration across various sectors. This involves improving regulatory frameworks, fostering multisectoral collaboration, and integrating services and data systems. Enhancing the regulatory framework and building capacity to assess and improve service quality are fundamental steps. For this, guidelines for integrated ECD services should be established. The government should define a menu of ECD services that families and children are to receive, spanning education, health, and social protection sectors. Clear guidelines for integrated services should be developed, ensuring that services are provided coherently across public and non-public sectors.

Moreover, effective collaboration between different sectors is crucial for improving child development outcomes. Establishing coordination among social

welfare, education, and health sectors is possible through a more specific legal framework that facilitates interministerial cooperation. Currently the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Social Welfare each play distinct roles in supporting child development, and improved coordination among these ministries is essential to improve delivery and monitoring at the local level.

To achieve this coordination, a multisectoral Early Childhood Development strategy that incorporates education, health and nutrition, and child and social protection. This strategy could be derived from the new Law on Child Protection or the new Law on Early Childhood Education. This strategy should include vision statements for early childhood development in Kosovo, define roles for individual ministries and stakeholders, and provide mechanisms for coordinated actions at the municipal level.

Lastly, it would be highly beneficial to advance digital instruments in the ECEC sector to create a cross-sectoral management information system that integrates data from health, education, and social protection sectors. Currently, the Educational Management Information System in Kosovo does not collect ECEC-specific information, and it is not interlinked with the Health Information System and Social Protection Information System. However, if they were to be interconnected, this would allow for effective data sharing across the various sectors relevant for child development and support more effective decision-making at the local, regional, and national level.

## Strengthening the quality assurance and monitoring system

Strengthening the quality assurance system for ECEC is crucial for ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the services provided. This requires not only improving the structure and quality of monitoring systems but also enhancing the capacity of educational professionals involved in these processes. A robust system should be designed to support improvement and learning across providers, rather than functioning solely as a compliance mechanism. For quality assurance to be meaningful, institutions and authorities must be able to interpret findings, translate them into actionable improvements, and provide targeted support where gaps are identified.

A critical first step is a comprehensive review of the existing regulatory framework governing ECEC, followed by updates to regulations that define quality standards across infrastructure, learning environments, staff qualifications, equipment, and curriculum implementation. The TEACH ECE assessment conducted in 2024 provides a strong foundation; however, sustained impact will require periodic follow-up assessments and the development of additional national tools aligned with the new ECEC curriculum. On this basis, a National ECEC Quality Framework should be developed, aligned with international benchmarks and good practice. The framework should clearly define the scope, frequency, and depth of quality assessments, combining both internal self-evaluation and external inspections to ensure

consistency and credibility across providers. These assessments should examine pedagogical practice, staff capacity, child development outcomes, curriculum delivery, and the adequacy of infrastructure. International experience highlights the value of embedding self-evaluation within formal quality systems: in Luxembourg, providers of non-formal education are required to maintain a continuous logbook of practice, supported by a handbook and quality indicators to guide reflection, while in Scotland, the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland publish widely used self-evaluation handbooks and online resources to support providers in reviewing and improving their practice (OECD, 2022).

To further strengthen monitoring and quality assurance in Kosovo, it is necessary to increase both the number and the capacity of educational inspectors, municipal evaluators, and pedagogical support staff. These professionals play a critical role in implementing regular inspections, assessments, and feedback mechanisms across all types of providers. Ireland offers a relevant example, having established an education-focused inspection program that includes direct observation of practice by inspectors with pedagogical expertise. In parallel, Ireland has strengthened curricular supports in both initial qualifications and continuing professional development, including through mentoring and coaching. It has also built a network of improvement support structures, combining a specialist central team providing expert support to nationally funded centers with local teams attached to county-level organizations (OECD, 2022). This layered support system ensures that inspection findings can be translated into targeted guidance and capacity building, rather than remaining purely evaluative.

Introducing and strengthening mechanisms for direct accountability to families is another critical dimension of quality assurance. This includes systematically bringing the views of parents and, where appropriate, children into inspections and self-evaluation processes. Interviews, focus groups, and standardized questionnaires are commonly used tools. Countries such as Montenegro and Scotland have developed standardized parent questionnaires to inform inspections, while Norway, Estonia, and Croatia provide structured questionnaires for providers to use as part of their own self-evaluation (OECD, 2022). These approaches not only enhance transparency and accountability but also help ensure that services are responsive to the needs and experiences of families. Furthermore, it is important that at the institutional level, educators and managers also understand and use feedback constructively, creating a culture where evaluation findings are viewed as opportunities for professional growth.

Finally, for these instruments to drive real improvement, MESTI will need to build institutional capacity not only to implement assessments but also to analyze results, share feedback with providers, and design targeted support and professional development responses. In this way, quality assurance tools can become engines for system learning and service improvement, rather than mechanisms of control alone.

## 7.

# Operational framework for action

Along these policies, the World Bank and other development partners have been joining forces to support the childcare sector expansion. Those responses revolve around the initial proposed framework and are being covered by several international agreements, including the work of the World Bank, European Commission, and UNICEF. Specifically, the World Bank has been supporting the government of Kosovo through analytical and project work (including the development policy, financing, and ECEC project) in the areas summarized in Table 9 below.

**Table 9. Operational responses to actions**

| PROPOSED ACTION                            | OPERATIONAL RESPONSE                                                                                                               | RATIONALE / FOCUS                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increase financing of the sector           | Government spending on ECEC remains low at 0.3% of GDP, well below the recommended 1% benchmark compared to EU and OECD countries. | Development Policy Financing support with Prior Action: Increase the share of the education budget allocated to ECEC, anchored in fiscal and policy reform commitments.                       |
| Expand provision through diverse models    | Limited public provision requires complementary delivery models to expand access efficiently.                                      | ECEC Project: Support construction of public facilities and introduce vouchers for private providers, enabling a mixed public-private-community provision model.                              |
| Develop Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) | Private providers face financing, capacity, and quality constraints; families face affordability barriers.                         | ECEC Project: Provide teacher training for all ECEC staff, including private providers.<br><br>There is a potential for increasing the support of PPP financing through different modalities. |





| PROPOSED ACTION                                       | OPERATIONAL RESPONSE                                                                                         | RATIONALE / FOCUS                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Improve access for underserved and vulnerable groups  | Rural areas, low-income households, and vulnerable children remain underserved by existing ECEC services.    | ECEC Project: Apply prioritization criteria for underserved areas and vulnerable groups and deploy targeted vouchers to improve affordability and enrollment for the SAS population.                                        |
| Address parental perceptions and demand-side barriers | Low awareness and misconceptions about ECEC benefits reduce uptake, especially among disadvantaged families. | ECEC Project: Implement information and outreach campaigns, linked to voucher programs, to communicate benefits, enrollment processes, and parent testimonials.                                                             |
| Strengthen monitoring and quality assurance systems   | Regulatory gaps and limited inspection capacity constrain quality and accountability.                        | Development Policy Financing support with Prior Action: Support implementation of ECEC legislation.<br><br>ECEC Project: Strengthen inspection capacity and introduce a national ECEC assessment and observation framework. |

Source: Authors

## 8. Conclusions

Kosovo's childcare and ECEC agenda has advanced in recent years through a combination of policy reform, analytical work, and investment support under the World Bank-supported ECEC program. Ongoing efforts include adoption of the 2023 Law on Early Childhood Education, expansion of public kindergarten infrastructure, piloting of a targeted voucher program for vulnerable children receiving social assistance, and initial steps to strengthen quality assurance through classroom observations (TEACH ECE). The deep dive report directly aligns with and reinforces this agenda by providing a comprehensive, evidence-based assessment of access, affordability, quality, governance, and financing of ECEC services. Drawing on primary data, household surveys, provider assessments, and international benchmarking, the report substantiates key constraints, such as limited coverage, inequitable access for vulnerable groups, weak system coherence, and insufficient quality monitoring, while offering an analytical foundation to guide the scale-up and refinement of ongoing reforms.

Specifically, Public-Private Partnerships can play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges. Establishing a clear policy framework that supports PPPs and provides guidelines for their implementation is essential. Identifying private sector entities with the expertise and interest in participating in PPPs for ECEC can leverage their skills and resources to benefit early childhood education initiatives. Negotiating favorable terms for PPP contracts ensures that both the government and private partners share the benefits and risks equitably, fostering a balanced partnership. Implementing a robust monitoring and evaluation system to track the performance of PPPs is crucial for continuous assessment and improvement.

Building on Kosovo current progress, the report identifies several priority areas for advancing Kosovo's ECEC agenda. These include scaling up access through

a diversified service delivery model that combines public provision with private, community-based, and PPP arrangements; strengthening affordability mechanisms beyond pilots to systematically reach low-income and marginalized households; and operationalizing the ECEC Law through sub-legal acts that define quality standards, inspection protocols, and accountability mechanisms. The report also highlights the need to deepen inter-sectoral coordination across education, health, and social protection through a multisectoral ECEC framework, supported by interoperable information systems linking ECEC, health, and social protection data. Further growth areas include sustained investment in workforce development, professionalization, and retention, as well as institutionalizing quality assurance tools and data-driven monitoring to support continuous improvement. Together, these areas provide a clear roadmap for transitioning from foundational reforms to a mature, equitable, and high-quality ECEC system that supports human capital development and women's labor force participation.

The success of these recommendations depends on strong inter-ministerial collaboration and a coherent national strategy for Early Childhood Development, integrating education, health, and social protection services. By addressing the identified constraints and implementing the proposed policy recommendations, Kosovo can build a robust and equitable ECEC system, fostering improved child development outcomes, empowering women, and contributing to the country's overall economic growth and human capital development. The potential for positive change is significant but requires sustained commitment and investment from the government and all stakeholders.

## 9.

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# Annexes.

# Data collection tools

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## Annex 1. Questionnaire to parents

1. Child belongs to the age group?
  - 1.1. 0 to 2 years and 11 months
  - 1.2. 3 to 6 years old
2. Gender
3. Job position
4. Municipality
5. I believe that all children under the age of 6 should benefit from EFH services?  
(select from 1 to 5, 1 being I completely agree and 5 being I completely disagree)
6. Have you registered your child/children in preschool education services?
7. Why have you/have you not sent your child/children to preschool?
8. Does your workplace provide access to preschool education for your children?
9. Do you think that the workplace (organization, corporation, institution) should provide preschool education for the children of its employees?
10. To what extent would you assess that the current existing early childhood education (ECE) services in your Municipality meet the general needs of the population? (to a large extent, to some extent, to no extent, don't know)

11. How do you generally rate the quality of ECD services in Kosovo? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high quality and 5 being low quality)
12. How accessible are these services to young children? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being highly accessible and 5 being not accessible at all)
13. How necessary are these services to young children? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being highly necessary quality and 5 being not necessary at all)
14. How qualitative are these services to young children? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high qualitative and 5 being not qualitative at all)
15. How would you assess the quality of the educational methodology and educational materials? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high quality and 5 being low quality)
16. How would you rate the quality of the infrastructure and the level of security? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high quality and 5 being low quality)
17. How would you rate the quality of care, hygiene and food? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high quality and 5 being low quality)
18. How do you rate the preparation and professionalism of educators? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high quality and 5 being low quality)
19. How do you evaluate the communication and educational approach of the educators? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high quality and 5 being low quality)
20. To what extent do you think children benefit in terms of development and education from these services? (to a large extent, to some extent, to no extent, don't know)
21. To what extent do you think parents are willing to access and benefit from ECEC services in Kosovo? (to a large extent, to some extent, to no extent, don't know)
22. How much trust do you have in public providers of preschool education? (to a large extent, to some extent, to no extent, don't know)
23. How much trust do you have in private preschool education providers? (to a large extent, to some extent, to no extent, don't know)
24. What are the reasons, in your opinion, why parents do not send their children to preschool institutions? (you can choose more than one)
  - 24.1. High prices
  - 24.2. Lack of kindergartens
  - 24.3. Parents prefer to leave their children with their relatives or nannies
  - 24.4. Distrust in the quality of kindergarten work
  - 24.5. Low employment of mothers in Kosovo
  - 24.6. Fear of neglect of the child
  - 24.7. Fear of possible violence against the child

- 24.8. Low quality of teacher training
  - 24.9. Kindergarten infrastructure
  - 24.10. The distance of the garden from the house
  - 24.11. The idea that young children are better educated and developed by their mothers
25. Where do you think the state of Kosovo should focus more on to increase access to and quality of ECEC in Kosovo? (you can choose more than one)
- 25.1. Construction of new public gardens
  - 25.2. Integration of EFH within secondary schools
  - 25.3. Increasing the number of qualified educators
  - 25.4. Licensing of private EFH services
  - 25.5. Finding new innovative models for providing EFH services
  - 25.6. Licensing NGOs to provide ECD services
  - 25.7. Licensing of various organizations/corporations to provide ECD services to the children of their employees
26. What are your requirements as parents regarding EFH?
27. What are your recommendations as parents regarding EFH?

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## Annex 2. Questionnaire for providers

- 1. Gender
- 2. Position
- 3. Municipality
- 4. Age
- 5. To what extent would you agree that all children under the age of 6 should benefit from ECD services? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being I completely agree and 5 being I completely disagree)
- 6. To what extent would you estimate that the current services in your municipality meet the general needs of the population? (to a large extent, to some extent, to no extent, don't know)
- 7. How would you generally assess the provision of ECD services in Kosovo? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high quality and 5 being low quality)
- 8. How accessible are these services to young children? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being highly accessible and 5 being not accessible at all)

9. How necessary are these services for young children? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being very necessary and 5 being not necessary)
10. How qualitative are these services for young children in general? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high quality and 5 being low quality)
11. How do you rate the quality of work methodology and educational materials in your kindergarten? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high quality and 5 being low quality)
12. How do you rate the quality of the infrastructure and the level of security in your garden? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high quality and 5 being low quality)
13. How would you assess the preparation and professionalism of educators in your KG? (select from 1 to 5, 1 being high quality and 5 being low quality)
14. Do all the teachers in your kindergarten have the appropriate university training to work with young children? (All of them, most of them, some of them, I don't know)
15. To what extent do you think children benefit in terms of development and education from these services? (to a large extent, to some extent, to no extent, don't know)
16. To what extent do you think parents are ready to access and benefit from EFH services in Kosovo? (to a large extent, to some extent, to no extent, don't know)
17. Where do you think the state of Kosovo should focus more to increase access to and quality of ECEC in Kosovo? (you can choose more than one)
18. What do you think are the most important goals or outcomes for the children you work with?
19. What are the main challenges/difficulties regarding the inclusion of children in ECEC?
20. What are the best options regarding increasing children's involvement in ECEC?
21. What are the main challenges regarding the quality of EFH service delivery?
22. What are the main opportunities regarding increasing the quality of EFH service provision?

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## **Annex 3. Interview guide for Central and local government representatives**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome and introduction. Explanation of the purpose of the interview.

1. Gender / M F
2. What is the name of your institution?
3. What is the name of the sector you work?
4. What is your role and responsibilities in the institution?

### **GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE SYSTEM**

1. What is the role of the institution you represent in designing and implementing system-wide:
  - 1.1. policies
  - 1.2. laws/administrating instructions
  - 1.3. quality standards
  - 1.4. accreditation processes
  - 1.5. rulebooks
  - 1.6. monitoring and assessment processes
  - 1.7. financing
  - 1.8. service provision itself
  - 1.9. benefits' administration and
  - 1.10. HR related to ECEC services?
2. What are the main benefits and services that the institution provides in relation to ECEC?
  - 2.1. During pregnancy to/and birth
  - 2.2. The first year
  - 2.3. Early childhood
3. What about the other central or local government institutions? (here we will probe based on the findings from the "Typology of matrices and services")?
4. What is the specific role of Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health/Social Protection?
  - 4.1. How do they cooperate?
5. How do you evaluate the intersectoral cooperation of the social, health care and education systems?

6. What are the main responsibilities of the central and local government for the provision of ECEC services?
  - 6.1. How are competencies divided between central and local government when managing with ECEC services and benefits?
  - 6.2. Are there any overlapping competencies? If yes, which are they?
  - 6.3. Are there any gaps?
  - 6.4. How are gaps handled?
  - 6.5. What are the mechanisms for collaboration between central and local government?  
*(\*note to the interviewer: by mechanisms here we mean memoranda of understanding, agreements, protocols for collaborations, funding procedures from central to local government or an appointed staff member for this collaboration at both levels and other means if the interviewee mentions.)*
  - 6.6. Which aspects of this collaboration work well?
  - 6.7. What are the challenges?
7. What is the role of private sector and NGOs, are they i.e. providers of ECEC services, providers of training for professionals, providers of quality control services or other? How do they cooperate:
  - 7.1. With central government?
  - 7.2. With local government?
  - 7.3. Which aspects of the collaboration work well?
  - 7.4. What are the challenges?
8. Does your institution contract out private sector providers/NGOs for the provision of some ECEC services?
  - 8.1. If yes, for which services?
    - 8.1.1. Preschools (kindergartens from 3 to 6 years old)
    - 8.1.2. Nurseries (from 0 to 3 years old)
    - 8.1.3. Day care centres
    - 8.1.4. Health Centres/Ambulatory services
    - 8.1.5. Foster Care
    - 8.1.6. Residential care when is necessary
    - 8.1.7. Childminders (when regulated by law)
    - 8.1.8. Nannies or tutors (when regulated by law)
  - 8.2. How are private providers selected for the provision of services? *Ask for: competitively or not, on what basis, for how long are they typically contracted?*
    - 8.2.1. How are private providers paid? *Ask if they are paid: lump sum with certain targets/specific services, per service? Per person? A mix?*
    - 8.2.2. Is it difficult to find quality service providers? Probe for: do you see contracts that cannot be tendered? Do you encounter issues of quality once contracts are tendered?
    - 8.2.3. If so, is this in general or more difficult for specific services or in specific locations? If more specific in some, in which ones?

- 8.3. If difficult, why do you think it is difficult? Probe for: lack of interest from service providers, difficulties in completing the criteria for the bidding in terms of high standards, tight schedules or other issues (*please explore more*) or other challenges.
  - 8.4. Is their remuneration related to some measure of quality of services provided?
  - 8.5. What works well when contracting these services out?
  - 8.6. What are the challenges when contracting these services out?
9. Is there a need to improve the overall legal (normative) framework? If yes, where?

**ACCESS AND EQUITY** (*\*note to the interviewer: ask the interviewee to mention the 2 main benefits and 2 main services and discuss about these in the following questions related to services and benefits*)

- 1. What are the eligibility criteria for benefiting from benefits and services?
  - 1.1. Are there any challenges in fulfilling the eligibility criteria (e.g. age of the child, parent's employment status)?
  - 1.2. Are there any challenges in understanding or assessing the criteria correctly, such as in a case where parents are employed in the informal sector?
    - 1.2.1. If so, what are these challenges?
    - 1.2.2. How do you resolve them?
- 2. Is the benefits and services package same or different throughout municipalities?
  - 2.1. If it is different, on what basis is the package provided in different municipalities? Please elaborate on what is the best/worst package.
- 3. Are there prioritization criteria in case the demand for services exceeds supply?
  - 3.1. If yes, what are these prioritization criteria for the different services and benefits?
- 4. Are there any criteria used for offering fee reductions or priority admission?
  - 4.1. If so, what are the criteria?
- 5. What are the primary factors that deter parents from enrolling their children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services?
  - 5.1. Structural Quality: Could inadequate infrastructure, such as poor hygiene, overcrowded playrooms, or an unfavorable teacher–student ratio, be contributing factors?
  - 5.2. Accessibility: Is there a lack of available ECEC services within a convenient distance from family homes?
  - 5.3. Process Quality: How might an inadequate learning environment, lack of inclusivity, teacher qualifications, or learning programs impact enrollment?
  - 5.4. Social norms? (is there a belief that children should stay home with their mothers/family? Or that they are being raised better if they stay in the home?)
  - 5.5. What about the fee for ECEC and the hidden costs that parents are often asked to pay?
  - 5.6. Additionally, could you specify the sources of your insights regarding these issues? Are they based on assessments, classroom observations, inspections, or feedback from parents?

**AVAILABILITY AND COVERAGE** *(\*Note to the interviewer: Before beginning this section ask the interviewees if they have the data and can complete the accompanying list of services with the respective information.)*

1. Are the current services and benefits sufficient to cover the needs of all families?
  - 1.1. Are there any differences between urban and rural areas?
  - 1.2. What are the current solutions to the potential geographical disproportional distribution of ECEC services?
  - 1.3. If not, what benefits/services are lacking/limited (e.g. full day kindergartens/nurseries with meals, at least 20 operating hours per week in urban and rural areas)?  
*(\*note to the interviewer: as mentioned above, focus on 2 main benefits or services)*
  - 1.4. Are there waiting lists with providers?
  - 1.5. Do you need to ration the provision of services or benefits?
  - 1.6. If yes, which ones?
2. Are there requirements for the minimum operating hours per week for ECEC services (20h per week or other)?
  - 2.1. Are there any differences in practice in urban and rural areas?
  - 2.2. What about between public, private and other alternative forms of service providers?
3. Do public or private ECEC centers provide flexible operating hours?
  - 3.1. What about drop-in service? *(\*note to the interviewer: drop in service is a service provided on an ad hoc basis, in cases of a last-minute, emergency or occasional help needed for parents. It doesn't require the traditional long-term commitment of typical kindergartens/nurseries)*
  - 3.2. If yes, how is it regulated?
  - 3.3. If no, what are the barriers to provide it?
4. What needs to be done to meet all the needs of children and parents for child-care services?

## **AFFORDABILITY**

1. What are the typical prices/ranges for the different services? *Please specify the UNIT: per service, per child, per month, per hour or other unit.*
  - 1.1. Preschools from 3 to 6 years old – Public and private
  - 1.2. Nurseries —from 0 to 3 years old— public and private
  - 1.3. Childminders
  - 1.4. Nannies or babysitters
  - 1.5. Other services
2. How affordable are public, private and other alternative forms of childcare services for families?
  - 2.1. Are there any hidden costs for parents, besides the fees?

- 2.2. If yes, how much out-of-pocket money will a family spent to cover the hidden costs during a month?
- 2.3. Are there any differences between urban and rural areas?
- 3. Are there specific efforts to make them affordable and support their provision in terms of demand and supply?
  - 3.1. *Supply*
  - 3.2. state subsidies for private childcare provision given to the private service providers
  - 3.3. *Demand*
    - 3.3.1. Fee exemptions
    - 3.3.2. Childcare tax allowances
    - 3.3.3. Education allowance or
    - 3.3.4. Initiatives from the private sector on subsidizing childcare?

## MECHANISMS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

- 1. What are the criteria and process for licensing and accreditation of public and private service providers?
  - 1.1. Are there any differences in licensing or accreditation procedures between public and private service providers?
- 2. How long does the licensing procedure take?
- 3. Have you heard of complaints of irregularities from providers applying for a license?
- 4. What specific quality standards are mandated for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs?
- 5. Can you detail the:
  - 5.2. safety protocols
  - 5.3. infrastructure requisites, and
  - 5.4. spatial guidelines that ECEC facilities must adhere to?
- 6. What are the established nutritional guidelines and standards for children with- in ECEC settings?

*Additionally: (\*note to the interviewer: the following questions on quality may need to be consulted with other staff members in the agency. In that case, if the interviewee does not have the information, send the specific questions that are not answered by email and ask them to follow up by a phone call in 3–4 days or when it is convenient for them)*

- 7. Structural Quality: What are the prescribed group sizes, staff-to-child ratios, and infrastructure requirements for optimal ECEC environments?

8. Program Quality: Could you elaborate on the curriculum, educational materials, program duration and intensity, as well as the extent of parental involvement expected in ECEC programs?
9. Process Quality: How are the quality of interactions between children and their caregivers, as well as among peers, assessed and ensured in ECEC settings?
10. Workforce Quality: What qualifications and competencies are considered essential for the ECEC workforce to maintain high standards of care and education? Please specify for the principal, the head teacher, the educator and assistant educator.
11. What are the mechanisms used to ensure quality assurance? Ask about:
  - 11.1. Classroom observation tool (s)? (Yes/No)
    - 11.1.1. How is it conducted? How often?
    - 11.1.2. How are the results of these observations considered for improving the quality of the service? Is there any follow-up?
    - 11.1.3. Are the results of observations tools published? If yes, where?
  - 11.2. Monitoring and/or inspection (s) (Yes/No)
    - 11.2.1. How many monitoring or inspection visits does an ECEC have annually?
    - 11.2.2. Is there sufficient staff to conduct these visits?
    - 11.2.3. Is the staff specialized to conduct these types of monitoring and inspection visits?
    - 11.2.4. Are the findings of inspection or monitoring visits published somewhere?  
Where? (*\*note to the interviewer: if they mention a website please ask them to show you in your mobile the specific website*)
    - 11.2.5. What happens if the childcare doesn't comply with the quality standards?
  - 11.3. Self-evaluation survey (Yes/No)
    - 11.3.1. How often do ECEC facilities (nurseries/kindergartens) conduct self-evaluation surveys?
    - 11.3.2. What are the components of a self-evaluation survey?
    - 11.3.3. Are the results of the survey published somewhere? If yes, where?
    - 11.3.4. In what ways are these survey taken into consideration to improve the quality of the service?
  - 11.4. Parental feedback (Yes/No)
    - 11.4.1. In what ways do ECEC facilities consider receive parental feedback for the services?
    - 11.4.2. Is this a regular procedure? If yes, how often is it carried out?
    - 11.4.3. How is parental feedback considered for the improvement of the quality of services? How is this process documented?
  - 11.5. Measuring children outcomes – developmental and learning (Yes/No)
    - 11.5.1. Do the ECEC facilities measure developmental and learning outcomes for children?
    - 11.5.2. If yes, how often does this happen?

11.5.3. In what does this process help to improve the quality of ECEC settings, processes, interactions and workforce?

12. Are there mechanisms the community to raise issues linked to the quality of services provided?
  - 12.1. What are those mechanisms? Are they used?
  - 12.2. What do potential users think of them? Do they know these exist?
13. Is the community involved in the designing of the guidelines for the curriculum?
14. What are the feedback mechanisms for evolving curriculum?
15. Is it flexible enough to change over time and who could influence the change?
16. Does the ECEC programs have any parental programs?
  - 16.1. What are the main topics addressed in such programs?
  - 16.2. What are the advantages of these programs?
  - 16.3. What are the challenges to deliver them?

## HUMAN RESOURCES

1. What is the current situation of ECEC workforce, in terms of number of workforce, skills and other components? *Ask if working in ECEC is attractive, what is the influx in the profession?*
  - 1.1. Are there any unmet needs or will they potentially be any unmet needs based on the enrolment of children and influx of people in the profession?
  - 1.2. What about skills mismatches?
  - 1.3. Do you conduct analysis of these issues? If yes, how often? How are the findings of the analysis used?
  - 1.4. If it is not an attractive job, what are the reasons? Are there any initiatives to change the situation?
2. Are there any minimum qualifications to become a preschool teacher, the head of an ECEC center or a childminder? *Ask for*
  - 2.1. University degree
  - 2.2. Training (s)
  - 2.3. Induction phase
  - 2.4. Other (s)
3. What are the requirements for continuous professional development?
  - 3.1. How are they being met in practice (minimum duration and nature of mandatory requirement, accreditation, periodicity)?
  - 3.2. What are the challenges?
  - 3.3. Is there a budget item for the professional development of teachers?

## FINANCING AND SPENDING

1. How does the system of financing childcare services work?
  - 1.1. How is financing divided between central government and municipalities?
  - 1.2. Are there enough funds in the funding system as needed?
2. What is the mandated level of co-payment from families, if any?
3. Do families have to pay any out-of-pocket money to ECEC programs, despite the law? *Ask for payments to cover any didactic materials, for heating or others.*
4. Do you have instruments to engage with the private sector for the provision of ECEC services?
5. On what basis do you give the payments to the private sector providers? *Ask for*
  - 5.1. *Per capita basis*
  - 5.2. *Historical data*
  - 5.3. *Other ways*

## BEST PRACTICES

1. Are there any best practices in the field of childcare services that you find particularly noteworthy? Please describe.
2. Are there any other issues important to discuss about nursery/kindergarten that are not mentioned here?
3. Do you have any question for me?

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## **Annex 4. Interview guide for directors of public/private nurseries, kindergartens, community centers, NGOs and mother/child primary health care**

### INTRODUCTION

1. Gender / M F
2. What is the name of your institution?
3. What is the name of the sector you work?
4. What types of services do you offer?
  - 4.1. What are the main challenges you face for service delivery?

**MAPPING OF BENEFITS AND SERVICES** (*\*note to the interviewer: if the key informant does not have knowledge about a question you can skip it and continue with the following one*)

1. What are the main benefits and services for childcare, starting from pregnancy and birth to school age?
  - 1.1. What institution is responsible for the provision of the specific benefits/services (Health, Social Protection, Education)?
  - 1.2. Are these sufficient to cover the needs of all families?
  - 1.3. If not, what benefits/services are lacking/limited? *Ask for: full day kindergartens/nurseries with meals, at least 20 operating hours per week in urban and rural areas, immunization, medical expenses or other*

## **ACCESS AND EQUITY**

1. What are the eligibility criteria for enrolment and for being accepted in your service?
  - 1.1. Do you have a waiting list?
  - 1.2. Are there and challenges in fulfilling the eligibility criteria (e.g. age of the child, prioritization based on parent's employment status or other)?
  - 1.3. Are there any challenges in understanding or assessing the criteria correctly, such as in a case where parents are employed in the informal market?
    - 1.3.1. If so, what are these challenges?
    - 1.3.2. How do you resolve them?
2. What are the programs to support vulnerable families to access your service, if any? Ask for:
  - 2.1. quotas for children in vulnerable situation
  - 2.2. fee exemptions for children with special needs or other vulnerable groups
  - 2.3. public subsidies for families in economic assistance scheme
  - 2.4. financial support/subsidy for sending children to private childcare?
3. Are there any criteria for offering fee reductions or priority admission?
4. Are there prioritization criteria in case the demand for services exceeds supply?
  - 4.1. If yes, what are these prioritization criteria for the different services and benefits?
5. What are the primary factors that deter parents from enrolling their children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services?
  - 5.1. Structural Quality: Could inadequate infrastructure, such as poor hygiene, overcrowded playrooms, or an unfavorable teacher–student ratio, be contributing factors?
  - 5.2. Accessibility: Is there a lack of available ECEC services within a convenient distance from family homes?

- 5.3. Process Quality: How might an inadequate learning environment, lack of inclusivity, teacher qualifications, or learning programs impact enrollment?
- 5.4. Social norms: is there a belief that children should stay home with their mothers/family? Or that they are being raised better if they stay in the home?
- 5.5. Additionally, could you specify the sources of your insights regarding these issues? Are they based on assessments, classroom observations, inspections, or feedback from parents?

## AVAILABILITY AND COVERAGE

- 1. What is the current demand and supply ratio in your service and in the municipality you operate?
  - 1.1. Are there any differences between this region and other areas?
- 2. Are the current services and benefits sufficient to cover the needs of all families?
  - 2.1. If not, what benefits/services are lacking/limited (e.g. full day kindergartens/nurseries with meals, at least 20 operating hours per week in urban and rural areas)?
- 3. Do you or other service providers provide flexible operating hours? What about drop-in service?
  - 3.1. If yes, how is it regulated?
  - 3.2. If no, what are the barriers to provide it?
- 4. What needs to be done to meet all the needs of children and parents for childcare services?

## AFFORDABILITY

- 1. What are the prices for your service?
- 2. How affordable are your services for families?
- 3. Throughout the year do parents have to contribute for the childcare service in any other way: e.g. to pay for fixing damages in the rooms, for heating/cooling, coloring pencils or other materials of this kind?
- 4. If yes, how much out-of-pocket money will a family spent to cover the hidden costs in a month per child?
- 5. Are there any differences between urban and rural areas?
- 6. Are there specific efforts to make them affordable and support their provision in terms of demand and supply?
  - 6.1. Supply
    - state subsidies for private childcare provision given to the private service providers
  - 6.2. Demand
    - 6.2.1. Fee exemptions

- 6.2.2. Childcare tax allowances
- 6.2.3. Education allowance or
- 6.2.4. Initiatives from the private sector on subsidizing childcare?

## MECHANISMS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

1. What are the criteria and process for licensing and accreditation for your service? Are they the same for other providers as well?
2. How long does the licensing procedure take?
3. Have you heard/did you have any complaints of irregularities from providers applying for a license?
4. What specific quality standards are mandated for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs?
5. How easy/difficult is it to comply with the requirements of quality standards?
6. Can you detail the:
  - 6.1. safety protocols
  - 6.2. infrastructure requisites, and
  - 6.3. spatial guidelines you must adhere to?
7. What are the established nutritional guidelines and standards for children?

Additionally:

8. Structural Quality: What are the prescribed group sizes, staff-to-child ratios, and infrastructure requirements for optimal ECEC environment?
9. Program Quality: Could you elaborate on the curriculum, educational materials, program duration and intensity, as well as the extent of parental involvement expected in your program?
10. Process Quality: How are the quality of interactions between children and their caregivers, as well as among peers, assessed and ensured in your setting?
11. Workforce Quality: What qualifications and competencies are considered essential for the ECEC workforce to maintain high standards of care and education?
12. What are the mechanisms you use to ensure quality assurance? Ask about:
  - 12.1. Classroom observation tool (s)? (Yes/No)
    - 12.1.1. How is it conducted?
    - 12.1.2. How are the results of these observations considered for improving the quality of the service? If there any follow-up?
    - 12.1.3. Are the results of observations tools published? If yes, where?

- 12.2. Monitoring and/or inspection (s) (Yes/No)
  - 12.2.1. How many monitoring or inspection visits do you have annually?
  - 12.2.2. Are the findings of inspection or monitoring visits published somewhere?  
Where? (*\*note to the interviewer: if they mention a website please ask them to show you in your mobile the specific website*)
  - 12.2.3. What happens if you don't comply with the quality standards?
- 12.3. Self-evaluation survey (Yes/No)
  - 12.3.1. How often do you conduct self-evaluation surveys?
  - 12.3.2. What are the components of your self-evaluation survey?
  - 12.3.3. Are the results of the survey published somewhere? If yes, where?
  - 12.3.4. In what ways are these survey results taken into consideration to improve the quality of In your service?
- 12.4. Parental feedback (Yes/No)
  - 12.4.1. In what ways do you receive parental feedback for the service?
  - 12.4.2. Is this a regular procedure? If yes, how often is it carried out?
  - 12.4.3. How is parental feedback considered for the improvement of the quality of your service? How is this process documented?
- 12.5. Measuring children outcomes – developmental and learning (Yes/No)
  - 12.5.1. Do you measure developmental and learning outcomes for children?
  - 12.5.2. If yes, how often does this happen?
  - 12.5.3. In what ways does this process help to improve the quality of your setting, processes, interactions and workforce?
- 13. Are there mechanisms the community to raise issues linked to the quality of your services?
  - 13.1. What are those mechanisms? Are they used?
  - 13.2. What do potential users think of them? Do they know these exist?
- 14. Do you implement any parental program?
  - 14.1. What are the main topics addressed in such programs?
  - 14.2. What are the advantages of these programs?
  - 14.3. What are the challenges to deliver them?

## HUMAN RESOURCES

- 1. What is the current situation of the workforce in your service?
  - 1.1. Have you faced any staff shortages?
  - 1.2. Skills mismatches?
  - 1.3. What do you do for staff retention?
- 2. What is the future of the profession and the workforce based on your experience?
- 3. Are there any minimum qualifications to become a preschool teacher, the head of an ECEC center or a childminder? Ask for

- 3.1. University degree
  - 3.2. Training (s)
  - 3.3. Induction phase
  - 3.4. Other (s)
4. What are the requirements for continuous professional development?
  - 4.1. How are they being met in practice (minimum duration and nature of mandatory requirement, accreditation, periodicity)?
  - 4.2. What are the challenges?

## FINANCING AND SPENDING

1. How does the system of financing ECEC services work?
2. Do you receive any funds from the state? If yes, what % more or less of costs is covered from these funds and what is covered from the families of the children?
  - 2.1. Are there enough funds in the funding system as needed?
  - 2.2. Do you face any challenges to receive funds on time?
3. What is the level of co-payment from families, if any?

## BEST PRACTICES

1. Are there any best practices in the field of childcare services that you find particularly noteworthy? Please describe.
2. Are there any other issues important to discuss about childcare services that are not mentioned here?
3. Do you have any question for me?

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## Annex 5. Guidance for focus group discussions, parents and grandparents

### GENERAL INFORMATION

- |                        |                                                                   |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Age                 | 4. Number of children                                             |
| 2. Gender              | 5. Age of the child/ren                                           |
| 3. Urban or rural area | 6. Child/ren enrolled in a public or private nursery/kindergarten |

## ACCESS, EQUITY, AVAILABILITY AND AFFORDABILITY

1. Have you enrolled your child in a nursery or kindergarten?
  - 1.1. If no, why not?
2. Would you have wanted to enroll your child earlier in nursery/kindergarten?
  - 2.1. If yes, how did you organize care for the child before the nursery/kindergarten acceptance?
3. What was your experience from enrolling your child in the nursery/kindergarten?
  - 3.1. Did you face any difficulties?
  - 3.2. How did you overcome them?
4. What difficulties do you face to bring your child in the kindergarten? What do you do to overcome them?
5. Do you pay a fee for your child to attend the nursery/kindergarten?
  - 5.1. If yes, how much is it?
  - 5.2. How do you manage to pay it?
  - 5.3. Approximately what percentage of your family's monthly income is the fee for the nursery/kindergarten?
6. How much time does it take you to go to the kindergarten/nursery in the morning?
7. What other requirements are there for a child to attend a nursery/kindergarten (clothes, food, other)?
  - 7.1. How to you meet them?
8. Do you benefit from any program to support you in covering the expenses of the nursery/kindergarten?
  - 8.1. If yes, what institution provides it?  
*Ask for:*
  - 8.2. financial support
  - 8.3. child allowance
  - 8.4. fee exemption
  - 8.5. targeted programs for children from minorities or with special needs
  - 8.6. other?
9. How this program helps you in fulfilling your family's needs to afford nursery or kindergarten?
10. How many hours per week your child/ren attend/s nursery/kindergarten?
  - 10.1. Are these hours flexible?
  - 10.2. How do you manage to bring and collect your child according to your working hours?

## PERCEPTION OF THE QUALITY OF THE NURSERY/KINDERGARTEN

1. What type of ECEC does your child attend? Ask for: public, private or other type
2. What is your overall experience with the kindergarten? Could you specify what you like and what you don't like?
3. How would you assess the overall quality of the services?
4. How many children are in the same group with your child? How many teachers?
5. Do you believe the teacher–child ration is appropriate as it is?
6. How would you assess the quality of infrastructure, space, and safety of the building and the classes?
7. How would you assess the care, hygiene and food quality of the nursery/ kindergarten?
8. How would you assess the available and used teaching and learning materials? What about the overall educational program they follow?
9. How is your interaction with your child's teacher (s)?
  - 9.1. What about with the kindergarten's support staff (psychologist/social worker)?
  - 9.2. And the director?
10. How would you assess the professionalism of the child's teacher? What about her interaction with the child?
11. Does the nursery/kindergarten conduct regular group meetings with parents?
  - 11.1. How often?
  - 11.2. What are the topics discussed in the meetings?
  - 11.3. Can you request an ad hoc meeting when it is needed?
12. Does the nursery/kindergarten provide any parenting programs?
  - 12.1. What are the topics discussed there?
  - 12.2. How satisfied are you with the quality of these programs?
13. What is your role in monitoring the nursery/kindergarten quality of service?
  - 13.1. Have you ever given a change to provide your feedback for something?
  - 13.2. What happened after?

## SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT *(if not already mentioned above)*

1. Overall, what do you believe deters parents from enrolling their children in nursery/kindergarten?
2. What would you suggest to improve access of all children in nurseries and kindergartens?

3. Overall, what do you believe is the quality of public nurseries/kindergartens?
  - 3.1. What about the private ones?
  - 3.2. What can be done to improve it?
4. Are there any other issues important to discuss about nursery/kindergarten that are not mentioned here?
5. Do you have any question for me?

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## **Annex 6. Guidance for focus group discussions, formal and informal paid caregivers**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome and introduction. Explanation of the purpose of the interview.

1. Gender / M F
2. Age
3. Years of experience as a babysitter

### **CAREGIVING EXPERIENCE**

1. How long have you been a babysitter for this child?
2. What are the daily caregiving tasks and responsibilities you have to do?
3. What is the age of the child? Does he/she have any special needs or medical conditions?
4. What are the challenges of being a babysitter? How do you overcome them?
5. Why did you choose to become a babysitter?
6. What is your wage as a babysitter? How is it compared to the minimum wage? Do you have social and health insurance?
7. What are your working hours? Are they fixed or flexible?
8. Were you hired through an agency or directly from the parents? If from an agency, how does the contracting system work? If directly from parents, how did they reach out to you?
9. How easy/difficult is to find a job as a babysitter? Is it an attractive profession?

10. To the extent that you know, why parents don't enroll their children in nurseries/ kindergartens? Why they prefer babysitters?

### CAREGIVER PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

1. What is your educational background? Do you have any previous professional experience in working with children? Were you trained by an agency to be a child's babysitter? If yes, from who?
2. Did you have to obtain a license in order to be a babysitter? If yes, what were the requirements?
3. Do you have to do something to maintain your license, e.g. to continue trainings and other qualifications?
4. How is your work monitored? By whom?
5. Is there any other issues important to discuss about your experience that is not mentioned here?

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## **Annex 7. Online questionnaire to identify and engage with providers who would be interested in scaling up childcare provision in Kosovo**

### QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of provider:
2. Contact info:
3. Type of services provided:
4. Years of operation:
5. Are you licensed for provision of ECE services? If yes, date of license expiry?
6. Number and profile of staff:
7. Qualifications of staff:
8. How would you rate the financial stability of your institution (1 —very stable— to 5 —very unstable—)

9. Does your institution fulfil the needs and requirements of your community for early childhood education services? If not, why?
10. Do you have a waiting list for admission to your KG? If yes, how many children are on the waiting list on average every year?
11. Are you willing to expand your institution to increase the number of children that you serve?
  - 11.1. If yes, why?
  - 11.2. If yes, do you have physical space for expansion? If no, how would you go about the expansion?
  - 11.3. If yes, do you have staff for expansion? If no, how would you go about the expansion?
  - 11.4. If yes, do you think parents and families would welcome this expansion?
12. What would your institution need as support to expand your services?
13. Do you see any barriers to expansion? If yes, please elaborate?
14. Would you be ready to cooperate with corporates for the provision of employer-based childcare?
15. Have you ever undergone an evaluation from an inspectorate? If yes, please provide details of the evaluation.



