“Every grip of hands gives us hope for life.
Gives us strength”
The aim of this annex is to raise the voice and demands of survivors and allow for a more accurate understanding of the complexity surrounding sexual violence associated to the conflict and its devastating impact on individuals and society. Our hope is that the content of the following pages will increase the society’s support and somehow contribute for more gender perspective policies.

“UN Women” expresses its deepest gratitude to survivors of sexual violence that is related to the conflict in Kosovo, who dedicated their time and shared their stories in this annex.
A special acknowledgment to the colleagues, partners and the organizations for the support provided and essential comments to the annex.

This edition is published under the project “UN Women” - Gender Sensitive Transitional Justice, funded by the European Union.
The purpose of this project, implemented in partnership with other UN agencies and local NGOs, is to increase efficiency of transitional justice processes and contribute towards a more just and stable society.

The views expressed in this publication represent the views of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of “UN Women”, the European Union, the UN or any of its organizations.
The views expressed in this Annex do not represent the views of “Koha Ditore”.

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Technical preparation: Ben Kajtazi
Printing: KOHA print
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The United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Sexual violence in Conflict

aims to raise awareness about the necessity of ending sexual violence in conflict, and respect victims and survivors of sexual violence worldwide and commemorate all who have audaciously devoted their lives and those who lost their lives in the battles for eradication of these crimes.

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 19th of June of every year as the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008), through which the Council condemns sexual violence as a war tactic and an obstacle to peacebuilding.

Launching of “Thinking of You” campaign, June 2015, dedicated to survivors of conflict related sexual violence in Kosovo
“Throughout the years we have been bearing a guilt that is not ours. We have been bearing a shame that is not ours. We have been neglected.”

“Immediately after the war, life has been very difficult for us, we have been prejudiced. Our life has always been so difficult... very often we were thinking whether “to commit suicide”. There was no hope for life... considering that war included everyone, and that all war categories benefited, and only us, women, who lived in our homes, were not considered by anyone, supported by no one. The rapes occurred in our homes, we were the ones to guard the houses.”
“Now, after the support by the institutions, our life is slightly different. Organizations have helped us in recognizing our suffering, but what mostly helped us is the support of each other. We have been our own voice, giving tens of interviews, which were very challenging, but we found the courage.”

“Our only thread of hope to living is to have these horrific crimes punished, and not let these crimes go unnoticed, as many of our sisters have passed away, and we are obliged to carry on their will of not silencing these crimes. All of the new generations, and the institutions, should recognize the crime committed against us.”
Since 1999, women's organizations have been providing support to survivors of sexual violence during the conflict. The slogan of the protest organized on 8 March 2012 by Kosovo Women's Network to break the persisting silence and seeking support for the survivors was “We do not want flowers, we want justice for women raped during the war.”

On 20 March 2014, the Parliament adopted the law recognizing the survivors as war victims, which constitutes a vital step in recognizing their legal status and mitigating the consequences of the armed conflict in Kosovo.

UN Women has supported the establishment of the Governmental Commission on the Recognition and Verification of the Status of Survivors of Sexual Violence During the War in Kosovo. Together with the Kosovo Institute for Public Administration, we developed training modules for the members of the Commission, authorized NGOs and DFDIL officials assisting in the process of recognizing and verifying the status of survivors. This support will continue even further, in order to ease this very important process.

The provision of reparations is one step in the process of achieving justice for the survivors that have been delayed and denied for so long. It is important to emphasize that the needs of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are not uniform and that survivors continue to face many challenges, including their limited access to employment, health, (re)education and social inclusion, which adds to the difficulties and limits hardship and limits their ability to engage in society.

In order to create sustainable livelihoods for the survivors, economic empowerment and the right to inheritance and property need to be tackled simultaneously. To facilitate access to justice for survivors, UN Women continues to support the capacity building of Kosovo Special Prosecutors and investigators of the Kosovo War Crimes Investigation Unit, which have taken on the important role to work with cases of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo.

In cooperation with Kosovo Women’s Network and four organizations specialized in treating survivors of sexual violence, UN Women provided microgrants for survivors towards their economic empowerment. These actions were coupled with psychosocial support as well as joint advocacy with organizations to represent the interests of the survivors more broadly.

Supported by the European Union and in partnership with other UN agencies and local NGOs since 2013, UN Women is implementing the Gender Sensitive Transitional Justice Programme, with the overall goal of enhancing the efficiency of transitional justice processes.

We hope that the Government of Kosovo will continue to work with dedication in strengthening the support mechanisms, improving the access to justice, raising public awareness, and mobilizing public support for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

We expect greater commitment from the institutions to recognize this war crime that has occurred in Kosovo and to bring those responsible to justice.

It is important for all to recognize that survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are not people in need of charity, but rather active agents in society whose rights have been violated and who have begun to be compensated for crimes committed against them.

We call upon society to alleviate the suffering of the survivors by supporting them and to facilitate the realization of their rights, which have been violated for such a long time.

Help them to rebuild their lives.

Flora Macula

Head of Office
UN Women
VOICE OF SURVIVORS

It was very difficult. No one supported us. Our situation was agonizing, and we felt very bad. There were a lot of bad things, we were prejudiced, we weren’t free to go anywhere, our health was not good ... there were a lot of things”.

“Over the years we have been victimized many times... always having the fingers pointed at us. We were in the mercy of god. Many of our friends are no longer alive, and whenever something good is done for us, we become emotional because they are no longer among us”.

“We are laggards, never having had a salary, without jobs ... we are all laggards, staying only indoors, as housewife’s, only to clean. We could not even go out to visit our friends, only our neighbours, and that even so rarely, because we were not allowed to go out”.

“I have been long waiting for this pension, first of all to get healed, because I have many health problems. Since the war, we are all sick, [sighs]... From the war ..., were are not good at all...we are devastated my dear, .... devastated”.

“Now we need a better future. Health, first of all, we should have money so that we can pay health treatments on our own, and not have to beg, we should have our rights and pay for the health treatments ourselves”

“We want Kosovo’s institutions to shed light to the crimes committed against the bodies of Kosovan women. We may enjoy these pensions soon or later, but what want is that these crimes are punished, and we will mostly be satisfied when we see it being punished”.

“While the perpetrators are not brought to justice, we are always guilty and shameful. If the perpetrators are punished, our souls will be at peace”. “Our plea for the institutions is to treat this category as all other categories emerged from war”.

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“Our life has improved, as we are in touch with one another. When we stretch our hands to one another, a simple grip of hands, we understand the pain, and realize that we are being supported. Stretching our hands, and a grip of our hand gives us hope for life. It gives us strength. That is what I would say to all women who suffered this crime, don’t be silent, because I have found support and so will they”.

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“It is time for survivors of sexual violence to finally find the proper institutional support in our country. They need greater support from all our society, so that we can together leave the bitter past behind and build a better future. Institutions should work more in raising the society’s awareness and strengthen supporting mechanisms for the survivors of sexual violence. Only by raising public awareness we can put any type of violence in our society to an end”.

Hashim Thaçi
President of Kosovo

“The Government of Kosovo started with the recognition of status and compensation of victims of sexual violence of the last war in Kosovo; however, we are aware that material compensation does not heal the wounds of this category. That is why we are strongly committed to make sure that this category enjoys proper health services, employment and vocational training, life rehabilitation and equality in society. The commitment to this category goes beyond institutional endeavours. The deserved rights and equality in society for these victims is attained only with joint commitment from all chains of our society”.

Skender Reçica
Minister of Labour and Social Welfare

“Sexual violence is no longer in the shadows in Kosovo. However, there are still no real statistics on the number of victims who survived the sexual violence. We already know of some victims, while for some others we probably will never know because they are not ready, and refuse to face the past out of fear and stigmatization by the society and family. We dare not forget the fact that the war crime of sexual violence was a used as a strategy of war to occupy the territory, for ethnic cleansing, and in particular as hatred and humiliation against women, as is the case in vast majority of victims of this crime.

As the State Prosecutor in the Special Prosecution of the Republic of Kosovo dealing with cases of war crimes, I am committed to discover and investigate cases of sexual violence during the war; and first of all, I demand justice and satisfaction for war victims, by contributing to the documentation of guiltiness of those who committed these terrible crimes. War crimes are not subject to statutory limitation and there will never be amnesty for those who committed these horrid crimes. Therefore, it is never too late to report a case.

Only with concrete commitment and cooperation, and with proper law enforcement, can we provide justice for the victims and punishment for war criminals”.

Drita Hajdari, Prosecutor, Special Prosecution of Kosovo
In Kosovo, 18 years have passed since the end of the conflict, and the subject relating to the survivors of Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) remains a challenge, where the guilt of this grave injustice continues to weigh heavy upon the survivors. I am pleased that the Commission on Recognition and Verification of the Status of Sexual Violence Victims is operational. This marked a bold step for these survivors. I have called upon relevant institutions to show increased attention to the five-year application process by taking all necessary actions to address these victims with the highest consideration, without delaying the processes. The Government must ensure that these reparations are guaranteed to all the survivors without discrimination.

Recently I met with a group of survivors of sexual violence, where I spoke but mainly listened to them. I realized that rehabilitations means more than legal recognition, it also means psycho-social help, access to medical services, access to justice, economic empowerment and fighting of the stigma. Consequences of this crime will continue to exist for many years to come, but we must ensure that wounds of this conflict are not transmitted to younger generations; we must prevent the consequence of the conflict from touching the future of our society, of our children.

The EU fully supports survivor's rights to reparations and by doing so we encourage government structures and other development partners to link survivors with existing government and development initiatives; and at the same we call for greater exchange of ideas between civil society and organisations working with survivors.

“Peace is also a process of learning, and the recognition of the sacrifice and pain of all women and girls survivors of sexual violence should be reviewed and included in the writing of the history of our state. The history will only be complete when their sacrifice and loss is known and respected.”

Nataliya Apostolova
Head of EU Office in Kosovo/EU Special Representative

“Peace is also a process of learning, and the recognition of the sacrifice and pain of all women and girls survivors of sexual violence should be reviewed and included in the writing of the history of our state. The history will only be complete when their sacrifice and loss is known and respected.”

Edi Gusia
Chief Executive of the Agency for Gender Equality
The core of comprehensive efforts related to the survivors of sexual violence of conflict in Kosovo is the establishment of the National Council for Survivors for the Sexual Violence during the War by the President Atifete Jahjaga, on 7 March 2014. Throughout her mandate as president, rehabilitation of this category has been an important part of her agenda.

While continuing her commitment in this regard, the former President of Kosovo established the “Jahjaga Foundation” in March 2018, in order to help the survivors of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo fight the stigma they face in society. The foundation is now implementing the project “Fighting the Stigma Surrounding Survivors of Conflict Related Sexual Violence in Kosovo”, supported by UN Women and UNDP, and funded by EU.

How hard it was to take the first actions, and place the issue of survivors in the agenda of central institutions?
Jahjaga: As was shown by the first discussions on this issue in the Parliament, certainly it was not easy to initiate the process of protecting the rights of a group of our society and also start discussions and mobilization of the public and institutions, as this had not happened before. This topic had remained silent for more than 15 years, along with the wounds, concerns, sorrows and the curtailed rights of survivors were not addressed for such a long time. Being aware of this situation, despite the difficulties, I was committed to start a change for the survivors – prove to them that they are not alone, and that we as a society and institutions recognize their sacrifice and will do everything possible for their equal treatment, and that we will fight further to provide them access to justice. In this regard, their institutionalization as specific legal category has been essential for these women and men to commence exercising their rights.

What is the current engagement of the president with Jahjaga Foundation with regards to the survivors?
Jahjaga: The Jahjaga Foundation is actively engaged in helping survivors (and other marginalized groups) so that this category receives the proper support from our institutions and society, but also so that they are trained to be independent and help themselves. In this aspect, the Foundation aims to provide survivors with concrete help through projects aiming their economic empowerment, so they will be employed or self-employed, fight stigma and prejudices against them, and push the cause of justice forward, which would be the real moral compensation for this category, familiarize youth with transitional justice mechanisms for sexual violence in conflict, and other activities strengthening this category.

How can the society and institutions increase the support for the survivors?
Jahjaga: All of us, as individuals or society, may contribute to the supporting of survivors, starting with a positive approach towards them and considering them as women and men who paid a very high price before and after the war. Given the fact that one of the challenges we faced for addressing this issue since the beginning was the fight against stigma, a positive approach means a lot for the survivors, but also for us as society that affects all citizens without distinction. We should understand that they have been target of an inhumane campaign aimed at their physical and psychological damage. Therefore, our institutions in particular, should continuously commit to ensuring that survivors enjoy equal treatment and access to services provided by law, and that their long-standing request for access to justice is finally realized.
Neglected by the institutions until recently, and stigmatized by the family and society, the survivors of sexual violence during the conflict in Kosovo had a door opened in women organizations, which have been providing support for survivors since 1999.

“After the war, women started telling the stories of what happened to them. When they started speaking, and the society in a way started to stigmatise them, they refrained from speaking. Therefore, the women organizations had to work for all these years with them and help them in the field of psycho-social program and economic strengthening”, states Igibale Rogova, Director of Kosovo Women’s Network.

Despite the great challenges over the years, women organizations consider this year as a milestone for the cause of survivors, calling it as “Year of recognition of the status of victims of sexual violence.”

This is supported even by Feride Rushiti, Director of Kosovo Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT):

“Undoubtedly, today we can list the recognition of the legal status of survivors of sexual violence as the main achievement. Let us not forget that all this was a long and laborious process. The establishment of mechanisms ensuring a fair and honest process is of special importance”.

For commitment in promotion and protection of the rights of survivors of sexual violence, Rushiti has been awarded with the International Women of Courage Award by the US Department of State.

Stigmatizing culture pronounced in Kosovo has significantly hampered the rehabilitation of survivors by nourishing in them “the feeling of guilt and shame”, considers Veprore Shehu, Director of “Medica Kosova”.

“Society did not recognize and show solidarity with their sorrow. Even the closest family members avoided this topic, pretending they know nothing or simply is better not to talk about this issue due to the comments of other members of community” added Shehu.

“We want no flower; we want justice for women victims of sexual violence during the war”, was the call of the protest organized on 8 March 2012 by Kosovo Women’s Network.
TIME FOR THE SURVIVORS

Following the commencement of implementation of the law on pension benefits for survivors of sexual violence during the war, the representatives of NGOs show that there are obstacles with regard to the benefit.

According to them, an obstacle for benefiting or applying for this pension is that the survivors are entitled to not more than one social benefit (e.g. if a women benefits pension for the spouse/child martyr of the war, civilian victim of war, or benefits the age pension, or any similar benefit), then the survivor should withdraw from her right to benefit, i.e. should choose among pensions.

“Due to stigma, women, despite their will, are withdrawing from their pension and continue to take any other pension, whatever it is, in many cases even if the pension they chose is smaller. The Government should repeal the provision in the law that hampers survivors of the sexual violence during the war from obtain more than one social benefit related to the war”, states Mirlinda Sada, Executive Director of “Medica Gjakova”.

Speaking of challenges faced by the survivors, including the stigmatization they have been facing for 20 years now, Kadire Tahiraj from the Centre for Promotion of Women Rights in Drenas states that “the current problem is the reasoning of pensions of those cases that have benefited the status of the survivor of sexual violence during the war. This challenge is a consequence of the stigmatization of society, because there are cases that even today family members of victims are not aware of what these victims have suffered. Also, there are cases that even the spouse of the victims knows nothing about what the victim has suffered.”

More support by institutions and society

Even though Kosovo managed to finally provide reparations for victims of sexual violence in conflict, this accounts for only one segment (although important) of social justice, while there is no formal justice and peace.

“Most of survivors consider the conviction of authors of sexual crimes as one of most important measures for their emotional rehabilitation, but also for restoring their dignity in entirety. Justice also allows to transfer the feel of guilt to the authors of these crimes, having also a psychological effect on the survivors, who consider that ‘only then the society will better understand that we have been victims and our body has been used for war purposes’”, states Shehu.

Rogova agrees that the survivors now need access to justice that is sensitive to gender and trauma suffered during the war:

“The survivors enjoy legal rights after all the fight of women organizations, women in politics and international organizations; however, they need justice for what happened to them.”

Speaking on the importance of economic strengthening, Tahiraj from QPDG states: “We are of the opinion that economic strengthening for this category by opening new jobs or any long-term project in this regard would be welcomed”, adding that “national institutions should treat this category equally to other categories emerging from the war and ensure justice for this category by convicting the crime committed in our country”.

Considering that monetary compensation without access to justice of victims of sexual violence is not a “fully completed mission”, Rushiti from KRCT adds: “we have a lot of work in this regard, but we strongly believe that with commitment and sincere and devoted work, humble to those we represent, and in cooperation with other stakeholders, we will be successful in achieving our common goals”.

A small business opened by a survivor, being beneficiary of one of 117 micro-grants of the project of UN Women, implemented in partnership with Kosovo Women’s Network and authorized NGOs as part of EU-funded project.
In view of marking the International Day of United Nations for Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Kosovo Centre for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (KRCT), in cooperation with Medica Gjakova (MGJ), launched the campaign “Be My Voice”.

“Be My Voice” aims at promoting the inclusive access and dignified treatment for the survivors of sexual violence by raising the awareness of population on consequences of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo. Thus, this campaign aims at fighting the social stigma and prejudices towards victims – survivors of sexual violence.

“Be My Voice” also aims at encouraging victims to apply for recognition of the status of survivors of sexual violence, and calls for stronger support within family, community and society. The campaign “Be My Voice” is supported by the British Embassy and Medica Mondiale in Germany.
For too long, sexual violence in conflict has been used as a silent, effective weapon in conflicts around the world. Historically, rape has been used as a strategy for ethnic cleansing and genocide, as a means to destroy families and communities, as a method of inducing terror, and extracting information. For a long time, sexual violence was next to invisible. Survivors suffered in silence, ashamed for something that was not their fault, shamed by their families, stigmatized, left to cope for themselves, and never understood or assisted. It was only in 1992, when the world faced widespread rapes of women in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, that the issue came to the attention of the UN Security Council. As a result of significant public pressure, sexual assault was finally recognized as a weapon of war.

The 19th of June, 2008 commemorates the breakthrough adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1820, which recognized sexual violence as a tactic of war and a threat to global peace and security, thus requiring an operational security, justice, and service response. It further recognized that rape and other forms of sexual violence constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Since the very start of the conflict in Kosovo, civil society organizations and human rights activists have been raising their voices to highlight the issue of rape being used against the civilian population, namely women and girls. It took almost twenty years of struggle, efforts, and tireless work of Kosovo institutions, civil society and UN Agencies (notably, UN Women) to give the victims and survivors of sexual violence during the conflict a voice. The law which gives legal recognition to these victims was approved in March of 2017 by the Kosovo Assembly. It was followed by the establishment of the Government Commission to recognize and verify survivors of sexual violence during the Kosovo conflict. In September of last year, the Government of Kosovo allocated a budget for the process of recognizing and verifying the status of sexual assault survivors. Once identified, the survivors receive the official status of civilian victims who are eligible for reparations and monthly pensions. It is a huge step forward, however, more needs to be done both from the legal and human perspective. To this day, the suffering continues, with victims or survivors being misunderstood, victimized and ostracized. It is our duty to lobby with other institutions to do everything in our power to recognize these women in the same manner as any other victim that suffered during the conflict, to lift the veil of invisibility and shame. They are our mothers, sisters, and daughters, and they must be treated with compassion, respect, and resolve for what they endured. For the majority of Kosovars, peace came 19 years ago. It is time to work together to finally bring peace to these women and children survivors of sexual assault and to the effects of conflict-related sexual violence that echo across generations, through trauma, stigma, poverty, poor health and unwanted pregnancy.

Indeed, this year, the 19th of June is dedicated to “The Plight and Rights of Children Born of War”. This year, we shall focus on the children whose existence emanates from sexual violence, who often are labeled “bad blood” or “children of the enemy” and alienated from their mother’s social group. Furthermore, whose mothers are more than often marginalized and shunned by their families and communities. Children conceived through rape in wartime often struggle with issues of identity and belonging for decades after the end of the war. They are rarely accepted by society. Additionally, unsafe abortion remains a leading cause of maternal mortality in conflict-affected settings, which further highlights the need to protect women in warfare. Today, in memory of survivors of this unacceptable wartime weapon, this crime against humanity, let us join the UN Secretary-General to “...amplify the voices of these stolen victims of war, who suffer stigma, shame, and exclusion in societies polarized by armed conflict.”

Ulrika Richardson, UN Development Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative.

Foto: Xhemajl Sllovinja/UNKT
Recognition and verification of the status of sexual violence victims during the war

The Government Commission for recognition and verification of the status of sexual violence victims of the war is established on 28 April 2017. The Minister of Labour and Social Welfare at that time, Arban Abrashi, stated that this compensation would not compensate for the missing justice, “but will be a modest institutional support to this category of the society”.

The main responsibilities and duties of this governmental commission are the recognition and verification of the status of sexual violence victims of the war, as foreseen under the Law no. 04/L-172 and in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in the Regulation (GRK) No. 22/2015 on the Determination of Procedures for the Recognition and Verification of Victims of Sexual Violence during the Kosovo Liberation War.

For the purpose of supporting the work of the Commission for the application process, four NGOs specialized on the issue of survivors have been authorized: KRCT, MEDIKA GJAKOVA, MEDIKA KOSOVA, and CPWR in Drenas. Also officials from the Department of Families of Martyrs and War Invalids will support the work of the Commission in this process.

The Commission is already made functional and operates in its facilities, where it has started to review the survivors’ cases and received 557 applications at the country level by 8.6.2018. Out of these, 218 cases have been reviewed and addressed by the Commission, 113 cases have been accepted, whereby the status of sexual violence victims during the war was recognized, while 85 cases were rejected, with the right to appeal.

Speaking about the application and appraisal process so far, Minire Balaj, Chair of the Commission, says: "The Government Commission, within the responsibilities and competencies vested by the relevant applicable legislation, is carrying out its professional work with utmost seriousness and dedication, with professional members of the field. Initially, there were challenges because of the sensitivity for handling cases and the process in general, but the process has gone very well". Speaking of the measures taken to avoid false application, Balaj explains that "the statements, as well as the presentation of false data and evidence for the purpose of obtaining the rights are punishable under applicable laws and the Criminal Code". Balaj emphasizes that there is a great need for public awareness and special attention to this category of society.
THE PROCESS FOR RECOGNITION AND VERIFICATION OF THE STATUS OF PERSONS VICTIMS OF THE WAR IN KOSOVO HAS COMMENCED

For any information, please contact the toll FREE number

(0) 800 20202

If you are survivor of sexual violence during the war, you can register in the following addresses:


Officer responsible in one of the regional offices of DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES OF MARTYRS AND WAR INVALIDS
Building for pensions in Prishtina, Mitrovica, Ferizaj, Gjilan, Prizren, Peja and Gjakova

CENTRE FOR PROMOTION OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS
Str. “Skënderbeu”, Drenas

KOSOVO CENTRE FOR REHABILITATION OF TORTURE VICTIMS
Str. “Hamëz Jashari”, 16b/2, 10000- Prishtina

MEDICA GJAKOVA
Str. “Fadil Nimani”, nr. 34, Gjakove

MEDICA KOSOVA
Str. “Luigj Gurakuqi”, nr.39, Gjakova