

KOSOVO¹

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENTS 2021

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KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Kosovo had poor resources to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, and experienced a high number of cases. The volatile political situation with changing governments in 2020 and 2021 also led to delays in effectively mitigating the impact of the crisis. This led to extended business and school closures with all the ensuing consequences for the economy, budget, education and poverty. Kosovo's GDP decreased by an estimated 5.3% in 2020, but is expected to grow by 7% in 2021. In July 2021 the Kosovo Government approved an Economic Recovery Package of EUR 420 million (around 6% of GDP). Priority goals include macro-fiscal stability, formalising and revitalising the economy, and enhancing employment. Strengthening the rule of law, formalising business activities and increasing the competitiveness of the private sector remain key issues for the economy. In addition, employers complain about the lack of skilled workers.

The level of expenditure by Kosovo's government on education as a percentage of GDP compares to the EU average, but outcomes are worse. PISA results deteriorated again, between 2015 and 2018. Kosovo students spend an average of 13.2 years in education, but the number of learning-adjusted years is only 7.9 (World Bank Human Capital Index 2020). In other words, '18-year-old Kosovars have the skills, knowledge and intellect of 13-year-olds' (Bajrami, 2021, p. 13). Any education sector reforms need to target these basic skills gaps as a matter of priority.

The Education Minister in office since March 2021 decided not to introduce the new VET curricula in September as they did not follow a common structure and were not designed to comply with relevant qualifications. Agreement still has to be reached on the compilation of a national list of vocational qualifications and a national VET curriculum framework for use as a common basis for future curriculum revisions. Furthermore, Kosovo faces a number of challenges in the areas of VET governance and financing. These include the functioning of the tripartite Council and the extension of the mandate of the Agency for VET and Adult Education. A new, more comprehensive basic law on VET would need to abolish the existing fragmentation and contradictions with other laws. The network of publicly funded VET providers may need to be revised in terms of number, location and VET offers in view of employers' needs and declining student numbers. In 2021, a new funding formula for VET was devised through the IPA-ADA's 'ALLED2' project which, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), provides training on budget planning to 20 pilot schools. If successful, MESTI could adopt the formula and extend it to all VET schools in Kosovo. However, further preparation and training would be needed for this purpose.

The Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK) has a 3-year policy in place for institutional development (2019-2021) and annual work plans for setting objectives, targets and key performance indicators. Operational processes are defined in the Operational Manual for Employment Services and in the regulations and manuals of each active labour market policy (ALMP). IT-based systems are used to support standardised processes. Profiling groups individuals into the three categories of 'low', 'medium' or 'high risk of becoming long-term unemployed'. Offices are well equipped for clients' self-service. Registered unemployed people have access to mediation services and, in principle, active labour market policies (ALMPs). EARK manages a network of vocational training centres, promotes their accreditation and the development of teaching materials, and exchanges data on participation. Employers use labour office premises to interview unemployed

persons. Another positive element is EARK's in-house training system for newly recruited staff (Gashi, A., 2018).

The main challenges include the large number of registered unemployed persons, including those not actively looking for jobs, in relation to the limited number of counsellors and active measures available, as well as the general lack of vacancies. The extent of ALMPs is far below what is necessary in terms of quantity and quality. Regular studies to assess and forecast labour demand and the effectiveness of ALMPs are lacking. To improve the relevance and quality of training, EARK may contract out training for unemployed jobseekers after going through competitive bidding procedures. In this case, it may be a requirement that only accredited training providers, or companies with accredited instructors, are allowed to apply.

In 2020, 33.6% of Kosovo's young people (aged 15-24) were not in employment, education or training (NEETs). The respective percentage for the 15-29 age group is as high as 40.4%. The upcoming Youth Guarantee scheme, supported by the European Union, will need to address the complexity of the challenges young people in Kosovo are facing to integrate into the labour market. It will need to raise basic and relevant technical skills levels, increase the availability of quality training offers, promote opportunities for gaining practical skills during company internships and implement accompanying support measures for young females and people from vulnerable backgrounds. EARK and its partners will need to improve their understanding of the situation of NEETs through better data and analyses, as well as the extent and effectiveness of measures.

1. KEY DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

■ Political developments and the health situation

Since the beginning of 2020, Kosovo has seen four distinct governments led by three different parties. Kosovo depends on external funding, and continues to be divided along ethnic lines, in political deadlock with Serbia. Recent rows between Kosovo and Serbia provide yet another example of 15 years of border and trade disputes and demonstrate how hard it is for the European Union to mediate. With Vetëvendosje's Albin Kurti as Prime Minister since March 2021, Kosovo could 'develop toward a prosperous future' or 'drift into diplomatic limbo for years to come' (Jones, August 2021).

Kosovo has had poor resources to effectively combat COVID-19. In August 2021, it ranked first in the region once again in terms of the number of daily cases of COVID-19 per million inhabitants. However, it has now become the 'vaccination champion' of the region. Some 40% of its population were vaccinated at the end of October 2021. The EU provided everything: EUR 5 million for tests, hospital beds, ambulances and respirators; EUR 63 million in economic and social assistance to the most vulnerable groups in society; EUR 100 million to maintain the macroeconomic stability of the country; and EUR 395,000 vaccines from the COVAX initiative (EPIK, 2021).

■ Demographics

Kosovo has a population of around 1.79 million (Kosovo Agency of Statistics – KAS), the youngest in geographical Europe. However, Kosovo has seen a steady decline in its birth rate – from 2.7 in 2000 to 1.66 in 2019. The reasons include the emigration of young people of productive age, including during the peak migration wave in 2014-2015 (*Balkan News*, July 2021). Declining school-age populations at various levels will have repercussions for financial, human resource and infrastructure planning in education and workforce availability.

■ Economic developments, informal economy, remittances

In 2020, Kosovo's economy saw a significant recession due to the pandemic-related lockdown and travel restrictions. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2021), Kosovo's GDP decreased by an estimated 5.3% in 2020, but was expected to grow by 6% in 2021. The World Bank (2021) expects economic activity in Kosovo to expand by 7.1% during 2021, an increase driven by diaspora visits and fiscal support measures. In the medium term, according to the report, economic growth will depend on the acceleration of the COVID-19 vaccination process and pandemic management.

While the government is continuing to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on growth, employment and poverty through fiscal and financial measures, major structural obstacles to growth and competitiveness remain. Kosovo needs to strengthen the rule of law, 'tackle the formalisation of the economy and low competitiveness of the private sector', as well as 'tap into renewable and energy saving potentials and fully open the energy market' (EU Office Kosovo, July 2021). Kosovo continues to present a rather unfavourable environment for foreign investment.

In June 2021, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Kosovo Government signed an agreement worth EUR 40 million to guarantee private sector loans. Funds will be channelled through the Kosovo Credit Guarantee Fund. Kosovo will also benefit from the EU Plan for Economy and Investment in the Western Balkans, also focusing on digitalisation and a greener economy.

In July 2021, the Kosovo Government approved an Economic Recovery Package of EUR 420 million (around 6% of GDP). The priority goals include macro-fiscal stability, formalising and revitalising the economy, and enhancing employment. Five sets of measures target employment support (EUR 50 million); economic recovery (EUR 108 million); support for public services (EUR 112 million); investment in infrastructure and the environment (EUR 100 million); and support for families (EUR 50 million)².

According to a survey by the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce, recovering from the crisis, over 45% of businesses rated their situation in the first quarter of 2021 as satisfactory. However, a reported problem remains the lack of skilled workers, especially during the summer months³.

The looming informal economy in Kosovo hinders economic development and strains already tight budgets. Before the pandemic, nearly 20% of registered businesses did not pay taxes and 30-40% of employees worked without contracts or social security. Such businesses and individuals were also excluded from short-term assistance during the pandemic (OECD, 2020, p. 7).

Households greatly depend on remittances that represent the most important source of foreign funding. In 2019, the remittance flow amounted to EUR 851.7 million, which accounted for 15.8% of GDP (Central Bank of Kosovo, cited in Merovci & Sekiraqa, 2021).

² Minister of Finance, Labour and Transfer, Hekuran Murati, at the Government meeting on 30 June 2021.

³ Interview with Berat Rukiqi, KCC President.

2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 Trends and challenges

■ Education expenditure, access, participation and early leaving

Government expenditure on education decreased from EUR 323 million in 2019 to EUR 313 million in 2020 (KAS). With a government expenditure on education that amounted to 4.5% of GDP in 2018, Kosovo was close to the EU average (4.6%)⁴. However, in terms of outcomes, Kosovo fares worse, as the PISA results illustrate (see below). Kosovo students spend an average of 13.2 years in education, but the number of learning-adjusted years is only 7.9 (World Bank Human Capital Index 2020). This gap of 5.3 years means that '18-year-old Kosovars have the skills, knowledge and intellect of 13-year-olds' (Bajrami, 2021, p. 13). Progress in education has been held back by the lack of political stability, leadership and development capacities, as well as the fact that 'teachers are hired based on political party affiliation' (Gashi, E., 2019, p. 1).

Participation in early childhood and basic education remains an issue for children, especially from remote areas and vulnerable backgrounds. Participation numbers decreased during the pandemic.

In 2020, 52.9% of upper secondary school students were enrolled in VET programmes, which represents a slight increase from 51.2% in 2019. Initial VET is provided in 68 vocational schools (including the six 'centres of competence') which operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI). 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 vocational education and training (VET) to higher education and low university completion rates point to inefficiencies in the public skills formation systems.

In 2020, 7.8% of young people aged 18 to 24 had left school without completing upper secondary education, which is a slight improvement from 2019 when the rate was 8.2.% (KAS, LFS data). Dropping out from school is due to systemic problems in education that have been present for the last two decades. The value of education has decreased, and children see education as an obligation rather than a necessity (Prishtina Insight, May 2021). Early school-leavers are poorly prepared for living and working in a knowledge society.

Once out of school, few possibilities remain for adults to develop their skills. Efforts are taken to include jobseekers in formal education programmes in vocational schools or non-formal short courses in VTCs. The adult learning participation rates (25-64) was 5.6% in 2020, an improvement from 2019 by 2.9 percentage points (KAS). 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. Low-skilled jobseekers benefit the least from training provision, which prevents them from moving out of unemployment (Viertel, 2020).

⁴ See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Government_expenditure_on_education

In 2020, 28.1% of the active population (aged 15+) had a high level of education (ISCED 5 or higher) – a further improvement vis-à-vis 2019, with 27.2%. In contrast, at 55.7%, the proportion of people with medium-level qualifications, decreased by 1.4% in the same period.

■ **PISA results**

In the OECD's 2015 and 2018 PISA tests in reading, mathematics and science, Kosovo ranked among the low performers of all participating countries. In 2018, only 21% of students attained at least Level 2 proficiency in reading (OECD average: 77%), while around 23% of students attained Level 2 or higher in both mathematics and science (OECD average: 76% and 78%, respectively) (OECD, 2019). Science results even dropped by 9% compared to 2015. 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 and 'to engage as critical and informed citizens' (MEST, 2019, p. 33).

■ **Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)**

In 2020, 33.6% of Kosovo's young people (aged 15-24) were not in employment, education or training, abbreviated to NEETs. The respective figure for the 15-29 age group (relevant for the Youth Guarantee) is as high as 40.4%. This represents a deterioration over 2019 of 0.9 percentage points (15-24) and 0.5 percentage points (15-29), respectively (KAS, LFS data).

■ **Education during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Schools closed on 12 March 2020 when the first COVID-19 cases were recorded in Kosovo. Further intervals of school reopenings and closures followed. During the lockdown phase, the ministry, with support from donors, made some educational resources available online and televised lectures in basic subjects. Distance learning was initially organised for grades 1-5 and later for grades 6-9. Responsibility for online classes for upper secondary education (both general and vocational) was left to the municipalities. Schools, teachers and parents faced many challenges. Before the pandemic, the system was ill-prepared for distance learning. Technology had hardly been used in schools. Internet connections are not generally available. Only 54% of the families in Kosovo have computers at home. Students did not receive adequate learning support (Prishtina Insight, May 2021). 'The quality of distance learning organisation, video materials and teaching approaches remains debatable' (Bajrami, 2021, p. 17). Even holding additional lectures to compensate for missed classes was not considered highly successful. Distance learning led to further learning gaps, especially among pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, with businesses struggling for survival during the pandemic, work-based learning and work experience for first-time jobseekers could hardly be organised. The start of the new school year 2021/2022 had to be postponed to 27 September 2021, again due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 VET policy and institutional setting

■ **Strategic and legal framework for VET and adult learning**

There is no shortage of ambitious strategies and action plans in Kosovo. These include Kosovo's Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021, which also covers initial VET in vocational schools (MEST, 2016). Progress with the implementation of the KESP was assessed as relatively poor. Bajrami (2021) concluded that 'it is vital that the new education strategy included educational measures that respond to the pandemic and the post-COVID-19 period and which help mitigate

inequalities in education, digitalise education, develop teacher capacity, as well as student competencies and skills essential for future success' (p. 18).

The Sector Strategy of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare 2018-2022 (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 2017a) and the Action Plan: Increasing Youth Employment 2018-2020 (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 2017b) cover elements of initial and continuing VET for young people and adults. Qehaja (2019) undertook a mid-term evaluation, while KOSINT2020 (2019) undertook a separate evaluation of the progress of the strategy's goals and measures in relation to the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo.

A new working group reconvened recently under the new government to draft the Kosovo Education Strategy Plan for 2022-2025, where the digitalisation of education and digital skills will be one of the priorities. Donors have always supported the drafting and evaluation of strategies for which ministerial actors have limited capacities. The latter had also not been able to adequately act upon recommendations from evaluations, which calls into question local ownership.

One problem is the fragmented legal framework for VET, which is regulated by several pieces of primary legislation (Education / VET / Education in the Municipalities / Kosovo Qualifications Framework / Labour / Employment Agency) and the ever-growing amount of secondary legislation (administrative instructions, orders and decisions). The VET Law adopted in 2013 (No 04L-138) lacks certain aspects of a modern law, as well as cross-references with other laws, and has not been universally implemented. Donors have added to this complexity by introducing new pieces of legislation and different practices in pilot institutions. A new VET (base) law could help the reform process forward, capturing the latest developments and decisions and regulating all aspects of VET for young people and adults in a comprehensive manner. The new VET Law would need to sort out existing discrepancies with other relevant laws or by-laws. Stakeholders in VET and autonomous VET providers need to be able to operate in a secure and enabling legal environment.

■ VET governance and financing arrangements

According to an ETF assessment (Rizvanolli Bajraktari & Pupovci, 2020), Kosovo's VET governance system faces a number of challenges. The tripartite Council for VET and Adult Education (CVETAE) has recently resumed work under the chairmanship of the head of metal sector employers. Its mandate, composition and modus operandi may need to be revised. The main tasks of the Council would be to advise government actors on the skills and profiles required in Kosovo and help design, implement and monitor relevant VET policies and legislation. The social partners should be able to participate on an equal footing with government institutions in charge of the economy, education, labour, employment and social welfare. In collaboration with the Social and Economic Committee chaired by the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce, the CVETAE may play a role in revising the national classification of occupations and advising MESTI on the broader qualifications or profiles that the public VET system could deliver. Putting in place a technical secretariat and regular meetings of the Council would be important.

The 2013 VET Law envisaged that the Agency for VET and Adult Education (AVETAE) would administer all VET schools, develop VET curricula, learning materials and teacher training schemes, and monitor and evaluate the entire VET system to inform policy. However, the Agency has never been mandated and resourced to do so. The GIZ's 'YES' project drafted a first study on the new role and functions of the Agency (INBAS & UBO, 2021), and a feasibility study is underway. In an effort to

reduce the number of public agencies, which the new government intends to do, the functions and staff of the National Qualifications Authority (NQA) could be integrated into the AVETAE.

Furthermore, the network of publicly funded VET providers may need revisiting in terms of number, location and VET offers, in view of both employers' needs and declining student numbers. Currently, there may be too many small VET schools, which offer a limited number of profiles. A baseline study establishing the status quo of all VET providers in Kosovo is missing. A vision and mid- to long-term plan could then guide the optimisation of the network and strategic investments in bigger training centres. Such bigger centres could cater to the training needs of young people and employed and unemployed adults. Such a plan would also need to guide the possible reallocation and skills development of VET teachers and the upgrading of equipment etc. Today hardly any public VET school meets the quality criteria set in the accreditation procedures by the NQA, and schools cannot be overburdened. It is important to have feasible regulations in place. A 'softer' approach might be to strengthen the continuous quality improvement processes in schools and support them through better curricula, learning materials, equipment, teacher training, the appointment of development coordinators and the conclusion of agreements with local employers for work-based learning. Strategic investments by the government and donors, as well as practical training provided by employers, will allow for higher-quality VET over time.

Municipalities receive block grants from the Ministry, including for education, but are not held accountable when they divert funds to other sectors. Recentralising the allocation of state funding for VET may not be possible currently under the existing Law on the Education in Municipalities (No 03L-068). However, neighbouring municipalities could possibly be encouraged to work together and plan and coordinate general and vocational education in their catchment areas. Creating bigger, 'regional' schools and VET centres with more students and a bigger variety of programmes might be a better option, as North Macedonia is currently trying to do. Alternatively, cooperating (VET) schools could better divide the work and coordinate the programmes or courses offered.

Municipalities are in charge of both the appointment of school staff and funding schools on a per capita basis that makes little distinction between general education and the more expensive vocational education. VET schools are generally underfunded and have so far had little discretion over budget planning and implementation. In 2021, the IPA-ADA's 'ALLED2' project introduced a new funding formula for VET and, in agreement with MESTI, provides training on budget planning to its 20 pilot schools. If successful, MESTI could adopt the formula and extend it to all VET schools in Kosovo. However, further preparation and training would be needed.

■ **Quality and quality assurance**

Problems in aligning VET profiles and programmes with labour market demand, in tandem with a generally poor focus on practice, are obstacles to the development of relevant professional skills. The new education minister stopped the introduction of the new 'core VET curricula', which was planned for September 2021. Schroeter and Kaçaniku (2020) found that the overhaul of VET core curricula did not go in the desired direction. The new VET curricula, revised by teachers, were criticised for not involving employers in the identification of relevant profiles and skills (or not being based on recognised qualifications). Also, the individual VET curricula did not follow a common structure. Reaching an agreement on a national VET curriculum framework still remains an issue.

Since all upper secondary schools teach general subjects taken from the secondary general school curriculum, and since teachers claim to keep their teaching hours, VET programmes tend to be highly

academic and leave little space for practical skills training, including in companies. Many teachers lack pedagogical skills and a proper insight into the world of work (see ETF, 2019, for example). In October 2021, MESTI confirmed its intention of introducing an obligatory 1-year pedagogical training course for would-be teachers at university level. The 'ALLED2' project is helping with the development. In June 2020, the (then) Minister of Education, Science and Technology had signed an 'Instruction on school-based teacher training', but implementation is not sure. Equipment and consumables are lacking and school-business relations remain weak. Exceptions here are VET providers and courses, which enjoyed several years of donor investment in staff development, equipment and materials (Viertel, 2020).

Furthermore, the continuous professional development of VET teachers to enhance their pedagogical and practical VET skills is crucial. A 4-to-6-week training course for VET teachers already in service (modelled e.g. on the example of Albania) appears more feasible than a 1-year programme. The systematic introduction of development functions in schools by appointing and resourcing coordinators, such as for quality, continuous professional development, school-business coordination, career guidance, etc. could help schools to gradually improve.

In the field of higher (vocational) education, issues with academic staff, outdated content, corruption, quality control and limited business cooperation are preventing better skills outcomes (Viertel, 2020). The Kosovo Accreditation Agency has resumed its work of assessing and accrediting higher education providers and programmes.

The NQA is the independent body in charge of assessing and accrediting VET providers and qualifications. The Agency has only partially been able to fulfil this role, missing out in particular on the quality assurance of qualifications offered by public VET providers and the accreditation of the latter. The six VET centres of competence are exceptions here and have all been accredited.

The NQA approach to quality covers only a few points of what would make up a more comprehensive approach to quality assurance, as reflected, for example, in the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET⁵. In relation to this, the previous Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, with the support of the German Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), had developed a quality assurance manual, trained staff and organised self-assessment processes among vocational schools. It is unclear how many VET schools are routinely doing this and whether the schools are taking follow-up steps to improve quality in a systematic manner. The AVETAE is supposed to manage VET and ensure its quality, but the Agency functions only to a limited extent. Municipalities or education inspectors have no procedures in place to look at the specificities and assure the quality of VET. Throughout the system, there is a lack of qualified staff to provide professional support to vocational schools and training centres.

■ Work-based learning arrangements

Offering company internships as a structural part of the VET curriculum is at an early stage. One obstacle is that teachers want to keep their teaching hours for financial reasons. A few vocational schools introduced work-based learning, but mostly only for some students. The previous ministry had set aside funds to cover accident insurance premiums for students on internships in 2019-2020 (GIZ,

⁵ See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0001:0010:EN:PDF> and the Resources menu item at <https://www.eqavet.eu/What-We-Do/European-Quality-Assurance-Reference-Framework>

2020) and adopted a national regulation and guidelines for work-based learning in 2020. Under this scheme, employers provided the equipment, materials, supervisors/instructors and – in some cases – food and travel costs for interns. The GIZ developed programmes to train in-company instructors at three levels of competence, with ‘master trainer’ being the highest level, and trained instructors. During the time of school and business closures, internships could not be offered to students.

To make work-based learning a systemic element of VET provision, VET curricula would need to be revised across the board, school-business liaison persons appointed in schools, a larger number of businesses involved through structured agreements, company instructors trained and processes coordinated between schools and businesses. However, it is unclear whether Kosovo’s businesses have the potential to extend their internship offers as many of them are small and operate partly on an informal basis. The Regional Challenge Fund of the German-funded Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) is trying to increase the labour market relevance of VET providers by funding partnerships between schools and private partners following a call for applications in Kosovo in early 2021.

On-the-job training and subsidised employment schemes also form part of publicly funded active labour market policies (ALMPs). Schools are not involved here. These schemes work better and the – mostly young – jobseekers acquire relevant skills. However, more rigorous evaluation practices by the Employment Agency should make sure that employers retain young people after their training.

■ Digital education and skills

Kosovo’s IT sector is assessed to have high potential (see e.g. Grzegorzczik, 2021), with local and international companies offering jobs mainly for highly skilled people (‘the platform economy’).

The Minister of Education, Science and Technology in office in 2020 had initiated work on a digital skills strategy, but work discontinued with the change of government. The relevant objectives and activities will instead be integrated into the new Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

The ‘EU Support for the Competitiveness of Kosovo’s ICT Sector’ project (2020-2023) provides a variety of IT and business training courses for a larger number of participants. As part of the ‘ICT4IID’ project funded by Sweden, a training and resource centre for ICT skills is being equipped in Prishtina, and some upper secondary schools have been turned into ICT skills centres.

■ Donor support to education and VET for young people and adults

Donor support to education includes a World Bank project (working on a ‘new financing formula for pre-university education’). Numerous donor projects support overall VET reform, the revision of curricula and individual training measures in selected areas and institutions. These include the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) programmes, including ALLED2 with co-funding from the Austrian Development Agency and ESVET-PRO with co-funding from Luxembourg DeveloPMENT (LuxDev). Bilateral initiatives include the ‘YES’ project (which expired in March 2021), the ‘Fit for Jobs’ project (2021-2024) and other projects with skills development components implemented by GIZ, several phases of the ‘EYE’ project funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), the ‘KSV-20’ project funded by LuxDev and the German-funded KfW Regional Challenge Fund.

3. LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

3.1 Trends and challenges

■ Labour market and employment challenges in general

Before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, labour market indicators had improved, although Kosovo was still lagging far behind other Western Balkan countries. High numbers of new labour market entrants each year and the lack of jobs translate into high levels of inactivity and unemployment, especially for women and young people. In 2020, 61.7% of Kosovo's working-age population were 'inactive' (59.5% in 2019), of which 79.2% were women (78.9% in 2019), with the pandemic contributing its share. Youth unemployment stood at 49.1% in 2020 (49.4% in 2019).

University graduates stand better chances on the labour market, although may end up in lower skilled jobs, which also compromises opportunities for low or medium-skilled people. Furthermore, the high share of NEETs (33.6% in 2020 vs. 32.7% in 2019) poses a risk to equitable human capital development (source of all data: KAS, Labour Force Survey – LFS).

Key labour market and employment challenges in Kosovo comprise:

- the labour market participation, the low activity and employment rates, especially among women and young people, the high NEET rate, underemployment and the low participation of older workers;
- the labour market functioning, including working arrangements, the lack of or non-compliance with employment contracts, overtime work without compensation, the low transition from temporary to permanent contracts and employment protection legislation;
- the lack of unemployment and health insurance and the partial lack of occupational safety measures for employed people, which are issues where Kosovo does not comply with the EU *acquis communautaire*⁶;
- the low level of expenditure on ALMPs compared with the extensive needs of beneficiaries, the lack of targeting of measures, the need for continuous capacity-building of employment service staff and the high level of long-term unemployment, especially of low-skilled people;
- the absence of adequate passive labour market measures or the lack of unemployment benefits, which could result in unemployed people falling into poverty;
- gender inequality in terms of employment and pay gaps; and
- the skills gap of unemployed people, especially young people (Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli, 2019, p. 40).

■ Employment

In 2020, the employment rate for the 15-64 age group stood at a low of 28.4% (30.1% in 2019), while that of the 20-64 age group was 32.3% (34.4% in 2019). The female employment rate (20-64) has always been markedly lower than the male rate, standing at 16.0% (15.6% in 2019). As women often work in safer, public sector jobs, employment losses were much higher among men during 2020, due to the outbreak of the pandemic (20-64: 48.8% in 2020 vs. 53.0% in 2019). In 2020, 57.7% of

⁶ 'acquis communautaire' = the accumulated legislation, legal acts and court decisions that constitute the body of European Union law.

employed people had temporary working contracts and 17% were in vulnerable employment (18.9% in 2019) (KAS, LFS).

Kosovo remains the country with the highest informal employment in the region. ‘Some 83% of its employed have some form of informality in their employment relations’ (SELDI, 2020, p. 4). The sectors facing the biggest challenges are construction, services, especially hotels and restaurants, and trade and transport. These sectors employ a large percentage of the Kosovo population, but are ‘plagued by unfair competition and lack of secure opportunities for employees’ (Pristina Insight, June 2019). Some ‘studies suggest that 77.1% of the employees in the construction sector in the country are unregistered’ (SELDI, 2020, p. 15). Undeclared workers have been unable to fully access the government support provided during the crisis (Williams, 2020). To combat undeclared work, Kosovo would require a mix of policies based on incentives and inspections (Gashi & Williams, 2019), as well as the consolidation of its contribution-based social insurance systems (health, unemployment and retirement).

■ Unemployment

In 2020, 25.9% people were unemployed (25.7% in 2019), which included 32.3% women (34.4% in 2019) and 23.5% men (22.6% in 2019). In the 4th quarter of 2020 alone, surveyed unemployment grew by 2.4 percentage points. Nearly half of the 15 to 24-year-olds (49.1% in 2020; 49.4% in 2019) are unemployed. Unemployment is much higher among young women (57.2% in 2020 vs. 60.3% in 2019) than young men (45.2% in 2020; 44.1% in 2019) (KAS, LFS).

By December 2020, the number of registered unemployed persons reached 168,980, which is an exponential increase by 138.7% compared to 70,790 at the end of 2019. This can be attributed to Measure 15 of the Government’s Decision for an Emergency Fiscal Package No 01/19, which offered EUR 130 per citizen in difficult social conditions but required registration with EARK. Another observed effect during 2020 was the 356% increase in the number of registered unemployed people who were – or declared they were – ‘without any school education’ (which was the quickest way to fill out the forms). The highest increase was recorded among persons aged 55+ (EARK, 2021).

At the same time, only 11,166 vacancies were reported in 2020 – the lowest number in the past 5 years. EARK was able to mediate 6,961 people into jobs – 1,330 into regular jobs and 5,631 into subsidised employment as part of ALMPs. Some 3,436 unemployed people – or 36.3% of all ALMP beneficiaries – were referred to training courses – a downward trend by 48% compared to the previous year due to VTC closures during the pandemic. Of these, 396 people were referred to ‘combined training’, taking place at both the VTC and in company (ibid).

■ Statistical data collection and labour market information

EARK maintains a sophisticated IT-based labour market information system (LMIS)⁷, containing rich data on jobseekers, unemployed people, employers, vacancies, ALMPs and job mediation outcomes. The challenges include 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 and periodical statistics, reports and analyses could assist individuals and employers with labour market needs information, job search and job matching. Furthermore, the LMIS could also help the government to review and shape

⁷ See <https://sitp.rks-gov.net/>

employment and training policies, including the development of new sectors and professions (Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli, 2019, pp. 19 and 75f.).

■ **Poverty**

Based on the 2017 Household Budget Survey, 18% of Kosovo's population was estimated to live below the poverty line and 5.1% below the extreme poverty line. Poverty is higher in rural settlements (KAS, 2019). A regularly conducted survey on income and living conditions would help the Kosovo government to calculate key indicators, such as people exposed to poverty and social exclusion risks, and design targeted education, employment and social protection measures.

3.2 Employment policy and institutional setting

■ **Strategy and legal framework in the employment policy field**

The Vetëvendosje government in place from January to June 2020 and since March 2021 abolished the labour ministry and integrated labour and social protection functions into the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers. The labour ministry's Sector Strategy 2018-2022 and the Youth Employment Action Plan 2018-2020 were adopted in December 2017 (Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, 2017a, 2017b). Qehaja (2019), who had carried out a mid-term evaluation, recommended that the labour and education ministries take greater efforts overall to promote youth employment. This evaluation did not lead to adjustments of the strategy or action plan nor any change of policy.

■ **Initiatives to boost employment including the Youth Guarantee**

The Economic Recovery Package approved by the Government in July 2021 envisages the following employment support measures:

- the 10% pension contributions of gross salaries of new (or recently legalised) employees will be covered for 12 months;
- support to women in employment: every woman who is newly employed as from July 2021 will be supported for the first 3 months with a subsidy of 50% of her salary, up to a maximum of EUR 170. At the end of the 3-month period, women will receive subsidies of 10% of their gross salaries;
- employment of young people: the State guarantees first-time employment for all young people;
- training and employment in IT: coupons will be provided to all interested young people. After the training, their employment will be supported for the first 3 months;
- employment of people with special needs: 50% of their salary up to a maximum of EUR 150 per month for the first 6 months⁸.

A condition for receiving subsidies is that the employee does not appear in the declarations of June 2021 of the Tax Administration of Kosovo.

The upcoming Youth Guarantee scheme, supported by the EU, will need to address the complexity of challenges young people in Kosovo are facing in integrating into the labour market, such as: raising basic and relevant technical skills levels; the availability of quality training offers; opportunities for gaining practical skills during company internships; and accompanying support measures for young women and people from vulnerable backgrounds. EARK and its partners will need to improve their

⁸ Minister of Finance, Labour and Transfer Hekuran Murati at the Government meeting held on 30 June 2021.

understanding of the NEET situation through better data and analyses, as well as the extent and effectiveness of measures taken.

■ Initiatives to increase the capacity of the public employment services

The Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK) has in place a 3-year policy for institutional development (2019-2021) and annual work plans for setting objectives, targets and key performance indicators. Operational processes are defined in the Operational Manual for Employment Services and in the regulations and manuals for each ALMP. IT-based systems are used to support standardised processes. Profiling is done taking into account people's skills, interests and motivation. It groups individuals into the three categories of 'low', 'medium' or 'high' risk of becoming long-term unemployed. Offices are well equipped for clients' self-service. Registered unemployed people have access to mediation services and, in principle, ALMPs. EARK manages a network of vocational training centres, promotes their accreditation and the development of teaching materials, and exchanges data on participation. Employers use labour office premises to interview unemployed persons. Another positive element is EARK's internal training system for newly recruited staff (Gashi, A., 2018).

The main challenges include the large number of registered unemployed persons, including those not actively looking for jobs, in relation to the limited number of counsellors and active measures available, and the general lack of vacancies. The extent of ALMPs is far below what is necessary in terms of quantity and quality. Regular studies to assess and forecast labour demand and the effectiveness of ALMPs are lacking. To improve the relevance and quality of training, EARK may contract out training for unemployed jobseekers after going through competitive bidding procedures. In this case, it may be a requirement that only accredited training providers, or training providers or companies with accredited instructors, are allowed to apply.

■ Donor support to the employment policy field

EARK has received financial support from the UNDP, SDC's 'EYE' project, GIZ, DIMAK Kosovo, KE-EYWG, the International Office for Migration (IOM), Swisscontact's 'C4EE' project and the German-funded DVV (EARK, 2021). EU support expired in 2020.

The ongoing EU project 'Supporting the employment of young people and women in rural areas through agricultural development' (budget: EUR 374,669) awarded grants and agricultural equipment to beneficiaries in the municipalities of South Mitrovica and Shtime. The project is aimed at helping disadvantaged young people, women and other people in rural areas to create new businesses and conditions for self-employment.

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STATISTICAL ANNEX – KOSOVO

This annex includes annual data from 2010, 2015, 2019 and 2020 or the last available year.

	Indicator	2010	2015	2019	2020	
1	Total population (in thousands) ^e	1,775.7	1,788.2	1,788.9	1,775.4	
2	Relative size of the youth population (15-24 age group, %) ^{e, c}	MD	28.6	27.9 (2017)	MD	
3	GDP growth rate (%)	3.3	4.1	4.9	-6.9	
4	GDP by sector (%)	Agriculture value added	13.6	10.3	7.7	7.6
		Industry value added	23.8	23.8	26.4	25.8
		Services value added	46.4	47.5	46.8	44.2
5	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP) ⁽¹⁾	3.8	4.7	MD	MD	
6	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure) ⁽¹⁾	MD	17.7	MD	MD	
7	Adult literacy (%)	MD	MD	MD	MD	
8	Educational attainment of the adult population (15+) (%) ⁽²⁾	Low ⁽³⁾	MD	19.2	16.5	16.2
		Medium ⁽⁴⁾	MD	58.0	56.3	55.7
		High ⁽⁵⁾	MD	22.9	27.2	28.1
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%)	Total	MD	14.5	8.2	7.8
		Male	MD	11.8	8.0	7.3
		Female	MD	17.5	8.4	8.4
10	Gross enrolment rates in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	MD	MD	MD	MD	
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	MD	50.8	51.2	52.9	
12	Tertiary education attainment (aged 30-34) (%)	MD	17.2	MD	MD	
13	Participation in training / lifelong learning (25-64 age group) by sex (%)	Total	MD	4.9	2.7	5.6
		Male	MD	5.9	2.9	5.8
		Female	MD	3.8	2.6	5.5
	Participation in training / lifelong learning (25-64 age group) by education (%)	Low ⁽³⁾	MD	0.1	0.1	0.8
		Medium ⁽⁴⁾	MD	2.9	2	3.7

		High ⁽⁵⁾	MD	1.9	0.6	1.2
	Participation in training / lifelong learning (25-64 age group) by working status (%)	Inactive	MD	2.3	1.6	2.8
		Employed	MD	1.6	0.9	2
		Unemployed	MD	1	0.3	0.9
14	Low achievement in reading, mathematics and science – PISA (%)	Reading	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
		Mathematics	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
		Science	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
15	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	MD	33.5	35.3	33.4
		Male	MD	50.8	52.6	49.0
		Female	MD	16.0	18.2	18.0
16	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	MD	66.5	64.7	66.6
		Male	MD	49.2	47.4	51.0
		Female	MD	84.0	81.8	82.0
17	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	MD	22.5	26.3	24.8
		Male	MD	34.7	40.8	37.6
		Female	MD	10.2	12.0	12.2
18	Employment rate by educational attainment (% aged 15+%)	Low ⁽³⁾	MD	7.5	9.1	8.3
		Medium ⁽⁴⁾	MD	30.1	34.1	31.5
		High ⁽⁵⁾	MD	51.3	57.5	54.7
19	Employment by sector(%)	Agriculture	MD	2.3	5.2	4.8
		Industry & construction	MD	28.3	27.6	27.3
		Services	MD	69.6	67.1	67.9
20	Incidence of self-employment (%)		MD	29.1	27.1	26.9
21	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)		MD	22.8	18.9	17.1
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	MD	32.8	25.5	25.7
		Male	MD	31.7	22.4	23.3
		Female	MD	36.5	34.4	32.2
23	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	Low ⁽³⁾	MD	47.0	32.2	34.2
		Medium ⁽⁴⁾	MD	33.6	25.6	26.6
		High ⁽⁵⁾	MD	18.8	21.3	19.2

24	Long-term unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	MD	23.7	MD	MD	
25	Youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%)	Total	MD	57.7	49.4	49.1
		Male	MD	54.2	44.1	45.2
		Female	MD	67.2	60.3	57.2
26	Proportion of people aged 15-24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	Total	MD	31.4	32.7	33.6
		Male	MD	28.3	31.4	34.0
		Female	MD	34.9	34.2	33.2

Latest update: September 2021

Sources:

Indicators 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 & 26 – KAS, Labour Force Survey.

Indicator 11 – MEST/KAS, EMIS system.

Indicator 14 – OECD's PISA database.

Indicators 1, 3 & 4 – The World Bank, World Development Indicators database.

Notes:

(1) Government accounts

(2) Active population aged 15+

(3) Low – primary and basic general education

(4) Medium – general secondary and vocational-technical education

(5) High – secondary special and higher education

Legend:

e = Estimates

c = Calculated data

N/A = Not applicable

MD = Missing data

ANNEX: DEFINITIONS OF INDICATORS

	Description	Definition
1	Total population (in thousands)	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 the youth population (15-24 age group) (%)	This is the ratio of the youth population (aged 15-24) to the working-age population, usually aged 15-64 (74)/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 US dollars. 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	GDP by sector (%)	The proportion of value added from Agriculture, Industry and Services. Agriculture corresponds to ISIC divisions 1-5 and includes forestry, hunting, and fishing, as well as the 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.
5	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of GDP. 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 companies). Both types of transaction together are reported as total public expenditure on education.
6	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure)	Public expenditure on education expressed as a percentage of total public expenditure. 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 companies). Both types of transaction together are reported as total public expenditure on education.
7	Adult literacy (%)	Adult literacy is the percentage of the population aged 15 and over who can both read and write a short simple statement on their everyday life, and understand it. Generally, 'literacy' also encompasses 'numeracy' – the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations.

	Description	Definition
8	Educational attainment of adult population (25-64 or aged 15+) (%)	Educational attainment refers to the highest educational level achieved by individuals expressed as a percentage of all people 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 (18-24 age group) (%)	Early leavers from education and training are defined as the percentage of the population aged 18-24 with, at most, lower secondary education who were not in further education or training during the 4 weeks preceding the survey. Lower secondary education refers to ISCED 1997 levels 0-2 and 3C short (i.e. programmes lasting under 2 years) for data up to 2013, and to ISCED 2011 levels 0-2 for data from 2014 onwards.
10	Gross enrolment rates in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	The number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education.
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	The 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	Tertiary education attainment (aged 30-34) (%)	Tertiary attainment is calculated as the percentage of the population aged 30-34 who have successfully completed tertiary studies (e.g. university or a higher technical institution). Educational attainment refers to ISCED 1997 levels 5-6 up to 2013 and ISCED 2011 levels 5-8 from 2014 onwards.
13	Participation in training / lifelong learning (25-64 age group) (%)	Participants in lifelong learning are people aged 25-64 who stated that they received education or training in the 4 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.
14	Low achievement in reading, mathematics and science – PISA (%)	Low achievers are those 15-year-olds who are failing to reach level 2 on the PISA scale for reading, mathematics and science.
15	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.
16	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.
17	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 1 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.

	Description	Definition
18	Employment rate by educational attainment (% aged 15+)	<p>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.</p> <p>Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: Low (ISCED levels 0-2), Medium (ISCED levels 3-4) and High (ISCED 1997 levels 5-6, and ISCED 2011 levels 5-8).</p>
19	Employment by sector (%)	This indicator provides information on the relative importance of various 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 Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community (NACE) is consistent with the ISIC.
20	Incidence of self-employment (%)	The incidence of self-employment is expressed by the number of self-employed workers (i.e. employers + own-account workers + contributing family workers) as a proportion of the total employed.
21	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)	The incidence of vulnerable employment is expressed by the number of own-account workers and contributing family workers as a proportion of the total employed.
22	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 2 weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the 4-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 3 months, at most).
23	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 2 weeks following the reference week); are actively seeking work, i.e. had taken specific steps in the 4-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 3 months, at most). Educational levels refer to the highest educational level successfully completed. Three levels are considered: Low (ISCED levels 0-2), Medium (ISCED levels 3-4) and High (ISCED 1997 levels 5-6, and ISCED 2011 levels 5-8)
24	Long-term unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The long-term unemployment rate is the proportion of people in the total active population who have been unemployed for 12 months or more, expressed as a percentage. The duration of unemployment is defined as the duration of a search for a job or as the period of time since the last job was held (if this period is shorter than the duration of the search for a job).

	Description	Definition
25	Youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%)	The youth unemployment ratio is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed people aged 15-24 by the total population of the same age group.
26	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 4 weeks preceding the survey. Data are expressed as a percentage of the total population of the same age group and gender, excluding those respondents who have not answered the question on participation in education and training.

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