



Qendra Kosovare për Studime Gjinore
Kosovar Gender Studies Center

GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN KOSOVO'S REFORM AGENDA:

ASSESSING THE EU GROWTH PLAN





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Author: Dren Kukaj
Editor: Luljeta Demolli

Kosovar Gender Studies Center (KGSC) www.kgsc.net has been contributing to gender mainstreaming since 2002 and continuously makes efforts to achieve gender equality in Kosovo. It has been pioneering changes to the discriminatory system, social norms, and double standards, and is very active in monitoring public institutions. KGSC mission is to integrate gender-sensitive analysis, programs, and policies in all sectors of Kosovar society by increasing gender awareness and focus on gender issues, developing gender studies and ensuring the inclusion of gender-sensitive policies through research, policy development, advocacy, and lobbying.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a gender analysis of Kosovo's Reform Agenda under the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. The analysis examines the extent to which gender equality considerations are integrated into the design of the reforms. It assesses how these reforms may affect women's economic participation, access to resources, and representation in decision-making processes. The research is based primarily on desk analysis of policy documents, including Kosovo's Reform Agenda and the gender-sensitive indicators developed to monitor the integration of gender perspectives within the reform framework.

The findings show that Kosovo's Reform Agenda includes several mechanisms that can support gender equality, particularly through the introduction of gender-sensitive indicators across several reform areas. These indicators focus on issues such as women's participation in public administration, gender-responsive public procurement, representation in governance structures, gender impact assessments in legislation, and gender equality considerations in education and labour market reforms. In this regard, the Reform Agenda provides an important starting point for integrating gender perspectives into economic and institutional reforms linked to Kosovo's EU integration process.

However, the analysis also identifies several structural gaps in the way gender equality is addressed within the reform framework. Gender considerations are not consistently integrated across all policy sectors, particularly in economic governance, private sector development, and financial sector reforms. In many cases, gender-sensitive indicators focus on procedural aspects of policymaking, such as gender impact assessments or representation targets. At the same time, broader economic reforms do not systematically address structural barriers that limit women's participation in entrepreneurship, employment, and access to finance. In addition, the availability of gender-disaggregated data remains limited in some reform areas, which may constrain effective monitoring of gender equality outcomes.

The analysis further highlights several risks to reform implementation if gender perspectives are not systematically integrated. Economic reforms aimed at stimulating private sector development may disproportionately benefit sectors where men are already overrepresented. Similarly, digital transformation and green transition policies may unintentionally widen gender gaps if existing inequalities in digital skills, labour market participation, and access to economic resources remain unaddressed. Structural barriers such as unequal distribution of unpaid care work, limited access to finance for women entrepreneurs, and underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions may also limit the inclusive impact of economic reforms.

■ At the same time, the Reform Agenda also creates important opportunities to strengthen gender-responsive policymaking. Gender-sensitive indicators, if consistently implemented, can serve as valuable tools for monitoring reform progress and promoting institutional accountability. Reforms related to public procurement, innovation governance, and publicly owned enterprises can contribute to increasing women's participation in economic and leadership positions. Digitalisation reforms may also expand access to public services and create new economic opportunities for women, particularly through digital entrepreneurship and remote work.

Based on these findings, the report proposes several policy recommendations. Kosovo's institutions should strengthen the systematic integration of gender impact assessments across all reform areas, improve the use of gender-disaggregated data in monitoring reform outcomes, and expand policies that support women's labour market participation, including childcare and care economy measures. The European Union can further support gender equality by integrating gender indicators more systematically within the monitoring of the Reform and Growth Facility and by supporting targeted programmes for women's economic empowerment. Civil society organizations also play an important role in monitoring reform implementation, providing independent analysis, and advocating for stronger gender-responsive policymaking.

Overall, the analysis shows that Kosovo's Reform Agenda provides an important framework for advancing economic development and EU integration. However, ensuring that these reforms contribute to inclusive and equitable development will require stronger and more systematic integration of gender equality considerations throughout the reform process.

2. INTRODUCTION

European Union integration remains the central strategic objective of Kosovo's political, institutional, and economic development. Since the declaration of independence, Kosovo has gradually aligned its legislative framework, governance structures, and economic policies with European Union standards. This process has been largely driven by EU accession instruments and reform frameworks that aim to strengthen democratic institutions, improve economic competitiveness, and promote social cohesion. Within this broader transformation, Kosovo's policy agenda has increasingly focused on structural reforms in public administration, economic governance, labour markets, and private sector development.

In recent years, the European Union has introduced new instruments intended to accelerate the integration of Western Balkan economies into the EU's economic space. One of the most significant of these initiatives is the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, launched in 2023 as a strategic framework to promote faster economic convergence between the region and the European Union. The Growth Plan combines financial support with reform conditionality through the Reform and Growth Facility, encouraging Western Balkan countries to implement targeted structural reforms that strengthen economic governance, improve the business environment, accelerate digital and green transitions, and facilitate integration into the EU single market.

With support from the European Union and UN Women, the Agency for Gender Equality has developed Gender-Sensitive Indicators (GSIs) aligned with the Reform and Growth Facility (Regulation EU 2024/1449). 16 policy measures are currently covered by 35 indicators, demonstrating a systematic effort to integrate gender equality across reform priorities. These indicators are embedded across key sectors such as governance, digitalisation, energy, labour market, and the business environment, ensuring that gender equality is treated both as a cross-cutting principle and as a measurable outcome of reforms. The Agency for Gender Equality organized a presentation for Civil Society Organizations in 2025 to inform them about the indicators and gender mainstreaming in Reform Agenda.

For Kosovo, the Reform Agenda under the EU Growth Plan represents a major roadmap for economic modernization and policy reform. The agenda outlines a series of measures aimed at strengthening institutional capacity, improve regulatory frameworks, expand economic opportunities, and promote sustainable growth. These reforms address a wide range of policy areas, including energy transition, digitalization, labour market development, public administration reform, and financial sector development. While the Growth Plan is primarily framed as an economic reform initiative, its implementation inevitably shapes broader social outcomes, including the distribution of economic opportunities and access to resources among different groups in society.

In this context, integrating a gender equality perspective becomes particularly important. Economic reforms and development strategies are not gender neutral. Policies that influence labour markets, entrepreneurship, education systems, access to finance, and public sector governance often affect women and men differently due to existing structural inequalities. In Kosovo, gender disparities remain significant across multiple socio-economic indicators. Women's labour market participation remains substantially lower than that of men, women are underrepresented in entrepreneurship and leadership positions, and structural barriers continue to limit women's economic participation, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized communities.

Research and policy analyses across the Western Balkans have highlighted that economic reform agendas often overlook gender dimensions unless these are explicitly integrated into policy design and implementation. When economic policies are formulated without systematic gender analysis, they may inadvertently reproduce existing inequalities or fail to address structural barriers that limit women's access to economic opportunities. In such cases, reform agendas that aim to promote growth may generate uneven benefits, leaving certain groups, particularly women, less able to participate in or benefit from economic transformation.

At the same time, there is growing recognition within European policy frameworks that gender equality is an essential component of sustainable economic development. Gender-inclusive policies contribute not only to social justice but also to economic performance by expanding labour force participation, improving productivity, and fostering more resilient economies. Ensuring that economic reforms address gender disparities, therefore, represents both a social

and economic imperative. For countries undergoing structural transformation in the context of EU integration, integrating gender perspectives into reform agendas can help ensure that economic growth is inclusive and that reform benefits are distributed more equitably across society.

Against this background, this research examines Kosovo's Reform Agenda under the EU Growth Plan from a gender equality perspective. The study seeks to explore the extent to which gender considerations are reflected in the design and implementation of reform measures and to identify potential gaps, risks, and opportunities related to gender-responsive policy development. Particular attention is given to policy areas that have significant implications for women's economic participation, including labour market reforms, entrepreneurship support mechanisms, access to finance, and institutional governance frameworks.

The overall objective of this research is to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how economic reform processes linked to EU integration interact with gender equality outcomes in Kosovo. More specifically, the study aims to analyse the main reform measures included in Kosovo's Reform Agenda, assess the extent to which gender perspectives are integrated into these reforms, and identify areas where additional policy attention may be required to ensure inclusive and equitable implementation.

By examining the intersection between economic reform policies and gender equality, this report seeks to support policymakers, civil society actors, and international partners in strengthening the gender responsiveness of reform processes in Kosovo. Ultimately, ensuring that gender equality considerations are systematically integrated into the implementation of the Growth Plan can contribute to more inclusive development outcomes and reinforce Kosovo's broader commitments to democratic governance, social inclusion, and European integration.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH APPROACH

This study employs a qualitative research approach, primarily through document and desk research. The research examines the extent to which gender equality considerations are reflected in Kosovo's Reform Agenda under the EU Growth Plan and how these reforms may influence gender equality outcomes in practice. The methodology combines policy document analysis with a review of existing literature and relevant analytical reports to identify key gender-related gaps, risks, and opportunities within the reform framework.

A central component of the research is the analysis of policy and strategic documents relevant to Kosovo's reform process and EU integration trajectory. This includes key EU policy frameworks, Kosovo's national reform documents, and sectoral policy strategies linked to the implementation of the Growth Plan. Particular attention is given to policy areas that have significant implications for gender equality, including labour market policies, education and vocational training reforms, financial inclusion, public procurement, digital transformation, and public administration reform. Through this analysis, the study seeks to identify whether gender considerations are explicitly integrated into policy objectives, indicators, and implementation mechanisms.

The research also includes a systematic review of Kosovo's Reform Agenda under the EU Growth Plan, focusing on the specific reform measures and indicators included in the agenda. Each reform area is examined from a gender perspective to assess whether gender equality considerations are incorporated into the reform design and whether the proposed implementation mechanisms have the potential to address existing gender gaps. The analysis considers both explicit gender-related measures and broader reforms that may have indirect implications for women's economic participation and access to opportunities.

In addition to policy document analysis, the research draws on existing literature, research publications, and analytical reports related to gender equality, labour

market participation, economic development, and EU integration in Kosovo and the Western Balkans. These sources include reports produced by international organizations, civil society organizations, and research institutions. Reviewing existing research helps situate the analysis within the broader evidence base on gender inequalities in Kosovo. It provides important contextual insights into the structural barriers that may influence the outcomes of economic reforms.



The research also incorporates targeted qualitative inputs from institutional stakeholders and experts where relevant. These contributions provide additional insights into the practical challenges of integrating gender perspectives into policy design and reform implementation. Such perspectives are used to complement the document analysis and better understand institutional dynamics and implementation constraints.

Despite these methodological approaches, the study has several limitations. First, the research is primarily based on desk analysis of policy documents and available literature, which means that the analysis focuses on the design and policy framing of reforms rather than on their long-term implementation outcomes. Second, as the Reform Agenda is relatively recent and many measures are still in early stages of implementation, it is not yet possible to assess the full impact of these reforms on gender equality outcomes. Finally, data limitations, particularly the availability of gender-disaggregated indicators in certain policy areas, may constrain the ability to conduct a comprehensive assessment of gender impacts across all reform sectors.

Nevertheless, the combination of policy analysis and stakeholder perspectives provides a solid analytical basis for examining how gender considerations are currently integrated into Kosovo's Reform Agenda and for identifying potential areas where gender-responsive policy approaches could be strengthened in the implementation of the EU Growth Plan.

3.1 Institutional Consultations and stakeholder inputs

As part of this research, several institutional actors and experts with relevant expertise in gender equality and EU-related reforms were contacted to gather institutional perspectives on integrating the gender perspective into Kosovo's Growth Plan and the Reform Agenda. The individuals involved in the research process included Edi Gusia, Chief Executive of the Agency for Gender Equality, Artan Çollaku, an official at the Office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo, and Nicole Farnsworth, Deputy Director and Lead Researcher at the Kosovo Women's Network.

The consultations were conducted via email using semi-structured questions to clarify how gender equality considerations are integrated into the implementation of the Growth Plan and related reform measures. The questions addressed issues such as gender-sensitive public procurement, gender equality indicators in labour market reforms, institutional monitoring mechanisms, and the role of gender equality institutions in the policymaking and implementation process.

Edi Gusia informed that, due to the current uncertainty regarding the future development and implementation of the Growth Plan, she could not provide detailed responses to the questionnaire. She noted that gender indicators had been drafted and presented to relevant sector representatives, but that there was still no clarity regarding whether and how these indicators would ultimately be incorporated into the implementation and monitoring framework of the Growth Plan.

A substantive institutional response was received from Artan Çollaku, who clarified the position of gender equality within the Reform Agenda negotiated between Kosovo and the European Union under the Reform and Growth Facility (RGF). According to this response, the Reform Agenda contains 111 negotiated reform steps that constitute the basis for financial disbursement under the RGF. Gender equality, however, was not negotiated as a standalone reform step within the Reform Agenda. Instead, it is addressed as a cross-cutting issue. Consequently, progress in this field is reported to the European Commission through annual reporting on the overall objectives of the RGF, rather than through the six-month progress reports that focus on the implementation of negotiated reform steps.

Nicole Farnsworth stated that the Kosovo Women’s Network had already produced a policy brief analysing the gender implications of the EU Growth Plan and recommended referencing this publication, which covers many of the issues raised in the consultation questions.

- Taken together, these consultations provide useful contextual insights regarding the institutional treatment of gender equality within the Growth Plan framework. They indicate that gender equality is primarily addressed horizontally as a cross-cutting policy objective rather than through dedicated reform steps within the Reform Agenda, which has implications for the monitoring and visibility of gender-related commitments within the implementation of the EU Growth Plan in Kosovo.
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4. EU GROWTH PLAN AND KOSOVO'S REFORM AGENDA

4.1 EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans

The EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, presented by the European Commission in November 2023, represents a new strategic framework aimed at accelerating economic convergence between the Western Balkan countries and the European Union. The plan seeks to bring some of the economic benefits of EU membership to the region before formal accession by strengthening economic integration, deepening structural reforms, and increasing financial support tied to reform performance.

At the core of the Growth Plan is the objective of reducing the significant economic gap between the Western Balkans and the European Union. Currently, GDP per capita in the region ranges between approximately 30% and 50% of the EU average, highlighting the persistent development gap that the EU seeks to address through targeted reforms and investments.

The Growth Plan is structured around four key pillars designed to support economic transformation and closer integration with the EU economy.

The first pillar focuses on increasing integration with the EU Single Market. This aims to gradually provide Western Balkan economies with access to key elements of the EU internal market, including goods, services, digital markets, and transport. By aligning regulatory frameworks and standards with EU legislation, the plan seeks to enable businesses in the region to participate more effectively in European value chains.

The second pillar emphasises strengthening regional economic integration within the Western Balkans. This objective builds on the existing Common Regional Market initiative and aims to remove barriers to trade, mobility, and investment among the countries of the region. Greater regional integration is viewed as a necessary step toward eventual integration into the EU's single market.

The third pillar focuses on accelerating structural reforms in areas central to the EU accession process. These reforms include strengthening the rule of law, improving the functioning of democratic institutions, enhancing public administration, combating corruption and organised crime, and improving economic governance. In addition, reforms are expected to support green and digital transitions, strengthen education systems, and improve labour market policies.

The fourth pillar introduces a new financial instrument: the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans. This instrument links EU financial support directly to the implementation of national reform agendas. The facility aims to incentivise governments to implement structural reforms by providing financial assistance based on measurable progress in agreed reform milestones.

The Growth Plan, therefore, represents a shift toward a performance-based financing approach, where financial support is conditioned on the successful implementation of reforms aligned with EU standards and policies. The plan also emphasises investments in sectors with high development potential, including transport connectivity, energy transition, digital transformation, education, and skills development.

4.2 Kosovo's Reform Agenda

In response to the EU Growth Plan, Kosovo has developed a national Reform Agenda that outlines the structural reforms the country commits to implementing to access funding from the Reform and Growth Facility and advance its EU integration process.

The Reform Agenda identifies a set of priority reform areas that correspond closely with the broader objectives of the EU Growth Plan. These reforms focus on improving the functioning of public institutions, strengthening economic competitiveness, enhancing human capital development, and accelerating the green and digital transitions.

One of the central priorities of the Reform Agenda is public administration reform, aimed at improving the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of public institutions. Strengthening institutional capacity is considered essential for ensuring effective governance, improving service delivery, and supporting the implementation of broader economic reforms.

Another key priority concerns economic development and private sector competitiveness. The agenda includes measures designed to improve the business environment, attract investment, and support the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. These reforms are expected to stimulate job creation and increase productivity across the economy.

The Reform Agenda also places emphasis on human capital development, including reforms in education, vocational training, and labour market policies. These measures aim to improve the skills of the workforce, increase labour market participation, and address structural challenges such as youth unemployment and skills mismatches.

In addition, Kosovo's Reform Agenda includes reforms related to digital transformation and green transition, reflecting the broader EU policy priorities. These reforms aim to modernise infrastructure, improve digital governance, and support the transition toward a more sustainable and environmentally responsible economy.

While the Reform Agenda includes several reforms that may indirectly contribute to gender equality, particularly in areas such as labour market participation, social protection, and education, gender considerations are not consistently integrated across all reform areas. Research analysing Reform Agendas across the Western Balkans indicates that gender-sensitive reforms tend to be concentrated primarily within policy areas related to fundamental rights and human capital. Other sectors, such as private sector development and economic governance, often overlook gender disparities.

4.3 Expected Economic and Institutional Impact

The implementation of the EU Growth Plan and Kosovo's Reform Agenda is expected to have significant economic and institutional implications for the country and the wider Western Balkan region.

From an economic perspective, the reforms aim to support structural transformation and accelerated economic growth. By improving the business environment, strengthening institutional governance, and investing in digital and green transitions, the Growth Plan seeks to enhance productivity and stimulate

private sector development. These reforms are also expected to contribute to job creation and improved economic opportunities, particularly for young people.

Another important objective is economic convergence with the European Union. Through increased integration with the EU Single Market and improved regulatory alignment, Western Balkan economies are expected to gradually become more integrated into European value chains. This process may facilitate increased trade, investment flows, and economic cooperation between the region and EU member states.

Institutionally, the Growth Plan is designed to strengthen governance structures and administrative capacity in the Western Balkans. By linking financial assistance to concrete reform milestones, the Reform and Growth Facility encourages governments to implement reforms in areas such as rule of law, public administration, public financial management, and anti-corruption measures.

Finally, the Growth Plan supports the gradual integration of Western Balkan countries into the EU's economic and institutional framework even before formal membership. By aligning national legislation, policies, and economic structures with EU standards, the reform process aims to prepare countries such as Kosovo for eventual participation in the EU Single Market and for full membership in the European Union.

In this sense, the Growth Plan represents not only a financial instrument but also a broader policy framework for accelerating the European integration and economic transformation of the Western Balkans.

5. GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE REFORM AGENDA

This chapter presents a gender analysis of Kosovo's Reform Agenda within the framework of the EU Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans. The analysis examines how the structural reforms foreseen in the Reform Agenda address gender equality considerations and whether they contribute to reducing structural economic and institutional inequalities between women and men.

The analysis is structured according to the main reform areas of the Reform Agenda and is guided by gender-sensitive indicators developed to monitor the integration of gender perspectives in policy design, legislation, and institutional reforms. These indicators assess whether the reforms incorporate gender equality considerations and whether they contribute to improving women's participation in economic activity, decision-making processes, and access to public services.

The indicators used in this analysis were developed in the framework of technical assistance provided to Kosovo institutions on gender mainstreaming in the Reform Agenda. The document was prepared in accordance with the objectives of the technical assistance defined by the Agency for Gender Equality and other public institutions participating in the Gender Equality Facility (GEF) project, funded by the European Commission and implemented by the UN Women Office in Pristina.

The chapter, therefore, analyses the Reform Agenda through five main thematic areas that are particularly relevant for gender equality outcomes: labour market participation and the care economy, entrepreneurship and access to finance, digital transformation and structural economic change, and governance reforms.

5.1 Public Administration & Public Finance

This section analyses the gender-sensitive indicators related to the Reform Agenda measures in Public Administration and Public Finance. The focus of the analysis is on how the indicators measure the integration of gender equality considerations within key institutional reforms and whether the implementation of these reforms contributes to improving women's participation in public institutions and economic processes.

The first gender-sensitive indicator, Indicator 1.1.1.1, is linked to the reform measure aimed at strengthening administrative capacities in public administration by filling vacancies through regular recruitment procedures and reducing the number of acting positions. The indicator focuses specifically on increasing women's participation and representation in public administration by 30% through the implementation of merit-based recruitment and affirmative action measures. The purpose of this indicator is to assess whether recruitment and staffing reforms in public administration create more equal opportunities for women to access employment and leadership positions within public institutions. In practical terms, the indicator evaluates the extent to which women benefit from newly opened positions in the public administration and whether gender-balanced recruitment practices are applied.

The assessment of this indicator relies on administrative data and is carried out through several steps. First, it examines the number of women compared to men who are recruited into newly opened vacancies. Second, it evaluates the proportion of women appointed to decision-making positions within public institutions. Finally, it assesses the overall number of women recruited to leadership or decision-making roles in sectors where women are traditionally underrepresented. The baseline for measuring progress is the gender composition of public administration employment by the end of 2023. Through these criteria, the indicator provides a concrete way to measure whether reforms in public administration contribute to improving gender balance in the public sector.

The second gender-sensitive indicator, Indicator 1.2.1.1, is associated with the reform measure aimed at completing the legal and institutional framework for the public procurement system in line with the EU acquis and European standards. This indicator evaluates whether Kosovo's public procurement legislation incorporates the principles of gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP). The

objective of the indicator is to ensure that the public procurement framework promotes equal access to public contracts and supports the participation of women and women-led businesses in public economic opportunities.

The indicator assesses whether gender considerations are integrated throughout the entire procurement cycle, including the pre-tender, tender, and post-tender phases. During the pre-tender phase, the assessment examines whether contracting authorities consider the potential gender impact of procurement decisions, include gender aspects in the definition of the contract, and design procurement procedures that facilitate participation of women-owned businesses and social enterprises. During the tender phase, the indicator evaluates whether gender equality considerations are reflected in the technical specifications, eligibility criteria, and evaluation procedures applied to bidders. This may include excluding bidders who fail to comply with equality obligations or encouraging bidders to demonstrate commitments to gender equality standards.



In the post-tender phase, the indicator focuses on the implementation and monitoring of gender equality commitments during contract execution. This includes whether contracts contain provisions requiring gender equality measures, whether subcontractors are required to comply with gender equality clauses, and whether contracting authorities collect gender-disaggregated data and monitor compliance with gender-responsive procurement requirements. Through this approach, the indicator seeks to ensure that public procurement is not only a financial and administrative process but also a policy tool that promotes inclusive economic participation and gender equality.

Overall, the indicators in this reform area aim to ensure that institutional reforms in public administration and public finance are implemented in a way that strengthens gender equality. By monitoring women's representation in public administration and the integration of gender-responsive principles in public procurement, these indicators provide measurable benchmarks for assessing the gender impact of governance reforms within the Reform Agenda.

5.2 Digitalisation & Green Transition

This section analyses the gender-sensitive indicators linked to the Reform Agenda measures under the policy area of Digitalisation and Green Transition. The focus of the analysis is on how gender equality considerations are integrated into regulatory frameworks related to digital public services, energy reforms, and climate policies. The indicators in this section aim to ensure that the digital and green transition processes do not reproduce existing inequalities but instead contribute to more inclusive and equitable development outcomes.

The first gender-sensitive indicator, Indicator 2.1.1.1, is linked to the reform measure aimed at ensuring user-friendly digital public service delivery through the reduction of administrative burdens and the increased availability and quality of online public services. The indicator specifically examines the extent to which gender impact assessments are incorporated into the regulatory impact assessment process, particularly when reviewing laws that may create administrative burdens for citizens or businesses.

The purpose of this indicator is to ensure that the development of new legislation and regulatory frameworks considers potential gender-related impacts. This means that when draft laws are prepared or adopted, institutions must assess whether these laws could create different administrative burdens or unintended discriminatory effects for women and men. The indicator therefore measures the number of draft laws that undergo both administrative burden assessment and gender impact assessment, as well as whether identified negative gender impacts are addressed during the legislative process. By embedding gender considerations in the regulatory review process, the indicator aims to ensure that digitalisation reforms contribute to more accessible and inclusive public services for all citizens.

The second set of indicators relates to Measure 2.3.1 – Transposition and implementation of the Clean Energy Package, which focuses on aligning Kosovo’s energy legislation with the EU acquis. Within this reform area, Indicator 2.3.1.1 evaluates whether the proposed and adopted regulatory frameworks governing energy and electricity incorporate gender impact assessments and gender equality objectives. The objective of this indicator is to ensure that the development of energy legislation considers the different ways in which energy policies may affect women and men, as well as other socially vulnerable groups.

The indicator measures the number of regulatory frameworks that have undergone a gender impact assessment and evaluates whether gender equality objectives are reflected in the final legislation. It also assesses the extent to which public consultations and expert recommendations—particularly those from the Agency for Gender Equality, gender experts, and civil society organisations—are incorporated into the legislative process. Through this approach, the indicator promotes the development of energy policies that are inclusive and responsive to diverse social needs, particularly in relation to energy access and energy poverty.

A related indicator, Indicator 2.3.1.2, focuses on the definition and policy treatment of vulnerable energy consumers. This indicator assesses whether the legal definition of vulnerability and the schemes designed to support vulnerable consumers consider intersectional gender-based vulnerabilities. In practice, this involves recognising that vulnerability in the energy sector may be shaped by multiple factors, including gender, age, disability, income level, geographical location, and social status. The indicator, therefore, examines whether energy support schemes address these intersecting forms of vulnerability and whether beneficiaries of such schemes are monitored through gender-disaggregated data, including information on the gender of household heads, income status, and geographic location.

■ The third reform measure analysed in this section is Measure 2.4.1 – Implementation of climate and energy actions in line with the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP). The corresponding gender-sensitive indicators aim to ensure that climate and energy policies are developed in a way that is responsive to gender equality objectives and inclusive of the needs of different groups within society.

The first indicator in this area, Indicator 2.4.1.1, assesses whether the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) has undergone a comprehensive gender impact assessment and whether the plan includes gender-responsive policies. The purpose of this indicator is to ensure that climate and energy strategies consider the different ways in which energy use, energy poverty, and climate policies may affect women and men. Rather than focusing only on technical or economic aspects of energy transition, the indicator encourages policymakers to consider broader social dimensions such as household energy consumption patterns, labour market participation in the energy sector, and the distributional effects of climate policies.

The second indicator, Indicator 2.4.1.2, focuses on the adoption of a gender-responsive Just Transition Roadmap. This indicator evaluates whether the policy framework guiding the transition toward a low-carbon economy includes gender-sensitive indicators and considers issues such as economic diversification, workforce development, and social inclusion. The aim is to ensure that the transition to sustainable energy systems does not disproportionately affect certain groups but instead promotes equitable opportunities, particularly for women and other vulnerable populations.

Taken together, the indicators under the Digitalisation and Green Transition pillar aim to ensure that regulatory reforms in digital governance, energy policy, and climate action integrate gender equality considerations at every stage of policy design and implementation. By requiring gender impact assessments, inclusive policy frameworks, and gender-disaggregated monitoring mechanisms, these indicators provide an important mechanism for evaluating whether Kosovo's digital and green transition reforms contribute to more equitable and inclusive development outcomes.

5.3 Business Environment, SMEs & Finance

This section examines the gender-sensitive indicators related to reforms aimed at improving the business environment, supporting SMEs and innovation, strengthening the governance of publicly owned enterprises, and enhancing financial inclusion. The indicators focus on how gender equality considerations are integrated into legislation, institutional governance, and financial sector reforms. The objective is to ensure that economic development policies contribute to inclusive growth and equal economic participation of women and men.

The first indicator analysed under this policy area is Indicator 3.1.2.1, which relates to the adoption of the Law on Innovation and Entrepreneurship. The purpose of this indicator is to assess whether the new legislative framework governing innovation ecosystems reflects and fulfils the objectives of gender equality. In practice, this means evaluating whether the law goes beyond formal anti-discrimination provisions and introduces specific measures designed to address structural barriers faced by women entrepreneurs. Such measures may include improved access to finance, targeted support for women-led start-ups, enhanced participation in professional networks, and the introduction of gender-responsive funding mechanisms within innovation programmes and incubators.

To assess the fulfilment of this indicator, the legislation must undergo a gender impact assessment. The assessment examines whether the draft law identifies existing gender inequalities in entrepreneurship and whether evidence-based recommendations for addressing these inequalities are incorporated into the final legal framework. The indicator therefore measures both the existence of the gender impact assessment and the extent to which its recommendations are reflected in the adopted law.

A related indicator under the same reform measure is Indicator 3.1.2.2, which focuses on gender representation in decision-making structures governing the innovation ecosystem. Specifically, it requires that at least 40% of the members of the National Innovation Council be women. This target aligns with Kosovo's legal framework on gender equality, which promotes balanced participation of women and men in public decision-making bodies. The indicator measures the gender composition of the council and evaluates whether institutional governance structures responsible for innovation policy reflect the principle of equal representation.

The second reform measure examined in this section concerns the governance of Publicly Owned Enterprises (POEs). Under Indicator 3.1.5.1, gender equality is incorporated into corporate governance through the requirement of gender-balanced representation on corporate boards and in managerial positions. Specifically, the indicator establishes two benchmarks: at least 30% female representation on corporate boards of directors and at least 40% female representation in decision-making positions within publicly owned enterprises.

The purpose of this indicator is to measure the extent to which women are represented in leadership and governance roles within state-owned companies. The assessment involves calculating the total number of publicly owned enterprises, the number of board seats across those enterprises, and the proportion of those seats occupied by women compared to men. In addition, the indicator requires analysis of the gender composition of managerial and decision-making positions within these enterprises. By introducing measurable targets for women's representation in corporate governance, the indicator aims to promote more inclusive leadership structures and strengthen gender equality in the public economic sector.

The final reform measure addressed in this section relates to financial inclusion and access to finance, particularly through reforms concerning microfinance institutions and non-bank financial institutions. The corresponding gender-sensitive indicator, Indicator 3.2.1.1, evaluates the number and proportion of legislative measures in the financial services sector that incorporate gender mainstreaming.

The objective of this indicator is to assess how effectively gender considerations are integrated into the regulatory framework governing financial institutions and financial services. This involves examining whether financial sector legislation undergoes gender impact assessments and whether recommendations from gender experts, the Agency for Gender Equality, and civil society organisations are incorporated into the regulatory framework. The indicator also evaluates the level of public consultation during the legislative process and whether the final legislation reflects gender-responsive approaches aimed at improving women's access to financial services.

By analysing these elements, the indicator provides insight into the degree to which financial sector reforms contribute to gender-inclusive economic development. Improved access to financial services, credit, and investment opportunities is essential for supporting women entrepreneurs, strengthening women-owned businesses, and reducing structural inequalities in economic participation.

Overall, the indicators within the Business Environment, SMEs and Finance pillar highlight the importance of integrating gender equality considerations into economic governance, innovation policy, corporate leadership, and financial regulation. Through gender impact assessments, representation targets, and gender-mainstreamed financial legislation, these indicators provide a framework for ensuring that economic reforms contribute to more equitable opportunities and outcomes for women and men in Kosovo's economy.

5.4 Education & Labour Market

This section examines the gender-sensitive indicators related to reforms in the education system and labour market policies. These indicators focus on the extent to which education reforms integrate gender equality considerations and

contribute to addressing structural inequalities in labour market participation, particularly those affecting women. The indicators emphasise early childhood education, vocational education and training (VET), and the alignment between education systems and labour market needs.

The first reform measure analysed in this section is Measure 4.1.2, which aims to increase enrolment in early childhood education and improve the quality of care systems and services. This measure is closely linked to broader socio-economic objectives, particularly the facilitation of women's participation in the labour market. Expanding access to early childhood education and care reduces the burden of unpaid care work, which disproportionately affects women, thereby enabling greater participation in employment and economic activities.

The first gender-sensitive indicator under this measure, Indicator 4.1.2.1, evaluates whether the quality assurance framework for early childhood education and care (ECEC) is free from gender bias and incorporates gender-responsive teaching methods. The purpose of this indicator is to ensure that early education systems promote inclusive learning environments that challenge gender stereotypes and support equal development opportunities for both girls and boys.

Assessment of this indicator involves examining several aspects of the educational framework. These include reviewing educational materials and textbooks to ensure that they avoid gender stereotypes and reflect diverse social experiences. It also includes evaluating whether teacher training programmes incorporate gender-responsive teaching methodologies and whether early childhood institutions actively implement such practices. In addition, the indicator considers the number of trainings delivered to teachers on gender-responsive teaching methods and the number of institutions that have adopted these approaches in practice. Through these mechanisms, the indicator seeks to address gender inequalities at an early stage of educational development and contribute to more inclusive educational environments.

A second indicator under the same measure, Indicator 4.1.2.2, focuses on enrolment rates of children aged 0–2 in early childhood education. The target established under this indicator is that at least 8% of children in this age group should be enrolled in pre-primary education. However, the indicator does not only measure overall participation levels; it also requires that enrolment data be disaggregated by several socio-demographic variables, including sex, rural

or urban location, disability status, ethnicity, and household socio-economic conditions.

The purpose of this approach is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of participation patterns and identify structural barriers that may affect access to early childhood education. By analysing enrolment rates across different demographic groups, policymakers can better identify inequalities in access and design targeted interventions to improve inclusion. This indicator therefore serves as a key tool for monitoring whether early childhood education policies contribute both to equal educational opportunities for children and to broader gender equality outcomes in society.



The second reform measure examined in this section is Measure 4.2.2, which focuses on aligning the education system with labour market needs through reforms in vocational education and training (VET) and adult education. The reform aims to strengthen cooperation between educational institutions and the business community, revise the legal framework governing VET and adult education, and expand work-based learning opportunities in vocational schools.

The corresponding gender-sensitive indicator, Indicator 4.2.2.1, assesses whether the regulatory framework governing vocational education and training integrates gender equality objectives and whether it has undergone a gender impact assessment during the legislative process. The purpose of this indicator is to ensure that vocational education policies promote equal access to training opportunities for both women and men and address gender-based segregation across different occupational sectors.

Evaluation of this indicator includes assessing the number of adopted VET and adult education regulatory frameworks that have undergone gender impact assessments and examining whether the resulting recommendations are reflected in the final legislation. The indicator also considers the extent to which public consultations include the participation of gender equality institutions, such as the Agency for Gender Equality, as well as gender experts and civil society organisations. Through this process, the indicator promotes the integration of gender mainstreaming principles into education and labour market policies, ensuring that reforms in vocational education contribute to more inclusive

labour market participation and reduced gender disparities in employment opportunities.

Overall, the indicators within the Education and Labour Market pillar highlight the importance of integrating gender equality considerations into both education policy and workforce development strategies. By addressing gender bias in early childhood education, monitoring participation patterns across demographic groups, and embedding gender equality objectives in vocational education reforms, these indicators aim to ensure that education and labour market policies contribute to long-term gender equality and inclusive economic participation in Kosovo.

5.5 Governance & Democracy

This section examines the gender-sensitive indicator related to democratic governance and parliamentary oversight, focusing on how legislative institutions integrate gender equality considerations within their internal structures and decision-making processes. The indicator linked to this reform area assesses the extent to which parliamentary procedures and institutional mechanisms promote gender mainstreaming in legislative work, oversight activities, and public policy scrutiny.

The relevant reform measure within the Reform Agenda is Measure 5.5.1, which aims to improve the performance of the Assembly in law-making and oversight through improved planning, internal management, and institutional development. Strengthening parliamentary capacities is considered an important component of democratic governance and institutional accountability. Enhancing the Assembly's effectiveness contributes to improved scrutiny of government policies, stronger legislative processes, and more transparent decision-making within democratic institutions.

Within this reform context, Indicator 5.5.1.1 focuses specifically on the integration of gender equality considerations within parliamentary procedures and oversight mechanisms. The indicator evaluates whether the Assembly systematically incorporates gender perspectives into legislative processes, including law-making, parliamentary debates, committee work, and policy review functions.

A central aspect of this indicator is assessing whether parliamentary committees and internal procedures include mechanisms to review legislation from a gender equality perspective. This involves analysing whether gender impact assessments are conducted during legislative drafting and whether gender equality institutions or experts are consulted during parliamentary deliberations. The indicator also examines whether parliamentary committees responsible for gender equality issues are actively involved in reviewing proposed legislation and monitoring government policies related to gender equality.

Another important component of the indicator concerns the institutional capacities of the Assembly to implement gender mainstreaming practices. This includes evaluating whether parliamentary staff receive training on gender equality principles, whether gender-sensitive analytical tools are used during legislative review, and whether the Assembly systematically collects and uses gender-disaggregated information when exercising its oversight role.

The indicator also emphasises the role of parliamentary oversight in monitoring the implementation of policies addressing gender equality and women's rights. Through hearings, reports, and oversight mechanisms, the Assembly can assess whether government reforms effectively address gender disparities and ensure that national policies align with gender equality objectives.

Overall, the indicator under the Governance and Democracy pillar highlights the importance of embedding gender equality considerations within democratic institutions. By strengthening parliamentary capacities to analyse legislation and policies through a gender perspective, the Reform Agenda aims to ensure that governance reforms contribute to more inclusive democratic processes, improved accountability, and stronger protection of gender equality principles in public policymaking.

6. KEY FINDINGS: GAPS, RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

This chapter synthesizes the main findings emerging from the gender analysis of Kosovo's Reform Agenda within the framework of the EU Growth Plan. The analysis highlights several structural gender gaps within the design of the Reform Agenda, identifies potential risks that could deepen existing gender inequalities if reforms are implemented without gender-sensitive approaches, and outlines opportunities for strengthening gender-responsive reform implementation.

The findings draw primarily from the analysis of gender-sensitive indicators across the main reform areas of the agenda, including public administration reform, digitalisation and green transition, private sector development, education and labour market reforms, and democratic governance. While some reform areas incorporate gender-sensitive indicators and policy mechanisms, the overall integration of gender equality considerations remains uneven across sectors.

6.1 Gender gaps in the Reform Agenda

The analysis reveals that gender equality considerations are incorporated only selectively within Kosovo's Reform Agenda. Although several gender-sensitive indicators have been developed to monitor reforms, their distribution across policy sectors is uneven and, in many cases, limited to procedural aspects of policy design rather than substantive gender equality outcomes.

One of the most visible gaps relates to the limited integration of gender perspectives in economic and structural reforms, particularly those related to private sector development, investment promotion, and industrial policy. While some measures address entrepreneurship and access to finance, gender-sensitive indicators often focus on legislative procedures or representation targets rather than concrete mechanisms aimed at increasing women's participation in economic activity. As a result, reforms intended to stimulate economic growth may not sufficiently address the structural barriers that women entrepreneurs

face, including limited access to capital, business networks, and market opportunities.

Another significant gap concerns the lack of systematic gender impact assessment across all reform areas. Several indicators require gender impact assessments during legislative processes, particularly in sectors such as energy policy, digital governance, and financial regulation. However, these requirements are not consistently applied across the entire reform framework. In practice, this means that many policy initiatives within the Reform Agenda may proceed without a structured evaluation of how reforms could affect women and men differently.

The analysis also identifies gaps in the availability and use of gender-disaggregated data for monitoring reform outcomes. Although some indicators require data disaggregated by gender and other socio-demographic variables, such data are not consistently integrated into monitoring frameworks. Without systematic gender-disaggregated data collection, it becomes difficult to assess whether reforms effectively reduce gender inequalities or whether existing disparities persist.

A further gap concerns the limited integration of gender equality within governance and institutional accountability mechanisms. While the Reform Agenda includes indicators related to women's representation in decision-making structures, such as public administration, innovation governance bodies, and publicly owned enterprises, these indicators focus primarily on numerical representation. Broader institutional reforms related to governance, regulatory frameworks, and economic policy coordination often do not explicitly address gender equality considerations.

Finally, the analysis highlights the limited recognition of the care economy within the reform framework. While reforms related to early childhood education and care indirectly support women's labour market participation, broader policies addressing unpaid care work, work-life balance, and care infrastructure are not systematically integrated across economic and labour market reforms. Given that unequal distribution of unpaid care responsibilities remains one of the main structural barriers to women's employment in Kosovo, this represents an important policy gap.

6.2 Risks of deepening inequalities

If implemented without strong gender mainstreaming mechanisms, several reforms within the Reform Agenda carry the risk of reinforcing existing socio-economic inequalities between women and men.

One important risk relates to labour market participation and structural employment inequalities. Women's labour market participation in Kosovo remains significantly lower than that of men, and women are disproportionately represented in informal employment, unpaid family work, and low-paid sectors. Without targeted gender-sensitive labour market policies, broader economic reforms aimed at stimulating private sector growth may disproportionately benefit sectors and occupations where men are already overrepresented.

A second risk concerns the digital transition and technological transformation of the economy. While digitalisation offers important opportunities for economic innovation and improved public services, women remain underrepresented in ICT-related education and employment. If digital transformation policies do not actively address gender gaps in digital skills, access to technology, and participation in the digital economy, they may inadvertently widen existing inequalities in employment and economic participation.

Similar risks exist within the green transition and energy policy reforms. Energy and climate policies often focus primarily on technological and environmental objectives, while the social implications of these transitions may receive less attention. However, energy poverty, energy affordability, and access to sustainable energy services may affect women and men differently due to differences in income levels, household responsibilities, and employment patterns. Without gender-sensitive policy design, green transition reforms may overlook these differential impacts.

Another potential risk relates to access to finance and entrepreneurship opportunities. Although reforms in the financial sector aim to strengthen financial inclusion, women entrepreneurs continue to face structural barriers in accessing credit, investment capital, and financial services. If financial sector reforms do not actively address gender disparities in financial access, women-led enterprises may remain underrepresented in economic development initiatives and innovation ecosystems.

Finally, there is a broader institutional risk that gender equality may remain treated as a peripheral issue rather than a core dimension of economic reform policy. If gender considerations are addressed primarily through isolated indicators rather than integrated into the overall reform architecture, the transformative potential of the Reform Agenda for advancing gender equality may remain limited.

6.3 Opportunities for gender-responsive reform

Despite these challenges, the Reform Agenda also provides several important opportunities to strengthen gender-responsive policy development and implementation.

One key opportunity lies in the use of gender-sensitive indicators as tools for policy monitoring and accountability. The existence of such indicators creates an institutional framework for tracking progress on gender equality across different policy sectors. If systematically implemented and supported by adequate data collection, these indicators can help policymakers assess whether reforms contribute to reducing gender disparities.

Another opportunity emerges from reforms related to public procurement and public sector governance. Gender-responsive public procurement mechanisms have the potential to expand economic opportunities for women-owned businesses by ensuring more inclusive access to public contracts. Similarly, representation targets within public administration, innovation governance bodies, and publicly owned enterprises can contribute to increasing women's participation in leadership and decision-making positions.

The digital transition also offers opportunities for promoting gender-inclusive economic participation. Digital public services can reduce administrative barriers for women entrepreneurs, facilitate access to public information and services, and create new forms of economic activity such as digital entrepreneurship and remote work opportunities. With appropriate policy support, digital transformation could therefore contribute to expanding women's participation in the economy.

Reforms in education and vocational training systems also represent an important opportunity to address gender segregation in the labour market. By integrating gender equality considerations into vocational education policies and training programmes, Kosovo can promote more balanced participation of women and

men across different sectors, including those traditionally dominated by one gender.



Finally, the broader framework of the EU Growth Plan and the Reform and Growth Facility provide an opportunity to strengthen gender mainstreaming within the EU accession process. By linking financial support to measurable reform outcomes, the Growth Plan creates incentives for governments to integrate gender equality considerations into policy implementation. If gender perspectives are systematically incorporated into monitoring mechanisms, funding priorities, and policy evaluation frameworks, the Growth Plan could contribute to more inclusive and equitable economic transformation.

Overall, the findings suggest that while Kosovo's Reform Agenda includes several promising mechanisms for integrating gender equality considerations, significant gaps remain in the systematic integration of gender perspectives across economic and institutional reforms. Addressing these gaps will be essential to ensure that the implementation of the Reform Agenda contributes not only to economic growth and EU integration but also to more inclusive and equitable development outcomes.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the gender analysis, this chapter outlines key policy recommendations aimed at strengthening the integration of gender equality considerations within the implementation of Kosovo's Reform Agenda under the EU Growth Plan. The recommendations are directed toward three main groups of actors: Kosovo's national institutions, the European Union, and civil society organizations. Strengthening cooperation among these actors is essential for ensuring that economic and institutional reforms contribute to inclusive and equitable development outcomes.

7.1 For Kosovo institutions

Kosovo's institutions should strengthen the systematic integration of gender equality considerations across all stages of the Reform Agenda implementation. Gender impact assessments should be conducted for all major legislative and policy reforms related to the Growth Plan, particularly in areas such as economic development, digital transformation, energy policy, and financial sector reforms. This would help ensure that reforms do not unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities.

Institutional monitoring mechanisms should also incorporate gender-disaggregated data collection across all relevant policy areas. Regular reporting on reform implementation should include indicators that measure how reforms affect women and men differently, particularly in areas such as employment, entrepreneurship, access to finance, and participation in decision-making.

Kosovo's institutions should further strengthen women's representation in leadership and decision-making positions across public administration, publicly owned enterprises, and governance structures related to innovation and economic development. Ensuring balanced participation in these structures can contribute to more inclusive policy design and oversight.

Finally, policies addressing childcare, early childhood education, and the care economy should be further strengthened, as expanding access to care services remains essential for increasing women's labour market participation and economic inclusion.

7.2 For the European Union

The European Union should continue to promote gender equality as a core component of the EU accession and reform processes in the Western Balkans. Within the framework of the EU Growth Plan and the Reform and Growth Facility, the EU could strengthen the integration of gender perspectives in reform monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Gender equality indicators should be systematically included in the monitoring of reform milestones and progress reports. This would help ensure that economic reforms supported by EU funding also contribute to reducing gender disparities.

The EU could also support targeted programmes that promote women's economic empowerment, including initiatives aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs, strengthening women's participation in innovation ecosystems, and improving women's access to finance and digital skills.

Finally, continued support for gender mainstreaming initiatives and institutional capacity-building in Kosovo would help strengthen the ability of national institutions to integrate gender equality considerations into policy design and reform implementation.

7.3 For civil society

Civil society organizations play an important role in monitoring reform processes and promoting accountability in the implementation of the Reform Agenda. Women's organizations and research institutions can contribute by providing independent analysis of how reforms affect gender equality outcomes.

Civil society actors should continue to engage in policy consultations related to the implementation of the Growth Plan and advocate for stronger integration of gender perspectives in economic and governance reforms. Their involvement can help ensure that the experiences and needs of women and marginalized groups are reflected in policy discussions.

In addition, civil society organizations can contribute to strengthening public awareness regarding gender equality in economic development and EU integration processes. Through research, advocacy, and public dialogue, they can support the development of more inclusive policy approaches and promote broader societal understanding of the importance of gender equality for sustainable development.

8. CONCLUSION

Kosovo's Reform Agenda under the EU Growth Plan represents an important framework for advancing economic transformation, institutional strengthening, and progress toward European Union integration. The reforms outlined in the agenda address key areas such as public administration, digital transformation, energy transition, private sector development, education, and labour market policies. Together, these reforms are expected to contribute to improved governance, stronger economic competitiveness, and closer alignment with EU standards.

The gender analysis conducted in this study shows that while some elements of the Reform Agenda incorporate gender-sensitive indicators, the integration of gender equality considerations remains uneven across policy sectors. In several areas, particularly economic governance, private sector development, and financial sector reforms, gender perspectives are not systematically embedded in policy design or monitoring mechanisms. As a result, there is a risk that reforms focused primarily on economic growth and structural transformation may overlook the structural barriers that continue to limit women's economic participation.

At the same time, the Reform Agenda also provides important opportunities for advancing gender equality. The inclusion of gender-sensitive indicators in several reform areas, the development of gender-responsive governance mechanisms, and the broader EU policy framework supporting gender equality create a foundation for strengthening gender mainstreaming in the implementation of reforms. If these mechanisms are applied consistently and supported by adequate data, institutional commitment, and policy coordination, the Reform Agenda could contribute to reducing gender inequalities and expanding women's participation in economic and public life.

Integrating gender perspectives into economic reform processes is not only a matter of social justice but also a prerequisite for sustainable development and

effective EU integration. Ensuring that women and men benefit equally from economic transformation strengthens labour markets, improves economic productivity, and contributes to more resilient institutions.

For Kosovo, embedding gender equality more systematically within the implementation of the Reform Agenda will be essential for ensuring that the benefits of the EU Growth Plan are distributed more equitably across society. Strengthening gender-responsive policymaking, improving institutional accountability, and supporting inclusive economic opportunities will help ensure that Kosovo's path toward European integration also advances substantive gender equality and inclusive development

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