

ADVOCACY BRIEF

Language Rights in Practice Why Joint Action Cannot Wait



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Mission in Kosovo

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo (the Mission) monitors and supports the implementation of language rights in Kosovo, in line with its mandate to promote human rights, institutional accountability, and inclusiveness. The Constitution¹ and the Law on the Use of Languages² guarantee the equal status of Albanian and Serbian as official languages and provide for the use of other community languages at the municipal level. Despite this strong legal framework, persistent shortcomings and incompliances remain. As a result, language rights remain a priority issue requiring enhanced attention and support.

This brief highlights key gaps and priority areas for support. It aims to guide the Mission and international partners in supporting responsible institutions to strengthen compliance, accountability and the effective protection of language rights and multilingualism in Kosovo.

The brief draws on Mission monitoring conducted between April 2023 and June 2025 in all 38 municipalities, including engagement with municipal language focal points, interpreters, communities' participation mechanisms, information offices, legal officers, and officers for European integration. These observations provide an evidence-based overview of structural challenges affecting the effective implementation of language rights and multilingualism at the municipal level.

KEY CHALLENGES

Delays and gaps in the implementation of language rights continue to undermine equitable access to public services, participation in public life and communications with institutions, particularly for non-majority communities. If not addressed, these challenges may weaken trust in public institutions, negatively affect inter-community relations, and hinder the development of a diverse and inclusive multilingual society.

Support to the Office of the Language Commissioner

The Office of the Language Commissioner (OLC) plays a critical oversight and advisory role, yet available resources remain insufficient to fully perform its mandate and ensure institutional compliance. Vacant since January 2025,³ the lack of a Language Commissioner limits institutional oversight and public accountability. This manifests as inconsistent communication with municipalities,⁴ and limited follow-up on recommendations issued by the OLC, thus weakening local enforcement.⁵

Appointment of municipal Language Focal Points

Language Focal Points (LFPs) co-ordinate integral processes to ensure municipal compliance with language legislation, namely, the provision of services to residents, interpretation and the translation of public-facing documents in the legally mandated languages. Despite the requirement in the Regulation on the Office of the Language Commissioner,⁶ only 22 out of 38 municipalities have appointed LFPs. Limited awareness, administrative barriers, and political constraints hinder compliance.

¹ Kosovo Constitution, Article 5 Languages and Article 59 Rights of Communities and their Members.

² Law No. 02/L-37 on the Use of Languages.

³ Recruitment was ongoing at the time of drafting; on 19 June 2026, the Admission Commission for the position was appointed.

⁴ During the reporting period, 17 of 38 municipalities reported no contact with the OLC.

⁵ Three municipalities confirmed having received recommendations on language compliance, out of which one remained unresolved during the reporting period.

⁶ Regulation No. 07/2012 on the Office of the Language Commissioner, Article 15.

Availability of interpreters and educational opportunities

Municipalities often rely on ad hoc and temporary arrangements due to a shortage of qualified interpreters and the absence of sustainable education and training pathways for new professionals. This results in inadequate availability of services in non-majority languages. While services in Serbian are generally available, provision in Bosnian, Turkish, and Romani languages remains mostly irregular.⁷

Translation timelines and workloads

Capacity constraints and limited staffing lead to frequent delays or shortcomings in translation and interpretation. The quality of available equipment and technologies remains inadequate in most municipalities.⁸ Larger multi-lingual municipalities face especially high workloads, directly undermining timely access to information, public documents, and services for non-majority communities, as well as public participation in all official languages.

Public awareness and use of complaint mechanisms

Public awareness of language rights and available complaint mechanisms remains very low. During the reporting period, only one formal complaint was submitted to the OLC by residents about the municipality’s failure to comply with its language obligations. Limited public trust in responsible institutions and weak public awareness of language rights results in low reporting of violations.

WHAT THE OSCE MISSION IN KOSOVO IS DOING

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo will continue supporting institutions to enhance language compliance through monitoring, policy engagement, and capacity building. By strengthening inter-institutional co-ordination, advocating for increased support to translation and interpretation capacities, as well as awareness-raising among communities, the Mission will contribute to enhanced protection and promotion of language rights in Kosovo.



CALL TO ACTION

Effective implementation of language rights is essential for ensuring equal access to public services and fostering social cohesion in a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic society. Nevertheless, without enhanced resources, adequate staffing and systematic capacity building, municipalities will continue to face challenges in fully complying with the applicable legal framework.

⁷ A lack of dedicated translators was observed in: Klinë/Klina, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Obiliq/Obilić, Mamuşa/Mamushë/Mamuša, Skenderaj/Srbica and Hani i Elezit/Elez Han for Serbian language; in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica South and Vushtrri/Vučitrn for Turkish language; and in Prizren and Gračanica/Gračanicë for Romani language.
⁸ Based on repeated feedback given to the Mission by municipal translators and interpreters during workshops and meetings held throughout 2024 and 2025 in all regions.

WHAT INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS CAN DO

Addressing persistent challenges, therefore, requires renewed institutional commitment and sustained support from international partners. Synergies among international partners and co-ordinated initiatives are essential to provide effective advocacy, technical assistance, and financial support to the responsible institutions.

1

Support the Office of the Language Commissioner and inter-institutional co-ordination

- Continue co-ordinated advocacy with the Office of the Prime Minister to ensure adequate allocation of financial and human resources to the Office, including the appointment of the Language Commissioner.
- Help identify solutions to enhance regular co-ordination between the OLC and municipalities (including northern municipalities), ensuring consistent oversight, systematic follow-up on recommendations and effective accountability.
- Provide technical support to the OLC to conduct regular outreach to all communities.

2

Advocate for availability of interpreters and educational opportunities

- Jointly advocate for the timely recruitment of qualified permanent translators and interpreters in municipalities.
- Engage with relevant institutions and partners to develop sustainable education and certification pathways for translators and interpreters.
- Facilitate and/or fund professional training opportunities for translators and interpreters.
- Promote the introduction of mutual official language learning in schools to foster bilingualism and inter-cultural understanding.

3

Encourage the appointment of Municipal Language Focal Points

- Advocate with municipal institutions that qualified LFPs are appointed and effectively performing their functions in all municipalities.
- Advocate for the provision of targeted training to municipal staff on language rights-related responsibilities, legal obligations and best practices.

4

Promote balanced and compliant translation timelines and workloads

- Advocate for the introduction of clear translation timelines and quality standards.
- Financially support the provision of technical equipment and modern translation technologies to improve accuracy, consistency and timeliness.

5

Raise public awareness for language rights and complaint mechanisms

- Support the implementation of targeted public awareness campaigns on language rights, relevant stakeholders and existing complaint mechanisms.
- Support the OLC to improve accessibility, responsiveness, and visibility of complaint mechanisms.
- Empower civil society to support outreach, especially to non-majority communities.