Early Childhood Education and Care in Kosovo: A Targeted Educational Approach Producing and Maintaining Social and Gender Inequalities

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This article examines participation in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Kosovo based on a recent survey and administrative data. Kosovo's ECEC policy aims to provide education and care for children aged 0 to 6 through an approach consisting of highly targeted public services for more vulnerable social groups, while expecting the rest to rely on the market or the family. It also provides a universal, public (2.5 hours a day) school preparatory programme for children aged 5-6 years. Availability of ECEC services has been rising, but remains well below the levels of the countries in the region. New services are increasingly coming through a market-based provision which leaves large social groups such as low-income families, rural families, parents with lower educational status and other socio-economically disadvantaged parents worse off. Since ECEC is considered highly relevant for children's personal development and success in school, as well as for female participation in the labour market, the findings suggest that the current policy contributes towards cementing and furthering social and gender inequalities in the long run. In the absence of more comprehensive public services and other supportive family policy measures, Kosovo maintains a strong implicit familialistic policy with a weak potential to contribute to women's employment.

Key words: Kosovo, ECEC, defamilialisation, familialism, privatisation.

INTRODUCTION

Kosovo has experienced the most radical social policy breakaway from the self-management socialism's (1952-1989) legacy among the former Yugoslav entities since the 2000s, primarily due to the influence of international organisations. Following a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) intervention that ended the war (1998-1999) between the majority Kosovo Albanians and the Government of Yugoslavia (Serbia), a United Nations Mission (UNMIK) took over the administration of Kosovo for nearly nine years (June 1999

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to February 2008), while NATO provided military security through a peacekeeping mission (which continues to this day). UNMIK worked in close cooperation with other major international organisations, such as the European Union (EU), the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in setting a new social policy and legislation structure which was largely "protectorate engineered" (Deacon et al. 2007: 236). The EU was involved in key processes such as pension privatisation (see Gubbels et al. 207: 7) and has directly managed the privatisation of former social enterprises. Still, the WB and IMF were in particular the main driving and ideational agency in shaping what Cocozzelli (2007: 216) has described as "a caricature" of the residual, liberal welfare regime.

This pathbreaking new regime installed a narrow social protection floor of benefits and services financed through general taxation while expecting the rest of the welfare to be created in the market. It resembles Esping-Andersen's (1990) liberal regime and Titmuss's (1974) residualism in the fact that the state is effectively expected to encourage private market activity and to intervene only as a last resort correcting mechanism by targeting the market and family "failures". In terms of cash benefits, the narrow floor under UNMIK gradually installed a social assistance scheme for families in poverty, a basic pension for all older adults above 65 years, and benefits for working-age adults with permanent disability, children with disabilities, children under care from relatives or community, war veterans with disability and next-of-kin of the dead in war, and early retirement of miners – all tied to or in practice reflecting the value of a consumption poverty threshold calculated on the basis of the costs of a minimum basket of food per day. Social services have been marginal, largely concentrated on reaction to the family violence and human trafficking cases. Former self-management socialism's social insurance institutions such as Pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) pensions, unemployment and health insurance, child allowances and various in-kind benefits were entirely discontinued. Other welfare was expected to be created through the market, for example, through income from jobs, individual (private) pension savings, and private services (see Cocozzelli, 2007, 2009; Mustafa, 2019, 2020).

After Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, some relevant layering – a term used to describe institutional change by adding new layers to existing institutions (e.g., Mahoney and Thelen, 2010) – took place in the general tax-financed floor. Namely, some existing benefits were unequally differentiated, and new benefits were added to the general tax-financed floor, such as pensions for contributors of former PAYGO pensions (prior to 1989), compensations for former political prisoners (most of them being prisoners during the socialist period), pension supplements for former teachers of the Albanian parallel system during the 1990s[1], and benefits for war victims and veterans. Although this layering and other changes have had important implications for the total expenditure and policy goals in the short run, the foundations of the regime launched by the international organisations during UNMIK were maintained due to their strong influence over the local insti-

[1] When Kosovo's status as a Socialist Autonomous Province, granted in 1974 through constitutional reforms in Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SRFY), was annulled in 1989, majority ethnic Albanian population begun resisting the Belgrade's rule of Kosovo by organizing itself through a "parallel state" which, among other things, provided education, health and poverty relief throughout 1990s for the majority of the population. It was financed by voluntary taxation of the Albanian population in Kosovo and diaspora and its strongest segment was education. For a comprehensive discussion of the social policy dimension during the "parallel state" of 1990s, see Fred Cocozzelli's (2009) book *War and Social Welfare*.

tutions and the dominance of the ideologically right-wing orientated political parties during the past two decades (Mustafa, 2019, 2020). Both during UNMIK and since the declaration of independence, the Serbian ethnic community has been interacting with the tax-financed rights of Kosovo and the larger social insurance and labour-related rights offered by the Government of Serbia (see e.g. Cocozzelli, 2009; Mustafa, 2019).

Kosovo's family policy was shaped within the contours of this regime and context. Daly (2020: 37) defines family policy in a narrow sense as the policy "oriented towards the welfare of families with children" organised in the form of cash or tax benefits for children, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, and parental leaves from employment. Daly (2020: 32) further writes that "family policy serves two main functions: supporting/resourcing individuals/the collective unit and regulating family-related behaviours and relationships". This article examines the determinants of participation in ECEC services in Kosovo. Participation in ECEC services means participation in what Vandenbroeck et al. (2018:15) refer to as "centre-based provision" through creches, daycare centres, kindergartens or schools rather than home-based provision. Beyond filling a research gap, the article might be informative for regions under privatisation pressures and the broader literature as it can shed further light on ECEC use under the conditions of limited public commitment, increased privatisation and its interaction with employment approaches and levels.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE AND INEQUALITIES

ECEC is associated, among others, with social investment interests (quality education towards future highly skilled labour force), children-centred rights, and gender equality (e.g., Bonoli et al., 2017; Daly, 2020; Esping-Andersen, 2009; Palme and Heimer, 2019; Scheiwe and Willekens, 2009). Systematic reviews of empirical evidence suggest that ECEC has wide-reaching benefits for children in terms of their development and personal agency. These include the provision of an environment that helps children to have a favourable, better-prepared beginning of the school education, improved capacity to learn, familiarity with school procedures etc. (Burger, 2009). Although family conditions' impact cannot be entirely wiped out (Burger, 2009), ECEC is associated with equalising potential for children coming from the more disadvantaged socio-economic, minority, immigrant etc. backgrounds, compared to children from the better-off families. For example, children of disadvantaged backgrounds who attended quality ECEC have been found to have gained better learning capabilities during later school years, have increased interactional and emotional skills, as well as school attendance (Bakken et al. 2017).

Central dimensions in ECEC and participation in it are availability, accessibility and affordability parallel to quality and flexibility (see Yerkes and Javornik, 2018; Vandenbroeck, 2020). Despite the well-known benefits of ECEC, these services are underdeveloped in many countries on all the dimensions (cf. Eurydice, 2019). As Vandenbroeck (2020: 177) argues, there is a "global phenomenon" of unequal access to ECEC services for children coming from more vulnerable families. The inequalities in access have various origins and may be related to socioeconomic status, citizenship and minority positions (e.g., Roma and other minorities), rural and lower-income areas, families with children with disabilities, precarious employment of parents etc. Yet, they are also related to policy design. The empirical literature has found substantial support for the "Matthew Effect" thesis, which claims that due to inequalities in

access, ECEC services tend to primarily benefit the children of the more privileged classes (see e.g. Bonoli et al., 2017; Pavolini and Van Lancker, 2018).

The nations' overall welfare effort, the design of ECEC policies and the underlying welfare regimes seem to *matter* when it comes to ECEC availability and accessibility (e.g. Dobrotić and Blum, 2019; Esping-Andersen, 2009; Javornik, 2014; Leitner, 2003). When quality services are available, easily accessible in terms of eligibility criteria, and affordable, they tend to be used (see e.g. Abrassart and Bonoli, 2015; Moss and Deven, 2019; Javornik, 2014). Among advanced economies, the nations falling in more generous social-democratic oriented welfare regimes typically provide more comprehensive and universal public ECEC services (also provided as children's rights), while the liberal ones embrace market provision combined with means-tested approaches in relation to public provision (see Béland et al. 2014: 751). Drawing on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data for advanced economies, Bradshaw and Finch (2010: 469) pointed to higher ECEC enrolment rates among the high spending, universalism-oriented Nordic countries. Vandenbroeck (2020: 178) further argues that in the countries that apply such policies, which result in high enrolment rates, there are also lower inequalities in access to services since "universal rights-based policies are more effective in reaching vulnerable families than targeted policies".

One of the reasons why the targeted policies could be less effective may lie in the fact that means-tested, targeted poverty protection programmes tend to be associated with management shortcomings leading to exclusions and undercoverage. If ECEC rights are tied to them, such shortcomings are then translated into difficulties related to ECEC access. The shortcomings in managing means-tested programmes tend to be even more emphasised in developing countries due to the lower quality of government (e.g. Dadap-Cantal et al., 2021). Other forms of targeting within ECEC systems, that could be typically found in countries facing a lack of services and still prioritising dual-earners, are also faced with similar challenges – if enrolment criteria are concentrated on the employees, they tend to cause the "Matthew Effect" (Bonoli et.al. 2017; Krapf, 2014; Pavolini and Van Lancker, 2018). The other layers of care provision in such policy contexts are the market and the family. Market-based ECEC provision may be expected to provide more choices and control for participating parents (Mitchell, 2017) and has the capacity to rapidly increase ECEC availability, particularly when supported through public subsidies. This is especially the case in countries faced with urgent needs, that is, "ECEC latecomers" (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021: 75-76). Yet, privatisation of ECEC is found to have led to high care costs for families, overestimation of parents' ability to make informed and reasonable choices, lack of places in certain areas as services moved to more affluent and populated regions, class differentiations in enrolment, various impediments to quality resulting from budgetary limitations allocated to the staff for preparation hours, unexpected closures etc. (see Mitchell, 2017; Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021, Vandenbroeck, 2020). Therefore, both the public or private provision of ECEC (see Yerkes and Javornik, 2018) and the eligibility criteria attached to ECEC such as citizenship (and children's right to ECEC), parents' employment status, means-testing etc. (cf. Dobrotić and Blum, 2020), seem to be very important in shaping ECEC availability and accessibility.

Participation in ECEC, in addition to contributing to children's educational outcomes and children's rights, aims to maximise labour market supply (Bradshaw and Finch, 2010: 462). The more successful

ECEC policies correlate with labour market policies that increasingly embrace the "dual earner – dual carer" model. This model is also supported by individualised taxation, non-transferable and well-paid fathers' leave entitlements, eligibility criteria for parenting leave benefits that do not require very long prior employment history, leave expenditures financed through social insurance or general taxation rather than charged on employers, flexible leave policy for care in cases of children's illness etc. Such policies tend to improve (women's) employment outcomes (including career achievements) and degender parental child care and other responsibilities, and contribute to changes in gender-related norms (see Brandth and Kvande, 2018; Doucet and McKay, 2020; Ferragina, 2017, 2020; Ferrarini, 2006; Korpi et al. 2013). In contrast, policies that maintain family level taxation, long parenting leaves and other incentives for maternal-centred care in a context of expensive or unavailable ECEC services may have an adverse effect on women's employment (Dobrotić and Stropnik, 2020; Ferragina, 2020) and negative implications for fertility and child well-being (Bradshaw and Finch, 2010).

Based on education and work-care reconciliation goals, Scheiwe and Willekens (2009) argue that there have been two main models of ECEC in Europe – the education model and the work-care reconciliation model. In the education model, the states recognise the needs of children for pre-school education and provide it with universal means as rights of citizenship; while in the work-care reconciliation model the ECEC is targeted to the children of the working parents. However, they also point to a "targeted educational approach" which aims to provide education through means-tested public ECEC for the poor and market-based services for the rest of the population rather than through universal means. Here, "the guiding paradigm is separation, not universal education" (Scheiwe and Willekens, 2009: 17).

Another widely used approach to analyse ECEC and its outcomes in different countries is defamilialisation. The concept of defamialisation was coined by Lister (1997; see Ciccia and Sainsbury, 2018: 97): "to bring the attention to the importance of relations of dependence within the family, that is, individuals' dependence on care provided by family members and financial dependencies within the family". Leitner (2003) operationalised the concept by further contrasting defamilialising policies with familialistic policies. According to Leitner (2003: 358), defamilialising policies aim to "unburden family in its caring function" through public and market care provision, while familialistic policies oblige and enforce "the dependence of people in need of care on their family". Leitner (2003: 359) further differentiated between "implicit familialism", where policy implicitly relies on family to provide care since there are no alternatives, and "explicit familialism" where the policy strengthens the caring function of the family (e.g., via care benefits). In the context of ECEC, defamilialisation means that child care, traditionally provided full-time within the family, is partially transferred to external parties such as public or private care services. From this perspective, in the residual, liberal-oriented regimes, one may expect lower welfare effort in family policy and lower defamilialisation, but also more frequent targeting towards narrow social groups and higher defamilialisation through private child care services compared to the welfare regimes that offer more generous and universal public rights. Faced with limited services or expensive and poorly monitored (for quality) services in the market, many parents may seek implicit familialistic solutions provided within the family sphere, including the postponement of ECEC enrolment and childcare expenses (see e.g. Doucet and McKey, 2020: 256).

KOSOVO'S ECEC POLICY

Targeted public services and growing market provision

The pioneering ECEC services outside the family in Kosovo appeared during socialism and were meant to cover children of working parents according to the work-care reconciliation principle. In 1981, at the peak of self-management development, the ECEC participation rate was 1.8% of children aged 0-6; it increased to 3.3% by 1986 (ESK, 1987: 35-37 and 340). Thereafter, like the expansion of similar social rights, the ECEC's expansion was halted and eroded by the economic crisis of the 1980s in Eastern Europe and the subsequent Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s. After 1999, the principles of ECEC policy were modified. Since then, Kosovo has followed what Scheiwe and Willekens (2009) defined as the "targeted educational approach" – public centre-based services are targeted to very narrow social groups, while the rest of the services are implicitly expected to be provided in the increasingly growing private market or in the family. Recently, the policy has even begun to incentivise market provision more explicitly by subsidising community-based services.

The general legislation, namely the law on pre-school education adopted in 2006 (Article 4 a & b), grants all children the right to pre-school education on the principles of equality and universality (Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, 2006). However, Kosovo does not have capacities in place to implement universal pre-school education. By formal administrative order (sub-legislation which provides guidelines on implementation of the law), it targets the public ECEC services towards social assistance beneficiaries, children with disabilities, children placed under care of relatives or community due to the loss of biological parents or their care, children of (disabled) war veterans, and children of single working mothers (MEST, 2016). Low-income parents (living together in one family) are also targeted by more recent enrolment calls, however, they are ranked lower in priority scores than other target groups. Moreover, when both parents work, the families receive lower scores than families where one of the parents does not work (e.g., Prishtina Municipality, 2020a). These are the dominant rules followed by the municipalities, which manage the services, even though in some of the small municipalities where public ECEC services are appearing for the first time, the first competitions have targeted children of both employed parents (e.g., in Malisheva in competition opened in July 2018 or Hani i Elezit in competition opened in August 2020).

By late 2020, there were 44 licensed public creches, kindergartens and daycare centres for children aged 0-6, primarily covering the older age groups (KAS, 2020a). As physical buildings, many of them were inherited from socialism, and most are based in cities; eight of them were in the capital Prishtina (Prishtina Municipality, 2021). In addition, there is a school preparatory programme that is financed by general taxation and is provided for children aged 5-6. This programme is not mandatory and is usually conducted in public elementary school facilities for 2.5 hours a day (although facilities providing ECEC can also provide the preparatory programme). The programme was launched by national legislation in 2006 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, 2006).

The rest of the services are implicitly expected to be provided within the family or through the market. The market-based provision is rising fast: the licenced private providers grew by 80.6% within two years (see Table 1, Section C below). Enrolment criteria in the case of private provision usually involve the ability to pay the ECEC fee and the age of children. Providers may also offer their own transport for children.

More than half of the licensed private facilities were in Prishtina, and they generally appear in more developed cities. Recently, the policy has begun to encourage and subsidise different forms of market provision more explicitly. There were, for example, nine community-based centres opened in Prishtina (Prishtina Municipality, 2020b), with funds for the building being allocated by the municipality or foreign donors, while the community of the parents manages and finances the delivery of services. In these cases, the municipality subsidises ECEC fees based on parents' income levels up to a maximum of 50% of the market price (see e.g. Prishtina Municipality, 2019). In 2010, a public-private partnership (PPP) was also created in Prishtina, where the municipality finances up to 50% of the ECEC fees. However, this model was not repeated as it involved "too complicated procedures" for launching it (Farnsworth et al., 2016: 41). The Ministry of Education provides licences for ECEC facilities and approves their pedagogical plans – according to the MEST data, the plans of 90% of providers were approved during 2019/2020.

The public services do not charge ECEC fees for children from families on social assistance, children of disabled war veterans, children without (or with only one) living parents, and children with disabilities. Parents who are charged ECEC fees and have more than one child in the public ECEC facilities pay reduced fees for the second and the third child (e.g., Prishtina Municipality, 2020c). The fees charged for the rest of enrolled children are lower in public than in private services. For example, a 2021 survey with 150 parents (stratified sampling) conducted in Prishtina, Ferizaj and Prizren found out that participating families spent on average €77 in public ECEC and €120 in private ECEC services per month (UBT, 2021). Earlier available data show that in Prishtina the public ECEC services charged €50 per child, while private and public-private ones charged around €100 (e.g. Hyseni, 2013; Prishtina Municipality, 2016). Based on the latest available European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey for Kosovo, the median monthly family disposable income in 2018 was €422 (EU-SILC, 2018); that means expenditures for two children in private ECEC can range from 28.4% to 48.4% of the median family disposable income depending on the area of living and chosen centres.

The official administrative data include the school preparatory programme as part of the pre-school education enrolment statistics. In total, the administrative data showed that 18.3% of children aged 0-6 were enrolled in all ECEC services during the year 2019/2020 (Table 1 below, Section a). However, 95.3% of enrolled children aged 5-6 were in the school preparatory programme. The coverage rate of the programme in 2019/2020 was 73% (calculated based on the preschool population deriving from live births statistics). When the number of pupils in the first year of elementary school (KAS, 2020b) is taken as a proxy of the preschool population aged 5-6, the coverage rate goes up to 81%. Without the school preparatory programme, the ECEC enrolment rate in Kosovo in 2019/2020 was 6.7% (Table 1, Section b). The enrolment rate for children aged 3-6 (8.8%) was higher than the enrolment rate for children aged 0-3 (4.3%). Most of these children were enrolled in private ECEC facilities, where the growth of available places was evident (Table 1, Sections b, c).

Kosovo's official administrative data do not report ECEC enrolment rates in all Serbian-run ECEC facilities (at least 10 of them), which usually also follow the policy of the Government of Serbia (Petrović et al. 2016) and are therefore public facilities. Out of them, in 2016, five facilities were in Northern Kosovo, and if the enrolment rate in the elementary school is taken as a proxy of the preschool population (0-6 years), the

ECEC enrolment rate in the North would be around 60%. With these figures, the total approximate ECEC enrolment rate in Kosovo would increase to 7.7%, that is, to 19.3% when including the school preparatory programme (Table 1, Section d).

Table 1
ECEC enrolment rates based on administrative data

a. Enrolment during the pedagogical year 2019/2020 with the school preparatory programme				
All ECEC			Public ECEC	Private ECEC
0-6 years old		18.3%	14.3%	4.0%
3-6 years old		30.5%	25.3%	5.2%
0-3 years old		4.3%	1.7%	2.6%
b. Enrolment during the pedagogical year 2019/2020 without the school preparatory programme				
0-6 years old		6.7%	2.8%	3.9%
3-6 years old		8.8%	3.8%	5.0%
0-3 years old		4.3%	1.7%	2.6%
c. Licensed ECEC facilities				
Year	Public	Private	Private (in Prishtina)	Private licensed child seats for enrolment
2017/18	42	88	51	3,779
2019/20	44	159	83	8,695
d. Approximate enrolment rates including unofficial numbers from northern municipalities				
0-6 years old		All ECEC	Public ECEC	Private ECEC
Including prep. programme		19.3%	15.3%	4.0%
Without prep. programme		7.7%	3.8%	3.9%

Enrolment source base: KAS 2020a,b and data issued by MEST for this research; data for northern municipalities (North Mitrovica, Leposavic, Zvecan and Zubin Potok) are from 2016 and are based on Žarković et al. 2017. The base children population used for calculations of enrolment rates is derived from live births figures for 2015-2020 (KAS, 2021b).

Note: Private facilities in Section c (2019/2020) include six community-based centres (449 seats) and one public-private (140 seats) centre – all based in Prishtina.

The countries of the region, although falling behind European figures, fare better in ECEC enrolment rates than Kosovo and tend to follow the work-care reconciliation concept. For example, Albania had 77,858 children registered in ECEC services in 2019/2020 (around 37% of the children 0-6), and only 12% of them were registered with private providers (Instat, 2021a). In 2019, Serbia had an enrolment rate of around 50% of preschool children and hundreds of private providers (Perišić and Pantelić, 2021). Both Albania and Serbia provide various subsidies for vulnerable groups through public services; however, their services tend to prioritise enrolment of children of working parents (Perišić and Pantelić, 2021; Tosku, 2021) and are, in this sense, different from Kosovo.

H1 – Drawing on the reviewed literature and this context, the main hypothesis of this study is that Kosovo's ECEC policy – consisting of targeted public and increasingly market provided centre-based ECEC services – leads to access inequalities,

which go against lower status and income social groups.

Labour market policy that is not conducive to defamilialisation and women's employment

Kosovo's post-1999 labour market policy underwent many changes compared to socialism, such as flexibilisation of hiring and dismissals, decreased employment protection, de-coupling of work with social insurance etc. However, the policy has not proved to be conducive towards significant defamilialisation of care (as already shown by enrolment in ECEC) and employment growth.

In terms of parenting leaves, in socialism (pre-1989), fathers were entitled to up to seven days of paid leave following the birth of a child (as part of a special provision with the labour market legislation regulating family and other personal occasions for which paid leave could be granted). Mothers were eligible to six months of paid maternity leave with an option for six additional months of work with a reduced working schedule paid as standard working time and two additional years of unpaid leave. In addition, employees had the right to longer unpaid leave (with health insurance coverage being valid) and the length of those leaves was determined via regulations of employees' work organisations (Official Gazette of SAP Kosovo, 1989: 313-333). Maternity leave rights were financed via social insurance.

Nowadays, fathers are granted three days of paid paternity leave (with 100% earnings replacement rate) upon a child's birth, while mothers are granted a six-month maternity leave (with 70% earnings replacement rate) – both are paid by the employers (Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, 2014). The Government pays an additional three-month maternity leave (with 50% earnings replacement rate) for all women in the labour market, and maternity leave can be extended for additional unpaid three months (voluntary unpaid leave). In addition, employees have the right to up to one year of unpaid leave (a period during which only pension contributions of leave takers are paid by employers) for the care of ill family members and related reasons (Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, 2014: Article 35). In September 2021, the government-paid maternity benefit was extended to unemployed women. This benefit is paid at the level of the minimum wage (€170) for six months. However, it is not fully clear whether this right is permanent (MFLST, 2021).

Thus, while the paid leaves remain maternity-leave-centred and unpaid leave options are shortened compared to socialism, the key changes relate to the way how maternity leave is financed – by employers with additions from government expenditure. This form of financing may translate into negative feedback by increasing employers' hesitancy to hire women. The countries of the region usually finance maternity leave through social insurance and tax expenditure (e.g. Koslowski et al., 2021). The fathers' leave entitlements, which are credited in the literature for changes in norms and degenderisation of care (e.g., Brandth and Kvande, 2018; Doucet and McKay, 2020), remain very short. This leave structure, lack of more abundant job offers and lack of available, affordable and quality ECEC services, as well as the poor female employment legacy from socialism, should all contribute to the low female employment. In fact, the growth of the female employment rate has been even less impressive than the growth in ECEC enrolment rates over time. In 1981, at the high point of socialism, the female employment rate (aged 15 to 64) was 9.3%, and the male employment rate was 36.6%, while the total employment rate in Kosovo was 22% (ESK, 1987: 32-45). In 2020, the female employment rate was

14.1% compared to 42% of men, and the total formal employment rate was 28.4% – the worst in the region and Europe (KAS, 2021a). Also, up to 35% of all employees working in Kosovo may be in the informal sector (Cojocaru, 2017), while non-formal work income was high even during socialism (Mustafa, 2020). A high unemployment rate among women (32.3% in 2020 compared to 23.5% among men) and especially very high inactivity rate among women (79.2% compared to 44% among men) also derives from women's involvement in unpaid and normatively expected household work and roles (e.g. housewives, as traditionally referred to). In the countries of the region used for the comparison, female employment was much higher in 2020: 58.9% in Serbia (Eurostat, 2021) and 61.2% in Albania (Instat, 2021b).

Cash child benefits can also indirectly increase families' resources to purchase services, but here, again, policy was oriented towards narrow targeting and minimum benefits. During socialism, cash child benefits were targeted towards lower-income workers and covered 36.7% of all children population in Kosovo in 1981 (Mustafa, 2020: 4). In post-1999, minimum benefits were issued only to children with disabilities and children under the care of relatives or community up to September 2021, when universal cash benefits were launched for the first time paying €20 a month for children aged 0-2 and (commencing in 2023) €10 for children aged 2-16. These are paid by general taxation. Serbia and Albania both issue family payments upon the birth of a child, but Albania does not have regular cash child benefits in place (Ymeri, 2019). Serbia issues child benefits that are targeted but, in practice, achieve a high degree of coverage (Pejin-Stokić, 2021).

The important policy changes (extension of maternity benefit to unemployed women and universal child benefits – paid through taxes) made in September 2021 in Kosovo were a result of the first-ever left-wing majority in the Parliament that came out of elections held in February 2021. It further pledged to 160 new ECEC facilities without stating the implementation timeframe (Government of Kosovo, 2021). However, it remains to be seen whether these changes will significantly change female employment levels and challenge still prevalent familistic practices.

H2 – The second hypothesis of the study is that existing ECEC and work-family policy should produce low defamilialisation and, instead, a more implicit familisation and impediments to female employment.

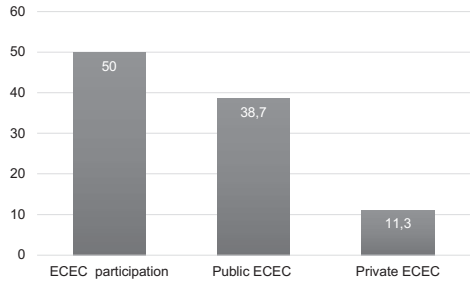
DATA AND METHODS

Data

The main data used in this article derived from a direct periodic omnibus survey (N=1065) conducted in September 2020 by UBO Consulting, a research agency in Kosovo that regularly collects data on behalf of the Prishtina Institute of Political Studies (PIPS). The inclusion of the author's questions in the survey was made possible by PIPS, and the questions were driven by the central theme of this special issue – care. The sample was representative, structured to represent the key demographic features of Kosovo with reference to national surveys and the census. From the general survey, only the population of respondents with children aged 0-6 in their families was used for the analysis presented in this article (N=488). Families are understood as family members in one household. The question asked to the respondents was whether they currently (in the month of the survey) use the ECEC centre-based services – in creches, kindergartens or daycare centres – for their children and, if so, whether these are services provided by public or private providers. In 50% of households, at least one child participated in ECEC services

including the preparatory programme, with the majority of them using public services (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Households with at least one child aged 0-6 participating in centre-based ECEC, %



These percentages are considerably higher than those deriving from the administrative enrolment data (Table 1). There might be several reasons behind the difference. For example, the live birth statistics issued regularly by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics – except for not capturing mortality cases – cannot capture outmigrations of families and also include families that live abroad, but register their children in Kosovo. If the number of children registered in the first elementary school year is taken as a base value, the children population (0-6 years) is overestimated by live births statistics up to 18.6% (KAS, 2020a,b). Still, the live births data offer better information compared to the last official long-term population projections (KAS's, 2017), which overestimated the number of children based on live births statistics for 12.2% (31% compared to numbers deriving from children enrolled in the first year of elementary school). Also, the administrative data do not report enrolment in Serbian-run ECEC facilities even in some other municipalities outside North Kosovo (see e.g. KAS, 2020 b: 45), although at least five of such facilities exist. It is further very likely that some private providers enrol more children than the formal number of seats for which they are licensed, and that some private ECEC services operate without a formal license[2]. Yet, there are crucial differences between the numbers in Table 1 and Figure 1, and they should not be taken as the same. The most important difference is that respondents of the survey used here were not asked to specify the number of children their families enrol in ECEC services – so they might do so for all their children or for any of them. This necessarily leads to higher estimates of participation rates based on the survey data (administrative and survey figures would be equal only if all the children in the household participated at the time).

The survey provides original and helpful information allowing to understand participation in the private (increasingly the dominant provider) and public ECEC services. In the case of public ECEC, there is also an analytical trade-off involved: without the school preparatory programme included in the category of public ECEC services, there would be more information on lengthier use of public ECEC services (particularly for children 0-5 years old). However, given that the school preparatory programme is public and free of charge for users, but not obligatory, this allows to investigate the relevance of an important dimension of policy design: namely, how an ECEC right is used when it exists as a universal right and is provided free of charge by public authorities.

Analytical strategy

The analysis proceeded by addressing the first hypothesis (H1), which expects

[2] For example, in September 2019, when a mother issued videos to the media showing how her child was beaten by an educator in a private service institution in capital Prishtina, leading to a public debate, it was understood that the institution was not licensed at all nor had it applied for license (see Syla, 2019).

that Kosovo's ECEC services – marked by highly targeted public services and growing market provision – lead to substantial access inequalities based on the socioeconomic background of social groups. Two logistic regressions were used (applying population weights). The first (logit) regression examined the impact of selected variables on all participation in (use of) ECEC services; the second (mlogit) regression examined the impact of the same variables on both public and private ECEC services. As shown in the literature review, family policy and broader welfare state literature pay strong attention towards understanding the differences in state vs market service provision (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 2009; Leitner, 2003; Yerkes and Javornik, 2018).

The independent variables (described in Table 2 below) used in both regressions – as key determinants of ECEC participation – were similar, and their selection was motivated by the literature review and contextual information. Age, gender and marital status were the first variables of interest since the literature dealing with ECEC and broader family policy seeks to understand how families cope with and change while adjusting to the contemporary mixed economies that seek multiple outcomes, such as high employment rate, gender equality, fertility etc. and how they cope with structural changes such as ageing (see e.g. Dobrotić and Blum, 2019; Doucet and McKey, 2020; Orloff, 1993; Daly, 2014; etc.).

The employment status is another crucial variable as the literature emphasises the important connection between ECEC and work or labour supply (e.g., Dobrotić et al., 2010). Quality employment and quality ECEC services (as well as the weak ones) can reinforce each other. It was necessary to have categories in this variable that could also capture differentiation in terms of status and sector of employment. Kosovo has advanced market economy reforms, privatised hundreds of former socialist enterprises after 1999 (see Knudsen, 2013; KPA, 2015), and about 65% of the formal employees work in the private sector (KPST, 2020). In socialism, employment protection was typically strong. Today, private sector employees have a considerably smaller median wage and operate in weaker employment conditions in terms of the implementation of contracts, employer's investment in skills, work leaves, interrupted employment etc. compared to the public sector employees (see Haxhikadrija et al. 2019), and many of them are likely to have unstable family income. At the same time, unemployment and inactivity levels remain high, especially among the women of the working-age population. These categories made it possible to see differences in ECEC participation rates along these status lines.

Variables on income class, education status, urban/rural area of living, and ethnicity, relate to arguments and findings in the literature which point to the unequal access to ECEC along with these backgrounds, as well as ECEC's capacities to improve the starting conditions of children coming from more fragile families before entering school (Bakken et.al. 2017; Burger, 2009; Vandenbroeck, 2020). The ethnicity variable also reflects Kosovo's context, where ethnic differences have been historically relevant for the political struggles along ethnic lines. Furthermore, today the Serbian minority, in areas where it makes the majority community, embraces the policy provided by the Government of Serbia more than the policy provided by Kosovo's institutions (Cocozzelli, 2009; Mustafa, 2019). From this perspective, the Serbian ethnicity variable can also capture to a certain degree the outcomes of a different policy that predominantly relies on public ECEC provision ("Serbian model"), allowing for comparison with the rest of Kosovo's policy outcomes. In Kosovo, there are also other smaller minorities such as Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Turkish, Bosnian and

Gorani, which may be farther from power resources and which have been, at least in the case of the first three, historically more marginalised.

The analysis continued by addressing in more detail the second hypothesis (H2), which expects that existing ECEC and work-family policy in Kosovo maintains and produces intensive implicit familialism and does not facilitate women's entrance into formal employment. The similar regressions of the first step were repeated – but this time focused on the women observations only. The only change in the list of independent variables was the removal of gender (due to the gendered model) and the removal of the category of part-time employment in the employment status variable (due to the lack of variation) since there was one observation (see Table 2).

Table 2
Descriptive statistics

		Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Age		488	38.50	14.03	18	88
		Categorical variables				
Variable	Category	All Observations		Women		
		Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	
Gender	Men	252	51.64			
	Women	236	48.36			
Marital Status	Not married	101	20.70	39	16.53	
	Married	377	77.25	188	79.66	
	Divorced	10	2.05	9	3.81	
Employment status	Unemployed Inactive	14	2.87	6	2.54	
	Emp. Public Sector	80	16.43	33	13.98	
	Emp. Private Sector	124	25.46	33	13.98	
	Emp. Part time	17	3.49	1	0.42	
	Unemployed	88	18.07	45	19.07	
	Housewives	90	18.48	89	37.71	
	Pensioners	44	9.03	12	5.08	
	Students	30	6.16	17	7.20	
Family Income Class	Income Class1	114	23.36	61	25.85	
	Income Class 2	200	40.98	101	42.80	
	Income Class 3	67	13.73	27	11.44	
	Undeclared Income	107	21.93	47	19.92	
Education	Lower education	95	19.47	63	26.69	
	High school	267	54.71	121	51.27	
	Tertiary education	126	25.82	52	22.03	
Area of living	Urban	224	45.90	105	44.49	
	Rural	264	54.10	131	55.51	
Ethnicity	Albanian	358	73.36	174	73.73	
	Serbian	76	15.57	38	16.10	
	Other	54	11.07	24	10.17	

RESULTS

The regression results (Table 3) confirmed the hypotheses' expectations. In relation to the first, main hypothesis, the results showed ECEC participation inequalities in terms of income class, employment and education status, as well as the area of living – particularly in the growing private provision sector. The results showed a significant negative impact of part-time employment and lower-income class (with monthly family income under €300) in the general ECEC and the public ECEC participation. Namely, being in part-time employment significantly decreased the likelihood of participation in all ECEC facilities and participation in public ECEC compared to employment in the public sector (reference category). The low income-class background also significantly reduced the likelihood of participation in all ECEC facilities and in the public ECEC compared to the wealthiest income class (with family income of more than 750€).

Regarding private ECEC services (the last column of Table 3), the divorced, the lower-income class, the lower education status (with elementary and high school education) and rural area of living had a negative effect on participation in the private ECEC. More concretely, the divorced status significantly reduced the likelihood of participation in private ECEC compared to the married status (the reference value), the lower-income background significantly reduced the likelihood of participation compared to the wealthiest income class, the lowest education status reduced the likelihood of participation compared to those with tertiary education (reference category), and the rural area of living significantly reduced the likelihood of participation in private ECEC compared to the urban one (reference value).

On the other hand, the results showed the significant positive impact of the Serbian ethnicity in general and the public ECEC participation; however, a significant negative effect on private ECEC participation compared to Albanian majority ethnicity (reference category). There were no significant coefficients for other minorities.

When it comes to the second hypothesis, overall results showed very low defamilialisation stemming from existing policy as the largest social groups were not significantly positively associated with ECEC use. Very importantly, none of the employment status categories in the working age were significantly positively associated with ECEC use either. In the women-only regressions, most employment status categories resulted in positive coefficients, but the only significant positive association (beyond Serbian ethnicity) came out in the case of retirees' use of private ECEC services. The divorced status (compared to married) and low and high school education (compared to tertiary education) showed again the significant negative likelihood of participation in private ECEC services among the women-only observations. The Serbian ethnicity's direction of significance was similar to the first regressions – significantly positive in all and public ECEC, and negative in private ECEC participation.

Table 3
Determinants of ECEC participation in all and women-only population

	All participants			Women only		
	Logit	Mlogit		Logit	Mlogit	
Independent Variables	All ECEC	Public ECEC	Private ECEC	All ECEC	Public ECEC	Private ECEC
Age	-0.0133 (-1.03)	-0.0104 (-0.72)	-0.0238 (-1.18)	-0.0117 (-0.67)	-0.0137 (-0.73)	0.00177 (0.07)
Gender						
Men	r.	r.	r.			
Women	0.341 (1.34)	0.437 (1.55)	-0.144 (-0.36)			
Marital Status						
Unmarried	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.
Married	0.394 (1.11)	0.277 (0.71)	0.686 (1.32)	-0.303 (-0.55)	-0.442 (-0.75)	0.0816 (0.10)
Divorced	1.160 (1.52)	1.200 (1.55)	-12.76*** (-13.31)	0.359 (0.39)	0.443 (0.49)	-13.80*** (-8.45)
Employm. Status						
Unemployed Inactive	-0.377 -0.58)	-0.861 (-1.12)	0.771 (0.81)	0.921 (0.87)	0.658 (0.58)	2.756 (1.28)
Emp. Public Sector	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.
Employed in Private Sector	-0.469 (-0.58)	-0.640 (-1.46)	-0.0601 (-0.09)	0.00212 (0.00)	-0.365 (-0.41)	1.593 (1.13)
Employed Part time	-1.604* (-2.18)	-1.729* (-2.03)	-1.264 (-1.01)			
Unemployed	0.0915 (0.20)	0.0244 (0.05)	0.132 (0.18)	0.843 (1.08)	0.506 (0.61)	2.206 (1.55)
Housewives	-0.484 (-0.93)	-0.766 (-1.39	0.357 (0.38)	0.227 (0.28)	-0.340 (-0.39)	3.243 (1.84)
Pensioners	0.576 (0.95)	0.223 0.34)	1.567 (1.62)	1.862 (1.74)	0.924 (0.78)	5.337** (2.90)
Students	-0.545 (-0.87)	-0.370 -0.59)	-1.347 (-1.04)	0.821 (0.85)	0.637 (0.63)	1.640 (0.91)
Family income						
Income Class1	-1.107** (-2.79)	-0.985* (-2.22)	-1.364* (-2.19)	-0.522 (-0.89)	-0.267 (-0.42)	-1.036 (-1.13)
Income Class2	-0.395 (-1.18)	-0.393 (-1.01)	-0.330 (-0.72)	-0.237 (-0.44)	-0.137 (-0.23)	-0.352 (-0.47)
Income Class3	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.
Undeclared income	0.399 (1.05)	0.557 (1.32)	-0.00440 (-0.01)	0.582 (0.99)	0.854 (1.35)	-0.0697 (-0.07)
Education						
Lower education	-0.550 (-1.31)	-0.0437 (-0.10)	-1.584* (-2.05)	-0.348 (-0.58)	0.423 (0.63)	-3.447** (-2.74)
High school education	-0.184 (-0.66)	0.319 (1.04)	-1.260** (-2.71)	0.232 (0.52)	0.826 (1.66)	-2.130* (-2.13)
Tertiary educ.	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.

	All participants			Women only		
	Logit	Mlogit		Logit	Mlogit	
Urban/Rural						
Urban	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.
Rural	-0.406 (-1.82)	-0.295 (-1.19)	-0.721* (-2.06)	-0.564 (-1.67)	-0.572 (-1.54)	-0.556 (-1.02)
Ethnicity						
Albanian	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.	r.
Serbian	1.440*** (3.83)	1.680*** (4.48)	-13.64*** (-29.33)	1.579* (2.44)	1.606* (2.54)	-12.02*** (-16.24)
Other minorities	0.00253 (0.01)	-0.0839 (0.13)	0.278 (0.47)	0.0436 (0.08)	-0.475 (-0.72)	1.460 (1.61)
N	487			235		

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

Notes: Base outcome = nonparticipation in ECEC. r=Reference category; Income Class 1 >=300€ a month; Income Class 2 = 301-750€; Income Class 3 = Above 750€; Undeclared income= Respondents that did not declare income (skipped the question) about the amount of family income in the survey but still use ECEC. In addition to Gender, variable "Employed part-time" (in Women only regressions) was dropped since there was only 1 observation (no variation).

DISCUSSION

Although policy reforms in post-socialist Eastern Europe generally leaned towards "a residualist and privatising direction" (Deacon, 2000: 147), the leading international organisations' influence – that promoted radical neoliberal ideas during the 2000s such as WB and IMF – was more intense in Kosovo. Family policy was treated with the same residualist and privatising principles for two decades (after 1999). Within it, Kosovo's ECEC policy goals were redirected from a legacy of what Scheiwe and Willekens (2009:17) define as the targeted institutional model that aimed to reconcile care and paid work towards a targeted educational approach where "the guiding paradigm is separation, not universal education". While socialism could not achieve its work-care goals due to a failure to meaningfully expand service provision after 1981 and its eventual collapse, the new model, which is an outlier for the region, is consolidating and beginning to produce outcomes and stratification the literature expects it to produce. In line with the separation paradigm, it can be expected that most centre-based services in Kosovo will come through the market, while public ECEC services will be targeted towards disadvantaged children such as children from families on social assistance, children with disabilities, children under care of relatives and community, children of disabled and other war veterans, children with one living parent, and children of single employed mothers. Low-income parents (living together) are more recently added as the last targeted category, but children with one working parent rather than two working parents are prioritised, meaning that even here the policy prioritises the income level and not the work-care reconciliation. Under this model, Kosovo already enrols more children than it did during socialism, but it remains substantially behind regional and European levels and, without a more comprehensive change, it will maintain an extensive familialism in child care.

As the regression results showed, the lower-income families are less likely to participate in all and in public ECEC ser-

vices. Similarly, other disadvantaged social groups did not show significant positive likelihoods of participation compared to the better-positioned groups. These outcomes are consistent with the targeted policy model. Policies that embrace the targeted rather than more inclusive and universal programmes tend to create fewer budgets to spend and fewer coalitions in support of the broader programmes (see e.g. Korpi and Palme, 1998). In Kosovo, the principles of the residualist policy prioritised national revenue stability and for two decades ECEC has never been a major topic of interest for relevant policy-making actors. The number of public creches, kindergartens and day-care centres remains very small, and even if the targeting would be entirely accurate (and fully implemented), most of the children from disadvantaged families would still not been covered. Furthermore, in line with significant failures, particularly in the developing countries, to deliver means-tested services without mistakes in coverage (Dadap-Cantal et al. 2021), Kosovo has seen a massive decline (-43.5%) in the number of beneficiaries of Social Assistance between 2005 to 2017 (World Bank, 2019). This was mainly a result of very stringent, un-updated eligibility criteria and means-tests and it suggests that inaccuracies of the Social Assistance programme should be expected to lead to the exclusion of children at-risk-of-poverty from enrolment in public ECEC. At the same time, public ECEC also targets other social groups, such as children of the war veterans who are not necessarily at-risk-of-poverty (World Bank, 2019: 18). These programmes have often been criticised as clientelist[3] practices.

Obviously, the regression coefficients for the lower-income and other fragile groups would be even worse (higher in a negative direction of association with ECEC use) without the public ECEC services. The school preparatory programme for children aged 5-6 has in particular influentially impacted the participation in the overall and public ECEC since it is free, it usually takes place in public schools and is widely used as the administrative data show. The participation in the school preparatory programme thus somewhat equalised and moderated the overall and public ECEC participation coefficients for the more fragile groups in the regression results. As Moss and Deven (2019: 434) write, factors such as the presence of ECEC services, affordability and quality are required as well for participation. The broad use of the school preparatory programme suggests that care outside the family may be used when it exists – in particular when it is a universal right, financed from the general taxation, and managed by public authorities.

In the context of Kosovo, where private ECEC services are rising very fast and becoming the dominant centre-based provider, the findings on the participation in private ECEC are massively relevant, and they support the segregation and the market-driven stratification thesis (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990; Scheiwe and Willekens, 2009; Vandenbroeck 2020). The findings show that children coming from lower socio-economic status such as children from lower-income families, families of lower education backgrounds, and families living in rural areas (54% of the population) as well as children of divorced parents are less likely to participate in private ECEC compared to the better-off groups. This suggests that, as the demand for ECEC services grows and population groups will look for them in the market, inequalities in ECEC access will strengthen along these lines.

[3] Stubbs and Zrinščak (2015: 398) define clientelism as "hegemonic political practices and strategies marked by particularistic modes of governance, exclusivist definitions of citizenship, and asymmetrical distribution and redistribution of resources".

As the welfare regimes literature expects, the more residual, liberal-oriented regimes tend to produce higher inequalities along socioeconomic lines deriving from the market relations. If ECEC is crucial for the today's children future in the labour market, their personal development and life (see e.g. Bakken et.al., 2017; Bonoli et.al, 2017; Burger, 2006; Vandenbroeck 2020; Plame and Heimer, 2019), this welfare regime is likely to produce and cement wide social inequalities in Kosovo, since large shares of families will find it more difficult than others to access services.

In terms of employment status, although the regression results did not show any positive significant association of the working-age categories with ECEC participation, most coefficients in the women's population were positive, and this may mean that further overall employment and women's inclusion in the labour market may increase participation in ECEC. Such participation increase would come primarily through the private ECEC sector. Yet, the overall defamilialisation of childcare remains low: neither the work-family nor the ECEC policy are conducive to it. Women remain underemployed and unsupported by norms and work-family policies regarding their entrance and participation in the labour market. Regarding ECEC, even the defamilialisation potential of the school preparatory programme existing in Kosovo, which is around 2.5 hours long, is weaker compared to, for example, Serbia where the programme takes place for four or more hours (see e.g. Perišić and Pantelic, 2021). Similarly, the fact that already highly targeted public ECEC prioritise single earners before the dual-earners may work in the same direction. In line with Leitner's (2003) thesis, one can argue that Kosovo's current ECEC policy is strongly implicitly familialistic due to the absence of comprehensive public ECEC provision and better public support regarding the access to ECEC, and the presence of strong impediments related to mothers' access to the labour market as well as maternity-centred parenting leaves – all these elements reduce parents' abilities to engage in employment and care and have a weak potential to degenderise care. Therefore, as Daly (2014:357) notes, while comparing welfare states one can still observe both some defamilialisation and familialism (or maintenance of it) at the same time.

A momentum that could challenge the segmented ECEC policy was created by parliamentary elections held in February 2021. After two decades of right-wing parties in power, the elections led to the first-ever left Parliament majority created by Lëvizja Vetëvendosje (LVV). It committed itself to substantially strengthening the ECEC services and immediately begun to address labour market topics (including the formalisation of labour, leaves from work, employment incentives, minimum wage) and child benefits. Like western parties now and in the past, powerful left parties can influence the expansion of social rights in the developing countries as well (see e.g. Huber and Stephens, 2012). Paradoxically, even though Kosovo's Government treats the institutions of the Government of Serbia in Serbian majority municipalities in Kosovo as illegal "parallel structures", the left can learn policywise from these structures. As the regression results showed, the Serbian minority – depending on the public-oriented policy with more abundant enrolment places provided by Serbia – relates positively with participation in public ECEC and overall ECEC. However, extensive literature also points to the strong relevance of path-dependence and the broader institutional context impediments, which could limit alternatives and resources even if there is a will for change from actors (see e.g. Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). In the context of Kosovo, such limitations could come from weak policy implementation

capacities, growing national debt, frequent changes in the government coalitions (none has finished a full mandate from one regular election to another since the declaration of independence in 2008), and the fact that relations with Serbia – pending a normalisation agreement which has been discussed since 2013 with the EU mediation and is ongoing – remain high on political agenda at the expense of socio-economic policy.

CONCLUSION

The public ECEC policy in Kosovo is targeted towards children coming from the more vulnerable social groups and is complemented by a short universal school preparatory programme (for the 5-6 age group), while the rest of the services are expected to be provided by the market or the family. This targeted education approach through non-universalistic means is an outlier for the region and at the same time a potential learning case for similar developing areas under privatisation pressures. In that respect, the main learning that could be taken away is that a model like this will translate to a situation where lower income, lower status, rural and other more fragile social groups will be less likely than the better-off to participate in ECEC and implicitly will have to seek care within the family. As such, the model also leads to significant implicit familialism and maintenance of gendered care, despite some growth in ECEC use compared to the country's past, which could be one of the reasons behind the extremely low female employment rate and high inactivity rate in Kosovo.

Without changes, the existing policy would contribute towards cementing and deepening social and gender inequalities in the long-term perspective in Kosovo. There are some good examples that could be used from change driven agents, such as the wide use of the universal school preparatory programme, which is free of charge and managed by public authorities. This and the small targeted public services ameliorate to a certain degree the position of those with more unfavourable backgrounds and thus suggests that any future investment in public ECEC could lead to higher enrolment and more equal access. At the same time, shortcomings such as the very short length of the school preparatory programme and the prioritisation of single earners compared to dual-earners may be evaded.

There were important limitations of the study. Since the space for free of charge questions to be included in the survey was very limited, this reduced the opportunity to gather more precise information and to conduct more substantial analyses such as those related to the impact of various specific available or non-available policies, or structures and norms in ECEC participation. For example, insightful variables, if available, would have been the length of parenting leaves or the beneficiaries of specific targeted social transfers which would allow to see how these translate in ECEC enrolment, the number of children in a family, the number of older persons in a family, time-use variables concerning work at home, variables catching norms through (dis)agreement with provided statements in the survey, ability to differentiate between school preparatory programmes from other longer services, as well as to differentiate between 0-3 and 3-6 age groups of children. Another dimension could have been the opinions of the users on the quality of ECEC and its affordability. In the future, more targeted surveys – such as the ones with parents and care workers as well as grown-up former users of ECEC cervices in comparison to non-users – and ethnographic approaches could provide other and richer insights on ECEC in Kosovo.

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Sažetak

RANI I PREDŠKOLSKI ODGOJ I OBRAZOVANJE NA KOSOVU: CILJANI OBRAZOVNI PRISTUP KOJI STVARA I ODRŽAVA SOCIJALNE I RODNE NEJEDNAKOSTI

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Rad analizira participaciju u ranom i predškolskom odgoju i obrazovanju (Early Childhood Education and Care – ECEC) na Kosovu na temelju nedavnog istraživanja i administrativnih podataka. Politika ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja na Kosovu nastoji osigurati odgoj i obrazovanje za djecu u dobi od 0-6 godina pristupom koji sadrži izrazito ciljane javne usluge za ranjivije socijalne grupe, te očekuje da se ostali oslanjaju na tržište ili na obitelj. Osiguran je opći i javni predškolski program za djecu u dobi od 5-6 godina (2,5 sati dnevno). Dostupnost usluga ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja se povećava, no i dalje ostaje znatno ispod razina drugih zemalja u regiji. Nove usluge sve su u većem broju tržišne zbog čega su velike socijalne skupine, poput obitelji s niskim primanjima, ruralnih obitelji, roditelja s niskim obrazovnim statusom i drugih roditelja nižeg socio-ekonomskog statusa, u još nepovoljnijem položaju. Kako se rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje smatraju izuzetno bitnim za osobni razvoj djeteta i uspjeh u školi, kao i za sudjelovanje žena na tržištu rada, rezultati pokazuju da sadašnja politika doprinosi jačanju i produbljivanju socijalnih i rodnih nejednakosti u dugoročnom pogledu. U izostanku sveobuhvatnijih javnih usluga i drugih mjera za podršku obiteljima, Kosovo održava snažnu implicitnu familijalističku politiku sa slabim potencijalom da pridonese zapošljavanju žena.

Ključne riječi: Kosovo, rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje, defamilijalizacija, familijalizam, privatizacija.