

KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT – KOSOVO* 2023

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following violent escalations in the North of Kosovo in May 2023, the EU imposed temporary and reversible measures on Kosovo, including the freezing of financial support, and which are still in place at the time of writing this country fiche. A violent attack on Kosovo police on 24 September further strained normalisation efforts between Kosovo and Serbia.

Despite the overall situation, economic indicators point at several positive developments. The World Bank estimates a 3.2% real GDP growth for Kosovo in 2023 (IBRD, 2023) and projects moderate growth of 3.8% for 2024. The IMF expects inflation (average consumer prices) to decrease to 4.7% in 2023, down from 11.7% in 2022 (IMF, 2023). Kosovo's high dependence on imports makes it quite exposed to international market dynamics, including price increases in electricity, food products and transport. 2023 saw record levels of foreign direct investment (balance of payments, World Bank Data, 2023a) and inbound remittance flows (CEIC Data 2023).

Labour market data also indicate some significant positive developments. The number of people in employment has steadily and significantly increased, from 347,072 in 2020 to 403,813 in 2022. This corresponds to a 16.3% increase. Although there remains a stark gender employment gap (the male employment rate of 49.4% vs. the female employment rate of 18.4% in 2022), this gap is decreasing (from 39.4 percentage points in 2017 to 31.0 percentage points in 2022). The overall unemployment rate fell to 12.6% in 2022, with a gender gap of 5.5 percentage points in favour of men. Also, the youth (15-24 age group) employment rate dropped by more than 16 percentage points to 21.4%, with a gender gap of 8.4 percentage points in favour of young men (Kosovo Agency for Statistics – KAS, 2023a). However, the inactivity rate remains of major concern, according to 2022 Labour Force Survey (LFS) data: the inactivity rate among working age Kosovars (15-64 age group) increased to 61.4%, with a gender gap of 23.5% in favour of men (Labour Force Survey 2022).

At policy level, important reform needs are being addressed. An intergovernmental group under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers (MFLT) drafted a first multiannual plan to implement a Youth Guarantee (YG) scheme in Kosovo. The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGIP), adopted by the Government in 2022, addresses the issue of very high numbers of persons not in employment, education or training (NEET). The start of implementation of the YG scheme is planned for 2024 in two pilot regions, Mitrovica and Ferizaj. The YGIP includes both preventative measures to make education and VET more relevant, and measures to expand job offers and learning opportunities for NEET. Challenges include how to reach out and activate NEET, given that few register with the Employment Agency, and how to garner the capacities of the Employment Agency as well as of other actors involved in Youth Guarantee implementation, such as education institutions, youth organisations and social partners.

Kosovo adopted a new education strategy 2022-2026, which includes five strategic objectives: early childhood education; pre-university education; vocational education, training and adult education; higher education and digitalisation of education. For successful implementation, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MESTI) needs to ensure the necessary human and financial resources. The restructuring of the MESTI is still pending (EC, 2023b).

There are declining student numbers and empty classrooms in some places, but overcrowded schools (66% working in shifts) in other places; this has prompted MESTI to create a working group on readjusting the school network. Another MESTI working group is working on a new funding formula for education. In addition, a working group has been set up by MESTI to review the 2013 VET law and draft new comprehensive VET legislation.

New developments in VET were initiated in the area of work-based learning (WBL), regulated by MESTI's Regulation 135/2020 and Administrative Instruction 137/2020. Under the KfW Development Bank's Kosovo Challenge Fund, VET schools cooperate with private partners to offer WBL. From 2023, four qualifications are taught in a dual VET approach, with eight additional qualifications to be added in 2024, under a German-funded project implemented by GFA Consulting Group.

Important ETF publications on the Kosovo education system in 2023: The [Torino Process Report 2023](https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/trp-assessment-reports/kosovo-2023)¹ and the [Kosovo Rapid Education Diagnosis \(RED\)](https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/document-attachments/kosovo-rapid-education-diagnosis-addressing-weak-links)². Each provides in-depth analysis and data, which partly informed the update of this country fiche.

¹ <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/trp-assessment-reports/kosovo-2023>

² <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/document-attachments/kosovo-rapid-education-diagnosis-addressing-weak-links>

1. KEY POLITICAL, DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Political developments

Albin Kurti, from the pro-European Vetëvendosje party, took over as Prime Minister and has been leading the government since March 2021. The current government still holds a solid majority in the Assembly and has continued to press ahead with its ambitious EU reform agenda. However, the continued lack of cross-party cooperation and disagreements within the majority proved to be a challenge to reforms. As Albin Kurti's mandate as Prime Minister enters its final year, his cabinet seems under pressure to solve pending issues, as dissatisfaction increases amongst Kosovars.

Demographics

Kosovo's population is estimated to be 1.77 million (KAS, 2023b). A new census will take place in 2024, having initially been planned for 2021. The latest census of 2011 did not consider some provinces in the north of Kosovo. The majority of people in Kosovo are Albanians, while there are some 120 000 Serbs, about one third of whom live in the north. Among the EU candidate countries and potential candidates, Kosovo has the highest share of young people (47.4% under 25 years, 2011 census data) (KAS, 2023b). Kosovo's fertility rate has been declining, from 2.7 in 2000 to 1.5 in 2021 (World Bank data³), and mainly young people and their families are migrating abroad.

In the past 10 years, 529 647 citizens, or almost 30% of the population, left the country (UNDP, 2020). The OECD states: "Kosovo has the second highest emigration rate among the Western Balkan Six economies, with 22% of its population living in OECD countries. Emigration flows to European countries have been growing in the past decade. (...) More than half of the Kosovar migrants of working age in OECD countries have low levels of education (52%), while the share of highly skilled migrants is relatively low at 13%" (OECD, 2022, p. 1). Wage gaps are an important pull factor driving emigration. In addition, gaps in human capital are emerging as a powerful determinant for explaining emigration to countries where returns to human capital are comparatively higher (ETF, 2022; Mara and Landesmann, 2022).

The triple demographic challenge of declining birth rates, the emigration of families and the rural exodus are seen in primary and lower secondary schools, where there are ever fewer students. This has repercussions for infrastructure and staff planning in education, as well as for future workforce availability.

Key economic developments

GDP grew by 5.5% in 2023, up from 4.1% in 2022 (European Commission (EC), 2023a). The Economic Reform Programme projects an annual GDP growth rate of 6.1% for 2024. However, given high external and domestic risks to economic growth (e.g., instable geopolitical situation, high import costs, outdated and unreliable power supply), a low growth scenario may appear more likely, projecting an annual growth rate of 3% in 2024 and 2025 (EC, 2023a).

Kosovo's high dependence on imports makes it quite exposed to international market dynamics, including price hikes in electricity, food products and transport. The inflation rate, average consumer prices, fell from 11.7% in 2022 to 4.7% in 2023 (IMF, 2023). Even though consumer price inflation has fallen substantially, there is still upward pressure from food prices and energy costs. The uneasy dialogue with Serbia and the sanctions imposed by the EU are having repercussions for the economy, with a slowing of trade relations and EU investment.

Remittances reached an all-time high in absolute terms in June 2023, reaching EUR 362mn, up 15% compared to the value in June 2022 (CEIC Data 2023, based on information from the Kosovo Central

³ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=XK>, last accessed 31 January 2024

Bank). In relative terms, remittances as share of GDP rose from 13.3% in 2022 to 13.7% (estimate) in 2023 (World Bank, 2023b). In June 2022 the gross minimum wage rose to EUR 264, from EUR 150 previously, which will affect 27% of employees. In April 2020 the government had offered a lump sum of EUR 100 to 800,000 citizens – 44% of the total population, mainly pensioners, public- and private-sector employees and students – to cope with the strong rise in prices. [...] The international energy turmoil has pushed many countries to go back to coal for their energy production. This is reflected in the strong rise of lignite exports from Kosovo, which in real terms rose tenfold in January-April 2022, year on year. Positive dynamics are also recorded for foreign direct investment inflows, which were up by 41% in the 1st quarter of 2022, year on year, although the majority of this continues to be absorbed by the real estate sector' (wiiw, 2022, p. 1).

Kosovo's informal sector is among the highest in Europe. This hinders economic development and strains already tight budgets. Depending on the definition used, informal workers made up between 35.6% and 42.4%⁴ of workers aged 15-64 in 2018. Informality is higher among youth, men, less-educated people and rural residents (Robayo-Abril et al., 2020). Businesses that did not pay taxes and individuals who worked without contracts were excluded from short-term Government assistance during the pandemic, which is why many made an effort to register. Kosovo has designed a strategy to address the underlying causes of informality but has not yet implemented it (EC, 2022a). On a positive note, since Government support during the pandemic was linked to *formal* businesses and jobs, 'the Pensions Savings Trust reported that the number of active pension contributors increased by 16% in the 2nd quarter of 2022 (year on year), equivalent to about 50,000 jobs being added or formalised' (World Bank, 2022a, p. 9).

According to the Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency (KIESA), key sectors with potential for investment and growth include⁵:

- ICT, with the possibility to offer business services such as software development or call centres to local and foreign clients. Kosovo claims to have relatively widespread English language skills and high internet penetration. The ETF (2022) has conducted a study on the platform economy;
- food processing and packaging, with Kosovo having 588 000 hectares of agricultural land with fertile, nutrient-rich soils and a strong agribusiness tradition;
- mining and metal processing, as Kosovo is rich in natural resources, such as lignite, aluminium, gold, lead, zinc, copper, bauxite, magnesium, asbestos, chromite, limestone, marble and quartz. Most resources remain unused;
- energy, including from renewable sources, including hydro, wind, solar, biomass and thermal energy;
- textile and leather processing;
- wood processing, with an estimated 53 million m³ of wood available from public forests and a tradition in exporting raw materials, semi-finished and finished products (doors, windows, kitchens and furniture);
- tourism, offering opportunities for mountain, adventure, farm, spiritual and thermal bath tourism.

Key social issues

In terms of poverty rates, Kosovo ranked the poorest country in the Western Balkans in 2023. An estimated 25.4% of the total population in 2023 live on less than USD 6.85 per person per day. Household Budget Survey data show that poor people are overrepresented in households headed by women, in households in which the head did not complete secondary education, in larger households

⁴ The estimates vary depending on the definition of informality. When defining informal workers as those who are employees and employers in small firms (five or fewer workers), self-employed with or without employees in non-professional occupations (i.e. clerks, service and market sales workers, agricultural workers, craft workers, machine operators and workers in non-professional occupations) or unpaid family workers, informality amounts to 42.4% based on the 2018 Labour Force Survey (LFS) data. If defined as an employee with no written contract, self-employed in firms with fewer than five workers, self-employed in non-professional occupations or unpaid family workers, the informality rate is 35.6% (Robayo-Abril et al., 2020).

⁵ See: [KIESA \(rks-gov.net\)](https://rks-gov.net).

and those with more children, and among Kosovars belonging to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities (World Bank, 2022b, p. 10). The pandemic has also 'highlighted the vulnerability of the population to negative shocks' (p. 7).

Kosovo's poverty rate in 2023 is estimated to fall to 23.6% due to the fact that employment is rising (World Bank, 2023a, p. 88). According to EU estimates, around 18% of Kosovo's population lives below the poverty line (EUR 45 per month, with 5.1% percent of the population living below the extreme poverty line). Children from poor households, and those with special needs, lack equal access to vital and quality health and education services. Children represent half of those benefiting from social assistance, but less than 10% of them are with special needs. Children with disabilities lack adequate health and rehabilitation services, social services and assistive equipment from state institutions. Most of them lack proper access to education facilities. Around 9% of children are involved in work, of whom 5.6% working under hazardous conditions, an issue being particularly evident among the Roma and Ashkali communities (EC, 2023b).

Further action is needed on long-standing issues such as lack of equal access to education and employment, lack of language compliance, and low representation in public institutions, including for the Roma and Ashkali communities.

The most disadvantaged people do not always benefit from adequate social assistance. The World Bank (2022) notes that 'recent increases in spending on war-related pensions have crowded out spending toward the poor. Disability benefits require declaration of 100% disability with regular re-assessments' (p. 8). An expansion of social assistance coverage, using a means-tested scheme and including people not only with full but also partial disabilities, would be needed for stronger poverty reduction.

2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 Trends and challenges

In the 2022/23 school year, 220 578 pupils attended primary and lower secondary education (both public and private) – down 23.1% compared to the school year 2012/13, when 286 677 pupils attended. The number of upper secondary pupils who attended in school year 2022/23 was 67 373 – down 37.2% from a decade ago (KAS, 2023, p. 86). Teacher-student ratios are low, with an average of 1:12.3 at upper secondary level and reaching a maximum of 27.9 in the municipality of Fushë Kosovë (MESTI, 2022a, p. 72). However, there is a general shortage of school buildings, which requires 65% of all schools to work in two shifts and 1% even in three shifts (source: EMIS data 2021/22), preventing schools from carrying out after-school activities.

While student numbers have declined over the past 10 years, the number of teachers has risen. Some small municipalities have established gymnasia or opened certain VET programmes, despite not having the conditions in place for them. They are reluctant to change VET programmes now to ‘avoid surplus teaching staff’ who are paid centrally by the Ministry of Finance (MESTI, 2022a, p. 34). MESTI mentions some 2 000 surplus teachers on the payroll who do not have specific teaching assignments, but who cannot be moved to other locations. An adjustment of education provision and staffing numbers might allow the Kosovo government to invest saved funds into upgrading education and training facilities, offers and quality (Viertel, 2020, p. 17). A MESTI working group is currently looking into the issue of adjusting the school network.

The management of pre-university education is shared between MESTI, municipal education directorates (MEDs) and schools. MEDs, which are generally understaffed, handle all procurement issues for schools and pay their bills. This can create problems for schools, as they fully depend on MEDs. MESTI lacks the legal basis and capacity to control how state education funds are used. Reporting lines from MEDs to MESTI are almost non-existent. Thus, the decentralised management system needs major structural reforms, perhaps as part of a reorganisation of the entire regional set-up of Kosovo and a reform of public administration. Generally, there is a lack of investment in improving the quality of infrastructure, reforming curricula, improving teachers’ skills and updating and learning (MEST, 2022b, p. 30). MESTI, through a dedicated working group, is working on a new funding formula for education, including VET.

Efforts need to continue to enhance curriculum reform and the development of teacher skills towards competence-based approaches at all levels, with a specific emphasis on key competences as defined by the EU framework⁶ and labour market-relevant skills. MESTI, with support from GIZ, has started work on a framework curriculum, which addresses these needs. According to the EC’s assessment of Kosovo’s Economic Reform Programme 2022-2024, ‘improving the quality and relevance of the education system to increase employment and mitigate skills mismatches’ is one of Kosovo’s three structural challenges (EC, 2022b, p. 300).

Human capital challenges in Kosovo broadly relate to the need to:

- use demographic, labour market and skills-needs analyses to inform and align skills formation systems for young people and adults;
- nurture, across all curricula and levels of education, cross-curricular key competences with a specific emphasis on maths, linguistics, digital, citizenship, entrepreneurship and career management skills;
- raise the quality and relevance of general and vocational education overall; and
- implement integrated measures that address labour demand and supply-side issues and combine training with insights into workplace practices and support for business start-ups and growth (Viertel, 2020, p. 35).

⁶ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2018.189.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2018:189:TOC.

Education strategy and legal framework for education

MESTI, with support from international partners, drew up the Education Strategy 2022-2026, which the Government approved on 30 September 2022. The Strategy was based on a prior thorough analysis of the available evidence and key challenges in education (see e.g. Bajrami, 2021). It also includes, for the first time, a chapter on digitising education (see section below for more details). The estimated costs amount to EUR 322 million (MESTI, 2022b, p. 10), which puts some question marks on strategy implementation. A systematic monitoring system will need to be established to capture annual progress, and discussions are taking place as to whether the existing EMIS can be expanded for this purpose or a centralised approach across all ministries should be given preference. The ETF Rapid Education Diagnosis includes several recommendations on monitoring and data generation in the field of education and VET, and a more structured response to these recommendations is still pending.

Important to highlight is the intention of Kosovo to move towards a more digitalised approach to education, as the above strategy recognises the need to upscale digital learning solutions to support individualised learning for children. ‘Shkollat.org’, Kosovo’s version of the Learning Passport, combines the largest repository of curriculum-aligned video learning content in Kosovo with communication tools to engage students inside or outside the classroom.

Overall, there is a need for a general overhaul of the legal framework: the Law on Early Childhood Education is still pending (at present, only pre-school education is regulated); the Law on Pre-university Education (to be revised); the Laws on VET and Adult Education and Training (to be merged and revised); and the Law on Higher Education (pending for many years due to “double majority vote” requirement). All laws would need to be duly cross-referenced with issues related to the funding and management of education in municipalities; the National Qualifications Framework (NQF); the Law on Regulated Professions (not yet implemented); and oversight, funding, management, development and quality assurance of the system by the various national agencies, etc.

Education expenditure

With government expenditure on education that amounted to 4.1% of GDP in 2021 (down from 4.6% in 2020 and 4.3% in 2019 – KAS, 2023b, p. 88), Kosovo is broadly in line with the EU average. However, in terms of outcomes, Kosovo fares worse. In 2020, a child from Kosovo can expect to spend 13.2 years in education. However, in terms of learning-adjusted years of school⁷, this corresponds to only 7.9 years of schooling (World Bank Human Capital Index 2020).

The current per capita funding formula (under revision), which has remained unchanged since 2008, takes into account the number of students and teachers, special education needs and non-wage operational costs. So far, school management has had little discretion over their budgets and it lacks autonomous budget management systems. Municipal education directorates (MEDs) are in charge of budget plans and submit them to the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers (MFLT), while MESTI has little control over which funds go where, and how they are used.

MESTI does not have a specific budget line for adult education and training. Training for unemployed adults is part of active employment policies and funded through the MFLT.

Access, participation and early school leaving

The pre-school education offer is insufficient, lacks in quality assurance, and also risks reinforcing rural-urban and work-related inequalities. Ten municipalities are deprived of public institutions; the largely private offer in urban areas benefits families who can afford it; and last but not least, the limited number of teaching hours at public pre-school and pre-primary levels does not solve the issue of low activity rates among women, as it is not a sustainable solution for finding a full or even part-time job (ETF, 2023).

⁷ Learning-adjusted years of school are calculated by multiplying the estimates of expected years of school by the ratio of most recent harmonized test scores to 625. See <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/gender-statistics/series/HD.HCI.LAYS>

The gross enrolment rate of 37.8% for preschool and pre-primary education (children aged 3 to 5) is lower than the OECD and EU averages. Within this average, pre-primary education, which refers to the last year before primary school for 5-year-olds, achieves an enrolment rate of 89.1% (ETF, 2023).

The draft Law on Early Childhood Education (pending) envisaged making pre-primary education compulsory for all children from September 2023 'if conditions allow'. Fewer girls are sent to kindergartens than boys, especially outside Prishtina (MESTI, 2022b). Didactic guidelines and materials are inadequate. Five textbooks have been developed since 2018, but are considered unsuitable for the age group. MESTI is working on a new curriculum.

The average gross enrolment rate in primary education is 101% and is therefore similar to average for the region. In the past two decades, the government, with the help of donors, has invested in constructing and refurbishing school buildings and facilities. Learning is conducted in four languages: Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian and Turkish. Special Learning Centres have been established in various municipalities, which have helped improve the participation of children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) families in compulsory education (9 years). However, the sustainable funding of the Learning Centres is not ensured, and RAE attendance at upper secondary level remains low despite scholarships provided by MESTI (MESTI, 2022b).

It is estimated that 38 000 children with disabilities in Kosovo do not attend school. The number has increased in regular schools but decreased in the resource centres. The main problems include the lack of suitable definitions of various forms of disability, barrier-free access to schools and adequate support, and the low number of suitably qualified teachers and assistants (MESTI, 2022b).

LFS data show low dropout rates for the years 2015, 2019 and 2020, but the data are missing for later years. The missing data leaves a significant gap in assessing the risk of school disengagement and comparability to EU trends. High NEET rates indicate a major need to monitor and address school engagement.

At upper secondary level, VET remains a second choice into which lower-performing students enrol. The enrolment rate of upper secondary school students in VET programmes has remained at around 50% since 2015. All students have the chance to sit State Matura exams, regardless of which programme they enrol in – a fact that is hotly debated in Kosovo.

Initial VET is provided in 68 vocational schools. This includes the six VET 'Centres of Competence', which operate under the Agency for VET and Adult Education (AVETAE). The Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK) directly manages eight publicly funded vocational training centres (VTCs). Furthermore, some private VTCs offer training in profiles that are sought after in Kosovo and abroad, such as in the healthcare or construction sectors. Fee-based courses often meet higher standards and are accredited by the National Qualifications Authority (NQA). Relatively high progression rates from VET to higher education and low university completion rates point to inefficiencies in the public skills formation systems.

Having left school, few possibilities remain for adults to develop their skills. The Agency for VET and Adult Education (AVETAE) has developed an additional module in their webpage in recent years where vocational schools can fill in the form with the data on the enrolment of adult education candidates according to respective education profiles.

2 000 learners attended adult education programmes comprising grades 10, 11 and 12 (MESTI 2022, p. 71). Of these, only 504, or 25%, were female. Efforts are being made to include job seekers in formal education programmes in vocational schools or short non-formal courses in VTCs. The adult learning participation rate (25-64) was 5.6% in 2020, an improvement of 2.9 percentage points from 2019 (KAS, LFS data). However, adult training opportunities across Kosovo remain restricted. Courses are often short and at basic skills levels. The training provided does not always improve the position of young people on the labour market, particularly that of low-skilled jobseekers (Viertel, 2020). The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (2022) addresses this issue for the NEETs up to the age of 29 years (see below).

While access to continuous VET and other opportunities for LLL remain problematic, the Kosovo education system provides for very high progression/graduation rates (ETF, 2023).

PISA results

In the OECD's 2015, 2018 and 2022 PISA tests in mathematics, reading and science, Kosovo ranked among the low performing countries in international comparison. In 2022, the PISA results for Kosovo⁸ followed the global pattern of backsliding on previous levels of learning achievements, observed as a consequence of the COVID crisis.

Results for Kosovo as percentage of students attaining at least Level 2 proficiency, and OECD average (OECD 2019 and 2023):

	Kosovo 2018	Kosovo 2022	OECD average 2018	OECD average 2022
Mathematics	23%	15%	76%	69%
Reading	21%	17%	77%	74%
Science	23%	21%	78%	76%

This means that most of Kosovo's students fall below Level 2 in reading, mathematics and science proficiency, the baseline required as a foundation for later learning and work.

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEET)

Young people in Kosovo face a very difficult transition from school to employment. The unemployment rate among young people aged 15 to 24 stood at 21.4% in 2022 (down from 49.0% in 2019), with more than half being unemployed for longer than 12 months, putting them in the category of long-term unemployed. In 2020, approx. 193,000 young people (15-29) were not in employment, education or training (NEET), corresponding to 40.4% of the total youth population (in 2021, the rate dropped to 39%). Both figures are very high, not only compared to the EU-27 average but also to Western Balkan countries. In 2021, NEET rates were higher for women compared to men (39% and 34.5%, respectively). For young people living in Mitrovica and Ferizaj they were 55.5% and 47.4%, and 51.5% for youths with tertiary educational attainment. Approx. 73.4% of the total NEET population are young people who are inactive, due to discouragement (27.6%), family and care responsibilities (16%) and for other non-specified reasons (19.5%). Young unemployed people represent 26.6% of the total NEET count, with a prevalence of long-term unemployed (18.7% of all NEET)' (MFLT, 2022, p. 6). The 2022 data updates are available only for the age group 15-24 and for which worsening trends are reported with a one percentage point increase from 32.0% in 2021 to 33.0% in 2022.

To address the situation on the supply side, an intergovernmental group has drawn up a multiannual Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, which was adopted by the Government of Kosovo in 2022. Implementation will be supported by the national budget and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) III funding, among others. One challenge will be reaching out to and activating NEETs, given that the vast majority of them do not register with the Employment Agency. Another challenge will be to expand WBL offers for both for initial and continuous training, as well as career guidance and counselling services.

Another effort to address NEETs and to improve school to work transition has been the Kosovo Generation Unlimited (K-GenU) internship programme in 2022, targeting adolescent girls and boys and young women and men aged 16–24 years, with a special focus on reaching NEET adolescents

⁸ Results for PISA 2022 in Kosovo can be accessed here: <https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/kosovo-1f99d575/>

and youth – especially those from ethnic minorities, those with functional difficulties or disabilities, and those from rural areas or poorer backgrounds.

2.2 Initial VET and adult learning

Strategic and legal framework for initial VET and adult learning

The new Education Strategy 2022-2026 also covers VET.

While a specific Law on VET (No 04/L-138) was adopted in 2013, it does not comprehensively regulate VET for young people and adults. For instance, it misses cross-references to other pieces of primary legislation such as the Law on Pre-University Education (No 04/L-032); the Law on Education in the Municipalities (No 03/L-068); the Law on Higher Education (No 04/L-037); the Law on Adult Education and Training (No 04/L-143); the Law on the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK); and the Laws on the National Qualifications Framework and the National Qualifications Authority (NQA). Hence, the current legal framework for VET is complex, fragmented, and in some areas incomplete. The Government of Kosovo has acknowledged the need for a comprehensive VET law reform and has initiated the drafting process in mid-2023. The concept note for the new law (i.e. the basis on which the new law will be drafted) is likely to include proposals for a new structure of VET governance, dual VET, teacher training and financing⁹.

VET governance and financing arrangements

VET is managed as part of the overall education system as described above. Exceptions are the six (VET) Centres of Competence, for which the Agency for VET and Adult Education (AVETAE) has some responsibility¹⁰. AVETAE does not currently have the capacity to manage all VET schools, as envisaged by the Law on VET, but could be upgraded to do so. GIZ is coordinating a respective feasibility study.

The EARK provides institutional funding for the eight Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) under its management and refers unemployed jobseekers to these. The VTCs specialise on short courses. However, the EARK does not have capacity to oversee the entire adult training landscape, or to take a leading role in developing the adult education offer in Kosovo. Various donors (e.g. EC IPA funds, German cooperation) support EARK for restructuring and capacity building in the context of the YG.

The tripartite Council for VET and Adult Education (CVETA) is not functioning as the law on VET intended. Regional VET councils or sector skills committees were formed on pilot basis, with funding from Germany and the USA, e.g. in the sectors of woodworking, agri-food, IT and energy. A more regular social dialogue should take place on the various aspects of VET legislation, policies, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, both at national and regional levels. Social dialogue does take place under the Social Economic Council led by the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers (MFLT), but this is related to labour legislation and provisions. Persistent difficulties regarding the coherent involvement of unions are reported. These difficulties relate to a very weak representation of workers – only a small fraction of workers are members of a union. A 2023 stand-off between the Teachers Union and the government, related to teachers' wages, ended without resolution, and led to further loss of trust.

VET funding has not increased significantly in recent years (MESTI, 2022b, p. 34), while the current per capita funding formula is inadequate, in particular for VET schools, which require more resources compared to general secondary schools, taking into account their specific needs for equipment and materials, teachers' continuous professional development, etc. The IPA / ADA (Austrian Development Agency) 2017 ALLED2 project developed a suitable VET financing formula and online tools for budget

⁹ Personal communication by MESTI, 22 January 2024.

¹⁰ The responsibilities of AVETAE are defined in Law No. 04/L-138 (VET law) of 2013 and include the administration and coordination of initial and adult training institutions, including the financial and human resources and the construction of buildings and infrastructure of public VET institutions under its jurisdiction. At the present time, however, AVETAE manages only the six CoCs. (Note that the VET law refers to AVETA, not AVETAE).

planning, with the intention that they will be mainstreamed. While VET schools are allowed to generate their own income, their lack of autonomy and other practical problems prevent them from doing so.

Qualifications, validation and recognition

The Law on the Kosovo Qualifications Framework was adopted in 2008. The framework now includes 192 VET and 396 higher education qualifications. However, these may be linked to individual providers only, and may overlap. The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) has accredited 92 VET providers. It uses an e-accreditation management system that assists providers in the process¹¹. A report by Rizvanolli-Bajraktari (2021, unpublished), drafted in the context of the IPA/ADA 2017 ALLED2 project, points to some issues regarding the validation of qualifications and the accreditation of providers. Contentious issues include, among others, the fact that labour market players are not always involved in the quality assurance of qualifications; qualifications are linked to individual providers, which has led to a plethora of overlapping qualifications; the NQA's regulation on a modular approach is not followed in curriculum development; MESTI does not see a need for public VET institutions to go through an accreditation process, and hence initial VET qualifications offered by public VET schools are not part of the NQF; incidences of corruption to obtain institutional accreditation; etc. Discussions are ongoing to address these issues and to bring NQF-related functions under an enlarged AVETAE.

The IPA/LuxDev 2018 ESVET-PRO project identified priority profiles in which services for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) could be offered; published manuals for the accreditation and evaluation of RPL providers; undertook various promotion activities; and trained 16 experts who will assess applications of RPL providers and 18 trainers who will train RPL providers in the future. To date, NQA has accredited 8 providers to provide RPL, and 267 individuals went through the RPL process¹².

So far, 125 occupational standards have been defined¹³.

Quality and quality assurance

Education stakeholders have made continuous efforts over the past decade to tackle quality and relevance issues and improve quality assurance. Examples include the introduction of competency-based curricula, data collection and monitoring of policies, pre-service and in-service professional development of teachers, and participation in education at all levels.

Work has been started on a national VET framework curriculum to guide a system-wide update of curricula. This remains a pressing issue given that curricula across the spectrum need to be more practice oriented and aligned to labour market requirements. In parallel, there is substantial need to update teaching and learning materials and establish related processes of continuous adaptation.

As regards training of VET teachers, a new programme commenced recently in collaboration with the University of Zadar for a one-year pre-service training for VET teachers. AVETAE coordinates teachers' continuous professional development for the six VET Centres of Competence for which it is responsible, but would need to be resourced to be centrally in charge of all VET schools, as foreseen in the current VET law.

The "legal framework for quality assurance is considered complete" (MESTI, 2022b, p. 30), although VET requires specific criteria, norms and arrangements that should be regulated separately. Here, Kosovo could follow the EQAVET framework. Personnel to manage quality are lacking at all levels – from quality coordinators at MESTI, MEDs or schools, to inspectors as per the establishment plan under the Law on the Education Inspectorate. Neither MESTI nor MEDs systematically collect and analyse specific qualitative indicators to inform their policies. Thus, the quality assurance system has to be considered to be in need of further development. Increasing school autonomy and providing for

¹¹ Information provided by Avni Gashi, then NQA Director, on 15 November 2022

¹² Personal communication from National Qualifications Authority, 25 January 2024

¹³ Personal communication from National Qualifications Authority, 15 November 2023

quality coordinators for VET schools would be among the important initiatives that should be pursued further.

To measure learning achievements, two national tests are organised every year: achievement tests at the end of the 9th grade and State Matura exams at the end of the 12th grade. Staff from MESTI's Division for Quality Assurance, Standards, Evaluation and Licensing have been trained and test items improved over time. MESTI (2022b) holds, however, that 'the main challenge is administering tests and preventing cheating in schools' (p. 31). Staff shortages limit the capacity to analyse the results from national and international assessments and draw policy conclusions.

On 20 September 2022, the Board of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) accepted the Kosovo Accreditation Agency's application for affiliate status. This decision may eventually facilitate the process of recognising graduates' diplomas in European countries and the exchange of students and professors.

Work-based learning arrangements

VET in Kosovo is insufficiently linked to the labour market, in terms of both VET offers and provision. The currently used subject-based curricula are not geared towards developing vocational skills. Where VET curricula have been updated and contain practical learning elements, schools find it difficult to implement them. Schools generally lack the conditions, teacher skills, equipment, materials and structured cooperation with businesses to develop learners' practical skills.

MESTI's Regulation 135/2020 and Administrative Instruction 137/2020 regulate work-based learning. In order to put a work-based learning system in place, VET curricula would need to be changed, together with school-business liaison coordinators resourced in all schools, a structured cooperation with businesses created, support provided to train company instructors, etc. A new GIZ-GfA project (2022-2024) involves 10 VET schools and 1 VET centre of competence in nine municipalities. Company internships are planned to be offered to all of the approximately 5 000 11th- and 12th-grade students in all 58 profiles covered. Schools have already signed 600 memoranda of understanding with businesses and are working on placements. The project will also draft a model of a simplified and standardised WBL lesson plan and train professional teachers on how to use it; it will develop training guidelines for companies on how to implement WBL; and it will deliver training for 10 school-business coordinators. Within the same project, a total of 12 profiles that were newly modified for dual VET will be piloted.

Dual VET schemes are planned to be expanded in connection with the future EU Youth Guarantee scheme for young NEETs.

Kosovo is being encouraged to become part of the EU's European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), of which other Western Balkan countries are already members.

A study, recently launched by ETF, will map ongoing apprenticeship and WBL initiatives and will assess them against the 14 criteria of the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship (EFQEA) or the European Quality Framework for Traineeships respectively.

Digital education and skills

While schools were closed during the pandemic, teachers were expected to move towards digital learning, for which they did not have adequate experience, learning platforms, materials or support. The lack of access to the internet, Wi-Fi, proper devices and online learning opportunities have led, not only to further learning gaps among students, but have also widened inequalities in education. This particularly concerns "children with low socio-economic status, children with special educational needs and children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) communities" (MESTI, 2022b, p. 23).

The 2020 Survey on the Use of Information and Communication Technology¹⁴ found that 96.4% of households in Kosovo had internet access. However, according to the Multiple Indicator Cluster

¹⁴ <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5804/anketa-e-p%C3%ABrdorimit-t%C3%AB-teknologjis%C3%AB-informative-komunikimit2020.pdf>.

Survey 2019-2020¹⁵, only 53.4% of households owned a computer (23.8% among RAE; 13.9% among the poorest families). Students experiencing financial hardship and those living in rural areas are said to have the lowest levels of digital competence (Shala and Grajcevc, 2017). Recently, Kosovo has joined the ICILS 2023 (International Computer and Information Literacy Study), which will help monitor targets regarding students' digital competences (EC, 2023).

The Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 (KESP) had specific objectives in the field of digital education which could be only partly met. Building on KESP, the current Education Strategy (2022-2026) (MESTI, 2022a) includes a dedicated strategic objective on digitalisation (strategic objective 5) with focus on the following five specific objectives, and a total budget of EUR 51.7 million: establishing a comprehensive digitalised platform for education at all levels; production of digital teaching materials; hardware and infrastructure for education providers; digital competence of all parties involved (i.e. citizens, students, teachers); institutional mechanisms for implementation of digitalisation.

According to a new organisational chart of MESTI, which is pending approval, a specific unit for overseeing digitalisation in education will be created in the ministry with a staff of between five and six people.

In 2019, the European Training Foundation (ETF) and MESTI piloted the EU's SELFIE tool, which is already available in Albanian and Serbian. Applying SELFIE at a system-wide level could be a way to gather evidence of needs and foster digital innovation in schools, as a component of school development plans.

'Shkollat.org', the localised version of the Learning Passport, was launched in 2021 by MESTI in collaboration with UNICEF. The learning platform combines the largest repository of curriculum-aligned video learning content in Kosovo with other communication tools. Using Shkollat.org, teachers and students can communicate, share and engage with content, collaborate on team projects or create individualised quizzes and assessments. Developing and expanding the use of Shkollat.org is essential to support digital learning in Kosovo.

Statistics on education and training

MESTI's Education Management Information System (EMIS) allows for data on educational institutions to be collected and processed electronically, including data on attendees, staff and to some extent infrastructure. MEDs and the public educational institutions in turn do not use digital platforms and 'offer almost no digital services so far' (MESTI, 2022b, p. 46).

Between 2015 and 2017, work was done to develop the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS), allowing users to follow enrolment trends. However, "HEMIS lacks ongoing technical support to address barriers to data entry and does not generate data needed for analyses" (MESTI, 2022b, p. 44). At the same time, public higher education institutions use the Electronic Student Management System and the University Management System, while KAA runs the e-Accreditation platform.

There have been pilot initiatives in various VET schools to carry out tracer studies among VET graduates. However, there are thus far no legal provisions governing these matters.

¹⁵ https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5765/republic-of-kosovo-national-and-roma-ashkali-and-egyptian-communities-2019-20-mics-sfr_albanian.pdf.

3. LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

3.1 Trends and challenges

Kosovo is confronted with longstanding structural labour market challenges.

Employer surveys continuously point to significant difficulties in recruitment due to skills gaps ranging from technical to meta-cognitive skills (World Bank, 2019). High unemployment and limited prospects in the labour market, especially among the youth, limit incentives for investment in education and skills. They are also a critical push factor for emigration and brain drain. In fact, Kosovo has one of the highest emigration rates among peer economies.

Chronic weaknesses include:

- persistent low labour force participation and employment rates, despite recent improvement in the number of employed persons, especially among women, young people and minorities; the high NEET rate; underemployment; and low participation among older workers;
- the functioning of the labour market, including working arrangements; non-compliance with employment contracts; overtime work without compensation; the low transition from temporary to permanent contracts; and the lack of legislation around employment protection.
- the lack of unemployment and health insurance and the partial lack of occupational safety measures for employed people – issues where Kosovo does not comply with the EU acquis communautaire;
- the low level of PES staffing and expenditure on active labour market policies (ALMPs), in comparison to the number and partly extensive needs of beneficiaries; the insufficient targeting of measures; the need for continuous capacity-building of employment service staff; and the high incidence of long-term unemployment, especially among low-skilled people;
- the lack of unemployment benefits, which may result in unemployed people falling into poverty;
- gender inequality in terms of employment and pay gaps; and
- the skills gap among unemployed people, including young people

(adapted from: Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli, 2019, p. 40).

However, formal employment is gradually increasing, as LFS data shows. According to Tax Authority data, the number of employees with a primary salary rose by 4.3% within one year (KAS 2023c; data refer to the period September 2022 – September 2023), reaching a total of 375 987 individuals, out of approximately 1.2 million persons of working age.

From January 2024, Kosovo citizens will be allowed to enter the Schengen area without a visa¹⁶. Although this new entitlement relates to only short-term stays in the Schengen area, many in Kosovo expect that labour emigration will be accelerated, and that the labour market may be depleted of qualified workers. However, given the high level of informal employment, effects on the formal labour market metrics remain to be seen.

Labour market characteristics

In the Western Balkans region, the labour market continued to recover, with an increase in employment and labour force participation, and an increase in labour demand and wages. Labour market formalisation continued, although information on labour markets remains limited. However, the LFS 2022 data for Kosovo show that, among working-age Kosovars (15-64 age group):

- inactivity reached 61.4%, with the female rate as high as 78.0% and the lower male rate at 44.5%. In other words, only 38.6% of working-age Kosovars participated in the labour force;

¹⁶ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/visa-free-travel-kosovo-citizens-eu-2024-01-03_en#:~:text=As%20of%201%20January%202024,Kosovo%20without%20issuing%20a%20visa

- the employment rate increased to 33.8%. Kosovo observed important gains in employment, adding close to 30 000 jobs to its economy, nearly a third of the total job growth in the Western Balkans region (World Bank, 2023b). Nevertheless, Kosovo ranks lowest according to employment rate among the six Western Balkan countries;
- there continues to be a stark gender employment gap, with the male rate reaching 49.4% and the female rate staying as low as 18.4%, however on a decreasing trend from 39.4 percentage points in 2017 to 31.0 percentage points in 2022. Among the reasons is the lower involvement of women in entrepreneurship, which is linked to lower access to finance and property, as well as family responsibilities and the lack of affordable early childhood education and childcare facilities. In September 2021, as part of the government's economic recovery package, maternity leave was introduced for women who have been unemployed for longer than 12 months. Excluding women in shorter spells of unemployment could act as a disincentive for women planning motherhood to engage in (formal) work;
- gender stereotypes in employment persist; women are more frequently employed in education, health and public administration, while men are more frequently employed in the trade, construction and manufacturing sectors;
- 47.7% of employed persons have permanent contracts for their main jobs, while 52.3% have temporary contracts;
- the unemployment rate fell to 12.6%. Unemployment was higher among women with a rate of 16.5%, compared to 11% for men;
- youth unemployment among the 15-24 age group dropped by more than 16 percentage points from 37.8% in 2021 to 21.4% in 2022 (KAS, 2023a).

See the attached Statistical Annex for the EU monitoring indicators where labour market indicators for different age groups are disaggregated.

Statistics on the labour market and employment

Since 2012, KAS has been carrying out labour force surveys following EUROSTAT standards and methodologies. However, it is widely known that some people work, despite declaring themselves inactive or unemployed. Kosovo needs to address the issue of informality as a priority concern.

The Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK) maintains a sophisticated IT-based labour market information system (LMIS)¹⁷, containing valuable data on jobseekers, unemployed people, employers, vacancies, ALMPs and job mediation outcomes. Challenges include the need to have a more user-friendly presentation, analyses, and the actual use of LMIS data. Some statistics, such as the characteristics of long-term unemployment and regional labour markets in Kosovo, are still missing. A dashboard of indicators in real time, as well as periodical statistics, reports and analyses, could assist individuals and employers in obtaining information on labour market needs and in job searching and matching. Furthermore, the LMIS could help the government to review and shape employment and training policies, including the development of new sectors and professions (Paun Jarallah & Rizvanolli, 2019, p. 19 and p. 75 et seq.).

Kosovo participated in the European Skills and Jobs survey 2023, which is implemented by the ETF and follows CEDEFOP's methodology tested for the EU-27. The presentation of results is scheduled for 2024.

¹⁷ See <https://sitp.rks-gov.net/>.

3.2 Employment policy and institutional settings

Strategy and legal framework in the employment policy field

Kosovo has continued drafting a new employment and labour market strategy 2023-2028, a new employment policy 2022-2024, and a concept document regulating the field of employment.

The Labour Law has been revised, and public consultations were completed in November 2022, which will also re-regulate the EARK's operations and services.

In preparation for the implementation of the EU Youth Guarantee scheme, the EARK amended its regulation governing the registration of jobseekers.

In July 2021, Kosovo endorsed the Western Balkans Declaration on ensuring sustainable labour market integration of young people (15-29)¹⁸. It has prepared a first Youth Guarantee (YG) Implementation Plan, which the Government adopted at the end of 2022. The Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers (MFLT) oversees the implementation. The EARK is involved in the YG service delivery system and the YG monitoring framework. As per YGIP commitments, MESTI plans to intensify actions related to 'early interventions' – or preventing young people from becoming NEETs. MESTI will also upgrade the Education Management Information System to include data on the YG. The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport is entrusted with coordination of initiatives related to outreach, in partnership with NGOs. The first years of implementing the Plan will focus on carrying out further research or mapping, among others, to obtain a better profile of the NEET population and to analyse skills and job opportunities in Kosovo's provinces, to prepare the groundwork from the point of view of legislation and readiness of EARK staff, and to pilot the monitoring of NEETs in YG measures in two provinces. The implementation of YGIP is currently delayed for the actions requiring EU funding.

Initiatives to boost employment

Active labour market policies (ALMPs) cover the following: vocational training; public works; wage subsidies; on-the-job training and internships; and entrepreneurship support. The most prominent ALMPs include on-the-job training, internships and vocational training provided by VTCs, while beneficiary numbers are quite low for public works and self-employment support. Due to the fact that Government support during the pandemic was linked to people's registration with the EARK, "in 2020 the number of registered unemployed people during the year exceeded 168,980, compared to 70,790 in 2019" (RCC, 2022, p. 5).

As the labour market recovered after pandemic shock, the number of registered unemployed jobseekers decreased to 82 042 in 2021 and 80 771 in 2022 (EARK, ETF ALMP data collection), which is a decline of approximately 51% compared to 2020, but which is still above pre-pandemic levels. A cause for concern is that the majority of these people (50 624, a slight decrease compared to 2021) are jobseekers without qualifications. The EARK registered a total of 12 291 job vacancies, increasing from 10 743 in 2021, most of which were in the "trade and repair of automobiles and household goods" sector, followed by the manufacturing industry and hotels and restaurants. From an occupational perspective, the highest demand for workers is in the ISCO group 5 – service workers and shop and market sales workers, ISCO group 7 – craft and related trades workers and ISCO group 2 – professionals. (EARK, ETF ALMP data collection).

Compared to 2021, there has been an increase in the number of jobseekers receiving career counselling services from EARK, including employment counselling (52 827 persons in 2022), with a slight over-representation of males and people with a medium level of education attainment, despite the significant proportion of people with a low level of education within the overall number of registered unemployed in Kosovo.

¹⁸ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/youth-policy-western-balkans-part-innovation-agenda-western-balkans/related-links-rex-553>

According to the information available on the EARK website, collected by the ETF, the main types of labour market measures (LMM) implemented in recent years, including 2022, include training/retraining (including skills validation) of jobseekers, schemes for direct job creation and start-ups, as well as self-employment promotion, public work opportunities wage subsidy, professional practice and job training. Implementation has not been constant over the years, and the number of beneficiaries varies considerably, since certain programmes are dependent on external funding.

For certain programmes, disaggregated data by gender, age and level of education is available and it reveals in some cases (professional qualification, direct job creation) an over-representation of males and jobseekers with a medium level of education.

Direct job creation has been increasing since 2020, and in 2022 reached 4 460 jobseekers. For the past two years, participation of males and females remained on a similar level, with males slightly more involved. By educational attainment, the overall trend shows that the largest group is those having a medium level of education (1,945 in 2022), followed by those having a low level of education (1,531 in 2022) with the smallest share going to those having a high level of education (73).

Start-up incentives take up a much smaller share of total labour market participants from 2019 to 2021 and there are no reported participants in 2022.

On-the-Job Training (TnP) is training provided by an employer to a jobseeker engaging in productive work, which develops essential knowledge or skills for performing a specific job with an adequate level of performance. Thus, the main objective of TnP is to increase the skills and prospects of the jobseeker for employment. In 2022, 125 participants took part in such training, but the peak was in 2020, with 1 498 participants. There is also an activation measure that focuses on professional practice, granted to 805 participants in 2022, a much smaller figure than in previous years, when the number ranged from 2 705 (2019) to 3 446 (2020).

Wage Subsidy (SpP) is a labour market measure that aims to create employment opportunities for jobseekers by subsidising employers to recruit them on a long-term basis. Participants in SpP schemes are expected to remain in the workplace after the end of the subsidy period. These are direct transfers to employers to encourage them to hire certain groups of jobseekers. In 2022 the number of beneficiaries was 1,073, more than double the figure from 2021.

The Public Works programme provides short-term employment opportunities through occupational activities aimed at improving local infrastructure. The purpose of the Public Works programme is to generate temporary employment for the registered unemployed through the implementation of projects that absorb the workforce, as well as the maintenance and rehabilitation of municipal assets and public spaces. Compared to 2019-2020, the number of participants was very small (9 persons) in 2021 and 2022.

Kosovo registers a negative trend in expenditure on labour market policies from over EUR 6 million in 2019 to a sharp decrease in 2020 and 2021 (ca. EUR 4.4 million and EUR 4.8 million respectively) and 2022 with only EUR 2.8 million (Source: EARK).

Transition from unemployment to employment registers very low values in Kosovo. In 2022, only 8% of registered unemployed people transitioned from unemployment into employment (6 472 persons), down from 12.4% in 2019. More females tend to transition to employment compared to males, and the rate is slightly higher for those under 25 years old. By the level of educational attainment, the percentage of registered jobseekers/unemployed who transitioned from unemployment into employment in 2022 is the highest for people having a high level of education (22%) and lowest for those having low levels, only 3.7% (Source: EARK).

The World Bank states: “spending on social services and labour market programmes is disproportionately low. Benefits are not always adequate and may cause, in some cases, disincentives to work. [...] A lack of case management and referral systems, as well as low spending, make social services and labour market programmes largely ineffective” (World Bank, 2022, p. 8).

The World Bank summarises the challenges as follows:

- “ALMPs are not well resourced and do not partner with NGOs, civil society or the private sector;
- EARK has low implementation capacity;
- Programming decisions are not based on labour market and jobseeker data and information;
- Codified monitoring and evaluation standards for data-driven reporting have largely not been implemented;
- There are no unemployment benefits to support workers who lost their employment” (World Bank, 2022b, p. 9).

The World Bank concludes that “there is an inevitable need to:

- Increase public resources for ALMPs and allow partnerships with non-public providers.
- Strengthen the capacity of the EARK by hiring and training counsellors, including for employer outreach, proactive case management and specialized support for vulnerable groups;
- Base programming decisions on labour market and jobseeker data and information;
- Establish rigorous monitoring and evaluation;
- Assess options for temporary financial support for those actively searching for jobs (unemployment benefits)” (ibid, p. 9).

Initiatives to increase the capacity of public employment services

The EARK is an independent body within the MFLT. Its mandate includes the provision of employment services to jobseekers and employers; the administration and implementation of ALMPs; the provision of labour migration counselling; the payment of maternity leave compensation; and determining the proof of unemployment status as a condition for access to social assistance.

Its organisational structure consists of the Head Office located in Pristina and a network of 34 municipal employment offices, eight vocational training centres (VTCs) and seven career orientation centres. The EARK currently employs 264 staff. During the lockdown period, a new web application was launched to register unemployed jobseekers and vacancies. A peer review among public employment services of the six Western Balkan economies highlighted as strengths of the EARK “the clearly defined process of institutional target-setting and key performance indicators”, as well as the digitised operational processes via a system known as SIMP. Another plus is “the profiling and segmentation of clients” according to their needs and individual strengths. Peers also praised the fact that “the training provided by VTCs is embedded in the EARK system”, which “makes the process of allocating jobseekers to training straightforward and quick” (RCC, 2022, p. 5). However, the latter could also be a disadvantage, as VTCs typically offer cheap, short training with a lack of focus on practical skills. There is no open competition to involve other training providers. This would involve higher administrative but also training costs, for which resources are lacking. Funds are also insufficient for higher-level, more intense training.

In terms of challenges, the report recommends that staff awareness be raised on issues of quality management; that counsellors cover services in a more integrated manner, from drafting individual employment plans to placing jobseekers in ALMPs; and that ALMPs be regularly evaluated for their quality and effectiveness in terms of jobseekers’ labour market integration. The EARK’s relations with employers also need to be strengthened through better communication with the business community. Improved (online) services for matching job vacancies with jobseekers’ profiles may encourage more employers to register their vacancies with the EARK (RCC, 2022, p. 5).

Further, effective implementation of ALMPs requires adequate capacities within the EARK. High workload limits the effectiveness of the EARK: the ratio of job seekers to counsellors is about 770:1, one of the highest client-to staff ratios in the region. Given the lack of resources, the EARK is still not in the position to set ambitious goals, but the EARK management is fully committed to enhancing the quality of the services offered to the public. In addition, the EARK faces major challenges in

implementing the YG scheme. The EARK has projected extra demand for some 100 staff, but the pending laws on civil servants and public officials are preventing it from recruiting external talent.

As part of a new restructuring programme of EARK, in collaboration with GIZ, an agreement has been signed for hiring 100 additional counsellors. However, these will need to be recruited from inside the civil service, and will need to be trained on the required skills¹⁹. The total staff number targeted after reorganisation will be 351 and EARK expects to achieve the full number of staff by 2025²⁰.

Other challenges include continuous capacity-building among EARK staff; the introduction of a three-tiered new service model (from low to high levels of support) and the re-organisation of local employment offices; the review and improvement of databases; effective outreach and NEET profiling strategies; and the registration and monitoring of, and expansion of offers to, NEETs. Top-level government support and long-term funding commitments would be required to achieve that.

For further information, please contact Matthias Themel, European Training Foundation by email at matthias.themel@etf.europa.eu.

¹⁹ Information obtained by Evelyn Viertel, June 2023, mission to Kosovo.

²⁰ Information obtained by Matthias Themel, January 2024, mission to Kosovo.

KOSOVO: STATISTICAL ANNEX

The Annex includes annual data from 2010, 2015, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 or the last available year.

	Indicator	2010	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	
1	Total Population (in thousands) ⁽¹⁾	1775.7	1788.2	1788.9	1790.1	1786.0	1762.0	
2	Relative size of youth population (age group 15-24 and denominator age 15-64, %) ^{(1)C}	30.5	28.0	26.9	26.6	26.4	26.2	
3	GDP growth rate (%)	4.9	5.9	4.8	-5.3	10.7	3.5	
4	Gross value added by sector (%)	Agriculture	9.5	7.7	7.2	7.4	6.9	7.4
		Industry	27.0	26.9	27.1	27.6	27.4	28.2
		Services	45.9	46.6	46.4	47.6	45.9	44.9
5	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
6	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure)	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
7	Adult Literacy (%) ^C	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
8	Educational attainment of total population (aged 15+) (%)	Low ⁽²⁾	M.D.	45.1	43.4	42.8	M.D.	M.D.
		Medium ⁽³⁾	M.D.	42.8	43.5	43.4	M.D.	M.D.
		High ⁽⁴⁾	M.D.	12.1	13.1	13.8	M.D.	M.D.
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%)	Total	M.D.	14.5	8.2	7.8	M.D.	M.D.
		Male	M.D.	11.8	8.0	7.3	M.D.	M.D.
		Female	M.D.	17.5	8.4	8.4	M.D.	M.D.
10	NET enrolment rates in secondary education (ISCED level 2-3) (%)	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	M.D.	50.8	51.2	52.9	M.D.	M.D.	
12	Low achievement in reading, mathematics and science – PISA (%)	Reading	N.A.	76.9	78.7 ⁽⁵⁾	N.A.	N.A.	83.1
		Mathematics	N.A.	77.7	76.6 ⁽⁵⁾	N.A.	N.A.	85.0
		Science	N.A.	67.7	76.5 ⁽⁵⁾	N.A.	N.A.	79.3
13	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%) ^C	Total	M.D.	33.5	35.7	33.7	34.6	M.D.
		Male	M.D.	50.8	53.1	49.4	50.1	M.D.
		Female	M.D.	16.0	18.5	18.1	19.2	M.D.
14	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%) ^C	M.D.	66.5	64.3	66.3	65.4	M.D.	

	Indicator	2010	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022	
		Male	M.D.	49.2	46.9	50.6	49.9	M.D.
		Female	M.D.	84.0	81.5	81.9	80.8	M.D.
15	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%) ^c	Total	M.D.	22.5	26.7	25.1	27.5	M.D.
		Male	M.D.	34.7	41.4	38.1	40.7	M.D.
		Female	M.D.	10.2	12.2	12.3	14.4	M.D.
16	Employment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	Low ⁽²⁾	M.D.	7.5	9.1	8.3	M.D.	M.D.
		Medium ⁽³⁾	M.D.	30.1	34.1	31.5	M.D.	M.D.
		High ⁽⁴⁾	M.D.	51.3	57.5	54.7	M.D.	M.D.
17	Employment by sector (%) ^c	Agriculture	M.D.	2.3	5.2 ^b	4.8 ^b	2.8	2.2 ⁽⁶⁾
		Industry	M.D.	28.3	27.5 ^b	27.4 ^b	25.2	24.3 ⁽⁶⁾
		Services	M.D.	69.6	67.0 ^b	68.0 ^b	71.9	73.2 ⁽⁶⁾
18	Incidence of self-employment (%) ^c		M.D.	29.1	28.3 ^b	27.7 ^b	22.8	21.0
19	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%) ^c		M.D.	22.8	20.3 ^b	18.1 ^b	13.5	13.3
20	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%) ^c	Total	M.D.	32.8	25.1 ^b	25.5 ^b	20.4	M.D.
		Male	M.D.	31.7	21.9 ^b	23.0 ^b	18.7	M.D.
		Female	M.D.	36.5	34.0 ^b	32.1 ^b	24.8	M.D.
21	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	Low ⁽²⁾	M.D.	47.0	32.2	34.2	26.6 ^c	M.D.
		Medium ⁽³⁾	M.D.	33.6	25.6	26.6	17.7 ^c	M.D.
		High ⁽⁴⁾	M.D.	18.8	21.3	19.2	13.7 ^c	M.D.
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%)	Total	M.D.	57.7 ^c	49.0 ^{b,c}	48.8 ^{b,c}	37.8 ^c	21.4
		Male	M.D.	54.2 ^c	43.6 ^{b,c}	44.9 ^{b,c}	33.4 ^c	18.6
		Female	M.D.	67.2 ^c	60.4 ^{b,c}	57.3 ^{b,c}	46.5 ^c	27.0
23	Proportion of people aged 15–24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	Total	M.D.	31.7	32.6 ^b	33.5 ^b	32.0	33.0
		Male	M.D.	28.3	31.1 ^b	33.8 ^b	31.7	32.2
		Female	M.D.	34.9	34.3 ^b	33.2 ^b	32.4	33.8
	Proportion of people aged 15–29 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	Total	M.D.	39.2	39.9	40.4	M.D.	M.D.
		Male	M.D.	33.7	35.6	38	M.D.	M.D.
		Female	M.D.	45.3	44.8	43	M.D.	M.D.
24		Total	M.D.	4.9	2.7	5.6	M.D.	M.D.

	Indicator		2010	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022
	Participation in training/lifelong learning (% aged 25-64)	Male	M.D.	5.9	2.9	5.8	M.D.	M.D.
		Female	M.D.	3.8	2.6	5.5	M.D.	M.D.
25	Human Development Index		M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.

Last update: 20/11/2023

Sources:

Indicators 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7: The World Bank, World Development Indicators database

Indicators 7, 10, 11: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics

Indicators 8, 9, 16, 17 (2022), 18 (2022), 19 (2022), 21, 22 (2022), 23 (2022), 24: KAS, Labor Force Survey

Indicators 13, 14, 15, 17 (2015-2021), 18 (2015-2021), 19 (2015-2021), 20, 22 (2015-2021), 23 (2015-2021): ILOSTAT LFS

Indicators 11: MEST/KAS, EMIS system

Indicator 12: OECD PISA 2018 Results (Volume I) Annex B1

Indicator 25: UNDP

Notes:

(1) Estimation.

(2) Low – ISCED11 levels 0-2

(3) Medium – ISCED11 levels 3-4

(4) High – ISCED11 levels 5-8

(5) applies to 2018

(6) Agriculture Sector A, Industry and Construction: Sectors B-F, Services: Sectors G-U

Legend:

^b = Break in time series

^c = ETF calculations

N.A. = Not Applicable

M.D. = Missing Data

Annex: definitions of Indicators

	Description	Definition
1	Total population ('000)	The total population is estimated as the number of people having their usual residence in a country on 1 January of the respective year. When information on the usually resident population is not available, countries may report legal or registered residents.
2	Relative size of youth population (age group 15–24) (%)	This is the ratio of the youth population (aged 15–24) to the working-age population, usually aged 15–64 (or 15–74 or 15+).
3	GDP growth rate (%)	Annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency. Aggregates are based on constant 2010 USD. GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources.
4	Gross value added by sector (%)	<p>The share of value added from Agriculture, Industry and Services.</p> <p>Agriculture corresponds to ISIC divisions 1–5 and includes forestry, hunting, and fishing, as well as cultivation of crops and livestock production. Value added is the net output of a sector after adding up all outputs and subtracting intermediate inputs. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or depletion and degradation of natural resources. The origin of value added is determined by the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC), revision 3 or 4.</p> <p>Industry corresponds to the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) tabulation categories C-F (revision 3) or tabulation categories B-F (revision 4), and includes mining and quarrying (including oil production), manufacturing, construction, and public utilities (electricity, gas, and water).</p> <p>Services correspond to ISIC divisions 50-99 and they include value added in wholesale and retail trade (including hotels and restaurants), transport, and government, financial, professional, and personal services such as education, health care, and real estate services. Also included are imputed bank service charges, import duties, and any statistical discrepancies noted by national compilers as well as discrepancies arising from rescaling.</p>
5	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	<p>Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of GDP.</p> <p>Generally, the public sector funds education either by directly bearing the current and capital expenses of educational institutions, or by supporting students and their families with scholarships and public loans as well as by transferring public subsidies for educational activities to private firms or non-profit organisations (transfer to private households and enterprises). Both types of transactions together are reported as total public expenditure on education.</p>
6	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure)	<p>Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of total public expenditure.</p> <p>Generally, the public sector funds education either by directly bearing the current and capital expenses of educational institutions, or by supporting students and their families with scholarships and public loans as well as by transferring public subsidies for educational activities to private firms or non-profit organisations (transfer to private households and enterprises). Both types of transactions together are reported as total public expenditure on education.</p>

	Description	Definition
7	Adult literacy (%)	Adult literacy is the percentage of the population aged 15 years and over who can both read and write a short and simple statement on his/her everyday life, and understand it. Generally, 'literacy' also encompasses 'numeracy' – the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations.
8	Educational attainment of total population (aged 15+) (%)	Educational attainment refers to the highest educational level achieved by individuals expressed as a percentage of all persons in that age group. This is usually measured in terms of the highest educational programme successfully completed, which is typically certified by a recognised qualification. Recognised intermediate qualifications are classified at a lower level than the programme itself.
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%)	Early leavers from education and training are defined as the percentage of the population aged 18–24 with at most a lower level of secondary education who were not in further education or training during the four weeks preceding the survey. Lower secondary education refers to ISCED 1997 levels 0–2 and 3C short (i.e. programmes lasting under two years) for data up to 2013 and to ISCED 2011 levels 0–2 for data from 2014 onwards.
10	NET enrolment rates in secondary education (ISCED level 2-3) (%)	This indicator covers the enrolments in a in a given level of education of children/youths belonging to the official age group corresponding to the given level of education.
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	Total number of students enrolled in vocational programmes at a given level of education (in this case, upper secondary), expressed as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled in all programmes (vocational and general) at that level.
12	Low achievement in reading, maths and science – PISA (%)	Low achievers are 15-year-olds who fail to reach level 2 on the PISA scale for reading, mathematics and science.
13	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%)	The activity rate is calculated by dividing the active population by the population of the same age group. The active population (also called 'labour force') is defined as the sum of employed and unemployed people. The inactive population consists of all people who are classified as neither employed nor unemployed.
14	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%)	The inactivity/out of the labour force rate is calculated by dividing the inactive population by the population of the same age group. The inactive population consists of all people who are classified as neither employed nor unemployed.
15	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of employed people by the population of the same age group. Employed people are all people who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the reference period, or were temporarily absent from such work. If a different age group is used, this should be indicated.
16	Employment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of employed persons by the population of the same age group. Employed persons are all persons who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during the reference period, or were temporarily absent from such work. If a different age group is used, this should be indicated. Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: Low (ISCED level 0–2), Medium (ISCED level 3–4) and High (ISCED 1997 level 5–6, and ISCED 2011 level 5–8).
17	Employment by sector (%)	This indicator provides information on the relative importance of different economic activities with regard to employment. Data are presented by broad branches of economic activity (i.e. Agriculture/Industry/Services) based on the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC). In Europe, the NACE classification is consistent with ISIC.

	Description	Definition
18	Incidence of self-employment (%)	The incidence of self-employment is expressed by the self-employed (i.e. employers + own-account workers + contributing family workers) as a proportion of the total employed.
19	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)	The incidence of vulnerable employment is expressed by the own-account workers and contributing family workers as a proportion of the total employed.
20	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15–64 or 15+ who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a maximum period of three months).
21	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15–64 or 15+ who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work (had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a period of, at most, three months)). Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: Low (ISCED level 0–2), Medium (ISCED level 3–4) and High (ISCED 1997 level 5–6, and ISCED 2011 level 5–8).
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed people comprise those aged 15–24 who were without work during the reference week; are currently available for work (were available for paid employment or self-employment before the end of the two weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the four-week period ending with the reference week to seek paid employment or self-employment, or had found a job to start later (within a maximum period of three months).
23	Proportion of people aged 15–24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	The indicator provides information on young people aged 15–24 who meet the following two conditions: first, they are not employed (i.e. unemployed or inactive according to the ILO definition); and second, they have not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. Data are expressed as a percentage of the total population of the same age group and gender, excluding respondents who have not answered the question on participation in education and training.
24	Participation in training/lifelong learning (% aged 25-64)	Participants in lifelong learning refers to persons aged 25–64 who stated that they received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator is the total population of the same age group, excluding those who did not answer the question on participation in education and training. The information collected relates to all education or training, whether or not it is relevant to the respondent's current or possible future job. If a different reference period is used, this should be indicated.
25	Human Development Index	The index is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
ALLED2	Second phase of the Aligning Education to Employment project (ADA, with funding from EC)
ALMPs	Active labour market policies
AVETAE	Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education
EARK	Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo
EC	European Commission
EFQEA	European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
ESVET-PRO	European Union Support to Vocational Education and Training, Professional Qualification and Occupation project
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
EUROSTAT	Statistical Office of the European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ICILS	International Computer and Information Literacy Study
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICT	Information and communication technology
ILO	International labour organisation
ILOSTAT	Statistical Office of the International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance

ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISIC	International Student Identity Card
IT	Information Technology
KAA	Kosovo Accreditation Agency
KAS	Kosovo Agency for Statistics
KESP	Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (2017-2021)
K-GenU	Kosovo Generation Unlimited
KIESA	Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LLL	Lifelong learning
LMIS	Labour Market Information System
LuxDev 2018	Bilateral cooperation agency of Luxembourg
MEDs	Municipal education directorates
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
MFLT	Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers
NACE	Nomenclature of Economic Activities
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NQA	National Qualifications Authority
NQF	National Qualification Framework
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PES	Public Employment Service
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RAE	Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SIMP	Kosovo's Labor Management Information System
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USD	United States Dollar
VET	Vocational education and training
VTCs	Vocational training centres
WBL	Work-based learning
XK	Country code for Kosovo
YG	Youth Guarantee
YGIP	Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan

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