



Kosovo Women's Initiative 2001-2002

Mission

A programme funded by the U.S. Government, the Kosovo Women's Initiative (KWI) builds on the resources and talents of women, of all ethnicities, in order to help improve the quality of life for women in Kosovo.

KWI Women's Councils Set-up in 2001

As one of the key objectives of the KWI programme is to empower the women of Kosovo, the ultimate aim is to eventually hand over the international administration of the Initiative to the women of Kosovo. Local Women's Councils were established during 2001 to ensure local ownership of the decision-making process regarding the use of the KWI grant funds. The process of handing the programme over to the local Councils will continue throughout 2002.

Six Local Women's Councils, each of about 15 members, have been established in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Prizren, Peje/Pec, Mitrovice/Mitrovica, Prishtine/Pristina Municipality and outer Prishtine/Pristina. Due to the division of the town of Mitrovice/Mitrovica into two areas controlled by different ethnic factions, the Council there consists of two Boards (North and South). In each Council there are from three to six minority representatives. All ethnic groups are represented: Serbs, Roma, Ashkalia, Egyptians, Bosniaks, Turks, and Albanians.

The councils meet regularly to discuss possible projects and how the available funds can be transferred to local women's group so that they may be best used to meet the needs of women in their areas. UNHCR co-ordinates the Board of Directors of the Local Women's Councils, providing advice and facilitating the integration process of the different ethnic groups. International NGOs working under the umbrella of the KWI help monitor the functioning of the Local Councils and programme management. International agencies have also provided technical training to local groups to strengthen their capacities in areas such as programme management.

KWI Promotes Inter-ethnic Dialogue

International efforts to promote inter-ethnic dialogue in Kosovo have received a boost through progress made by the KWI's Women's Councils. Under the KWI, UNHCR and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) have established a multi-ethnic Women's Council in Gjilan Municipality, comprised of Albanian, Serb, and Ashkaelia women. The Council seeks to implement projects that benefit women from all ethnic

communities in the area. In the divided city of Mitrovica - due to political, logistical, and security constraints - the KWI Council had to be split almost entirely along ethnic lines into two separate boards. The Northern Mitrovica Board is made up of Serbs and one Roma, and the Southern Mitrovica Board is made up of Albanians and one Bosniak.

During the second half of 2001, UNHCR and IRC managed to bring together the two Mitrovica Boards, along with the Gjilan/Gnjilane Council, for an exercise in reconciliation and peace-building. The women exchanged experiences and discussed ways in which KWI projects could help foster tolerance and improve the lives of women from all ethnic groups, who have been traumatized by developments in Kosovo over the past three to four years. The results were phenomenal, with all ethnically mixed working groups able to come to a consensus on how they can work together in 2002 to achieve their goals. The Mitrovica Boards decided to follow the positive example set by the Gjilan Council, and will work to form one united Council for the entire Municipality during the course of 2002. They will also work with KWI Councils set up in other areas in Kosovo, in order to share information and promote tolerance. One participant described the initiative best when she said that, "tolerance and reconciliation are being promoted through the most flexible party of society - women."

Goals and Objectives of the Local Women's Councils in 2002

Empowerment of women

The Councils will continue to promote initiatives and projects which allow women to increase their participation in all aspects of public life. For 2002 the Councils intend to work on the following objectives:

Education

The high rate of school drop out rates, particularly among adolescent girls, is a major concern. The promotion of education of girls will be a major activity.

Activities include:

- Development of scholarships for secondary and tertiary education
- Development of scholarships for vocational training

Decision-making Positions

The Councils will support women to become involved in decision-making positions at all levels and in a wide variety of areas in public life.

Activities include:

- Promote women's participation in boards of present local administrations
- Network with all stakeholders and local institutions

Women in the Economy

Given the high level of interest of local women's groups requesting KWI grants for income generating projects, continued promotion of the economic participation of women will be a key activity.

Activities include:

- Provision of grants for income generating activities
- Provision of technical assistance such as business training and access to small loans and microcredit
- Promotion of networking activities with business associations

Psychosocial Support and Advocacy

A major component of KWI has been support to women's groups which provide psychosocial counselling, legal advice, and other forms of related support. The Local Women's Councils wish to continue with this objective in 2002.

Activities include:

- Strengthen present activities supporting women's groups
- Advocacy for women's rights in all areas of public and private life

Reconciliation

The excellent working relationship established between different ethnic groups represented on the Councils has exceeded all expectations. All Councils have agreed on the importance of reaffirming their multiethnic vision and continuing the promotion of reconciliation.

Activities include:

- Ensuring the continued multiethnic composition of the Councils in 2002
- Strengthening interethnic relationships among Council members
- Promotion of tolerance building initiatives with local women's groups and increasing the number of ethnically-diverse projects
- Awareness raising activities among returnee communities about KWI projects and promotion of further community participation in them.

Capacity-building of the Council Members

The Council Members have requested more training in 2002, in order to enhance their skills and competencies and strengthen their self-confidence.

How Donors Can Help

The aim is to build the capacity of the Local Women's Councils to serve as a vehicle to channel donor funding allocated for women in Kosovo. The official registration of the Local Women's Councils as a foundation will prove the necessary basis for this. Donor funding for projects sponsored by the Women's Councils will help strengthen this unique, ethnically-diverse network, which directly targets women in a participatory manner and plays a critical role in the peace-building process.