Implementing Global Gender Norms at the Global-Local Nexus: The Case of Kosovo



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Submitted for the degree of DPhil in International Relations
in the Department of Politics and International Relations
at the University of Oxford

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Abstract

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This thesis examines how global gender norms, enshrined in international policy frameworks, travel via peace- and state-building efforts to post-conflict contexts, focusing on the case of post-conflict Kosovo. Empirically, this study focuses on a specific subset of gender equality and women's rights norms – internationally agreed norms that relate to women's economic empowerment – and their implementation by international organizations (IOs) in the case of Kosovo. IOs and their entities tasked with implementing global normative commitments at the global-local nexus constitute an important node in potential processes of post-conflict transformation.

Theoretically, the thesis integrates insights from feminist political economy with IR scholarship on norms and IOs and explores the question of how we account for the disjuncture between the implementation of global women's economic empowerment norms by IOs and women's lived realities and needs. Drawing on an in-depth analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with donor and international organizations, governmental institutions and civil society, as well as documentary analysis, the thesis develops a novel framework for understanding the complex dynamics of fragmented norm implementation in internationalized post-conflict and development contexts.

The analysis reveals that IOs have not taken a holistic approach to the implementation of global women's economic empowerment norms in Kosovo, which has (re)produced gendered forms of economic insecurity and resulted in limited gains for women. By centring the concept of social reproduction and a feminist attentiveness to the everyday, the thesis goes beyond the state-centrism of IR norms scholarship and develops a concept of norm implementation which centres the individuals who are the targets of global norms and policies.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ..... **iii**

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations ..... **v**

List of Figures and Tables ..... **vii**

Chapter 1: Introduction **1**

1.1 Introduction and Overview 1

1.2 Analytical framework 4

1.3 Conceptualizing Women's Economic Empowerment Norms 8

1.4 Preview of the Argument and Contributions of the Thesis 12

1.5 Methodology 20

1.6 Case Selection 24

1.7 Data Collection and Analysis 30

1.8 Chapter Overview 35

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework **37**

2.1 Introduction 37

2.2 Tracing Constructions of Women's Economic Empowerment 38

2.3 Beyond Institutionalization: Implementing International Norms at the Domestic Level in International Relations Theory 45

2.3.1. Remaining research gaps 51

2.4 Going all the way down: feminist IR approaches to norm diffusion 54

2.4.1. Invisible Labour: Feminist Political Economy 58

2.5 Building a Theory of Fragmented Implementation 67

2.5.1. Where are the women? Implementation 'all the way down' 68

2.5.2. Norms as processes in IR theory 71

2.5.3. Kosovo-specific elaboration 77

Chapter 3: Setting the Scene: Normative and Country Context **83**

3.1 Background to the conflict 83

3.2 Historical context of international intervention from a gender perspective 88

3.3 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Norms on the Global Stage 96

3.4 International actors and economic empowerment in Kosovo 103

Chapter 4: *'What Coordination?'* Inter-organizational Dynamics in Kosovo **107**

4.1 Introduction 107

4.2 Coordination platforms in Kosovo 109

4.3 Host Government Partner Weakness 112

4.3.1. Short-term agendas and fragility of institutions 112

4.3.2. Weaknesses of the national gender machinery 116

4.4 Inter-organizational Coordination 122

4.4.1. Mandate ambiguity 127

4.4.2. 'It became a bloodbath between agencies': competitive logics 131

4.5 Conclusion 135

Chapter 5: Donor political economies and development logics 138

5.1 Introduction 138

5.2 Short-term development logics 140

5.3 Pressure to achieve quick wins 143

5.4 Taking women's economic empowerment for granted 149

5.5 Conclusion 154

Chapter 6: Lost in Implementation: Unpaid Work and Social Reproduction at the Domestic Level... 157

6.1 Introduction 157

6.2 Economic empowerment in practice 160

6.3 Pretending to care about care? 164

6.3.1. Strategy-implementation gaps 164

6.3.2. Addressing the consequence not the cause 168

6.3.3. Absence of holistic approaches 171

6.4 IO discourses on unpaid work 175

6.4.1. It hasn't been a government priority 176

6.4.2. Gender as separate 182

6.4.3. Organizational constraints and logics 186

6.5 Conclusion 189

Chapter 7: Domestic Social Institutions in Kosovo 192

7.1 Introduction 192

7.2 Social Norms, Unpaid Work and Women's Economic Empowerment in Kosovo 194

7.3 Domestic policies and legislation 199

7.4 Conclusion 209

Chapter 8: Synthesis and Conclusion 211

8.1 Synthesis of findings 212

8.2 Limitations, external validity and additional case studies 216

8.3 Implications for academic literatures 219

8.3.1. IR norms scholarship 219

8.3.2. Feminist literatures 225

8.3.3. International-local interactions 227

8.4 Policy Implications 231

8.5 Future Research 234

Bibliography 241

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AGE	Agency for Gender Equality
ALMMs	Active Labour Market Measures
ALMP	Active Labour Market Programme
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DGNEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DSR	Depletion through Social Reproduction
EBRD	The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EU	European Union
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
FSS	Feminist Security Studies
FPE	Feminist Political Economy
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
GBV	Gender-based Violence
IFI	International Financial Institution
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
IO	International Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KPGE	Kosovo Programme for Gender Equality
KWN	Kosovo Women's Network
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Development Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Overseas Development Aid
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based violence
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAW	Violence against Women
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1.1	WEE norm cluster	11
Figure 2.1	Fragmented Implementation	73
Figure 2.2	Fragmented Implementation in Kosovo	77
Figure 3.1	Main International Organizations in Kosovo in Relation to Gender Equality	86
Table 3.1	References to Economic Empowerment in Key Global Gender Equality Frameworks	97
Table 3.2	References to Unpaid Work in Global Gender Equality Frameworks	98
Table 3.3	Gender Relevant Projects by Policy Priority Area 2015-2018	102
Figure 7.1	Feminist Inscription in Drenas	206

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Overview

> *The reproduction of human beings… and the immense amount of paid and unpaid domestic work done by women in the home is what keeps the world moving.*[1]

This thesis is concerned with how global norms addressing gender equality are mainstreamed, operationalised and implemented in post-conflict states by international organizations (IOs). The global gender equality regime spans various issue areas including eliminating gender-based violence and discrimination against women, promoting women's political participation and women's economic empowerment, and is underpinned by numerous international commitments and policy frameworks. Such commitments include the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Women, Peace and Security agenda (WPS), amongst others, which together constitute the global normative framework for promoting gender equality.

It is well known that global gender norms are translated differently in different contexts.[2] These processes are heavily context dependent and are far from linear and straightforward, particularly in post-conflict settings. Research has shown the various pathways through which war and state collapse *can* give rise to opportunities for women to participate in political,

[1] Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 2.
[2] See Peggy Levitt and Sally Merry, 'Vernacularization on the Ground: Local Uses of Global Women's Rights in Peru, China, India and the United States', *Global Networks* 9, no. 4 (October 2009): 441–61.; Susanne Zwingel, 'How Do Norms Travel? Theorizing International Women's Rights in Transnational Perspective', *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (March 2012): 115–29.

economic and social spaces in ways in which they were previously unable to.[3] Conflict can cause demographic, social and economic shifts, which can in turn create changes in, for example, labour force participation and open space for women's increased engagement in formal and informal political and economic spheres. International organizations and their entities tasked with implementing global normative commitments at the global-local nexus constitute an important node in these potential processes of post-conflict transformation.

Surprisingly, however, relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted thus far to an exploration of the translation processes and implementation practices of these norms by international organizations at the ground level of practice. This is especially relevant in post-conflict settings, which can present a 'window of opportunity', both in the immediate aftermath of conflict as well as in longer-term state-building and development processes.[4] However, how do gender equality norms travel via peace- and state-building efforts? And to what extent do international gender norms, enshrined in global policy frameworks, travel to post-conflict settings and affect everyday practice?

How norms travel is a question that has long interested scholars of International Relations (IR). Classic accounts of norm diffusion proposed a linear model of the 'norm life cycle' to explain the emergence and spread of norms.[5] Subsequent scholarship challenged these early

[3] Melanie M. Hughes, 'Armed Conflict, International Linkages, and Women's Parliamentary Representation in Developing Nations', *Social Problems (Berkeley, Calif.)* 56, no. 1 (2009): 174–204; Melanie M. Hughes and Aili Mari Tripp, 'Civil War and Trajectories of Change in Women's Political Representation in Africa, 1985–2010', *Social Forces* 93, no. 4 (2015): 1513–40; Aili Mari Tripp, *Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa*, Cambridge Books Online (Cambridge: University Press, 2015); Miriam J. Anderson, *Windows of Opportunity: How Women Seize Peace Negotiations for Political Change*, Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[4] Madeleine Rees and Christine Chinkin, 'Exposing the Gendered Myth of Post Conflict Transition: The Transformative Power of Economic and Social Rights', *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 48, no. 4 (2016 2015): 1211–26.

[5] Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887–917.

accounts of norm diffusion which treated norm content as relatively static and focussed on the mismatch between global norms and local contexts. This scholarship highlighted the various ways in which norms are adapted to fit local normative orders.[6] However, it was not until the mid-2010s that there was a step change within norms scholarship and scholars really addressed the question of whether and how norms actually make a difference in practice.[7] Despite the rich body of scholarship that has emerged on this topic, 'there is a continuing lack of attention to the micro-level dynamics and practices in norm diffusion...[and] how heterogeneous actors participate in the daily activities of norm translation.'[8]

This imbalance in the literature is particularly problematic from a feminist perspective, which is concerned not only with how norms emerge and travel but also whether and how they ultimately affect women's everyday lives. From the perspective of women living in post-conflict and developing environments, the question of whether and how international norms and the policies through which they are implemented meaningfully affect their lived realities is a crucial one. A closer empirical examination of locally situated experiences of international gender norms is therefore warranted. With this purpose in mind, this study focuses on a specific sub-set of gender equality and women's rights norms – internationally agreed norms that relate to women's economic empowerment – and their implementation in the case of Kosovo. The thesis focuses on UN norms given that 'the UN has long played an agenda-setting role on

[6] Amitav Acharya, 'How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism', *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (April 2004): 239–75; Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe', *International Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (March 1999): 84–114.

[7] Although Acharya uses the term 'local', his analysis does not follow what happens once a norm has been adapted by the state to meet national conditions, i.e. the implementation process.

[8] Xiaoyu Lu, *Norms, Storytelling and International Institutions in China: The Imperative to Narrate*, St Antony's Series (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 8.

women's rights.'[9] It is the UN's history as a global force in the area of gender equality – detailed in Chapter 3 – which justifies the focus on these norms in particular. The question at the heart of this thesis is the following: ***How do we account for the disjuncture between the expectations that underpin the implementation of global women's economic empowerment norms by the international community and women's lived realities and needs?***

To shed light on this, this study addresses this research question through the following sub-questions: (1) How are UN's women's economic empowerment norms implemented by international organizations in Kosovo? (2) How do internationally driven economic empowerment interventions interact with the everyday lives of women in Kosovo?

1.2 Analytical framework

Kosovo has been the subject of one of the most costly and extensive instances of internationally-led post-conflict statebuilding and has experienced various phases of international administration since NATO's intervention in 1999. Despite this, there is a general acceptance that Kosovo bears many of the hallmarks of a 'weak and captured state', a track-record which has elicited local mistrust in and resistance to the continued international presence in Kosovo.[10] The failure of the international community to deliver on its goal of 'a multi-ethnic, functional and democratic state' has been subject to increasing analysis by scholars given the scale and length of international intervention.[11] As time goes on, the question of why a state

[9] Mona Lena Krook and Jacqui True, 'Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms: The United Nations and the Global Promotion of Gender Equality', *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 1 (1 March 2012): 112; Enrique Restoy and Stefan Elbe, 'Drilling Down in Norm Diffusion: Norm Domestication, "Glocal" Power, and Community-Based Organizations in Global Health', *Global Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (1 September 2021): ksab025.

[10] Nicolas Lemay-Hebert, 'State-Building from the Outside-In: UNMIK and Its Paradox', *Journal of Public and International Affairs* 20 (2009): 65–86.; Aidan Hehir, 'How the West Built a Failed State in Kosovo' The National Interest, August 31 2016.

[11] Arolda Elbasani, 'State-Building or State-Capture? Institutional Exports, Local Reception and Hybridity of Reforms in Post-War Kosovo', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 18, no. 2 (3 April 2018): 150.

that has been (an increasingly unwelcome) home to one of the largest and costliest statebuilding efforts in history continues to suffer from dysfunctional institutions, rampant corruption and ethnic tensions, is becoming more and more pertinent.[12] However, analyses of interventions from a feminist perspective are markedly absent from this scholarship.

Against this backdrop, the case of Kosovo reveals an interesting paradox, whereby despite awareness and interventions from the international community targeting women's economic empowerment, female participation in the formal labour market has remained extraordinarily low during the post-conflict period. With an estimated female labour force participation rate of 22%, Kosovo not only lags behind its Western Balkans neighbours, but it has the lowest rate in Europe and Central Asia.[13] Women's employment rates are also dismal, with only 18.4% of working-age women employed compared with 49.4% for males.[14] These statistics are important because it suggests that despite over two decades of international intervention, there has been little improvement in women's material lives as reflected in their participation in the formal labour market.[15] It is the process leading up to this outcome – the practices of domestic norm implementation involving interactions between various norms, stakeholders and domestic structures – that this thesis seeks to explain. My objective is two-fold: first, to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms of and barriers to the vertical implementation of global gender equality norms, and second, to explain why women's economic empowerment

[12] See Elton Skendaj, *Creating Kosovo: International Oversight and the Making of Ethical Institutions*, University Press Scholarship Online. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Andrea Lorenzo Capussela, *State-Building in Kosovo: Democracy, Corruption and the EU in the Balkans* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Elbasani, 'State-Building or State-Capture?'

[13] Republic of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister, Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 'Kosovo Labour Force Survey 2022' (Prishtina, 2022). In contrast, male labour force participation is estimated to be 55.5%. Labour force participation rates refer to the number of women employed or actively seeking work.

[14] Republic of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister, Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 17.

[15] The rationale for using labour force engagement as a measure of empowerment will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Underlying the discussion in this thesis is an acknowledgement that economic participation and income alone do not automatically result in women's empowerment.

strategies have not been more effective and their interaction with women's lived realities. It does so through focussing on two interrelated processes: 1) Examining how international organizations have sought to implement women's economic empowerment norms across their programming in Kosovo and 2) Exploring the factors which influence and shape these policy-making processes at both the local and international levels. The rationale for selecting women's economic empowerment norms as the focus of this study is based on a key contention within feminist IR scholarship, namely that 'actual economic conditions in post-war states are the crucial factor preventing women from increasing their security.'[16]

In addition to being empirically surprising, Kosovo is also a theoretically insightful case for scholars of IR for several reasons. First, it represents a case in which there is a broad agreement amongst IOs and the Kosovo government on the principle and underlying value of the norm – the need to economically empower women – and what the implementation modalities and intended results of implementation should look like. Women's economic empowerment has been translated into IO strategies at both the global and country levels.[17] It is also embedded in national legislation and policies, as women's economic empowerment is one of three pillars in the Kosovo Programme for Gender Equality. This is worth mentioning since norm diffusion scholarship has often treated legislation as a metric of implementation. Second, it is an overcrowded sector in terms of international actors, and international interventions in the field of women's economic empowerment represent a substantial portion

[16] María Martín de Almagro and Caitlin Ryan, 'Subverting Economic Empowerment: Towards a Postcolonial-Feminist Framework on Gender (in)Securities in Post-War Settings', *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 4 (December 2019): 1061.; Jacqui True, *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*, Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[17] Many of the IOs under study have global level (gender) strategies and country-level strategies, and sometimes even country-specific gender-equality strategies.

of gender-relevant development assistance to Kosovo.[18] Yet, despite international attention and funds, these interventions are not translating into significant results in practice. In other words, it is neither a case where the norm has not been translated at the legislative level, nor where there is contestation by IOs or the national government over the ideational component of global norms addressing women's economic empowerment. As such, this is not a case which can easily be explained by norm contestation, nor by local resistance on the basis of a 'cultural mismatch' or global norms needing to be reconstructed to better fit pre-existing local norms in order to gain acceptance by local elites and the public.[19] Instead, the Kosovo case appears to reveal a disconnect between the discursive understanding of the norm and what is implicated and required for effective implementation at the ground level**.** This finding raises important questions around how norms travel, which form the focus of this thesis: How do gender equality norms travel via peace- and state-building efforts? How can we account for cases where global gender norms travel result in very limited change on the ground thereby achieving little in practice? What is the role of international institutions in this process and why do they not adjust global norms to the local reality?

In order to answer these questions, this thesis engages in an in-depth qualitative study of Kosovo, to examine the process through which the international community has implemented global norms on women's economic empowerment. It contends that to really understand how norms travel, it is necessary to drill down to the ground level of practice and embed oneself in

[18] A recent report by the Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality (AGE) found that projects focussing on economically empowering women (gender-specific projects or gender mainstreamed), specifically the supply side of labour, represented the highest share of gender-relevant ODA in the period from 2015-2018. It is also an issue area which IOs have approached in broadly the same way, illustrated by the similarities in implementation modalities, such as entrepreneurship promotion, micro-grants, skills/vocational training, employment generation, etc. It is precisely this focus on the supply-side by IOs which this thesis argues has contributed to the limited travelling of global economic empowerment norms, which will be elaborated on in the following chapter.

[19] This is not to discount role of gender discriminatory social norms, which play a key role in this analysis and will be expanded upon in the following chapter.

the local context. This reflects Laura Shepherd's claim regarding the WPS agenda that 'the most valuable theory building happens 'on the ground' and that to understand WPS, researchers and practitioners alike must examine its local contexts.'[20] Before proceeding it is important to acknowledge that the international community's focus on and prioritization of the formal economy will be problematized and expanded on later in this introductory chapter. As will be argued in this thesis, the defining and understanding of the formal 'productive' vs. the informal reproductive economy is an important driver of IO policymaking in the economic sphere and thus constitutes a crucial part of the explanation for the limited effect of international norms in this domain. Nevertheless, it is an important observation and starting point in the context of this study's focus on international organizations as implementers of global gender norms, precisely because it is an area which has received significant international support within the neoliberal peace- and statebuilding framework. It is the low rate of women's participation in the labour force which has prompted the vast array of international interventions in this field, the majority of which aim to increase female participation in the formal labour market. Formal employment rates for women are therefore an important indicator to take into account when considering the driving force behind international interventions and thus an important reflection of their outcomes.

1.3 Conceptualizing Women's Economic Empowerment Norms

This study conceptualizes norms in line with the classic constructivist definition, as 'standard[s] of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity.'[21] Drawing on the second wave of norm diffusion scholarship, I treat norms as processes with dynamic content, open to various interpretations and contestation at any point during the norm life cycle.[22] Gender

[20] Laura J. Shepherd, 'Situating Women, Peace and Security: Theorizing from "the Local"', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22, no. 4 (7 August 2020): 458.
[21] Finnemore and Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', 892.
[22] Krook and True, 'Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms'.

equality and women's empowerment can be considered 'fundamental' global norms, alongside principles such as human rights, rule of law, democracy and sustainability.[23] Global norms then become part of international treaties, conventions or agreements, and thereby become formally validated.[24] As internationally agreed standards, these documents arguably represent the highest level of norm interpretation. Although global norms manifest in internationally accepted standards, I follow the second wave of norms research, which does not view these global treaties and goals as 'fixing' the norm meaning, which is rather determined by their 'meaning in use.'[25] I thus conceptualize women's economic empowerment as a global norm cluster which has found its way into numerous international treaties and policy documents, which I refer to as international normative frameworks.[26] These frameworks are fluid and their substance is subject to continuous translation and reinterpretation as they move between diverse contexts and actors.

This study does not attempt to trace how any one specific global agenda, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has travelled, but rather conceptualizes 'women's economic empowerment norms' as the assemblage of global agendas which promote women's economic empowerment. This conceptualization is based on two key factors. First, although tracing specific global commitments tells an interesting story regarding which norms resonate in certain contexts and why, it often does not neatly map onto policies and programming which

[23] Antje Wiener, 'Agency of the Governed in Global International Relations: Access to Norm Validation', *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 2, no. 5 (3 September 2017): 716.
[24] Antje Wiener, 'Enacting Meaning-in-Use: Qualitative Research on Norms and International Relations', *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 1 (January 2009): 191.
[25] Wiener, 'Enacting Meaning-in-Use'.
[26] For more on the relationship between gender equality and women's rights norms and international normative frameworks, see Zwingel, 'How Do Norms Travel?'; Susanne Zwingel, 'Women's Rights Norms as Content-in-Motion and Incomplete Practice', *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 2, no. 5 (3 September 2017): 675–90; Susanne Zwingel, 'Translating International Women's Rights Norms: CEDAW in Context', in *Feminist Strategies in International Governance*, 1st ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 111–26.
The specific ways in which global gender frameworks deal with economic empowerment will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

seek to contribute to multiple global agendas simultaneously. The fieldwork revealed that at the ground level of practice, actors most often refer to organizational strategy documents rather than global normative frameworks. These organizational strategies are frequently based on and refer to a combination of global policy agendas, which include women's economic empowerment as part of a broader 'gender agenda.' Hence staff members largely viewed their work as contributing to the organizational strategy rather than to any one global agenda in particular. Although, when asked about contributions to global level frameworks, the Sustainable Development Goals were mentioned most frequently. Second, global commitments to gender equality are designed to speak to and align with each other, even though they may refer to specific issue areas or contexts. Thus, even at the UN level it can be difficult to distinguish between frameworks such as the WPS and the SDGs, even though the two vary in scope, with WPS traditionally focussing on conflict-affected societies and the SDGs targeting development more broadly.

Based on how women's economic empowerment is included and treated in international normative frameworks, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, it is possible to map out the 'content' of the economic empowerment norm cluster.[27] As mentioned above, the conceptual framework developed in this thesis relies on a notion of norms as dynamic and fluid, since the 'content' of a norm or set of norms is continually subject to re-interpretation and may change during diffusion. However, for the purposes of the analysis, it is helpful to start by mapping the norm cluster's contents into different sub-components in order to identify how the global-level content travels to the implementation phase. Following the 'problem-value-behaviour' structure of norm content, the 'problem' is women's low(er) rates of

[27] The concept of a norm cluster 'allows for multiple combinations of conceptually interlinked but distinct values and behaviors, offering multiple acceptable solutions to similar and interlocking problems', see Carla Winston, 'Norm Structure, Diffusion, and Evolution: A Conceptual Approach', *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 3 (1 September 2018): 638–61.

participation in the formal economy, the overarching 'value' is women's right to full and effective economic participation, with multiple, related 'behaviours' as a means of addressing the problem.[28] The content of the norm cluster is laid out in Figure 1.

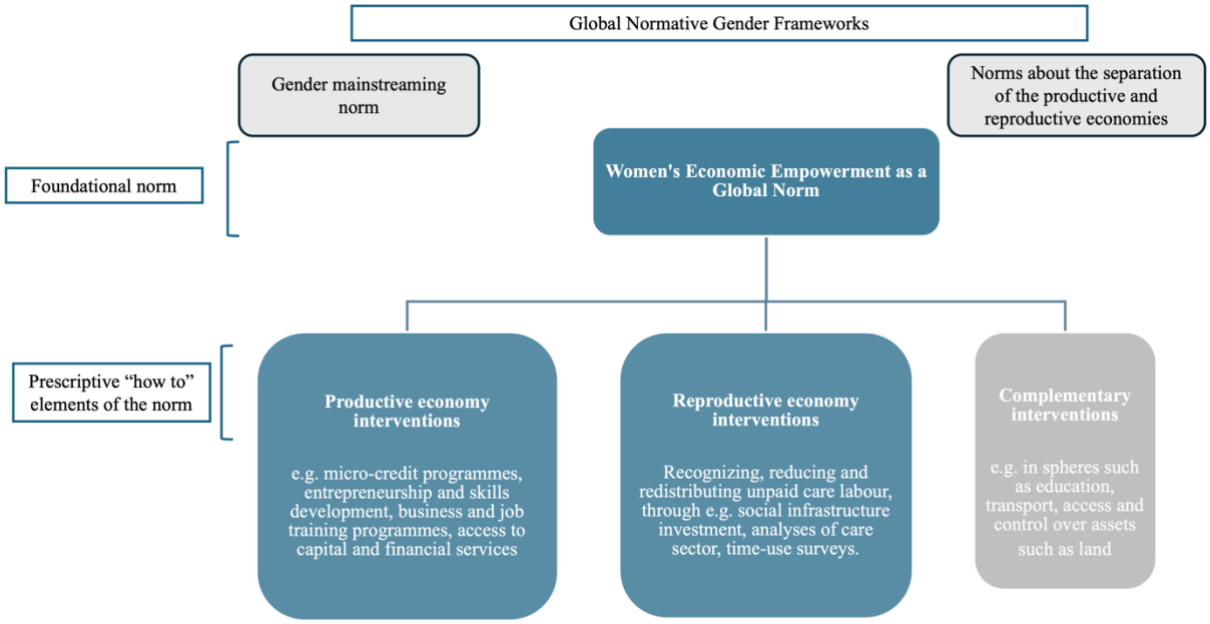


Figure 1.1: The Women's Economic Empowerment Norm Cluster

I conceptualize the norm cluster as having two main sub-elements with various interventions or behavioural prescriptions that attach to each; namely to do with the productive economy on the one hand, and the reproductive economy on the other. In other words, the goals and 'behaviours' prescribed in global gender frameworks can be divided into two main categories, those to do with women's participation and inclusion in the formal market economy and those concerning reducing women's unpaid work. These two sub-components form the focus of this thesis, although the frameworks also discuss complementary interventions in areas such as education and land ownership. More broadly, understandings of women's economic

[28] For a discussion of the tripartite structure of norms, see Winston, 'Norm Structure, Diffusion, and Evolution', 640. Winston suggests that norms consist of a problem, value and a behavioural component.

empowerment and the solutions to the 'problem' are also informed by gender mainstreaming and beliefs about the separation of the formal economy and care economies. Gender mainstreaming is a technocratic or 'policy' norm underpinned by the normative belief that 'an awareness of gender inequalities and differences in policymaking processes' will lead to improved outcomes for women on the ground.[29] Dichotomous understandings of the formal and informal economies entail a focus on the 'productive' economy which obscures 'the value and importance of reproductive labour and the social or care economy in sustaining the economy altogether, which is also gendered labour.'[30] The implications of both of these norms on the interpretation and implementation of women's economic empowerment as a global norm will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

1.4 Preview of the Argument and Contributions of the Thesis

This thesis seeks to make two inter-related arguments. First, that the disjuncture between what international interveners aim to do and what they actually achieve on the ground can be explained in large part by the absence of a holistic approach. Second, that in not taking a holistic approach, IOs have largely failed to deliver on their own stated goals of increasing women's labour force participation and have actively participated in the (re)production of gendered inequalities in the economic domain. Judging the outcomes of economic empowerment efforts in Kosovo based on labour market participation rates may seem at odds with feminist critiques which have established that merely increasing participation in the labour force does not always translate into empowerment for women. On the contrary, I recognize that labour force participation is an imperfect, minimal measure of economic empowerment for reasons

[29] Krook and True, 'Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms'; Jacqui True, 'Feminist Problems with International Norms: Gender Mainstreaming in Global Governance', in *Feminism and International Relations*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and J. Ann Tickner (Routledge, 2011), 75.
[30] Elena B. Stavrevska, 'Feminised Work, Invisible Labour', in *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research*, ed. Swati Parashar, Élise Féron, Catia Cecilia Confortini, and Tarja Väyrynen. 1st ed. (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2021), 403.

identified by feminist scholars, which will be discussed further in the following chapter. However, as mentioned above, this measure corresponds to international organizations' own stated goals. Increasing women's labour market participation is one goal (if not *the* goal) of nearly all economic empowerment programmes. As True and Hozić note, 'promoting the kind of gender equality that ensures the maximum formal participation of labour is crucial to the creation of globalized market relations.'[31] Taking into account feminist scholarship which has established that participation in the labour force alone does not always translate into empowerment for women, I claim that it represents a necessary but not sufficient marker of women's economic empowerment. Indeed, this is a key element of the argument in this thesis, which emphasises the imperative for a broader, more ambitious notion of economic empowerment and asks *why* we haven't seen a broader approach to economic empowerment from IOs in Kosovo and the implications of this on women's labour force engagement. In sum, I am interested in quantitative data on women's participation in the labour force insofar as it reflects international organizations' own stated goals and the failure of IOs to achieve those goals. However, I accept the limitations of this measure and the critiques levelled by feminist scholars and do not disregard such critiques but integrate them into the core argument of this thesis; hence I am also interested in the way in which norms of masculinity and femininity play out through domestic social institutions and their discursive and material effects.

A holistic approach is defined as one which addresses women's labour force participation in tandem with the social aspects which enable women to fully participate in the labour force. This definition draws on arguments by feminist scholars such as Deepta Chopra, who advocate for a broader notion of economic empowerment which 'comprises both the market economy

[31] Jacqui True and Aida A. Hozić, 'Don't Mention the War! International Financial Institutions and the Gendered Circuits of Violence in Post-Conflict', *Review of International Political Economy* 27, no. 6 (1 November 2020): 1203.

where women participate in the labour market, and the care economy which sustains and nurtures the market economy.'[32] Feminist political economists have long highlighted the various forms of unpaid work undertaken by women – such as reproductive, caring and subsistence labour - and how 'the formal economy relies on all of them, cannot function without them, and is constructed through and in relation to them.'[33] The notion of a holistic approach also speaks to the anthropological concept of 'embeddedness', which refers to the interconnections between economic activity and social relations, norms and cultural practices.[34] This perspective claims that it is impossible to disaggregate the economy from social spheres and underscores the importance of taking into account the socio-cultural context in which women's economic lives are conceived and structured. The absence of a holistic approach therefore entails failing to consider women's position in the economy. In making these arguments, the thesis aims to show the added value of applying a feminist approach, and specifically a feminist political economy (FPE) perspective, to norm implementation at the national level by international organizations in order to better understand the outcomes of norm diffusion for women in post-conflict contexts.

This study seeks to make four main contributions. **First**, from a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on norm diffusion in IR by responding to two, inter-related gaps in the literature. The first relates to the level of analysis and the centring of identity as key aspects of what norms 'do'; the bulk of IR norms literature has focussed on the diffusion

[32] Deepta Chopra, 'Balancing Paid Work and Unpaid Care Work to Achieve Women's Economic Empowerment', *IDS Policy Briefing*, no. 83 (January 2015), https://core.ac.uk/reader/29136480.
[33] Carol Cohn and Claire Duncanson, 'Whose Recovery? IFI Prescriptions for Postwar States', *Review of International Political Economy* 27, no. 6 (1 November 2020): 1219. See also Diane Elson, 'The Economic, the Political and the Domestic: Businesses, States and Households in the Organisation of Production', *New Political Economy* 3, no. 2 (July 1998): 189–208; Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis and Beyond*, First edition. (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2013).
[34] See for example Greta R. Krippner, 'The Elusive Market: Embeddedness and the Paradigm of Economic Sociology', *Theory and Society* 30, no. 6 (1 December 2002): 775–810.

of norms between states at the international level and their formal adoption at the state level, rather than what occurs afterwards. This is due in part to the widespread assumption among many IR scholars of the state as a unitary actor, which claims that 'identity' is the identity of the constitution of states, rather than of individuals. As such, studies rarely drill down deep enough to examine whether and how international norms result in any change at the individual level and how they interact with people's lived realities.[35] As mentioned above, unlike the primacy of the state in IR norms scholarship, bringing a feminist perspective to IR norms scholarship draws attention to the individual level of change. In doing so, this work extends existing accounts of norm diffusion and socialization theories and builds on recent contributions which call for 'a better understanding of how norms ultimately reach the people they are intended for.'[36] Feminist approaches clearly show that it is insufficient to stop at the state level when examining the diffusion of global norms and that their effect on (gendered) individuals must be taken into account, since they are the ultimate recipients of global norms, particularly in the case of human-rights norms and gender-equality norms. Drawing on the heuristic tools provided by FPE, this study introduces a novel conceptualization of norm implementation which incorporates both the actions taken to effect change in line with the norm *and* the outcomes for individuals who are the targets of global gender norms and policies. In doing so, this study develops existing accounts of norm diffusion and implementation by considering whether national-level and organizational commitments to empowerment by states and IOs translate into actual improvement in the lives of the norm addressees, in this case ordinary women. By including outcomes for women in the conceptualization of implementation, this understanding of implementation puts individuals at the centre and

[35] Restoy and Elbe, 'Drilling Down in Norm Diffusion'. There is a wealth of feminist work on gender and security at the intersection of constructivism and critical theory which looks at the 'gendered effects' of norms, such as work by Laura Shepherd and Cynthia Enloe. However, this body of work primarily leans into critical theory rather than constructivist literature.
[36] Restoy and Elbe, 'Drilling Down in Norm Diffusion', 2.

contributes to redressing the focus on the legal/administrative levels within current analyses of norm implementation. As mentioned above, this is in part assessed by taking into account women's actual levels of economic empowerment**,** measured via labour market outcomes.

Second, the study centres the role of international organizations as agentic actors at the domestic level in norm implementation processes. It offers an innovative take on the dynamics of norm implementation at the domestic level with a strong international presence. Contrary to the state-centric approach which tends to dominate IR norms scholarship, this study instead focuses attention on international organizations as the primary actor of interest. Much of the earlier norms scholarship examines the so-called 'implementation gap', whereby states pay lip-service to certain international norms and standards but fail to uphold and implement them in practice.[37] By focussing on state compliance with international norms, these contributions tend to downplay the role of international organizations as norm implementers at the ground level of practice, especially in contexts with a strong international ground presence. Taken together, both of these gaps in the literature mean that 'the role international actors play domestically has been largely neglected by scholars, who consider implementation to be governed by national specificities or the characteristics of an international norm.'[38] Conversely, more recent scholarship maintains that domestic norm implementation processes are under-theorised and argues that there is still much to be learned from analysing processes of implementing global normative frameworks at the ground level of practice which involve myriad actors deserving

[37] See, for example, Thomas Risse, Steve C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations 66 (Cambridge: University Press, 1999); Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, *The Persistent Power of Human Rights: From Commitment to Compliance*, vol. 126, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Emilie Hafner-Burton, *Making Human Rights a Reality* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013); H. Richard Friman, *The Politics of Leverage in International Relations: Name, Shame, and Sanctions*, Palgrave Studies in International Relations (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[38] Anne Crowley-Vigneau, *The National Implementation of International Norms: Transnational Networks and Local Content Policy*, Euro-Asian Studies (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 197.

of further attention. As Betts and Orchard note, 'it is not the case that the international actors' role ceases with institutionalization… there may be an ongoing "implementation game" in which international actors interact with national actors to contest and shape how exactly those international norms are applied in practice in particular developing countries.'[39]

Third, the project adds further analytical perspective to feminist political economy and feminist peace scholarship by focussing on the role of international actors in reproducing gendered norms at the ground level of practice and the factors driving this process. FPE approaches have provided a wealth of insights into the functioning of the global economy by bringing to light the entirety of economic activity and in doing so, the inextricable links between the productive and reproductive economies. In other words, FPE approaches have illustrated how the formal economy relies on women's under-valued social reproductive and care labour, which are frequently neglected during post-conflict reconstruction processes.[40] However, the role of certain actors beyond international financial institutions (IFIs) in reproducing patriarchal norms and the factors driving this process have been comparatively less explored. FPE analyses have shed much light on the costs and consequences of structural adjustment policies and the neglect of the care economy for women in post-conflict contexts. However, these approaches are weaker in their ability to explain the process leading up to these outcomes. Here, I take up Claire Duncanson's call for further research on 'women's economic empowerment activity in conflict-affected areas [which] would enable feminists to further explore which version of women's economic empowerment is being implemented.'[41]

[39] Betts and Orchard, *Implementation and World Politics*, 17–18.
[40] Shirin M Rai, Jacqui True, and Maria Tanyag, 'From Depletion to Regeneration: Addressing Structural and Physical Violence in Post-Conflict Economies', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 26, no. 4 (1 December 2019): 561–85.
[41] Claire Duncanson, 'Beyond Liberal vs Liberating: Women's Economic Empowerment in the United Nations' Women, Peace and Security Agenda', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21, no. 1 (January 2019): 125.

Much of FPE theory demonstrates and advocates for the 'ideal' model of women's economic empowerment. The analysis presented in this thesis complements these analyses by demonstrating some of the frictions and barriers that occur during the process of implementation. For example, True, Rai and Tanyag propose the idea of the 'regenerative state' centred on valuing and redistributing the social reproductive burden, alongside ensuring women's equal access to political power and redressing conflict-related harms such as GBV.[42] True et al. include international organizations in the web of actors involved in building and governing the regenerative state and note that 'the regenerative state can be supported rather than obstructed by international actors and policy frameworks.'[43] However, what is still lacking is an analysis of why on the ground level of practice, international organizations (often in conjunction with the state) interpret and implement international policy frameworks in ways that reproduce gendered norms and structural inequalities. By combining insights from FPE, IO and norms theory, this analysis provides greater depth of understanding of this phenomenon. In doing so it builds on and contributes to studies of feminist peace by analyzing the factors that hinder or facilitate the capacity of international actors to advance notions of peace that centre women's social reproduction and bring about meaningful change for women.[44]

Lastly, this thesis makes a significant empirical contribution to the literature on the national implementation of gender norms in Kosovo and the Western Balkans, as well as WPS scholarship. There is a limited but rich literature on how global gender norms, particularly UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, have travelled in post-

[42] Rai, True, and Tanyag, 'From Depletion to Regeneration', 575.
[43] Rai, True, and Tanyag, 'From Depletion to Regeneration', 579.
[44] María Martín de Almagro, 'Building Feminist Peace: Gender, Legal Reforms and Social Reproduction after the United Nations Mission in Liberia', *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 5, no. 1 (2022): 45–62; Sarah Smith and Keina Yoshida, eds., *Feminist Conversations on Peace* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022); Sarah Hewitt and Jacqui True, 'Is Feminist Peace Possible? Constraints and Opportunities in a Global Political Economy', in *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research*, ed. Swati Parashar, Élise Féron, Catia Cecilia Confortini, and Tarja Väyrynen. 1st ed. (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2021), 368–78.

conflict contexts.[45] However, until now there has been no in-depth local-level study of a post-conflict context with a substantial international presence, which introduces a different set of dynamics. More specifically, analyses of efforts to implement women's economic empowerment on the ground level of practice remain scarce.[46] Given that 'efforts to lift women's economic participation have recently become a more pronounced aspect of international assistance for post-conflict restoration'[47], this absence constitutes a major gap in our knowledge. The study reveals crucial organizational constraints to the implementation of global gender norms and highlights some of the challenges of transferring critical feminist ideas regarding systematic structural inequalities into policy practice. Whilst there has been some (albeit limited) research into the adoption of gender equality norms by development organizations, this research mostly focuses on the institutionalization of gender equality norms within organizations as an end-product in itself. The fundamental question of whether organizations' efforts to address gendered inequalities in the "real world" are successful has been noticeably overlooked.[48]

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[45] For literature on how gender norms travel in post-conflict contexts, see: Diana H. Madsen, 'Friction or Flows? The Translation of Resolution 1325 into Practice in Rwanda', *Conflict, Security & Development* 19, no. 2 (2019): 173–93; Diana H. Madsen, '"Localising the Global" – Resolution 1325 as a Tool for Promoting Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Rwanda', *Women's Studies International Forum* 66 (2018): 70–78; Elin Martine Doeland and Inger Skjelsbaek, 'Narratives of Support and Resistance: A Political Psychological Analysis of the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Political Psychology* 39, no. 5 (2018): 995–1011; Jenny Lorentzen, 'Norm Appropriation through Policy Production: Rwanda's Gender Policies', *Third World Thematics : A TWQ Journal* 2, no. 5 (2017): 658–74; Annika Bjorkdahl, 'A Gender-Just Peace? Exploring the Post-Dayton Peace Process in Bosnia', *Peace and Change* 37, no. 2 (2012): 286–317.
Laura McLeod is one of the few scholars to address international-local interactions around gender policies and gender mainstreaming in post-conflict contexts. See Laura McLeod, 'Configurations of Post-Conflict: Impacts of Representations of Conflict and Post-Conflict upon the (Political) Translations of Gender Security within UNSCR 1325', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13, no. 4 (1 December 2011): 594–611.

[46] Whilst there are macro-analyses of post-war IFI economic strategies and their detrimental gender effects, this study focuses on economic empowerment interventions specifically, whilst also taking into account the broader macro-economic context. Furthermore, whilst there is some literature on economic policies and women's economic empowerment in the Bosnian context, there is very little analysis of the Kosovo context.

[47] Nicole George, 'The Price of Peace?: Frictional Encounters on Gender, Security and the "Economic Peace Paradigm"', in *New Directions in Women, Peace and Security*, ed. Soumita Basu, Paul Kirby, and Laura J. Shepherd, 1st ed. (Bristol University Press, 2020), 41.

[48] Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, Lars Engberg-Pedersen, and Adam Moe Fejerskov, 'Global Norms and Heterogeneous Development Organizations: Introduction to Special Issue on New Actors, Old Donors and Gender Equality Norms in International Development Cooperation', *Progress in Development Studies* 18, no. 2 (April 2018): 77–94.

These empirical findings have important policy implications. Many of the interviewees involved in the research revealed that they would find a comprehensive analysis of the work around women's economic empowerment extremely valuable. IO staff often only have a vague understanding of what other organizations are doing in this field, the reasons behind which will be discussed further in later chapters. This study argues that it is essential to better understand how norms travel through country level offices of global governance organizations to enable more effective policy engagement. A better understanding of the mechanisms of and barriers to the vertical implementation of global gender equality norms once they enter international institutions is critical in explaining why global gender policy frameworks often fall short of fulfilling their transformative potential. As Spehar notes, 'analyzing gender policy implementation gaps is crucial if we are to understand why, despite numerous and ostensibly progressive gender policies having been adopted in the Western Balkans over the last few decades, we can still witness significant gender inequalities persisting in them.'[49] Additionally, this speaks to the post-conflict peacebuilding and statebuilding scholarship as it sheds light on the ability of peace- and statebuilding actors to deliver on gender elements of their mandates.

1.5 Methodology

This study undertakes a theoretically informed inductive analysis of Kosovo for the purposes of theory-building. I undertake intensive qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews, alongside documentary evidence such as IO reports, and government and civil society publications. My objective is two-fold: first, to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms of and barriers to the vertical implementation of global gender equality norms, and second, to explain why women's economic empowerment strategies have not been more effective and their interaction with women's lived realities. These two objectives are

[49] Andrea Spehar, 'The Pursuit of Political Will: Decision Makers' Incentives and Gender Policy Implementation in the Western Balkans', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 20, no. 2 (3 April 2018): 237.

intertwined. In unpacking *how* the process unfolded in Kosovo and explicating key factors and junctures, this study offers an explanation for the limited effectiveness of international efforts in the case of Kosovo. The analysis thus has both a process and outcomes dimension. However, it should be noted at the outset that in seeking to explain the limited effectiveness of international efforts on women's economic empowerment at the macro level, the analysis does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of all factors affecting female labour market engagement, nor does it seek to discount the role of other factors. That is to say, FPE theory suggests, and the empirical evidence confirms, that the factors identified in this study strongly influence the outcome; however, I do not make the strong claim that it *causes* it. This is in part due to the complexity of the phenomenon and the wide range of (f)actors that influence female labour market participation rates, which makes it nearly impossible to prove causality by drawing causal links between variables.

The single case study design is particularly well-suited to inductive theory-building and afforded the opportunity to conduct an empirically rich, nuanced analysis of the context.[50] This was an iterative process which involved going back and forth between theory and empirical observations. The choice of a single case allowed me to examine how economic empowerment 'works' across a range of international organizations and national stakeholders in order to understand complex processes of norm travel at the domestic level. In this way, the choice of a single case entails a large number of observations.[51] Inevitably, the pursuit of granularity involves sacrificing breadth over depth. However, using a single case study approach has allowed me to achieve the depth of understanding required to follow the life cycle of a norm

[50] See Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).
[51] Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds., *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, 2nd ed (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharp, Inc, 2014), xix–xx.

to the implementation phase. The particular case selected, as shall be discussed below, can be considered somewhat unique due to the extent and nature of international intervention. However, as Flyvbjerg notes, 'atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied.'[52] Whilst Kosovo possesses certain unique characteristics, many of the problems that Kosovo experienced are typical and representative of problems that arise in other post-conflict, transitional contexts with a plethora of international organizations, and international development settings more broadly.

The study's epistemological perspective is grounded in interpretivist insights. IR feminist theory has been influential in shaping the interpretivist research methodology through its emphasis on gendered power relations and its emancipatory goals, namely improving the security of women. In this thesis, I pursue a feminist approach to the norm diffusion process, which foregrounds women's lives and experiences. There are several defining features of a 'feminist research methodology', one of which is the foregrounding of everyday life and 'how the mundane matters.'[53] Feminist analyses do not focus only on women, although women's experiences are privileged due to their historic invisibility within mainstream IR. An analytical gaze on women's everyday experiences provides an alternative lens through which to view the functioning of global politics, one which makes visible the connections between the 'personal' and the international. Enloe uses the example of international political economy of textiles to demonstrate the connections between the personal and international politics. She shows how the idea that women are not heads of households plays out in the international political

[52] Bent Flyvbjerg, 'Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research', *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (April 2006): 229. See also Harry Eckstein, 'Case Study and Theory in Political Science', in *Case Study Method* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009), 118–64.
[53] Cynthia Enloe, 'The Mundane Matters', *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 4 (December 2011): 447–50.

economy of textiles via the behaviour of managers and executives who pay women less and deny them opportunities for promotion based on assumptions about their personal lives, in order to maximise profit.[54]

Feminist scholars have shown that 'looking towards the individual reveals different notions and conceptions of what security, militarisation or peace are from multiple standpoints or contexts rather than universal 'truths''.[55] Feminist security studies (FSS) in particular have long argued that the state is a 'misleading construction that purports to protect its citizens but often perpetuates the subordination of women.'[56] FSS takes as its starting point the fact that 'secure states often contain insecure women' and that individuals are embedded in unequal social structures, all of which differentially impact an individual's security.[57] To quote Ann Tickner, 'whereas much of IR is focused on describing and explaining the behavior of states, feminists are motivated by the goal of investigating the lives of women within states or international structures in order to change them.'[58] FSS's concern with the security of marginalised individuals and groups challenges the state-centric approach of both mainstream security studies and norms research. This research incorporates this concern through its focus on the interaction between international interventions and women's everyday lived realities.

More specifically, a feminist approach to norm diffusion is one which is concerned not only with norm change and diffusion, but also with the power dynamics which drive these

[54] Quoted in Juanita Elias and Adrienne Roberts, 'Feminist Global Political Economies of the Everyday: From Bananas to Bingo', *Globalizations* 13, no. 6 (1 November 2016): 790.
[55] Jacqui True and Sarah Hewitt, 'International Relations and the Gendered International', in *The SAGE Handbook of the History, Philosophy and Sociology of International Relations*, by Andreas Gofas, Inanna Hamati-Ataya, and Nicholas Onuf (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018), 93.
[56] Laura Sjoberg, 'Introduction to Security Studies: Feminist Contributions', *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (12 June 2009): 196.
[57] Sjoberg, 'Introduction to Security Studies', 198.
[58] J. Ann Tickner, 'Feminism Meets International Relations: Some Methodological Issues', in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.

processes and the capacity of new norms to unsettle and displace existing gendered hierarchies. By bringing FPE into conversation with IR norms and IO scholarship, this thesis serves to further this research agenda. Unlike much of the constructivist scholarship, critical feminist approaches to norm diffusion do not take a norm's inherent 'goodness' for granted. Feminist scholars have demonstrated that even seemingly progressive norms and narratives, such as gender mainstreaming, can entrench dominant gender norms or 'create new patterns of domination and marginalization' rather than displacing them.[59] Critical feminist perspectives are therefore interested in whether new norms remove old forms of gendered subordination and oppression. This is precisely the approach of this thesis, which asks why, despite over two decades of international presence in Kosovo and the multitude of efforts to empower women economically, international interventions have been unable to disrupt existing gendered hierarchies and exclusions in the labour market and increase women's representation in the formal economy.

International actors are defined as actors having their headquarters outside of Kosovo and having a direct on-the-ground presence in Kosovo.[60] 'International' therefore encompasses regional actors in the context of this study, such as the European Union and the OSCE. Although the study seeks to transcend the boundaries between 'local' and 'global', the terms are utilized for the sake of analytical clarity. I use the terms 'international' and 'global' interchangeably, as well as 'domestic' and 'local'.

1.6 Case Selection

[59] True, 'Feminist Problems with International Norms', 88.
[60] I borrow this definition from Sara Hellmüller, *The Interaction Between Local and International Peacebuilding Actors* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018).

The selection of Kosovo as a case study for understanding the complex processes of norm travel at the domestic level in internationalized contexts is based partly on its nature as a context where the international community has in many ways had a mandate for transformation. In other words, it has had license to do far more than in many other cases of international intervention, even in the post-independence period.[61] Furthermore, the international community in Kosovo has not been constrained insofar as it has not faced formal opposition, especially at the outset, but also during the latter years of international presence, although this has begun to change more recently. This is not to say that the missions have been locally popular (UNMIK and EULEX in particular have faced resistance from the local population), nor that the government has always cooperated and/or implemented what was agreed to the best of their ability. However, the international community has not faced institutional resistance in the same way as other contexts such as Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Côte d'Ivoire. In this sense, Kosovo and perhaps also Timor-Leste, are somewhat unique vis-à-vis the potential for transformation vested in the international community.

Kosovo in many ways embodies the neoliberal vision of post-conflict peace- and statebuilding. Kosovo has experienced various (unprecedented) forms of international governance and influence since 1999, of which women's empowerment specifically has been part. Kosovo was formally administered by the international community from 1999 until independence in 2008, after which the international community retained a significant degree

[61] See Artan Mustafa, 'Early Childhood Education and Care in Kosovo: A Targeted Educational Approach Producing and Maintaining Social and Gender Inequalities', *Revija Za Socijalnu Politiku* 27, no. 3 (16 December 2021): 367–90; Artan Mustafa, 'Kosovo's Social Policy during Self-Management, UNMIK and Independence: Persisting High Inequality and Social Exclusion', *International Journal of Social Welfare* 29, no. 1 (2020): 96–108. Jacqui and Hozić make a similar argument in reference to IFIs, claiming that 'the limited knowledge and attention of IFIs to gendered power and inequality in the economy is even more painfully obvious in conflict-affected contexts like the Ukraine, East Timor, and the Western Balkans where they have had (practically) free-reign', in True and Hozić, 'Don't Mention the War! IFIs and the Gendered Circuits of Violence in Post-Conflict', 1202.

of influence. It is a country with an extensive international presence and which has been the recipient of substantial sums of international aid and development assistance. According to OECD data, Kosovo was the fourth largest recipient of official development assistance (ODA) per capita among countries and territories with a population of 1 million or more between 2008-2017.[62] Between 2015-2018, Kosovo received a total of 695 million EUR of ODA.[63] This is striking given that the post-independence period supposedly marked the decline of international involvement in Kosovo. However, despite the extensive presence of and investment from the international community, Kosovo still exhibits poor statebuilding and democratic performance. The same can be said in regard to efforts to economically empower women, which have yielded unexpectedly poor results compared to the length and extent of interventions in this area. As Bojičić-Dželilović and Hozić point out, 'Two decades later…nearly two-thirds of women in the Western Balkans are either outside the labor force or are unemployed. Despite numerous initiatives, including legislative changes intent on promoting gender equality and participation such as gender-based quotas, most women in the Western Balkans are now on the margins of political life and, at least officially, economically inactive.'[64] In this sense, the situation in Kosovo is reflective of patterns in the broader region. It is difficult to determine exactly how much aid has been directed towards women's economic empowerment due to issues with the aid management platforms and gender markers. A World Bank report estimated that between 2008-2014, over $50 million was implemented and/or programmed to be spent on economic empowerment interventions contributing to women's economic empowerment in Kosovo. However, this figure is likely higher since the authors

[62] OECD, 'Field visit to Kosovo', in *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Austria 2020* (OECD Publishing, Paris), Note 18. https://doi.org/10.1787/c3aef350-en.
[63] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, Office of the Prime Minister, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality: The State of Alignment with Kosovo Government Priorities (2015-2018)', March 2020, 15.
[64] Vesna Bojičić-Dželilović and Aida A. Hozić, 'Taxing for Inequalities: Gender Budgeting in the Western Balkans', *Review of International Political Economy* 27, no. 6 (1 November 2020): 1295.

acknowledge that not all initiatives that played a role in women's economic empowerment were included due to data accessibility and reliability issues.[65]

Kosovo thus offers an interesting ecosystem to conduct a granular study of different organizations at different levels. Kosovo's dependence on foreign aid further highlights the need to consider the role of international organizations as global norm translators and provides interesting insights into the process of gender mainstreaming broader economic programming in addition to gender-specific policies and programmes. The crowded and established international sector in Kosovo makes it a rich case for examining the implementation of global women's economic empowerment norms by different international organizations. Thus, the Kosovo case enables an analysis of the interactions between the 'cacophony of actors, interests and agendas [which] have called Kosovo home since the end of the war' within a given issue area and how inter-institutional dynamics affect the translation of global gender norms at the domestic level.[66] An in-depth analysis of different international organizations in Kosovo working on economic empowerment and the approaches to this issue sheds light on crucial stumbling blocks to the implementation of global gender norms at the domestic level, thereby revealing a much thicker explanation of how norms travel through networks of institutions at the domestic level.

Furthermore, Kosovo is a country which is still very much transitioning from war to peace, characterised by contested statehood, inter-ethnic tensions and poverty. From a

[65] World Bank, 'Kosovo - What works for women assessment of interventions for economic empowerment' Washington, D.C, World Bank Group, 2015. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/562881521458293154/Kosovo-What-works-for-women-assessment-of-interventions-for-economic-empowerment.

[66] Nicole Farnsworth, eds., '1325 Facts & Fables. A Collection of Stories about the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in Kosovo' (Prishtina: Kosova Women's Network, 2011), 10.

feasibility perspective, it is easily accessible and a relatively safe context to conduct research, enabling an embedded approach to data collection. This case thus provides a valuable opportunity to see how dynamics common to post-conflict and development settings, such as institutional fragility, weak host government leadership, and structural power imbalances between international organizations and host governments, shape the process of norms travelling, yielding insights which extend beyond Kosovo and speak to other conflict-affected and developing settings. In this regard, Kosovo is emblematic of a broader set of cases; this can include contexts with international administrations (such as Timor-Leste and Cambodia), but also post-conflict societies with extensive multi-dimensional peacekeeping missions (such as Liberia and Sierra Leone), as well as other large-scale development contexts.

In sum, Kosovo represents a particularly fruitful case and allows for a fine-grained analysis of IO practices at the domestic level, which highlights the need to disaggregate norm implementation processes. It is worth noting that by focussing on Kosovo, the intention behind the analysis developed in this thesis is not to build an exceptionalist argument which exoticizes and measures Kosovo against impossible standards; nor is it to suggest that Kosovo, and the Balkans more broadly, lag behind European 'modernity' and need to 'catch up' with the Western liberal democracy.[67] I also do not intend to portray Kosovo as exceptional with regards to the ways in which economic empowerment norms have been implemented by international organizations and government institutions. Indeed, as Spehar has argued, 'no country can be considered fully "developed" in terms of how far they have progressed with their gender policy implementation processes.'[68] I have tried to avoid these pitfalls by emphasising the

[67] On the tendency to exceptionalise the post-Yugoslav space, see Elena B. Stavrevska et al., 'Of Love and Frustration as Post-Yugoslav Women Scholars: Learning and Unlearning the Coloniality of IR in the Context of Global North Academia', *International Political Sociology* 17, no. 2 (20 March 2023): olad008.
[68] Spehar, 'The Pursuit of Political Will', 247.

responsibility of the policies of the international community in keeping women in the margins of the economy. In other words, women's marginalization within the Kosovo economy is not the inevitable by-product of conflict and regional 'backwardness' but in part the responsibility of international organizations and their policies, which must be held accountable. What I also claim is that, for reasons discussed above, Kosovo presents an interesting case to examine the role and contribution of the international community in the fragmented and fractured implementation of global gender frameworks in national contexts and the impact on women on the ground. In this sense, Kosovo tells a story of something bigger than Kosovo and even bigger than conflict-affected societies, since the disjointed implementation of global gender frameworks can be seen even in countries which are considered to be developed such as the UK.[69]

Whilst Kosovo possesses certain unique characteristics, the phenomenon of international gender norms not achieving significant results in practice despite international intervention is certainly not unique to Kosovo. More specifically, as mentioned above, many other contexts display similar trends in terms of women's employment levels despite significant international funds, both in conflict-affected and non-conflict societies, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Palestine and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, since the analysis focuses on one country, I make limited claims to the theory's generalisability beyond Kosovo, although in Chapter 8, I identify potential areas for further examination of the contingent generalisability of my findings beyond Kosovo.

[69] For example, regarding the implementation of the CEDAW Convention in the UK, the CEDAW Committee has repeatedly highlighted the UK's failure to incorporate the CEDAW Convention as a whole. In 2018 the committee noted that 'It reiterates its previous concerns expressed in 1999, 2008 and 2013…regarding the lack of measures taken to fully incorporate the provisions of the Convention into its national legislation, leading to a fragmented and uneven legislative framework on the rights of women and girls.' (CEDAW/C/GBR/8: Concluding Observations, 3).

1.7 Data Collection and Analysis

This study undertakes an in-depth, qualitative single case study analysis to build a process-based framework for understanding the limited travelling of global women's economic empowerment norms in Kosovo. In order to fully appreciate the mechanisms driving policy formulation and implementation on the ground, the analysis also takes the global level of analysis into account, such as the role of mandates or global strategies formulated at higher decision-making levels, or how coordination dynamics between international organizations at the global level (in this case referring to organizations' headquarters) are reproduced in organizational practices at the ground level. Whilst this study primarily focuses on country offices as international organizations who work to implement global gender norms, the focus of the analysis is not confined exclusively to these. Given that international organizations are mandated to work with national governments, the role of the Kosovo government cannot be ignored and also features in the analysis. It is not based on the assumption that external support is decisive nor the sole driver of change.

The research draws on three types of sources. First, it builds on the secondary and policy-related 'grey literature' on statebuilding in post-conflict Kosovo in general as well as existing scholarly analyses of international economic empowerment interventions in other post-conflict and developing contexts. Second, the research draws on data gained from semi-structured interviews conducted during ten months of field research in Kosovo.[70] This involved non-random sampling, selecting key actors 'according to the position they have held and their known involvement in a political process'[71], in this case the development and implementation of women's economic empowerment interventions in Kosovo. I was able to identify initial

[70] The field research obtained ethics clearance through the University of Oxford [Ref No.: SSH_DPIR_C1A_20_027].
[71] Oisín Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing: A Case for Non-Probability Sampling', *PS: Political Science & Politics* 40, no. 4 (October 2007): 771.

interviewees through information available in published reports and my position as a researcher at a local NGO, the Kosovo Women's Network (KWN), a role I took on during the Covid pandemic when fieldwork was impossible. KWN is a leading actor in advancing gender equality in Kosovo and has close relations with the international community. For instance, it has a partnership with the EU serving as a 'help desk' on gender equality matters and is often involved in government consultations regarding gender equality legislation. Not only did this provide me with a unique vantage point from which to observe the norm implementation process within the specific policy domain of interest as well as related issue areas, it also enabled me to identify an initial subset of interviewees through connections facilitated by KWN. Subsequent interviewees were then identified through 'chain-referral sampling'[72], whereby initial respondents were asked to suggest and share information on other key actors. Interviewees were generally very forthcoming and willing to facilitate connections with colleagues, including individuals whose contact information was not publicly available and/or who were no longer working in the same role but had previously been involved in the political process under examination.

Elite interviews offered several critical contributions given the study's focus on international organizations' strategies and implementation. As Tansey argues, 'Elite interviews can shed light on the hidden elements of political action that are not clear from an analysis of political outcomes or other primary sources. By interviewing key participants in the political process, analysts can gain data about the political debates and deliberations that preceded decision making and action taking, and supplement official accounts with first-hand testimony.'[73] Interviews offered key insights into the assumptions underlying the international

[72] Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing', 770.
[73] Tansey, 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing', 767.

community's understandings of economic empowerment and the drivers behind policy and programmatic choices which are not visible in published strategy documents and project concept notes. Several interviewees also shared a number of unpublished documents, which provided a further data source for this thesis and enriched the data corpus. These included a draft of the Kosovo National Development Strategy (prior to its official publication); internal evaluations of IO programmes and strategy documents which were not publicly available; and correspondence between the international community and the Kosovo government.

I conducted 54 interviews between October 2021 and March 2024, primarily in-person in Prishtina, and in some cases remotely where interviewees were not based in Kosovo. I sought to target a wide spectrum of individuals, ranging from international officials to national actors, based on the criteria that they are somehow involved in or knowledgeable about women's economic empowerment. Interviews were conducted with both gender-specific staff (such as gender advisors and gender focal points) as well as non-gender specialist staff, such as IO staff members or civil servants who work on economic issues more broadly. Interviewees included: current and former staff of UN entities (such as UNMIK, UNDP, UN Women, World Bank); staff of regional organizations (e.g. EU, OSCE); bilateral development agencies and INGOs (e.g. SDC, SIDA, USAID, Swiss Contact, Helvetas); Kosovo government officials (Agency for Gender Equality, Development Cooperation Office, Ministry of the Economy, Ministry of Labour, Transfers and Social Welfare); and local civil society actors.

Interviews with country-level staff of international organizations consisted of both Kosovo nationals and international officials. Additionally, interviewees in international organizations included individuals based in Kosovo, as well as those working in regional offices and at headquarters. Interviewees were posed a standard set of questions, with some

tailoring depending on whether they worked for an international organization or the Kosovo government. All interviews were conducted in English, which on the whole did not pose any challenges given the level of English required to work within international organizations. There were a few cases where interpreters were required for interviews with civil society representatives.

There are also several challenges associated with conducting interviews. First, my affiliation with KWN, although ultimately a useful starting point, posed certain challenges due to the organization's tensions with the international community regarding issues of funding, consultation and ownership. Although KWN has strong relationships with the gender advisors within most international organizations, which facilitated effective chain-referral sampling, I sometimes had to be cautious about disclosing my association with KWN so as to avoid influencing my interactions with international organizations. However, being embedded within the organization was ultimately beneficial from both a personal learning perspective and for research purposes as this immersion allowed me to gain firsthand insights into the international community's dynamics from the perspective of civil society and lent me credibility during my initial interviews. This is particularly important in heavily researched contexts such as Kosovo where researchers have a reputation for non-reciprocal, extractive research practices which can present challenges in terms of accessing interviewees. Being embedded within the organization also led to my participation in the inaugural 'Women, Peace and Security Forum' in October 2022 hosted by the President of Kosovo, which provided a useful platform for informal conversations and for making connections for my second round of interviewing in late 2022.

Second, there was a tendency amongst some international organizations to be defensive of their work, a reaction that is understandable given the reliance of many IOs on donor

funding, which creates an environment which discourages critical reflection on their own failings and areas for improvement. As a result, some interviews felt like more of a PR opportunity rather than an honest reflection on the organization's challenges and opportunities for change. This tendency was particularly evident in certain UN agencies, which often operate on an unofficial patronage system for job placements, which can make staff apprehensive about expressing concerns that could be perceived as critical of the organization or its leadership. I worked to mitigate these challenges and potential bias by triangulating their perspectives with others within the same organization as well as by seeking insights from external stakeholders and community members who interacted with the organization. Given the sensitivity of the research topic, which involved probing implementation challenges and examining policy and organizational shortcomings, all interviewees were offered the option of anonymizing the data they provided. Throughout the thesis all interviewees are generally referred to by their position, no names are used, and in some cases where interviewees requested their organization not to be specified, a general signifier is used, such as 'UN agency staff member' or 'bilateral donor representative'.[74]

Finally, I addressed these concerns by triangulating findings from these interviews with a wide range of written sources published by international organizations, government institutions and civil society. These include documents and reports from IOs and national-level actors, including: EU country progress reports; IO reports and publications; UN Kosovo Team annual reports; independent programme evaluations; organizational global and country-level strategy documents (including both gender-specific strategies and overarching strategies); reports and publications by the Kosovo government (such as the Kosovo Agency of Gender Equality) and local NGOs, including KWN and the Kosovar Gender Studies Centre. Although conducting

[74] An annotated list of interviewees will be available at the viva.

large-scale surveys on public perceptions and gender attitudes was not feasible given resourcing limitations, I took advantage of recent survey data collected by civil society organizations which provided key insights into public perceptions of gender roles. In particular, *The Institute for Social Policy Musine Kokalari* commissioned quantitative and qualitative research, including a time-use survey, on caregiving as unpaid work in Kosovo in 2022. This and other surveys were useful in capturing public perceptions about unpaid care work and women's position in society more broadly.

1.8 Chapter Overview

The remainder of the thesis proceeds as follows. **Chapter 2** begins by contextualizing the concept of empowerment. It then turns to a critical review of the relevant literature, with a particular focus on IR norms research and feminist political economy. This review serves as the basis for the conceptual framework developed in this thesis, elaborated in the final section of the chapter.

Chapter 3 establishes the historical backdrop to international intervention in Kosovo. I provide an overview of the background to the conflict, followed by a specific discussion of international intervention from a gender perspective. The chapter also provides the international policy context by mapping references to women's economic empowerment within the major global gender equality frameworks. The chapter then provides further context to the Kosovo case in terms of external economic empowerment interventions.

Chapters 4 through 7 are organized thematically and reflect the themes that emerged from the interviews, examining (1) Inter-organizational dynamics in Kosovo, (2) The political economy of the donor community, and (3) Normative ambiguity, and (4) Domestic social institutions, respectively. This theory-generating portion of the thesis seeks to identify the main factors contributing to fragmented implementation in Kosovo and analyse the impact of fragmented implementation on women in Kosovo.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis. It synthesizes insights from the previous four empirical chapters to address the question of why we see the fragmented implementation of global women's economic empowerment norms in Kosovo. It points to their broader implications for literatures on norm implementation, feminist scholarship, and international-local interactions, and offers avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents the theoretical background and conceptual foundations of the thesis. Its first part contextualizes the concept of 'economic empowerment' which lies at the heart of the thesis. Second, it reviews and critiques extant analyses of norm travel, highlighting their main strengths and weaknesses. Third, it draws on insights from feminist IR scholarship to derive tools and insights that can help inform debates on norm implementation at the domestic level. In this area, the chapter particularly focuses on FPE approaches. Finally, it elaborates a novel analytical framework to study the implementation of international economic empowerment norms by international organizations in post-conflict settings. By bringing feminist political economy approaches into conversation with IR norms and IO theory, the framework provides fresh insights into the process of norm implementation in the domain of economic empowerment.

Before proceeding to the following sections, an important caveat must be mentioned regarding the nature of this argument. The focus on IOs as the primary actor of interest does not seek to reinscribe a top-down notion of norm diffusion in which international organizations transfer norms onto passive local populations. Similarly, it does not aim to deny national governments and local non-state actors of any agency. There is much merit in the bottom-up analyses of norm (re)definition and implementation by local actors. The interest of this thesis, however, lies in the fact that insufficient attention has been paid to the role of international organizations as agentic actors at the domestic level in norm implementation processes. Rather, it highlights that just as states and local actors have been shown to be powerful agents in processes of norm implementation, international actors too are worthy of more attention in this context.

For the purposes of analytical clarity, the study distinguishes between IO and government policies. In reality, the divide is not so neat as IO policies and practices both shape and are shaped by the agenda of the host government. In theory, for example, UN agencies are supposed to align their strategies and priorities with those of the host government. However, the reality on the ground is far messier as IOs also have their own corporate strategies, guidelines and policies which trickle down from HQs. Indeed, one of the core critiques of liberal peacebuilding has been the tendency amongst international organizations to blindly follow their own agendas without tailoring to national specificities and needs. Thus, while the analysis focuses on IO policies and practices, it recognizes that these cannot be viewed in isolation and also includes the role of the Kosovo government and agencies in its explanation of the implementation trajectories of UN women's economic empowerment norms.

2.2 Tracing Constructions of Women's Economic Empowerment

This section explores the concept of economic empowerment and traces its evolution and the shift in meaning that has occurred as it has been taken up by various international development and corporate actors. Understanding how the concept has developed at a global level is crucial as it is this understanding that informs IO policies in practice. Women's empowerment, including economic empowerment, remain contested concepts within feminist scholarship. Importantly, it shows possible variants in usages of the term based on two broad understandings of economic empowerment that have been identified within feminist scholarship: liberal and liberating empowerment.[1] It is important to note that the two are not binary, and liberal versions of economic empowerment can contain elements of a more

[1] Cecilia M. B. Sardenberg, 'Liberal vs. Liberating Empowerment: A Latin American Feminist Perspective on Conceptualising Women's Empowerment1', *IDS Bulletin* 39, no. 6 (26 January 2009): 18–27.

liberating approach.[2] Nevertheless, it is useful to distinguish between the two for conceptual clarity as they represent very distinct ideas of what constitutes empowerment for women.

Cecilia Sardenberg first distinguished between 'liberal' and 'liberating' notions of women's empowerment.[3] The central difference between these two understandings is the purpose of women's empowerment and the means through which it is achieved. Whilst liberal empowerment sees women's (individual) empowerment as a means to other development ends, liberating empowerment has the transformation of power relations and structural inequalities at its core.[4] The introduction of women's empowerment into international development discourse dates back to the 1980s and 1990s, which saw the emergence of a field known as 'Gender and Development'.[5] In 1984 the DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) network was formed by feminist researchers, activists and politicians from the Global South.[6] These early feminists, such as Gita Sen and Caren Grown, advanced a vision of empowerment centred on collective action for 'structural transformation, through actions that promoted radical changes in the institutions of patriarchal domination.'[7] The kind of empowerment envisioned in these early applications sought to change power relations through consciousness-raising and collective action. This notion of empowerment recognised that it is not enough to simply integrate women into existing systems which perpetuate their oppression

[2] Duncanson, 'Beyond Liberal vs Liberating', 116.
[3] Sardenberg, 'Liberal vs. Liberating Empowerment'.
[4] Sardenberg, 'Liberal vs. Liberating Empowerment', 19.
[5] See Gita Sen and Caren Grown, *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives* (London: Earthscan, 1988); Caroline O.N. Moser, 'Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Gender Needs', *World Development*, World Development, 17, no. 11 (1989): 1799–1825; Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought* (London: Verso, 1994); Jo Rowlands, *Questioning Empowerment: Working with Women in Honduras* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1997); Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, Cambridge South Asian Studies 58 (Cambridge: University Press, 1994). The GAD approach emerged from feminists of the South as an alternative to the earlier 'Women in Development' approach which called for women's equal inclusion in mainstream development processes without questioning the structures these women were included in. This approach suffered from the much-critiqued 'add women and stir' phenomenon whereas GAD advanced a more structural critique.
[6] Duncanson, 'Beyond Liberal vs Liberating', 113–14.
[7] Sardenberg, 'Liberal vs. Liberating Empowerment', 20.

and inequality. Empowerment was regarded 'as the process by which women attain autonomy and self-determination, as well as an instrument for the eradication of patriarchy, a means and an end in itself.'[8]

As the term was increasingly adopted by organizations such as the World Bank, UN and other INGOs and corporations, its meaning changed drastically. Empowerment has since become a buzzword synonymous with 'the self-optimising individual'.[9] The focus of liberal empowerment has been on individual self-improvement and betterment through economic independence. As Cornwall aptly notes, 'infused with liberal individualism, this model of empowerment relocates what was once conceived as a collective process in the self-actualizing individual.'[10] Another key feature of current neoliberal discourses on women's empowerment is the multiplier effect of 'investing in women'. According to this narrative, women's empowerment is 'smart economics', a no-brainer which brings with it a whole host of benefits including economic growth, sustainable peace, poverty reduction, better childhood development outcomes and increased family and community wellbeing – it is the tool to end all other inequalities. As Martín de Almagro and Ryan argue, 'although empowering women instrumentally to achieve peace and the development of the state is not a bad thing per se, it becomes pervasive when what is sought is simply the rebuilding of a patriarchal state in a neoliberal global order.'[11] The value of women's economic empowerment is thus less about genuinely empowering women to make their own life choices through consciousness-raising and collectively challenging patriarchal systems of oppression and more about individual self-

[8] Sardenberg, 'Liberal vs. Liberating Empowerment', 19.
[9] Andrea Cornwall and Althea-Maria Rivas, 'From 'Gender Equality and "Women's Empowerment" to Global Justice: Reclaiming a Transformative Agenda for Gender and Development', *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (February 2015): 397.
[10] Andrea Cornwall, 'Beyond "Empowerment Lite": Women's Empowerment, Neoliberal Development and Global Justice', *Cadernos Pagu*, no. 52 (30 November 2018): 21–22.
[11] Martín de Almagro and Ryan, 'Subverting Economic Empowerment', 1066.

betterment and the resulting societal benefits. In other words, 'empowerment becomes an individual resource to be maximised for efficiency.'[12] The idea that women are expected to participate in the formal labour market and in doing so contribute to economic growth and other development goals, alongside their unpaid domestic responsibilities, only serves to further entrench gender inequalities. This sentiment is captured by Laura Shepherd's notion of women in post-conflict contexts 'as superheroines, agents of their own salvation, capable of representing the needs and priorities of others and with the capacity to effect positive transformation in their given environments.'[13]

Whether individual engagement in the formal economy and higher incomes can in fact lead to women's empowerment has been a source of debate amongst feminist scholars. Research shows that increased income alone does not necessarily translate into better well-being or more equality for women for a number of reasons.[14] First, it depends on the extent to which women are able to effectively control income and exercise decision-making power within the household.[15] Second, participation in the productive economy combined with no concomitant change in expected levels of unpaid domestic labour can result in a double or triple shift for women.[16] In other words, many women are simply *'working harder* - in and outside

[12] Cornwall and Rivas, 'From 'Gender Equality and "Women's Empowerment" to Global Justice', 406.
[13] Laura J. Shepherd, 'Sex, Security and Superhero(in)Es: From 1325 to 1820 and Beyond', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13, no. 4 (December 2011): 510–11.
[14] Naila Kabeer and Luisa Natali, 'Gender Equality and Economic Growth: Is There a Win-Win?', *IDS Working Papers* 2013, no. 417 (2013): 1–58.
[15] V. Spike Peterson, 'Informalization, Inequalities and Global Insecurities', *International Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (1 June 2010): 22.; Shahra Razavi, 'From Rags to Riches: Looking at Poverty from a Gender Perspective', *IDS Bulletin* 28, no. 3 (1997): 49–62.
[16] A double shift refers to the dual burden shouldered by women of participation in the formal economy as well as unpaid housework. A triple shift refers to situations where women undertake reproductive labour, informal work *and* formal employment which often occurs under deteriorating economic conditions caused by SAPs, flexibilization and informalization to compensate for decreased public service provision and a decline in male wages. See V. Spike Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting of Global Political Economy: Integrating Reproductive, Productive and Virtual Economies* (London and New York.: Routledge, 2003), 95.

households.'[17] Many feminists have thus criticised the neoliberal drive for women to join the formal economy and stand on their own two feet with minimal involvement of the state as it creates extra burdens for women. For example, Sardenberg's study of a working-class community in Brazil shows that women's economic empowerment has little effect on traditional gender norms, even though economic independence does enable women to escape situations of domestic violence.[18] Peterson also claims microfinance and similar programmes rely on individualised conceptions of women's agency which absolves the role of the state and makes the 'problem' of women's empowerment as located entirely within women themselves, 'diverting attention from underlying systems that inexorably create 'problems.''[19] Third, the potential for small-scale entrepreneurship to undermine women's ability to participate in more collective forms of empowerment and trap women in debt-cycles due to high-interest loans of micro-finance schemes has also been noted by feminist scholars. These three critiques highlight how oftentimes liberal empowerment interventions with a narrow focus on women's participation in the formal economy can normalize structural inequalities and undermine the goals of gender equality.

The fundamental problem for feminist scholars with the liberal empowerment narrative is that it leaves the structural basis of gendered inequalities unquestioned. Claire Duncanson notes that 'it offers no challenge to the broader neoliberal macroeconomic framework that has created and sustained gender-based inequality and oppression, through the global feminization of labour, the erosion of public support for social reproduction and the privileging of the rights of

[17] V. Spike Peterson, 'Informalization, Inequalities and Global Insecurities', *International Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (1 June 2010): 22.
[18] Shahra Razavi, 'From Rags to Riches: Looking at Poverty from a Gender Perspective', *IDS Bulletin* 28, no. 3 (1997): 49–62.
[19] V. Spike Peterson, 'Rethinking Theory: Inequalities, Informalization and Feminist Quandaries', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 14, no. 1 (March 2012): 21.

capital over those of the global poor.'[20] This approach, which Cornwall has dubbed 'empowerment lite' sees empowerment as depoliticised and neutral, as something that can be 'given' to beneficiaries. In the words of Sardenberg, 'it is an approach that de-politicises the process of empowerment by taking power out of the equation. Instead, the focus is on technical and instrumental aspects that can supposedly be 'taught' in special training courses, for example.'[21] The pitfalls of this approach are neatly captured in a 2017 report: 'Instead of "power," women are given livelihoods. Instead of conscientization about the structures of oppression, skills training. And instead of agency, the choice between raising chickens or cows.'[22]

This narrative of empowerment leaves the structural sources of women's subordination unchallenged, such as patriarchal gender norms which dictate that women should undertake the lion's share of domestic and social reproduction labour. Women are rather seen as 'as hard-working maternal altruists, devoted to their families and communities.'[23] This is particularly problematic in the context of neoliberal economic policies which entail privatisation and deregulation. Feminist analyses have shown that women shoulder the burden of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), taking up increased informal labour as a result of male under- and unemployment, as well as increased unpaid labour in the home as a result of reduced public service provision. Women's unpaid work acts as a 'shock-absorber' in times of economic crisis.[24] Such policies are based on 'an assumption about the infinite flexibility of unpaid labour within the household, which in turn has led to further subordination of women and other groups

[20] Duncanson, 'Beyond Liberal vs Liberating', 114.
[21] Sardenberg, 'Liberal vs. Liberating Empowerment', 19.
[22] Duncanson, 'Beyond Liberal vs Liberating', 114.
[23] Cornwall, 'Beyond "Empowerment Lite"', 13.
[24] Shahra Razavi, 'The Political and Social Economy of Care in a Development Context: Conceptual Issues, Research Questions and Policy Options', *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development*, Gender and development programme paper; no. 3, 2007, 8. See also Penny Griffin, 'Crisis, Austerity and Gendered Governance: A Feminist Perspective', *Feminist Review* 109, no. 1 (1 February 2015): 49–72.

whose labour has been seen as feminised.'[25] The fundamental problem with this narrative is that empowerment has been robbed of its transformative potential to challenge power relations and the status quo. 'Empowerment lite' tries to squeeze women into the neoliberal project, leaving the structural bases of gender inequalities intact. Linking Laura Shepherd's notion of women as superheroines in the context of WPS to FPE, Lucy Hall refers to this as the logic of super(heroinism), whereby 'the labor and resources of superheroines are assumed to be "infinitely elastic".[26]

In sum, the neoliberal understandings of economic empowerment which have underpinned international interventions have transformed 'gender inequality from a structural problem to an individual affair.'[27] Broadly speaking, these articulations of women's empowerment view participation in the formal labour market as the most desirable form of economic empowerment. It is worth noting that there has also been a focus on the actual conditions of work, or 'decent work', referring to 'productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.' Nevertheless, post-conflict economic recovery and economic development interventions are imbued with a neoliberal drive to push women into the productive economy as a necessary first step towards empowerment. This section has sought to establish what the underlying goals of IOs are; also what other kinds of economic empowerments there *could* be. It is also important to note that a neoliberal approach does not inherently foreclose a focus on the reproductive care economy, even from an instrumentalist perspective, although it can influence the way in which it is thought about and implemented in practice; the two are not mutually exclusive.

[25] Stavrevska, 'Feminised Work, Invisible Labour', 402.
[26] Lucy B Hall, 'Logics of Gender, Peace, and Security: Theorizing Gender and Protection at the Intersections of State and Civil Society', *Global Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (1 September 2021): 10.
[27] Catherine Rottenberg, 'The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism', *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (4 May 2014): 420.

2.3 Beyond Institutionalization: Implementing International Norms at the Domestic Level in International Relations Theory

This section argues that although IR norms scholarship provides valuable insights into the creation and diffusion of international norms, it falls short of explaining 'the outcomes of international norm diffusion and their implementation in national and local contexts', especially in internationalised post-conflict contexts.[28] It briefly discusses the recent trends in IR norms literature followed by a specific discussion of the scholarship relevant to the implementation phase. Given the depth and breadth of the IR norms scholarship, it is beyond the scope of the thesis to provide an exhaustive review of the complex debates in this field. Instead, it summarises the key trends and focuses on the factors identified within this extensive literature that are most relevant to the norm implementation phase.

The primary aim of early IR norms scholarship was to counter Realist claims that norms are merely epiphenomenal and exert no independent influence on state behaviour. In doing so, examining the emergence and spread of international norms formed the heart of the Constructivist IR norms research agenda. This early scholarship is characterised by models such as Finnemore and Sikkink's norm life cycle, as well as 'boomerang' and 'spiral' models of norm diffusion. While early IR scholarship on norm diffusion tended to portray norm content as static, the second wave of norm scholarship adopted a discursive approach to norm diffusion and emphasised the fluid nature of norms, whose meaning varies across contexts and interactions with different local actors and contexts.[29] True and Krook treat norms as processes, arguing that they are better defined as 'works-in-progress, rather than as finished products'

[28] María Martín de Almagro, 'Lost Boomerangs, the Rebound Effect and Transnational Advocacy Networks: A Discursive Approach to Norm Diffusion', *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 4 (October 2018): 675.
[29] Zwingel, 'Women's Rights Norms as Content-in-Motion and Incomplete Practice'; Jutta Joachim and Andrea Schneiker, 'Changing Discourses, Changing Practices? Gender Mainstreaming and Security', *Comparative European Politics* 10, no. 5 (December 2012): 528–63.

with an 'ongoing potential for contestation.'[30] The authors observe that 'regulative norms such as gender mainstreaming that prescribe certain standards of behaviour but do not have a deep impact on state identity leave more room for local reinvention of norm content, attracting widespread — albeit varying and inconsistent — adoption.'[31] Extant scholarship offers several explanations for the implementation trajectories of international norms at the domestic level. Recent literature highlights the significance of norm precision in determining the potential for modification in local contexts, on the one hand, and the difficulty of determining breaches of imprecise norms.[32] Analyses of the causes, nature and effects of norm contestation on a norm's life cycle have dominated recent studies of norm diffusion.[33]

Despite the profound contribution of studies on norm contestation, the concept of contestation is arguably less useful for explaining cases where organizations or states accept and agree on the ideational component of a norm – its 'goodness' – and implementation occurs, yet still fails to achieve the intended effects despite a lack of detectable contestation. Antje Wiener defines contestation as 'the range of social practices, which discursively express disapproval of norms.'[34] The majority of contestation studies follow Wiener's definition and rely on discursive contestation. Stimmer and Wisken's notion of behavioural contestation provides a useful exception to this trend and is particularly relevant to the implementation phase. The authors expand Wiener's definition of contestation to include not only discursive contestation but also behavioural, which they define as 'occurring when the actions of relevant actors imply the existence of conflicting understandings of the meaning and/or (relative)

[30] Krook and True, 'Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms', 110.
[31] Krook and True, 'Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms', 123.
[32] Joachim and Schneiker, 'Changing Discourses, Changing Practices?', 555.
[33] Nicole Deitelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann, 'Things We Lost in the Fire: How Different Types of Contestation Affect the Robustness of International Norms', *International Studies Review* 22, no. 1 (1 March 2020): 51–76.
[34] Antje Wiener, 'A Theory of Contestation—A Concise Summary of Its Argument and Concepts', *Polity* 49, no. 1 (January 2017): 112.

importance of a norm.'[35] They argue that behavioural contestation is visible during the implementation phase of a norm and depends on an actor's implicit, revealed preferences rather than their motivations or intent to disapprove of or harm a norm. This comes closer to describing instances where there is no obvious contestation by actors and could include instances where a norm or certain aspects of it are misunderstood or deprioritised and fail to be successfully implemented as a result. However, in keeping with the bulk of IR norms literature (particularly on norm contestation), their conceptualisation of behavioural contestation refers primarily to states as the norm addresses and thus the actors with the power to shape norm content. It is also less informative on the reasons *why* behavioural contestation might occur, particularly in the context of IOs as norm implementers.

A further factor identified in the IR norms literature influencing domestic implementation outcomes are local framings and cultural (mis)matches. These explanations highlight the role of local culture, practices and beliefs as either an enabling or disabling influence on norm effectiveness. Checkel's notion of a cultural match refers to 'a situation where the prescriptions embodied in an international norm are convergent with domestic norms.'[36] Checkel argues that the greater the degree of congruence between the international norm being promoted and the target country, the more likely the norm is to have a constitutive effect in a given state. These approaches have been criticized, however, for portraying an essentialist view of local culture as 'both inhibiting change and resisting change themselves.'[37] Acharya also highlights normative fit as a key determinant of norm diffusion, paying particular attention to the role of local agency in achieving this. Drawing on the example of Asian regionalism, his concept of

[35] Anette Stimmer and Lea Wisken, 'The Dynamics of Dissent: When Actions Are Louder than Words', *International Affairs* 95, no. 3 (1 May 2019): 521.
[36] Checkel, 'Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe', 87.
[37] Lisbeth Zimmermann, 'Same Same or Different? Norm Diffusion Between Resistance, Compliance, and Localization in Post-Conflict States', *International Studies Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (February 2016): 100.

localization describes 'the active construction (through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection) of foreign ideas by local actors, which results in the former developing significant congruence with local beliefs and practices.'[38] While it is important to recognise the relationship between international norms and domestic normative structures, in the context of this study, it is not the case that local political actors have rejected UN economic empowerment norms on the basis that they are unappealing or do not resonate with local beliefs and practices. Rather than lacking *ideational or cultural* appeal due to cultural mismatches, it appears that lack of adjustment of international norms to the local *structural* context and dynamics is a key factor constraining norm effectiveness. I thus argue that the existing norms literature is unable to account adequately for international gender equality norms and change beyond the legislative level.

For both Acharya and Checkel, the greater the degree of congruence, the more likely norm diffusion will be successful. I argue that contrary to this claim, and in line with feminist theorizing on norm diffusion (outlined later in this chapter), in order to be 'effective' beyond the legislative level, international gender norms must necessarily possess a significant degree of incongruence with domestic norms in order to challenge and displace existing discriminatory patriarchal norms at the domestic level. This claim of course depends on how 'culture' is defined as Checkel's definition of culture is somewhat narrow, defined as: 'a situation where the prescriptions embodied in an international norm are **convergent** with domestic norms, as reflected in discourse, the legal system (constitutions, judicial codes, laws), and bureaucratic agencies (organizational ethos and administrative procedures).'[39] The flipside of this argument is presented by Levitt and Merry, who argue that 'the more global norms challenge existing

[38] Acharya, 'How Ideas Spread', 245.
[39] Checkel, 'Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe', 87.

practices, the less they are likely to be accepted and integrated in societies.'[40] In the context of global gender norms, the Kosovo case suggests that incongruence with existing domestic beliefs and values might be a necessary condition for the norm to have an impact beyond the legislative level, i.e. for the norm recipient. The Kosovo case shows that when global gender norms are implemented such that they do not sufficiently challenge existing gendered norms at the domestic level, i.e. if they are *too* congruent with existing gendered beliefs and values, the norm might be institutionalized at the legislative level but will have little effect on the everyday lives of women.

Thus, while culturalist explanations shed light on how gender norms travel and the barriers norms can encounter at the domestic level, the utility of these perspectives for understanding the process of gender norm implementation via IO policies and programming is somewhat limited. The argument offered in this thesis does not seek to discount the role of local gendered norms, as these exist worldwide and are a significant underlying driver of gender inequality. Rather, it proposes that just as the role of local filters in mediating norm diffusion have received much attention in the scholarly literature, international organizations can also act as filters of global norms in ways that significantly impact a norm's trajectory at the local level and therefore warrant further attention.

A further body of scholarship that is relevant to the implementation phase in the norm life cycle are those which focus on monitoring compliance. This body of scholarship often problematically assumes normative meaning to be fixed and implementation to be a top-down process. Compliance is measured by comparing the actions and behaviour of relevant actors

[40] Lars Engberg-Pedersen and Adam Fejerskov, 'The Difficulties of Diffusing the 2030 Agenda: Situated Norm Engagement and Development Organisations' in Sachin Chaturvedi et al., eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Development Cooperation for Achieving the 2030 Agenda: Contested Collaboration* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 165–83.

with the prescriptions of a given norm or set of norms. The literature identifies various sources of constraint on norm implementation, such as domestic veto players or a lack of capacity.[41] However, determining what counts as compliance by norm addressees (primarily conceived as states in the extant literature) can be challenging, since 'if we accept that the meaning of norms can be hard to pin down, it becomes difficult to say with certainty whether a given behaviour conforms with the requirement of a norm.'[42] This is particularly true for ambiguous and imprecise norms which lack concrete procedures and standards.[43] Furthermore, scholars have pointed out that measuring compliance tells us little about norm effectiveness and whether international norms make any difference in practice.[44] As Anne Crowley-Vigneau aptly notes, 'compliance in itself however does not show how efficient an institutionalized norm is at changing practices, as in some states; the new norm may just be formalizing a situation that already existed.'[45] Certain constraining factors identified by compliance studies, such as capacity constraints, can also influence norm implementation in an organizational context, for example through understaffing or underfunding for particular global norms. The chronic underfunding of the WPS agenda and gender equality more broadly has been well-documented by INGOs and civil society.[46] These factors undoubtedly contribute to the ability of international actors and states to fully implement these agendas on the ground. A simple explanation for the inability of IO programming to increase women's participation in the

[41] Edith Brown Weiss and Harold Karan Jacobson, *Engaging Countries: Strengthening Compliance with International Environmental Accords*, Global Environmental Accords (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: MIT Press, 1998); Thomas Risse-Kappen, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, *The Persistent Power of Human Rights: From Commitment to Compliance*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations 126 (Cambridge: University Press, 2013).
[42] Stimmer and Wisken, 'The Dynamics of Dissent', 519.
[43] Jacqui True and Antje Wiener, 'Everyone Wants (a) Peace: The Dynamics of Rhetoric and Practice on "Women, Peace and Security"', *International Affairs* 95, no. 3 (1 May 2019): 553–74.
[44] Lisa L. Martin, 'Against Compliance', in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on International Law and International Relations: The State of the Art*, ed. J. Dunoff and M Pollack. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 605.
[45] Crowley-Vigneau, *The National Implementation of International Norms*, 37.
[46] Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, 'Follow the Money: Assessing Women, Peace, and Security through Financing for Gender-Inclusive Peace', *Review of International Studies* 48, no. 4 (October 2022): 668–88.

workforce could be that there simply has not been enough funding devoted to this issue. Whilst this is certainly a contributing factor, this only tells part of the story and does not fully explain why, for example, certain aspects of women's economic empowerment are prioritised over others by IOs at the ground level of practice, or why we do not see better coordination between international actors at the ground level of practice.

2.3.1. Remaining research gaps

Although extant scholarship has produced important theoretical insights which have significantly advanced the Constructivist norms research agenda, they generally suffer from two related drawbacks. The first is the state-centric approach which has dominated IR norms scholarship. By focussing on state compliance with international norms, these contributions overlook the role of international organizations as norm implementers at the ground level of practice, especially in contexts with a strong international ground presence. Even after the formal adoption of international normative frameworks, international organizations' influence can be decisive in determining the trajectory of implementation. Whilst formal adoption is one part of the norm institutionalization process, as Restoy and Elbe argue, 'studying what happens *after* the formal appropriation of an international norm is…an equally important (if not even more pertinent) aspect of norm diffusion demanding further analysis.'[47] This is a process in which IOs continue to play a vital role, beyond the one attributed to them as norm entrepreneurs in many accounts of norm diffusion, which overlooks their role even once a state has agreed to a new norm. IOs are directly involved in the implementation of global normative frameworks such as the SDGs and the WPS agenda.

[47] Restoy and Elbe, 'Drilling Down in Norm Diffusion', 2.

The second shortcoming relates to the level of analysis. Studies rarely drill down deep enough to examine whether and how international norms result in any change at the individual level and how they interact with people's lived realities.[48] The bulk of the literature has focussed on the diffusion of norms between states at the international level and their formal adoption at the state level, rather than what occurs afterwards. This imbalance in the scholarly literature has left the question of domestic implementation processes relatively unaddressed compared to our understanding of how norms emerge and subsequently diffuse throughout the international system. Taken together, these two gaps in the literature mean that 'the role international actors play domestically has been largely neglected by scholars, who consider implementation to be governed by national specificities or the characteristics of an international norm.'[49] Furthermore, the interaction between international organizations and the populations they purportedly serve has also been relatively overlooked in IR. Betts et al. argue that aside from a few exceptions, 'studying the interaction of international organisations and their subject populations has generally been marginal to the mainstream study of international institutions, particularly within International Relations.'[50]

Building on the work of scholars such as Acharya, and Levitt and Merry, more recent studies have refocussed attention on the significance of local processes in shaping the norm diffusion outcomes.[51] Although Acharya's concept of localization is universally associated

[48] Restoy and Elbe, 'Drilling Down in Norm Diffusion'.
[49] Crowley-Vigneau, *The National Implementation of International Norms*, 197.
[50] Alexander Betts, Naohiko Omata, and Olivier Sterck, 'Transnational Blindness: International Institutions and Refugees' Cross-Border Activities', *Review of International Studies* 47, no. 5 (December 2021): 716. There a few important exceptions to this trend, see Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations 115 (Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 2010); Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (Cambridge: University Press, 2014); Emily Paddon Rhoads, *Taking Sides in Peacekeeping: Impartiality and the Future of the United Nations* (Oxford: University Press, 2016); Susanna P. Campbell, 'International Organizations in Peacebuilding: Globally Accountable, Locally Constrained', in *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 142–200.
[51] Acharya, 'How Ideas Spread'; Levitt and Merry, 'Vernacularization on the Ground'.

with the domestic or national level, his primary focus is actually at the regional level in South-East Asia, as he does not zoom into the national and sub-national level.[52] Restoy and Elbe coined the term 'domestication', which describes the 'domestic translation, integration, and incorporation of new norms "within" countries'.[53] The authors distinguish between domestication and localization in two respects. The first is that localization entails congruence-building between transnational norms and pre-existing local normative beliefs and practices. By contrast, domestication involves a 'direct and unmediated' domestic "appropriation" of international…norms…without such extensive adaptation.'[54] Second, domestication largely unfolds at the sub-state level. In their analysis of global health norms, they identify the crucial role of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in furthering the domestication and diffusion of international HIV/AIDS norms, despite the rejection of these norms by national leadership. While the role of CBOs specifically is less pertinent in the context of this study, Restoy and Elbe's claim that the intricate process of implementing global normative frameworks at the ground level of practice involves myriad actors which deserve further attention is applicable for the purposes of this study. A similar claim is made by Crowley-Vigneau regarding the importance of Transnational Experience and Expertise Networks (TEENs) in the local adoption of international norms. Recent literature thus casts important light on the role of domestic actor constellations, particularly the role of non-state actors. However, IOs at the domestic level have thus far rarely been included as part of these constellations. Given that post-conflict and developing contexts are often characterised by a high degree of international presence which wields a significant level of influence, the neglect of the role of IOs as norm implementers in these contexts is significant.

[52] Alexander Betts and Phil Orchard, 'Introduction: The Normative Institutionalization-Implementation Gap', in *Implementation and World Politics: How International Norms Change Practice*, ed. Alexander Betts and Phil Orchard (Oxford University Press, 2014), 13.
[53] Restoy and Elbe, 'Drilling Down in Norm Diffusion', 3.
[54] Restoy and Elbe, 'Drilling Down in Norm Diffusion', 4.

Against this background, this study builds on recent scholarship which has sought to redress the imbalance in the literature with regards to relevant actors and the level of analysis and calls for 'a better understanding of how norms ultimately reach the people they are intended for.'[55] Responding to this call and departing from dominant trends in IR norms scholarship, this study extends existing accounts of norm diffusion and implementation by considering whether national-level and organizational commitments to empowerment norms by states and IOs translate into concrete changes in the lives of the norm addressees, in this case ordinary women on the ground. Even without zooming into the regional or municipal levels, national-level statistics can provide a useful indicator of whether or not a norm or norm cluster is achieving the effects intended by norm entrepreneurs. The relative neglect of the everyday within mainstream IR norms research highlights the value of a feminist approach to norm diffusion, detailed in the following section.

2.4 Going all the way down: feminist IR approaches to norm diffusion

In contrast to the relative neglect of the individual level in IR norms scholarship, feminist scholarship foregrounds the everyday and the individual, specifically marginalised individuals and groups, in its analysis.[56] As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, for all its concern with normative change, remarkably little IR norms scholarship has attempted to trace the impact of international norms all the way down to the individual level. When it does, the effect

[55] Restoy and Elbe, 'Drilling Down in Norm Diffusion', 2.

[56] The work of Cynthia Enloe is foundational in this regard, see Cynthia H. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Other work within feminist international political economy (IPE) has also centred the everyday through its focus on the everyday practices of social reproduction which underpin global capitalism, see for example Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill, *Power, Production and Social Reproduction: Human In/Security in the Global Political Economy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Isabella Bakker and Rachel Silvey, eds., *Beyond States and Markets: The Challenges of Social Reproduction* (London: Routledge, 2008); Meg Luxton and Kate Bezanson, *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neo-Liberalism*, 1st ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006); Jill Steans and Daniela Tepe, 'Introduction - Social Reproduction in International Political Economy: Theoretical Insights and International, Transnational and Local Sitings', *Review of International Political Economy: RIPE* 17, no. 5 (2010): 807–15.

is often assumed to be homogenous across various populations, such as those which are 'crisis-affected', ignoring the gendered effects of norms. Ironically, Constructivism is late to identity.

Feminist security studies (FSS), one branch of feminist IR, offers important insights into the study of how global normative frameworks travel and what is required for a norm to have an effect in practice. Unlike conventional security studies which focus on state security, feminist security scholars have long argued that the state is a 'misleading construction that purports to protect its citizens but often perpetuates the subordination of women.'[57] FSS takes as its starting point the observation that 'secure states often contain insecure women'[58] and that individuals are embedded in unequal social structures, all of which differentially impact an individual's security. To quote Ann Tickner, 'whereas much of IR is focused on describing and explaining the behavior of states, feminists are motivated by the goal of investigating the lives of women within states or international structures in order to change them.'[59] FSS's concern with the security of marginalised individuals and groups contrasts with the state-centric approach of both mainstream security studies and norms research. A feminist lens shows that it is insufficient to stop at the state level when examining the diffusion and effect of global norms; how state-level commitments interact with the everyday lives of gendered individuals must also be taken into account, since they are the final recipients of global norms, particularly in the case of gender-equality norms and broader human-rights norms.

This study pursues a feminist approach to norm diffusion which is concerned not only with norm change and diffusion, but also with the power dynamics which drive these processes and the capacity (or lack thereof) of new norms to unsettle and displace existing gendered

[57] Sjoberg, 'Introduction to Security Studies', 196.
[58] Sjoberg, 'Introduction to Security Studies', 198.
[59] Tickner, 'Feminism Meets International Relations', 25.

hierarchies. Unlike much of the Constructivist scholarship, critical feminist approaches to norm diffusion do not take a norm's inherent "goodness" for granted. Critical feminist perspectives on norm diffusion are therefore interested not only in how norms travel, but also in their capacity to unsettle other existing forms of gendered subordination and oppression.

Jacqui True argues that even seemingly progressive norms, such as gender mainstreaming, can entrench dominant gender norms or 'create new patterns of domination and marginalization' rather than displacing them.[60] For example, gender mainstreaming within World Bank development policy has rendered women's economic empowerment a private issue, to be achieved individually (for example, through entrepreneurship) or through the household (through the equal distribution of social reproduction responsibilities).[61] This leaves the fundamental gendered hierarchies which sustain the productive economy unchallenged, such as the dependence of the formal labour market on the reproductive economy which largely consists of women's unpaid, domestic labour. This connects to broader feminist critiques of neoliberal economic development which have emphasised self-responsibilization and individualization as the means to women's economic empowerment. True highlights how 'the dependence of national and global economies on informal household economies—and especially women's work—goes unquestioned' and in doing so, 'embodied gender norms are redefined but also reinforced by the policy norm of gender mainstreaming.'[62]

A similar fixing of gendered identities and norms has occurred as a result of the emphasis on women's protection from and the prevention of sexual violence during conflict in international security discourses. The focus on women's protection from conflict-related sexual

[60] True, 'Feminist Problems with International Norms', 76.
[61] True, 'Feminist Problems with International Norms', 82–83.
[62] True, 'Feminist Problems with International Norms', 83.

violence and sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly during the first 12 years of the WPS agenda, has been widely criticized by feminist scholarship. Although huge progress has been made with regards to breaking the silence around sexual and gender-based violence at both the international and domestic levels, it has also problematically reinforced and reified certain gender binaries. As Heidi Hudson notes, 'UN rape discourses unwittingly perpetuate the protector–protected power relationship, keeping vulnerable women at the mercy of their male protectors.'[63] This narrative is a problematic one for several reasons. Firstly, it overshadows notions of women's agency and participation in conflict and post-conflict processes which was a key driver behind the early WPS resolutions. Another implication is that it obscures men's experiences of SGBV during conflict, as well as privileging 'spectacular' violence (resulting from war) over other more 'ordinary', everyday forms of violence.[64] Gender mainstreaming norms have also been co-opted through the integration of women into masculine military structures and institutions like NATO, which has become an important policy priority. Such approaches have been accused of 'making war safe for women', which is antithetical to the anti-militarism behind the initial WPS resolutions.[65] Just as women have been added into existing labour markets without addressing the gendered inequalities that sustain them, Hudson notes that 'equal participation in ending wars does nothing to address war as an institution in itself.'[66]

Feminist scholars have shed important light on the ways in which the normalization and instrumentalization of certain ideas and practices, including gender equality, can lead to their

[63] Heidi Hudson, 'A Double-Edged Sword of Peace? Reflections on the Tension between Representation and Protection in Gendering Liberal Peacebuilding', *International Peacekeeping* 19, no. 4 (1 August 2012): 453.
[64] Marie E. Berry and Milli Lake, 'Women's Rights After War: On Gender Interventions and Enduring Hierarchies', *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 17, no. 1 (2021): 469.
[65] Laura J. Shepherd, 'Making War Safe for Women? National Action Plans and the Militarisation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', *International Political Science Review* 37, no. 3 (1 June 2016): 324–35.
[66] Hudson, 'A Double-Edged Sword of Peace?', 450.

depoliticization which can undermine the very structural changes they seek to achieve. In their analysis of post-conflict gender interventions, Marie Berry and Milli Lake conclude that 'interventions in the name of gender equality…can leave intact the very systems that produced gender oppression in the first place', including patriarchy, capitalism and militarism.[67] Elena Stavrevksa argues similarly in her analysis of microfinance programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, showing how such forms of economic engagement, even when considered 'successful', can in fact atomise women's agency and perpetuate existing inequalities.[68] These insights show that it is crucial to trace the impact of global norms down to the ground level in order to see whether and how they meaningfully effect concrete changes in the lives of intended norm recipients, since very often they do not achieve their intended effects.

2.4.1. Invisible Labour: Feminist Political Economy

One strand of feminist theorizing in particular – feminist political economy (FPE) – has provided crucial insights into women's lived realities and everyday experiences. This section reviews the relevant literature on FPE. FPE provides key insights into how the global economy functions and reveals critical blind spots in mainstream macroeconomic thinking. A feminist political economy approach reveals what women's economic empowerment means in all of its

[67] Berry and Lake, 'Women's Rights After War', 461. Jacqui True similarly notes that 'efforts by these [international] institutions to mainstream and diffuse gender equality may end up entrenching—rather than transforming—dominant gender norms and international power relations', in True, 'Feminist Problems with International Norms', 88. See also, Melissa Johnston, *Building Peace, Rebuilding Patriarchy: The Failure of Gender Interventions in Timor-Leste*, Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023).

[68] Elena B. Stavrevska, 'The Mother, the Wife, the Entrepreneur? Women's Agency and Microfinance in a Disappearing Post-Conflict Welfare State Context', *Civil Wars* 20, no. 2 (3 April 2018): 193–216. This is an issue which has also been discussed at length in the critical literature on microcredit, see for example Manuela Angelucci, 'Win Some Lose Some?: Evidence from a Randomized Microcredit Program Placement Experiment by Compartamos Banco', Economic Growth Center Discussion Paper, no. 1026 (2013); Britta Augsburg et al., 'Microfinance at the Microfinance at the Margin: Experimental Evidence from Bosnia and Herzegovina', *IDEAS Working Paper Series from RePEc*, 2012; Adrienne Roberts and Susanne Soederberg, 'Gender Equality as Smart Economics? A Critique of the 2012 World Development Report', *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 5 (1 June 2012): 949–68; Milford Bateman, *Why Doesn't Microfinance Work?:The Fragile Illusion of Local Neoliberalism*, 1st ed. (London: Zed, 2010); Aneel Karnani, 'Romanticizing the Poor Harms the Poor', *Metamorphosis: A Journal of Management Research* 6, no. 2 (2007): 151–62.

facets and thus what is required to engender change at the level of women's everyday lived experiences.

The question of 'who counts' and is valued in the formal economy, and why women do not count, is a form of a norm which has gendered assumptions and gendered consequences, even though it is presented as neutral. The definition and understanding of the formal economy and how it relates to the informal economy within mainstream macroeconomics invisibilizes much of the unpaid social reproductive labour undertaken by women globally. Defining the informal economy is a political decision which determines whose labour is counted as value-producing work and included in economic analyses.[69] There is no single definition of the 'informal economy', also referred to interchangeably as the 'submerged', 'underground, 'hidden, 'shadow', 'parallel', 'grey' and 'extra-legal' economy.[70] What is common to most of these definitions, however, is the understanding of 'labour' as that which produces profit or surplus value. Conventional economic approaches privilege the formal economy and see the 'labour force' as those individuals currently engaged in or seeking formal employment. In her pioneering work *If Women Counted*, Waring argues that this limited view of labour renders 'all other activities…unproductive, including the labour that is involved in social reproduction.'[71]

Stavrevska points out that 'global governance institutions often adopt a limited view that equates formality with productivity and importance.'[72] Informal economic activity is therefore excluded from formal accounting such as GDP calculations and remains 'under the surface', obscured from view and absent from policy-making. Furthermore, statistics which measure the

[69] Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting*, 86.
[70] Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting*, 86.
[71] Stavrevska, 'Feminised Work, Invisible Labour', 400.
[72] Stavrevska, 'Feminised Work, Invisible Labour' 399.

percentage of women in the formal labour market imply that women do not perform any other labour, which in actuality they do, although it is informal economy labour, a significant amount of which is unpaid domestic and care labour. Martín de Almagro and Ryan argue that this exclusion should be seen as 'a political decision that serves to render these women invisible and illegitimate, and one that devalues the overall representations of women and their work in post-conflict economic recovery and development.'[73] This erasure is highly problematic as it serves as the basis for international interventions and policy-making, and reinforces stereotypes of women as inactive economic agents and passive victims in need of saving and empowering.[74] It is even more problematic in post-conflict contexts due to the size and scope of the informal economy; in the aftermath of conflict many people, especially women, resort to informal economic activities due to the destruction of the formal sector during armed conflict. These activities can include 'petty trade, and selling produce and fruit, homemade food, scarce traded goods, etc.'[75], which exist alongside and often serve those formally employed in post-conflict employment generation activities such as public works infrastructure projects.[76]

The informal economy is generally viewed negatively in post-conflict reconstruction and development, with IFIs and states advocating for its reduction and eventual eradication through 'formalization.' Whilst there is no doubt that economic activities in the informal space offer no social protection, lower wages and the potential for exploitation, viewing the informal economy in a wholly negative light and in need of formalisation is problematic for three reasons. Firstly, Nordstrom argues that the networks fostered during informal economic activities can be

[73] Martín de Almagro and Ryan, 'Subverting Economic Empowerment', 1063–64.
[74] Martín de Almagro and Ryan, 'Subverting Economic Empowerment', 1064.
[75] Stavrevska, 'Feminised Work, Invisible Labour', 402.
[76] Martín de Almagro and Ryan, 'Subverting Economic Empowerment', 1069.

empowering and provide an opportunity for networking, developing a sense of agency, as well as a means of survival and a potential gateway to the more profitable formal economy.[77] Secondly, Stavrevska argues that 'formalisation alone would not address the lack of available and accessible care services that contribute to reproducing existing and creating new inequalities and gendered hierarchies.'[78] Thirdly, the informal economic activities performed by women can cumulatively amount to more than the formal state tallies of official economy activities.[79]

One of the major insights of feminist IPE is that the productive and reproductive economies are interdependent and mutually constitutive. A key contribution of FPE has been to challenge the 'informal-formal dichotomy' and bring to light the continuum on which the formal, informal and unpaid care economies operate. Contrary to mainstream IPE scholarship, FPE highlights the '*relationship* between unpaid work in the home and waged labor in the formal/productive economy'.[80] This insight is extremely important given that it runs counter to most mainstream macroeconomic analyses, which see the productive and reproductive sectors as discrete entities, which can, by extension, be addressed separately when it comes to policy-making. FPE argues that informalization is a structural feature of the global economy due to the downward pressure on wages since 'employers are not "expected" to pay for social reproduction.'[81]

[77] Martín de Almagro and Ryan, 'Subverting Economic Empowerment', 1063.
[78] Stavrevska, 'Feminised Work, Invisible Labour', 406.
[79] Martín de Almagro and Ryan, 'Subverting Economic Empowerment', 1063.
[80] Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting*, 87. Emphasis in original. See also Elias and Roberts, 'Feminist Global Political Economies of the Everyday'.
[81] Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting*, 87.

V. Spike Peterson's conceptualisation of economic activity as a continuum, comprised of three 'mutually constitutive' economies characterised by increasing degrees of formalisation offers a helpful alternative to the informal-formal binary and its sidelining of social reproductive labour.[82] She labels the least formalised or regulated form of economic activity the 'social or domestic economy', often referred to as the 'care economy', which includes childcare, eldercare, housekeeping and community work. In other words, those activities which contribute to social reproduction. This form of labour rarely involves cash exchange and is generally considered a family/household matter in so far as it takes place within the private family unit and is not state regulated. The second activity Peterson refers to is the irregular economy, consisting of a range of both licit and illicit entrepreneurial activities. These can range from 'baby sitting, petty trade, home-based production, streetside selling, gambling, sex work, drug dealing, arms trading.'[83] These activities are also not regulated by the state but some form of renumeration/payment is involved. The third economy identified by Peterson is the productive or formal economy, consisting of state-regulated exchange and production of goods and services driven by profit-making principles.[84]

Feminist political economists have long emphasised the linkages between social reproductive labour and the formal market economy. Social reproductive labour encompasses 'supporting and nurturing those who undertake paid work, caring for infant, elderly, sick, and disabled populations (either paid or unpaid), food preparation, and domestic work in the home.'[85] More specifically, unpaid care work is the 'care of persons with no explicit monetary reward' and includes activities such as childcare, elderly care, care for the sick and care for

[82] Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting*, 86.
[83] Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting*, 86.
[84] Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting*, 87.
[85] Ellen Gordon-Bouvier, 'Vulnerable Bodies and Invisible Work: The Covid-19 Pandemic and Social Reproduction', *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law* 21, no. 3 (1 September 2021): 213; Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting*, 87.

people with disabilities.[86] The majority of this form of unpaid work takes place within or across households globally and is primarily performed by women.[87] Feminists have argued that social reproductive labour, primarily performed by women worldwide, produces and maintains the labour-power which sustains the formal economy. This also 'benefits employers, who do not then have to pay the full costs of producing the labor force' and make higher profits.[88] One reason why caregiving and other social reproductive labour has been and continues to be rendered invisible by mainstream economic analyses is due to biological determinism underpinning the gendered division of labour, which 'assigns women the primary role in sustaining family/household well-being and depoliticizes the socially necessary work that women do and the disproportionate burden of responsibility placed on them when economic conditions degenerate.'[89]

Particularly in developing, conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts, labour intensive social reproductive duties limit women's ability to engage in more productive and/or well-paid activities, such as education and participation in the formal labour market, and instead confine them to the household and/or the informal economy where they are underpaid and precarious.[90] It also undermines women's ability to participate in peace processes and post-conflict

[86] Razavi, 'The Political and Social Economy of Care in a Development Context', 6.
[87] Shirin M. Rai, Catherine Hoskyns, and Dania Thomas, 'Depletion: The Social Cost of Reproduction', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16, no. 1 (2 January 2014): 86–105. Women also perform most of the *paid* care work globally, such as healthcare workers, domestic workers, etc.
[88] Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting*, 87.
[89] Peterson, *A Critical Rewriting*, 95. See also Penny Griffin, *Gendering the World Bank: Neoliberalism and the gendered foundations of global governance* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Judy Fudge, 'A New Gender Contract? Work/Life Balance and Working-Time Flexibility', in *Labour Law, Work, and Family: Critical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Joanne Conaghan and Kerry Rittich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 261–88; Marilyn Waring, *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics* (San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 1990), 29.
[90] Jenny Hedström, 'On Violence, the Everyday, and Social Reproduction: Agnes and Myanmar's Transition', *Peacebuilding* 9, no. 4 (2 October 2021): 381.

governance, a key tenet of the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda.[91] Stavrevska makes the important point that provision and access to care services is therefore a key determinant of prospects for gender equality.[92] Stavrevska highlights that, 'if care is only available and accessible to certain parts of society, that approach would lead to unpaid externalisation of care or social reproduction work.'[93] This has several potential consequences, one of which is that 'those who take on the burden of care work in the absence of affordable and accessible services are then unable to perform waged labour.'[94] In other words, not only can caregiving and other social reproduction responsibilities impose additional burdens on women once they enter the formal labour market, it can also prevent them from joining or remaining in the formal economy at all, as we will see is the case in Kosovo in the empirical discussion in Chapter 7. It also causes physical and emotional depletion, which Rai et al. have termed 'depletion through social reproduction' (DSR).[95] The concept of DSR captures the individual and collective harm done to women through the 'non-recognition or "naturalization" of social reproductive and other forms of unpaid or underpaid informal and insecure work.'[96] All of this has profound consequences for women's security by exposing them to poverty, violence and harm.[97] Importantly, this burden on women is intensified in conflict-affected contexts due to increased care needs caused by, for example, conflict-related trauma and injuries and the absence or loss of male family members, combined with a lack of social

[91] OGIP, 'An Inclusive and Sustainable Approach to Relief and Recovery', LSE Women, Peace and Security Policy Brief Series, May 2022, https://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/assets/documents/An-inclusive-and-sustainable-approach-to-relief-and-recovery-policy-brief-05.pdf.
[92] Stavrevska, 'Feminised Work, Invisible Labour', 403.
[93] Stavrevska, 'Feminised Work, Invisible Labour', 403.
[94] Stavrevska, 'Feminised Work, Invisible Labour', 403–4.
[95] Rai, Hoskyns, and Thomas, 'Depletion'. DSR refers to 'the level at which the resource outflows exceed resource inflows in carrying out social reproductive work over a threshold of sustainability, making it harmful for those engaged in this unvalued work.'
[96] Jenny Hedström and Elisabeth Olivius, 'Insecurity, Dispossession, Depletion: Women's Experiences of Post-War Development in Myanmar', *The European Journal of Development Research* 32, no. 2 (1 April 2020): 388.
[97] Hedström, 'On Violence, the Everyday, and Social Reproduction'; Juanita Elias and Shirin M. Rai, 'Feminist Everyday Political Economy: Space, Time, and Violence', *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 2 (April 2019): 201–20; True, *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*.

provisioning.[98] Due to the gendered nature of care work, conflict and 'post'-conflict contexts increase the expectations of women's 'work', since 'the responsibility to ensure the well-being of their communities is pushed disproportionately onto the shoulders of women.'[99]

Over the past decade or so feminist scholars have critiqued the disciplinary distinction between FPE and FSS on the basis that it reproduces the division in mainstream IR between economics and security.[100] Emerging from these debates is a growing understanding that economic policy at all levels of governance influences security, and the ways in which that is gendered. Although I have addressed the two separately for the purposes of this chapter, these debates show how demarcating FSS and FPE is arbitrary because the economics of gender and security are interwoven, and how by doing so we '[silence] the everyday experiences of those we claim to center in our analysis.'[101] Discussions of depletion and continuums of violence in conflict-affected contexts are one example of attempts to integrate the two sub-fields and reveal the nexus between economic processes, social reproduction, and violence. For instance, Rai et al. argue that the 'economic marginalization of women and girls thus constitutes a form of structural violence that may further intensify the political economy of violence and bodily harm that women and girls distinctly experience during and after conflict.'[102] These insights underpin

[98] Rai, True, and Tanyag, 'From Depletion to Regeneration', 563.
[99] Jenny Hedström, 'Militarized Social Reproduction: Women's Labour and Parastate Armed Conflict', *Critical Military Studies* 8, no. 1 (2 January 2022): 65; Martín de Almagro and Ryan, 'Subverting Economic Empowerment'; Hedström and Olivius, 'Insecurity, Dispossession, Depletion'; Rai, True, and Tanyag, 'From Depletion to Regeneration'; Yasmin Chilmeran and Nicola Pratt, 'The Geopolitics of Social Reproduction and Depletion: The Case of Iraq and Palestine', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 26, no. 4 (1 December 2019): 586–607; Diane Elson, 'Empowerment and Economics', in *The Progress of the World's Women*, ed. Karen Judd (New York: United Nations, 2000), 15–36.
[100] María Martín de Almagro and Caitlin Ryan, 'Introduction: (Re)Integrating Feminist Security Studies and Global Political Economy: Continuing the Conversation through Empirical Perspectives', *Politics & Gender* 16, no. 3 (September 2020): e12; Amanda Chisholm and Saskia Stachowitsch, '(Re)Integrating Feminist Security Studies and Feminist Global Political Economy: Continuing the Conversation', *Politics & Gender* 13, no. 04 (December 2017): 710–15; Juanita Elias, 'Introduction: Feminist Security Studies and Feminist Political Economy: Crossing Divides and Rebuilding Bridges', *Politics & Gender* 11, no. 2 (June 2015): 406–8.
[101] Martín de Almagro and Ryan, 'Introduction: (Re)Integrating Feminist Security Studies and Global Political Economy', 5.
[102] Rai, True, and Tanyag, 'From Depletion to Regeneration', 567.

the conceptual framework in this thesis, elaborated further below, which considers the nexus between international economic empowerment interventions and the (re)production of gendered insecurities.

In sum, FPE approaches have provided vital insights into the functioning of the global economy by bringing to light the entirety of economic activity and in doing so, the inextricable links between the formal 'productive' economy and informal care economies, which forms a key theoretical linchpin of the framework developed in following section. Through making visible the social reproductive work which dominates many women's everyday lived experiences and the contribution of this work to the macroeconomy, it becomes possible to understand the need for a holistic approach to women's economic empowerment for economic empowerment norms to travel and have an effect at the everyday level of analysis. These approaches thus serve as a vital 'corrective for the exclusions of much IPE scholarship by exposing how global economic restructuring operates to reproduce gendered and racialised inequalities and asserting the need to uncover the micro level processes through which these transformations take shape.'[103] FPE has also illuminated the costs and consequences of neoliberal post-conflict state-building and development initiatives for women's everyday lives. However, the role of certain actors in reproducing patriarchal norms and the factors driving this process have been comparatively less explored. Stavrevska, for example, argues that there has been a 'wealth of feminist political economy work on the structures within which the economy unfolds' and calls for more research with a 'focus on people's agency in performing, reproducing, or challenging patriarchal norms in the economic domain.'[104] Given the important role of international actors in post-conflict contexts, the absence of in-depth, granular analyses

[103] Elias and Rai, 'Feminist Everyday Political Economy', 202.
[104] Stavrevska, 'Feminised Work, Invisible Labour', 406.

of IOs and their approaches to economic empowerment at the ground level of practice constitutes a major gap in our knowledge.

2.5 Building a Theory of Fragmented Implementation

This section develops the theoretical framework advanced in this thesis. As a result of the deficiencies identified above, it is clear that a more nuanced framework is needed to capture the complex dynamics of global (gender) norm implementation in internationalized post-conflict contexts which requires a feminist attentiveness to the everyday. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, Kosovo represents an empirically surprising case, since women's labour force engagement remains the lowest in the Europe and Central Asia, despite receiving significant sums of foreign aid and the implementation of hundreds of interventions with the goal of economically empowering women. It is theoretically puzzling as this outcome cannot be easily explained by current scholarly contributions on norm contestation which have dominated recent IR norms scholarship.

The thesis seeks to develop a process-based analytical framework based on an abductive granular analysis of how the international community has implemented global gender equality norms in the economic domain in a post-conflict context. The conceptual framework developed in this thesis links insights from feminist political economy with IR scholarship on norms and IOs and explores how key international actors in the domain of gender equality understand and implement the UN's women's economic empowerment norms, and the outcomes it produces. I propose that a feminist political economy lens is essential to understanding the implementation outcomes of global gender norms. By making visible the entirety of economic activity and the interdependence between the formal 'productive' and informal reproductive economies, FPE reveals the disconnect between the way economic empowerment norms are

operationalized by international organizations and local women's lived realities and needs and post-conflict (in)security. In doing so, FPE provides a framework to understand women's everyday gendered experiences, making it possible to see why even when economic empowerment norms are nominally implemented by IOs, the effect on ordinary women's everyday lives can be limited. Additionally, applying an FPE lens to the norm implementation phase seeks to address the imbalance that currently exists with IR norms research. As Shweta Singh notes, 'there needs to be greater critical thinking on why there is scant research on everyday experiences of women, and so much attention paid to norm diffusion at the national and international levels.'[105]

2.5.1. Where are the women? Implementation 'all the way down'

The framework developed in this chapter proposes a theoretical lens to address the central research question motivating this thesis: *How do we account for the disjuncture between the expectations that underpin the implementation of global women's economic empowerment norms by the international community and women's lived realities and needs?* The analytical framework focuses on the implementation level of enquiry. Drawing on insights from feminist IR, I seek to develop a concept of implementation which centres the individuals who are the targets of global gender norms and policies. There is no uniform definition of norm implementation in the scholarly literature and the term has often been conflated with compliance or institutionalization. In their pioneering work on norm implementation, Alexander Betts and Phil Orchard distinguish between two parallel processes: institutionalization and implementation. The former is primarily an international process whereby 'norms emerge at the international level and become reflected in international law and

[105] Shweta Singh, 'In between the *Ulemas* and Local Warlords in Afghanistan: Critical Perspectives on the "Everyday," Norm Translation, and UNSCR 1325', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22, no. 4 (7 August 2020): 520.

organizations, and are signed, ratified, and adopted by particular states.'[106] Implementation by contrast is primarily a domestic process triggered when a state or organization commits to an emerging norm. In line with Betts and Orchard's definition, this study defines implementation as a primarily domestic process, however it adopts a broader definition of implementation which refers to *the process through which international normative frameworks are applied at the ground level of practice*. This can include actions which seek to 'introduce the new international norm's precepts into formal legal and policy mechanisms', as per Betts and Orchard's definition, but also includes any initiative or intervention that contributes to the realisation of global normative frameworks at the domestic level**.**

The benefits of expanding the scope of Betts and Orchard's definition are twofold. First, it captures a greater range of norm implementation practices, to reflect the dynamics of norm implementation in contexts with a direct international presence on the ground. This *may* include the introduction of the international norm's precepts into national-level legal and policy mechanisms, but it does not understand this to be the only goal or effect of IO practices and policies. While IOs certainly advocate for and/or assist in the revision of domestic laws to bring them into alignment with certain international standards and the development of new national or sectoral strategies in host countries, this is not always the case. For example, some IO initiatives target beneficiaries directly, such as micro-credit programmes or skills development. Such schemes still represent the implementation of UN economic empowerment norms (at least in the eyes of IOs, irrespective of their effectiveness), even though they do not necessarily contribute to a final product visible at the national level. Given the focus of this study on international normative frameworks and how they evolve on the ground, it is necessary to take all such efforts into account. This perhaps suggests two 'forms' of implementation, one of

[106] Betts and Orchard, *Implementation and World Politics*, 5.

which is visible at the national level through the creation of new institutions and legislation, and another which is a broader set of efforts which seek to affect change in line with the norm and impact the lives of people, but which have no legislative output. This definition thus encompasses the wide range of IO policies and programmes towards realizing and actualizing global normative commitments at the ground level of practice, irrespective of whether they contribute to the legalization of an international norms precepts or not. In sum, I claim that implementation exists in certain cases outside of the legislative reception at the domestic level of international agreements or UN resolutions.

Second, in addition to recognizing that norm implementation can include interventions that are not directly reflected in a change at the national legal or policy level, this definition conceptualizes implementation as also extending *beyond* the point of legalization. For example, Stimmer and Wisken define implementation as including 'not only Betts and Orchard's definition "as the steps necessary to introduce the new international norm's precepts into formal legal and policy mechanisms", but also the subsequent use of these mechanisms.'[107] This holds particularly true for normative frameworks such as the SDGs, which often suffer from ineffective implementation mechanisms, such as a lack of monitoring and enforcement.[108] Therefore in these cases the fuzziness and imprecision of the norm content at the global level means that even once incorporated into national laws and strategies, implementation mechanisms can be ineffective and require continued efforts to strengthen or adjust them to ensure their effectiveness and achieve a deeper level of national institutionalization. In this way the definition is consistent with Betts and Orchard's general notion that the implementation 'process…furthers the adoption of a new norm.'[109] Even once domestic legal, institutional and

[107] Stimmer and Wisken, 'The Dynamics of Dissent', 521.
[108] Stimmer and Wisken, 'The Dynamics of Dissent', 522.
[109] Betts and Orchard, *Implementation and World Politics*, 6.

policy frameworks reflect a commitment to certain global normative frameworks, such as CEDAW, Agenda 2030, or the SDGs, as is the case in Kosovo,[110] this does not signal that implementation is complete.

2.5.2. Norms as processes in IR theory

The following section is a brief overview of the framework of analysis that this thesis applies. As noted earlier in this chapter, IR norms scholarship has taken the form of two waves. The framework is firmly situated in the 'second wave' of norm diffusion scholarship, which moved away from the notion that norms acquire a 'taken for granted' quality, instead arguing that norms are best viewed as 'content in motion'[111] or 'as works-in-progress, rather than as finished products.'[112] Based on empirical observations, this scholarship highlighted that multiple understandings and interpretations of the same norm can co-exist amongst different actors, and 'therefore, there are different interpretations of the practices and policies needed to adopt a norm in domestic contexts.'[113] Although the norm life cycle model proposed by Finnemore and Sikkink has been called into question by subsequent generations of scholarship, it nevertheless offers a useful point of departure for situating the framework developed in this thesis. Building on scholarship which has shown that norms are best conceived as processes and works in progress, the framework developed here shines a light on what can be described as the final stage of the life cycle, by following the norm from its birth at the international level down to its release into a post-conflict context.

[110] Since Kosovo is not a member of the United Nations (UN), it cannot become an official signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, Agenda 2030, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Nevertheless, Kosovo has worked to align its legal, institutional, and policy framework on gender equality with international law and policies.
[111] Zwingel, 'Women's Rights Norms as Content-in-Motion and Incomplete Practice'.
[112] Krook and True, 'Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms'.
[113] Martín de Almagro, 'Lost Boomerangs, the Rebound Effect and Transnational Advocacy Networks', 676.

In line with this scholarship, the framework adopts a dynamic understanding of norms as processes, in which norm content is by no means fixed and is constantly reconstituted, even during the final stage of the norm lifecycle. Global normative frameworks such as CEDAW or the SDGs thus provide the normative setting. However, as Caglar, Prügl, and Zwingel aptly note, 'the meaning of a norm derives not from an imagined, codified intention but from the process of norm translation.'[114] Norms are thus best seen as 'fluid propositions that need to gain reception and pass through societal filters before they become part of the vernacular.'[115] In the context of the SDGs, Taylor and Mahon claim that 'what becomes of the formal gains – and gaps – will be determined by subsequent struggles at local, national, regional, and global scales.'[116] Scholars such as Susanne Zwingel and Jacqui True argue that gender equality and women's rights norms are particularly prone to contestation and reinterpretation given that 'assumptions about appropriate gendered behaviour vary widely across the globe. They are of deep social significance and not, as other sets of norms that have attracted the interest of International Relations scholars, predominantly internationally produced.'[117]

Within this body of scholarship, the work of Anette Stimmer is particularly helpful in providing a more nuanced account of norm content. Stimmer distinguishes between 'norm frames' (*justifications*) and 'norm claims' (*to action*) and demonstrates various possible configurations of claim-frame agreements and disagreements and their implications for the precision of a norm. In other words, there is a difference between the normative value-based component of the norm (such as pursuing climate justice, protecting human rights or promoting gender equality) and the prescriptive component which dictates *how* to achieve or deliver those

[114] Gülay Caglar, Elisabeth Prügl, and Susanne Zwingel, eds., 'Conclusion: Feminist Strategies in International Governance', in *Feminist Strategies in International Governance* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 290.
[115] Caglar, Prügl, and Zwingel, 'Conclusion: Feminist Strategies in International Governance', 290.
[116] Sara Rose Taylor and Rianne Mahon, 'Gender Equality from the MDGs to the SDGs: The Struggle Continues', in *Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals* (Routledge, 2019), 54.
[117] Zwingel, 'Women's Rights Norms as Content-in-Motion and Incomplete Practice', 676.

principles. According to Stimmer's framework, it is possible for states to agree on the norm frame but disagree on the norm claim, and vice versa. This specification of the dual character of norm content is useful in explaining fragmented implementation as it helps us 'move beyond a dichotomous understanding of norm contestation and acceptance.'[118]

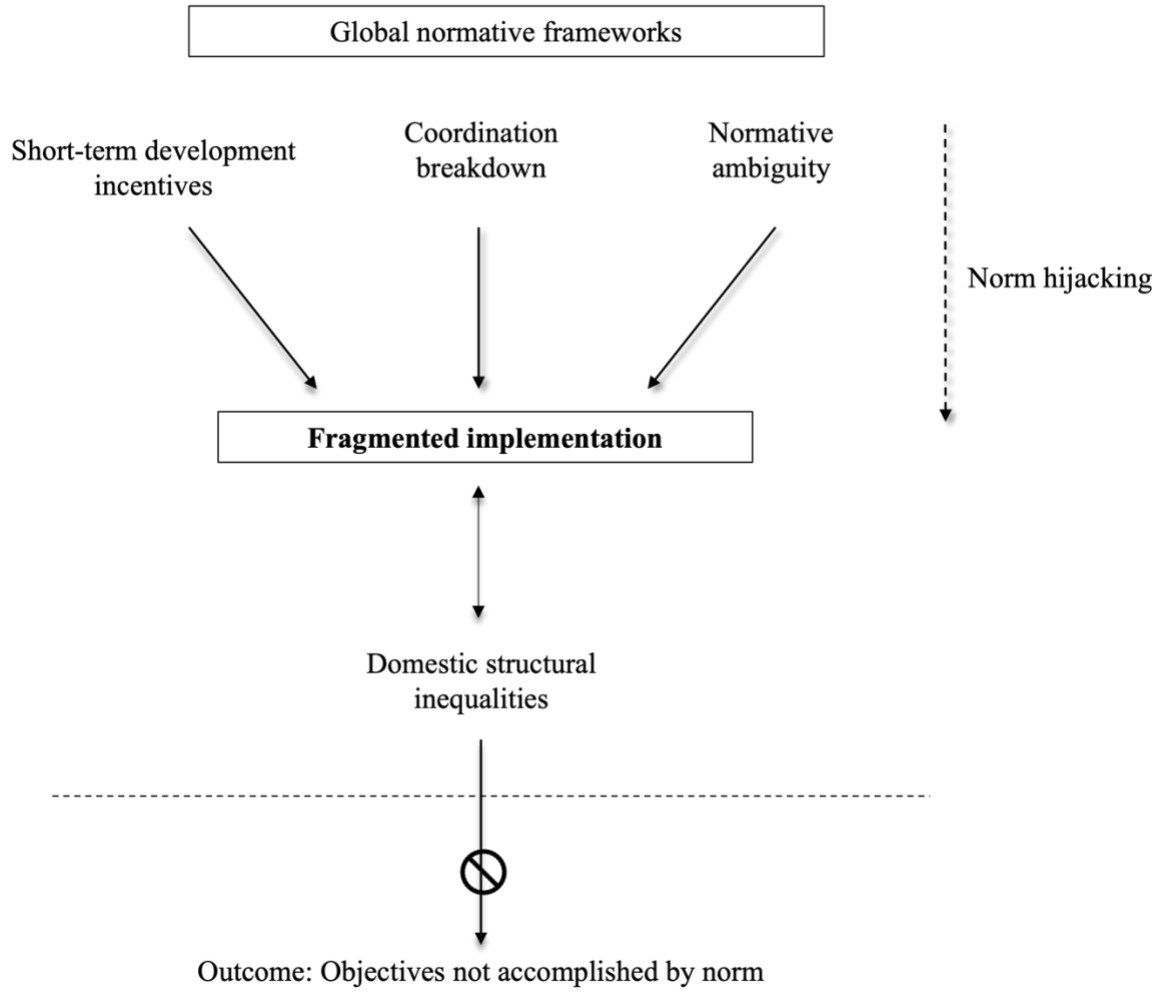


Figure 2.1: Fragmented implementation

Informed by this approach, this thesis develops a framework for understanding norm implementation and the continuous process of re-negotiating norm meaning even during the final stage of the norm 'life cycle', focussing on the prescriptive elements of the norm. With

[118] Anette Stimmer, 'Beyond Internalization: Alternate Endings of the Norm Life Cycle', *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1 June 2019): 272.

that in mind, what follows advances the argument that, even when there is agreement on the overall value-based component of the norm, this does not necessarily result in the full implementation of the prescriptive components of the norm on the part of the relevant norm implementers in a given context. I label this process 'fragmented implementation', whereby the overall norm claim is seemingly implemented, but in actuality, implementation clusters around certain prescriptive elements of a norm whilst others are omitted, rendering implementation incomplete.

The framework takes a two-level approach to implementation. First, it analyses the drivers of fragmented implementation on behalf of international actors and identifies three dominant factors based on an abductive analysis of the Kosovo case, detailed in the following section 2.5.3. I conceptualize this process as one of norm hijacking, whereby international actors are able to exercise agency during the process of norm implementation and direct which aspects of the norm are practiced and which are left aside, due to a combination of factors. Hijacking has largely been discussed in relation to the agency of local actors, such as the misuse of global norms by domestic political elites for strategic benefit.[119] Here, I apply the term instead to refer to the role of international actors. The outcome of the norm hijacking process is fragmented implementation, whereby only certain aspects of a global norm or norm cluster are implemented. This fragmentation is the consequence of the ability of certain actors to exercise agency within the norm implementation phase due to their positional influence, despite what may have been agreed during high-level international negotiation processes. If, then, as Critical constructivist scholarship argues, the meaning of a norm is defined by how it

[119] See, for example, Annika Björkdahl and Ivan Gusic, '"Global" Norms and "Local" Agency: Frictional Peacebuilding in Kosovo', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18, no. 3 (2015): 265–87; Levitt and Merry, 'Vernacularization on the Ground'; Jelena Subotic, *Hijacked Justice Dealing with the Past in the Balkans* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

is practiced - the 'norm-generative dimension of practice'[120] – it follows that it is through this process of fragmented implementation that the meaning of the norm is circumscribed and altered.

From this perspective, fragmented implementation itself is ultimately norm-generative in that it narrows the meaning of the norm. Thus, I contend fragmented implementation causes a reinterpretation of the prescriptive norm content at the domestic level by limiting the range of possible implementation practices. As such there is a change in the '*how to'* element of the norm, i.e. the means through which a given global norm should be achieved in practice, leading to fragmented implementation. The framework thus illustrates how implementation is not only a means of contestation, but also a way of re-defining the context, the scope, the goals, and the actual impact of global norms.[121]

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the focus on international actors is not intended to diminish or downplay the role of local agency, but to shed light on the agency of international actors, especially in highly internationalized, conflict-affected contexts such as Kosovo. The role of local actors, namely the Kosovo government and relevant ministries and agencies, will also be included in the scope of the analysis. As will be shown throughout this thesis, international actors wield a significant degree of influence in post-conflict contexts dependent on foreign aid. This creates power imbalances between host governments who are often weak

[120] Phil Orchard and Antje Wiener, *Contesting the World: Norm Research in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 14.
[121] This argument speaks to an emerging literature within the "practice turn" in IR which draws attention to the micro-level practices of international organizations as key to norm implementation dynamics. These studies show how established norms change through practice over time. See, for example, Aarie Glas and Marion Laurence, 'Changing Norms in Practice: Noninterference in the UN and ASEAN', *Journal of Global Security Studies* 7, no. 2 (11 May 2022): ogac003; Aarie Glas and Emmanuel Balogun, 'Norms in Practice: People-Centric Governance in ASEAN and ECOWAS', *International Affairs* 96, no. 4 (2020): 1015–32; Marion Laurence, 'An "Impartial" Force? Normative Ambiguity and Practice Change in UN Peace Operations', *International Peacekeeping* 26, no. 3 (27 May 2019): 256–80.

due to ongoing changes in governance and institutions, and powerful international actors, which create the conditions for a significant degree of international agency.

Second, in line with the individualised notion of norm implementation outlined in section 2.1.1 of this chapter, it explores the implications of fragmented implementation on norm recipients at the ground level of practice, from which it is also possible to derive policy recommendations. By capturing the implementation process and directing which aspects of a given global norm or norm cluster get implemented, international actors can, both consciously or unconsciously, (re)produce structural inequalities which do not align with the needs of the population locally. The phenomenon of 'fragmented implementation' is thus significant and problematic in that it reduces the effectiveness of international interventions and moreover, does not bring about the transformative change envisioned in global normative frameworks for women on the ground.

Borrowing from the institutionalist literature, I contend that fragmented implementation therefore results in a situation of 'means-ends decoupling'. Bromley and Powell define means-ends decoupling as the implementation of policies in practice which are only loosely tied to the intended outcome.[122] For the purposes of this thesis, I adapt their definition to refer to a situation where the policies implemented in practice are only *partially* tied to the intended outcome. In other words, the means do contribute towards the intended outcome and are perhaps necessary but not sufficient to achieve the intended outcome. As a result, the intended norm recipients are unlikely to feel the benefits of the global norm despite implementation efforts.

[122] Patricia Bromley and Walter W. Powell, 'From Smoke and Mirrors to Walking the Talk: Decoupling in the Contemporary World', *Academy of Management Annals* 6, no. 1 (June 2012): 496–97.

2.5.3. Kosovo-specific elaboration

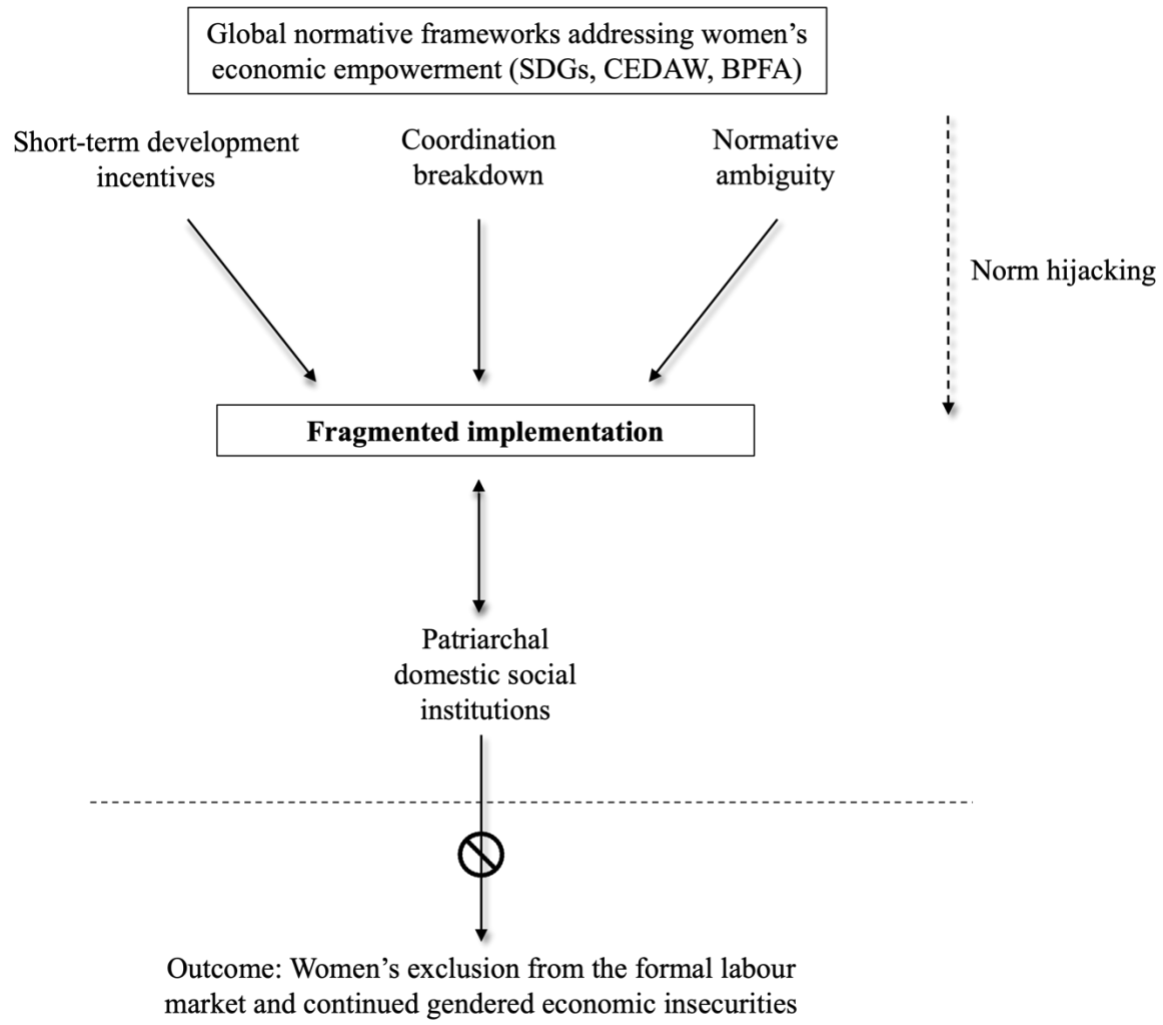


Figure 2.2: Fragmented Implementation in Kosovo

I conceptualize the implementation of global women's economic empowerment norms in Kosovo as a case of fragmented implementation vis-à-vis the prescriptive elements of the norm, specifically with respect to prescriptions regarding recognizing and redistributing women's unpaid labour at the ground level of practice.[123] In the case of women's economic empowerment, the norm has been accepted internationally and is enshrined in several key

Figure 2.2: Fragmented Implementation in Kosovo

[123] The specific ways in which women's economic empowerment is included in international policy frameworks, including references to unpaid care and domestic work, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

global normative frameworks on gender equality. At the national level in Kosovo, there is widespread agreement on behalf of international organizations and the government that women should be empowered economically (the norm frame). During the data collection process, I did not detect any intentional contestation of the norm claims stipulated within global normative frameworks by either group of actors, particularly regarding the need to address the structural root causes of gendered inequalities as part of women's economic empowerment. As Esquivel notes in relation to the SDGs, 'Interestingly though, the principle of the reduction of women's unpaid care and domestic work is now widely accepted, even if in an instrumental fashion, as it is seen as an impediment for women's labour force participation and therefore as detrimental of growth.'[124] This assessment reflects what I found to be the case in Kosovo. Yet, we still see a lack of holistic approach towards economic empowerment by international organizations. As detailed in the Introduction to this thesis, a holistic approach draws on feminist political economy and is defined as one which addresses women's labour force participation in tandem with the social aspects which enable women to fully participate in the labour force. In the case of Kosovo, a holistic approach might include: funding interventions which seek to recognize women's unpaid labour and its contribution to national GDP, such as time-use surveys; programmes which seek to transform care-related social norms; investing in affordable and accessible social care infrastructure including childcare, elderly care, and care for the long-term sick and disabled; and analyses of care as a service sector, in order to identify coverage gaps and promote a national approach to care. These approaches have been pursued in countries such as Uruguay.[125] How is one to make sense, then, of international organizations' satisficing behaviour in the area of women's economic empowerment? Why do certain elements of the

[124] Valeria Esquivel, 'Power and the Sustainable Development Goals: A Feminist Analysis', *Gender & Development* 24, no. 1 (22 February 2016): 16.
[125] ILO, 'How a new law in Uruguay boosted care services while breaking gender stereotypes', https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/how-new-law-uruguay-boosted-care-services-while-breaking-gender-stereotypes.

'content' of the norm that has been approved internationally get implemented and certain other elements end up not being implemented? And which actors primarily drive this process?

The framework identifies three sets of factors which enable norm hijacking, constraining the range of possible implementation practices and leading IOs to concentrate on certain aspects of women's economic empowerment and neglect others: 1) Short-term development incentives; 2) Coordination breakdown; 3) Normative ambiguity. Short-term development incentives refers to the international political economy of the donor community, in other words the funding complexes that underpin peacebuilding and development interventions and the subsequent logics that arise from them. Coordination breakdown describes the lack of coordination on-the-ground both among IOs, as well as between IOs and the Kosovo government. Normative ambiguity refers to the unclear and sometimes conflicting aspects within the global women's economic empowerment norm cluster itself, examining how these ambiguities affect the interpretation and institutionalisation of certain elements of the norm cluster at the ground level of practice.

I contend that these factors foreclose certain implementation practices and encourage others, resulting in a change in norm meaning at the ground level of practice. I argue that in the case of Kosovo, women's economic empowerment has not meant eradicating some of the key structural barriers to economic participation, as envisaged in the global normative frameworks, in the same way that 'development' more broadly in the Kosovo context has not meant poverty eradication. This subsequently leads to fragmented implementation. The potential for uneven implementation in the case of the SDGs has been noted by observers. For instance, Fukunda-Parr warns that 'selectivity could lead to neglect of goals and targets that address the need to challenge power relations, reform institutions, and achieve other changes

in the structures of political, economic and social life.'[126] However, the complex processes preceding these outcomes have not yet been explored in-depth, not least in the case of global gender norms, hence the value of the framework elaborated in this thesis.

Building on the insights offered by feminist scholars, the second level of the framework shows how fragmented implementation interacts with women's lived realities by (re)producing and reinforcing structural, patriarchal domestic social institutions. Branisa et al. define 'social institutions' as 'long-lasting norms, values, and codes of conduct that find expression in traditions, customs and cultural practices, informal and formal laws. They frame gender roles and the distribution of power between men and women in the family, in the market, and in social and political life.'[127] Crucially, the authors note that social institutions related to gender inequality 'build an often taken-for-granted basis of people's behaviour and interaction in all spheres of life' which in turn shape 'the social and economic opportunities of men and women, their autonomy in taking decisions or the capabilities to live the life they value.'[128] In the case of Kosovo, this manifests in the reproduction of structural gendered inequalities, namely gender divisions of labour which keep women from participating in the formal economy – undermining a key goal of international organizations – and create additional burdens for women who do participate in the formal labour market. Applying the concept of 'depletion through social reproduction' discussed in section 2.4.1 of this chapter, I argue that by failing to challenge patriarchal structures in the economic domain, international interventions have contributed to women's continued economic insecurity by limiting their access to paid, secure economic opportunities. For many women in Kosovo, in the absence of an affordable and

[126] Valeria Esquivel and Caroline Sweetman, 'Gender and the Sustainable Development Goals', *Gender & Development* 24, no. 1 (3 March 2016): 4.
[127] Boris Branisa, Stephan Klasen, and Maria Ziegler, 'Gender Inequality in Social Institutions and Gendered Development Outcomes', *World Development* 45 (1 May 2013): 254.
[128] Branisa, Klasen, and Ziegler, 'Gender Inequality in Social Institutions and Gendered Development Outcomes', 254.

accessible care system and interventions which recognize this fact, they remain trapped within the home, carrying out social reproductive work, enabling their continued depletion through social reproduction and exposure to gendered harm and insecurity.

In sum, this research develops a framework to understand how the prescriptive component of global norms is translated during the implementation phase, and how this interacts with domestic structures, as well as the consequences for local populations. The framework developed here does not claim to represent a predictive model that can be applied everywhere in the world, even with similar scope conditions. However, it does seek to provide a sufficient level of abstraction so that it could be applied to other cases of implementing global norms in contexts with a high degree of international involvement, including but not limited to post-conflict contexts. The arguments developed in this thesis may travel beyond post-conflict settings, offering relevance to broader large-scale international development contexts. Many of the conditions and dynamics observed in Kosovo are not exclusive to conflict-affected environments. As such, alongside post-conflict scholars, scholars and practitioners interested in large-scale development initiatives more broadly may also benefit from the insights presented in this thesis.

In terms of issue areas, the framework is likely to be applicable to the implementation of global gender norms in other internationalised (post-conflict) contexts, but also to other global norms which are potentially vulnerable to hijacking by powerful international actors or states, in ways that do not best serve (certain sections of) local populations, such as norms pertaining to climate justice.

Chapter 3: Setting the Scene: Normative and Country Context

This chapter examines the core normative cluster examined in this thesis and situates the empirical chapters within the context of broader international intervention in Kosovo. It begins by outlining the history of the conflict in Kosovo, followed by a chronological overview of the experience of international intervention. Second, it provides an overview of the early years of international intervention from a gender perspective. Then, it introduces the policy context at the international level by mapping references to women's economic empowerment in international normative gender frameworks. The fourth section reviews some of the available data on international efforts in the domain of women's economic empowerment. The final section draws on primary material, in the form of published reports by civil society and international organizations, as well as government agencies.

3.1 Background to the conflict

Under the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), Kosovo existed as an autonomous province within Serbia from 1974. In 1989, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic effectively revoked Kosovo's autonomy via constitutional amendments. The repeal of Kosovo's autonomous status was followed by the implementation of a series of discriminatory laws against ethnic Albanians between 1989 and 1991, which together are widely recognised as the triggers of the 1998-99 Kosovo War.[1] Ethnic Albanians were dismissed en masse from their workplaces, excluded from state institutions, denied civil and political rights and access to Albanian-language education and media.[2] During this time, arbitrary arrests and police

[1] Aidan Hehir, ed., *Kosovo, Intervention and Statebuilding: The International Community and the Transition to Independence*, Routledge Studies in Intervention and Statebuilding (London: Routledge, 2010), 6.
[2] Besnik Pula, 'The Emergence of the Kosovo "Parallel State," 1988–1992', *Nationalities Papers* 32, no. 4 (December 2004): 806.

violence against Albanians were commonplace.[3] In response to the systematic repression of Kosovar Albanians through oppressive new laws and policies, a peaceful civil resistance movement emerged under the leadership of Ibrahim Rugova, who served as the head of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). The LDK's goal was initially the re-establishment of Kosovo's regional autonomy, however it shifted to independent statehood as the repression of ethnic Albanians intensified.[4] The LDK coordinated the so-called "parallel state" or society which emerged in Kosovo in the early 1990s as a form of resistance to Belgrade's rule of Kosovo. The parallel state 'consisted of a loose conglomeration of educational and cultural institutions, health services, social assistance networks, political parties, local financial councils, and a government-in-exile.'[5]

The non-violent movement ultimately failed to resolve the conflict peacefully and there was no mention of Kosovo in the Dayton Accords of 1995, which ended the war in neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was seen as a huge blow to the LDK whose peaceful tactics had not paid off and generated the international support they needed.[6] Popular resentment and frustration contributed to the emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a group of separatist guerrilla fighters who sought Kosovo's independence through military means. In late 1997 the KLA increased their activity and launched attacks on Serbian policemen, public offices and civilians, with the aim of inciting counterattacks by Belgrade that would increase support from the international community and force them to intervene on behalf of Kosovo Albanians.[7] 1998 saw a shift in tactics by the FRY/Serbian forces, who

[3] Richard Caplan, 'International Diplomacy and the Crisis in Kosovo', *International Affairs* 74, no. 4 (1 October 1998): 751.
[4] Capussela, *State-Building in Kosovo*, 3–4.
[5] Pula, 'The Emergence of the Kosovo "Parallel State," 1988–1992', 797.
[6] Hehir, *Kosovo, Intervention and Statebuilding*, 6. See also Caplan, 'International Diplomacy and the Crisis in Kosovo', 750.
[7] Hehir, *Kosovo, Intervention and Statebuilding*, 6–7.

embarked upon a campaign of ethnic cleansing and began to target ethnic Albanian villages suspected of collaborating with the KLA. There were mass civilian killings and whole villages were razed to the ground.[8] Hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanians were forced to flee their homes, either as refugees into neighbouring Albania and Macedonia or as internally displaced persons within Kosovo. The violence continued to escalate resulting in a humanitarian emergency, culminating in the infamous Račak massacre of January 1999, where 45 Albanians were killed by Serbian security forces.

Despite attempts to resolve the conflict by the West at negotiations at Rambouillet in early 1999, Milosevic rejected the proposals that were tabled at the conference. In March 1999, as a consequence, NATO unilaterally launched an aerial bombing campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (the successor to the SFRY). During NATO's intervention, the number of internally displaced persons and refugees – most of them ethnic Albanians – increased significantly, totalling around 900,000.[9] After three months of aerial bombing, the conflict ended on 9 June 1999. Kosovo was placed under an open-ended UN transitional administration and the issue of independence was postponed indefinitely.[10] These terms were formalized under UNSCR Resolution no. 1244 of 15 June 1999 which authorised the establishment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). UNMIK's sweeping mandate represented an important shift in the scope of UN peacekeeping missions. Never before had a UN peacekeeping mission possessed such extensive executive, legislative and judicial powers. Several international organizations worked alongside UNMIK to execute the wide-ranging functions of the mandate: NATO, UNHCR, OSCE and the EU, the latter being responsible for

[8] Marc Weller, *Contested Statehood: Kosovo's Struggle for Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 67–68.
[9] Capussela, *State-Building in Kosovo*, 5.
[10] Capussela, *State-Building in Kosovo*, 5.

economic reconstruction under Pillar IV of UNMIK.[11] During the early days of the UNMIK administration, as refugees and internally displaced persons returned to their homes, there was widespread 'reverse ethnic cleansing' by KLA fighters and ordinary citizens against the Kosovo Serbian and Roma community. This resulted in a second wave of refugees who fled to Serbia.[12]

Following widespread violent civil unrest in Kosovo in 2004, negotiations on Kosovo's independence began in late 2005. The negotiations ultimately failed as Serbia, supported by Russia, was only willing to grant Kosovo substantial autonomy, but not independence, which was non-negotiable for Kosovo. In March 2007, Martti Ahtisaari, the UN Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo, proposed the 'Ahtisaari plan' which laid out a roadmap for Kosovo's independence, contingent on temporary international supervision and compliance with a range of principles on governance and minority protection.[13] However, the plan was rejected by Serbia and by extension, Russia. With the support of the US and most European powers, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence on 17 February 2008. Kosovo's unilateral declaration 'solved a double deadlock – both between Kosovo and within the Security Council.'[14] Although Kosovo has achieved widespread recognition, it is still not recognized by five countries within the EU[15], in no small part due to concerns on behalf of some countries that Kosovo set a precedent which could spark similar independence demands from their own national minorities. As Capussela notes, 'the Kosovo crisis provoked decisions that have challenged the prohibition of the use of force, harmed the authority of the Security Council,

[11] Richard Caplan, *International Governance of War-Torn Territories: Rule and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 37.
[12] Capussela, *State-Building in Kosovo*, 5–6.
[13] Capussela, *State-Building in Kosovo*, 8.
[14] Capussela, *State-Building in Kosovo*, 9.
[15] Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Romania and Slovakia.

weakened the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, and inaugurated the doctrine of humanitarian intervention.'[16]

It is these profound political implications which made the West 'determined to make Kosovo a "success story"', which resulted in what Gëzim Visoka has described as a 'fluid peace policy', driven by policy failure and unintended consequences.[17] UNMIK's size and role declined following independence, with some claiming that the mission has fulfilled its purpose and become obsolete. With the opening of EU accession negotiations with Kosovo in 2013, the EU was able exert a stronger influence over Kosovo. International involvement has also continued through foreign aid and the physical presence of donors. Between 2009-2018, Kosovo received the highest share of ODA per capita of all the Western Balkan countries, amounting to 280 USD per annum or 7.5% of its GNI.[18] A large proportion of this ODA came from EU institutions. Furthermore, as evidenced by periodic tensions in the North of Kosovo, where Kosovo Serbs are concentrated, Kosovo still relies on Western states for its national security through NATO and EULEX. International influence in Kosovo has remained strong in the domain of its foreign policy, as evidenced by current increased international pressure on the Kosovo government to establish an Association of Serb-majority Municipalities, as stipulated in the Brussels Agreements signed between Kosovo and Serbia in 2013 and 2015. The figure below illustrates the main categories of international organization currently operating in Kosovo.

[16] Capussela, *State-Building in Kosovo*, 10.
[17] Gëzim Visoka, *Shaping Peace in Kosovo* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 36.
[18] Will Bartlett, 'International Assistance, Donor Interests, and State Capture in the Western Balkans', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 29, no. 2 (3 April 2021): 188–89.

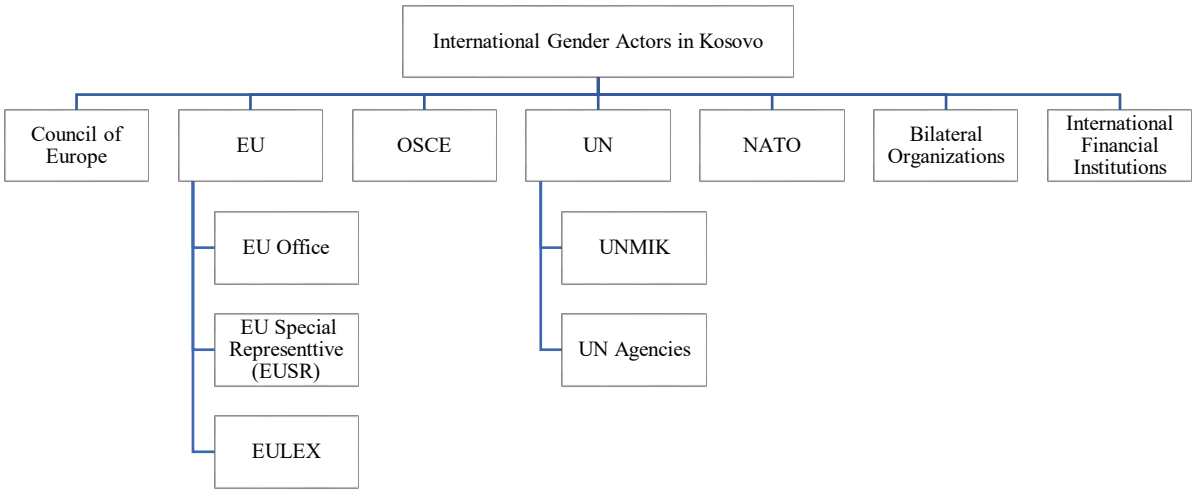


Figure 3.1. Main international organizations in Kosovo in relation to gender equality.

3.2 Historical context of international intervention from a gender perspective

Just as the international intervention in Kosovo represented a laboratory for testing the liberal peace agenda, so too did it present a specific opportunity to implement peacebuilding from a gender perspective, based on the freshly adopted UN Security Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.[19] At that time, UNSCR 1325 was the most pertinent international gender framework in the case of Kosovo as UNMIK was deployed just as the UN was incorporating nascent ideas of gender into its peacebuilding operations. Kosovo was one of the first peacekeeping missions, alongside UNTAET (Timor-Leste) to have a dedicated Office of Gender Affairs (OGA) within the mission in 1999, prior to the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000. The OGA was thus the first of its kind and was mandated to 'facilitate the mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective into the substantial operations of the Mission and in doing so

[19] UNSCR 1325 was a landmark resolution on gender as it was the first to recognize the unique impact of armed conflict on women and call for women's inclusion in all stages of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.

contribute to the promotion of gender equality in Kosovo.'[20] The stakes were particularly high for UNMIK given that 'the United Nations [in Kosovo], when acting as a governing power, was obliged to uphold the same standards that it had itself created to ensure the rights of the people vis-à-vis their governments.'[21]

A number of important pieces of gender legislation were passed under UNMIK. Kosovo's gender legislation is some of the most progressive in the region, although significant barriers persist around implementation, leading many scholars to highlight the gap between law and practice.[22] Major gender-related legislative developments in the post-conflict period include the Law on Gender Equality (2004), the Law on Inheritance (2004), UNMIK Regulation on Protection against Domestic Violence (2003), UNMIK Regulation on the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (2001), the Law on Crimes Related to Sexual Violence (2003), the Anti-Discrimination Law (2004), the Kosovo Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings (2005), and Family Law (2004).[23] In 2003 Kosovo adopted a National Action Plan for the Achievement of Gender Equality and the first National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 was introduced in 2014. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is enshrined in the Kosovo Constitution. There have also been important institutional developments, including the creation of dedicated national gender machinery such as the Agency for Gender Equality (AGE), ministerial and municipal level gender equality officers, and the Advisory Office on Good Governance,

[20] Maddalena Pezzotti, 'UNMIK Office of Gender Affairs Places Gender Concerns at the Top of the Peacekeeping Political Agenda in Kosovo' (UNMIK, 2004)
[21] David Marshall and Shelley Inglis, 'The Disempowerment of Human Rights-Based Justice in the United Nations Mission in Kosovo', *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 16 (2003): 104.
[22] Jock Baker and Hilde Haug, 'The Kosovo Women's Initiative: An Independent Evaluation', *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit*, November 2002, 161.
[23] Baker and Haug, 'The Kosovo Women's Initiative', 157–58.

Human Rights, Equal Opportunities, and Non-Discrimination (OGG) within the Prime Minister's Office.

However, the international community – UNMIK in particular – has been widely criticised by the Kosovar women's movement for side-lining local capacities and expertise in the early post-conflict period and failing to implement their own commitments to gender equality. Women were largely excluded from the interim governing structures and were not appointed to senior decision-making positions in the international administration, mirroring other post-conflict contexts such as Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Timor, to name a few. Despite their extensive lobbying and advocacy, women were also marginalised in the negotiation process over Kosovo's final status in Vienna in 2006, as political status was not considered to be a 'women's issue.'. Only in 2011 was a female representative – Edita Tahiri – finally included as part of the dialogue process with Serbia.

The OGA was firstly under Pillar II of UNMIK (Civil Administration) but it was then moved into the office of the SRSG in late 2004.[24] A report of the SG from June 2000 claims that 'the Office of Gender Affairs made significant progress in mainstreaming gender issues throughout UNMIK, including in JIAS (Joint Interim Administrative Structure), as well as within the local community and municipal structures.'[25] A later memorandum by the Chief of the OGA in October 2004 claimed that 'the Office of Gender Affairs fulfilled its raison d'être managing to place UNSCR 1325 at the heart of policy making through streamlined strategies.'[26] There is no mention in either of these memos of the frustrations felt by Kosovar

[24] UNDPKO, *Gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations: Progress report*, (New York: UNDPKO, 2005), 29.
[25] Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2000/538) 6 June 2000.
[26] Pezzotti, 'UNMIK Office of Gender Affairs Places Gender Concerns at the Top of the Peacekeeping Political Agenda in Kosovo'.

women's civil society and their concerns regarding women's security in post-conflict Kosovo. The silences in the DPKO assessments of the OGA are revealing of the differing perspectives of gender mainstreaming and gender security. Similarly, a DPKO progress report on gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations from 2005 makes no note of any of the problems experienced by the OGA and portrays the office as a generally effective unit for gender mainstreaming which supported local women and their demands and fostered productive partnerships. The UNMIK reports contain no register of any resistance or tensions with local activists, which contrasts strongly with reports of women's civil society organizations and their accounts of their interactions with international actors. KWN activists noted that the UNMIK reports rarely included women's input and 'tended to exaggerate their [UNMIK's] achievements while ignoring the voices of Kosovar women', suggesting disagreements over ownership of the progress made in this period.[27]

Outside of the OGA, there is a perception amongst women's activists that early gender programming primarily targeted community-based organizations rather than empowering women in politics and advocating for women's equal political participation.[28] This resonates with the experience of women activists in Timor-Leste, where the UN and donors preferred to work with non-politicised groups focussing on "discrete gender-based programs" over groups formed in the resistance period which had distinct political goals.[29] In the realm of economic empowerment, a good example of this is the US-funded Kosovo Women's Initiative (KWI), established in July 1999 and inspired by similar projects in Rwanda and Bosnia. The project was led by UNHCR and had an initial grant of $10 million. The KWI focussed on income-

[27] Farnsworth, '1325 Facts & Fables', 99.
[28] Ana Villellas Ariño and Gema Redondo de la Morena, 'An Approach to the Kosovo Post-War Rehabilitation Process from a Gender Perspective', Quaderns de Construcció de Pau, January 2008, 18.
[29] Sarah Smith, *Gendering Peace: UN Peacebuilding in Timor-Leste* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 44.

generation through micro-credit loans and grants to local NGOs for vocational training and income-generation projects.[30] The funds were intended to be distributed very quickly (within one year) and were disbursed through four international umbrella organizations, including Oxfam.[31] However, the project was widely criticised by local women's groups for favouring traditional vocational activities such as sewing, handcrafts, hairdressing and English lessons, without much consideration of the sustainability and longer-term value of such projects.[32] Research conducted in 2006 found that a very small number of the businesses established via income generation grants in the immediate post-war period were still active.[33] Although an UNHCR evaluation of the initiative claims that efforts were made to 'diversify into non-traditional activities that have resulted in both employment and empowerment'[34], it seems that the goal of 'enhancing the principles of gender equality at all levels of government and civil society' was largely unmet.

Several assessments of the initiative highlight issues such as a lack of local consultation in the planning phase, quick staff turnover, complex and time-consuming project proposal processes, and disagreement over goals between international and local actors. A Gender Audit conducted in 2000 found that 'organisations and networks that had been active for some years resented having to go through international umbrella groups, the staff of which were sometimes very new and inexperienced – not only in Kosovar affairs but also in international work.'[35] Furthermore, many new women's groups sprung up in order to gain access to the funds, sometimes in place of pre-existing organizations which had worked with their local

[30] Nicole Farnsworth, *History Is Herstory Too: The History of Women in Civil Society in Kosovo 1980-2004* (Prishtina: Kosovar Gender Studies Centre, 2008), 269.
[31] Chris Corrin, 'Developing Policy on Integration and Re/Construction in Kosova', *Development in Practice* 13, no. 2–3 (1 May 2003): 67–68.
[32] Corrin, 'Developing Policy on Integration and Re/Construction in Kosova', 86.
[33] Farnsworth, *History Is Herstory Too*, 271.
[34] Baker and Haug, 'The Kosovo Women's Initiative: An Independent Evaluation', 4.
[35] Corrin, 'Developing Policy on Integration and Re/Construction in Kosova', 70.

communities for years and had a good understanding of local needs and priorities. In one evaluation, a respondent remarked that 'Kosovar women lobbied for the KWI funds from the US government, but it is surprising that international organisations are taking a leading role and leaving out the local women's organisations.'[36] The lack of local consultation is emblematic of the top-down approach pursued by international actors in the early stages of international intervention which created friction between IOs and women's organizations. As Julie Mertus explains, 'the large amount of funding for gender related projects, although well-intentioned and in some cases well-conceived, created conflict between locals and internationals as well as between various local representatives.'[37] The KWN criticized the KWI for drawing too directly from their experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina without paying adequate attention to conditions on the ground at the end of the war in Kosovo. One of the lessons drawn was the challenges faced by UNHCR in working with multiple local women's groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[38] However, international actors failed to take into account the better degree of coordination among women's organizations in Kosovo due to their collaboration and participation in the non-violent civil resistance movement in the 1990s.

Women's civil society also criticised the early administration for perpetuating patriarchal norms. This occurred in two main ways: first, through low levels of female representation within the missions themselves, thereby not leading by example. Second, by using the supposedly all-encompassing patriarchal nature of Kosovar society as an excuse to exclude women in the post-conflict reconstruction process at senior decision-making levels. The perceptions of international actors regarding the nature of Kosovar society have contributed to

[36] Agnes Kalungu-Banda, 'Post-Conflict Programmes for Women: Lessons from the Kosovo Women's Initiative', *Gender & Development* 12, no. 3 (November 2004): 38.
[37] Julie Mertus, 'The Impact of Intervention on Local Human Rights Culture: A Kosovo Case Study', *Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1, no. 2 (December 2001): 31.
[38] Corrin, 'Developing Policy on Integration and Re/Construction in Kosova', 69.

the persistence of gender inequalities in Kosovo by failing to challenge fundamental patriarchal structures and capitalise on local knowledge. Women's activists have widely criticised the lack of knowledge of Kosovar society. Igballe Rogova, an internationally renowned Kosovar women's rights advocate, laments how:

> They [international institutions] came with prejudices about Kosova: [that] this is a patriarchal Islamic country, but they brought patriarchy to Kosova, by bringing a system with men . . . The UN when they came to Kosova, they were using a law that existed 500 years ago. It's called *Kanun*. And they were giving *Kanun* to their staff and saying "This is Kosova".[39]

International actors cited traditional conceptions of gender as a reason for excluding women in the negotiation process with Serbia. Lesley Abdela, who worked for the OSCE and tried to address the lack of women in Kosovo's transitional administration, notes that 'when I pointed out this discrepancy I was told women in leadership posts would be "alien to local culture and tradition" and, in any case, "no women in Kosovo are interested in participation in politics or public life".'[40] These statements are emblematic of a narrative common to peacebuilding and human rights promotion which associates the local with 'culture' and traditionalism and the international community with modernity and progressive gender norms.[41] Indeed, Irvine argues that 'the UN was generally inclined to position itself as defender of gender equality against reluctant national governments and it approached its role in the Balkans with this view.'[42] Veprore Shehu, a Kosovar women's activist, makes a similar observation regarding the ignorance of international actors surrounding Kosovar women's capabilities and rights to participate in the negotiations on Kosovo's final status, facilitated by Martti Ahtisaari:

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[39] Laura McLeod, 'Gender and Post-Conflict Reconstruction', in *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2019), 346–47.
[40] Lesley Abdela, 'Men with a Mission: No Women', *The Guardian*, 2 March 2000, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/mar/02/balkans.
[41] Smith, *Gendering Peace*, 123.
[42] Jill A. Irvine, 'Leveraging Change', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 15, no. 1 (1 March 2013): 24.

> What was irritating me…was when we asked, 'Why hasn't anything been done to have a woman on the negotiation team?' He presented [Albanian traditionalism] as one of the obstacles, like, 'We didn't want to break the tradition.[43]

This statement is revealing of how international actors furthered or at the very least preserved pre-existing norm structures, which has been widely criticised by women's activists. Igballe Rogova explains that 'taking the whole of Kosovo society as a patriarchal world was ignorant of its rich history and patently wrong.'[44] Sarah Smith identifies a similar dynamic in the case of Timor-Leste where there was 'an assumption of a patriarchal system [in Timor-Leste] and that this system was well established; this [is] used as an excuse rather than seen as a site in which behaviours can change.'[45] As discussed above, the exclusion of women from decision-making structures also reinforced patriarchal norms and restricted women's agency, supporting Smith's argument that peacebuilding missions themselves are gendering and that obstacles to implementing gender equality are not limited to patriarchal, 'traditional' norms in the local realm. The following statement from a June 2000 SRSG report is indicative of the low bar for female representation at decision-making levels in the early stages of UNMIK:

> Out of 40 co-head positions (20 each for internationals and locals), 19 international and 18 local co-heads have been appointed…Four women have been appointed as international co-heads, and three have been appointed as local co-heads through the efforts of my Special Representative.[46]

That the appointment of seven women out of a total of forty is described as an achievement is indicative of the low priority given to gender balancing in the early stages of transitional administration.

[43] Farnsworth, '1325 Facts & Fables', 47.
[44] Farnsworth, '1325 Facts & Fables', 20.
[45] Smith, *Gendering Peace*, 125.
[46] United Nations, S/2000/538, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, June 2000, 2.

3.3 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Norms on the Global Stage

This section introduces the policy context at the international level by charting the origins of international normative commitments to women's empowerment and mapping the references to women's economic empowerment in international policy/normative frameworks. The aim is to contextualise women's economic empowerment within the global normative frameworks, before later zeroing in on the Kosovo context. Women's economic empowerment spans several major global gender equality frameworks, thus it is important to begin by analyzing how economic empowerment appears in these various frameworks and the main ideas propagated in order to understand: How does the concept of women's economic empowerment and women's rights appear in United Nations gender equality frameworks? How do these policies imagine women's economic empowerment in practice? What are the desirable forms of economic empowerment? With this purpose in mind, the following section aims to provide an overview of the development and content of several UN policy frameworks. It does not provide an exhaustive overview; rather, it focuses on the most relevant international agenda-setting frameworks concerning gender equality in conflict-affected and developing contexts, namely the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The emergence of gender equality and women's empowerment as global norms dates back to the mid-1970s.[47] 1975 was declared 'International Women's Year' and the following year marked the start of the UN Decade of Women (1976-85). The adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 by the UN General Assembly marked a major milestone in women's rights. CEDAW defined what

[47] Taylor and Mahon, 'Gender Equality from the MDGs to the SDGs: The Struggle Continues', 54.

constitutes discrimination against women and mapped out measures to protect and fulfil women's rights, based on the goal of 'substantive equality' rather than just formal equality. Over the next two decades there were a series of 'World Conferences on Women' in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995**),** which 'served to establish gender equality and women's empowerment as global norms.'[48] These conferences resulted in several Platforms for Action, most notably the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) in which 'governments affirmed that women's empowerment and substantive equality were cornerstones of development rather than merely an end goal.'[49] Gender-balanced decision-making and gender mainstreaming were both included in the BPfA as 'mega strategies' for the achievement of gender equality.[50] Crucially, the UN conferences provided space for the development of a strong, vibrant and diverse global women's movement 'whose main nodes were transnational networks.'[51]

Despite the normative shifts and progress following the UN conferences, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), launched in 2000, were widely considered to be a 'setback for rights-based approaches to development, and for gender equality and women's rights specifically.'[52] The MDGs were geared towards developing countries and were the product of a top-down formulation process by UN development technocrats with very limited consultation.[53] Despite the inclusion of a stand-alone gender goal, the MDGs adopted a narrow

[48] Taylor and Mahon, 'Gender Equality from the MDGs to the SDGs: The Struggle Continues', 54.
[49] Selamawit Tesfaye and Rachael Wyant, 'Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering All Women and Girls', in *International Norms, Normative Change, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 133.
[50] Krook and True, 'Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms', 112.
[51] Gülay Caglar, Elisabeth Prügl, and Susanne Zwingel, eds., 'Introduction: Feminist Strategies in International Governance', in *Feminist Strategies in International Governance* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 8.
[52] Esquivel and Sweetman, 'Gender and the Sustainable Development Goals', 3.
[53] Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, 'From the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals: Shifts in Purpose, Concept, and Politics of Global Goal Setting for Development', *Gender & Development* 24, no. 1 (2 January 2016): 45.

view of gender equality, which focussed on equality of access to education as the means to women's empowerment. The successor development agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), were adopted in 2015 as part of UN Resolution 70/1, *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. The SDGs were seen as a chance to remedy the severe shortcomings of the MDGs and re-centre the transformative vision of gender equality fought for by feminist activists in Beijing and Cairo decades earlier. However, feminist activists and scholars have critiqued the extent to which the SDGs succeeded in achieving this goal. The inclusion of a stand-alone gender goal was carried over from the MDGs to the SDGs, however the SDGs contain a much stronger gender analysis than the MDGs. SDG 5 ('Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls') covers a much wider range of issues than its predecessor, MDG 3. Gender also features as a cross-cutting theme throughout many of the other goals. The SDGs contain a much broader set of goals than the MDGs, which is largely due to the more consultative process leading up to their formation. However, several scholars have also noted the continued dominance of the private sector and multinational corporations in this process, reflected in the legitimization of the private sector as a development partner and in financing modalities promoted within the SDGs, such as public-private partnerships.[54]

Table 3.1 provides an overview of references to women's economic empowerment in three major global policy frameworks in order to establish the main ideas transmitted at the international level. It is important to examine how women's economic empowerment figures at the level of inter-governmental agreements, which guide and inform IO and government strategies at the national level. The Kosovo Constitution notes that the rights and freedoms guaranteed by several international agreements and instruments, including CEDAW, are

[54] Nicole Bidegain Ponte and Corina Rodríguez Enríquez, 'Agenda 2030: A Bold Enough Framework towards Sustainable, Gender-Just Development?', *Gender & Development* 24, no. 1 (2 January 2016): 91; Colleen O'Manique and Pieter Fourie, 'Affirming Our World: Gender Justice, Social Reproduction, and the Sustainable Development Goals', *Development* 59, no. 1–2 (June 2016): 123.

guaranteed by the Constitution and directly applicable in Kosovo. Due to its status as a non-member-state of the United Nations, Kosovo is not an official signatory to Agenda 2030 at the UN General Assembly. However, Kosovo has sought to align its legal, institutional, and policy framework on gender equality with international law and policies, and in January 2018 the Kosovo Assembly adopted a parliamentary resolution endorsing the SDGs.

Table 3.1. References to economic empowerment in key global gender equality frameworks

Framework (year)	Section	Reference to women's economic empowerment
CEDAW (1979)	Article 11	- Eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, including the right: to work, to the right to the same employment opportunities, to free choice of profession and employment, promotion, to job security, to equal renumeration, to social security, and the protection of health and safety in working conditions all regardless of marital status, pregnancy or maternity status
BPfA (1995)	Strategic Objective F	- F.1: Promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources - F.2: Facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade - F.3: Provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women - F.4: Strengthen women's economic capacity and commercial networks - F.5: Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination
SDGs (2015)	SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere	- Social protection systems for all. - Equal rights to economic resources, basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, new technology and financial services.
	SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership including in economic life. - Give women equal rights to economic resources, including land, property, financial services, inheritance.
	SDG 8: Economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	- Full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, and equal pay for work of equal value. - Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.
	SDG 10: Reduce inequality within	- By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

	and among countries	

Table 3.2. References to unpaid work in global gender equality frameworks

Framework	Section	Reference to unpaid labour
CEDAW (1979)	Article 11, 2c.	(c) To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities.
	General Recommendation 23 (1997) Article 7	11. Relieving women of some of the **burdens of domestic work** would allow them to engage more fully in the life of their communities. Women's economic dependence on men often prevents them from making important political decisions and from participating actively in public life. Their double burden of work and their economic dependence, coupled with the long or inflexible hours of both public and political work, prevent women from being more active.
BPfA (1995)	Point 160	Lack of employment in the private sector and reductions in public services and public service jobs have affected women disproportionately. In some countries, women take on more **unpaid work,** such as the care of children and those who are ill or elderly, compensating for lost household income, particularly when public services are not available
	Strategic objective F.1, 165. g.	(g) Seek to develop a more comprehensive knowledge of work and employment through, inter alia, efforts to measure and better understand the type, extent and distribution of **unremunerated work**, particularly work in caring for dependants and unremunerated work done for family farms or businesses, and encourage the sharing and dissemination of information on studies and experience in this field, including the development of methods for assessing its value in quantitative terms, for possible reflection in accounts that may be produced separately from, but consistent with, core national accounts.
	Strategic Objective F.6	Promote harmonization of work and **family responsibilities** for women and men
SDGs (2015)	5.4	Recognize and value **unpaid care and domestic work** through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

Table 3.2 provides an overview of references to unpaid care and domestic work within the BPfA, CEDAW and the SDGs. Despite featuring in previously ratified conventions and policy agendas, the inclusion of women's unpaid care and domestic work within the SDGs was

a hard-won feat and the result of normative disagreements.[55] The target does not use the term "redistribute", but implicitly refers to methods of redistribution and reduction of unpaid care and domestic work through 'public services, infrastructure and social protection policies.' Although there was broad agreement by governments on the need to recognize, redistribute and reduce[56] unpaid care work, there were reservations regarding the implementation of these objectives.[57] Some member states denied that unpaid care work was a national problem in their countries, despite it being recognized as a universal issue.[58] This issue was contentious as it concerns an 'aspect of gender inequality that is hard-wired into the way families and households provide for, and nurture, their members.'[59] As a result of this controversy, the language in this particular target is relatively weak and the wording confusing. Instead of adopting the widely-used three-pronged approach of 'recognize, redistribute and reduce' unpaid care work, the target refers to 'the promotion of shared responsibility', which is further diluted by the caveat of 'as nationally appropriate.'[60] Razavi argues that the inclusion of public policies as an aspect of reducing and redistributing unpaid care between families and society was a huge win for feminist activists. However, the formulation of the target which draws attention to 'recognizing and valuing', has the potential to emphasise the statistical counting and monetary value of unpaid care work over the policies which focus on reduction and redistribution.[61] This is compounded by the limited indicator associated with target 5.4, which proposes measuring time spent on unpaid domestic and care work. Whilst time-use surveys have been highlighted as important tools to recognise the value of unpaid labour and its

[55] Shahra Razavi, 'The 2030 Agenda: Challenges of Implementation to Attain Gender Equality and Women's Rights', *Gender & Development* 24, no. 1 (2 January 2016): 30–31.
[56] This is widely referred to as the 'Three Rs' framework, first developed by Diane Elson. See Diane Elson, 'Recognize, Reduce, and Redistribute Unpaid Care Work: How to Close the Gender Gap', *New Labor Forum* 26, no. 2 (May 2017): 52–61.
[57] Tesfaye and Wyant, 'Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering All Women and Girls', 139–40.
[58] Tesfaye and Wyant, 'Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering All Women and Girls', 140.
[59] Razavi, 'The 2030 Agenda', 30–31.
[60] Razavi, 'The 2030 Agenda', 31.
[61] Razavi, 'The 2030 Agenda', 31.

contribution to national economies, additional indicators, for example, relating to men's attitudes towards care responsibilities, would increase the strength of this target. Time-use alone also says little about the specific *kinds* of services and policies required to redistribute unpaid care work.

There is no doubt that the SDGs represent a significant improvement on the MDGs. However, observers have also noted that despite its emphasis on transformation, the 2030 Agenda suffers from some of the same problems as the MDGs, such as a limited approach to the structural bases of inequalities and an absence of a human rights-based approach within the goals and targets themselves.[62] In the domain of economic empowerment, a key criticism of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) is the underlying focus on economic growth measured by GDP per capita growth rate. As mentioned in the previous chapter, feminist political economists have long highlighted the problems with GDP as a measurement of growth, namely that it overlooks the vital contribution of unpaid social reproductive work to maintaining human and social capital. SDG 8 omits any reference to unpaid social reproductive labour and its 'constitutive role…as a cornerstone of the global economy', thereby failing to recognise its harmful effects of economic growth on women.[63] In other words, by relying on GDP growth, SDG 8 promotes a version of economic growth which is likely to occur at the *expense* of women, who often take on a double burden upon entering into wage labour leading to increased levels of depletion. Rai et al. argue that the focus on economic growth and decent work is problematic as it contradicts the call to 'value unpaid care and promote shared domestic responsibilities' within SDG 5. The continued focus on 'productive work' instead serves to marginalise and devalue unpaid social reproductive labour, undermining the goal of 'decent

[62] Esquivel, 'Power and the Sustainable Development Goals', 12.
[63] Shirin M. Rai, Benjamin D. Brown, and Kanchana N. Ruwanpura, 'SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth – A Gendered Analysis', *World Development* 113 (January 2019): 375.

work for all'. As Rai et al. explain, 'without strategies for redistributing unpaid domestic labour within the household, an emphasis on paid decent work, although important, can only remain a limited approach to gender equality.'[64]

Even from this brief overview, it is clear that women's economic empowerment as a global norm within the SDGs is ridden with inconsistencies. Against this backdrop of deficiencies and contradictions, the SDGs seem to promote a vision of economic empowerment fundamentally predicated on women's participation in the formal labour market as a means to economic growth and gender equality. Although SDG 8 makes scant reference to informal workers, target 8.3 seeks to 'encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises.' The critiques discussed above show how the overriding emphasis on economic growth risks jeopardizing the goal of 'decent work for all'. As Rai et al. argue, 'women's wage employment while considered a panacea in the SDGs…can actually increase the depletion of women if not replenished through state social infrastructural support, redistribution of gender care roles and the recognition of domestic labour.'[65] How do these contradictions and tensions play out on the ground? As one of the leading policy frameworks informing international and national development efforts, the inconsistencies visible between the various gender-related goals within the SDG agenda have important implications for how economic empowerment manifests in practice.

3.4 International actors and economic empowerment in Kosovo

Economic empowerment is a sprawling and overcrowded domain in Kosovo with nearly every international donor active in this field. As a result, mapping the broad range of initiatives in this field is challenging, particularly considering that women's economic

[64] Rai, Brown, and Ruwanpura, 'SDG 8', 370.
[65] Rai, Brown, and Ruwanpura, 'SDG 8', 378.

empowerment is a cross-cutting issue which spans both gender specific initiatives as well as broader projects relating to employment, property rights, etc. A 2020 report published by the government Agency for Gender Equality (AGE) in Kosovo attempted to assess the extent to which Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) in Kosovo targeting gender equality was aligned with government priorities during the period 2015-2018.[66] Two of the policy areas identified by the government are particularly relevant in the context of this study: Priority 2 on discrimination at work or education and priority 5 on increased access to pre-school education.

Table 3 provides an overview of gender relevant projects according to government gender policy priority areas between 2015-2018. Gender Marker 1 refers to projects designed to contribute in some limited way to gender equality but not significantly. Gender Marker 2 refers to projects is designed to contribute significantly to gender equality. Gender Marker 3 refers to projects whose principal purpose is to advance gender equality.

Table 3.3 Gender relevant projects by policy priority area 2015-2018

Relevance	**Total gender relevant projects**	**Domestic violence**	**Anti-discrimination in the labour market and education**	**Anti-trafficking**	**Access to pre-school**	**Property rights**	**No clear focus on gender priority areas**
Gender Marker 1	14	1	5	0	0	0	
Gender Marker 2	19	3	15	1	1	3	
Gender Marker 3	104	25	29	5	0	1	
Total	**137**	**29**	**49**	**6**	**1**	**4**	**53**

Source: Adapted from AGE report on ODA alignment.[67]

[66] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality: The State of Alignment with Kosovo Government Priorities (2015-2018)', 2020.
[67] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality', 20.

As Table 3 demonstrates, between 2015-2018, the highest share of gender-relevant ODA in Kosovo went to women's economic empowerment, reflected by the share of projects relating to anti-discrimination at work or education out of the total number of at least partially aligned projects.[68] However, within this share, the majority of projects (32) focussed on the supply side of labour. These projects broadly focus on supply-side constraints, such as improving women's access to finance, providing skills training and capacity development. Donors such as the World Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) have been especially active in this field. As the report notes, 'Such approaches create the assumption that providing women with micro-credit and training will enable women to increase their incomes, or it will make it easier for them to meet their practical gendered responsibilities and improve their bargaining power and status in the household community.'[69] The report goes on to note that 'However, they do not directly address the institutional and systemic aspects of discrimination, of the norms and values that foster gender stereotypes and sustain discriminatory practices and attitudes (they do so only indirectly), which is the mandate of all public institutions and beyond foreseen in the LGE.'[70] Notably, there was also only one project relating to access to pre-school in this period.

As the report itself recognises, analyses of international efforts in the domain of gender equality broadly, including economic empowerment, are hampered by the availability of accurate statistical data. Several fundamental challenges in particular are worth mentioning as they highlight important deficiencies in existing aid tracking processes, which were also mentioned by interviewees as a stumbling block to better coordination between donors. First, the Aid Management Platform (AMP) used by donors to record information on funding commitments and disbursals to Kosovo does not include gender as a separate area of focus,

[68] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality', 22.
[69] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality', 21.
[70] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality', 21.

making it difficult to identify gender-relevant projects from the database alone. As a result, 'neither the government nor partners are fully aware of who is doing what in this area.'[71] Second, identifying gender-relevant projects and determining the significance of the gender component within any given project is impeded by vague project descriptions. Third, not all gender-relevant projects are included within the database. Fourth, the platform does not include the results of projects or programmes.

Despite these challenges, the available data is a useful attempt at mapping the priority areas of gender-relevant aid in Kosovo and is helpful in so far as it provides an indication of the priorities and areas of focus of the international donor community. The data from the interviews conducted for this thesis supports the general patterns identified in the statistical data collected by the AGE regarding the tendency for international efforts to employ a more 'liberal' version of empowerment through focussing on supply side issues relating to women's economic empowerment with the goal of integrating women into existing markets, neglecting the structural drivers. Nearly all interviewees emphasised that women's economic empowerment norms have not been implemented in a holistic manner in Kosovo.[72] However, the existing, limited data is unable to provide an in-depth picture of how economic empowerment has been practiced on the ground in Kosovo and tells us little about the main drivers behind the process of implementation. How do the multitude of international actors interact during this process? What are the mechanisms of and barriers to the vertical implementation? This will be our focus for the rest of our study.

[71] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality', 28.
[72] As mentioned in the Introductory Chapter, a holistic approach is defined as one which addresses women's labour force participation in tandem with the social aspects which enable women to fully participate in the labour force.

Chapter 4: *'What Coordination?'* Inter-organizational Dynamics in Kosovo

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters established the analytical and theoretical framework which underpins the thesis as well as the wider empirical context. This chapter is the first of four empirical chapters that examine the fragmented implementation of the economic empowerment elements within global normative gender frameworks. According to the framework devised in Chapter 2, a holistic approach to women's economic empowerment requires inter-organizational coordination and cooperation. The UN itself has made numerous proclamations and analyses over the years stressing that 'coherence and coordination of efforts…are essential if there are to be meaningful results towards the achievement of the goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women.'[1] No single agency or organization possesses the financial or human resources to address the multifaceted challenges of gender inequality alone, hence the need for coordination across agencies and sector processes. The UN has also invested significant resources into improving coordination across the UN over the last 20 years, with conservative estimates suggesting a figure surpassing 2 billion dollars.[2] More than half a billion dollars was invested in piloting the 'Delivering as One' reform initiative alone.[3]

Despite this emphasis on coordination, visible in the numerous reform efforts since the 2005 Paris Declaration which advocated for increased alignment among donors, donor coordination within and beyond the UN system continues to be unpredictable and a formidable

[1] United Nations, CEB/2006/2 *United Nations system-wide policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women: focusing on results and impact*. This commitment was operationalised through the development of the first 'UN System-wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women' (SWAP) in 2012, followed by an updated version in 2018.
[2] Zineb Touimi-Benjelloun and Joanne Sandler, 'Collective Power for Gender Equality: An Unfinished Agenda for the UN' (United Nations University International Institute for Global Health, 27 July 2022), 6.
[3] Touimi-Benjelloun and Sandler, 6.

challenge at the ground level of practice.[4] UN Women itself emerged from one such reform effort, the 2006 Panel on System-Wide Coherence initiated by Kofi Annan, which merged the UN's four existing gender entities into a single entity in 2010.[5]

Despite the extensive scholarship on various aspects of donor coordination, there is remarkably little research on the realities of donor coordination in a complex, cross-cutting issue area such as gender equality. Furthermore, such research is often situated within the aid effectiveness literature, which is less concerned with the implications of donor coordination on the translation and distortion of norm meaning at the ground level. As Sjöstedt and Sundström note, despite donor coordination being a cornerstone of the global aid effectiveness agenda, 'how these ambitions play out in practice—and to what extent they are feasible or even worth striving for—has rarely been addressed in contemporary research.'[6]

This chapter discusses the issue of inter-organizational coordination and cooperation in the context of gender equality and women's economic empowerment specifically. Overall, this chapter demonstrates that the weak coordination capacities both among IOs, and between IOs and the Kosovo government, results in a fragmented, piecemeal approach to women's economic empowerment. To do so, the chapter draws on interviews, and various policy documents and evaluations to detail the complexities of day-to-day coordination in an area as cross-cutting as gender equality, in an environment as crowded as Kosovo. It attempts to

[4] For example, see GA Resolution A/RES/72/279 adopted in 2018 on '*Repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system'*. This resolution addresses the repositioning and strengthening of the UN development system to better support member states in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It emphasizes the need for a more integrated, coordinated, and effective approach to UN operational activities for development.

[5] Joanne Sandler and Anne Marie Goetz, 'Can the United Nations Deliver a Feminist Future?', *Gender & Development* 28, no. 2 (3 May 2020): 248–49; Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin, 'The Creation of UN Women', *RegNet Research Paper Series*, Regulatory Institutions Network (RegNet), July 2013.

[6] Martin Sjöstedt and Aksel Sundström, 'Donor Co-Ordination or Donor Confusion? How Disputed Facts and Problem Framing Affect the Prospects for Aid Harmonization', *Development Policy Review* 35, no. S2 (2017): 64–79.

unpack some of the key factors that obstruct effective coordination in the context of gender equality.

The chapter begins with a brief outline of the various coordination platforms that exist in Kosovo relevant to women's economic empowerment. The chapter then turns to evaluating the coordination dynamics between donors and the government of Kosovo, followed by donors themselves. This chapter shows, first, how the inability of the government to direct and guide donor interventions, together with tensions within the international community over ownership of the gender equality agenda more broadly, have impeded coordination. Second, and more importantly, the chapter shows how these incoherent interventions have not been conducive to a holistic approach to economically empowering women and are unlikely therefore to translate into significant gains for women on the ground.

4.2 Coordination platforms in Kosovo

On paper, there are several formal coordination mechanisms in Kosovo which are technically responsible for coordinating donor activities. According to the Regulation on Donor Coordination, the government is responsible for organizing three levels of coordination platforms: a High-Level Forum, Sector Working Groups, and Sub-Sector Working Groups.[7] The Kosovo Development Coordination Office (DCO) is the government entity within the Office of the Prime Minister which is mandated to facilitate coordination and collaboration between international donors and local institutions to support development efforts in the country. Its primary purpose is to ensure that donor assistance aligns with Kosovo's development priorities and is effectively utilized to achieve sustainable development outcomes. The DCO is intended to serve as a focal point for communication and coordination between donors, government agencies, and other stakeholders, aiming to enhance the effectiveness and

[7] Regulation (GRK) - No.09/2015 on Coordination of Foreign Donors' assistance.

efficiency of donor assistance programs in Kosovo. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 3, the Aid Management Platform (AMP), developed by the EU, constitutes a further mechanism through which donor coordination is supposedly meant to take place via the annual submission of investment data. Yet data from interviews and document analysis reveal that these working groups do not function as intended.[8] According to a government report, 'Donor coordination meetings (High Level Forum) are sporadic, whereas sector coordination group meetings even rarer. When they do occur, they only serve as a platform for information sharing rather than agenda-setting. The policy-dialogue between development partners and the government is therefore done exclusively at the bilateral level.'[9] In response to the coordination deficit on the side of the government, several interviewees mentioned that the EU organized 'member states plus' technical coordination meetings to fill the gap, comprised of member states and main donors. The intention behind these meetings is to discuss the various sectors donors are embarking into, to foster genuine cooperation to achieve complementarity of efforts. Yet according to one EU official, 'it doesn't work so well, because where EU is, everybody follows'[10] partly because of the substantial funding the EU has to offer as Kosovo's largest donor, compared to the limited resources of UN agencies, for example.

At the global level there are numerous gender-related coordination mechanisms such as the UN-SWAP network, the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE), and the UNDG Gender Equality Task Team. At the country level, internally within the UN Kosovo Country Team, UN Women also chairs the cross-agency gender theme group known as 'Results Groups V'. Gender theme groups are mechanisms to ensure the coherent and coordinated support to national country priorities across the UN family. UN

[8] One interviewee pointed out that the platform 'was not user friendly, it wasn't really functional, it was a nightmare to use it', partly because development agencies such as UNDP would input the funds from bilateral donors to implement projects. Simultaneously, bilateral donors would also report the funds they granted for the same project, leading to confusion (Interview with UN development practitioner, Prishtina, October 2022).
[9] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality', 25.
[10] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.

Women also chairs the Security and Gender Group (SGG), established in 2007, which is mandated to 'promote, enhance and coordinate efforts for gender equality and women's empowerment in Kosovo, to contribute to women's and men's safety and security as well as to emphasize that women are equal contributors to and participants in shaping security policies and institutions.'[11] The SGG is a multi-stakeholder group composed of international organizations and diplomatic missions, most of the key Kosovo institutions dealing with gender, including the security sector and women's organizations, civil society, and women's organizations. There was no specific coordination group dedicated to women's economic empowerment at the time of fieldwork in 2021-2023, despite a recommendation from a 2015 World Bank report, advising that 'Stronger cooperation and collaboration needs to be encouraged among key stakeholders working in the area of gender equality. Currently, there is a UN Gender Safety and Security Group, however there is no network dealing with economic empowerment.'[12]

Despite the multitude of coordination mechanisms available on paper, these platforms were, on the whole, not used to share information strategically and thus largely constituted 'tick box' exercises, with little agenda-setting purpose. The absence of coordination was a point of unanimous agreement during the fieldwork, amongst government officials, and international organizations – including international and local staff – alike. One country director of a Scandinavian development organization, when asked about the degree of donor coordination in Kosovo, simply laughed and asked 'Coordination…? What coordination?'. She continued, 'In general I think the coordination is very bad. And I find it amazing that all these donors do their own thing. But you know, there's also a political agenda behind each donor. The US has a huge, big political agenda of course, the EU as well. But everybody, all the bilaterals do as

[11] SGG, Terms of Reference.
[12] World Bank Group, 'Kosovo - What Works for Women: Assessment of Interventions for Economic Empowerment', December 2015, 11.

well.'[13] A senior official at SDC, Kosovo's third largest bilateral donor, agreed, reflecting that, 'You know, in Kosovo you have a feeling that the donors expect the government to align to their agendas, and not that we are supposed to align to any policy in country.'[14]

4.3 Host Government Partner Weakness

Most interviewees across international organizations and Kosovo government institutions unanimously agreed that the lack of ownership on the part of the government had impeded the coordination process and emphasised the need for greater ownership on the part of the government. As the director of the DCO explained, 'we don't really coordinate what the donors implement here, we have some kind of leverage to try to steer a bit some processes, some interventions from different donors, but we don't have proper coordination at all, because our role has not been shaped very well in this context, it was a bit of improvisation.'[15] With regards to women's economic empowerment, a senior government official for gender equality echoed this sentiment, 'When it comes to economic empowerment of women, I think that here, I don't see good coordination, unfortunately.'[16] The capacity of the Kosovo government to effectively coordinate donor aid, including aid targeting women's economic empowerment, was undermined by several, inter-related factors: short-term government agendas and lack of internal planning systems; political instability; and the weaknesses of the national gender machinery.

4.3.1. Short-term agendas and fragility of institutions

[13] Interview with country director, Prishtina, November 2022.
[14] Interview with senior SDC official, Prishtina, November 2022.
[15] Interview with the director of the Office for Donor Coordination, Prishtina, April 2022.
[16] Interview with a senior government official for gender equality, March 2022. See also Interview with UN development practitioner, Prishtina, October 2022.

The lack of a coherent, long-term approach to development more broadly made it challenging for the government to provide direction and set the agendas for donors. For example, Kosovo had no overarching national development strategy (NDS) until 2016. As one former DCO staff member in charge of coordinating economic development aid noted, 'when you don't have [a national strategy], how will you coordinate people and tell them where you want them to go? What is your vision as a state in 10 years' time? So, it was very much donor driven.'[17]

However, even when a national development strategy was developed in 2016, it 'became obsolete, it was like a wish list strategy, nobody took it seriously and it wasn't properly implemented.'[18] This was in part due to the disconnect between the central government and line ministries, which resulted in a lack of policy coherence as sector strategies did not feed into the overarching NDS. This had direct implications for women's economic empowerment and tackling women's unpaid care burden. For example, as highlighted in the Kosovo Programme for Gender Equality, the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan focused on 'increasing attendance at pre-primary level but not pre-school level', which directly contravened the NDS which aimed to 'increase the number of children attending pre-school education by 5,000 children annually until 2021: by building public kindergartens and increasing involvement in private institutions.'[19] These contradictory policies are symptomatic of the broader incoherence and missing links between various strategy documents at different levels of government, which undermined the ability of the government to meaningfully coordinate donor aid. With regards to gender equality priorities at the national level, during the 7-year period between 2013-2020, there was no Kosovo Programme for Gender Equality - the highest-level strategic document

[17] Interview with former DCO staffer, Prishtina, April 2022.
[18] Interview with the DCO director, Prishtina, April 2022.
[19] Office of the Prime Minister and Agency for Gender Equality, 'Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024', June 2020, 33. As discussed in Chapter 2, access to affordable pre-school education plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality and enabling women to fully participate in the workforce.

defining the national gender equality priorities and structure for integrating gender equality into legislation, policies, and public services. The director of the DCO bluntly described how the lack of long-term vision undermined the government's ability to effectively coordinate the international community: 'We don't know what we want. It's very simple. If we don't know what we want, how can we do this dialogue with donors and ask them where to provide their assistance?'[20]

The lack of long-term, strategic vision and ensuing policies stemmed partly from the broader political climate in Kosovo, marked by successive governments failing to complete their four-year mandates. For example, during the 2017-2021 period, Kosovo witnessed four government transitions, setting a turbulent backdrop. The current administration at the time of writing, under the leadership of Albin Kurti, is expected be the first since Kosovo's independence to complete its mandate. During fieldwork, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare was in the process of being merged with Ministry of Finance to create a new Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers. As one gender advisor described it, 'when you absorb ministries, the chain of commands will change… We're not starting totally from scratch, but we are going backwards. These kinds of institutional change affect the work that international organizations can do… The countries that dissolved from Yugoslavia before are more independent, you don't see for instance such an important ministry being seized by a new government that comes. There is more consistency. But for Kosovo this is still a reality.'[21] This instability further undermined the ability of the DCO to fulfil its role. The frequent change in governments and infighting amongst coalitions was a further obstacle to creating and maintaining long-term policies. As a result, several interviewees noted that the internal political culture was one which revolved around ministers pursuing individual short-term gains, rather

[20] Interview with the DCO director, Prishtina, April 2022.
[21] Interview with international gender advisor, Prishtina, April 2022.

than defining specific development objectives and allocating resources to achieve those. The Director of the DCO noted that 'We plan based not on ideas, concepts, policies, but we plan based on resources and where we want to allocate these resources… We didn't apply a cycle where we first thought about ideas, policies, but instead we thought about, we have money, let's spend it. That was the policy before, in the previous governments, to a certain degree is still the same, because it's challenging to change now what we had before.'[22] Another interviewee added that 'This has been the main issue – the accountability of public institutions and having the strategic vision for what they want to achieve. The domestic political struggles always took over the development, always dealing with these tensions, but not with having a vision of development.'[23] An official evaluation by the Agency for Gender Equality on the alignment of donor aid over the 2015-2018 period similarly noted that 'The lack of a clear and well-communicated policy framework left donors without a well-defined platform of priorities during this period, making their agenda-setting a scattered top-down exercise without much coordination.'[24] A new NDS was in the process of being drafted when fieldwork was carried out in 2022 and was subsequently adopted in 2023. Several interviewees hoped that the new NDS would contribute to better policy coherence. However, the disconnect persists, as per the EU 2023 country report, 'the government adopted the national development strategy and plan 2023-2029 (NDS/NDP), which sets both long-term and short-term priorities, covering activities on a three-year rolling basis. There are no clear links between the NDP/NDS and the sector strategies and their respective action plans, or with the medium-term expenditure framework.'[25]

[22] Interview with the director of DCO, Prishtina, April 2022.
[23] Interview with former DCO staffer, Prishtina, April 2022.
[24] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality', 24.
[25] European Commission Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Kosovo Report 2023, 8 November 2023.

In response to the overall lack of coordination by the government, donors wrote a series of letters to the government in 2020 and 2021 expressing their frustrations and calling for a revival of donor coordination. The letters demanded 'ownership by the government for its own development agenda which entails programming, implementing and monitoring the of donors' assistance according to the government's priorities.'[26] They also stated that the necessary structure for coordination is in place 'but it has not been used to its full potential for some time.'[27] The letters were signed by all the major embassies present in Kosovo, as well as IFIs and the UN Resident Coordinator, and are reflective of the sheer extent of coordination breakdown between donors and the Kosovo government.

4.3.2. Weaknesses of the national gender machinery

The capacity of the government to coordinate the donor community in the domain of gender equality in particular was further eroded by the weaknesses of the Agency for Gender Equality, the government's national gender machinery. The AGE, in conjunction with the DCO, is primarily responsible for coordinating donor aid related to the gender equality agenda. However, like the DCO, it has been unable to fulfil this function for several reasons.

First, the AGE faced significant challenges due to the government's failure to allocate adequate resources, which hampered its capacity to effectively fulfil its duties. As highlighted in the EU's Gender Analysis, the AGE's efforts were impeded by a lack of political support, understaffing, insufficient funding, and a failure by the government to adequately engage them in policymaking processes.[28] Consequently, it is hardly surprising that the AGE encountered difficulties. Several interviewees highlighted the capacity constraints as a serious limitation to the AGE's role. The DCO director noted that '[the government] have starved the Agency of

[26] Ref. Ares (2020)3182888 - 18/06/2020, Letter to Prime Minister from donors.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Kosovo Women's Network, *Kosovo Gender Analysis*, 2018, 11.

certain resources, they have just put the agency in the box there in the corner like they are the ones that deal with gender, these women over here.'[29]

Second, the AGE was not considered a legitimate counterpart by international partners in general, and specifically in the field of women's economic empowerment. A senior government official for gender equality noted that there had been very little direct investment in the AGE to strengthen it as an institution, and very little cooperation with the AGE in the area of women's economic empowerment specifically.[30] Whilst there had been some cooperation with the Agency as an implementing partner in capacity building and awareness raising activities in the field of gender-based violence, or the development of new public policies and legislation, collaboration in the field of economic empowerment was unheard of. This is reflective of a broader tendency to sideline national actors and either carry out tasks directly or through other non-governmental actors – a common flaw in externally driven peacebuilding and development processes.[31] As Isaković and Mlinarević note, a similar phenomenon occurred in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, where 'very few attempts were made to improve the capacity of public institutions so that they could eventually deliver services themselves.'[32] The AGE leadership perceived that in general, donors preferred to channel funds through civil society organizations [CSOs].

Indeed, in stakeholder interviews conducted for the ODA alignment report, 'donors interviewed noted the lack of trust in the government's absorption and technical capacity to administer funds.'[33] As a result, donors have been reluctant to support the AGE beyond

[29] Interview with the director of DCO, Prishtina, April 2022.
[30] Interview with a senior government official for gender equality, April 2022.
[31] Sarah B. K. von Billerbeck, *Whose Peace? Local Ownership and United Nations Peacekeeping* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 89; Simone Dietrich, 'Bypass or Engage? Explaining Donor Delivery Tactics in Foreign Aid Allocation', *International Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (1 December 2013): 698–712.
[32] Nela Porobić Isaković and Gorana Mlinarević, 'Sustainable Transitions to Peace Need Women's Groups and Feminists: Questioning Donor Interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Journal of International Affairs* 72, no. 2 (2019): 183–84.
[33] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality', 23.

technical assistance and capacity building. One exception to this trend was a SIDA intervention between 2015-2020, which provided direct budget support to the AGE. Whilst the limited capacity of the AGE was a persistent theme in interviews, the data also indicates that the AGE had taken steps to improve this situation, through the SIDA project and a subsequent project involving the disbursal of funds during COVID. According to a senior government official for gender equality, the SIDA support was instrumental in strengthening the agency's capacities, visibility, and legitimacy in the eyes of other ministries, enabling the agency to receive 2 million Euros from the Ministry of Finance for the purposes of women's economic empowerment as part of COVID-19 economic recovery measures. However, despite this, according to the director of the AGE: 'to be frank, I see far bigger investments in civil society organizations than in governmental institutions, even though this experience with 2 million Euros over these last two years was a success story for the Agency for Gender Equality, I don't see any international partner coming and saying okay, now we can start something, a different era of cooperation… It was capacity building until now, but we can do something now jointly. The Agency has the expertise and now I don't understand the lack of interest and will to support the government directly with funds for economic empowerment.'[34] The AGE also pointed out that donor preferences to work with CSOs was not conducive to the UN's purported goal of national ownership, noting that 'I'm not seeing any will or interest towards this kind of support, even starting from the EU. I definitely understand civil society organizations are crucial and yes, we should invest in them, but I think [donors] have to do some prioritization and to understand with whom they are the partner of in this country.'[35] The EU's apparent reluctance to collaborate with and support the Agency was also evident in their rejection of the AGE's funding application for an economic empowerment initiative aimed at women credit unions

[34] Interview with a senior government official for gender equality, Prishtina, April 2022
[35] Interview with a senior government official for gender equality, Prishtina, April 2022

and supporting female entrepreneurs in 2022. Instead, the EU suggested that such an initiative was better suited for the Ministry of Trade and Industry, even though the AGE would have collaborated with this ministry in any case. [36]

In addition to projects carried out directly by international organizations themselves, such as UN agencies, support provided to local NGOs is another important form of intervention. Donor preferences for channelling funds through non-governmental partners particularly in the field of WEE contributed to duplication of activities and a lack of coordination. For example, an independent evaluation of SIDA support to the AGE noted that 'CSOs interviewed mentioned the need for strengthening the coordination of gender equality initiatives implemented by CSOs and other agencies. An example of lack of such coordination was given, in which 4-5 organizations had worked uncoordinated on promotion of parental leave. This caused unnecessary confusion with the line ministry, which could have been avoided, had a proper coordination taken place.'[37] The inclusion of parental leave provisions within labour laws is closely linked with women's economic empowerment, as it can lead to a more equal sharing of domestic responsibilities and enable women's participation in the labour market.[38] Thus, this exemplifies how the duplication of initiatives can contribute to fragmented implementation and hamper progress on women's economic empowerment. Regarding the uncoordinated support provided to CSOs by donors, a separate interviewee recalled that,

> I lead the CSO-donor coordination meeting every 3 months, and there hasn't been any discussion of how we should increase women's participation in the labour market… I'm quite disappointed with the last two we had. I feel that we cannot get past the idea that we are there just to report on what we do, very little on what *should* be done and how it should be done and what the challenges are. Because these meetings are an hour and a half, you have twenty people there, they report for three minutes...there's no coordination actually, it's just ticking the box that we're having these meetings, I think. And most people come in and go because they have other things going on. For example.

[36] Interview with EU gender advisor, Prishtina, March 2022; Interview with senior government official for gender equality, April 2022.
[37] Bente Topsøe-Jensen and Ariana Qosaj-Mustafa, 'Final Evaluation of the Framework Agreement Regarding Direct Grant Support and Consultancy to the Agency for Gender Equality, Kosovo', February 2021, 22.
[38] The existing Law on Labour will be discussed further in Chapter 6 in the context of the role of the government in upholding patriarchal domestic social institutions via gender-discriminatory laws, as outlined in Chapter 2.

> in the last meeting I raised the issue of gender-based violence and the support that we're giving to NGOs, and what specific support are we giving and why we're doing what we're doing. But I mean, that was the last point in the agenda and by that time, we had only three people left. It's not strategic.[39]

This reflection touches on a broader problem which riddled Kosovo's coordination platforms: the struggle to move beyond pure information exchange, which ultimately undermined a harmonized approach to women's economic empowerment.

Furthermore, donors tended to bypass the AGE during the process of project formulation, which undermines 'the direct dialogue between donors and gender mechanisms in Kosovo as well as the better alignment and coordination with the Kosovo gender agenda priorities.'[40] Circumventing the AGE, in turn, weakened its ability to perform a coordinating role and ensure the implementation of the Kosovo gender equality agenda, ultimately contributing to a fragmented, non-aligned approach to women's economic empowerment, among other aspects of gender equality. Instead of ensuring that a gender perspective is included from the inception phase, aligned with national gender priorities, a senior government official for gender equality reflected that donors 'come to us to tick the box, they present their projects, already drafted, prepared, they consult you somewhere in the end of the phase because from the beginning, they know with whom they're going to start work.'[41] The resulting projects are thus reflective of donors' own understanding of what the country gender priorities are, based on dialogue with specific sector agencies, from which the AGE was excluded.

In addition to not collaborating and providing the necessary direct support to empower the Agency for Gender Equality, the EU was reportedly involved in attempts to undermine the position of the AGE within the government. A senior government official for gender equality relayed an incident from 2019 in which the EU had been involved in discussions questioning

[39] Interview with bilateral donor representative, Prishtina, November 2022.
[40] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality', 28.
[41] Interview with senior government official for gender equality, April 2022

the AGE's position strategically important position within the Office of the Prime Minister. She recalled that,

> It came out that even people who were working in the EU, the international community, were questioning in discussions the importance of the Agency, like do they need the Agency for Gender Equality? I'm sorry but it's in the Kosovo constitution, it's in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW], it's in the Beijing Platform for Action, they tell us that in countries where gender equality is underrepresented, you should have these kinds of national gender machineries in higher ranking positions. So you, as a representative of the EU, please don't come to Kosovo and raise issues like, do they need gender equality? If you don't have these answers in your home country, please don't come and make a bigger damage than already exists in this country.[42]

As referenced above, the importance of having national gender machineries 'within the executive branch of the government' is stipulated in CEDAW, which is part of the Kosovo constitution.[43] The EU's tendency to contravene CEDAW was a recurring theme in several interviews, including one instance where an EU-contracted expert claimed that Kosovo is not ready to have women's inheritance rights included in the civil code, even though CEDAW clearly says that customary and traditional augments should not be used as a reasoning to undermine women's rights.[44] This seemed to be tied to observations by EU staff that for all the positive changes that have occurred within the EU, non-gender-specialist staff in particular still lack a gender perspective. In the words of one EU gender advisor, 'The main challenge is that the rest of our colleagues don't feel the ownership obligation still. They don't feel like they owe it to apply what is already committed by their organization in terms of gender equality…there is still not a culture that gender is something that concerns everybody – as I said, this is changing little by little, we've done the trainings etc. but it's still not the case… In every policy document that talks about gender equality they always talk about the ownership

[42] Interview with senior government official for gender equality, April 2022. See also Topsøe-Jensen and Qosaj-Mustafa, 'Final Evaluation of the Framework Agreement Regarding Direct Grant Support and Consultancy to the Agency for Gender Equality, Kosovo', 21.
[43] CEDAW, General Recommendation No. 28 on the Core Obligations of States Parties under Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW/C/2010/47/GC.2, 7.
[44] Interview with leading civil society representative, online, February 2024.

by the whole range of employees, it's there on paper, but I don't think we are even close.'[45] In the context of the EU specifically, various reforms and policies such as the organization-wide Gender Action Plan, currently in its third iteration, have to a certain extent contributed to raising the level of gender-awareness at the delegation level. However, despite this progress, according to EU Office staff, the need to include a gender perspective is still not embedded in the institutional culture and is thus more fragile than it might appear externally from the various policy documents, trainings and country-level gender strategies. As Rao points out, 'Just because an agency has a policy on gender mainstreaming does not mean that its staff or the ways it works will automatically change. And just because an agency offers gender awareness or gender analysis training does not mean it will henceforth contribute effectively to gender equality.'[46]

In short, the failure to be recognized as a credible counterpart by international organizations, together with the lack of adequate resources provided by the government, culminated in a national gender machinery unable to assume a proactive role in coordinating gender-related interventions.

4.4 Inter-organizational Coordination

In addition to host government weaknesses, inter-organizational tensions also weakened coordination and collaboration in the domain of gender equality, including women's economic empowerment. There were palpable tensions between international organizations over the lack of coordination as well as the perceived 'ownership' over the gender equality agenda, particularly between UN Women and other organizations. Although staff were reluctant to discuss these tensions on the record due to the close-knit nature of the international

[45] Interview with EU gender advisor, Prishtina, March 2022.
[46] Joanne Sandler, Aruna Rao, and Rosalind Eyben, 'Strategies of Feminist Bureaucrats: United Nations Experiences', *IDS Working Papers* 2012, no. 397 (2012): 30.

community in Kosovo, informal conversations with UN and non-UN staff members, as well as civil society representatives, revealed frustrations surrounding the role of UN Women vis-à-vis other agencies. As the 'largest embodiment of the "gender architecture"', UN Women play a crucial role in steering gender equality interventions at the country level'.[47]

UN Women possesses a triple mandate comprising intergovernmental norm-setting, operational functions, and interagency coordination responsibilities.[48] Of these, the role of coordinating within the UN system is the most recent addition, not being explicitly assigned to any of UN Women's precursor organizations. Coordination is thus officially part of UN Women's 'triple mandate', which requires it to 'promote coordination and coherence across the UN system to enhance accountability and results for gender equality and women's empowerment'.[49] Yet, evidence indicates that this aspect of UN Women's mandate is not functioning effectively in Kosovo.

The aforementioned UN Women-led SGG was widely perceived as an ineffective platform for coordinating gender efforts. As one embassy representative put it, 'It's once in every 3/4 months, everyone that has gender or women's rights in their agenda participates in that meeting, and it's a chaotic meeting. You sit there and you just listen. There is no follow up, it's not action oriented. It makes sense because you want to meet these people and hear what they are doing, but if you're going to bring people in for two or three hours at least make an effort to follow up, saying what was agreed etc.'[50] Another interviewee agreed, 'the SGG is not a functioning body in Kosovo... The problem with the SGG meeting is that we just go round, present what we are doing. I don't see the point.'[51] The same gender advisor revealed

[47] Dalberg Global Development Advisors, 'Independent Review of the UN System's Capacity to Deliver on Gender Equality', February 2023, 65.
[48] UN Women, 'Coordinating for Gender Equality Results: Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's Contribution to UN System Coordination on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women', May 2016, 9.
[49] UN Women, Strategic Plan 2022–2025, 2021, 2, http://undocs.org/en/UNW/2021/6.
[50] Interview with a National Program Officer, Prishtina, November 2022.
[51] Interview with international gender advisor, Prishtina, April 2022.

that despite efforts by gender advisors within IOs to improve the functionality of the SGG by setting up sub-groups on specific themes and assisting with tasks such as minute-writing, UN Women were unresponsive.[52]

Several interviewees felt that UN Women were falling short in their mandated role as coordinator of gender equality efforts, not only as chair of the SGG but also due to their perceived lack of collaborative engagement more broadly. According to one interviewee, UN Women were 'very defensive, very discrete, and not open'.[53] The example of donor coordination in the field of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) provides a case in point. Various international organizations have worked on the topic of GRB in Kosovo over the past decade, which is a strategy used by governments to ensure that public budgets contribute to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.[54] When implemented successfully, GRB can contribute to a more holistic approach to women's economic empowerment through a more equitable allocation resources to meet the needs of both women and men. For instance, it can facilitate targeted investments in sectors such as education and healthcare, which are essential for women's advancement.[55] Most recently, UN Women have begun implementing a SIDA-funded regional GRB project in Kosovo entitled 'Transformative Financing for Gender Equality in the Western Balkans' in 2020. A gender advisor for an international organization currently working on GRB summarized the problem as follows:

> Especially now for example, with the GRB programming that is coming from the regional project by UN Women, they're working on GRB, but who is the expert, what is happening, we have no clue. I don't have any access to see how they're tackling GRB and whether they are considering the elements of care economy concepts…There were attempts [to coordinate], but we do our GRB and they do theirs. I'm seeing now that we have been working for example with Gračanica, and now UN Women are launching a regional GRB project in Gračanica, which for me, I don't get it. We have submitted to UN Women the municipalities where we are active, we had a meeting one year ago when

[52] Interview with international gender advisor, Prishtina, April 2022.
[53] Interview with international gender advisor, Prishtina, April 2022.
[54] For example, for a list of GRB initiatives up until 2014 see Nicole Farnsworth et al., 'Lessons Learned: "Doing" Gender Responsive Budgeting in Kosovo' (Prishtina: Kosovo Women's Network, 2014), 20–21.
[55] The pitfalls of GRB as an approach will be elaborated on in Chapter 6.

> they were launching the project. Now they are rolling out and we have seen nothing of it, I've seen from Facebook. So how donor coordination is channelled, I don't get it. I've reached out several times I tried to exchange material regarding our GRB efforts, what are you teaching, what are we teaching. but no response.[56]

This appraisal contrasted with UN Women's assessment of coordination around GRB, 'we try not to overlap, or especially now with GRB...I insist that our teams, even when they develop a new initiative, really investigate and do research who is doing something similar. So for example, if they cover certain municipalities, because you cannot always cover all municipalities, we can see which municipalities don't have that, or they are not covered, and we go with the other municipalities.'[57] Similar problems were identified in other gender equality domains, suggesting that this is an issue which goes beyond women's economic empowerment and affects the broader landscape of gender equality and women's empowerment. Another UN official cited a similar example in the field of gender-based violence. In February 2022, a delegation of experts from the Council of Europe responsible for monitoring implementation of the Istanbul Convention visited Kosovo. She recalled that during the meeting between the visiting experts, the national coordinator for domestic violence, and other donors, it transpired that 'OSCE is supporting some municipal coordination mechanisms against domestic violence in some municipalities, UN Women is supporting some others. But then they have different standards, different ways of cooperation, different ways of training these coordination mechanisms, which to me is a problem, there should be a unified way of how these structures are being trained, developed, being systematic in their work across the country.'[58] UN Women itself acknowledged that despite having a memorandum of understanding with OSCE at the global level, coordination at the ground level was challenging

[56] Interview with international gender advisor, Prishtina, April 2022.
[57] Interview with UN Women Kosovo official, Prishtina, April 2022.
[58] Interview with national gender advisor, Prishtina, March 2022. According to 'Guidelines for Effective Performance of Municipal Coordination Mechanisms Against Domestic Violence (MCMDVS)', as of May 2023, a total of 33 municipal coordination mechanisms were established, 20 with the support of the OSCE mission and 13 with the support of UN Women, 5, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/0/543843.pdf.

due to the expansion of OSCE's mandate from 'only political participation' to include elements such as Women, Peace and Security, and training for the health service providers in the cases of domestic violence, which overlaps with UNFPA's mandate.[59] This is indicative of the difficulty of translating global level coordination frameworks and agreements to the ground level of practice, especially when mandates overlap, which is not uncommon when it comes to gender equality, as will be discussed further below. As one former UN staff member reflected, 'These MOUs are signed at the HQ level, they're expected to trickle down at the field level. Oftentimes they are very vague, the moment you read it you realise that the point of signing this MOU was not really collaboration, it was just to tick some box or some request by some member state, it was more done, as we would say in Albanian, *to put sand on your eyes*, rather than to actually do something in practice.'[60]

Findings regarding coordination issues in Kosovo, including accusations that UN Women had behaved in a non-collaborative manner, are supported by recent analyses and evaluations of the UN system's gender architecture and specifically on UN Women's coordination role. A 2023 independent global review of the UN's system's capacity to deliver on gender equality also highlighted the tensions 'between 'gender spaces' and 'non-gender spaces', noting that gender entities (like UN Women) 'sometimes assume they are solely responsible for the gender equality agenda, as opposed to seeing their role as enabling the rest of the system to deliver on its mandate which includes gender equality.'[61]

[59] Interview with UN Women Kosovo official, Prishtina, April 2022; 'OSCE and UN Women sign first-ever Memorandum of Understanding', 28 September 2018, https://www.osce.org/secretariat/397745.
[60] Interview with former UNDP and UN Women regional staff member, online, April 2022.
[61] Dalberg Global Development Advisors, 'Independent Review of the UN System's Capacity to Deliver on Gender Equality', 18.

4.4.1. Mandate ambiguity

As mentioned above, the lack of clarity over UN Women's mandate was visible in Kosovo, particularly surrounding the balance between its coordination role and its operational activities and expertise. UN Women's mandate has been criticised for being 'too broad and vague', with other UN entities in addition to UN Women staff calling for greater clarification.[62] Several interviewees attributed inter-organizational tensions around gender equality mandates at the country-level, particularly regarding the role of UN Women and their perceived 'ownership' over the gender equality agenda, to a lack of clarity over organizational mandates at the HQ level. A former Kosovo-based UN official reflected that 'there should be an agreement at the HQ level that better defines what the roles and contributions of each agency are. If there are cases where agencies don't operate, then the other agencies take bits and parts of their work. But in general, where these agencies exist and coexist in a working environment, there should be a clearer understanding of who does what and why.'[63] By contrast, UN Women staff at the headquarters level felt that there was a good degree of coordination in general, for instance through agencies consulting each other and providing feedback during the process of developing strategic plans, as well as representatives from different agencies serving on each other's executive boards. According to one UN Women official 'there's a good understanding of what the roles of other agencies are' at the HQ level.[64] Another senior UN Women official noted that, for example, decisions around which entity should take the lead on issues such as the care economy, '[are] not determined at the global level. There are countries in which UNDP has taken the lead and there are other countries in which ILO has done that, and there are others in which UN Women has done that. Again, as I said, that is a country determination, we don't

[62] Council on Foreign Relations, 'Renewing the Global Architecture for Gender Equality', March 2022, 6; UN Women, 'Coordinating for Gender Equality Results: Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's Contribution to UN System Coordination on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women', May 2016, 19.
[63] Interview with former UNDP and UN Women staff member, online, April 2022.
[64] Interview with senior UN Women HQ official, online, January 2023.

decide.'[65] This contrasts with findings from Kosovo and recent evaluations on the UN's gender architecture, which generally call for more guidance from HQ regarding the division of labour between different agencies working on gender equality at the country level. Such contrasting perceptions around the need for greater coordination and mandate clarity are corroborated by findings from a 2016 UN Women corporate evaluation which reported that: 'The need for direction is more acute at the field level than at HQ. However, it is also perceived that it is at HQ level that UN entities need to make additional efforts to clarify the mandate boundaries so that translation of the mandate in the field is guided by meaningful, discussed and agreed upon strategic frameworks.'[66] This reflects a common disjuncture between HQ and country-level perceptions of coordination, whereby, as one interviewee highlighted, 'there are issues with clarity on mandates on many things between UN agencies. I mean, although everybody says that, yes, everything is clear, all of us have it written in black and white, but it's not clear in practice and in the field. And it's not even clear globally, in all honesty.'[67]

The preference at HQ to leave it to country offices to interpret mandate boundaries has practical consequences on the ground; it affects relationships between country-level offices of agencies and undermines gender equality progress at the country level through competition for financing. Several interviewees highlighted the role of competition for funding, partly stemming from murky mandates, in fuelling inter-agency tensions at the country-level, as shall be discussed further in the following section. As one interviewee noted, 'the money factor disturbs everything.'[68] It should be noted that UN Women is the most under-resourced UN agency, particularly considering its ambitious coordination role. As per the 2023 Independent

[65] Interview with senior UN Women official, online, January 2023.
[66] UN Women, 'Coordinating for Gender Equality Results', 51.
[67] Interview with former UNDP and UN Women staff member, online, March 2024.
[68] Interview with former UNDP and UN Women staff member, online, April 2022.

Review, 'UN coordination' represents only 3.3% of UN Women's budget.[69] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the direct result of limited resources, together with seemingly overlapping gender equality mandates, was what many interviewees felt was an uncollaborative, un-feminist approach on the part of UN Women. The same review also highlighted that a scarcity of resources often pushes UN Women to engage more in operational activities, implying a contradiction between the ambitious coordination goals bestowed upon UN Women and the resources available to achieve this function. Furthermore, the scepticism and distrust surrounding UN Women's mandate and role at the field level further undermines its ability to perform its stipulated coordination role. As one international gender advisor recalled, 'The Facebook page of UN Women [in Kosovo] is delusional...I'm just like what are you working on? Do you have one product?'.[70] The UN report also noted that 'At the field level, the perception of lack of operational capacity also affects UN Women's credibility in terms of its UN coordination role.'[71]

The question of UN Women's expertise and the balance between its coordination role and its operational activities has been a source of tension not only in Kosovo but also globally. As the recent UN Independent Review noted, gender entities 'sometimes try to replicate or reproduce service delivery work that is in the mandate of other, much larger entities, and are not able to deliver on this work due to lack of technical, political, financial capacity.'[72] It is worth noting that the Independent Review itself, whilst raising some key points, was widely regarded by many feminist scholars and activists as an attempt to restrict UN Women's operational role and was subsequently superseded by an implementation plan, titled the

[69] Dalberg Global Development Advisors, 'Independent Review of the UN System's Capacity to Deliver on Gender Equality', 19.
[70] Interview with international gender advisor, Prishtina, April 2022.
[71] UN Women, 'Coordinating for Gender Equality Results', May 2016, 14.
[72] Dalberg Global Development Advisors, 'Independent Review of the UN System's Capacity to Deliver on Gender Equality', 18.

'Gender Equality Acceleration Plan', officially based on the review, but in reality divorced from it.[73]

In Kosovo, one recent example of the tensions regarding UN Women's mandate and its perceived capacity limitations was visible in critiques of UN Women's involvement as an implementing partner in an EU-funded Covid recovery project. UN Women was responsible for implementing the economic empowerment segment of the project which targeted vulnerable women, such as gender-based violence survivors, in the Dukagjini region.[74] The economic empowerment component was facilitated by various NGOs and included vocational trainings in areas such as tailoring and handicrafts, the provision of equipment, as well as training in financial management or business digital marketing with the goal of facilitating income generation through self-employment.[75] The project is typical in its focus on encouraging entrepreneurship through handicrafts via 'capacity building' activities. On its website, UN Women described the project as aiming to 'promote women's ability to secure decent jobs…and to support those women most in need by engaging particularly marginalized groups, including rural women. Our goals are higher incomes, better access to and control over resources, and greater economic security.'[76]

However, these activities were not accompanied by work targeting the structural inequalities which also influence women's exclusion from the labour market, for example childcare, housing, education, or transport barriers. As one UN agency staff member also involved in the project noted, these kind of one-off interventions lack a 'systems approach' and therefore overlook 'the impeding factors that challenge the sustainability of the economic

[73] Letter to the UN Secretary General regarding the Independent Review of the UN System's Capacity to Deliver for Gender Equality, June 2023.
[74] The Dukagjini region encompasses three of Kosovo's seven districts: Gjakova, Peja and Prizren.
[75] 'Women from rural areas in Kosovo gain business skills and confidence', 12 October 2022, https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2022/10/women-from-rural-areas-in-kosovo-gain-business-skills-and-confidence.
[76] Ibid.

empowerment.'[77] She perceived UN Women as lacking the expertise to execute the economic empowerment segment, noting that 'they don't have the expertise to do [economic empowerment], or the platform, everything that they do they do through civil society organizations, they don't have the internal capacities or programmatic support to do it.'[78] These are particularly important elements to consider when working with survivors of domestic violence in order to contribute to long-term, sustainable reintegration. She continued, 'It's complex, you cannot tackle all the aspects, but you can at least influence some of the factors that challenge success in your intervention. If there was better coordination the load could be spread.'[79]

4.4.2. 'It became a bloodbath between agencies': competitive logics and impact on the ground

While the above criticisms levelled against the UN Women programme may indeed be accurate and exemplify the kind of one-off, short-term interventions in the name of women's economic empowerment, they are also reflective of larger systemic issues within the UN at the global level which manifest in competitive dynamics and tensions between UN agencies at the local level. One of these issues are long-standing tensions between UN agencies driven by competition for funds. As one former senior UNIFEM official commented, 'there's never *not* been a time when the other agencies have said that UNIFEM, and now UN Women, should have no operational role and they should get all the operational work.'[80] This is in part down

[77] Interview with national gender advisor, Prishtina, March 2022.
[78] Interview with national gender advisor, Prishtina, March 2022.
[79] Interview with national gender advisor, Prishtina, March 2022.
[80] Interview with former senior UNIFEM official, online, March 2024.

to the diffusion of the gender-mainstreaming norm which resulted in a scaling-up of gender work as a cross-cutting theme across all UN agencies.[81]

In addition to overlapping mandates between entities, the competition for resources is primarily rooted in the decline in core funding available to UN agencies, which has transformed resources into an extremely contentious issue as each agency is individually responsible for mobilizing 'non-core' resources from donor governments, which now represent a larger proportion of funding. The pressure to mobilize funds, at the expense of collaboration, is thus baked into the UN system and breeds a culture of fighting over resources. According to the Independent Review, 'performance assessments of country representatives are based in part on resources mobilized for their entities, and thus there is little motivation for staff to focus their efforts on joint resource mobilization or joint action.'[82] A UNDP regional staff member echoed the problems created by the emphasis on resource mobilization: 'The business model of the UN entities is all about mobilizing resources to do programming. So it's not like you have the resources; the donor base and the donor funding is shrinking every year shrinking, shrinking. So the resource mobilization is oftentimes taking over the sensemaking and what makes sense in the collaboration. So that's, I would say, that's the biggest impediment.'[83] Another former UN Women regional official described how all too often, infighting over funding becomes a personal issue between different agency senior leadership: 'It's a matter of existence, both in terms of organizations and the management of the organizations that have to make sure that they have enough to operate and obviously, for them to have another tick, so that they can move on to another better mission. And then that goes down to people, because obviously, if

[81] Marie Saiget and Simon Tordjman, 'Can UN Reform Be Successful? The Case of UN Women', in *Crisis of Multilateralism? Challenges and Resilience*, ed. Auriane Guilbaud, Franck Petiteville, and Frédéric Ramel, The Sciences Po Series in International Relations and Political Economy (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 226.
[82] Dalberg Global Development Advisors, 'Independent Review of the UN System's Capacity to Deliver on Gender Equality', 66.
[83] Interview with UNDP regional staff members, online, April 2024.

there is no money in the organization, people will lose their jobs.'[84] Reflecting on an interagency proposal for ending violence against women in Morocco, a former UN Resident Coordinator and UNIFEM resident representative similarly recalled that 'instead of bringing all of those assets [of different agencies] to an initiative to address VAW in Morocco, it became a bloodbath between agencies... [it] turned into a personal fight, and this is about ending violence against women...and it's just absurd, and no one is addressing the root causes that.'[85] The impact of such tensions in Kosovo was evident in the reflections of one UN agency staff member who noted that accusations of mandate overstepping on gender equality even had organizational management questioning whether they were doing 'too much' on gender equality.[86] These tensions thus have a tangible impact at the country level by undermining coordination, which is not merely an abstract, technical goal, but actually impedes gender equality progress on the ground.

The competition for resources affects all UN entities, but particularly UN Women given its position within the UN system and as mentioned above, its chronic underfunding. At the time of UN Women's inception in 2010, feminist bureaucrats within the UN warned that UN Women risked being subject to the same 'institutional sabotage' within the UN system, consisting of 'positioning an entire organisation or unit and the people in it at a structural disadvantage because they work on gender equality.'[87] As Sandler and Goetz note, 'gender equality frequently remains the lowest priority when it comes to resource distribution. UN Women is sorely under-funded and has one of the smallest budgets of any UN agency. Its original financing needs (to implement its expansive mandate) were estimated at half a billion. Only [in 2020], a decade after it was set up, has it reached that level of financing.'[88]

[84] Interview with former UNDP and UN Women regional staff member, online, March 2024.
[85] Interview with senior UN officials, online, March 2024.
[86] Interview with UN agency staff member, Prishtina, November 2022.
[87] Sandler, Rao, and Eyben, 'Strategies of Feminist Bureaucrats', 15.
[88] Sandler and Goetz, 'Can the United Nations Deliver a Feminist Future?', 257.

The patriarchal funding system in turn creates capacity gaps, which directly affects how normative agendas travel from the global to the local level. For instance, UN Women only launched its first dedicated strategy on women's economic empowerment in 2024, 14 years after its inception, after appointing its first head of women's economic empowerment at the headquarters level in 2022.[89] A former UN Women regional staff member recalled that 'before she came, there were no regular WEE meetings of global focal points. We only met once in a while, so there was this lack of communication also between the regions.'[90] She noted that until very recently, women's economic empowerment as a topic within UN Women was 'an organizational priority only in words, it wasn't in practice, unfortunately… I think UN Women had just started working on women's economic empowerment after the recent changes that they have made in the organization overall and it was still sort of a nascent period in the beginning. They were talking about it a lot, that it's a priority, but it wasn't. In fact, it wasn't. And again, it's a matter of resources, there was no resources.'[91] Such capacity constraints were also visible at the regional level; for instance, until 2023 there was also no economic empowerment specialist nor team in the UN Women regional office in Istanbul, under which the Kosovo office sits.[92] This suggests that UN Women's limited capacities and approach to WEE in Kosovo can also be traced to under-resourcing and the patriarchal culture of the UN, which has implications for how economic empowerment has been embedded (or not) within the organization.

In short, the under-resourcing of UN Women, together with ambiguity surrounding gender equality mandates, feeds into the competition for funds, all of which undermine coordination around gender equality and have in turn contributed directly to siloed approaches

[89] UN Women, 'Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy', January 2024.
[90] Interview with former UNDP and UN Women regional staff member, online, March 2024.
[91] Interview with former UNDP and UN Women regional staff member, online, March 2024.
[92] Interview with former UNDP and UN Women regional staff member, online, March 2024; Informal conversation with UN Women regional staff member, London, September 2024.

to economic empowerment specifically, often resulting in short-term approaches, rather than systemic, holistic interventions.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed how, despite the rhetoric at the global level, and specific gender coordination frameworks and mechanisms, coordination efforts on gender at the country-level remains weak. Multiple, often interrelated factors explain why, but they fall into two overarching categories: the shortcomings of the Kosovo government as a host partner, and inter-organizational dynamics. As has been shown, the lack of coordination can have a profound impact on whether a global norm made up of various constitutive parts is implemented in its entirety, or whether its meaning is circumscribed in the implementation phase through a focus on a few select areas. The degree of coordination, and crucially *strategic* coordination beyond mere information sharing, determines which elements of global normative agendas are implemented and which are not, and can potentially distort the meaning of what a complex norm like women's economic empowerment means in practice.

The chapter revealed certain inconsistencies and contradictions within the international community's discourse around the paramountcy of coordination to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, and its practices on the ground. While the chapter highlights the institutional weaknesses on the part of the Kosovo government in terms of its inability to provide a cohesive and comprehensive strategy to guide donor efforts, it does not seek to apportion the 'blame' entirely on the government itself. Indeed, as the chapter has shown, the weak coordination capacities of the Kosovo gender machinery are partly the result of a lack of efforts to empower the AGE by the international community who did little to enhance the capacities of the AGE. Instead, it seeks to show how government-related factors influence the relationship and interaction with donor partners, whilst also holding the international community accountable. In doing so, the empirical story aims to provide a more complete

picture of the realities of coordination between donors and host governments, and among donors themselves, in a complex conflict-affected environment like Kosovo. In the context of the UN specifically, the chapter revealed a disconnect between the purported normative benefits of coordination and the kinds of problems created at the ground level by issues such as the perceived ambiguity of the division of labour of around gender equality and the inadequate funding provided to UN Women.

The coordination dynamics and challenges identified in this chapter align with the existing, albeit limited, scholarly research on donor coordination on gender in other contexts, for example Koester et al.'s research in the context Bangladesh and Nepal[93], as well as 'grey literature' such as the recent evaluations and reviews of the UN's gender architecture.[94] This suggests that Kosovo's crowded international set-up offers broader insights into the factors behind and implications of weak coordination on the ground.

While coordination breakdown is not the only reason for the lack of a holistic approach to economic empowerment, it does appear to have played a considerable role in undermining a holistic approach. It is the structural inequalities underpinning women's economic exclusion which are compromised by coordination breakdown, as these are areas which often demand greater collective effort in terms of resources and challenging established norms and the status quo. Overall, the absence of coordination resulted in donors failing to identify deficiencies in economic empowerment initiatives in Kosovo collectively and missed chances to leverage each other's efforts. Instead of seeing women's economic empowerment as a collective effort, donors overall pursued their own individual projects, often resulting in overlapping activities

[93] Diana Koester et al., 'How Can Donors Improve Their Support to Gender Equality in Fragile Settings? Findings from OECD Research', *Gender & Development* 24, no. 3 (1 September 2016): 353–73.
[94] See, for example, UN Women, 'Coordinating for Gender Equality Results', UN Women, 'Insights on organizational effectiveness and efficiency: A meta-synthesis of UN Women evaluations', 2020; UN Women, 'Corporate evaluation of UN Women's UN system coordination and broader convening role in ending violence against women, July 2021; Council on Foreign Relations, 'Renewing the Global Architecture for Gender Equality', March 2022.

and inefficiencies. This, in turn, encouraged the marginalisation of the structural inequalities in the labour market, notably women's care burden – a theme which I discuss at much greater length in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5: Donor political economies and development logics

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored how inter-organization coordination and cooperation dynamics – a key element of the so-called aid effectiveness agenda – play out in practice in a complex issue area such as gender equality and their impact on holistic approaches to women's economic empowerment. As was shown, despite dedicating significant sums towards improving coordination, with numerous coordination mechanisms in place both at the headquarters and country-level, inter-organizational coordination at the ground level remains unpredictable and riddled with challenges. Most importantly, it showed how weak coordination capacities both among IOs, and between IOs and the Kosovo government, resulted in a fragmented, piecemeal approach to women's economic empowerment. This chapter turns to the political economy of the donor community and the development logics that arise from it. I seek to problematise the donor approach and show how donor political economies and the ensuing development logics can undermine holistic approaches to women's economic empowerment and impede gender equality progress at the domestic level. In doing so, the chapter touches on another element of the aid effectiveness agenda, namely the pressure for international organizations and development agencies to report on results, and crucially, showcase quick wins.

The focus on the inter-related issues of donor political economies and the pressure to achieve quick wins speaks to a much larger issue of how the international donor community functions especially in low- and middle-income countries, since interventions have finite funding and finite duration with the pressure to show quick results. The kind of funding commitments required to change the patriarchal systems which rely on women's unpaid labour are far higher and longer-term than most donors have been able to commit to so far, largely due to budget-planning cycles and demands to demonstrate tangible results. This therefore

undermines the degree to which donors can change patriarchal structures and profoundly affects the kinds of interventions which donors engage in.

The pressure to report on results, the so-called 'results management' commitment, has been discussed within development scholarship on aid effectiveness in terms of its implications for the principle of national ownership. Results management refers to allocation of aid 'on the basis of performance as measured by the strength of country policies and monitorable results.'[1] Existing research has, for example, identified tensions between commitments to promote national ownership and harmonize efforts with other donors on the one hand, and the pressure to demonstrate results and pursue donor country government priorities on the other.[2] It has also explored internal organizational issues such as results reporting systems[3], the effect of organizational autonomy constraints on IO performance[4], as well as the relationship between national structures and foreign aid delivery tactics.[5] Natsios coined the notion 'obsessive measurement disorder', which refers to the idea that the most impactful development programs are often the hardest to quantify, whilst those that are easiest to measure tend to be the least transformative.[6] However, the research impetus behind much of this work is largely problem-solving, focussing on how can we make aid 'better' and more effective, which does not necessarily tell us much about how norms travel. Beyond the general notion that results management can impede aid effectiveness and sustainable development, questions such as how

[1] Martin Sjöstedt, 'Aid Effectiveness and the Paris Declaration: A Mismatch Between Ownership and Results-Based Management?', *Public Administration and Development* 33, no. 2 (2013): 144.
[2] See, for example, Sjöstedt, 'Aid Effectiveness and the Paris Declaration'; Therese Brolin, 'Ownership and Results in Swedish General Budget Support to Mozambique', *Forum for Development Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017); Matthew Dornan, 'How New Is the "New" Conditionality? Recipient Perspectives on Aid, Country Ownership and Policy Reform', *Development Policy Review* 35, no. S1 (2017): O46–63; Sarah Holzapfel, 'Boosting or Hindering Aid Effectiveness? An Assessment of Systems for Measuring Donor Agency Results', *Public Administration and Development* 36, no. 1 (2016): 3–19.
[3] Holzapfel, 'Boosting or Hindering Aid Effectiveness?'
[4] Dan Honig, 'When Reporting Undermines Performance: The Costs of Politically Constrained Organizational Autonomy in Foreign Aid Implementation', *International Organization* 73, no. 1 (2019): 171–201.
[5] Simone Dietrich, 'Donor Political Economies and the Pursuit of Aid Effectiveness', *International Organization* 70, no. 1 (2016): 65–102; Simone Dietrich, *States, Markets, and Foreign Aid* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).
[6] Andrew Natsios, 'The Clash of the Counter-Bureaucracy and Development', *Center for Global Development*, 2010.

this affects the articulation of global norms in specific issue areas and what this means for the advancement of particular agendas (beyond simply discussing 'aid effectiveness') have been relatively underexplored.

Less discussed, then, is the question of how these constraining development logics affect the pursuit of gender equality outcomes and feminist calls for structural change.[7] To address this gap, this chapter evaluates how these macro-issues play out in practice and affect norm implementation practices in a particular country context in a specific issue area. I argue that in addition to the neoliberal logics underpinning understandings of economic empowerment long criticized by feminist scholars, international funding complexes are also, at least in part, responsible for the fragmented implementation of women's economic empowerment norms. The chapter is organized as follows: it begins by briefly exploring the link between short-term development logics and the international funding complex dependent on electoral cycles. I then turn to a more in-depth examination of the origins and consequences of the pressure on international organizations to produce measurable results, before discussing the popular intervention modality of grants to women-owned businesses illustrating how this pressure manifests in practice. The implications of the lack of coordination and pressure for results specifically vis-à-vis efforts to address women's unpaid care and domestic work will be discussed in Chapter 6 on economic empowerment in practice.

5.2 Short-term development logics

The short-term nature of donor funding cycles as a barrier to deeper, transformative change came up frequently in interviews. The inability of most donors to commit longer-term funding

[7] One exception to this is Sjöstedt's work exploring how gender as a development priority travels in the case of SIDA, focussing on the education sector in three developing countries. However, Sjöstedt primarily focuses on the tensions within the international aid architecture rather than norm change. See Sjöstedt, 'Aid Effectiveness and the Paris Declaration'.

and instead implement interventions based on 2–3-year timelines is rooted in the funding structure of development initiatives, which operate on short cycles of 3-4 years, aligned with government funding tied to electoral cycles. Rather than addressing long-term issues, the focus thus remains on repetitive actions that yield immediate results to satisfy taxpayers' expectations. As one senior UN development practitioner explained,

> The projects have finite funding and finite duration. Because nobody wants to say look, I will be supporting this particular issue for the next 10 years and I will be putting in 10 million, because every time funding is dependent on the government who provides it and the governments in that state usually have these four-year cycles as everybody does, so nobody can make that type of commitment. And that's why you end up with short projects, you try and do something, but you can't really do something because you don't have enough money and you have to show results, because then if you don't really show results, the follow up funding will not materialize.[8]

This suggests that international funding structures play an important role in driving the short-term nature of interventions on the ground. This link reveals how the political economy of donor interventions has undercut the sustainability of interventions across different issue areas, including gender equality and women's economic empowerment. There were some exceptions to this trend, notably SIDA and SDC both noted that they try to implement longer project cycles, such as multiple phases of four or five years.[9] However, even longer-term plans are not immune to changes in donor governments; for example, one bilateral donor representative noted that following a right-wing shift in the donor government, the term 'feminism' was being wiped out of development materials and that she had been instructed not use the term in speeches for the embassy ambassador in Kosovo.[10]

Several IO officials conceded that these short-term approaches were unlikely to translate into significant gains and ensure that impacts would be durable. A senior Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) official noted that

[8] Interview with UN development practitioner, Prishtina, October 2022.
[9] Interview with senior UNDP official, Prishtina, October 2022
[10] Interview with bilateral donor representative, Prishtina, November 2022.

> It is the standard here to have quick fixes to show off. Because also as a donor agency, a lot of donors, including the EU, which is a big donor in country, have these timelines of two, three years projects. And what do you expect in terms of addressing root causes? I think one of the factors that hinders the economic empowerment of women, it's this short thinking of the donor projects, you cannot have a three-year project and close it and expect that the things will have a positive impact on the ground.[11]

An analysis of the EU-funded projects database in Kosovo confirms this fact, with most projects running for two to three years.[12] An EU official agreed, noting that 'nobody in Kosovo, sadly enough, has talked about long-term sustainability. In fact, they have all talked about it, but it hasn't actually been done, all the donors since the beginning have talked about long-term sustainability of every cent that was given to Kosovo, it was like "oh sustainability" all the time, but no, because nobody tackled the issues and again, I'm sorry, but as a Kosovar local, I have to blame the international community.'[13] As a result of these short time-frames, many interviewees emphasised that there had also been little attempt to conduct long-range planning or long-term assessments. As one CSO representative articulated,

> Everyone wants their results in a two-to-four-year maximum timeframe. Nobody wants to wait 10, 15, 20 years to see results. Everyone wants to see results now. So because of that, there's this tendency to pick the low-hanging fruit, to do what is easy to get the results without having to think what will happen to that girl five years from now, because there's never any impact studies. And this is a huge problem in development. There's nothing to look at the long-term impact, only to look at the at the max outcomes, four-year outcomes.[14]

The lack of sustainability was also visible in the lack of efforts to empower the Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality (AGE) and develop gender mainstreaming capacities within the government. As discussed in the previous chapter, donors frequently preferred to work through NGOs or directly with government ministries, rather than empower and consult the AGE. The 2020 report on ODA alignment noted that the inadequacy of these efforts is a function of the

[11] Interview with senior national programme officer, Prishtina, November 2022.
[12] See, https://kosovoprojects.eu/.
[13] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.
[14] Interview with civil society representative and gender consultant, online, April 2024.

desire to achieve quick impacts, claiming that 'technical assistance to support capacities and policy/institutional processes aiming to mainstream gender in policy-making has been insufficient, not strategic and has not fostered sustainability… Technical assistance in this area…was often insufficient in both time-length and resource allocations. Not much emphasis is given to coaching and mentoring during the technical assistance support activities. The pressure seems to have been mostly in producing quick results, which is totally at odds with capacity development principles.'[15]

5.3 Pressure to achieve quick wins

After sketching out the context of the international funding complex, I show in this section how the pressure to deliver rapid, tangible outputs plays out in the case of women's economic empowerment interventions in Kosovo. As mentioned above, the focus on results has its roots in shifts in the discourses of international aid architecture visible in successive high-level, standard-setting agreements which emphasised the question of results, such as the UN Millennium Declaration (2000), the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (2011).[16] As Bächtold has argued, 'while the signing of declarations on the modalities of delivering aid have largely been interpreted by most practitioners as technical exercises for donors, they have been tremendously instrumental in steadily shifting the discourse on development towards questions of results and technicalities of development cooperation.'[17] The focus on results has also

[15] Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, 'Official Development Aid for Gender Equality', 27.
[16] Stefan Bächtold, 'The Rise of an Anti-Politics Machinery: Peace, Civil Society and the Focus on Results in Myanmar', *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 10 (3 October 2015): 1968–83. On the growing importance of 'results' in international cooperation, see Rosalind Eyben, 'Hiding Relations: The Irony of "Effective Aid"', *The European Journal of Development Research* 22, no. 3 (1 July 2010): 382–97. For a criticism of the focus on quantitative results, see Natsios, 'The Clash of the Counter-Bureaucracy and Development'.
[17] Bächtold, 'The Rise of an Anti-Politics Machinery', 1973.

become a key source of legitimacy for international actors in peacebuilding and development contexts.[18]

Whilst the focus on results initially grew out of aid fatigue and a dissatisfaction with its seemingly inefficient and insufficient results, the pressure has increased even more in recent years. The increased pressure to show results and accountability for foreign aid has also been linked in part to the rise of populist parties and in some cases, subsequent reductions in ODA. Research has shown that right-wing populist governments influence aid policy, often leading to a reduction in foreign aid spending.[19] For example, the UK government under the Conservatives has significantly cut foreign aid in recent years, with a significant proportion of remaining funds also being diverted to fund asylum seeker programmes in the UK. In 2022, the right-wing Swedish government abandoned its pioneering feminist foreign policy and in 2023 announced reforms to the Swedish foreign aid budget, with an emphasis on pursuing national interests, claiming that 'development assistance is an important foreign policy tool to pursue and protect Swedish interests.'[20] The impact of such cuts and the pressure on foreign aid budgets was felt by IO staff in Kosovo who felt that it had translated into even more pressure to show quick results in their programming which had in turn undermined the sustainability of their efforts. According to one senior UN official,

> In recent years what I have seen is this shift towards nationalism within donor countries. This concept of, we have our own internal issues, we have our own people in poverty, we have our own gender issues, just as a general thing, so why are we providing funding to someone else, why are we not sorting *our* issues? So this is that sort of populism that has really been on the rise in these last few years…my impression is that, actually there has

[18] Bächtold, 1972.
[19] Dennis Hammerschmidt, Cosima Meyer, and Anne Pintsch, 'Foreign Aid in Times of Populism: The Influence of Populist Radical Right Parties on the Official Development Assistance of OECD Countries', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 35, no. 4 (4 July 2022): 478–99; Tobias Heinrich, Yoshiharu Kobayashi, and Edward Lawson, 'Populism and Foreign Aid', *European Journal of International Relations* 27, no. 4 (1 December 2021): 1042–66; J.A. Emmanouilidis et al., *Europe's Troublemakers: The Populist Challenge to Foreign Policy* (European Policy Centre, 2016).
[20] Government of Sweden, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government presents new direction for development assistance', 15 December 2023. https://www.government.se/press-releases/2023/12/government-presents-new-direction-for-development-assistance/#:~:text=The%20Government%20is%20reforming%20development,links%20development%20assistance%20and%20trade.

> been a reduction [of ODA] and in countries where the ODA hasn't reduced, the accountability that the parliament, but also the citizens require, on how this ODA is spent has shifted, it is much more critical. They want to see where their money is going, which again, creates a vicious circle actually, because then for these governments to justify, they have to show these quick results and then quick results are a temporary solution, you're not addressing the root issues.[21]

The short timeframes of most donor funding cycles increase the pressure to demonstrate quick wins and concrete outputs in a short amount of time, usually several years, with little consideration of long-term impact. A case in point was a 2014-2019 USAID 'EMPOWER private sector' project which sought to increase private sector competitiveness and facilitate job creation, with a particular focus on job opportunities for women. One of the project objectives was 'advancing the economic engagement of priority populations, including women, youth, and minorities (including North Kosovo).'[22] In this case, the pressure to show immediate results manifested in the form of the number of jobs created by the project. The project final report exemplifies this pattern, stating that 'By the end of the program, the project created 1,870 new jobs for women, which represents 37% of the total new jobs created by USAID EMPOWER Private Sector activity-supported activities.'[23] As part of the project, grants were distributed to several women-owned or co-owned baklava producers. An INGO representative who had also been involved in the sector analysis prior to the USAID intervention recalled an instance where she had advised USAID not to distribute grants on the basis that the businesses were fragile, and it would distort the market and lead to failure. However, the former USAID deputy-mission and subsequent mission-advisor reportedly insisted on providing grants to several of the businesses due to extreme pressure to report on job creation.[24] One of the businesses that received a grant, Rolleo, was highlighted as a success

[21] Interview with UN development practitioner, Prishtina, October 2022.
[22] US Agency for International Development, 'USAID Empower Private Sector Activity, in Partnership with SIDA', Quarterly Report No. 16, July 2018, 23, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00T8TP.pdf.
[23] US Agency for International Development, 'USAID Empower Private Sector Activity, Final Report', February 2020, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WJ1K.pdf.
[24] Interview with INGO organization Country Director, Prishtina, November 2022.

story by USAID on social media and in project reports. According to a quarterly report, 'At the end of Q16, Rolleo opened its first stand-alone store "Rolleo's Bakery and Coffee", where it introduced in its offerings many of the new recipes and decoration techniques its employees learned during the training provided by the EMPOWER-engaged pastry chef. The opening of the new store and the addition of new products resulted in Rolleo hiring six additional women employees, thus, bringing the number of women employed at the company to 27.'[25] Here again, the emphasis on job creation for women is clear. This closely aligns with findings on USAID in other contexts. For example, in his analysis of municipal governance projects, Honig found that USAID projects were a 'numbers game', noting that 'the need for reporting looms large for USAID.'[26]

A new factory was also opened with numerous international officials attending the opening.[27] However, according to the INGO representative, Rolleo – formerly one of the largest companies in the large city of Ferizaj – and another producer, subsequently closed down and no longer exist.[28] In this case, USAID had been warned that intervening in the market through grant provision was likely to lead to business failure due to non-organic growth, yet the need to report on job creation overrode these warnings and ultimately had adverse consequences. This example encapsulates two key issues, first and most obviously the impact of results management on the sustainability of interventions; and second, the way in which the pressure to demonstrate results distorts economic empowerment policy in practice by encouraging certain implementation modalities which allow aid agencies to show tangible outcomes, but which might be disconnected or even at odds with the intended broader impact. This intervention is one of countless examples of a common approach to supporting women's

[25] US Agency for International Development, 'USAID Empower Private Sector Activity, in Partnership with SIDA', Quarterly Report No. 16, July 2018, 23, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00T8TP.pdf.
[26] Honig, 'When Reporting Undermines Performance', 193.
[27] Interview with INGO organization Country Director, Prishtina, November 2022.
[28] Interview and follow-up email correspondence with Swiss INGO representative, November 2022 and January 2024.

economic empowerment: providing grants to women-owned businesses. One interviewee noted that this has become a popular modality as it 'an easy way to disburse funds.'[29]

The question of what constitutes a 'result' was another theme which came up during fieldwork interviews. Recalling the reporting process for a UN project on training journalists to recognize labour issues concerning gender quality, a UN agency staff member explained how

> When we report, I'm always so nervous. Because I mean, look, we train them. But what? I mean, do you know what they're doing with this training? We make things look beautiful on paper and in reporting using the most beautiful words to explain how important it was and how it changed their lives… it's not a result when you report saying just that X number journalists have been trained. That's just letting them know that they have been trained. But how they're going to use that training, that is the actual result. But I don't see that we are doing that. Probably it's the fault of the donors as well, because they request reporting of course, but not monitoring.[30]

The emphasis on immediate results and the lack of follow-through via long-term impact assessments is a common flaw in internationally driven economic empowerment interventions. An SDC official described the focus on 'how much' within the donor community, 'It's very much accountability driven. You know, I give money, so how many jobs have you created? I give money so how many people have access to water? It's always about how many, how many, how much, it's not about, what really has an impact? What has changed in their livelihoods? So what we have done, are these people just better off financially or actually in a better position?[31] A civil society representative echoed this insight:

> You can see that when you look at intervention logics, they are so simple…I review these sometimes, some of them are like "the number of trainings held", which is not a result. The result is the change in awareness and knowledge, the question of if they got a job, did they keep that job? Were they paid well at that job? Were the working conditions decent? These are results, not the number of trainings, but donors still approve that as a result. So if you measure your success based on how many people you trained, then what do you care about how many people are still employed? That's not in your framework, donors are also to blame for that, because they should be looking at that and saying no.[32]

[29] Interview with former UN Women regional staff member, online, March 2024.
[30] Interview with UN agency staff member, Prishtina, April 2022.
[31] Interview with senior national programme officer, Prishtina, November 2022.
[32] Interview with civil society representative and gender consultant, online, April 2024.

The pressure to show quick results also manifested in the pressure to spend funds, which several interviewees noted is another indicator of individual and organizational performance. As discussed in Chapter 4, the pressure to mobilize resources – one measure of performance – has undermined coordination between international organizations, and UN entities in particular. However, several interviewees noted that there is not only a pressure to bring in funding but also to spend funds, which again encourages quick wins and undermines durable systemic reform. According to a 2016 independent report on results-based management in the United Nations development system, 'there are disincentives in the system, and according to some entities, performance appraisal systems reinforce and reward delivery (spending allocated funds) rather than development results.'[33] Interviewees confirmed that the pressure to spend funds is baked into the UN system in particular. A former UN Women economic empowerment specialist noted that, 'there's a pressure to mobilize and then there's a pressure for spending as well, which is another criteria of evaluating performance. If you're a Resident Coordinator or head of office or even a programme specialist, and you mobilize enough resources, but you're unable to spend, that's an issue as well. So this is why if you look at the spending curve, it's always the same everywhere, it's not Kosovo specific, I've seen it in other countries. It's the UN I think.'[34] A civil society representative agreed, reflecting that 'you have to disburse the money to get more money, because if you couldn't disburse the old money, then you don't need as much money. So you have to spend more, to ask for more. And that's how the whole cycle works for UN agencies.'[35] The emphasis on budget spent is evident in UN online budget trackers, such as the UNDP transparency portal, which measures the budget

[33] Angela Bester, 'Results-Based Management in the United Nations Development System', January 2016, 12, https://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/qcpr/pdf/sgr2016-studies-rbm-8jan2016.pdf.
[34] Interview with former UN Women regional staff member, online, March 2024.
[35] Interview with civil society representative and gender consultant, online, April 2024.

versus expenditure for every project annually and over the project's lifetime.[36] Similar trends have been identified in other peacebuilding contexts; for example, Susanna Campbell identified a similar emphasis on spending funds at the expense of achieving peacebuilding goals or development outcomes in UNDP Burundi. She observed that 'even more than focusing on specific deliverables, UNDP Burundi tracked money: money spent, money raised, money not spent… The goal was to pressure staff members to spend the money allocated to them.'[37] What is striking is that Campbell's data was collected over a period spanning 15 years, from 1999-2014, suggesting that there has been relatively little learning regarding the pitfalls of these approaches.

In short, this suggests that the incentive structures baked into the UN system, based on spending and utilizing annual budgets for short-term results, can detract from investments in longer term transformative approaches. The pressure in turn also aggravates the coordination issues described in the previous chapter, particularly in the context of the UN system.

5.4 Taking women's economic empowerment for granted

As mentioned above, one way in which short-term development logics have manifested in the context of women's economic empowerment specifically is through the focus on grants for women-owned businesses. This is part of the broader focus on women entrepreneurs, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. These types of projects began in the immediate post-war period, for example through investments in women-led businesses via the $10 million dollar 'Kosovo Women's Initiative' discussed in Chapter 3, of which very few were sustained. However, despite several evaluations of this initiative, many of the same problems persist until

[36] UNDP Transparency Portal, https://open.undp.org/projects.
[37] Campbell, 'International Organizations in Peacebuilding', 190.

the time of writing regarding the sustainability and efficacy of this approach for economic empowerment.[38]

Many interviewees highlighted the fact that grants are an easy way for donors to disburse funds and show results by claiming that they gave a certain number of grants to businesses owned by women, however, their sustainability has rarely been analysed. As one programme officer for a key bilateral donor noted, 'We tried to fix the problem and the issue of women's economic empowerment through grants. That's not how we should fix it. We cannot fix that issue or that specific problem through this way of interaction.'[39] She continued, 'the problem with the international community is that the designs are really short-sighted. They look at the life of the programme, meaning that if they can achieve to have 50 grants or support 50 women-led businesses, and they sustain throughout the life of the programme which is 4 or 5 years, then whatever happens after the programme is done, it doesn't matter. I think this is one of the challenges when we talk about sustainability.'[40] An EU official agreed that the short-term, project-based nature of economic empowerment interventions had overlooked the importance of longitudinal impact assessments: 'Did anybody, you can ask these guys, us [EU] included, and the US who provided grants, say okay, you provided grants in 2016-2018, can you tell me what happened to those women? There's no follow up, and who would do the follow up? Of course they can't do the follow up, because they are project driven and they will go. But then they should have had a more holistic approach and worked with the government and set up a structure or empowered a structure that could then follow up and keep records of how many of these grants that were given are still operational. This is never done.'[41] She continued, 'unfortunately, I think it's like when you're in Rome and you do as the Romans do - we as

[38] Kalungu-Banda, 'Post-Conflict Programmes for Women'; Baker and Haug, 'The Kosovo Women's Initiative: An Independent Evaluation'.
[39] Interview with bilateral donor representative, Prishtina, November 2022.
[40] Interview with bilateral donor representative, Prishtina, November 2022.
[41] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.

donors, we come to Kosovo, we do the work and then we end up doing the same as the government does, being lazy to follow up... I mean, we are meant to be doing development.'[42]

In addition to the USAID intervention discussed in the previous section, there were other examples of grant interventions that had been relatively unsuccessful or the long-term impact of which was unknown. For example, a 2018-2022 SIDA-funded programme targeting women-led initiatives in northern Kosovo involved a grant component, according to interviews with the funder and the project evaluation, over half of the businesses supported were not sustained past the project end date.[43] The inability of donors to follow up on these kinds of interventions beyond the project end-date was also highlighted by a senior UN development practitioner, who cited several examples where financial support had been provided to women to start businesses but there was no budget to follow up. Recalling a project which financed internships for women in traditional ornamental work, she noted that 'because we are not a donor, we need to have the money, and okay we monitor and we evaluate while the project is implemented. But then when the project ends, it is practically impossible for us to follow up and to see, for example, I honestly don't know what happened with those six people… it's very difficult to make sure that what we invested in, we saw it through at the end. I mean, how many businesses are still operational after two, three, five, however many years?'.[44] Another donor representative echoed this sentiment, 'How many of the women that they will support will work for four years while they have that grant and then decide to close the business because they have to go back and take care of their parents or in-laws? So I think that if they don't make this systemic change, it's just another failed intervention.'[45]

[42] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.
[43] Danish Refugee Council, 'Supporting Social Entrepreneurship and Promoting Socio-economic Empowerment in Minority Communities in Kosovo – period from 01 April 2018 to 31 December 2022. Final Progress Report.'
[44] Interview with UN development practitioner, Prishtina, October 2022.
[45] Interview with bilateral donor representative, Prishtina, November 2022.

Whilst monitoring is a requirement of most interventions, these more often than not focus on project outputs rather than longer-term outcomes. One result of this is that there is little sense of 'what works' when it comes to implementation modalities. For example, active labour market programmes (ALMPs), of which grants to women-owned businesses are one component, aim to facilitate transition to the labour market and have actively targeted women and have been running for over a decade in Kosovo through various providers. Yet, analyses of these programmes are scarce. As a 2019 World Bank report highlighted, 'only one in three programs (34%) conduct independent performance evaluations, while other types of evaluations are inexistent. Indeed, no programme reported the use of process evaluations, impact evaluations or cost-benefit analysis.'[46] Only recently has this changed, with several longer-term assessments of public active labour market measures (ALMMs) providers conducted by the German development agency GIZ, which in fact revealed 'a relatively low impact of ALMMs in helping secure sustainable employment.'[47]

Furthermore, recent research has found that whilst grants might be distributed to women-owned businesses on paper, this is not always the case in practice. For example, in interviews conducted by the Kosovo Women's Network, one civil society representative observed that 'there are companies officially registered under women's names but run by men, who are the legitimate property owners of these businesses.'[48] In these cases, the fact that the business is technically owned by a woman means very little in practice if they have little influence over managing the business and is thus unlikely to contribute to women's economic empowerment. A civil society representative and international gender expert cited one example where she advised a major donor that aside from supporting women-owned businesses, they should also

[46] The World Bank, 'Active Labor Market Programs (ALMPs) in Kosovo: Mapping of Non-Public Providers', August 2019.
[47] Vigan Behluli and Yll Agimi, 'The Evaluation of Active Labour Market Measures in Kosovo', 2022.
[48] Nicole Farnsworth et al., 'In the Shadows: A Gender Analysis of Informal Work in Kosovo' (Kosova Women's Network, 2024), 141.

include worker contracts as one of the minimum conditions for grant awarding, in order to address informality and contribute to decent work opportunities for women. The most recent data estimates that 42% of Kosovars are engaged in the informal economy, of which 65% are women, especially rural women.[49] However, the donor refused on the basis that it would cause issues for spending the money since it is such a common practice amongst businesses that no one would have applied and they would not have had been able to disburse the grants. This example shows, again, how the pursuit of immediate results – in this case disbursing grants within the required timeline – was prioritised at the expense of ensuring *decent* work for women, (i.e. ensuring that the work is formal and women have the appropriate rights, benefits etc.), which is also a crucial element of global norms on women's economic empowerment.[50] In other words, the donor preferred to knowingly support the informal economy and ignore violations of workers' rights in order to have enough beneficiaries to spend the funds. A separate interviewee supported this sentiment, recalling a recent visit to a donor-supported cosmetics salon where the working conditions were poor, and it was clear that not all of the (female) employees had contracts. She noted that in general, 'very little is done to discuss the decent work and labour rights and having contracts and having health insurance and all of this… To me, it's more than just supporting women-led businesses. You have to add other layers to it.'[51]

The purpose here is not to stray into the territory of M&E and evaluate whether individual economic empowerment projects have been successful or not. It is rather to show that the absence of long-term impact assessments of international economic empowerment

[49] Women make up a large proportion of the informal economy in Kosovo, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, resulting in precarious work characterised by unstable income, poor working conditions, low job security and a lack of legal and social protections. Fighting informality has been a long-term priority of the Kosovo government. See, Farnsworth et al., 'In the Shadows: A Gender Analysis of Informal Work in Kosovo'.
[50] It is important to note that 'decent' work is part of SDG 8, and is defined as 'productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity' (ILO, 2019).
[51] Interview with bilateral donor representative, Prishtina, November 2022.

interventions enables *claims* of success and impact through the demonstration of immediate results. Such claims fuel the repetition of particular intervention modalities, even though in reality, the efficacy of grants as an implementation modality remains largely unknown. As one interviewee put it, 'because everything changes every 3-4 years, it's very rare that you get long-term perspectives or evaluations. [The donor community] doesn't find out what the problem is in the long-term, they just keep doing the same thing over and over again thinking it's making some difference because it shows immediate results and that's what they want to show to their taxpayers.'[52] As a result, there are few opportunities for organizational learning, which helps explain why women's economic empowerment has been implemented in a fragmented way that pays little meaningful attention to the underlying structural roots of their economic marginalization.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued for the analytical importance of the ways in which development processes shape the implementation of women's economic empowerment norms at the ground level of practice and intersect with norm meaning. In the context of a weak government beneficiary who could not exert ownership over the broader development agenda, as described in Chapter 4, donors have been left to dictate their own agendas, allowing development logics to flourish, thus circumscribing the meaning of women's economic empowerment. By bringing the aid effectiveness literature into conversation with the IR norms scholarship, the chapter has highlighted how the short-term nature of donor interventions and the pressure to produce immediate results limited and distorted what economic empowerment for women means in practice, reducing it to interventions which satisfy these pressures. As one EU official summarised 'if it's left up to donors, they go left and right, to do things that are

[52] Interview with civil society representative and gender consultant, online, April 2024.

more easily implemented...why would you bang your head against the wall to find a plot for your money to be allocated [to build a kindergarten] and you know they have a timeline that you need to implement them, rather than just opting for fancy active labour market measures, regardless of the long-term impact, if it's there or not?'[53]

Most importantly, this chapter has shown how short-term, results-driven development logics create a disconnect between the rhetoric and reality of women's economic empowerment – that is, between what IOs *think* and *aim* to do and what they actually achieve in practice, and how this is ultimately divorced from the lived experiences and needs of women in Kosovo. Indeed, for all the emphasis on formal accountability to donor governments and tax-payers, at the same time, IOs operate with little local accountability to women on the ground. In this chapter, I have argued that this is due at least in part to the fact that international organizations limit the meaning of women's economic empowerment and how it can be achieved in such a way that it fits with organizational logics which value the delivery of rapid, demonstrable outputs. It is much easier to produce immediate, measurable results in areas such as female entrepreneurship compared to complex processes of changing patriarchal structures and social norms around gendered divisions of labour. As one SDC official noted, 'it's always this conflict between the aid agencies' agendas, reporting on results and the real needs on the ground.'[54] The issues discussed in this chapter are by no means unique to Kosovo and take place against a backdrop of what Bächtold has described as an 'increasing technocratisation and managerialisation with the emergence of a "focus on results"' within the international aid architecture over the past 15 years. By exploring how the focus on short-term results and accountability affects international interveners' intervention choices, the chapter sheds light on the role of these practices in the reproduction of gendered inequalities. The findings in this

[53] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.
[54] Interview with senior national programme officer, Prishtina, November 2022.

chapter also reveal interesting parallels with the 'post-development' literature, such as Ferguson's *Anti-Politics Machine*, which similarly identified a disjuncture between IO culture and on the ground policy implementation as a result of the tendency to rely on depoliticised, 'technical' solutions.[55] These works have important implications for how norms travel (or not) in IR; however they have rarely been connected with one another. This chapter builds on and seeks to go beyond these accounts by bridging these two areas of scholarship, showing how the focus on short-term results and accountability, as Bächtold has argued, similarly acts as an 'anti-politics' machine which foregrounds technocratic solutions and depoliticises gender interventions by leaving structural inequalities unaddressed.[56] This has, in turn, not only made aid less 'effective', but also changed what economic empowerment means for women in practice.

Thus, elements of women's economic empowerment which arguably would lead to more sustainable, gender-transformative change, have been marginalized in favour of quick-fix projects for women such as the provision of grants and job creation. This is not to say that none of these interventions has been successful in creating jobs for women, but that the effects have been limited and unpredictable, and without long-term impact evaluations. This helps explain why, as shown throughout this thesis, there has been a disjuncture between international interventions and women's lived realities. This disjuncture has undercut the international community's ability to achieve their organizational objectives of increasing women's labour force participation, while at the same time also acknowledging that merely entering the labour force does not equate to economic empowerment, an issue which will be discussed further in the following chapter.

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[55] See, for example, James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: University Press, 1990); Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford, Conn: Kumarian Press, 1998).
[56] Bächtold, 'The Rise of an Anti-Politics Machinery'.

Chapter 6: Lost in Implementation: Unpaid Work and Social Reproduction at the Domestic Level

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have explored the role of inter-organizational coordination and donor political economies in contributing to the fragmented implementation of women's economic empowerment norms in Kosovo. This chapter takes a closer look at economic empowerment in practice, detailing how economic empowerment measures and in particular normative commitments to women's unpaid care work have been operationalized at the ground level. More specifically, this chapter explores the disconnect between global and organizational-level commitments to women's unpaid care work by international actors on the one hand, and the reality of economic empowerment implementation on the ground on the other.

As described in Chapter 3, women's unpaid care work as a driver of gender inequality is present in key global normative gender frameworks such as the BPfA, CEDAW and most recently the 2030 Agenda. These frameworks thus serve as normative frameworks with transformative potential, by laying the foundations for a holistic approach to economic empowerment which addresses women's labour force participation in parallel with the social aspects which enable women to fully participate in the labour force. For instance, as Rai et al. argue, 'The SDGs provide a framework that can be used to develop gender-sensitive policies by the regenerating state.'[1] In recent years, there has also been growing attention to unpaid care at an international level by IFIs such as the World Bank, the IMF and the EBRD, with numerous publications touting the importance of addressing women's unpaid care burden.[2] The

[1] Rai, True, and Tanyag, 'From Depletion to Regeneration', 579.
[2] For example, see IMF, 'Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid Work: Stronger Policies to Support Gender Equality', 2019; UN Women, 'Promoting women's economic empowerment: Recognizing and investing in the

International Labour Organization (ILO) in particular has played a key role in shedding light on the unequal distribution of unpaid care and bringing the issue to the attention of organizations which have traditionally pursued neoliberal and capitalist economic policies, involving austerity measures that restrict public expenditure.[3] On the one hand, evidence of increased commitments to the 'care agenda' and growing recognition of the gendered relationship between production and social reproduction is encouraging. For example, in 2021 the World Bank committed to supporting childcare expansion as part of the IDA20 Replenishment.[4] In contrast to earlier feminist scholarship which rightfully emphasised the international community's complete blindness to women's unpaid economic contributions, there has undoubtedly been a significant shift in the level of awareness amongst IOs regarding the need to address women's unpaid care burden, primarily to enable women to work.[5] As such, we are now faced with a very different set of institutional factors where the World Bank and UN agencies are discussing care work and informal care economies, particularly in a post-COVID context, but at the same time, how do we explain the inconsistencies in implementation at a local level?

A closer analysis of economic empowerment in practice in Kosovo suggests that there has been a hollowing out of the women's economic empowerment agenda and that despite shifts in global discourses on care work, implementation has been inconsistent and haphazard. Whilst it is thus important to recognize the progress particularly over the past decade, it is

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care economy'; ILO and UN Women: A guide to public investments in the care economy; ILO, 'Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work', 2018; UN Women, 'Why we care about care? A collection of essays in English on Care Economy', 2016.

[3] See, for example, International Labour Organization, 'Empowering Women at Work Government Laws and Policies for Gender Equality', 2020.

[4] For example, see 'IDA20 Special Theme: Gender and Development', June 2021, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/680341625067486855/pdf/IDA20-Special-Theme-Gender-and-Development.pdf.

[5] See, for example, True and Hozić, 'Don't Mention the War! IFIs and the Gendered Circuits of Violence in Post-Conflict'. Citing Roberts and Soederberg, True and Hozić note that '[IFIs] approach to gender equality and women's empowerment stresses the need only to increase women's labour market participation and entrepreneurship rather than to recognise and support women's existing unpaid economic contributions (Roberts & Soederberg, 2012).'

equally important to critically analyse how the growing awareness of the role and importance of the care economy has been translated and implemented by different international organizations and what this means ultimately for addressing and redressing gendered inequalities. Through this analysis, this chapter reveals how certain elements of the 'content' of the women's economic empowerment norm that has been approved internationally get implemented and certain other elements end up being marginalised.

This chapter seeks to show, first, how women's economic empowerment has been operationalised in the Kosovo context, through analysing the concrete actions taken by IOs in the name of women's economic empowerment and in particular the implementation (or lack thereof) of normative commitments to women's unpaid work.[6] It is worth noting that the chapter does not seek to provide an exhaustive analysis or mapping of every single economic empowerment intervention but rather focuses on gauging the overall approach to WEE by the international community. Second, this chapter shows how unpaid care work and social reproduction has been consistently marginalised within economic empowerment interventions and broader macro-economic and social policies. Third, it analyses IO discourses for the limited engagement with the care economy. Finally, and most importantly, throughout the chapter, I show how in marginalising the care agenda, IOs have further entrenched and failed to challenge patriarchal structures in the economic domain. As Musliu and Chao have recently

[6] While this chapter focuses on economic empowerment interventions specifically, it recognises the broader macro-economic context of internationally led neoliberal economic recovery processes in post-war Kosovo. Kosovo was subject to the same externally-promoted economic restructuring and reforms as elsewhere in the Western Balkans. Feminist scholars have pointed out the detrimental gendered effects of post-war privatisation and austerity measures which maintain gendered circuits of violence and deepen gender inequalities. In Kosovo, the effects of such post-war reforms are visible in the under-investment in social infrastructure, including healthcare and education, as well as other care infrastructure. See, e.g., Rita Augestad Knudsen, 'Privatization in Kosovo: "Liberal Peace" in Practice', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 7, no. 3 (1 September 2013): 287–307; Mustafa, 'Early Childhood Education and Care in Kosovo', 382. For the gendered effects of post-war economic reform processes on women, see, for example, Bojičić-Dželilović and Hozić, 'Taxing for Inequalities', 1285–89; Daniela Lai, 'Macroeconomic Interventions and the Politics of Postwar Justice', *Politics & Gender* 16, no. 3 (September 2020): e14; Jacqui True et al., 'A Feminist Perspective on Post-Conflict Restructuring and Recovery: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina', 2017, 71; True and Hozić, 'Don't Mention the War! IFIs and the Gendered Circuits of Violence in Post-Conflict'; Jennifer G. Mathers, 'Women, War and Austerity: IFIs and the Construction of Gendered Economic Insecurities in Ukraine', *Review of International Political Economy* 27, no. 6 (1 November 2020): 1235–56.

observed, given 'Kosovo's unprecedented exposure to Western interventionism and statebuilding', many works of IR start from the premise that liberal interventionism in Kosovo, as well as in other contexts, is normatively more progressive than the previous system, and inherently promotes gender progressiveness and gender equality.[7] This chapter contributes to the limited critical feminist literature on Kosovo's statebuilding experience, by demonstrating that this is far from the case.

6.2 Economic empowerment in practice

As we saw in Chapter 2, the dominant (neo)liberal discourse of women's economic empowerment has portrayed it in instrumental terms, highlighting the added value of 'investing in women' and privileging individualist notions of empowerment. It is worth noting again that the neoliberal approach and understanding itself does not foreclose a focus on the care economy. Indeed, even the most neoliberal development organizations now recognise (in theory) the downsides of a significant part of the population being excluded from the labour market due to structural inequalities, notably caregiving responsibilities. In other words, the gradual awakening to the care economy has in large part been because of the persistent low rates of women's labour force participation in many parts of the world and the constraining effects on economic growth.[8] The implications of this approach – what it means to think about unpaid work primarily through the lens of it being a barrier to women's employment – will be discussed further below. This section takes a closer look at the projects stemming from this conceptualization of economic empowerment.

Women's economic empowerment has been pursued both as part of broader economic development projects alongside other 'target' groups such as minority communities, as well as

[7] Vjosa Musliu and Itziar Mujika Chao, *Feminist Encounters in Statebuilding: The Role of Women in Making the State in Kosovo* (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2024), 3.
[8] Bojičić-Dželilović and Hozić, 'Taxing for Inequalities', 1280–81.

through projects exclusively directed towards women. The latter modality has become increasingly popular over the past decade, with an increasing number of projects aimed at women specifically. Interventions targeting women's economic empowerment typically focussed on women business owners and entrepreneurs involving soft-skills development, networking opportunities, technical assistance, vocational trainings and the provision of resources, all with the aim of enabling women to become self-employed and enter the labour force, or strengthening existing women-led businesses. Programmes such as the EBRD's 'Women in Business', UN Women's entrepreneurship 'expos', USAID's 'Inclusive Economic Engagement', MCC's 'Women Entrepreneurs in Energy', UNDP's 'Self Employment Programme' within the Active Labour Market Measures are just a handful of examples of these kinds of programmes.[9] As discussed in Chapter 5, women entrepreneurs have also been supported financially through grants to women-owned businesses. Fostering entrepreneurship has also featured as a component in a number of other projects not specifically dedicated to women's economic empowerment, such as the EU-funded joint UN Women and UNDP post-Covid humanitarian assistance project discussed in Chapter 4, as well as in projects with other focuses such as peacebuilding and cultural heritage.[10] A 2012 SIDA gender analysis noted that 'In Kosovo, the few existing WEE measures tend to focus on entrepreneurs…There is a need to see WEE [Women's Economic Empowerment] in a broader perspective than the current focus on women entrepreneurs' suggesting that relatively little has changed over the past

[9] See EBRD 'About the Women in Business Programme', https://ebrdwomeninbusiness.com/about.xhtml; 'EU and UNDP support Kosovo women entrepreneurs and livelihoods of their families', USAID 'Inclusive Economic Engagement', https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-08/Inclusive%20Economic%20Engagement%20Activity_Final%202023.pdf; MCC, 'MFK launches WEE Program to empower Women Entrepreneurs', https://millenniumkosovo.org/mfk-launches-wee-program-to-empower-women-entrepreneurs/; See also, GIZ 'Support of female entrepreneurs in Kosovo: Supporting Women-Owned Businesses in Kosovo', https://www.k-w4w.org/site/assets/files/1898/support_of_female_entrepreneurs_in_kosovo_2021_1.pdf.

[10] UNDP project entitled 'Cultural Heritage as a Driver for the Economic Revival of Janjevë.', see https://www.undp.org/kosovo/projects/cultural-heritage-driver-economic-revival-janjeve/janjevo.

decade in terms of women's economic empowerment modalities.[11] These interventions are thought to 'empower' women by enabling them to enter the work force and become self-reliant. As one civil society representative put it,

> I think there is a thought out there that, if we support women entrepreneurs, we supported women. But I think there's a failure to recognize that that's a tiny percentage of women in Kosovo who can actually become a woman entrepreneur. So you're not genuinely supporting women's economic empowerment, because you're only supporting a few people and that's great, and we should empower women entrepreneurs, for sure. But that's not where all the resourcing should go… There's a lot of other women out there who we should support, who are not necessarily entrepreneurial, but they can work and they can be empowered economically.[12]

The international community's emphasis on entrepreneurship is not unique to Kosovo. Isaković and Mlinarević argued that there had been an increase in the number of women-specific economic empowerment interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina which were similarly 'firmly confined to a neoliberal understanding of the relationship between women and the economy, privileging entrepreneurship, and measuring empowerment through individual successes instead of collective gains.'[13]

This is not to say that structural inequalities have been entirely overlooked, for example USAID led a substantial program on property rights in 2014, which is another barrier to women's economic empowerment as women frequently lack collateral to access finance opportunities.[14] The EU were also involved in assisting the Kosovo government with amendments to the property rights legislation. There have also been limited efforts to economically empower women by breaking gendered occupational stereotypes with initiatives aiming to get women into STEM fields.[15] However, despite some deviations from this theme

[11] Ulf Färnsveden and Nicole Farnsworth, 'Gender Study in Kosovo: Review of the Implementation of the Law and Program of Gender Equality in Kosovo', 2012.
[12] Interview with civil society representative, online, April 2024.
[13] Isaković and Mlinarević, 'Sustainable Transitions to Peace Need Women's Groups and Feminists', 184.
[14] USAID Kosovo, 'Property Rights Program: Final Report' July 2019. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TS6J.pdf.
[15] UNDP has been active in this field through the 'Global Engineer Girls' project, https://www.undp.org/kosovo/projects/global-engineer-girls-kosovo.

and some positive exceptions, the sheer number of programmes on entrepreneurship and grants to women-owned businesses, compared to the very few dedicated attempts to address the care economy, was striking. The vast majority of examples mentioned by interviewees focused exclusively on helping women enter the labour market through trainings and provision of resources, either enabling them to find employment or become self-employed. It is not that these interventions are 'bad' in and of themselves; they may benefit some women through increasing their incomes and offering a sense of independence. It is that, for over two decades, they have been implemented with very little consideration of the structural inequalities in the labour market, in particular women's unpaid care work burden, as will be discussed further below. In doing so, they have (re)produced gendered inequalities by maintaining gendered divisions of labour which burden women with the lion's share of caretaking responsibilities.

On the whole, the international community's approach appears to have been one which pursues formal employment without considering the root causes of women's exclusion. Several interviewees acknowledged the weaknesses of this approach. As one gender advisor noted,

> This is where the donor community comes in: they think that if they support women, or if they push for more women to be included in the labour market without resolving these other things, it's going to be possible… I think there's no sort of system in place that says we have to first resolve this, or resolve this while we are supporting women...

This approach is exacerbated by the fact that, as discussed in Chapter 4, there has been weak coordination between international organizations. As a senior UN official stated, in the realm of economic empowerment 'I think it's been more siloed, individual initiatives. And many actors kind of wanting to do something visible, something to leave their mark. I mean, all good intentions, but I think that there's so much more that would be needed.'[16]

[16] Interview with senior UNDP official, Prishtina, October 2022.

6.3 Pretending to care about care?

Despite its growing importance and invocation by international actors, the translation of commitments to addressing women's unpaid care burden from global normative frameworks to the practical implementation of women's economic empowerment in Kosovo tended to be ad-hoc and incoherent at best. Most IO staff were aware of the importance of unpaid care, particularly gender specialist staff. However, the data revealed that often this individual level of awareness was not reflected at an institutional level by senior management and/or at the level of organizational activities. The analysis reveals two primary kinds of implementation gaps in this regard: first, that in the implementation of projects or the measures that were proposed, considerations of unpaid care work were not reflected at all. Second, when unpaid care work *was* considered, it was often reflected in ways which were not holistic, or actually furthered existing gendered domestic social institutions instead of challenging them. The following sections explore the question of how IOs have considered women's unpaid care work in interventions in Kosovo, arguing that when it comes to implementation, interventions have largely overlooked the key elements highlighted by feminist scholars, namely the reduction and recognition of unpaid care work.

6.3.1. Strategy-implementation gaps

Several interviewees spoke candidly about the organizational shortcomings with regards to the approach to women's economic empowerment and the fact that the care economy had not been a forefront policy issue. One senior EU official noted that 'for sure a holistic approach to economic empowerment of women or to any topic related to women or even gender equality has been lacking from the side of the donors but also government.'[17] A senior UNDP official

[17] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.

noted that 'For some reason the care economy, I mean, it's not been a huge priority in Kosovo so far…it's still something that's not been a huge priority here.'[18] A UN Women official agreed, observing that unpaid care and the care economy is 'something that actually in Kosovo, it hasn't been addressed, really. It's a big problem.'[19] The gap between normative commitments and policy practice was particularly evident amongst several organizations which included unpaid care in their organizational strategy documents yet had not operationalized these elements in the Kosovo context. It was often at the point of translating organizational priorities from documentation into practice that considerations of unpaid care work were lost. For example, unpaid care work was included as a key strategic priority for UNDP since 2018 under 'Signature Solution 6', which calls for 'strengthen[ing] gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls', including 'removing structural barriers to women's economic empowerment, including women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care work.'[20] However, several UNDP staff noted that there had been no programmes targeting unpaid care work, despite it also emerging as a major theme in the UN joint socio-economic impact assessments during the COVID crisis.[21] Potential ways for international organizations to address women's unpaid care work are laid out in numerous guidance documents and practical intervention guides on care economy interventions and how to include care economy in project designs. However again, relatively little of this had been implemented in Kosovo.[22] A common

[18] Interview with senior UNDP official, Prishtina, October 2022.
[19] Interview with senior UN Women official, Prishtina, November 2022.
[20] UNDP, 'UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021'; UNDP, 'UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2021'.
[21] United Nations Kosovo Team, 'Rapid Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of Covid-19 in Kosovo'; United Nations Kosovo Team, 'Rapid Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of Covid-19 in Kosovo – 2'; United Nations Kosovo Team, 'Rapid Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of Covid-19 in Kosovo – 3'.
[22] See, for example, UN Women and ILO, 'A Guide to Public Investments in the Care Economy Policy Support Tool for Estimating Care Deficits, Investment Costs and Economic Returns', 2021; Swiss Development Cooperation SDC, 'Gender and Unpaid Care Work', 2017; Helvetas 'Unpaid care work: Practical Guidance on Analysis and Intervention Design', 2017; Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 'Entry Points to Recognise, Reduce and Redistribute. Quick Guide to What and How: Unpaid Care Work', (Ser. Women's Economic Empowerment), 2012; Anna Fälth and Mark Blackden, UNDP/BDP Brief on Gender Equality and Unpaid Care Work, 2009; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'Guide to Producing Time Use Statistics Measuring Paid and Unpaid Work', 2005.

recommendation is to include, for example, unpaid care analyses during project inception phases and time-use surveys.[23] According to one Country Director of a Swiss development organization, 'it's like we have all the expertise and we have this knowledge [on unpaid care work], and we don't do it here. We don't use it here. It's frustrating.'[24]

In the context of UNDP specifically, the lack of attention to the care economy was surprising for two further reasons, first since they are known in Kosovo for their long-standing work on facilitating labour market access through the flagship 'Active Labour Market Measures' programme [ALMP] and second, since there has been a substantial, long-running care economy component within the ALMP in neighbouring North Macedonia.[25] A UNDP North Macedonia staff member noted that even though these kinds of programmes are 'more than necessary in Kosovo', no one from UNDP Kosovo had approached them to seek expertise on this issue.[26] One ALMP staff member in Kosovo noted that he was not aware of the programme in Macedonia, and that so far they had not been able to incorporate considerations of unpaid care within the Kosovo ALMPs.[27] This was underscored in a 2022 evaluation of the Kosovo ALMPs, which recommended that the measures 'also consider subsidies to address disincentives and constraints – cover travel, and child- and elderly-care, or provide for flexible time arrangements. Greater availability of care-leave and widespread flexible working arrangements are important for the employment opportunities of young women.'[28] This demonstrates that not only had the ALMPs not tackled the care economy directly by trying to implement an equivalent programme to the one in North Macedonia, but they were also not

[23] SDC, 'Gender and Unpaid Care Work', 5.
[24] Interview with Country Coordinator, Prishtina, November 2022.
[25] The community works programme (CWP) in North Macedonia was launched in 2012 and has focussed on social services expansion and job creation, including care for elderly, disabled individuals, and pre-school children. See UN Women, 'Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment: Recognizing and Investing in the Care Economy', 2018, p. 48.
[26] Interview with UNDP North Macedonia staff member, online, April 2024.
[27] Interview with UNDP Kosovo ALMP project manager, November 2022.
[28] Silviya Todorova, Artan Avdiu, 'Final Evaluation of the Active Labour Market Programmes 2 Project in Kosovo (ALMP2)', 2022, 103.

care responsive insofar as they failed to account for and mitigate care burdens to enable more women to benefit from the measures, despite featuring in UNDP's global gender strategy for at least 5 years prior to data collection. As mentioned above, whilst measures such as subsidies only mitigate the impact of the unequal distribution of unpaid work and do not provide a sustainable solution to the problem, the very fact that even these measures have not been included demonstrates the extent to which the social reproductive burden had been overlooked. Similarly, UN Women had also not worked directly on the care economy, despite having specific policy tools designed with ILO for this purpose.[29] As shall be shown below, there are several reasons behind these discrepancies between organizational-level commitments and policy implementation. However, it is evident that considerations of unpaid care had been marginalised, even by organizations which emphasise it in their strategy documents, suggesting that there is a strategy-implementation gap between official organizational positions on the care economy and the travelling of this concept to the regional and country levels. Additionally, some projects identified the challenge of unpaid care in research, however it was then not included as a key area of intervention. For example, research conducted under the Swiss 'Enhancing Youth Employment' project identified the unpaid care burden as a challenge, noting that 'women are expected to take care of children, mainly doing housework, which is an unpaid job. Young or middle-aged people are expected to care for parents and elderly family members.'[30] However, this element was not subsequently included in the scope of the project recommendations. Similarly, USAID had only addressed women's unpaid care work relatively superficially, stating that 'the mission recognizes this challenge and continues to address it when possible by encouraging greater women's participation – for example the mission

[29] Interview with senior UN Women official, Prishtina, November 2022.
[30] Vladimir Živković, 'Why the Employment Market System Doesn't Work for Everyone in Kosovo', 2022.

organizes the capacity building and training activities for women at times and venues where women can easily join.'[31]

6.3.2. Addressing the consequence not the cause

Where there had been efforts to address women's care burden, these often took the form of interventions which served to address the consequences rather than the problems themselves by bringing employment opportunities to women at home, enabling women to reconcile work and care responsibilities. When asked how they had considered women's unpaid care burden within their programming, many IO staff members replied that although they were not working on the care economy directly, they recognised the role of women's care responsibilities in hindering their ability to join the labour market and had sought to address this in their programming. For example, one senior UNDP official noted that they were 'not directly looking at just the care economy but looking at also how to provide employment opportunities for women working either full-time or part time from home. I think that that's been more of our focus, and hopefully, we will be able to do more in this area moving forward', citing the creative industries such as artisanal work or the sewing and the fashion industry as potential home-based industries.[32] Another UN staff member stated that through the ALMPs, 'we have a lot of women, for example, that are self-employed, and they just go in the training, they get the grant, they're working at home. They're caring for the kids, but they're just selling the goods as well. So somehow we did it, but not directly.'[33] Another large donor noted that although they try to deal with the root causes, for example through changing social norms, 'if nothing helps to include more women in work and if they really cannot leave the house, then what we

[31] Email correspondence, USAID Kosovo, November 2023. USAID also noted that during the early stages of USAID's work in Kosovo, the mission invested in building and refurbishing the childcare institutions. However, the mission's strategic development objectives have shifted from building infrastructure to building the capacities of Kosovo government institutions, private sector and civil society organizations hence, currently the mission is not investing in childcare and care infrastructure.
[32] Interview with senior UNDP official, Prishtina, October 2022.
[33] Interview with UNDP Kosovo ALMP project manager, November 2022.

did, for example as one of our activities was to introduce the women [to] online work...So these are the ways we tried to do it, to bring them into the labour market.'[34]

The notion that online work from home and the purported flexibility it offers is an employment solution for women is problematic from a feminist political economic perspective given the likelihood that 'flexibility' simply means enabling women to both work – being integrated in the labour market – *and* also take care of children, which essentializes the needs of women. Underpinning such projects is the notion that they allow women to combine paid and unpaid work and achieve 'work-life balance'. The substantial multi-phase 'Women in Online Work' (WoW) project, supported by a range of donors, is a case in point. As the former project director of the overarching 'Enhancing Youth Employment' project which encompassed WoW stated, 'eighty percent of women in Kosovo are not participating in the labor market at all…That means that most work is unpaid housework. For them, online work could provide a useful part time job.'[35] However, as Peterson argues, any purported benefits of more flexible work opportunities for women must be considered in the context of care availability.[36]

Other examples included efforts to work with the private sector to engage women aged 40-60, 'who are still very much capable to work, but they don't have time or capacity because of the care obligations that we mentioned to work full-time, but can work for several hours, let's say.'[37] Another employment project by the Swiss development organization Helvetas entitled 'Reconomy' targets women and youth and has promoted online freelancing as an avenue for employment opportunities. The project website proposes the concept of 'mompreneurs' and citing women's caregiving responsibilities, notes that 'a freelancing career,

[34] Interview with senior national programme officer, November 2022.
[35] Johannes Stenlund, 'Being Your Own Boss Online', *Kosovo 2.0*, June 2018, https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/author/johanness/.
[36] V. Spike Peterson, 'How (the Meaning of) Gender Matters in Political Economy', *New Political Economy* 10, no. 4 (December 2005): 509.
[37] Interview with senior UN Women official, Prishtina, November 2022.

while not being a solution to all such issues, offers several benefits to mothers, including a flexible schedule and the ability to work from home.'[38]

All of the interventions mentioned above pay very little attention to the issue of how to actually reduce and shift the unpaid care burden away from women outlined in global-level normative frameworks. In the case of Kosovo where there has been very little corresponding discussion of and efforts towards reducing and redistributing women's unpaid work, such interventions risk placing an even greater burden on women by leaving the gendered division of care work unchallenged. Such projects, perhaps unintentionally, (re)produce the notion that women can 'have it all', without considering the impact on women of being integrated in the labour market with no commensurate redistribution of unpaid care work within the household. As feminist scholars have pointed out, 'the devaluation or nonrecognition of social reproduction, including unpaid care labor, leads to the depletion of the wellbeing of individual women, households, and communities.'[39] These interventions thus highlight a critical issue: while institutions may be more cognizant of the unpaid care burdens shouldered by women, there is a danger that when it is merely viewed through the neoliberal prism of women's entry into the labour market, rather than women's collective empowerment, these interventions are very likely to actually reinforce patriarchal norms within the economic sphere. Returning to Cornwall's critique of 'empowerment lite' discussed in Chapter 2, although it may seem as if contemporary interventions offer women more options than choosing 'between raising chickens or cows', their agency remains circumscribed if participating in the labour market merely constitutes a double or triple burden. In other words, just because international interventions may appear to be accounting for the 'structural' roots of women's labour market

[38] See Gender and Social Inclusion at Reconomy: Right Size Fits All', https://www.reconomyprogram.com/knowledge-hub/gender-equity-and-social-inclusion-at-reconomy-right-size-fits-all/.
[39] Rai, True, and Tanyag, 'From Depletion to Regeneration', 564.

exclusion, it does not mean they are dealing with the roots of those structural issues. Whilst such interventions may provide women with more income, they are fundamentally about individual growth and betterment and are unlikely to lead to transformative change for most women, especially marginalized women. As Hozić and True have astutely argued, 'participation and recognition without redistribution will not deliver peace or economic inclusion anywhere in the world.'[40]

6.3.3. Absence of holistic approaches

Another way in which unpaid care had been addressed is through the provision of early childhood institutions. However, these interventions were very recent at the time of this research and were not holistic as they had uniformly been approached from the perspective of early childhood education, which has implications for the extent to which interventions actually reduce women's unpaid care burden. For example, both the EU and World Bank, two major donors in Kosovo, had recently initiated projects focusing on childcare services. It is worth noting that these projects were extremely recent at the time of this research and prior to this period, very few donors had focussed on early childhood education.[41] As discussed in Chapter 3, access to early childhood education is a significant issue in Kosovo and numerous municipalities faced a shortage of affordable, public childcare facilities, with some having none until very recently. While efforts had been made to address this shortfall by constructing more facilities, the supply still falls far short of meeting demand.[42] A World Bank staff member noted that 'the main priority right now is how to increase access and coverage of early childhood

[40] True and Hozić, 'Don't Mention the War! IFIs and the Gendered Circuits of Violence in Post-Conflict', 1206–7.
[41] Interview with civil society representative, online, April 2024.
[42] For example, Artan Mustafa notes that 'the number of public creches, kindergartens and daycare 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' in Mustafa, 'Early Childhood Education and Care in Kosovo', 383.

education. And through that to help release the labour force, which is in this case is women and release them from the care of children and make them future labour workforce.'[43] A senior EU official stated that while the EU had previously allocated funds for constructing several kindergartens under IPA II (2014-2020), they were hoping to focus more on kindergartens under IPA III (2021-2027), but that this was a very recent focus as the emphasis had previously been on higher education. Furthermore, the pace of implementation had been extremely slow; out of the 7 kindergartens programmed in 2016 under IPA II, only one had been completed, with 6 still currently under construction at the time of writing.[44] The same official noted that the EU could have previously been much more proactive in supporting the government to fulfil the conditionalities for EU funding for care facilities, particularly around identifying plots of land. She noted that 'we went [to the government] with the project and the condition was that you clear all ownership issues, license, property, and everything is in order, so we can just bring in the money…it's like we came up to a certain point and the government was right there but then there was a gap between us, that might not be easy for them to fill and we didn't care so we put a condition for the land.'[45] By contrast, another EU staff member blamed the government for these lengthy processes, stating that they 'would be very slow in identifying a public plot of land and then they would have a lot of issues around property and ownership.'[46]

Whilst improving access to affordable quality early childhood education can be an important way of alleviating the unpaid care burden, the prioritisation of childcare and the early childhood development framing resulted in other aspects of care being overlooked. As one gender expert noted, recent work on early childhood development is 'targeted to best interests of the child, not empowering women and girls. It's two trains, if you don't connect it, then you

[43] Interview with World Bank staff members, Prishtina, November 2022.
[44] Email correspondence with EU official, April 2024.
[45] Interview with senior EU official, November 2022.
[46] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.

end up only doing childhood. What about elderly care?'[47] Similarly, a former UN staff member noted, 'in the region everyone thinks about childcare, period, that's it. But that's not the only component.'[48] The extent of the elderly care crisis was visible in 2022 when the physical abuse of a dementia patient in one of Kosovo's few elderly care homes sent shockwaves across the country, which the Director of the AGE described as a 'red flag.'[49] Many interviewees brought up the struggles of having to look after their own ageing parents, noting that they were also in a relatively more privileged position than most of the population due to their positions as senior civil servants or in international organizations.[50] The importance of framings has been highlighted by the social policy literature, which emphasises that discourse paradigms play a key role in determining the nature of policy aims and measures.[51] For example, whether 'men and women have the same access to leisure time or power resources, or if unpaid work is divided unequally between the sexes' is a key element of the gender equality perspective, but less important from a social investment standpoint.[52] The emphasis on discourses of human capital development and economic growth ignores the unmet care needs of other groups in society such as the elderly and long-term sick or disabled, who may be less economically 'viable' but who have a right to care, which would also help transform currently unpaid care into paid work opportunities, particularly for women.[53] The fact that both the EU and the World

[47] Interview with international gender advisor, Prishtina, November 2022.
[48] Interview with former UN Women regional staff member, online, March 2022.
[49] Interview with senior government official for gender equality, Prishtina, November 2022.
[50] Interview with World Bank staff members, Prishtina, November 2022; Interview with senior UN Women official, Prishtina, November 2022; Interview with senior government official for gender equality, Prishtina, November 2022; Interview with development organization Country Director, Prishtina, November 2022.
[51] Elena Zacharenko and Anna Elomäki, 'Constructions of Care in EU Economic, Social, and Gender Equality Policy: Care Providers and Care Recipients versus the Needs of the Economy?', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 29, no. 4 (1 December 2022): 1314–35; Ivana Dobrotić, 'Challenges to the Europeanisation of Work-Care Policies in the Western Balkans', *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy* 38, no. 2 (July 2022): 165–79; Diana Auth and Hanne Martinek, 'Social Investment or Gender Equality? Aims, Instruments, and Outcomes of Parental Leave Regulations in Germany and Sweden', in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 153–76.
[52] Auth and Martinek, 'Social Investment or Gender Equality?', 156.
[53] Razavi, 'The Political and Social Economy of Care in a Development Context', 31.

Bank, two of the largest donors in Kosovo, framed their work on childcare from the perspective of childhood development rather as part of a comprehensive approach to the care economy matters politically.[54] By not adopting and emphasising a holistic, inclusive approach to the care economy, the Kosovo government is thus unlikely to adopt such an approach either.

Finally, UN Women stated that they had recently sought to tackle the unpaid care through a regional programme on gender responsive budgeting (GRB).[55] As discussed in Chapter 4, GRB can support the care economy through influencing financing for care infrastructure. GRB had facilitated the construction of childcare institutions. For example, in the municipality of Gjakovë 'in 2021, two public kindergartens were successfully constructed, the first investment of this kind since 1981.'[56] However, despite this positive example, the UN Women GRB project was neither focussed specifically on the care economy, and thus had not been strategically planned to tackle this issue, nor had it been connected to national-level policy dialogue on the care economy. A more holistic approach might involve encouraging and assisting the government to collect time-use data, to conduct analyses of care sector coverage gaps (including childcare but also elderly care and long-term care for the sick and disabled) and costings of the care economy, and initiating national-level policy dialogue on the care economy highlighting the value of women's unpaid care work and promoting spending on social infrastructure, all of which contribute to framing care as a public good. Without central-level discourse and awareness-raising, GRB will remain piecemeal and insufficient, particularly in the context of Kosovo where there have been significant challenges to

[54] See for example, a press release by the World Bank, 'Kosovo Prioritizes Early Childhood Development to Build Human Capital and Promote Prosperity', February 2022, which makes no mention of early childhood education from the perspective of gender equality. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/02/23/kosovo-prioritizes-early-childhood-development-to-build-human-capital-and-promote-prosperity.
[55] Interview with UN Women official, Prishtina, November 2022; Interview with UN Women staff member, Prishtina, April 2022.
[56] UN Women, 'Embracing Gender Responsive Budgeting in Western Balkans Initiatives in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia', 2023, 13.

implementing GRB at the central and local levels.[57] Ultimately, GRB is a policy tool which can contribute to operationalizing the concept of care economy, but must be accompanied by and connected to national-level policy dialogue on the care economy in order to be effective. Moreover, the effectiveness of GRB as a tool to address gendered inequalities has been questioned by feminist scholars, particularly in the context of Western Balkans. For example, Bojičić-Dželilović and Hozić point out that structural constraints, pursued by IFIs, limit the effectiveness of GRB which tends to focus on budget process and expenditure over gender-unequal revenue mobilization.[58]

6.4 IO discourses on unpaid work

As can be seen then, considerations of unpaid work in practice during the implementation phase, if reflected upon at all, have so far been fulfilled in ways which target the symptoms not the cause of women's economic marginalisation, or through disjointed and incoherent efforts, lacking a comprehensive approach. This section turns to analysing some of the discourses deployed by international actors for their limited engagement with the care economy within their programmes in Kosovo. Whilst scholars have observed that the care economy has been neglected in the broader Western Balkans region[59], the discourses and practices of IOs on this topic on the ground have not been analysed. As translators of global norms to country-level, unpacking practitioner discourses and narratives is crucial in order to understand implementation gaps and bottlenecks. Their accounts are useful data points as they reveal much about IO perspectives on economic empowerment and priorities in implementation. It is

[57] For example, a GRB consultant engaged with the UN Women project noted that technical issues such as the lack of results-based budgeting had posed a significant challenge to implementation of GRB in practice, along with a lack of capacities, knowledge and political will. She anticipated that the public finance management system was likely to transition to results-based budgeting soon, but was not aware of the timeframe. These challenges were echoed by other interviewees, for example Interview with EU Economic Officer, Prishtina, April 2022.
[58] Bojičić-Dželilović and Hozić, 'Taxing for Inequalities'. See also True and Hozić, 'Don't Mention the War! IFIs and the Gendered Circuits of Violence in Post-Conflict'.
[59] Isaković and Mlinarević, 'Sustainable Transitions to Peace Need Women's Groups and Feminists'; True et al., 'A Feminist Perspective on Post-Conflict Restructuring and Recovery: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina'.

particularly important given the increasing acknowledgement and attention to the care economy by IOs in recent years, especially in the wake of the COVID pandemic. While narratives and justifications varied among organizations and individuals, they shared and reinforced a common theme: the care economy has and continues to be relegated, as Enloe puts it, to the patriarchal time zone of 'later'.[60] This section is structured around three prominent narratives that emerged from interviews with IOs. First, narratives which attributed the marginalisation of interventions addressing unpaid care work to the government; second, perceptions of the care economy as separate from other economic development initiatives; and third, organizational-level factors which contributed to institutional inertia.

6.4.1. It hasn't been a government priority

Many IOs stressed government constraints as an obstacle to working on the care economy more comprehensively or at all. For example, one senior UN official stated that 'we respond to the needs that are articulated, in the national development strategies, and in the government programmes, so, for example, the areas that are emerging for us, are very much also a reflection of what are the key priorities for the government, in a way, and I think that they're here, I mean, it's not a theme that has been actively discussed.'[61] Similarly, a World Bank staff-member noted that they are 'client driven' and explained with regards to their very recent focus on early-childhood care that 'historically, the main focus in education, also from the counterpart side, from the government side, has been on primary education and higher-level education. So early childhood has never been...hasn't been a priority, or that much of a priority until these past few years.'[62] When asked whether they had considered taking a more

[60] Cynthia H. Enloe, *The Curious Feminist Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 215.
[61] Interview with senior UNDP official, Prishtina, October 2022.
[62] Interview with World Bank staff members, November 2022.

comprehensive approach to the care economy and working on elderly care alongside their work on childcare, an EU staff-member responded 'Because the government needs to get started on that... When you don't have proper legislation, when you don't have proper mechanisms. Also if you look from a financial perspective, how can you invest, you have to have some responsibility for how you invest taxpayers' money.'[63] In contrast, as discussed in Chapter 5, issues of sustainability and value-for-money had not been a forefront consideration in projects supporting grants for women-owned businesses, for example. When asked whether they would consider supporting the government with analyses of the care sector a Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) programme manager replied 'Of course, they just need to ask, they just need to know what they need, that's the problem, they don't articulate their needs, because they don't know what the problem is. Here, I think the biggest issue is not knowing what the problem is.'[64] A UN Women official stated that the biggest challenge to working on the care economy was 'political will. It has to come also from the institutions, decision makers, mainly, to understand the importance.'[65] A senior UN Women HQ echoed this sentiment, claiming that 'as much as it's a dialogue, policy arenas are not arenas where you dictate to sovereign governments.'[66] However, by contrast, evidence indicates that this frequently happens in practice, particularly in a heavily internationalized context like Kosovo.

Whilst it is true that donors have to align with government priorities in theory, according to DAC guidelines[67], there is ample evidence that this is not the case in practice. Although it is true that the extent to which different organizations are able to influence the government varies, in general blanket statements regarding government-led statebuilding and development

[63] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.
[64] Interview with senior national programme officer, November 2022.
[65] Interview with senior UN Women official, Prishtina, November 2022.
[66] Interview with senior UN Women HQ official, online, January 2023.
[67] OECD, 'International Engagement in Fragile States: Can't we do Better?', 2011; OECD, 'Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations', 2007.

processes simultaneously over-emphasise the power of the government and downplay international actors' ability to lead the development agenda. This is particularly true in the field of gender equality, where women's civil society organizations and international organizations have historically taken the lead in advocating for gender-related topics such as justice for survivors of wartime sexual violence and implementing policy tools such as gender mainstreaming and GRB. Indeed, several interviewees acknowledged the ability of international actors to push forward policy issues in domains they considered important.[68] For instance, although the EU presents the IPA programming process as directed by the government, several interviewees noted that there is much scope for the EU to influence based on its own priorities. A senior EU official noted that 'Oh we direct it a lot. We also have our own agenda', citing the provision of the energy package in October 2022 during the European energy crisis.[69] She also noted that due to weak government capacities in Kosovo the EU has had more sway. Another EU staff member cited an example of an EU project on justice which was 'in theory written by the Ministry of Justice, but assisted by the [EU] task manager who told the Ministry of Justice people what the priorities were and where the money was going to be given.'[70] Similarly, another UN official agreed, stating that 'EU will work on everything that they decided they want to work on.'[71] The ability of donors to direct government priorities was further evident in that at the time of interviewing, the only sector which had a project 'priority list' was the energy sector. As a minister from the Ministry of Economic Development explained, 'because the focus of international donors was mainly in the energy sector… that

[68] Processes of international imposition have been criticised within the critical statebuilding literature, see e.g. Susanna Campbell, David Chandler, and Meera Sabaratnam, *A Liberal Peace?: The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011). However, the critical statebuilding literature has largely focused on the processes and manner through which policies are imposed and adopted without local consultation and collaborative development, rather than the content. By contrast, scholars of FPE criticise the *content* of neoliberal economic policies which they have shown to be detrimental to women.
[69] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.
[70] Interview with EU gender-specialist, Prishtina, March 2022.
[71] Interview with senior UNDP official, Prishtina, October 2022.

was the priority. This was an initiative that was considered as a priority by international donors. It's not that we came up with this idea and were very much interested in having this list of projects...It was something that was a requirement from international donors.'[72] Other policy areas which have been pushed by international actors include the rule of law, corruption, organized crime, readmission and reintegration, for example as part of the visa liberalisation conditions.[73] Beyond the EU, UNDP staff members recognised the influential role of UNDP in introducing the circular economy concept in Kosovo, 'at the time when no one was talking about circular economy here…I guess a lot of it also has to do with the personal passions of the senior leadership of the country office.'[74] A separate UNDP staff member agreed, noting that 'this is what happened with climate change, for example; it was not in the government priority list, and we really pushed this, not only us, but also different actors and players.'[75] This aligns with analyses of UNDP in other contexts. Campbell, for example, argues that 'in UNDP broadly, much decision-making power is given to the UNDP Resident Representative…the approach of the UNDP Resident Representative can have an important influence on how the UNDP country office responds to the evolving country context.'[76]

Such statements are further reinforced by the fact that donors frequently diverge from government objectives, highlighting an exaggerated emphasis on alignment with government priorities. For example, access to elderly care features in the 2020-2024 Kosovo Programme for Gender Equality under strategic objectives 1 and 2.[77] The Director of the AGE noted that

[72] Interview with minister from Ministry of Economic Development, Prishtina, April 2022.
[73] European Commission, 'Visa Liberalisation: Commission confirms Kosovo fulfils all required benchmarks', 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_4562.
[74] Interview with senior UNDP official, Prishtina, October 2022.
[75] Interview with UNDP gender specialist, Prishtina, November 2022.
[76] Campbell, 'International Organizations in Peacebuilding', 196.
[77] Office of the Prime Minister and Agency for Gender Equality, 'Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024', 10–11. Strategic Objective 1: 'providing access to quality social and family services, residential day care centres for the elderly and people with disabilities, thus facilitating women's access to the labour market' and Strategic Objective 2: 'creating opportunities and access to care services for children and the elderly', https://abgj.rks-

'I think we have missed elderly persons overall. We as institutions, at the same time, I didn't see any pioneering idea from the side of the donors. Nobody came to me and discussed that and that's a pity because it would provide good momentum.'[78] She also noted that, 'personally, even when we present [our priorities], it is not that I got any positive response [from the international community]'[79], suggesting that donors are not receptive to government priorities (at least regarding gender equality) even when they are clearly presented. This observation is further supported by the report on ODA (mis)alignment with national gender priorities, cited in Chapter 4.

More broadly, IO narratives that blame the government run counter to and obscure the asymmetrical power relationships that exist in general between IOs and local partners in Kosovo, especially in domains which are less electorally relevant, where the local partners are not so interested in claiming ownership to begin with, such as gender equality. Kosovar scholars have highlighted the unequal power dynamics between the international organizations and local partners which have characterised the international presence in Kosovo.[80] Although UNMIK's influence waned post-independence, 'it was replaced by an enhanced EU mission (EULEX) and EU, UN and NATO missions remain powerful actors in Kosovo today'[81] and 'the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund continued to play an important role in

gov.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/AGE%20Kosovo%20Program%20for%20Gender%20Equality%202020-2024.pdf

[78] Interview with senior government official for gender equality, Prishtina, November 2022.

[79] Interview with senior government official for gender equality, Prishtina, November 2022.

[80] Vjosa Musliu and Gëzim Visoka, 'Introduction: Local Critiques of Intervention and Statebuilding', in *Unravelling Liberal Interventionism*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 1–20; David Chandler, 'Kosovo: Statebuilding Utopia and Reality', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 13, no. 5 (2019): 545–55; Björkdahl and Gusic, '"Global" Norms and "Local" Agency'. The strong influence of donors on national policy processes and various forms of 'new' conditionality has been discussed in the development literature on aid effectiveness, see, for example: Malin Hasselskog, 'What Happened to the Focus on the Aid Relationship in the Ownership Discussion?', *World Development* 155 (1 July 2022): 105896; T. D. Harper-Shipman, *Rethinking Ownership of Development in Africa*, 1st ed., Routledge Studies in African Development (Routledge, 2019); Dornan, 'How New Is the "New" Conditionality?'; David Booth, 'Aid, Institutions and Governance: What Have We Learned?', *Development Policy Review* 29, no. s1 (2011): s5–26.

[81] Henry Redwood, Elena Morina, and Jeta Rexha, 'Towards Emancipatory Statebuilding in Kosovo? Spatial and Aesthetic Community Building After War', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 0, no. 0 (2024): 4.

policy design and supervision.'[82] Mustafa underscores the historically strong influence of IOs in the realm of social policy specifically, emphasising the unprecedented influence of IOs in Kosovo, and the fact that they encouraged privatisation and the 'familialisation' of care from the outset via their macroeconomic policies.[83] Although the Kurti administration has taken a stronger stance against the international community, which several interviewees cited as a positive development, this has primarily curbed international influence in 'high' politics realms such as foreign policy, rather than in 'low' politics domains such as social policy and gender equality. Indeed, in the domain of gender equality and social policy, the left-wing Kurti administration arguably provides more scope, rather than less, for international actors to pursue and advocate for progressive policy change. As Mustafa and Berisha have argued, whilst political parties have increasingly played a role in policy choices since independence, international actors, particularly the World Bank, IMF and the EU, maintain a strong influence in Kosovo. In their analysis of the Kosovo government's pandemic response, they note that 'the policy interaction of powerful global organisations with the government will remain influential in terms of ideas, discourses and direct involvement.'[84] In short, the government-led narrative, whilst not entirely untrue, also serves as a convenient excuse which masks a deeper issue which is the de-prioritization of the structural causes of women's economic exclusion and IO agendas falling short of transformative approaches to economically empowering women.

[82] Artan Mustafa, 'The Politics of Citizenship, Social Policy, and Statebuilding in Kosovo', in *Unravelling Liberal Interventionism*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2019), 167.
[83] The 'familisation' of care refers to the expectation that care will be provided by the family – usually by women – instead of by public services.
[84] Artan Mustafa and Butrint Berisha, 'Why Is Progressive Policy Reform in Kosovo Uncertain, despite the Accelerated Power Shift to the Left?', *Party Politics* 29, no. 5 (1 September 2023): 978.

6.4.2. Gender as separate

The idea that the government had not prioritised the care economy and therefore it had been challenging for international actors to work on this issue also reveals that despite the increasing emphasis on the care economy since the formulation of the SDGs, there is still a tendency to see gender equality (and the care economy in particular) as separate from other major areas of economic intervention, such as work on macroeconomic policies and supporting private sector development.[85] For example, there has been extensive donor support to the private sector which generates increased demand from the labour market. However, if such support is gender-blind and does not consider that by not addressing the care economy many women are automatically excluded from taking advantage of the increased demand, it is unlikely to have any significant impact on the majority of women. As one senior UN Women HQ official explained, 'you cannot anymore talk about women's economic empowerment without discussing the care economy; even if the focus is just on the productive work spheres, even that on the supply side and on the demand side has to do very much with the care economy….even if the government has decided that it wants to look just at the labour market issue. Well, unpaid care is not de-linked, it is, in fact, a labour market issue.'[86] Thus, even if the care economy per se has not been a government priority, women's labour market participation has been an issue therefore development actors should have been advocating for this. Another former UN Women regional staff member agreed, noting that 'The problem is

[85] The tendency for IFIs in particular to treat gender equality goals separately from broader macroeconomic policies during post-war development process has been highlighted by feminist scholars, for example in post-conflict contexts such as Bosnia. According to Mlinarević et al., 'The approach taken by the IFI's, such as IMF, towards gender equality since 2013 is to add female labour force participation to the list of issues considered "macro-critical"... While this recognition is indeed important, this approach still requires substantial adjustment as it neglects to analyse how conventional IFI policies may already impact or even undermine gender equality in range of spheres, including upon the capacity of women to engage in decent paid work.' True et al., 'A Feminist Perspective on Post-Conflict Restructuring and Recovery: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina', 9–10. For more on the distinction between macroeconomic policies and gendered inequalities, see also, Diane Elson and Nilufer Cagatay, 'The Social Content of Macroeconomic Policies', *World Development* 28, no. 7 (1 July 2000): 1347–64.

[86] Interview with senior UN Women HQ official, online, January 2023.

that gender equality again, and women's economic empowerment again, or women's empowerment in general is looked at as an issue separate and isolated from everything else. And as long as this is looked at like that, we will always have the same problem.'[87] Another country director echoed this sentiment, stating that 'let's be honest, the inclusion issue always comes as a side issue, even with biggest donors. But it is like, okay, did we think about gender and inclusion? It's like, let's put [in] something on that.'[88] A UNDP staff member stated that they were keen to work on the care economy 'when the time is right, we need to address this.'[89] In this sense, then, although the international community often blamed the government for not prioritising the care economy, it seems as if they had also fallen into the same trap of treating the care economy as 'something for later' and separate from other areas of intervention.

In reference to the UN Women-ILO policy tool on the care economy, one UN Women official noted that 'But really, honestly, I didn't have time to focus on this because there's so many things going on.'[90] While she agreed that more needed to be done, she went on to stress that there had been more pressing issues: 'because we are also facing a lot currently with violence against women, sexual violence, all of these increased during COVID in many countries, including Kosovo, femicide which has never been the case. Or at least it wasn't reported as it is now. And then, politics is very much focussed on this peace process.'[91] Here again, the care economy is constructed as a secondary priority, in a way that private sector development, or gender-based violence – a more visible effect of the patriarchy – rarely are. Portraying the care economy as a second order priority also obscures the connections between economic insecurity and gender-based violence, as the gendered nature of care economies

[87] Interview with former UN Women regional staff member, online, March 2024.
[88] Interview with INGO organization Country Director, Prishtina, November 2022.
[89] Interview with UNDP Kosovo ALMP project manager, November 2022.
[90] Interview with senior UN Women official, Prishtina, November 2022.
[91] Interview with senior UN Women official, Prishtina, November 2022.

particularly in post-conflict situations increases women's economic vulnerability and dependence on men, making it challenging for them to exit abusive situations.

Neither UN Women nor UNDP had actively sought to propose interventions directly on the care economy or initiate policy dialogue in this area. Several interviewees noted that the interviews had been 'inspirational' in terms of prompting them to look further into care economy issues, once again highlighting that normative commitments to unpaid care have not yet been institutionalised.[92] One UN agency staff member admitted that 'we thought more of women's economic empowerment in terms of direct facilitation into the labour market and entrepreneurship. So these were two solutions. We didn't think about the entire system.'[93] Not only has the care economy been considered as separate from other aspects of economic development, it has also been deprioritized within the 'hierarchy' of gender equality issues.

Relatedly, there was very little discussion by donors of the care sector as investment and a way to transform currently unpaid work into paid work. Care infrastructure has not been framed as an investment in the same way that transport and capital expenditure investments are seen as investments that bring about economic development, but as a burden on public finances. Feminist political economists have demonstrated the potential for investments in the care economy to transform unpaid work into decent, paid work for women; increasing expenditure on care services has been shown to generate more than double the number of jobs compared to equivalent investments in the construction sector, for example.[94] No donor had, for instance, carried out a thorough analysis of care as a service sector, which has been recommended in the numerous guidance documents on the care economy produced by international organizations

[92] Interview with senior UNDP official, Prishtina, October 2022; Interview with Country Coordinator, Prishtina, November 2022.
[93] Interview with UNDP gender specialist, Prishtina, November 2022.
[94] Ipek lkkaracan, 'A Feminist Alternative to Austerity: The Purple Economy as a Gender-Egalitarian Strategy for Employment Generation', in *Economics and Austerity in Europe*, ed. Bargawi, Hannah, Giovanni Cozzi, and Susan Himmelweit (Routledge, 2017), 49–61; Jerome De Henau et al., 'Investing in the Care Economy: A Gender Analysis of Employment Stimulus in Seven OECD Countries', March 2016.

and bilateral donors. According to a 2017 SDC guidance document, these types of analyses, as well as other unpaid care analyses, are important in 'framing care as a societal issue and a "public good".'[95] Feminist scholars such as Carol Cohn and Claire Duncanson advocate for such an approach, arguing that investment in social infrastructure is crucial to delivering a gender-equitable, sustainable peace.[96]

Finally, with regards to elderly care arrangements, several interviewees cited socio-cultural arguments as a barrier to working on elderly care in particular, which effectively served to delay work in this area.[97] For example, a Senior Program Officer at SDC claimed that 'For elderly care, it's not the lack of investment, it's a lack of behavioural change. People still don't see it as normal to take elderly people to a day-care facility. And this will not change by having an investment there.'[98] Similarly, a World Bank staff-member stated that 'At this stage, also, the demand for elderly services, I would say is low because of that mentality and expectation that family members should be the main providers of care services.'[99] Such culturalist arguments in fact perpetuate gendered caregiving norms by explaining the lack of interventions and investment in this space as the product of deep-rooted cultural norms which dictate/normalize that this duty should fall on women, which in turn creates an insufficient demand for elderly care services. In making this claim, these statements inadvertently work to delay and de-prioritize initiatives in the elderly care sphere by suggesting that norm change and mindset shifts are a pre-requisite for interventions in the elderly care sector. On the other hand, a programme officer from another major donor disagreed, stating that the problem is the

[95] SDC, 'Gender and Unpaid Care Work', 2017, 8.
[96] Cohn and Duncanson, 'Whose Recovery?'.
[97] The tendency for IOs to use culturalist arguments to justify slow gender equality progress has been noted by feminist scholars. See, for example, Bojičić-Dželilović and Hozić, 'Taxing for Inequalities', 1296. Also Tea Hadžiristić, 'Is Bosnia the worst place in Europe to be a woman?' *Open Democracy*, 5 December 2016, https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/tea-hadziristic/women-in-bosnia.
[98] Interview with senior national programme officer, Prishtina, November 2022.
[99] Interview with World Bank staff members, Prishtina, November 2022.

lack of any system rather than insufficient demand.[100] The Director of the AGE also highlighted the strength of cultural norms which burdens women with taking care of the elderly. However, instead of seeing this as a hindrance to working in this sector, she highlighted the importance of not thinking purely in terms of infrastructure but also developing other forms of support which might be seen as more culturally 'acceptable' such as home-based services, including psychological and physical therapy services, and community-based spaces.[101]

6.4.3. Organizational constraints and logics

The decentralised nature of some country offices which allowed a significant degree of individual agency on the part of senior management was often cited as further reason for the marginalisation of interventions on unpaid care. A programme officer of a major Nordic donor noted that

> For example, there's nothing coming from the central level that says this is the policy, this is how you should do it. It's very much up to the local context. For example, I would like to push a lot for reproductive rights and the whole debate around unpaid work and all of that, but no, it's not high up on the agenda for [organization name] globally nor for senior management at [organization name] here so…[102]

The donor referenced here had published guidance documents on interventions targeting unpaid care work, however these had not been implemented in Kosovo, suggesting that interventions addressing the reproductive economy have not been institutionalised since their implementation ultimately depends on the priorities set by senior local staff. A country director of a Nordic INGO echoed this sentiment, highlighting the personality driven nature of gender equality work more broadly and the authority of senior management to set priorities,

It's all about people. If the country director is interested in it then they will do something. If not, then you can see also clearly how far gender and social equity is a topic. Even though

[100] Interview with bilateral donor representative, Prishtina, November 2022.
[101] Interview with a senior government official for gender equality, Prishtina, November 2022.
[102] Interview with bilateral donor representative, Prishtina, November 2022.

most countries do have a gender focal point. Somehow this funny thing of [organization name] having all these interesting experiences, and we have a website, like an intraweb, we share a lot, we have every two years, we have a country director meeting that we call a "share week". So these things are all shared, but...so the advantage and the disadvantage, the advantage of decentralization is that as a country director you can do a lot, the disadvantage is that these things then can be left out or not taken up and no one actually holds country directors accountable for implementing or not these gender policies.[103]

This suggests that a lack of accountability meant that unpaid care work had frequently fallen by the wayside, again suggesting that normative commitments to unpaid care, have yet to be embedded institutionally. A senior UNDP official similarly remarked that 'UNDP is definitely a very decentralized organization. So, as country offices, we have a lot of space and power to decide ourselves, what areas we focus on.'[104] She also noted that regarding the global gender equality strategy, apart from ensuring that the 'key strategic elements' are addressed, at the country level 'there's no force and there's no push, but there is a lot of positive encouragement, positive incentives.'[105] This again highlights how unpaid care work had not been considered a key strategic priority. These statements point to the importance of individual country-office leadership in determining how high up gender equality features on the organizational agenda at the country-level. They also help explain the existence of implementation gaps between organizational commitments to addressing unpaid care included within strategic documents and policy practice discussed earlier in this chapter.

The combination of a lack of accountability and obligation to implement organizational commitments to unpaid care brings into question the ability of international actors to hold 'the partner government accountable for international commitments made and for better enforcement of international conventions and agreements relevant to unpaid work and unpaid

[103] Interview with Country Coordinator, Prishtina, November 2022.
[104] Interview with senior UNDP official, Prishtina, October 2022.
[105] Interview with senior UNDP official, Prishtina, October 2022.

care work.'[106] This highlights again that although provisions for programming and policy support on the care economy may have been made, they are still dependent on the gender-literacy of individuals particularly at the level of senior leadership. Similarly, a senior EU official underscored the role of senior management in not enforcing a holistic approach to sectors, noting that, 'nobody has said that we need this holistic approach. I mean, just to stamp on it, like to make it obligatory, because they do, there are thousands of manuals on how to do sector-wide approach to a sector, but nobody has put a stamp on it to make it obligatory.'[107] The frequent lack of genuine gender awareness and commitment was also visible in the lack of consultations with the Agency for Gender Equality, discussed in Chapter 4. As the agency director noted, 'Even [donors'] capacities towards gender equality approach were not at the level that it should be, you know? Sometimes you end up with interventions where aid is provided but it's not provided with gender mainstreaming.'[108]

Several interviewees linked the absence of holistic approaches and feminist perspectives on the part of senior management to heavy organizational bureaucracies and cultures which stifle creativity and perpetuate the same approaches. A senior EU official noted that they have no time to think: 'One of the things that I have seen in our work that is really preventing us from focusing on these holistic approaches, we spend so much time doing paperwork, the bureaucracy of the EU is *so* huge, it doesn't give you time, literally, it's just a matter of time to think and sit and discuss.'[109] Another National Programme Officer observed that

> When you serve in an embassy like this for too long, you become part of it, you don't recognise it. There's a lack of capacity building from within the institutions that make these

[106] Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 'Entry Points to Recognise, Reduce and Redistribute. Quick Guide to What and How: Unpaid Care Work' (Ser. Women's Economic Empowerment), 2012.
[107] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022. The same interviewee also noted that previously they had been active discouraged by the EU in Brussels from taking sector-wide approaches to the education sector on the basis that Kosovo 'was not ready'.
[108] Interview with senior government official for gender equality, Prishtina, November 2022.
[109] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.

> people say, "I want to learn more about other approaches or new approaches." In the context where we live, it's hard to get a job and hard to get a good job, the way to keep it is to go with the flow, tick the boxes, don't rock the boat.

She continued, noting that

> This year for 8th March [International Women's Day] I was trying to influence the Embassy to post something about unpaid labour, unrecognised labour, but we ended up with the typical "we celebrate, we resist and we protest". And I think this is mostly because the international development schools of thought are not very diverse when it comes to ways of thinking and introducing these policies that are more towards the left.[110]

These statements suggest how cumbersome bureaucratic procedures and organizational pathologies seem to encourage a path of least resistance when it comes to women's economic empowerment. This is exacerbated by the fact, as discussed in Chapter 5, that results-driven development logics which prioritize quick wins have also undermined innovative thinking and led to institutional inertia.

6.5 Conclusion

By exploring the reality of economic empowerment interventions in Kosovo, this chapter has sought to expose the disconnect between global and organizational-level commitments to women's unpaid care work by international actors and the reality of economic empowerment implementation on the ground. This chapter has shown that the selective ways in which the international community has operationalized women's economic empowerment norms have undermined the realization of a key desired policy goal, namely increasing women's formal economic participation, by failing to resolve a key bottleneck to their participation. As discussed in the Introduction and in this chapter, participation in the formal economy is by no means a panacea to women's economic empowerment. However, at the same time, it is also true that being excluded from the formal economy due to extensive caregiving responsibilities reproduces gendered insecurities by confining women to the home and to the informal

[110] Interview with bilateral donor representative, Prishtina, November 2022.

economy. In other words, in not achieving a key policy goal, the international community has actively contributed to women's economic exclusion and continued precarity, even though feminist scholars have shown that that formal economic participation is not in and of itself the key to women's economic empowerment.

By detailing the trajectory of economic empowerment interventions, this chapter showed how there has been a hollowing out of the WEE agenda in Kosovo, visible in the focus on entrepreneurship and employability as means to enter the formal, 'productive' economy. These approaches reflect a narrow understanding of women's economic empowerment which has, for the most part, neglected women's unpaid labour, despite growing attention to the care economy at a global level. In this sense, then, a significant gap exists between global-level normative gender frameworks which highlight the need to account for women's social reproductive labour, and implementation at the ground level of practice. This chapter has shown that whilst there is greater awareness on the part of IOs regarding the role and importance of women's unpaid care burden, this element of the women's economic empowerment norm has often been left unaddressed in implementation, or implemented in ways which are either not holistic or target the symptoms rather than the root cause. Importantly, as described, these approaches, by leaving patriarchal structures in the economy unchallenged, have further entrenched women's economic marginalization by reinforcing gendered divisions of labour.

In addition to empirically highlighting the disjuncture between international programming and women's lived realities and needs, the chapter has tried to explore the reasons underlying this. The discussion of IO narratives on the care economy reveals that, ultimately, donors' agendas and the interventions that follow stop short of the kinds of potentially transformative measures envisaged across global gender normative frameworks and in doing so, whilst maybe helping some women via increased incomes, have not translated into significant change for women. Whilst there have been some, very recent, initiatives in Kosovo to address specific

elements of the care economy, mainly childcare, these efforts come only after more than two decades of international influence. Moreover, as this chapter has shown, they are not part of a broader care agenda aimed at taking a comprehensive approach to recognizing, reducing and redistributing women's unpaid care burden. In the following chapter, I analyse the implications of this disconnect for women in more detail.

Chapter 7: Domestic Social Institutions in Kosovo

7.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have explored how a combination of several factors resulted in the fragmented implementation of women's economic empowerment norms in Kosovo, demonstrating how and why international organizations have furthered and created new gendered inequalities through their economic empowerment interventions. This chapter explores the nature of those gendered inequalities, applying the concept of social institutions developed by Branisa, Klasen and Ziegler.[1] In particular, it focuses on the gendered division of labour within the household, which I conceptualize as domestic social institutions related to gender equality, and their impact on prospects for women's economic empowerment. In doing so, the chapter thus considers the impact of fragmented implementation of economic empowerment norms on women, recognising that outcomes for women are a product of both international interventions and the intersection of those interventions with domestic policy environments which reinforce one another and oftentimes also perpetuate gendered social norms. The significance of these gendered social norms relates to the latter half of the theoretical framework devised in Chapter 2, namely the interaction between international interventions and women's lived realities.

In addition to examining the 'content' of patriarchal domestic social institutions in Kosovo, this chapter considers the role of local agency in maintaining, and resisting, gendered social norms. The role of local authority structures, namely the Kosovo government, was discussed in Chapter 2 vis-à-vis the government's weak capacities to coordinate the international community. Going beyond coordination, this chapter highlights the role of government in maintaining gendered social norms directly through policies, particularly around women's caregiving responsibilities. Although it is challenging to neatly disentangle

[1] Branisa, Klasen, and Ziegler, 'Gender Inequality in Social Institutions and Gendered Development Outcomes'.

the role of the state from international interveners given their inherent interconnections, there are certain areas such as national-level legislative frameworks and policies where the power ultimately rests with the government. While the main focus of this study is on international actors, the (re)production of gendered inequalities in the economic domain is the result of interactions between the international community and domestic legislative frameworks, even though as I argued in the previous chapters, the international community maintains a considerable degree of influence over domestic policy.

Recalling the dangers of essentializing local 'culture' emphasised in feminist scholarship, it is important to acknowledge that local cultural norms, practices and institutions are not fixed, and their effect intersects with other factors such as class, race, religion, ethnicity and sexuality. In line with the analytical approach of this thesis, this chapter regards domestic social institutions as norms which have been shaped by international interventions and also shape the impact of those very interventions. They are not static 'things' with which international interventions and global normative frameworks interact, but are dynamic and ever-changing, for example due to changes in demographics. Thus, women's lived realities and the gendered social norms which govern them are not simply a passive level of analysis. To the contrary, I argue that the domestic social institutions examined in this chapter do not exist independently of international interventions; they are active, evolving elements within the analytical framework of this thesis. The views and data examined below are intended to shed light on the Kosovo context, but the norms discussed are also not unique to Kosovo; they reflect global trends around the gendered division of labour. The chapter draws on a combination of interview data and published reports to unpack gendered norms in Kosovo and how they connect with women's economic activity. Both the interviews conducted for this study and recent data on public perceptions in Kosovo confirm the resilience and persistence of patriarchal norms and values which mediate women's economic participation, albeit in

different ways and to different extents depending on various social categories. Moreover, there is an important difference between treating 'illiberal' social institutions as immutable 'blockages' to the liberal peace project, versus exploring the role of social institutions to demonstrate precisely why they *need* to be taken into account and addressed by international organizations in their economic empowerment interventions. In other words, by emphasising social and cultural norms, IOs often absolve themselves of or downplay their responsibility for creating and/or sustaining the gendered social norms, specifically in this case gender-based divisions of labour. This tendency has been criticized within critical peacebuilding scholarship for associating resistance to or the failed implementation of international gender norms solely with the domestic realm, and not with the shortcomings of international actors themselves.[2]

The chapter is divided into two main sections. First, it draws on recent survey data and explores the 'content' of social norms prevalent in Kosovo, demonstrating the links between gendered social institutions and women's economic activity. The second section shifts its focus to examine the contribution of domestic policies and legislation in shaping and reinforcing gendered social institutions. Additionally, this section explores more recent developments, highlighting how civil society organizations and movements have actively resisted and challenged these entrenched notions, advocating for greater recognition of women's unpaid care work and sustainable economic empowerment solutions for women.

7.2 Social Norms, Unpaid Work and Women's Economic Empowerment in Kosovo

Global trends indicate that women undertake the lion's share of unpaid care labour in the household. A 2018 ILO study found that women perform 76.2% of unpaid care work

[2] See, for example, Oliver P. Richmond, 'A Pedagogy of Peacebuilding: Infrapolitics, Resistance, and Liberation', *International Political Sociology* 6, no. 2 (June 2012): 496; Nicola Pratt and Sophie Richter-Devroe, 'Critically Examining UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13, no. 4 (December 2011): 489–503. For the depiction of traditional cultures within international discourses, see: Sally Engle Merry, 'Human Rights Law and the Demonization of Culture (And Anthropology Along the Way)', *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 26, no. 1 (2003): 55–76.

globally.[3] Country-wide time-use data on unpaid care work in Kosovo is relatively limited; however, a 2022 study on unpaid care work in Kosovo by the Institute for Social Policy (ISP) gathered qualitative and quantitative data on time use by Kosovar citizens on unpaid care work. The study found that on average, women spend 6.2 hours per day on unpaid care work, compared to 3.5 hours for men. In other words, women spend 44% more time on unpaid care work.[4] There was general agreement amongst respondents, both men and women, that women (mothers/partners, sisters and grandmothers) contribute most to the household. The report estimated the value of women's unpaid care work in Kosovo to represent approximately 33% of Kosovo's GDP or €2.8 billion.[5]

A recurring theme across reports which measure public perceptions and gender attitudes in Kosovo is the pervasiveness of social institutions regarding the gendered division of labour. A 2018 OSCE/UNFPA survey of male perceptions of gender equality in Kosovo notes that around 70% of men surveyed believed both that a women's primary role is to take care of her home and family and that a woman should take care of her children.[6] The report noted that 'persisting norms and attitudes in Kosovo perpetuate gender inequality with clearly defined gender roles and expectations for men and women.'[7] Traditional gender roles were highlighted by both men and women in the report; caring for the family and running the household are commonly seen as women's responsibilities whilst men are seen as the breadwinners.[8] The more recent 2022 ISP data affirms the same trend, noting that 'chores around the house, childcare and elderly care are perceived as a woman's responsibility.'[9] The

[3] ILO, 'Care Work and Care Jobs: For the Future of Decent Work', Geneva, 2018.
[4] Marigonë Drevinja and Visar Ymeri, 'Who Cares? Unpaid Care Work in Kosovo' (The Institute for Social Policy Musine Kokalari, 2022).
[5] Drevinja and Ymeri, 51.
[6] OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 'Survey on Well-Being and Safety of Women in Kosovo', November 2019, 24.
[7] OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 31.
[8] OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 31.
[9] Drevinja and Ymeri, 'Who Cares? Unpaid Care Work in Kosovo', 40.

data further suggests that when men are involved in care work, such as household chores, childcare and eldercare, it is widely seen as 'help for women's work' rather than an obligation.[10] Another social norm which emerges from the reports is the responsibility that Kosovar citizens feel to take care of the elderly and other dependents. Nearly all elderly in Kosovo rely on family care, as there is virtually no public provision. Again, this usually falls on women in the household. The time-use data collected in the report clearly reflects these beliefs: on average women universally spend more time on housework, childcare and eldercare than men each day. Interviews conducted for this thesis confirmed this trend, as one staff member of a bilateral donor reflected,

> My father ended up in the hospital a year or two ago because of a heart attack. And we sent him to the public hospital. And you have to have someone there constantly to buy medicine, to make sure that he gets the proper food because, of course the nutrition at public hospitals is awful. You have to have someone who is available 24 hours within the health institution. And it's mainly women, so my Mom for example, who are there 24 hours. I mean, I'm taking this as an example but this is how it is. It looks like these are very peripheral issues and questions but when you put all of these together, this is actually the problem, the elderly care, the child-care, the lack of incentive for women to be active in the labour market, to be actually seeking a job. How many unemployed women are actually seeking a job? Very few.[11]

The ISP report also reveals how certain gendered social norms are continually reproduced in the household through mundane practices such as the types of household chores allocated to sons and daughters during youth. Daughters are more frequently asked to assist with activities in the household, such as cleaning, cooking, washing dishes and clothes, whereas sons are more often involved in activities such as repairs, gardening and grocery shopping.[12] The data suggests that gendered divisions of labour begin at a young age and also feed into beliefs that women are innately better at certain chores than men since they are socialised into performing certain tasks from childhood. It is worth noting that several of the

[10] Drevinja and Ymeri, 'Who Cares? Unpaid Care Work in Kosovo', 40.
[11] Interview with bilateral donor representative, Prishtina, November 2022
[12] Drevinja and Ymeri, 'Who Cares? Unpaid Care Work in Kosovo', 37.

surveys show that it is not only men but also women who uphold patriarchal norms, with a significant proportion regarding themselves as 'naturally' better at certain tasks than men.[13] The strength of societal norms around the division of labour between men and women is evident in the ISP report where most respondents agreed that society judges and ridicules men for performing house or care work. Nearly 9 out of 10 women surveyed believed that their husbands would perform more housework if society were less judgemental and agreed that they would 'like more help from their partners in the household.'[14] According to one man from Prishtina: 'My wife had an accident at her workplace, now she can't work…I used to do everything and still do in our house…They told me personally that I am not a man because I help out my wife.'[15]

Notably, Kosovo departs from global trends which show a negative correlation between the number of years spent in education and time spent doing unpaid care work. A positive correlation usually applies to men (the more time spent in education, the more time spent doing unpaid care work). By contrast, the data in the 2022 ISP report finds that the number of years in education has no significant effect on time spent performing unpaid care work for women, which the authors attribute to deeply entrenched traditional gender roles in Kosovo.[16]

Although seemingly banal features of the private household sphere, the data in Kosovo clearly shows the extent to which patriarchal norms remain entrenched in Kosovo and the extent to which they govern women's lives, despite progress over the past two decades. Whilst the impact of these norms on women differs depending on various social categories, their pervasiveness in Kosovo adds weight to the importance of gendered norms and practices in mediating the effect of interventions which focus solely on women's employment and do not

[13] Drevinja and Ymeri, 30–31.; OSCE Mission in Kosovo and UNFPA Kosovo, 'A Men's Perspective on Gender Equality in Kosovo Main Findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey' (Pristina, 2018), 31.
[14] Drevinja and Ymeri, 'Who Cares? Unpaid Care Work in Kosovo', 28.
[15] Drevinja and Ymeri, 29.
[16] Drevinja and Ymeri, 48.

recognise the unpaid work undertaken in the home. As we have seen, studies of feminist political economy regularly point to the significance of social norms, the gendered division of labour – and how these lead to the undervaluation of social reproductive labour – on women's opportunities for economic empowerment. As one respondent in the ISP study lamented: 'They say women are unemployed because they are not working, not bringing a wage home and thus you are unemployed… They call me unemployed, but I am 24 hours at my family's disposal, doing everything for them.'[17] Women in Kosovo, as is the case world-wide, play a crucial role in maintaining and developing human and social capital through unpaid labour. However, as the Program Director at ISP explains in a recent editorial: 'The public debate on gender equality [in Kosovo] has largely been focused on women's representation in the public sphere. But inequality emerges from the household and needs to be addressed from a bottom-up approach. Gender inequality in the labour market mirrors gender inequality at home.'[18]

The data thus clearly shows that women's unpaid care responsibilities are directly connected with women's low activity in the formal labour market. Not only are women unemployed, but also a high proportion are not active in the labour market, meaning they are also not seeking work. Figures available from the Kosovo Statistics Agency from 2022 suggest that 78% of women are not engaged in paid employment or actively seeking work whilst only 18% of working-age women are employed.[19] Despite steady economic growth in Kosovo, female labour market participation has ranged between 18 to 22%, compared to 55 to 65% for men since 2012.[20] Asked to identify the key reasons why women stay home and remain inactive

[17] See 'Women Bear the Brunt of Unpaid Care Work in Kosovo', *Kosovo 2.0*, November 2022, https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/women-bear-the-burden-of-unpaid-care-work-in-kosovo/.
[18] See 'Women Bear the Brunt of Unpaid Care Work in Kosovo'; Antigonë Isufi, 'Working for Free: Kosovo Women Remain Chained to Household Chores', *Prishtina Insight*, November 2021, https://prishtinainsight.com/working-for-free-kosovo-women-remain-chained-to-household-chores-mag/.
[19] Republic of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister, Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 'Kosovo Labour Force Survey 2022', 16.
[20] Ardiana Gashi, Artane Rizvanolli, and Nick Adnett, 'Bucking the Trend: Female Labor Market Participation in Kosovo', *Croatian Economic Survey* 21, no. 2 (2 December 2019): 85–116.

in the labour market, representatives from local civil society and think-tanks as well as some international donors consistently mentioned care responsibilities. This is in line with findings from various surveys conducted over recent years in Kosovo. According to a 2018 study by the Millennium Challenge Corporation, a US foreign aid agency, the leading reason why Kosovar women stay home and remain inactive in the labour market is due to childcare duties.[21] It is telling that whilst 32.2% of women cited childcare duties as the reason for their inactivity, the equivalent figure for men was only 1.1%.[22] This finding is corroborated by other surveys which find that a high proportion of respondents identify family responsibilities as the main reason for women's economic inactivity.[23] A 2016 Kosovo-wide household survey also found that one-third of women identified care responsibilities and household work as the main reason why they were not working for a salary, compared to only 4.8% of men.[24] In another 2016 survey, nearly all unemployed women surveyed would like to work in a paid position and the majority (88%) would use childcare services if an affordable option was available.[25] There is a clear picture emerging from the available data that care and family responsibilities are one of the main reasons for women's low activity in the labour market, whilst they constitute a negligible reason for men.

7.3 Domestic policies and legislation

This section examines the role of domestic-level policies and legislation in furthering gendered social institutions in Kosovo relating to gendered divisions of labour. It first examines

[21] Hira Siddiqui et al., 'MCC Kosovo Labor Force and Time Use Study Research Report' (Millennium Challenge Corporation, February 2018), 15–16.
[22] Siddiqui et al., 'MCC Kosovo Labor Force and Time Use Study', 15–16.
[23] Linda A. Morina and Rezarta Delibashzade, 'Women's Inactivity in the Labor Market: Factors Hindering Women's Participation in the Labor Market' (Democracy for Development (D4D), 2017), 18; 'Women in the Workforce: An Analysis of the Workforce Conditions for Women in Kosovo' (Prishtina: Riinvest Institute, 2017); Dita Dobranja, 'Women Employment Study for Kosovo' (Regional Cooperation Council, May 2022).
[24] Nicole Farnsworth et al., 'Who Cares? Demand, Supply, and Options for Expanding Childcare Availability in Kosovo' (Kosovo Women's Network, 2016), 9.
[25] Farnsworth et al., 'Who Cares?', 20.

domestic policies related to childcare, followed by the Law on Labour and government economic empowerment measures, before finally turning briefly to civil society efforts to challenge gendered norms and stereotypes. Social norms which push women into unpaid labour, especially childcare, have been reinforced at the municipal level, as municipalities are largely responsible for care provision. For instance, due to limited public pre-school capacities, many local authorities have prioritised access to public kindergartens for children of parents who are both employed.[26] Such discriminatory policies reflect the idea that care solutions are mainly for those who are employed, which also relates to the undervaluing and non-recognition of women's care work. Such policies are based on gendered assumptions of the 'male breadwinner', since families with at least one parent not participating in the workplace are considered to be less in need of childcare solutions, as one parent, usually the mother, is implicitly expected to take on this role. Such policies serve to externalize reproductive labour onto women who provide it 'for free', thereby deepening gendered hierarchies, also known as the 'familialisation' or 'feminization' of care.[27] These assumptions thus perpetuate gendered inequalities as the more time women spend performing unpaid labour, the less time they are able to devote to generating an income through paid labour, as well as to their own recreation and wellbeing. As discussed in Chapter 2, this has numerous effects on women's security and wellbeing by relegating them to the home and the informal sphere, resulting in continued economic dependence on men, increased risk of domestic violence, depletion and time poverty, to name but a few consequences. As Kosovar scholar Artan Mustafa argues, the current early childhood care model based on low public provision and growing marketisation of childcare

[26] Angela Demas et al., 'A Situational Analysis of ECD Services in Kosovo' (World Bank Group, June 2021), 37.
[27] Sigrid Leitner, 'Varieties of Familialism: The Caring Function of the Family in Comparative Perspective', *European Societies* 5, no. 4 (1 June 2003): 353–75.

which is unaffordable to the vast majority of the population 'contributes towards cementing and furthering social and gender inequalities in the long run.'[28]

The origins of these contemporary policies are rooted in the abrupt departure from the legacy of socialist Yugoslavia and the transition to the market economy pushed by international organizations which 'had much more power than they did in most of the other countries in the region'[29] making Kosovo '"a caricature" of the residual, liberal welfare regime.'[30] These policies thus reflect the enduring influence of international organizations over socio-economic policies, which set the basis for social policy even after independence. The social policies implemented by international organizations in the post-war period involved the installation of a narrow social protection floor and a highly targeted educational approach whereby public early childhood education and care (ECEC) targeted only the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, while others were expected to rely on market-based services or the family, in line with residual welfare policies.[31] However, the targeting has not been accurate, many lower-income, rural families are less likely to be able to afford ECEC, which exacerbates social inequalities. As Mustafa argues, 'the parties which emerged from the Kosovo Liberation Army did not fundamentally [transform] the long-term goals of the existing social policy designed by international organisations.'[32] The tendency of international organizations was to disregard 'socio-economic traditions, legacies and pre-conflict practices', as well as gender relations, to clear the path for liberal market institutions, which echoes patterns in the region.[33] As Lai has argued in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 'the bracketing of the socialist past further

[28] Mustafa, 'Early Childhood Education and Care in Kosovo', 367.
[29] Mustafa, 'Kosovo's Social Policy during Self-Management, UNMIK and Independence', 97.
[30] Mustafa, 'Early Childhood Education and Care in Kosovo', 368.
[31] Mustafa, 'Early Childhood Education and Care in Kosovo'. The targeted education approach contrasted with the 'targeted institutional model' under socialism which aimed to reconcile paid work and care responsibilities, although this model was ultimately unsuccessful due to a failure to expand public service provision after 1981. For more on residual social policies, see Richard Titmuss, *Social Policy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974).
[32] Mustafa, 'Kosovo's Social Policy during Self-Management, UNMIK and Independence', 106.
[33] Werner Distler, Elena B. Stavrevska, and Birte Vogel, 'Economies of Peace: Economy Formation Processes and Outcomes in Conflict-Affected Societies', *Civil Wars* 20, no. 2 (3 April 2018): 144.

contributed to [women's] depletion by facilitating the disappearance of social services to support social reproduction that were traditionally available in the workplace, with clear gendered effects.'[34] As the survey and interview data indicate, the same is true in Kosovo, where the promotion of privatisation and the residual role of the state during internationally-led post-war economic reform has resulted in limited public care provision by the state, perpetuating gendered caregiving responsibilities and economic exclusion. The domestic structures which shape women's lived realities and with which more recent economic empowerment interventions interact therefore must be analysed against the early enabling influence of radical neoliberal policies which were a way of divorcing the space from the previous history of socialism. As discussed in Chapter 6, the provision of other forms of care infrastructure, notably elderly care and care for the long-term sick and disabled, is close to non-existent.[35]

The 2022 ISP report found that the majority (79%) of respondents with one or more children under the age of six did not send their children to a childcare facility of any kind. This is in keeping with previous survey data which found that the majority of employed people depend on family members for unpaid care services.[36] Lack of infrastructure and affordability are key reasons why many parents do not send their children to childcare facilities in Kosovo.[37] A 2016 report by the Kosovo Women's Network on the provision and demand for childcare in Kosovo found that twelve municipalities did not have basic childcare support services. Although some of these municipalities have since built care centres, at least six municipalities

[34] Daniela Lai, 'What Has Justice Got to Do with It? Gender and the Political Economy of Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Review of International Political Economy* 27, no. 6 (1 November 2020): 1265. See also Andrew Gilbert, 'The Past in Parenthesis: (Non)Post-Socialism in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina', *Anthropology Today* 22, no. 4 (2006): 14–18; Distler, Stavrevska, and Vogel, 'Economies of Peace'.
[35] For instance, a 2021 EU analysis notes that 'Public residential care in Kosovo is limited to the main 'house for elderly without family care' (HEWFC) in Pristina and three community-based elderly care centres in the municipalities of Skenderaj, Istog and Gracanica'. Amir Haxhikadrija, 'ESPN Thematic Report on long-term care for older people', European Social Policy Network, June 2021.
[36] Farnsworth et al., 'Who Cares?', 8.
[37] Drevinja and Ymeri, 'Who Cares? Unpaid Care Work in Kosovo'.

had no pre-schools as of 2020.[38] Overall provision across Kosovo remains well below adequate, and demand far outstrips supply in most municipalities.[39] During interviews conducted for this thesis, interviewees frequently highlighted the absence of affordable, accessible childcare as a key domestic structural issue which impedes women's economic empowerment. As an OSCE staff member explained with reference to the lack of care services in Kosovo:

> Kosovo has the largest portion of youth in the region, so many women are in the reproductive period. If you analyse cross-sectionally you will understand that if these young women decide to become mothers, they are naturally excluded from the economic sector and active engagement in the labour market and they have to agree on either staying home or working in the grey economy where they're not covered with labour protection mechanisms. Due to these elements, they are naturally excluded from the labour market.
>
> …The access to care possibilities for vulnerable categories such as the elderly and disabled is even lower than kindergartens for kids. Taking into consideration the gender stereotypes and position of women in this society whereby women are predominantly caring for elderly members and members with disabilities, it is easy to understand why, according to the latest civil society reports, 80% of the economically active female population in Kosovo is out of the labour market after Covid. [40]

The lack of affordable child and eldercare solutions thus acts as an impediment to women's participation in the labour market as societal norms dictate that they are the ones who should undertake this responsibility in the absence of public or market-based solutions. As the ISP report notes, 'the significant gender inequality in paid work mirrors unequal distribution of unpaid care work, which in turn is the result of deeply-rooted gender-based separation of work.'[41] Interestingly, in addition to the availability and affordability, many men surveyed in the ISP 2022 report cited concerns over their children's safety as a main reason for not sending them to a kindergarten. The report notes that although this does not mean women are not

[38] Dorentina Kastrati, 'Neglecting society's little ones', *Kosovo 2.0*, December 2020, https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/neglecting-societys-little-ones/.
[39] Dorentina Kastrati, 'Neglecting society's little ones'; Nicole Farnsworth et al., '"The Pandemic Knows No Gender"? A Gender Fiscal Budget Analysis: The Government of Kosovo's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic from a Gender Perspective' (Prishtina: Kosovo Women's Network, 2020).
[40] Interview with OSCE official, Pristina, November 2022.
[41] Drevinja and Ymeri, 'Who Cares? Unpaid Care Work in Kosovo', 47.

concerned about their children's security, 'it is men who are saying no, but it is women who are replacing this service for free.'[42]

The reports reveal the pervasiveness of the gendered norms regarding the division of labour in Kosovo and illustrate the connections between gendered social institutions and gendered economic inequalities in Kosovo. As feminist political economy scholarship would anticipate, the data illustrates the negative effects of this unrecognized labour on women in Kosovo, demonstrating why economic empowerment interventions that overlook this element are very unlikely to succeed in their objectives of significantly affecting women's labour market engagement, as reflected in women's extremely low activity rates.

In addition to childcare policies, Kosovo's Law on Labour is a key point of contention amongst civil society activists and the international community alike. Under Kosovo's current Labour Law, fathers are entitled to only two days of paid leave whereas mothers are granted 12 months of paid maternity leave, which is amongst the longest in Europe. As one staff-member from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare pointed out, men are currently entitled to more days off to get married than for the birth of a child.[43] Interviewees noted that proposals to reform Kosovo's Labour Law have been under discussion for nearly a decade; they accused the government of foot-dragging regarding the implementation of amendments.[44] The 2023 Kosovo EU report confirmed this, noting that 'Kosovo has postponed amendments to the legislation on labour and on health and safety at work, which are necessary to further align with the EU acquis, including with the EU Directive on work life balance.'[45] Civil society and some international organizations have been advocating for the inclusion of non-transferable

[42] Drevinja and Ymeri, 'Who Cares? Unpaid Care Work in Kosovo', 48.
[43] Interview with Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare staff members, Prishtina, November 2022.
[44] Interviews with senior UN Women official, Prishtina, November 2022; Interview with bilateral donor representative, Prishtina, November 2022; Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.
[45] European Commission Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Kosovo Report 2023, 8 November 2023.

parental leave in the Law on Labour.[46] As it is, the law codifies the unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities by assigning family responsibilities almost exclusively to women, which contradicts the Kosovo Program for Gender Equality and also SDG 5.4, which calls for the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family. Many interviewees and civil society reports have noted that the current law also discriminates against women and therefore furthers their economic exclusion due to the fact that the employer is liable for covering the first six months of maternity leave at 70% of the salary, which discourages the private sector from hiring women of child-bearing age due to the financial burden.[47]

From the perspective of IOs, it is worth noting that several interviewees mentioned that they had been pushing for the reform of maternity leave regulation. For example, one EU official noted that 'we always tend to encourage the government to adopt policies which favour women's activation in the labour market. We have helped, for example, with several projects with the government to amend to the Law on Labor, to no avail.'[48] Whilst it is true that ultimate decision-making power rests with the government, it is also reflects the tendency identified in Chapter 6 to blame the government for delaying progress with regards to women's economic empowerment and their unpaid care burden specifically, and downplay the ability of international actors to also contribute through other means, for example, through improving the government's capacity to undertake time-use surveys or assessments of costs and returns of public investments in social care infrastructure, or initiating dialogue on different models of care provision, all of which would assist in generating a comprehensive approach to care. As a 2017 UN report highlights, fragmented care-related legislations 'do not provide a coordinated and comprehensive approach to recognition of the care economy as a coherent integrated

[46] See, for example, Iliriana Banjska, Gresa Rrahmani, and Nicole Farnsworth, 'Striking a Balance: Policy Options for Amending Kosovo's Law on Labour to Benefit Women, Men, Employers and the State' (Prishtina: Kosovo Women's Network, 2016); David JJ Ryan, 'Expanding Choices through Family-Friendly Policies Kosovo Analytical Report', 2021.
[47] Kosovar Center for Gender Studies (KGSC), 'Impact of the Labor Law on Women in Kosovo' 2011.
[48] Interview with EU official, Prishtina, November 2022.

economic sphere. This results in policy design and implementation imbued with coordination failures and conflicts with the guiding principles of equality in caregiving and care receiving.'[49]

In 2021, the Kosovo government introduced a new policy of maternity allowances for women, whereby new mothers would receive €170 for six months after childbirth for those who are unemployed, and for three months for those who are employed. The allowances were framed as an economic empowerment measure for women and only women were allowed to receive them, except for under certain circumstances such as where the father has custody of the children or the mother has died.[50] The scheme also excluded non-heteronormative couples as well as families that have adopted children. As a staff-member from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare explained,

> What I think is very important in our society is for women to understand what financial independence means. For example, many of the women who live in more rural areas, they don't know what it's like to get money. Because the idea [of the scheme] is that only the mothers can get the money… so women having a monthly earning, can give them a sense of financial independence, and then maybe work as an incentive for in the future to work again. And not be a burden to their husbands. Because in a patriarchal society being a financial burden to your husband cannot work in the best way. So it may incentivise them to work in the future.[51]

However, the measure was criticized by some civil society groups for being anti-feminist and further confining women to the home by reinforcing gendered caregiving inequalities in the domestic sphere.[52] The scheme was also accompanied by a banner with an image of a mother holding her baby, which one NGO subsequently photoshopped to also include a male figure to recognize both parents' role in caregiving.[53] Whilst acknowledging that the policy was a useful form of support for new families, NGOs claimed that selling it under the banner of women's

[49] UN Women, 'Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment: Recognizing and Investing in the Care Economy', 2018, 21.
[50] Interview with Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare staff members, Prishtina, November 2022.
[51] Interview with Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare staff members, Prishtina, November 2022.
[52] Institute for Social Policy "Musine Kokalari", 'Incomplete Support for Unemployed New Mothers' [in Albanian], https://musineinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Raporti-per-mbeshtetjen-e-lehonave-te-papuna-8.pdf.
[53] Interview with a QIKA director, Prishtina, November 2022.

economic empowerment risked reinforcing the idea that only the mother should take care of the child, arguing that parental leave would be more beneficial. As one think-tank highlighted, 'although important as a measure, this carries a risk in itself, if it is not followed by another parallel and aggressive policy of employment of women. If there is no simultaneous increase in the employment of women in Kosovo, then maternity pay risks presenting and placing women in a one-dimensional social role - that of a mother.'[54] Such concerns are not unfounded, as demonstrated by the slow progress on other more sustainable measures that would facilitate women's employment. Even just in terms of childcare (not to mention elderly or disability care), there has been a glacial pace of change. For example, as mentioned above, the 2022-2024 Economic Reform Plan foresaw the construction of twelve kindergartens in 2022, however only one had been completed by 2023.[55] As Mustafa reflected, 'unfortunately, the government has not moved transparently and committed to its main commitment — the opening of 160 public early childhood education and care institutions. Without movement in this direction, the maternity benefit for unemployed women may have undesirable consequences, in fact even unintended by the government — such as strengthening conservatism.'[56] In the same way that international organizations sought to address women's unpaid care burden through promoting women's employment opportunities for women at home, as discussed in Chapter 6, such policy initiatives demonstrate that even seemingly progressive schemes and measures can further gendered inequalities, particularly when they are not considered from a holistic perspective. Another NGO noted that 'women's empowerment occurs through economic independence from men. This means education and employment…not only for temporary help that can often be counterproductive.'[57]

[54] Institute for Social Policy "Musine Kokalari", 'Incomplete Support for Unemployed New Mothers',12.
[55] Republic of Kosovo, 'Economic Reform Program: 2023-25', Prishtina 2023, 170.
[56] Gentiana Paçarizi, 'One Year of Kurti's Government: how is it going?', *Kosovo 2.0,* March 2022, https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/one-year-of-kurtis-government-how-is-it-going/.
[57] Koha Ditore, 'QIKA: Allowances for maternity leave do not empower women, there is a risk of further isolating them at home', September 2021.

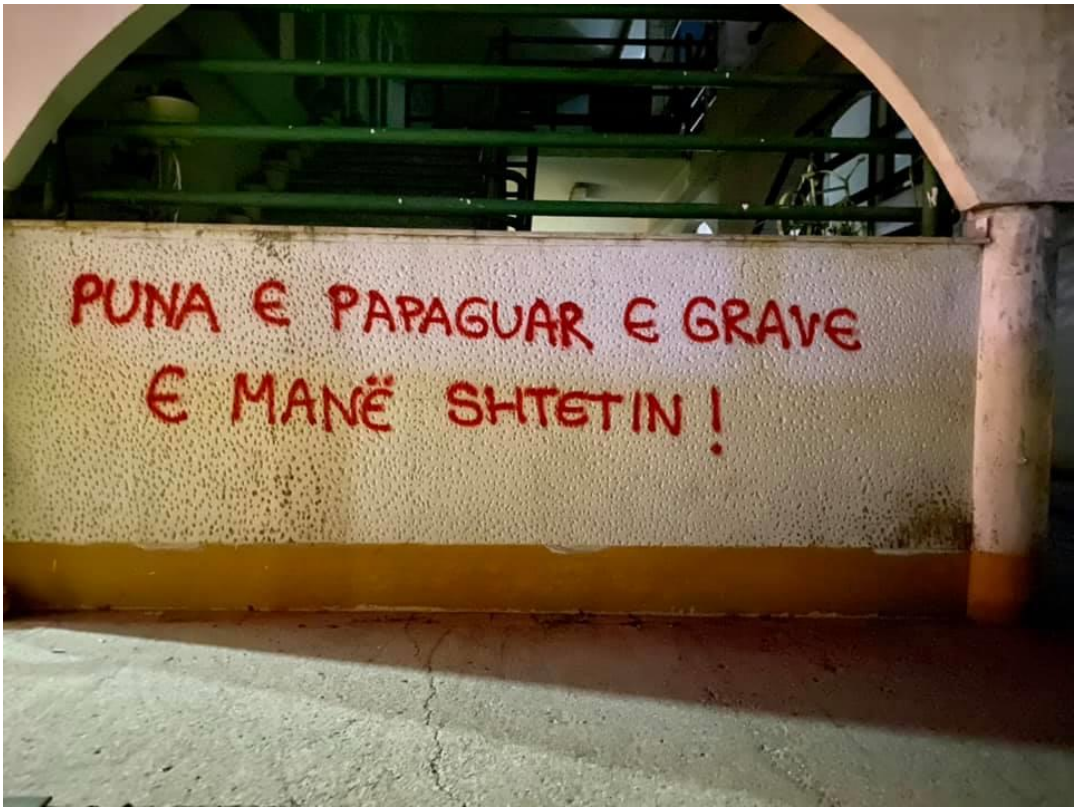


Figure 7.1: A feminist inscription in Drenas, Kosovo. Translation: 'The unpaid labor of women upholds the state'.[58]

Civil society has tackled the issue of unpaid care through numerous avenues, including a mixture of reports, such as those mentioned above, and more recently, public actions, protests and awareness-raising efforts, such as Figure 7.1 above. For example, in 2021 on International Women's Day, one NGO – the Center for Information, Criticism and Action (QIKA) – sought to highlight the oppression of women within the home by setting up a dining-style table in a public space in Prishtina and overturning it.[59] One of QIKA's directors recalled that 'we received over 10,000 comments insulting us, threatening to rape us, to murder us because we touched something holy, which is a woman setting up a table for her husband and her family. So people's reaction really told us that this is something that is going to be so difficult to work

[58] Photo courtesy of the Collective for Feminist Thought and Action, original source: https://prishtinainsight.com/working-for-free-kosovo-women-remain-chained-to-household-chores-mag/.
[59] Center for Information, Criticism and Action, 'What really turned the tables? [in Albanian]', March 2021. https://qika.org/en/activities/cka-ne-te-vertete-permbysi-tavolina/.

with because we have this pushback... There is pushback from the general public to take women outside of that traditional role of this caretaking person.'[60]

7.4 Conclusion

Through elaborating the content and nature of gendered social institutions in Kosovo, this chapter has established two goals. First, by mapping the content of patriarchal social norms in Kosovo, it shows empirically how domestic social institutions directly affect women's lives and play a key role in circumscribing women's economic inactivity and unemployment. Indeed, without attention to the unpaid social reproductive work that shape women's everyday experiences, the nuances of how global norms travel and ultimately reach, or fail to reach, those they are intended for would remain invisible. Second, by showing how pervasive these norms are, and how they are also reinforced by domestic legislation, the chapter has demonstrated why externally-driven economic empowerment interventions that overlook this element are very unlikely to succeed in their objectives of significantly affecting women's labour market engagement. As mentioned in Chapter 2, these kinds of interventions constitute a case of means-ends decoupling, whereby the policies implemented in practice are only partially tied to the intended goal of increasing women's labour force participation. In other words, it is not that interventions that narrowly focus on women's participation in the neoliberal market economy have not benefitted *any* women, it is that these interventions alone are not sufficient to achieve the goal of substantially increasing women's formal participation, particularly in ways which do not result in a double or triple burden.

As argued throughout this thesis, international interventions have contributed to the perpetuation and reproduction of these social norms by largely disregarding issues related to unpaid care work. I do not claim that patriarchal domestic social institutions are *only* a product

[60] Interview with a QIKA director, Prishtina, November 2022.

of international interventions, which do not occur in a vacuum. However, given the degree of international influence in Kosovo, they have undoubtedly been (re)produced by international interventions, who must be held accountable, especially when those interventions interact with domestic policies and legislation which also reinforce gendered social norms, some of which also have roots in internationally supported post-war economic reforms.

Thus, it has shown how IO interventions shape women's lived realities and interact with domestic structures and national-level legislation and policies. These interactions perpetuate gendered social norms, creating a complex web of influences that sustain economic and social inequalities. In addition, the findings in this chapter underscore the necessity of a holistic approach to economic empowerment to effectively challenge and transform the gendered social institutions that constrain women's economic opportunities in Kosovo.

Chapter 8: Synthesis and Conclusion

This concluding chapter brings together the findings from the empirical chapters and highlights broader implications for academic literatures as well as areas for future research. Returning to the initial puzzle that inspired this thesis, this enquiry was motivated by the observation that despite over two decades of international intervention and numerous economic empowerment initiatives, most women in Kosovo remain on the margins of economic life and outside the formal labour force, according to official statistics and personal observations. In other words, economic empowerment norms have been promoted and various associated measures have been adopted but with marginal improvement in outcomes for the vast majority of women. Accordingly, this thesis sought to answer the question of how do we account for the disjuncture between the expectations that underpin the implementation of global women's economic empowerment norms by the international community and women's lived realities and needs?

Global women's rights and development frameworks, such as the SDGs, CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, recognise the structural impediments to women's empowerment, as discussed in Chapter 3, and in doing so, sow the seeds for a holistic approach to economic empowerment. Indeed, 'more than two decades after the landmark 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing and, more recently, with the consensus on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the global commitment to women's economic empowerment has never been stronger.'[1] Despite some limitations, these normative frameworks recognise the need to address women's labour force participation in tandem with the social aspects which enable women to fully participate in the labour force. Yet, in practice, as this thesis has shown,

[1] Gaelle Ferrant and Annelise Thim, 'Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment: Time Use Data and Gender Inequality', OECD Development Policy Papers, 16, February 2019, 5.

international actors in Kosovo have implemented a version of economic empowerment that is hollow and stripped back, a version that re-inscribes gendered inequalities and hierarchies, rather than challenging and transforming them.

As demonstrated throughout, I contend that the disjuncture between what international interveners aim to do and what they actually achieve on the ground can be explained in large part by the absence of a holistic approach to the implementation of global women's economic empowerment norms in Kosovo. I also argue that the lack of a holistic approach is a key factor underlying the limited change in women's actual economic empowerment on the ground in Kosovo. At the same time, not only have IOs failed to deliver on their own stated goals of increasing women's labour force participation, which, as discussed in Chapter 1, is a minimal measure of women's economic empowerment, but in doing so, they have also actively participated in the (re)production of gendered inequalities in the economic domain.

8.1 Synthesis of findings

Overall, the thesis shows that the disjuncture between the implementation of global women's economic empowerment norms by IOs and women's lived realities and needs stems from the fragmented implementation of the economic empowerment norm cluster at the ground level of practice. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, the international community's selective approach to economic empowerment in practice limits the meaning of economic empowerment and in doing so, reproduces gendered inequalities. More specifically, the meaning is limited, or 'hijacked' through a complex interplay of three factors, namely contradictions between coordination rhetoric and actual practices on the ground; tensions between short-term, measurable outputs and transformative results; and internal tensions within the economic empowerment norm cluster itself. These three dynamics contribute to what I refer to as norm hijacking, which leads to fragmented implementation.

First, as described in Chapter 4, the lack of strategic coordination, both among IOs, and between IOs and the Kosovo government, contributed to incoherent, siloed approaches to economic empowerment on the part of international organizations, who largely pursued their own individual projects, failing to identify the deficiencies in economic empowerment initiatives in Kosovo collectively, resulting in missed chances to leverage each other's efforts. As discussed in Chapter 5, these disjointed efforts often clustered in areas with 'low hanging fruit' which satisfy organizational demands to showcase 'quick wins', driven by international funding complexes and accountability pressures. In other words, the political economy of the international community and the pressure to report on results not only fosters competitive dynamics which further undermine inter-organizational coordination, but also encourages economic empowerment interventions to concentrate in areas which deliver the least transformative change for women on the ground. This is exacerbated by, as shown in Chapter 6, normative ambiguity and contradictions within the economic empowerment norm cluster itself, meaning that commitments to addressing social reproductive work at the global level have not yet been institutionalised within international organizations. Despite growing global rhetoric and awareness on the part of IOs regarding the role and importance of women's social reproductive work, in practice IOs continue to marginalize this element of the women's economic empowerment norm in implementation or implement it in ways which are either not holistic or target the symptoms rather than the root cause. The case of Kosovo therefore reveals a disconnect between global and organizational-level commitments to addressing social reproductive work by international actors and the reality of economic empowerment implementation on the ground, highlighting important continuities in narrow approaches to economic empowerment. Such approaches, ironically, undercut interveners' own organizational aims.

Taken together, these three factors provided an opportunity for international actors to hijack the meaning of women's economic empowerment outlined in global normative frameworks, by circumscribing the range of possible implementation practices. In doing so, women's economic empowerment has been largely reduced to the classic neoliberal notions prioritizing women's integration into existing labour markets without considering women's position in the Kosovar economy. Such approaches seek to merely 'add' women to existing markets without disrupting gendered inequalities, leaving aside the potentially transformative, more liberating aspects expressed in the global normative frameworks such as the SDGs and CEDAW. As shown in Chapter 7, because the international community implements women's economic empowerment in a fragmented way, they have further entrenched and failed to challenge patriarchal structures in the economic domain, which in turn has significant implications for women on the ground. Hence, the international community's approach to economic empowerment is not only out of sync with women's lived realities and needs, but also shapes those very realities by strengthening domestic social institutions which perpetuate their gendered insecurity and depletion by relegating them to the domestic and the informal spheres.

As discussed in Chapter 1, international interventions have produced disappointing outcomes according to their own aims – increasing women's labour force participation – but also against the more ambitious yardstick of adopting a holistic approach, that is, the extent to which international actors have addressed women's social reproductive work alongside labour force participation. The latter is important insofar as it in no small measure explains the former, but also because it represents a more transformative measure of economic empowerment considering feminist critiques regarding the potential for waged labour to constitute an additional burden if not accompanied by measures to reduce and redistribute the social

reproductive burden.[2] Put differently, by centring the concept of a holistic approach, the findings in this thesis not only help us understand why international organizations have not been able to achieve their intended aims (or norm implementation outcomes), but also in recognizing that these outcomes themselves are flawed, *why* we do not see a more holistic approach from IOs in practice. In other words, they help explain why certain elements of the 'content' of the norm that have been approved internationally get implemented and certain other elements end up not being implemented. With this in mind, I do not claim that labour force outcomes are an accurate reflection of women's empowerment, but that they do reflect the very limited success of international interventions based on their own terms. Ultimately, as highlighted throughout, the outcomes of external economic empowerment interventions cannot be explained without considering both the formal, productive and informal, reproductive economies and women's position within the Kosovar economy.

Labour force outcomes thus show how ineffective international interventions have been, with women's labour force participation ranging between 18-22 percent over the past five years. In Kosovo, there is also a significant gender disparity in labour market participation. According to the Kosova Agency of Statistics, the labour force participation rate for men is 55.5 percent, whereas for women it is only 22 percent.[3] This results in a significant gender labour gap of 33.5 percent in 2022, highlighting the considerable difference between male and female participation in the workforce. However, more importantly still, as mentioned in Chapter 7, the entrenchment of domestic social institutions which exclude women from the formal labour market and uphold gendered divisions of labour has significant implications for women's security, given the material economic basis to women's experiences of insecurity and

[2] Sylvia Chant and Caroline Sweetman, 'Fixing Women or Fixing the World? "Smart Economics", Efficiency Approaches, and Gender Equality in Development', *Gender & Development* 20, no. 3 (November 2012): 517–29.
[3] Republic of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister, Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 'Kosovo Labour Force Survey 2022', 16.

gender-based violence.[4] Deep inequalities persist in Kosovo, and violence against women remains exceptionally high across the country, including increasing rates of femicide.[5] A 2019 OSCE report, for example, highlighted that women's financial reliance on their partners was a major factor preventing them from leaving abusive relationships, as evidenced by the fact that 69 percent of the women surveyed lacked personal bank accounts.[6] This, in turn, undercuts critical gender policy objectives such as reducing violence against women and increasing women's political participation, outlined in the WPS agenda. More broadly, it impedes women's ability to participate in all aspects of public life, another key tenet of the WPS agenda. Furthermore, while outside of the specific focus of this thesis, recent analysis by KWN identified a positive relationship between unpaid care labour and being engaged in informal work.[7] While further research is required to determine any causal relationship in the case of Kosovo, research in other post-conflict contexts suggests a link between extensive caretaking responsibilities and insecure work.[8]

8.2 Limitations, external validity and additional case studies

Whilst a single country case inevitably limits breadth in favour of depth, focussing on a single case allowed for a granular study of the complex dynamics of norm implementation in a contextually rich way, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of this process. This exploration is particularly salient for understanding instances of norm hijacking and fragmentation, in which IOs use their structural power and influence to (un)intentionally

[4] Denisa Kostovicova, Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic, and Marsha Henry, 'Drawing on the Continuum: A War and Post-War Political Economy of Gender-Based Violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22, no. 2 (14 March 2020): 250–72. For the material basis of violence against women, see True, *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*; Jacqui True and Maria Tanyag, 'Global Violence and Security from a Gendered Perspective', in *Global Insecurity: Futures of Global Chaos and Governance*, ed. Anthony Burke and Rita Parker (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), 43–63.
[5] Adelina Hasani and Vesa Kroçi, 'Women's Security Concerns in Kosovo' (Kosovar Center for Security Studies, February 2024).
[6] OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 'Survey on Well-Being and Safety of Women in Kosovo', 83.
[7] Farnsworth et al., 'In the Shadows: A Gender Analysis of Informal Work in Kosovo', 131.
[8] Hedström and Olivius, 'Insecurity, Dispossession, Depletion', 387.

subvert the underlying spirit and principles of international norms or normative agendas, while technically implementing certain components. This is particularly relevant for macro-level issues such as development policy, including gender equality interventions, and international trade, as well as more specific issue areas such as transitional justice.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 identified possible enablers of norm hijacking by international organizations leading to fragmented implementation. The factors identified in this study which enabled norm hijacking and the change in norm meaning within Kosovo are common in post-conflict and conflict-affected transitional contexts with a high concentration of international actors. These include a relatively weak host government which lacks leadership capacity, asymmetric power relations between national partners and international interveners, and weak coordination among international organizations. What is more, the organizational factors identified in this framework, specifically coordination breakdown and donor political economies, are systemic issues, embedded within the broader peacebuilding and development ecosystem, and are thus likely to be salient in other peacebuilding and development contexts. More general interviews with IO staff, many of whom had experience serving in other missions and/or who worked at the headquarters and regional level and thus had a broader perspective, combined with existing empirical research, suggest that these factors plague the peacebuilding and development community all over the world. Given their prevalence, it is reasonable to assume that the inferences drawn from this study would apply more broadly. Moreover, additional case studies would enable further refinement of these findings to determine whether they are generalisable across other contexts. Future research could extend the analysis to additional country cases with internationally driven economic empowerment interventions in a variety of conflict-affected contexts such as Syria, Myanmar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, East Timor, Liberia, or Sierra Leone. Cases could also include post-conflict contexts with a stronger host government; for example, in contexts with ‘stronger’ host governments, one might ask

whether this leads to better donor coordination and more holistic, less siloed approaches by IOs?

Going beyond post-conflict societies, the framework is also likely to be applicable in other cases where international actors are in a position to exercise considerable influence over the implementation of global norms at a local level. A particularly prevalent factor driving norm hijacking is the asymmetrical power relationships between 'international' and 'national' actors. Possibilities for norm hijacking and fragmented implementation by international actors in domestic contexts are thus likely to depend on the presence of unequal power dynamics, which frequently characterise post-conflict and conflict-affected societies, but also development contexts more broadly, where IOs often implement donor-driven agendas. These unequal dynamics can occur due to any one or a combination of the following reasons: because IOs have been mandated and/or because they have the money and thus the structural power to redirect norm meaning away from the original purpose and in ways which might not be best suited to local populations (aid dependency). Alternatively, it might be an issue area in which the national government is less interested in claiming ownership, leaving international organizations with a lot of power to set the agenda, as has frequently been the case with gender equality and women's inclusion, or because national governments are not able to set the agenda due to weak leadership capacities and institutions, as we have seen in Kosovo. The framework could thus be extended to other contexts where international actors are able to exercise structural power and redefine the meaning of global norms in practice.

Furthermore, given this study's focus on a highly internationalised post-conflict context, the framework is geared towards international actors. However, the core process identified in this thesis – norm hijacking by powerful actors or groups, leading to fragmented implementation resulting in the norm outcome not being reached – is likely to be applicable at different levels of analysis beyond the domestic sphere. Whilst the specific factors that enable

norm hijacking are likely to change depending on the context, the scope of the framework could be expanded to the implementation of global norms which are potentially vulnerable to hijacking by powerful international organizations or states, in ways that do not best serve local populations or groups of individuals within them, and which prevents the norm outcome from being reached, such as norms pertaining to the climate change regime. Existing scholarship highlights how the phenomenon of donor or major actor 'hijacking' or capturing policy processes is evident in the implementation phase of the net-zero norm, for example.[9]

8.3 Implications for academic literatures

The above findings are the result of a granular, abductive analysis of the Kosovo case which has important, multifaceted implications for several academic literatures. Beyond theory generation, the analysis in this thesis offers several other insights about norm travel and implementation; externally driven economic empowerment interventions; and international-local interactions. Below, I reflect on how this thesis contributes to ongoing scholarly debates in these various areas.

8.3.1. IR norms scholarship

The analysis of norm implementation by international organizations presented in this thesis has significant theoretical implications for IR norms scholarship, which tends to be state-centric and rarely drills down into how international norms result in any change at the individual level and interact with people's lived realities. Drawing on feminist perspectives, this thesis has advanced a notion of norm implementation which shifts the referent of 'success'

[9] Sam Fankhauser et al., 'The Meaning of Net Zero and How to Get It Right', *Nature Climate Change* 12, no. 1 (January 2022): 15–21; Chris Armstrong and Duncan McLaren, 'Which Net Zero? Climate Justice and Net Zero Emissions', *Ethics & International Affairs* 36, no. 4 (April 2022): 505–26; Friends of the Earth International, 'Chasing Carbon Unicorns: The Deception of Carbon Markets and "Net Zero"', February 2021, https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Friends-of-the-earth-international-carbon-unicorns-english.pdf; Kirstine Lund Christiansen et al., '"Our Burgers Eat Carbon": Investigating the Discourses of Corporate Net-Zero Commitments', *Environmental Science & Policy* 142 (1 April 2023): 79–88.

away from the state to the wellbeing of women within state constructs, i.e. those individuals who are the targets of global gender norms and policies. In doing so, this thesis has sought to show the added value of applying a feminist approach to norm diffusion and implementation. As True and Hozić note, 'where non-feminist scholars see governments and borders, feminists see perpetual loops of violence and harm that transcend and transgress them.'[10] Indeed, without attention to women's everyday lives, the nuances of how global norms travel and ultimately reach, or fail to reach, those they are intended for would remain invisible. Feminist scholars' focus on the role of the everyday therefore adds significant insights to the IR literature on norms; the heuristic tools provided by FPE are necessary to understand implementation as it affects individuals, in contrast to the Constructivist norms literature which has largely stopped at the legal/administrative levels. Feminist perspectives highlight the need for further critical research into how global norms reach those they are intended for, recognising that global norms do not have a uniform impact on 'society' in general, as is largely assumed in norms literature, but impact different groups of the population differently.

This thesis also contributes to our understanding of the role of international organizations in implementation processes and their agency in redefining norm meaning at the ground level of practice. In doing so, my findings on the agency of IOs highlight the need for more research focusing on the role of international organizations as agentic actors at the domestic level in norm implementation processes. Although this may seem like an obvious avenue of enquiry, it remains an underexplored and fruitful area of research. In considering the effects of norm hijacking on the meaning of a norm, is it worth asking a question which has been much debated in IR norms scholarship: what is the norm? Is it what is written in inter-governmental agreements or is it the one that is actually practiced? Or perhaps it is both? Given the high concentration of international actors in Kosovo, which is an advanced peacebuilding

[10] True and Hozić, 'Don't Mention the War! IFIs and the Gendered Circuits of Violence in Post-Conflict', 1194.

and statebuilding context with significant funds invested, there is strong reason to believe that the implementation of economic empowerment norms in Kosovo has the potential to be replicated elsewhere. In this sense, the implementation of economic empowerment norms in Kosovo and its emphasis on formal labour market participation could become precedent for economic recovery in other post-conflict contexts such as Ukraine or Palestine, with likely detrimental consequences for women.

My findings on the ability of IOs to reshape norm meaning at the domestic level share important similarities with recent trends in norm studies, which emphasise that 'the meaning of a norm cannot be found anywhere but in its interpretive enactment.'[11] On a related note, these findings also have important implications for the role of the 'Global South' in norm entrepreneurship; the Global South has increasingly been recognised as norm entrepreneurs in various fields, in the same way that feminist bureaucrats and activists have played an important role in normative gender frameworks.[12] However, the findings in this thesis call into question the sustainability of that normative agency, if processes of norm diffusion and implementation can still be captured later on by the same old players that can exercise power because of their combined GDP or structural advantage within a particular system locally. The thesis thus provides further evidence in support of the view that 'norm diffusion [is] an ongoing negotiation process in which entrepreneurs must continually work toward consolidation of the norms they promote.'[13]

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[11] Thomas Linsenmaier, Dennis R. Schmidt, and Kilian Spandler, 'On the Meaning(s) of Norms: Ambiguity and Global Governance in a Post-Hegemonic World', *Review of International Studies* 47, no. 4 (October 2021): 517. See also Carlotta Minnella, Swapna Pathak, and Marcos Sebastian Scauso, 'The Tension within Norms: Agency and Risks in Pursuit of Global Climate Justice', *Global Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (9 April 2024): ksae019.

[12] Cristina G. Stefan, 'The Responsibility to Protect: Locating Norm Entrepreneurship', *Ethics & International Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2021): 197–211; Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and Bhumika Muchhala, 'The Southern Origins of Sustainable Development Goals: Ideas, Actors, Aspirations', *World Development* 126 (2020); Oliver Stuenkel, 'Brazil and Responsibility to Protect: A Case of Agency and Norm Entrepreneurship in the Global South', *International Relations (London)* 30, no. 3 (2016): 375–90; Eric Helleiner, 'Southern Pioneers of International Development', *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 20, no. 3 (19 August 2014): 375–88.

[13] Alise Coen, 'Can't Be Held Responsible: Weak Norms and Refugee Protection Evasion', *International Relations* 35, no. 2 (1 June 2021): 354.

Through developing the concept of fragmented implementation, the thesis also contributes to our growing understanding of the possible implementation pathways that norms or norm clusters can follow as they are translated vertically from global abstractions to on-the-ground realities. Within fragmented implementation, several different scenarios emerge from the empirical data in this thesis: the first is **invisible implementation**, whereby certain elements of a norm are invisible and are totally bracketed off by IOs in the implementation process. For instance, IOs have largely ignored areas of care and social reproductive economies in Kosovo, aside from very recent, limited efforts. The second is **partial or weak implementation,** where certain elements of a norm might be implemented in part or not in a comprehensive manner. For example, despite recent attention to childcare by some international organizations in Kosovo, there has been a failure to address other aspects of care and to situate childcare policies as part of a broader discourse on the care economy in Kosovo. The third is **perverse implementation**, whereby norms can have sometimes perverse, distorting effects on the ground due to invalid underlying causal knowledge, or because the contextual fit for that causal knowledge is inapt, or because there are other extraneous variables that mean that the enactment of that norm actually leads to unexpected outcomes. As discussed in Chapter 6, this is evident in Kosovo in ways in which some IOs have attempted to address women's unpaid care work through interventions which actually reinforce gendered stereotypes and intensify women's depletion. Additionally, this could also apply to the tendency in post-conflict economic recovery processes to push women into low-income jobs without considering the entire market, such as handicrafts, sewing and beauty, which then become saturated, and which unintentionally reproduces gender stereotypes and ultimately has little effect on women's empowerment. [14] More broadly, this might also apply to the norm of gender mainstreaming, which, as noted in Chapter 2, can be considered as a norm that spans

[14] Lai, 'What Has Justice Got to Do with It?', 1271.

various issue areas but which can unintentionally entrench dominant gender norms rather than displacing them. The fourth pathway is **full implementation**, where a norm or an element of a norm is implemented in its entirety, for example in the case of entrepreneurship development or skills training. However, as demonstrated by this thesis, this does not necessarily mean that the norm will achieve its intended impact, but rather that certain aspects of a norm or norm cluster can act as implementation clusters. Further research is needed to assess how these typologies might evolve and apply in different contexts and across different norm clusters.

This thesis also contributes to discussions about norm ambiguity and the multiplicity of potential meanings that norms can acquire 'in use'. Some scholars have identified the positive and constructive potential of norm ambiguity, highlighting that strict and precise norm definitions can be restrictive and potentially exercise some counterproductive effects.[15] They argue that vagueness in the prescriptive elements of global norms – the 'how to' components – allows for greater contextual relevance and adaptability. However, the empirical findings here align with and support the argument that 'In the case of norm evasion, such elements of ambiguity-as-flexibility arguably dissipate as governments seek to subvert the underlying spirit and purpose of the norm.'[16] This phenomenon is not limited to governments, indeed as this thesis has shown, the same may be said about IOs. The findings suggest that normative ambiguity and imprecision, exemplified by, for example, the caveats that appear in the SDGs around the sharing of unpaid and domestic work 'as nationally appropriate', are highly likely to result in fragmented implementation. What IOs consider to be context relevant, or a

[15] Wesley W. Widmaier and Luke Glanville, 'The Benefits of Norm Ambiguity: Constructing the Responsibility to Protect across Rwanda, Iraq and Libya', *Contemporary Politics* 21, no. 4 (2015): 367–83; Antoine Rayroux, 'Speaking EU Defence at Home: Contentious Discourses and Constructive Ambiguity', *Cooperation and Conflict* 49, no. 3 (2014); Antje Wiener, 'Constructivism and Sociological Institutionalism', in *Palgrave Advances in European Union Studies*, ed. A. Bourne and M. Cini (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005), 35–55; Luke Glanville and Wesley W. Widmaier, 'R2P and the Benefits of Norm Ambiguity', in *Constructing the Responsibility to Protect*, ed. Charles T. Hunt and Phil Orchard, 1st ed. (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2020), 50–68.

[16] Coen, 'Can't Be Held Responsible', 343.

contextually relevant interpretation of a norm, is not always in keeping with what is best for a population or groups within a population locally. As discussed, vagueness in normative frameworks, compounded by intervention logics which prioritise measurable results within short timeframes, are likely to lead to avoidance of those normative prescriptions which involve a more fundamental rethinking of power relations and economic systems.

Lastly, the findings in this thesis also represent an important refinement and corrective to analyses of norm diffusion which emphasise norm congruence, normative fit and cultural context as a key determinant of norm effectiveness and 'success.'[17] Contrary to these analyses, in the context of global gender norms and women's rights, the Kosovo case suggests that a certain degree of incongruence with existing domestic beliefs and values is a necessary condition for the norm to have an impact beyond the legislative level, i.e. for the norm recipient. The Kosovo case shows that when global gender norms are implemented such that they do not sufficiently challenge existing gendered norms and at the domestic level, i.e. if they are *too* congruent with existing cultures, the norm might be accepted and institutionalised at the legislative level but will have little effect on the everyday lives of women. While much has been written on the problem of imposing alien norms on host states and societies, the Kosovo case suggests that in the realm of gender equality and women's empowerment, some level of imposition may be necessary to disrupt patriarchal oppression and transform established gender norms. A feminist perspective would see patriarchy itself as a 'culture', thus requiring increased attention to how international norms may be implemented in ways that simply replicate the status quo and leave culturally legitimised power relations intact.[18] More broadly, the findings expose the flaws of using legislation alone as a yardstick or end-point for domestic norm diffusion, since the data revealed numerous instances of commitments pertaining to

[17] Checkel, 'Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe'; Acharya, 'How Ideas Spread'.
[18] For a critique of the concept of 'culture', see Birgit Bräuchler, 'The Cultural Turn in Peace Research: Prospects and Challenges', *Peacebuilding* 6, no. 1 (2 January 2018): 17–33.

gender equality and gender discrimination being codified in laws, but with limited or no implementation in practice; for example, the Kosovo Law on Gender Equality which legally requires institutions to carry out gender-responsive budgeting, but which has been barely implemented in practice.

8.3.2. Feminist literatures

My findings on the implementation of economic empowerment norms in practice align with and expand several key insights of feminist scholars, in particular those who theorize and critique the gendered effects of post-war reconstruction policies. While there have been rich accounts of the ways in which the broader macroeconomic context has been detrimental to women[19], this thesis extends the focus beyond the macroeconomic context shaped by IFI-imposed policies to consider a broader range of international institutions and explore the micro-dynamics of norm implementation through gender interventions. Rather than finding the source of the disjuncture between external interventions and women's lived realities purely in the neoliberal underpinnings of economic empowerment interventions, as FPE tends to do, this thesis also points to donor political economies and inter-organizational dynamics as key elements of the explanation. The case of Kosovo suggests that both of these factors may act as constraints on international actors' choices in a given context. Perhaps due to the tendency to privilege the role of neoliberal discourses in explaining IO policies, more 'technical' issues such as coordination have been relatively sidelined in feminist critiques of neoliberal approaches to women's economic empowerment. One consequence of the growing attention to the care economy is that IO staff on the ground are generally aware of the need to address care work and informal care economies. Of course, this awareness is not incompatible with

[19] See, for example, the special issue on 'International Financial Institutions and Gendered Circuits of Labour and Violence', guest edited by Aida A. Hozić & Jacqui True, *Review of International Political* Economy, 27, no. 6 (2020).

neoliberal logics, since as mentioned throughout, even the most neoliberally minded by now recognise the role of care economy and the importance of it for the purposes of economic growth, even if not for women themselves. However, by considering why this awareness and various policy commitments, both at the global level and organizational level, have not been translated into concrete action in the case of Kosovo, the thesis uncovered the critical role of donor political economies and inter-organizational dynamics during the implementation process, alongside normative ambiguity which enables the continued dominance of neoliberal empowerment logics. In other words, instead of placing all of the analytical weight on neoliberal approaches, the attention to the micro-dynamics of implementation revealed a broader range of factors determining the state of play at the country level. The explanation of fragmented implementation advanced in this thesis thus provides a more comprehensive explanation of the disjuncture between IO implementation and women's everyday lives. In doing so, the empirical findings here build on and complement the insights of feminist scholars who theorize and critique the gendered effects of post-war reconstruction policies and gender interventions.

In addition, the focus of this study on the practices of implementation has contributed to feminist work in IR and development literature on how economic empowerment is articulated at the ground level. Feminist scholars have noted that liberal conceptions of economic empowerment tend to dominate in peacebuilding and development discourses but rarely have these scholars examined the micro-processes of policy implementation on the ground.[20] Returning to the conceptualizations of empowerment outlined in Chapter 2, feminist scholars highlight the potential for both liberating and liberal versions of economic empowerment on the ground. As Boer Cueva et al. note, 'empowerment as a concept, contains within it the potential both to further embed the priorities and rationalities of neoliberal

[20] Duncanson, 'Beyond Liberal vs Liberating'.

governance, and…to transform women's lives.'[21] The findings of this thesis provide additional insights into *why* the liberal tends to dominate, by offering a more comprehensive understanding of barriers to the vertical implementation of a more transformative version of empowerment, which is one of this thesis's key contributions.

More broadly, the thesis provides further evidence in support of the view that although the 'project approach' to empowerment tends to fall short of structural change, it also has the potential to 'facilitate a more liberating economic empowerment.'[22] Although there are countless examples of empowerment 'projects' in Kosovo which exemplify the liberal, individualist logic of empowerment, there were also some positive exceptions, for example a UNFPA project aimed at aligning with the EU's work-life balance directive which advocates for family-friendly policies such as parental leave. These kinds of projects go beyond individual betterment and hold the potential for driving structural change. Initiatives elsewhere in the region focussing specifically on the care economy also have liberating potential by starting national dialogues on the care economy. As discussed, such dialogues are crucial for moving beyond siloed discussions on, for example, childcare and creating systematic, national care plans.

8.3.3. International-local interactions

At its broadest, the findings also speak to the literature on the relationship between international and local actors and raise critical questions on the role of IOs vis-à-vis host governments in post-conflict states. For instance, what responsibility or obligation do international organizations have to implement normative agendas where, as is often the case in post-conflict contexts, government ownership over peacebuilding, statebuilding and

[21] Alba Rosa Boer Cueva, Penny Griffin, and Laura J. Shepherd, 'Logics of Empowerment in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 28 April 2023, 473–74.
[22] Duncanson, 'Beyond Liberal vs Liberating', 125.

development agendas is weak? Indeed, the very presence of the international community in such contexts is deemed necessary precisely because national institutions have been weakened or obliterated due to conflict. As discussed, this question is especially pertinent in the arena of economic and social rights, but more broadly in the context of any interconnected policy and development agendas, where frequently policy outcomes are interconnected and goals cannot be achieved without advances in other related areas. As this thesis has shown, women's engagement in the formal economy cannot be achieved without some progress regarding women's access to affordable and accessible care. The same is true in other areas, such as the connections between developing certain sectors of the economy and education reform, for example.

While various literatures, namely literature on the local turn in peacebuilding and development literatures on aid effectiveness, emphasize the necessity of national ownership and government buy-in for sustainable peacebuilding and development processes, the findings in this thesis suggest that the principle of local or national ownership can have adverse effects for gender equality progress and women on the ground when put into practice selectively by international organizations. As noted in Chapter 6, the idea of national ownership was raised by some international organizations to explain their limited or lack of engagement with the care economy; in order to ensure national ownership, IOs claimed that they were bound by government priorities and had to work in government priority areas. However, in practice, national ownership has been deployed selectively in Kosovo, with IOs pushing and imposing policies in certain areas such as rule of law and the energy sector, whilst other areas, such as social infrastructure, have taken a back seat. In other words, national ownership has not been respected and implemented consistently across different policy domains. In this sense, national ownership can be deployed to provide a cover of legitimacy to avoid working on certain areas that might be deemed more challenging or have not been at the top of IOs' own agendas, which

in turn allow for the continuation of highly unequal gender relations. This in turn suggests that the concept of national ownership can be used selectively in ways that absolve international organizations of responsibility for implementing certain elements of global normative agendas on women's rights, including those which are also embedded in organizational strategy documents and country action plans. It is true IOs do have to align with the government to a certain extent and government buy-in and local ownership are undoubtedly important for ensuring policy implementation. Indeed, feminist scholars have shown the challenges that can arise from a lack of domestic political ownership.[23] However, this does not mitigate the fact that, at the same time, IOs in Kosovo and in other post-conflict contexts nevertheless have the ability to push forward policy issues. As True et al. have argued in the context of IFIs,

> The corruption, cronyism and capture of local elites by vested interests of foreign investors are also instrumental in post-conflict contexts. But this recognition does not absolve IFIs from responsibility for post-war outcomes. They have more leverage in post-conflict spaces than other more stable, less fragile spaces and they largely go under the radar in conventional peace processes outside of formal or publicised peace agreements. IFIs virtually act as sovereigns because the sovereignty of post-conflict states is compromised or in question (some—like Bosnia and East Timor—are protectorates).[24]

Although the actors under analysis in this thesis go beyond IFIs, a similar argument can also be made regarding the obligation to ensure economic and social rights in relation to donors and international organizations who might have less financial clout, but who, at the very least, have a crucial role to play in generating political will and drawing attention to issue areas that might not be seen as a priority by the host government. Even just in terms of advocacy, the findings from Kosovo suggest that international organizations and donors are not maximising their role as advocates to generate political will in certain issue areas, primarily because donors' own agendas have fallen short of prioritising and promoting issues such as the care agenda. In

[23] For example, Spehar's analysis of implementation gaps with respect to GRB in the Western Balkans highlights the pitfalls of aid dependency which 'can create a lack of domestic political ownership; the same can happen when the push for change comes entirely or overwhelmingly from external actors', in Spehar, 'The Pursuit of Political Will'.
[24] True and Hozić, 'Don't Mention the War! IFIs and the Gendered Circuits of Violence in Post-Conflict', 1199.

the case of Kosovo, for example, this was evident as many IO staff interviewed for this thesis acknowledged the need and the scope for their organization to do more work on the care economy.

The question of the 'responsibility' and accountability of IFIs to ensure economic and social rights in particular has been touched on by feminist scholars, who argue that 'there is a responsibility by international institutions for violations of economic and social rights within a state. Therefore, there must be liability on behalf of both the member states and the international institutions when international economic agreements, with for example the IMF and World Bank, have a negative impact on, or are in breach of, the realization of state's human rights obligations.'[25] This is not to minimize the agency of the government or the importance of national ownership, but to recognise that at a political level, IOs in Kosovo and in other post-conflict contexts do have the ability to push forward policy issues, and with this in mind, can be held accountable for their choices and consequences. Wider empirical evidence has shown that peacebuilding programs have frequently neglected social, economic and cultural rights in favour of ensuring political and civil rights.[26] What is more, even if one accepts the claim made by some IOs that their limited engagement with the care economy has to do with national ownership, there are numerous other ways that international organizations, including IFIs but also going beyond, can create (progressive) policy space which does not amount to direct imposition. There is a spectrum of approaches available to international organizations which range from creating policy space through advocacy and advising, to persuasion, at one end, to

[25] True et al., 'A Feminist Perspective on Post-Conflict Restructuring and Recovery: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina', 7. For further discussion on the legal basis for IFIs to ensure social and economic rights, see C. M. Chinkin, *International Law and New Wars* (Cambridge: University Press, 2017); Rees and Chinkin, 'Exposing the Gendered Myth of Post Conflict Transition'.

[26] Amanda Cahill-Ripley, 'Challenging Neoliberalism: Making Economic and Social Rights Matter in the Peacebuilding Agenda', in *Economic and Social Rights in a Neoliberal World*, ed. Gillian MacNaughton and Diane F. Frey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 192–214; Jacqui True and Sarah Hewitt, 'What Works in Relief and Recovery', in *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security*, ed. Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 177–92.

direct imposition, for example through loan conditionalities, at the other. In the context of the care economy, beyond IFI financing, organizations can generate political will and greater policy space for the government to implement care-related policies, by, as mentioned in this thesis, conducting and/or funding time-use surveys; assisting in framing social infrastructure as an investment rather than expenditure and presenting evidence-based benefits, for example in terms of job creation and economic growth, even if this means approaching it from a more instrumentalist perspective, to name but a few options.[27]

8.4 Policy Implications

Against a background of growing attention to women's social reproductive burdens by international organizations, albeit largely driven by instrumentalist logics, the findings have timely and important policy implications. This thesis's exploration of the Kosovo case has also, and importantly, drawn attention to the risks inherent in approaching unpaid work primarily through the lens of it being a barrier to women's participation in the labour market. The findings confirmed the existence of a tendency to see the links between the care economy and women's economic empowerment in a utilitarian, instrumental fashion. In other words, there is a need to resolve the care issue because women need to work to be productive and contribute to economic growth, in a way that is not really centred on women's needs, agency, or ideas, but the need for them to be an active part of the economy. This thesis empirically demonstrates the implications of contradictions within global normative frameworks – for example between economic growth and decent work for women – and how they play out in practice, confirming the warnings of feminist scholars. As Budlender cautioned, 'there is…now a danger that unpaid care work can, as with gender and the environment, become a "cross-cutting issue" that will be referred to repeatedly but more as a sign of political correctness than of bringing about

[27] For feminist alternatives to traditional postwar economic recovery policies, see Cohn and Duncanson, 'Whose Recovery?', 1227.

fundamental changes that could address the underlying problems.'[28] Accordingly, some of the interventions discussed in Chapter 6 serve as a stark reminder of how even when there is seeming 'recognition' of unpaid care work, this can seamlessly coexist with neoliberal logics which are less concerned with redistribution and more interested in how to work around women's unpaid care duties so that they can fulfil both. These include, for example, the push to integrate women into the online gig economy and other forms of home-based work. As noted in Chapter 3, the emphasis on GDP growth in the SDGs – widely criticized as a measure by feminist scholars – sits uneasily with targets on gender equality and decent work for all, since SDG 8 overlooks social reproduction. In this way, the push to include women in the market economy in pursuit of economic growth can override considerations of recognizing, and even more importantly, reducing women's unpaid labour. As Boer Cueva et al. note, 'centralising an economic logic of empowerment reinforces the assumption that formal economy contributions are fundamental, potentially erasing the value and visibility of socially reproductive labour while overburdening the bodies that complete most of this work.'[29]

These findings also have important implications for the 'ideal' model of relief and recovery which has been proposed in recent Women, Peace and Security analyses. The limitations of the fourth pillar of the WPS agenda - Relief and Recovery (R&R) – and the potential for it to be refashioned into a more transformative pillar, going beyond its currently very limited, short-term vision of economic empowerment, have been highlighted by WPS scholars. Jacqui True and Sarah Hewitt, for example, argue that 'within "relief and recovery," there are opportunities to bridge the divide between "relief" or short-term humanitarian assistance that responds to women's needs, and "recovery" or the long-term development

[28] Shirin Rai, Debbie Budlender, and Ulla Grapard, 'Feminist Classics/Many Voices: Marilyn Waring. *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics*', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16, no. 3 (3 July 2014): 527.
[29] Alba Rosa Boer Cueva, Penny Griffin, and Laura J. Shepherd, 'Logics of Empowerment in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 26, no. 3 (1 September 2023): 473.

frameworks and initiatives that address the strategic interests of Resolution 1325 in gender equality, conflict-prevention, and sustainable peace.'[30] Ryan notes that 'in particular, the 2019 UNSG report on Women, Peace and Security emphasizes that initiatives should not be limited to microeconomic or small-scale interventions, but should deal with structural inequalities.'[31] However, this would require more than just changing the language of existing WPS resolutions or adding additional resolutions focussed on economic empowerment. For these opportunities to be realised, it is first necessary to understand how women's economic empowerment is currently being practiced on the ground in post-conflict contexts and the obstacles to implementing a more holistic approach to women's economic empowerment. As Boer-Cueva et. al remind us, 'it is important...to consider the links between WPS, empowerment and economic development, and the ongoing relationships between conflict, development and peacebuilding.'[32]

Crucially, my findings reveal important organizational constraints to the implementation of global gender norms and demonstrate some of the obstacles to transferring critical feminist ideas regarding systematic structural inequalities into policy practice. Recent academic and practitioner scholarship on WPS, particularly in the wake of COVID-19, has emphasised the need to place the care economy at the centre of relief and recovery efforts, whether from conflict, climate, or global health crises. [33] These contributions argue that valuing social reproduction and redistributing the burden of care are key to achieving more transformative relief and recovery processes. As a recent policy brief noted, 'acknowledging

[30] True and Hewitt, 'What Works in Relief and Recovery'.
[31] Caitlin Ryan, 'Women, Peace and Security: Women's Post-War Economic Empowerment', November 2020, Joint Brief Series: New Insights on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) for the Next Decade, Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PRIO and UN Women, 1.
[32] Boer Cueva, Griffin, and Shepherd, 'Logics of Empowerment in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', 28 April 2023, 454.
[33] OGIP, 'An inclusive and sustainable approach to relief and recovery', LSE Women, Peace and Security Policy Brief Series, May 2022; Luna K C and Crystal Whetstone, 'Women, Peace, and Security and Increasing Gendered Risk in the Era of COVID-19: Insights from Nepal and Sri Lanka', *Global Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (18 July 2022): ksac036.; Swisspeace Policy Brief, 'Centering Care in Women, Peace and Security', February 2022.

the role of care and responding to the disproportionate burdens it holds is central to undertaking relief and recovery that addresses the structural factors leading to these burdens, and to ensuring that care and wellbeing is centred in recovery processes'.[34] The analysis in this thesis revealed some crucial obstacles that need to be taken into consideration when rethinking the R&R pillar so that it does not once again fall into the trap of overpromising and underdelivering. It is essential to understand the current obstacles international organizations, donors and INGOs face in addressing the structural aspects of women's economic empowerment and their implications so that these can be addressed in the implementation frameworks for future relief and recovery efforts. In other words, it is important to consider not only what should be, but the concrete mechanisms through which these goals are reached.

8.5 Future Research

This thesis sought to enhance our understanding of the implementation of economic norms in practice and the disjuncture between external interventions and the everyday lives of women. However, there were several significant research areas that fell outside the scope of this project. The research highlighted several related topics that would be valuable for future studies, especially those that expand the examination of externally-driven economic empowerment interventions across multiple countries.

Following the money. Going forwards, a key area of research would be to combine the kind of granular qualitative analysis of economic empowerment conducted in this thesis with critical quantitative studies tracking IO funding allocations for women's economic empowerment. This strand of enquiry draws on a key question often asked by feminist civil society and activists – 'where is the money?'.[35] As noted throughout this thesis, economic

[34] OGIP, 'An inclusive and sustainable approach to relief and recovery', LSE Women, Peace and Security Policy Brief Series, May 2022, 16.
[35] The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), 'Where is the Money for Feminist Organizing?', 2021.

empowerment has become an increasingly important issue and policy agenda. Tracing and analyzing financial allocations and disbursements would reveal deeper normative and strategic choices about how economic empowerment is conceptualized and which issues are prioritised by policymakers at the ground level of practice. A potential empirical challenge identified in the Kosovo context could be the availability of data regarding gender-relevant projects, since gender is a cross-cutting issue and donors have not been consistent in inputting the gender-relevant objectives within projects across a wide range of sectors such as health, human rights, and employment. However, these could be overcome by combining data on financial allocations with a manual review of projects, or by limiting the analysis to one organization, such as the EU. By breaking down the economic empowerment norm into different sub-policy areas, it would be possible to identify the meanings attached to the norm cluster in practice by examining which elements of the norm are prioritised in practice based on funding decisions. Quantitative research, combined with in-depth case studies, would add further depth and potentially new insights into the phenomenon of norm fragmentation at the ground level of practice. Quantitative analysis would allow for further disaggregation and mapping of the norm in practice, whilst case-study analysis is required to tease out the assumptions and deliberations underlying policy and programmatic choices and investment decisions which are not visible from quantitative data alone.

Considerable further research is needed to analyse the relationship between the growing rhetoric on supporting relations of social reproduction and its translation into practice by international organizations in low-and middle-income countries. Evidence beyond the case study of Kosovo suggests that this rhetoric is yet to be mirrored in practice. As Khurana and Verma have noted, ‘despite the renewed discourse around the importance of social provisioning during the pandemic, an analysis by Oxfam shows that 84% of the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) COVID-19 loans require or encourage recipient poor countries to

adopt tougher austerity measures. A feminist economic perspective centred on social reproduction and care is thus necessary to comprehensively understand and address the fallouts of the pandemic and ensure that equity and gender justice are placed at the centre of the post-COVID rebuilding process.'[36] These realities, which align with the findings in this thesis, suggests that there is a significant gap between the rhetoric and reality of commitments to recognizing and reducing unpaid care work. It also suggests that, in the context of economic empowerment, analyses of loan conditionalities in combination with externally funded projects and policies, could also be included as part of a quantitative analysis. Indeed, existing analyses show that 'there has been a substantial increase in the number of conditions and policy areas under reform since the [2008] global financial crisis.'[37]

Understanding the Ideational Persistence of Neoliberal Approaches to Women's Economic Empowerment and Economic Recovery. A second crucial area for further research would be into a puzzle that emerges from this thesis and other scholarship: what explains the persistence of neoliberal approaches to economic empowerment and economic recovery, which remain focussed on the productive economy despite a wealth of feminist analysis which highlights time and time again the devastating impacts on women? This could be achieved by conducting ethnographic studies of IOs in order to further understand the limited inroads made by feminist political economy, notably within IFIs but also with respect to other international organizations. As True and Hozić argue, 'despite decades of scholarship, activism, and expert advice on the benefits of taking gender into account in economic policymaking, including inside the IFIs—the persistent marginalization of feminist approaches to political economy is evident in the design of structural reforms, stabilisation loans, export strategies, microfinance,

[36] Nalini V. Khurana and Ravi K. Verma, 'SDG 5: Addressing Gaps and Accelerating Progress Towards a Feminist, Intersectional, and Transformative Vision for Change', in *Transforming Unequal Gender Relations in India and Beyond: An Intersectional Perspective on Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Saroj Pachauri and Ravi K. Verma (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2023), 15.
[37] True et al., 'A Feminist Perspective on Post-Conflict Restructuring and Recovery: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina', 31.

gender budgeting, and other fiscal policies in post-conflict states.'[38] Mathers similarly notes that 'it is almost as though a generations' worth of feminist theorizing about political economy had never taken place.'[39]

Preliminarily, one tentative explanation for the continued stronghold of neoliberal approaches may simply lie in organizational pathologies and the difficulties of breaking away from entrenched, familiar approaches underpinned by mainstream neoclassical economics. For instance, the interviews conducted for this thesis revealed that relatively few organizations had trained staff on care economy principles. Unlike gender specialist staff, development staff often possess backgrounds in fields such as law and engineering, and thus lack gender-awareness, let alone specific knowledge of the care economy. In the absence of such trainings, another more specific explanation relates to patriarchal logics across various levels of economic policymaking: to what extent do international interveners bring their own conceptual baggage and biases, often coming from patriarchal European cultures which normalize that caregiving responsibilities primarily belong to women and largely, aside from feminist organizations and civil society, do not perceive the care economy as a forefront policy issue. In other words, if Western policymakers and civil servants responsible for formulating international development policies are also considering strategies to enable post-conflict countries to catch up with the "west", this could lead to the issue of the informal unpaid care economy being overlooked. This oversight may stem from the perception that the informal unpaid care economy is either insignificant or an inherent aspect of life, thereby not warranting substantial attention or intervention. Such perceptions significantly influence the allocation of attention and resources in policy development. Future research could employ immersive, ethnographic studies

[38] True and Hozić, 'Don't Mention the War! IFIs and the Gendered Circuits of Violence in Post-Conflict', 1206.
[39] Mathers, 'Women, War and Austerity', 1251.

focusing on particular IOs and IFIs, as well as interviewing, in order to better understand the internal factors that hinder a broader acceptance of feminist approaches to political economy.

Conceptualizations of empowerment. Finally, more research is needed into women's own perspectives and how they understand their own economic empowerment, both within Kosovo and beyond. This research agenda would involve analysing the perspectives of the actual beneficiaries of some of the interventions discussed in this thesis, as well as more in-depth analyses of civil society discourses on economy empowerment. This research agenda would address the gap in current literature by examining how women in Kosovo and possibly beyond conceptualize their economic empowerment. By analyzing the perspectives of actual beneficiaries of empowerment interventions and conducting in-depth analyses of civil society discourses, this research could uncover potential contradictions between the international community's portrayal of empowered women, civil society organizations' constructions of these women, and the women's own perceptions of empowerment. It is likely that this research would unearth discrepancies and contradictions between external portrayals of empowered women and the self-perceptions of those directly involved, as well as potential connections.

This would be a particularly interesting issue to explore in the context of Kosovo considering the past socialist model and how women's societal role was conceived, compared to how the neoliberal model envisages women's role in society. Although the actual situation of women in socialist Yugoslavia was far from perfect, as they still faced the burden of unpaid labour in the household due to prevailing patriarchal societal gender roles and norms, the double burden was somewhat lessened by the strong welfare state.[40] However, whilst Kosovo shares some aspects of this past, it was also a region within the former socialist Yugoslavia which was always economically underdeveloped and marginalized because of the political equilibrium that favoured elites that had a vested interest in keeping Kosovo subordinated. For

[40] Stavrevska, 'The Mother, the Wife, the Entrepreneur?', 197.

Kosovo, the regime became oppressive, so the perceptions that people, and specifically women, might have of that past are very different. Of particular interest would be the extent to which women in Kosovo experience a sense of 'Yugo-nostalgia' and how this might influence their perceptions of empowerment and societal roles, specifically whether there were any features of women's role in society under socialist Yugoslavia which are still considered to be something that was lost.

While the interviewees for this thesis did include members of civil society and analyses of recent survey data on all of the above, its particular emphasis was not on mapping detailed discrepancies between their views. This approach aligns with recent calls in the literature to empirically investigate the lived experiences and understandings of empowerment from the perspectives of those directly involved, rather than solely relying on what international organizations highlight as progress and successes on the ground.[41] This research would connect with recent scholarship on empowerment, which has to date still not 'explore[d] empirically how the logics of empowerment are experienced by the people they are written by or for.'[42] This research agenda would enable an even more nuanced understanding of how well international approaches and assumptions capture and represent the experiences and aspirations of Kosovar women. Relatedly, in the case of Kosovo, further research could explore the links between unpaid care labour and informality, exploring the extent to which caregiving responsibilities push women into insecure, informal work.

In sum, the conclusions of this thesis have significant academic and practical implications. It highlights the need for greater attention to locally situated experiences of international normative frameworks. In particular, the analysis of Kosovo shows just how important it is for

[41] Duncanson, 'Beyond Liberal vs Liberating', 125.
[42] Boer Cueva, Griffin, and Shepherd, 'Logics of Empowerment in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', 28 April 2023, 458.

international organizations of all kinds to take women's position in the economy seriously, as FPE has long demonstrated, in order to achieve women's empowerment. Without this holistic approach, IOs risk impeding progress towards the stated goals they seek to achieve, and in doing so, continually marginalizing those they are seeking to support.

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