

# KOSOVO\*

## EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENTS 2020



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

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# KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT (SEPTEMBER 2019–OCTOBER 2020)

Before the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, labour market indicators had improved in Kosovo, although the country still lags far behind other Western Balkan countries. High numbers of new labour market entrants every year and a lack of jobs translate into high inactivity and unemployment rates, especially among women and young people. University graduates stand a better chance in the labour market, although many of them may end up in less demanding jobs. The high proportion of people in vulnerable employment and the high proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) pose a risk to equitable human capital development.

Key labour market and employment challenges in Kosovo relate to:

- labour market participation, especially of women and young people
- labour market functioning, including the lack of – or non-compliance with – employment contracts, overtime work without compensation, employment protection legislation, the lack of health and unemployment insurance for employed people
- active labour market measures, including the low level of expenditure contrast with the extensive need of beneficiaries, the poor targeting of measures and the need for the continuous capacity building of employment service staff
- the absence of passive labour market measures (unemployment benefit)
- gender inequality in terms of employment and pay gaps
- the skills gap of unemployed people, including young people (Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli, 2019)

Kosovo still performs poorly in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests run by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Progress in education has been held back by a lack of political will and stability, leadership and development capacities, but also by non-merit-based staff recruitment.

Participation in early childhood and basic education remains an issue for children from vulnerable backgrounds. One in 12 young people leave school early and are poorly prepared for living and working in a knowledge society. Relatively high progression rates from vocational education and training (VET) to higher education and low university completion rates point to inefficiencies in public skills formation systems. Once out of school, few possibilities remain for adults to develop their skills. Efforts are made to include adults in formal programmes in vocational schools and to include jobseekers in non-formal short courses in publicly funded vocational training centres (VTCs). However, participant numbers are small and courses are short and often at basic levels. Training alone does not always improve the position of people in the labour market.

The duration and severity of the COVID-19 pandemic considerably worsened Kosovo's labour market situation. Restrictions on movement have led to a reduction in business activities and the closure of businesses, leaving many workers jobless. The closure of educational institutions for six months will put Kosovo's learners at an additional disadvantage compared to their peers abroad, despite the praiseworthy efforts in Kosovo to televise lectures for a few school subjects. Reduced opportunities for work-based learning in VET due to the difficult economic situation may exacerbate existing quality problems.

# 1. KEY POLITICAL, HEALTH, DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

## ■ Political developments

A no-confidence vote against the previous government on 26 March 2020 complicated Kosovo's initial response to the COVID-19 crisis and saw former Prime Minister Albin Kurti (Vetëvendosje party) lead a caretaker government. On 3 June 2020, the parliament voted to elect a new coalition government led by Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti (Democratic League of Kosovo, LDK). This means that, at the onset of the pandemic, Kosovo ousted its government and fired the health minister and key people responsible for managing the health sector.

The current partners in the Kosovo government plan to expand their unstable coalition by including the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK). A political crisis could be added to the existing economic and social crisis, if the government fails and/or opposition mounts against the ongoing arrests of former commanders in the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The European Union's (EU) Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák, is currently mediating in the negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia.

## ■ Health situation

After a premature relaxation of virus restrictions in mid-April 2020, the COVID-19 crisis escalated in July and August 2020. With 54.2 fatalities per million people towards the end of August, Kosovo was the deadliest place in the world for coronavirus (sources: John Hopkins University, Bloomberg, IMF; broadcast by Kosovo media, 28 August 2020).

There are several reasons for this. Since breaking away from Serbia, Kosovo remains one of Europe's poorest states, reliant on remittances from citizens who have left for more affluent parts of the continent. Testing capacity has been low for a long time, with the result that official data may have undercounted infections. The health system, drained of staff and financial resources, was approaching breaking point. Many health professionals were infected. Politics, however, appears to have been the major contributing factor. Kosovo was the only country in the region that failed to apply swift, extraordinary measures to limit the spread of the pandemic.

The new Prime Minister, Avdullah Hoti, tightened social distancing measures again in July 2020 in an effort to control the rising number of COVID-19 cases. The Law on Preventing and Combating the COVID-19 Pandemic in Kosovo, which entered into force on 26 August 2020, imposes fines on individuals and legal entities who do not respect health and safety measures.

## ■ Demographics

Kosovo has a population of 1.79 million (KAS, 2018<sup>1</sup>), the youngest in Europe. In 2017, 27.9% of the population were aged between 15 and 24.

## ■ Economy

Kosovo's economy has always been weak due to its limited regional and global economic integration, its political instability, corruption, unreliable energy supply, a large informal economy, unresolved property disputes and a tenuous rule of law. Ethnic tensions, organised crime, religious radicalism, migration and young institutions are the biggest threats to security in Kosovo. In pre-pandemic times, the economy was progressing, but it lacked the major economic reform and private sector investment that would reduce unemployment and raise living standards (see, for example, SeeNews, 2020; World Bank, 2020a, pp. 19–22).

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/11/07/kosovos-demographic-destiny-looks-eerily-familiar/>

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2020) provided an update on the economic situation and prospects in Kosovo during the initial COVID-19 period<sup>2</sup>.

Indicators, such as reduced foreign investment or fewer registered businesses, illustrate the current difficulties facing Kosovo's economy. From March to May 2020, the value of foreign investment reached EUR 38.9 million, a 25% decline compared to the same period the year before (EUR 52 million; source: Central Bank of Kosovo). The number of registered businesses dropped from 1 859 in the 4th quarter of 2019 to 1 513 in the 2nd quarter of 2020 (source: MTI, Office for Business Registration, quoted in KAS, 2020, p. 45).

During the budget review process in July 2020, the Kosovo government estimated that gross domestic product (GDP) would shrink by 3% and the tax base would shrink by nearly half a billion euros by the end of 2020. The World Bank expects GDP to contract by 8.8% in 2020 (World Bank, 2020b, p. 137).

To help the private sector, the Kosovo government announced a EUR 365 million economic recovery package on 13 August 2020 to ease the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some EUR 100 million will be given to companies to allow them to access loans and for other private investments. Another EUR 3 million is earmarked for companies to digitalise their business, allow their employees to work from home and continue to communicate with their customers. The Kosovo assembly voted in favour of the related Law on Economic Recovery in its first reading on 12 October 2020, but had not finally approved it by mid-November 2020 due to a lack of a quorum. The package is partly financed by international loans and grants. Measures include:

- easing access to loans for private entrepreneurs and farmers
- easing the tax burden for businesses
- providing financial support for young people, civil society organisations, artists and sportspeople
- supporting non-majority communities
- supporting projects aimed at improving lives and reviving the economy

On 28 September 2020, the Kosovo government allocated approx. EUR 87 million to private businesses (to make up for the losses suffered as a result of the pandemic), citizens in need, a number of ministries and other beneficiaries. Of this amount, EUR 60 million were allocated to businesses, which will benefit depending on the number of employees they had registered in December 2019 (source: EU Media Monitoring, 12 October 2020).

#### ■ Informal economy

The informal economy is quite large in Kosovo, with between 30 and 40% of employees working without contracts or social security. Nearly 20% of registered businesses do not pay taxes. The size of the informal economy may hinder economic recovery efforts by excluding businesses and individuals from assistance schemes and straining already tight public funds (OECD, 2020, p. 7).

#### ■ Remittances

Kosovo's diaspora continues to support the country's economy and boost its recovery. During the first half of 2020 (January to July), Kosovo obtained a record EUR 526 million in remittances, marking a rise of EUR 47 million compared to the same period the previous year (source: Central Bank of Kosovo).

#### ■ International support

The OECD (OECD, 2020) summarises international support for the socioeconomic recovery of Kosovo through loans and donations. The UN Kosovo Team (2020) published its own socioeconomic response plan on 24 August 2020.

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<sup>2</sup> See sections on 'Reopening of the economy', 'Short-term impact', 'Support to firms' and 'Outlook'.

Kosovo will also benefit from the recently approved EU plan for economy and investment in the Western Balkans, with a particular focus on digitalisation and the green economy.

## 2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### 2.1 Trends and challenges

#### ■ Education expenditure, access, participation and early leaving

With government expenditure on education amounting to 4.5% of GDP in 2018, Kosovo compares to the EU average (4.6%)<sup>3</sup>. However, in terms of outcomes, Kosovo fares much worse. Progress in education has been held back by a lack of political will and stability, leadership and development capacities, but also by the fact that ‘teachers are hired based on political party affiliation’ and ‘leadership positions are given as political favours’ (Gashi, 2019) rather than on the basis of competence.

Participation in early childhood and basic education remains an issue for children from vulnerable backgrounds. In 2019, 1 in 12 young people aged 18 to 24 (8.2%) left school without completing upper secondary education; this was an improvement on the 2018 figure of 9.6% (KAS, LFS data). Early school leavers are poorly prepared for living and working in a knowledge society. Relatively high progression rates from vocational education and training (VET) to higher education and low university completion rates point to inefficiencies in public skills formation systems. Once out of school, few possibilities remain for adults to develop their skills. Efforts are made to include adults in formal programmes in vocational schools and to include jobseekers in non-formal short courses in publicly funded vocational training centres (VTCs). However, capacities for adult training across Kosovo are restricted. Participant numbers are small and courses are short and often at basic levels. Training alone does not always improve the position of young people in the labour market. Low-skilled jobseekers benefit the least from training provision, which prevents them from moving out of unemployment (Viertel, 2020).

In 2019, 27.2% of the population (aged 15+) had a high level of education (International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 5 or higher) – an improvement of 4.3 percentage points on 2015. However, at 56.3%, the proportion of people with medium-level qualifications declined by 1.7% in the same period. This data may, however, be influenced by emigration patterns.

In 2019, 51.2% of upper secondary school students enrolled in VET programmes, which represents a slight decline on 2018 (52.9%). Initial VET is provided in 62 vocational schools and 6 centres of competence, which operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Science<sup>4</sup>. Eight VTCs are managed directly by the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK). Furthermore, some private VTCs offer training in profiles that are sought after in Kosovo or abroad, such as in the healthcare or construction sectors. Such fee-based courses often meet higher standards and are accredited by the National Qualifications Authority (NQA).

#### ■ PISA

In the OECD’s 2015 and 2018 PISA tests in reading, mathematics and science, Kosovo ranked among the worst of all participating countries. In 2018, only 21% of students attained at least Level 2

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<sup>3</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Government\\_expenditure\\_on\\_education](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Government_expenditure_on_education)

<sup>4</sup> The name of this ministry was Ministry of Education, Science and Technology until June 2020.

proficiency in reading (OECD average: 77%), while some 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' (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2019, p. 33). After the shocking 2015 PISA results, then Minister Bajrami had promised to make education a government priority and introduce reforms (Halili, 2016) – obviously without tangible results yet.

#### ■ **NEETs**

In 2019, 32.7% of Kosovo's young people (15–24) without a full upper secondary education were not in employment, education or training (NEET). This represents a deterioration of 2.6 percentage points on 2018 (KAS, LFS data). Both education and employment ministries and agencies, with support from donors, are providing some youth training and employment schemes. COVID-19 impacted negatively on opportunities for work-based learning and work experience.

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

Schools in Kosovo closed on 13 March 2020 when the first COVID-19 case was recorded. During the lockdown phase, some learning materials were shared via online platforms and some lectures in basic subjects were televised. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Science worked with firms to provide students with computers and free internet access. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) survey found that 96% of children were able to participate in distance learning and that households held largely favourable views of the learning opportunities provided during the confinement (UNDP, 2020).

The Ministry of Education and Science prepared a master plan, asking for an additional EUR 9 million from the Economic Recovery Fund to introduce health and safety measures in schools. Schools reopened on a staggered basis: on 14 September 2020 (for grades 0–6 and grade 10) and on 21 September (for grades 7–9 and grades 11 and 12). The plan included the recruitment of 1 000 additional part-time teachers and technical staff, especially for classes with high student numbers, but only for the duration of the pandemic. In the Serbian municipalities of Kosovo, the new school year started on 1 September 2020.

In late August 2020, Kosovo's institutions were still unable to organise *Matura* exams, which are a requirement for students who want to enrol in higher education.

## 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 (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2016). Mehmeti et al (2019) carried out a mid-term evaluation of this strategic plan. 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. These have been evaluated by Qehaja (2019), while KOSINT2020 (2019) undertook a separate evaluation of the progress of the strategy's goals and measures in relation to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo. Strategy drafting and evaluation processes are mostly driven by donors. Ministerial actors have limited capacity to

undertake such work. Nor do they do much about the conclusions obtained, which calls into question local ownership.

#### ■ **VET governance and financing arrangements**

Vocational schools operate under the municipal education directorates, which also hire directors and teaching staff. Central budget funds are allocated to them through specific grants for education. VTCs providing training for (unemployed) adults currently fall under EARK's responsibility. Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli (2019) and others suggest that VTCs be brought under the Ministry of Education and Science and organised as autonomous VET providers as part of a comprehensive VET system for young people and adults.

VET schools and VTCs are free to establish links with companies and to place VET students in company internships. However, in reality, this does not happen very often. In general, vocational schools and VTCs would benefit from higher levels of de facto autonomy and flexibility in a number of areas, in particular: the employment and professional development of staff; decisions about the VET programmes and curricula that are offered; contracts with employers and other third parties; pedagogical processes, including those that take place in collaboration with businesses; and their own revenue and financial management. On the other hand, the autonomy of VET providers would need to be accompanied by functioning national frameworks of qualifications, quality assurance mechanisms and accountability (reporting to be undertaken by providers and monitoring by a national agency). To make this happen, the National Agency for VET and Adult Education would need to have much greater capacity, and guidelines, indicators, capacity-building support and IT-based management systems would have to be made available to all VET providers.

#### ■ **Quality and quality assurance**

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2016) admitted that 'at least 30% of vocational schools offer programmes for which there is little demand' (p. 27). Problems in aligning VET programmes with labour market needs, in tandem with a generally poor focus on practice, constitute obstacles to the development of relevant professional skills. Curricula are insufficiently focused on developing skills that are relevant to the labour market. Since all upper secondary schools prepare students for the *Matura* exams, teaching on VET programmes tends to be highly theoretical and leaves little space for practical learning. Many teachers lack an insight into the world of work and practical skills (see ETF, 2019, for example). The Minister of Education and Science recently signed an Administrative Instruction on school-based teacher training. Equipment and consumables are lacking and relations with employers are rather weak. Exceptions here are VET providers and programmes, which enjoyed several years of donor investment in curriculum revision, staff development, equipment and materials (Viertel, 2020).

In the field of higher (vocational) education, issues with academic staff, outdated content, corruption, quality control and limited business cooperation currently prevent better skills outcomes (Viertel, 2020). The Kosovo Accreditation Agency has only recently 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 been able to partly fulfil this role, missing out in particular on public vocational schools and the programmes or qualifications they offer. There is some resistance on the part of the Ministry of Education and Science to have the NQA assess public vocational schools, also because most may fail the challenging assessment criteria. The Ministry of Education and Science's VET department would also like to stay in charge of VET core curricula. These combine general and vocational subjects and are currently not necessarily geared towards the skills and competences



required by employers and reflected in qualifications. The six VET centres of competence are exceptions here and have all been accredited.

The NQA approach to quality covers only a few elements of what would make up a more comprehensive approach to quality assurance, as reflected in the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET, for example<sup>5</sup>. In relation to this, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, with the support of German development agency GIZ, developed a quality assurance manual, trained staff and organised a self-assessment process among vocational schools. It is unclear whether the schools are taking follow-up steps to improve quality in a systematic manner.

As the Ministry of Education and Science's executive agency, the National Agency for VET and Adult Education is supposed to manage VET and ensure quality, but it functions only to a limited extent. Nor do municipalities or education inspectors play a major role in the quality assurance 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. A few vocational schools introduced work-based learning without being able to offer internships to all of their students. In 2019, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, with the help of donors, started to take a more systematic approach by working on a draft national regulation and guidelines for work-based learning. The overhaul of VET core curricula that was initiated did not go very far in the desired direction (Schroeter and Kaçaniku, 2020). Designing curricula that help students acquire vocational competence remains a major task.

GIZ developed programmes to train in-company instructors at three levels of competence, with master trainer being the highest level. It is unclear whether Kosovo's businesses have the potential to extend their offering of work-based learning, as many of them are small and some operate in the non-formal domain. Employers provide the equipment, materials, supervisors or instructors and (in some cases) cover food and travel costs for interns. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology had set aside funds to cover the cost of accident insurance for students on internships in 2019–2020 (GIZ, 2020). The current COVID-19 pandemic is likely to worsen the economic situation, which will impact also on work-based learning. However, schools, curricula, teachers and assessment guidelines are still also largely ill-equipped to implement work-based learning in VET on a more systematic basis.

Internship schemes also form part of publicly funded active labour market policies (ALMPs), but as a separate measure rather than integrated into the training provided by VTCs.

#### ■ **Digital education and skills**

The Minister of Education and Science in office since June 2020 has initiated work on a digital skills strategy.

#### ■ **Donor support to VET for young people and adults**

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 (ALLED I & II, ESVET-PRO with co-funding from the Austrian

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<sup>5</sup> 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.egavet.eu/What-We-Do/European-Quality-Assurance-Reference-Framework>

Development Agency and LuxDev), the YES project and earlier projects involving GIZ, several phases of the EYE project funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation and the KSV-20 project funded by LuxDev.

## 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 still lags far behind other Western Balkan countries. High numbers of new labour market entrants every year and a lack of jobs translate into a high level of inactivity and high unemployment rates. Kosovo has the lowest female activity rate (18.2% in 2019) and the highest youth unemployment rate (49.4% in 2019, improved from 55.4% in 2018) in the Western Balkan region. University graduates stand better chances in the labour market, although many of them may end up in less demanding jobs, which results in skills underutilisation and further deterioration in the labour market opportunities available to people with medium- or low-level qualifications. In 2019, 18.9% of employed people in Kosovo were in vulnerable employment (improved from 22.8% in 2015). Furthermore, the high share of NEETs (32.7% in 2019 compared to 31.4% in 2015) poses a risk to equitable human capital development (Viertel, 2020).

Key labour market and employment challenges in Kosovo relate to:

- labour market participation, the low activity and employment rates especially of women and young people, the high NEET rate, underemployment, low participation of older workers, low participation of migrants or foreign workers
- labour market functioning, including working arrangements, the lack of or non-compliance with employment contracts, overtime work without compensation, low transition from temporary to permanent contracts, employment protection legislation, a lack of unemployment and health insurance for employed people
- labour market measures, including low levels of expenditure on ALMPs versus the extensive needs of beneficiaries, the lack of targeting measures, the need for capacity building of employment services, and the high level of long-term unemployment
- the absence of proper passive labour market measures or the lack of unemployment benefit that could result in unemployed people falling into the poverty gap, the lack of occupational safety and health for employed people
- gender inequality in terms of employment and pay gaps
- the skills gap of unemployed people, especially young people (Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli, 2019, p. 40).

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic considerably worsened the labour market situation in Kosovo. Movement restrictions over many months resulted in a reduction in business activities and the closure of businesses, leaving many workers jobless.

#### ■ Employment

Based on data obtained from the Kosovo Tax Administration, the GAP Institute in Kosovo found a marked decrease in the number of employees in the wholesale and retail sector, which employs the most workers in Kosovo. In March 2019, around 80 000 employees were working in this sector, this

number had fallen to 43 000 a year later. The number of construction workers fell from 21 000 to 10 000 in the same period, and the number of workers in manufacturing fell from about 34 000 to 22 000 (GAP Institute, 2020).

A UNDP survey found that approximately 8% of workers lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the largest job losses occurring in the construction and hospitality sectors (UNDP, 2020).

### ■ Unemployment

The World Bank claims that, by April 2020, labour markets in the Western Balkans had lost about 40% of their achievements in decreasing unemployment. This was expected to affect in particular Kosovo, which had the largest increase in employment before the crisis (World Bank, 2020a).

According to Shpëtim Kalludra, Head of EARK's Division for the Development of Active Measures and Labour Market Analysis, over 65 000 new jobseekers had registered with the agency since mid-March 2020, bringing the total number up to over 170 000 (*Koha Ditore*, 3 June 2020). In November 2019, this number was 104 872 (Qehaja, 2019, p. 31). However, using such registrations or claims for unemployment benefits to gauge the unemployment impact could be misleading. Registration has been a condition for benefitting from Kosovo's Emergency Fiscal Package, which provided EUR 130 in monthly assistance from April to June 2020 for families without jobs and income.

### ■ Statistical data collection and labour market information

KAS stated that it had difficulties collecting and processing data due to the COVID-19 pandemic. LFS results for Q1 2020 were only published on 27 August 2020.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, with support from the Swiss-funded EYE project and UNDP, set up a labour market information system (LMIS)<sup>6</sup> in December 2012. The LMIS brings together a variety of data from multiple sources. However, data on long-term unemployment or data that would provide a picture of regional or local labour markets in Kosovo, for example, is still missing.

Major concerns exist about a more user-friendly presentation, analyses and the actual use of LMIS data. EARK has a quite sophisticated IT system and rich data on jobseekers, unemployed people, employers, vacancies, ALMPs and job mediation outcomes. A dashboard of indicators in real time, and periodical statistics, reports and analyses could assist with job matching, job search, labour market needs information and the development of job profiles and skills. It could give valuable information to employers about the development of new sectors and professions. The LMIS could also help government to review and shape policies (Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli, 2019, pp. 19 and 75f.).

### ■ Poverty

The economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has seen many families faced with great financial difficulties. As part of Kosovo's Emergency Fiscal Package, all payments to social welfare recipients were doubled during April and May 2020. In addition, tax liabilities and pension contributions, as well as loan repayments for individuals and payments to public utility companies were suspended for certain periods (OECD, 2020).

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<sup>6</sup> See <https://sitp.rks-gov.net/>

The World Bank (2020, p. 9) estimates that the proportion of the population believed to have lived in poverty in 2017 (17.9%), might increase to 27.5% 'if the crisis lasts six months', i.e. until August 2020. That means that 148 000 people might live in poverty.

To stimulate consumption and financial circulation, the government announced in June 2020 that Kosovo citizens with pension savings would be entitled to withdraw, by the end of this year, part of these savings before reaching retirement age. However, this requires amendments to the Law on Pension Funds. Mustafa (2020) claims that this measure would not help the social groups worst hit by the pandemic and puts at serious risk the future financial security of those who withdraw funds.

Donors have continued to support poor, vulnerable people during the pandemic. This includes UNDP Kosovo, for example, which temporarily provided, in close cooperation with the centres for social work, vouchers for food, hygiene and other items for approximately 2 000 families living in extreme poverty.

### 3.2 Employment policy and institutional setting

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

Kosovo's coalition government under the leadership of Vetëvendosje, in office from January 2020 after elections had been held in October 2019, had abolished the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. It had integrated labour policy functions into a super ministry, alongside with the economy, trade, strategic investments, entrepreneurship and industry portfolios. This in turn complicated and delayed decision-making processes related to the employment policy field for several months. The new coalition government, in place since 3 June, reversed this decision, re-instituted the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and appointed a new minister.

The 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 carried out the mid-term evaluation, recommended that the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (and the Ministry of Education and Science) made a greater effort overall to promote youth employment. The evaluation did not lead to adjustments of the strategy or action plan, nor to a change of policy. The Youth Employment Action Plan is now coming to an end. In view of the drawbacks to implementation due to politics and the COVID-19 crisis, the strategy and action plan might be revised to what can really be achieved in the current environment in Kosovo.

Unemployed people in Kosovo have no insurance as outlined by the ILO's Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention. Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli (2019) see 'a strong need to [...] establish a system to coordinate unemployment and health insurance contributions and benefits arising from work' (p. 25).

The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is in charge of strategic development, monitoring and overall evaluation of employment policy. This implies that key performance indicators are defined and agreed together with EARK. However, there are some operational activities, such as the management of EARK's assets and the purchase of goods, for which the agency should be responsible. It is suggested that the responsibilities of the ministry's Department for Labour and Employment are to 'be redefined by amending Regulation 02/11' (Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli, 2019, p. 11).

## ■ Initiatives to boost employment

Based on the perceptions of respondents to a survey on the public employment services in 2018<sup>7</sup>, jobseekers are generally not well informed about the public employment services, nor do they trust that they can find a solution for them.

Jobseekers appearing in employment offices are registered in the employment management information system and are profiled as being at a low, medium or high risk of becoming long-term unemployed. The traditional range of ALMPs are available. Figure 5 in the mid-term assessment report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare's sectoral strategy (Qehaja, 2019, p. 33) provides an overview. The number of ALMP beneficiaries increased considerably between 2015 and 2019, and rose by 23% between 2018 and 2019.

In 2018, a total of 8 694 unemployed people benefited from ALMPs (Rizvanolli et al and GIZ, 2019, p. 30). This included all participants in training in VTCs and internship opportunities organised through various projects (UNDP, GIZ, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, and Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency). Given that, in 2018, there was an annual average of 95 890 registered jobseekers (EARK, 2019), the ALMP coverage rate was 9.1%. However, some jobseekers benefit from several measures. The majority of unemployed people (63%) participated in training for jobseekers.

It should be noted that, while 113 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian people (or 4% of all ALMP beneficiaries) were included in a separate ALMP on entrepreneurship in 2017, this number had dropped to 73 (2% of all ALMP beneficiaries) in 2019 (Qehaja, 2019, p. 49).

In 2019, a total of 5 138 people benefitted from training or skills recognition in a VTC (Qehaja, 2019, p. 36), fewer than in 2018. According to an internal report by EARK, around 33% of training beneficiaries from 2016 and 2017 were employed, while 13% of them were self-employed (Qehaja, 2019, p. 37). Social activation is weak, particularly of unemployed people with low levels of education, those in receipt of social assistance and/or people with disabilities (Rizvanolli et al and GIZ, 2019, p. 16). Indicators are expected to worsen considerably during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kosovo's recently approved economic recovery package (worth EUR 365 million) includes support for youth employment and a total of EUR 5 million for cultural, sports and artistic initiatives.

EARK counsellors are not specialists in working with different clients (jobseekers, employers, young people, long-term unemployed people, the European Employment Services Network (EURES)), nor in developing new forms and channels of service delivery, such as group work or workshops. Local employment offices cannot adapt ALMPs to local needs. The present 'one-size-fits-all' model means that services are not adequately targeted to clients' needs and some people, such as long-term unemployed people, are likely to remain unemployed (Rizvanolli et al and GIZ, 2019, p. 33). Qehaja (2019, p. 107) suggests that EARK should provide more specific ALMPs for women and minority communities living in Kosovo. Qehaja also recommends that EARK should take a more proactive approach towards employers and businesses.

Kosovo's institutions are not in a position to offer a Youth Guarantee scheme (Council of the European Union, 2013) on a wider scale for the foreseeable future. This would require a profound transformation of education, employment and social services and the way in which these interact. Kosovo's big number of young people is also challenging. That said, there might be some value in raising

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<sup>7</sup> Helvetas/EYE project, *Public Employment Services 2018*, unpublished report, quoted in Qehaja, 2019, p. 31.

awareness, enabling networking and knowledge sharing. A Youth Guarantee feasibility study could draw on the evaluations undertaken by Rizvanolli et al for GIZ (2019) and Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli (2019). Youth Guarantee approaches may be applied for smaller target groups.

EARK does not have sufficient capacity to evaluate ALMPs in order to determine their effectiveness. Rizvanolli et al and GIZ (2019) undertook an ALMP evaluation, while the 2018 IPA project 'Support to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare' has now been tasked with carrying out an impact assessment.

#### ■ **Initiatives to increase the capacity of the public employment services**

In their capacity assessment, Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli (2019) point to the fact that EARK still needs proper institution building, including the hiring of new staff and capacity development and the further development of online tools. They suggest that the agency should prepare its own strategy, defining its mission, vision, quality policy and goals, capacity building, client orientation and service delivery, and stakeholder cooperation through employment partnerships. They suggest that the EARK structure should be reorganised at three levels – central, regional (offices in seven bigger cities) and local (offices in 31 smaller municipalities).

In April–May 2020, UNDP Kosovo helped EARK to offer online registration services for unemployed people. In a post-crisis stage, the availability of such online tools and services may be expanded.

Social partners currently have little influence on decisions made by EARK. Responsibilities, including budget planning, oversight and discharge, could be assigned to the existing advisory board; alternatively, a management board could be established. EARK management is currently highly centralised, with the General Director approving a large number of decisions and requests. Duties and responsibilities could be devolved to heads of units at all three levels. Cooperation agreements on employment partnerships, currently signed by the minister, could be delegated to local office heads (Paun Jarallah and Rizvanolli, 2019).

EARK has not taken any steps yet to join the EURES network. This would include an analysis of the situation and the adjustment of EARK's processes to EURES system requirements.

#### ■ **Donor support to the employment policy field**

Active donors in the employment policy field include EU IPA, GIZ, the UN Team Kosovo, Swiss Development Cooperation and others.

For further information, please contact Evelyn Viertel, European Training Foundation, email: [Evelyn.Viertel@etf.europa.eu](mailto:Evelyn.Viertel@etf.europa.eu).

Recent ETF Country Intelligence Products:

- [Mapping of Covid-19 impact on education and training](#)
- [ETF Torino Process Assessment](#)
- NQF Inventory Country Page <https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/nqf-inventories>

## KOSOVO: STATISTICAL ANNEX

Annex includes annual data from 2010, 2015, 2018 and 2019 or the last available year.

	Indicator	2010	2015	2018	2019	
1	Total Population (,000) <sup>e</sup>	1,775.7	1,788.2	1,797.1	1,794.2	
2	Relative size of youth population (age group 15-24, %) <sup>E, C</sup>	M.D.	28.6	27.9 (2017)	M.D.	
3	GDP growth rate (%)	3.3	4.1	3.8	4.2	
4	GDP by sector (%)	Agriculture added value	13.6	10.3	7.2	6.9
		Industry added value	23.8	23.8	26.3	26.6
		Services added value	46.4	47.5	47.3	47.4
5	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP) <sup>(1)</sup>	3.8	4.7	4.5	M.D.	
6	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure) <sup>(1)</sup>	M.D.	17.7	15.3	M.D.	
7	Adult literacy (%)	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
8	Educational attainment of adult population (15+) (%) <sup>(2)</sup>	Low <sup>(3)</sup>	M.D.	19.2	15.9	16.5
		Medium <sup>(4)</sup>	M.D.	58.0	59.2	56.3
		High <sup>(5)</sup>	M.D.	22.9	24.9	27.2
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%)	Total	M.D.	14.5	9.6	8.2
		Male	M.D.	11.8	9.3	8.0
		Female	M.D.	17.5	9.9	8.4
10	Gross enrolment rates in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	M.D.	50.8	52.9	51.2	
12	Tertiary education attainment (aged 30-34) (%)	M.D.	17.2	20.9	M.D.	
13	Participation in training/lifelong learning (age group 25-64) by sex (%)	Total	M.D.	4.9	3.5	2.7
		Male	M.D.	5.9	3.5	2.9
		Female	M.D.	3.8	3.5	2.6
14	Low achievement in reading, mathematics and science – PISA (%)	Reading	N.A.	N.A.	78.7	N.A.
		Mathematics	N.A.	N.A.	76.6	N.A.
		Science	N.A.	N.A.	76.5	N.A.
15	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	M.D.	33.5	35.2	35.3

		Male	M.D.	50.8	54.9	52.6
		Female	M.D.	16.0	15.7	18.2
16	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	M.D.	66.5	64.8	64.7
		Male	M.D.	49.2	45.1	47.4
		Female	M.D.	84.0	84.3	81.8
17	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	M.D.	22.5	24.8	26.3
		Male	M.D.	34.7	39.3	40.8
		Female	M.D.	10.2	10.5	12.0
18	Employment rate by educational attainment (% aged 15+%)	Low <sup>(3)</sup>	M.D.	7.5	7.2	9.1
		Medium <sup>(4)</sup>	M.D.	30.1	34.2	34.1
		High <sup>(5)</sup>	M.D.	51.3	61.6	57.5
19	Employment by sector(%)	Agriculture	M.D.	2.3	3.5	5.2
		Industry & Construction	M.D.	28.3	26.2	27.6
		Services	M.D.	69.6	70.3	67.1
20	Incidence of self-employment (%)		M.D.	29.1	27.7	27.1
21	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%)		M.D.	22.8	19.7	18.9
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	Total	M.D.	32.8	29.4	25.5
		Male	M.D.	31.7	28.3	22.4
		Female	M.D.	36.5	33.3	34.4
23	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	Low <sup>(3)</sup>	M.D.	47.0	40.0	32.2
		Medium <sup>(4)</sup>	M.D.	33.6	31.0	25.6
		High <sup>(5)</sup>	M.D.	18.8	18.9	21.3
24	Long-term unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)		M.D.	23.7	17.2	M.D.
25	Youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%)	Total	M.D.	57.7	55.4	49.4
		Male	M.D.	54.2	51.5	44.1
		Female	M.D.	67.2	64.7	60.3
26	Proportion of people aged 15–24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%)	Total	M.D.	31.4	30.1	32.7
		Male	M.D.	28.3	30.2	31.4
		Female	M.D.	34.9	30.0	34.2

Last update: [September 2020](#)



**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

**Indicators** 11 – MEST/KAS, EMIS system

**Indicators** 14 – OECD 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= estimations

C= calculated data

N.A. = Not Applicable

M.D. = Missing Data

## ANNEX: INDICATORS' DEFINITIONS

	Description	Definition
1	Total population (000)	The total population is estimated as the number of persons 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 (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 U.S. 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 share of value added from Agriculture, Industry and Services. 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.
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 enterprises). Both types of transactions 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 enterprises). Both types of transactions together are reported as total public expenditure on education.

	Description	Definition
7	Adult literacy (%)	Adult literacy is the percentage of population aged 15 years and over who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement on his/her everyday life. Generally, 'literacy' also encompasses 'numeracy', the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations.
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 persons in that age group. This is usually measured with respect to the highest educational programme successfully completed which is typically certified by a recognized qualification. Recognized intermediate qualifications are classified at a lower level than the programme itself.
9	Early leavers from education and training (age group 18-24) (%)	Early leaving from education and training is 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 four weeks preceding the survey. Lower secondary education refers to ISCED 1997 levels 0-2 and 3C short (i.e. programmes with duration less than 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) (%)	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) (%)	Total number of students enrolled in vocational programmes at a given level of education (in this case upper secondary education), 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, higher technical institution). Educational attainment refers to ISCED 1997 level 5–6 up to 2013 and ISCED 2011 level 5–8 from 2014 onwards.
13	Participation in training/lifelong learning (age group 25-64) (%)	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 consists of 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, maths and science – PISA (%)	Low achievers are the 15-year-olds who are failing 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 persons. The inactive population consists of all

	Description	Definition
		persons 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 persons who are classified as neither employed nor unemployed.
17	Employment rate (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.
18	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 consider: Low (ISCED level 0-2), Medium (ISCED level 3-4) and High (ISCED 1997 level 5–6, and ISCED 2011 level 5–8)
19	Employment by sector (%)	This indicator provides information on the relative importance of different economic activities with regard to employment. Data is presented by broad branches of economic activity (i.e. Agriculture/Industry/Services) which is based on the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC). In Europe, the NACE classification is consistent with ISIC.
20	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.
21	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.
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed persons as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed persons 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 period of, at most, three months).

	Description	Definition
23	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%)	The unemployment rate represents unemployed persons as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people who are employed or unemployed. Unemployed persons 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)
24	Long-term unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%)	The long-term unemployment rate is the share of unemployed persons since 12 months or more in the total active population, 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).
25	Youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%)	The youth unemployment ratio is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed persons 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 four weeks preceding the survey. Data is expressed as a percentage of the total population of the same age group and gender, excluding the respondents who have not answered the question on participation in education and training.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ALMP	Active labour market policy
EARK	Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EURES	European Employment Services Network
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German development agency)
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
KAS	Kosovo Agency of Statistics
KESP	Kosovo Education Strategic Plan
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
LDK	Democratic League of Kosovo
LFS	Labour force survey
LMIS	Labour market information system
NEET	Not in employment, education and training
NQA	National Qualifications Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDK	Democratic Party of Kosovo
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VET	Vocational education and training
VTC	Vocational training centre

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