

Evaluation of the European Union External Cooperation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - February 2026

Evaluation of EU cooperation with Kosovo* (2016-2023)

INTRODUCTION

This evaluation looks at **EU cooperation with Kosovo from 2016 to 2023**. It assesses how far this cooperation has helped Kosovo **move closer to EU standards and supported its EU path**. The evaluation takes stock of past progress and lessons learned, to improve future EU assistance in Kosovo, strengthen policy dialogue, and bring Kosovo closer to EU priorities.

This assessment mainly looks at **bilateral financial and technical assistance managed by DG ENEST** through the **Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA)**.

EU BILATERAL ASSISTANCE TARGETED FOUR MAIN THEMATIC AREAS:



Energy, environment and climate change;



Socio-economic development, including education, employment, competitiveness (SMEs and trade) and agriculture;

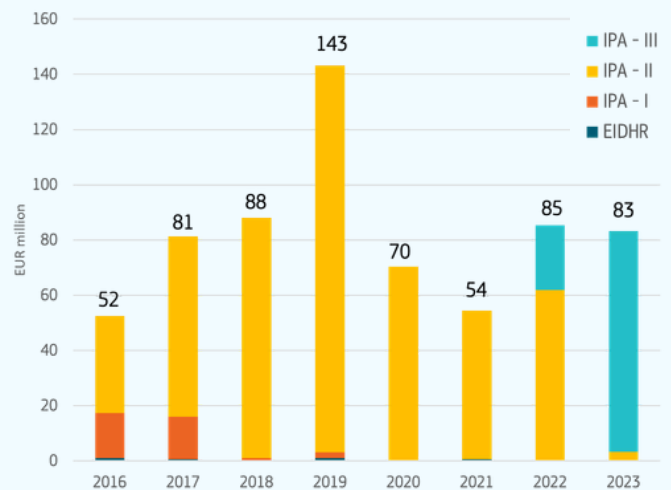


Public administration reform (PAR), including public financial management (PFM) and municipal administration;

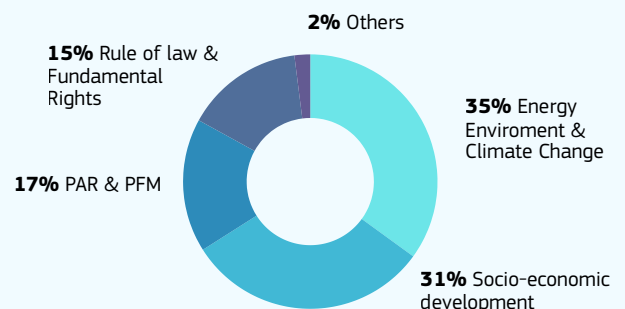


Rule of law and fundamental rights.

The EU has been the **biggest donor** to Kosovo, with **EUR 658 million** of bilateral funds contracted by DG ENEST between 2016 and 2023. Funding peaked in 2019, when several major infrastructure contracts were signed.



Most of the EU's support went to **energy, environment, and climate change**, closely followed by **socio-economic development**. About one-third of the funding was for **PAR and PFM**, and **rule of law**.

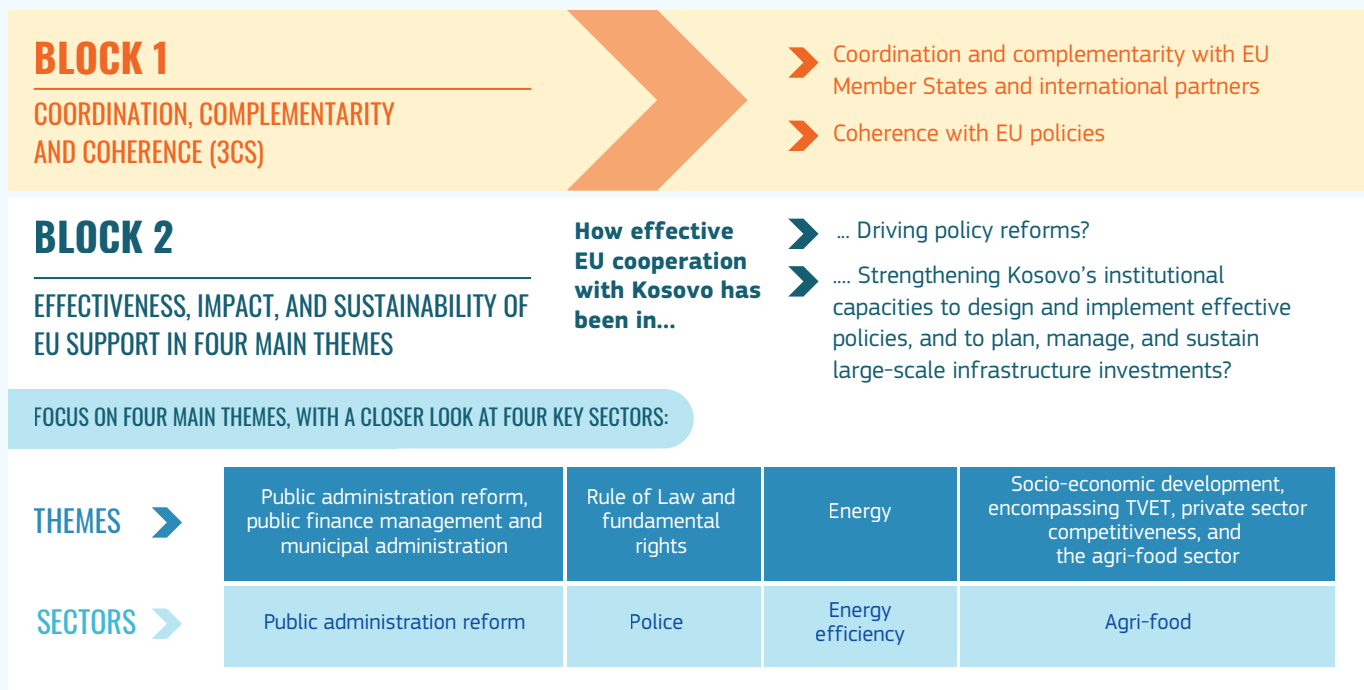


Source: ADE, based on EU CRIS Database.

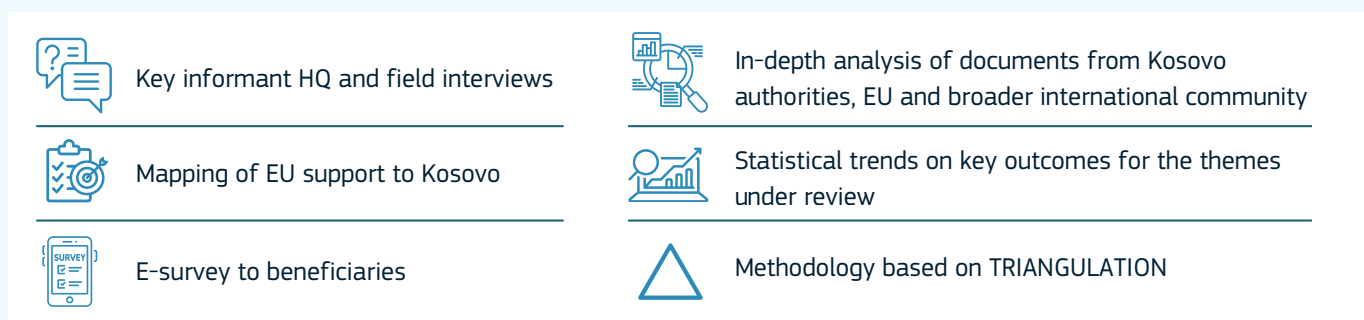
*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



This evaluation followed DG NEAR's guidelines for strategic evaluations. It used a **contribution analysis approach**, based on a reconstructed intervention logic and an **evaluation matrix with two blocks** (see figure below). The methods were chosen to match the main interest of the Inter-Service Group (ISG): to assess **how effective EU cooperation with Kosovo has been in driving policy reforms in four main themes**. Broader questions, such as the overall relevance of EU cooperation or the mix of different aid modalities, were left out of scope, as agreed with the ISG.



Because data on the results of national strategies and EU interventions was limited, the evaluation **cross-checked different sources** (see figure below).



MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS



Kosovo has been on its **EU path** since the Thessaloniki Declaration in 2003, but it has not yet gained candidate status or started negotiations. Its non-recognition from five EU Member States creates unique challenges for joining the EU, and the timeline for possible accession remains highly uncertain.

The **EU's leverage in driving policy reforms** across the thematic areas **mainly came from Kosovo's European prospects**. The EC's recommendations from the Kosovo annual reports, along with the joint conclusions of the SAA bodies, gave a clear roadmap for Kosovo's EU path. Following these recommendations has been key for the authorities in shaping, adopting, and implementing EU-related reforms.

EU support, mainly through **IPA assistance, helped develop and adopt many policies and reforms** in public administration, public financial management, municipal governance, rule of law, energy, and socio-economic development.

However, **putting these reforms into practice has often been difficult** because of political instability, limited political will, institutional resistance to change, limited administrative capacity, and weak institutional steering.

The **EU's influence on policy reforms has varied across areas**, as explained in the next sections.

CLUSTER 1 ON POLICY REFORM LEVERAGE PER THEMATIC AREA

C1

Support to PAR and PFM

While the EU's IPA support has contributed to initial legislative and structural changes in the PAR/PFM area, reform implementation and sustained progress has been hindered by inconsistent political commitment, political instability, capacity shortfalls, and fragmented administrative practices.

EU support has been instrumental in helping Kosovo gradually consolidate its PAR and PFM strategic framework. However, progress in key PAR areas – such as professionalising the civil service, establishing fair remuneration, and rationalising agencies, and enhancing administrative service delivery – has remained limited since 2016. In PFM, advancements have been made in domestic revenue mobilisation and external audit. Challenges persist in public procurement, internal control, and audit. Municipal governance has improved, but disparities remain, and municipal financing reforms have stalled.



C2

Support to Rule of Law

EU support to Kosovo contributed to strengthening the rule of law and fundamental rights, achieving significant reforms but with ongoing challenges in implementation and sustainability.

EU support for the rule of law has enhanced justice sector capacity, intelligence-led policing, and judicial efficiency. However, political interference, resource constraints, and resistance to reform limit impact, particularly in anti-corruption efforts. Gender equality has advanced through legislative reforms. Yet institutional fragmentation and funding shortages significantly undermine the effective implementation of the legal framework.



C3

Support to Energy

EU support to Kosovo's energy and district heating sectors has effectively integrated investments in physical infrastructure with initiatives to align the country's policies and regulatory frameworks with the EU standards, though challenges in implementation and long-term sustainability persist.

In the energy sector, EU-funded investments have improved infrastructure. In addition, capacity-building has facilitated regulatory alignment with EU directives and strengthened institutional capacities. This contributed to greater energy efficiency. The 2023 SRBC Energy Support Package strengthened coordination among Kosovo's institutions, though implementation delays and weak institutions remain ongoing challenges. Ensuring long-term sustainability requires better data, robust monitoring, and sustained capacity-building.



C4

Support to TVET, PSD and Agri-food

The EU's support in TVET, private sector development, and agri-food has facilitated policy and institutional development as well as legislative improvements. But the implementation of reforms and the achievement of sustained results have been impeded by inconsistent political commitment and steering, capacity deficiencies, and external challenges.

The EU-induced Vocational Education and Training (VET) reforms improved policy development, teaching quality and infrastructure. But their effects on the labour market remain modest. Private sector development has been supported through improvements in policy and strategic framework, quality infrastructure, access to finance, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). However, overall economic development and advancement in Kosovo's value chains robustness remain limited. EU support was instrumental in establishing a well-equipped Kosovo Food and Veterinary Agency and improving the food safety and veterinary systems. This progress has yet to be translated into better market performance or safer food for consumers. Across all sectors, weak monitoring and reporting practices hinder precise impact measurement.



C5 Institutional and human capacity gaps persisted despite EU-funded capacity-building initiatives, compounded by the authorities of Kosovo's lack of sufficient political commitment and persistent politicisation within the administration.

The effectiveness of EU-funded capacity-building initiatives varied across thematic areas. Progress was often undermined by politicisation, administrative turnover, and limited institutional ownership. Technical assistance was generally well-received in sectors such as energy, socio-economic development, and rule of law - where outputs like energy efficiency plans and harmonised standards were put to use. But the long-term impact remained uncertain due to high staff turnover and weak enforcement of reforms. In contrast, support to Public Administration Reform saw limited uptake, as political shifts led to a reshaping of Kosovo's approach to civil service reform, diverging from EU standards. Similarly, EU-trained capacities in the Food and Veterinary Agency were partly lost due to a lack of political commitment.

Coordination and monitoring of EU support by the National IPA Coordinator (NIPAC) and line ministries also remained a challenge. There was severe understaffing until early 2024 and continued limitations due to the inexperience of newly recruited staff.

C6 Kosovo benefited from a combination of aid modalities. Technical assistance was most effective when paired with budget support or aligned with EU recommendations from the Kosovo Annual Enlargement Reports. Budget support facilitated meaningful dialogue on key reforms and was positively received by the authorities. Challenges such as institutional capacity gaps, limited administrative ownership, and political instability reduced its impact, particularly in advancing systemic reforms in Public Administration Reform.

Kosovo has benefited from significant capacity-building efforts across various sectors. TA often fostered regular dialogue between the EU and Kosovan institutions and proved most effective when complementing budget support or recommendations from EU annual enlargement reports. Traditional TA was preferred over EU instruments like TAIX and Twinning. The latter saw lower usage in Kosovo compared to other enlargement countries, largely due to shifts in government dynamics.

The introduction of budget support in 2017 for public administration reforms helped engage high-level policy dialogue and technical dialogue on these reforms. But it was introduced prematurely given political instability, limited political will, and insufficient data reliability. The budget support on public financial management proceeded smoothly, addressing tax collection, budget credibility, audit, and budget transparency. In the energy sector, the budget support helped foster inter-ministerial collaboration. However, it focused more on short-term goals like electricity subsidies rather than systemic renewable energy reforms. Delays in implementing energy efficiency measures in social housing left part of the EUR 67.5 million tranche unspent by mid-2024.

C7 Monitoring shortfalls on the part of both Kosovo and the European Commission have undermined the Commission's ability to assess the results and impact of its support, and to build upon its successful initiatives.

Kosovo's authorities did not establish an adequate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system to track progress on sector-level reforms. The National IPA Coordinator's annual reports remained primarily descriptive and lacked analysis of results. Limited data on policy implementation at the sector level hindered the ability to assess the effectiveness and impact of EU support. Additionally, shortcomings in institutional learning - such as weak systems for capturing, analysing, and applying lessons learned - prevented both the authorities and their partners from effectively designing, monitoring, or refining policies. Progress and annual reports for EU-funded projects were produced. However, they mainly focused on activities and outputs rather than assessing results or impacts. External Results-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) was inconsistently applied across sectors. ROM reports generally focused on outputs instead of outcomes, particularly in areas like public administration reform, public financial management, rule of law and fundamental rights, and socio-economic development.

CLUSTER 3 ON COHERENCE, COORDINATION AND COMPLEMENTARITY

C8 Donor coordination in Kosovo was hindered by weak government leadership and inconsistent participation, though the EU played a central role through mechanisms like the MS+ meetings and the Western Balkans Investment Framework. Successful coordination occurred in some sectors, but gaps remain in others.

The donor environment in Kosovo has been crowded. The EU was the largest contributor of over EUR 1.06 billion in ODA, driving reforms aligned with the Acquis. Despite efforts to enhance government ownership, donor coordination by the Government remained weak due to frequent government changes, limited political will, and poor institutional capacity. The EU Office organised regular MS+ meetings to fill this gap. But these were largely informational and lacked strategic depth due to their broad participation. Sector Working Groups were mostly donor-driven and inconsistent, with successful outcomes in sectors like energy and rule of law, but gaps in areas such as private sector development and vocational education and training. The main challenge was the inability of line ministries to uphold sector policy dialogue.

The Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) served as the primary collaboration mechanism for EU and European Development Finance Institutions, supporting infrastructure projects. Kosovo's political context and lack of a strong investment pipeline posed additional challenges. Despite this, initiatives blending EU grants with EBRD loans successfully supported private sector development.





R1

Emphasise a long-term partnership, prioritising long-term sector-level reforms over short-term interventions and strengthening the authorities' political engagement and ministerial involvement.

PAR and PFM

- ▶ Prioritise **IPA assistance in impactful PAR areas**, continue building **administrative capacity**, and increase **CSOs and public engagement** for greater transparency and accountability.
- ▶ Address **critical PFM gaps** in capital expenditure, public procurement, internal control and audit, and enhance tax collection.

Rule of law and fundamental rights

- ▶ Continue supporting Kosovo's **institutional reforms in the justice sector** through targeted capacity building and digital transformation.
- ▶ Strengthen Kosovo's **police reform** efforts through enhanced regional cooperation and operational capacity-building.
- ▶ Promote **gender equality** through stronger institutional mainstreaming and coordination mechanisms.
- ▶ Improve **strategic planning and financial management** across justice and home affairs sectors.
- ▶ Foster **civil society engagement and public accountability** to enhance the rule of law and fundamental rights.

Energy

- ▶ Strengthen Kosovo's reforms efforts in **energy and environment** through enhanced synergies with other EU MS and EDFIs as well as continued support to institution building.

Socio-economic development

- ▶ Reinforce Kosovo **education/TVET** reform efforts.
- ▶ Strengthen Kosovo's **private sector** development eco-system.
- ▶ Facilitate Kosovo's efforts to ensure **safe food** from farm to fork.

R2

Continue to enhance the capacities of the administration (including NIPAC), CSOs, and EU Office.

For NIPAC:

- ▶ Provide targeted TA to NIPAC staff to enhance their knowledge and skills related to specific sectors
- ▶ Strengthen NIPAC's ability to lead the coordination of IPA programming and donor coordination process

For national administration and CSOs:

- ▶ Build training capacity on EU issues, notably the structural funds, the Growth Plan and the management of funds
- ▶ Support the development of secondary legislation and implementation regulations to ensure operationalisation of reforms and institutional sustainability
- ▶ Promote inter-institutional coordination mechanisms to improve communication and cooperation within the administration

For EU Office:

- ▶ Ensure the EU Office has sufficient capacity to support Kosovo on its EU path



R3

Continue to improve Kosovo's and the EC's M&E systems from programming to implementation to systematically track progress on reforms and (sector) outcomes.

- ▶ Promote the establishment of national system to monitor progress on actions and reforms
- ▶ Strengthen performance frameworks at the intervention level
- ▶ Support NIPAC's monitoring capacity
- ▶ Strengthen EU's monitoring systems.

R4

Strengthen sector policy dialogue with multiple stakeholders and promote a more active role for the authorities of Kosovo.

- ▶ Strengthen Kosovo's capacity to steer consultation and coordination with multiple actors
- ▶ Improve monitoring of sector reforms within sector working groups
- ▶ Encourage joint financing of large-scale projects
- ▶ Promote alignment of donor reporting processes



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 [Read the full report: Evaluation of EU cooperation with Kosovo – Publications Office of the EU.](#)