



Prishtina, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023

## Meeting Minutes

**Topic:** Public Discussion on the Environmental and Social Management Framework of the Early Childhood Education and Care for Kosovo's Human Capital Project

**Location:** Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI)

**Time:** 13:30 – 15:30

This public discussion took place as part of the preparation process for the Early Childhood Education and Care for Kosovo's Human Capital Project (P179656), organized by MESTI, which is the main implementing agency for project preparation and related activities.

The following individuals participated in this meeting:

1. Mevlude Murtezi, Director, Collegium of Directors of Pre-school Institutions of Kosovo
2. Gëzime Rexhepi Çollaku, Director, Association of Private Pre-school Institutions of Kosovo
3. Lulavera Behluli, Project Coordinator, Save the Children
4. Dafina Krasniqi, ECD Officer, UNICEF
5. Shukrije Lecaj, Pedagogical Coordinator, CARITAS
6. Driana Sogojeva, Consultant, MESTI
7. Leonora Shala, Coordinator, MESTI
8. Isuf Gashi, Head of Division, MESTI
9. Nita Prekazi, Senior Officer for International Financial Cooperation, Ministry of Finance, Labor, and Transfers
10. Aurora Osmanaj, Intern, MESTI
11. Luljeta Kabashi, Deputy Director of DAGJ, MESTI
12. Imrane Ramadani, Officer, MESTI
13. Reshit Kurtaj, Education Officer, DKA Prizren
14. Shpresa Kastrati, Environmental Specialist, World Bank
15. Labëri Luzha, Head of the Division for Pre-school Education, MESTI
16. Erjona Bajraktari, Environmental Consultant, MESTI
17. Jora Lumezi, Social Consultant, MESTI
18. Tigran Shmis, World Bank (online)
19. Mjellma Rrecaj, World Bank (online)
20. Mrikë Aliu, World Bank (online)

### Agenda:

**13:30 -14:00**

- Introduction  
Avni Rexha – Director, Department of Pre-University Education (MESTI)  
Labëri Luzha – Head of the Preschool Education Division (MESTI)  
Tigran Shmis – ECEC Project Representative, World Bank Group



- Furthermore, Luzha highlighted that the new law addresses several critical issues contributing to early childhood education and care. These encompass expanding children’s access to pre-school institutions, enhancing the quality of education, and efforts to increase the capacity of existing pre-school spaces. There are plans to renovate current facilities, create new modular kindergartens, and extend educational initiatives. Luzha emphasized the extensive efforts of the Government of Kosovo in collaboration with partners like UNICEF, Save the Children, CARITAS Switzerland, and the World Bank in advancing early childhood development. A collaborative project with these partners aims to design and construct 47 new kindergartens across the country over a 5-year period. The new law introduces articles focused on inter-sectoral coordination, a field targeted for regulation or improvement by the World Bank project in Kosovo. She acknowledged the challenge posed by this aspect but deemed it not impossible, as they will engage with international and local experts. She said that the overarching goal is to comprehensively support children in early childhood, prioritizing their health, well-being, and education.
- Luzha also highlighted additional aspects incorporated into the new law, including provisions for training nannies to assist parents who may face constraints in sending their children to preschool institutions, as an alternative new option. Furthermore, she continued with the mention of the components of this project, which are: 1) Improving the Quality of ECEC Services in Kosovo, 2) Fostering Multi-sectoral Integration in ECEC Service Delivery, 3) Increasing Equitable Access to ECEC Services, and 4) Project management, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Moving forward, Tigran Shmis, the representative of the World Bank, addressed the audience. Expressing great honor to speak before this gathering, Shmis anticipated a fruitful discussion. He acknowledged and commended everyone involved in the final steps of submitting and preparing the project on behalf of the entire Bank team. Shmis emphasized that the project responds to a pressing need in the country, focusing on providing access to quality early childhood education and care services for families in Kosovo. Highlighting Kosovo’s slight lag compared to other regional countries in this aspect, he mentioned the collaborative efforts with MESTI and the extensive international consultations sought during the project’s drafting phase.
- Shmis emphasized that the project places a dual focus on quality and access. Access ensures that children have the opportunity to attend kindergartens, and when the services are of higher quality, it yields better outcomes for children, particularly in their later lives, such as enhanced performance in the job market and an overall improved quality of life. He highlighted that early investment in the care and education of children plays a pivotal role in shaping successful individuals later in life, hence the project’s title emphasizing human capital. Shmis articulated that when Kosovo chooses to invest in its young children, it signifies an investment in the country’s future, crucial for economic development. He pointed out that the 22 million euros invested in this project will result in significantly larger benefits down the line, considering it not as an expense but as an investment in Kosovo.
- Furthermore, the World Bank representative delved into the project components and their societal impact, highlighting a specific project activity known as community grants. This activity will enable all municipalities to participate in a competition, providing an avenue to comprehend how societies and communities perceive early childhood development. The focus is on understanding their concerns, satisfaction levels, ideas, both negative and positive aspects of the project, and more. Additionally, the project will conduct various studies on the quality of services in the country,

examining the roles of teachers, identifying areas for improvement, and assessing the outcomes of children in pre-school institutions. Shmis concluded by emphasizing that these represent just the initial steps of the project. The next phases involve submission to the World Bank's senior management, approval by the Kosovo Assembly, and finally, the official signing of the agreement that marks the commencement of the project.

- Erjona Bajraktari, appointed by MESTI as a consultant for preparing project documents related to the environmental and social framework, commenced the presentation of foundational documents. She initiated the discussion with the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF), designed to preempt, minimize, or alleviate potential adverse environmental and social impacts associated with the project implementation. The Resettlement Policy Framework (RPF) was formulated to establish policies and procedures that prevent and minimize the project's necessity to acquire privately owned land, thereby averting impacts on the income loss of affected parties. The Labor Management Procedures (LMP) document facilitates the identification of crucial labor requirements and associated risks, aiding the borrower in determining essential resources to address labor-related issues. Furthermore, the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) seeks to activate stakeholder involvement at appropriate stages during the project's preparation and implementation. Bajraktari indicated that she would now proceed with presenting the first two documents, ESMF and RPF, while her colleague would cover the remaining two, LMP and SEP.
- The environmental consultant for the project highlighted that the overall anticipated impacts from the complete implementation of the project are expected to be positive in social aspects. Furthermore, Bajraktari mentioned that activities under component 3, involving the reconstruction of existing buildings, reorganization of pre-existing kindergarten spaces, and the construction of new kindergartens, might entail medium-term and local environmental and social impacts. These impacts are temporary and can be effectively avoided or minimized by applying protective measures in accordance with World Bank standards, the health and safety protection policies of the World Bank, and compliance with the environmental and social legal framework of the Republic of Kosovo. She emphasized that the primary social impact requiring careful consideration during project implementation is associated with the risk of excluding needy and disadvantaged groups, preventing them from benefiting from the project. Bajraktari added that the level of environmental and social impacts of the project, primarily linked to the implementation phase of planned activities under component 3, is assessed to be moderate.
- Furthermore, Bajraktari provided an overview of the ESMF document, emphasizing its foundation on existing environmental policies, regulations, and laws. This document conducts a thorough examination of the current legal landscape in Kosovo, ensuring alignment with World Bank standards. She clarified that MESTI will assume responsibility for overall implementation, coordination, results monitoring, and communication with the World Bank concerning all project-related activities. Moreover, she introduced the establishment of a Central Project Implementation Unit (CPIU) within MESTI, tasked with offering technical and operational support for project activities in targeted regions/municipalities. This includes functions such as procurement, financial management, and the management of environmental and social impacts.
- Continuing, Bajraktari proceeded with the presentation of the second document, the RPF. This document provides guidelines and procedures to minimize the loss of land, private assets, and resulting income due to project implementation. She emphasized that any unavoidable impacts

should be addressed with sufficient mitigating measures to restore affected individuals' living standards to pre-project levels. In conclusion, the consultant stated that in case of any discrepancies between the Kosovar legal framework and the World Bank Involuntary Resettlement Standards, the provisions of RPF will prevail and become part of the legal agreement signed between the Republic of Kosovo and the World Bank within the project financing framework.

- Subsequently, Jora Lumezi, the project consultant for social issues, took the floor to present the final documents, LMP and SEP. Lumezi outlined that the LMP document aims to address potential work risks, which are considered moderate, with a specific focus on health and safety at work, including concerns related to COVID-19. She highlighted the document's strong emphasis on raising awareness about gender-based violence, harassment, and challenges related to workload. The commitment to addressing these risks and ensuring fair practices, safety, and compliance with labor regulations is emphasized in the document. Additionally, Lumezi mentioned that the LMP provides a summary of labor legislation, focusing on three main areas: National Legislation (Labor Law 03/L-212) in Kosovo, Legal Provisions for Health and Safety at Work (Kosovo Law on Safety and Health at Work 04/L-161), and World Bank Environmental and Social Standards (ESS2). According to Lumezi, the project places significant emphasis on fair treatment, prevention of discrimination, and ensuring equal opportunities for the workforce. Lumezi explained that an integral part of LMP is the Grievance Redress Mechanism, serving as a unified platform for addressing complaints and concerns for project employees. This mechanism includes a clear definition of who the employee should contact to file a complaint, a framework for addressing the complaint within a specific timeframe, the option to escalate the complaint to a higher organizational level, the right to representation, protection against retaliation, access to legal remedies, and the submission and handling of anonymous complaints. In conclusion, Lumezi emphasized that workers have the right to refuse to work if their safety or well-being is at risk or if proper health and safety measures are lacking.
- Furthermore, Lumezi proceeded with the final document, the SEP, which serves several purposes, including the identification and analysis of stakeholders, planning engagement modalities and effective communication tools for consultations and disclosure, defining the roles and responsibilities of various actors in implementing the SEP, establishing the project's grievance mechanism, providing feedback to stakeholders, and monitoring and reporting on the SEP. She explained that the plan categorizes project stakeholders into three groups: those affected by the project, other interested parties, and individuals or groups that are disadvantaged/vulnerable. According to this document, key participants in the project's execution include Local and Regional Authorities, Private Companies and Associations, Preschool Staff and Local Communities, Government and Regulatory Bodies, Non-Governmental Organizations and International Organizations, and Individuals or groups that are disadvantaged/vulnerable.
- Lumezi highlighted that the SEP has various objectives, such as compliance with Kosovo's legal requirements and alignment with World Bank standards, identifying key stakeholders, ensuring effective communication, addressing grievances, defining roles and responsibilities, and more. She emphasized that an integral component of this plan is the establishment of a grievance redress mechanism, similar to the previous document, which includes an online platform and a complaint registry. The goal is to inform all relevant actors about the procedures for submitting complaints regarding project activities and to provide timely responses to their potential concerns.

- Following the presentation of the four crucial project documents within the social and environmental framework, a session of questions and open discussions with the participants commenced. Luzha from MESTI initiated the open discussion, mentioning that these prepared documents would initially be shared in internal public discussions, specifically with the dependent institutions of the Government of Kosovo. Subsequently, they would be shared with the wider public to gather opinions from those not present at the meeting, seeking comments and ideas to ensure the comprehensiveness of these documents.
- Further, Lulavera Behluli, Project Coordinator at Save the Children, took the floor. She commenced by extending congratulations to the Preschool Education Division at MESTI for their commendable efforts and the initiation of this highly significant project for the country. Emphasizing the paramount importance of the preschool education quality component, Behluli underscored that it should be a top priority for this project. She further highlighted the shared objective among MESTI and all partners regarding aiming to increase children's enrollment in preschool institutions. Behluli pointed out that the latest PISA report indicated no significant performance difference between children who attended preschool education and those who did not. Consequently, she stressed the critical need to enhance the quality of preschool education for the proper development of children. Additionally, Behluli emphasized the crucial role of inter-sectoral cooperation in such a project, ensuring collaborative synergy among all stakeholders for more effective outcomes.
- Furthermore, Isuf Gashi from MESTI, also a member of the working group, raised another significant concern: rural constructions, modular constructions, and adaptations of existing structures. He emphasized the necessity for the project to provide more detailed information regarding locations and property issues, considering that building permits are contingent on property conversion into municipal ownership. Gashi identified the primary challenge of the project as securing suitable locations, a task that should be entrusted to experts. He also highlighted the potential environmental and social impacts in both urban and rural areas where the respective constructions are planned. Addressing the location challenge, Luzha assured that there would be continuous collaboration with local municipalities, which share priorities in ECEC, women's employment, and other social aspects. Consequently, she expressed confidence that the matter of locations would progress smoothly with easily attainable solutions. Regarding other concerns raised by Gashi, it was noted that all details regarding the environmental impact surrounding the constructions would be outlined in documents prepared by project consultants, shared with participants and the wider public. Additionally, the project consultant, Bajraktari, clarified that specific details concerning locations, expropriation, etc., would be determined in subsequent phases of the project.
- The subsequent topic in the discussion was introduced by Mevlyde Myrtezi, Director at the Collegium of Directors of Preschool Institutions in Kosovo. She emphasized the significance of conducting research on the current state of ECEC at the national level, aligning with the specific needs of the country. Myrtezi advocated for a focused approach on two key elements highlighted during the discussion, namely component one and two – the capacity building of ECEC professionals and the promotion of healthy nutrition for children. Drawing from her hands-on experience in ECEC through fieldwork, she underscored the pressing need for improvement in these areas, particularly in rural settings. Consequently, she urged the project representatives to give special attention to these aspects. Regarding this, Luzha acknowledged the existing deficiencies in these domains within Kosovo and affirmed that the project would actively address

these issues, particularly concerning children's health. According to her the plan involves conducting a comprehensive analysis to identify specific intervention needs in kindergartens across Kosovo's municipalities. Additionally, she highlighted the development of an administrative guideline on healthy nutrition and the collaboration with experts to create new menus.

- Next, Gëzime Rexhepi Çollaku, Director of the Association of Private Preschool Institutions, took the floor, addressing the future prospects for private preschool institutions. She expressed concern about the constant risk of closure and external pressures faced by these kindergartens, despite their role in increasing early childhood education enrollment. Rexhepi Çollaku sought clarity on the potential collaboration with these private institutions in the future, whether initiated by the World Bank or the Government of Kosovo, as they have lacked state support thus far. Luzha responded by highlighting the presence of over 200 licensed private kindergartens nationwide, leading to the establishment of the Association of Private Preschool Institutions through UNICEF for coordination and mutual strengthening. She outlined that projects from MESTI, including this World Bank initiative, will focus on capacity building for all educational staff in preschools across the country, irrespective of their affiliation with public or private institutions. The project will also involve drafting new administrative guidelines, encompassing support for the private sector by the Government of Kosovo in the realm of ECEC. Luzha emphasized the active participation of private sector actors in the drafting process. In conclusion, she conveyed a positive outlook for the collaboration to deepen, emphasizing the involvement of these institutions in decision-making and ensuring the representation of all stakeholders' voices.
- Moreover, Leonora Shala from MESTI underscored the paramount importance of children's health. She highlighted the group within MESTI actively raising awareness and working diligently in this regard. Shala pointed out the significant steps taken, such as the inaugural drafting of administrative guidelines on healthy nutrition for children in kindergartens, the introduction of new menus sponsored by UNICEF, the incorporation of nutrition into the educational curriculum as an integral component, and various other initiatives. Conclusively, she expressed the team's receptiveness to comments and ideas for continuous improvement in this domain, assuring that they are committed to addressing all concerns comprehensively.
- Luljeta Kabashi from the Division for Children with Special Needs at MESTI proposed that it would be beneficial for this project to also encompass children with special needs. She emphasized the necessity and significance of intervening with these children in preschool institutions for our country. Kabashi continued by stressing the importance of preparing educators with sufficient knowledge to deal with children, provide care, and empower them, ultimately enabling these children to lead independent lives in the future. In response, Luzha affirmed that this project will prioritize the early identification of children with special needs and aim to reduce child mortality. Additionally, she highlighted that all constructions will adhere to MESTI's existing infrastructure standards, subject to review through this project for updates that favor children with special needs. Luzha illustrated this with an example, pointing out that many kindergartens currently lack elevators, and such deficiencies will be addressed with the World Bank project.
- The public discussion concluded with Luzha expressing gratitude to all participants for their valuable contributions. She affirmed that MESTI will maintain coordination with the partners involved in this consultation concerning the planned activities within this project. Furthermore, she

indicated that the documents prepared will undergo updates based on the feedback received during this meeting.