Youth, Employment and Skills in Kosovo (YES)

**Project Background**

Despite steady growth the economy of Kosovo is still fragile, relying on remittances and foreign development assistance. Kosovo’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is at one of the lowest levels in Europe and poverty, especially among young people, remains high. Consequently, migration is prevalent, particularly among disadvantaged population groups.

The level of youth unemployment is close to 60% and at the same time, many vacancies in the private sector cannot be filled. Bridging the gap between the job seekers’ skills and the labour market demands remains a major challenge in Kosovo. To address these deficiencies, the Government of Kosovo has drawn up the Economic Reform Program (ERP) and the Action Plan for Increasing Youth Employment (2018-2020) as key strategic planning documents. The Youth, Employment and Skills Project supports these reform initiatives by public and private sector stakeholders at both implementation and policy level.

**Project Objective**

The employability of young Kosovars aged between 15 and 35 years is improved, taking into account the specific needs of returned migrants, all ethnic groups and minorities.

**Approach**

The YES project enhances the employability of young people by improving the quality of Vocational Education and Training (VET) as well as strengthening matching mechanisms between labour market supply and demand. The project applies a bottom-up approach, primarily working with institutions at the local level such as vocational schools, public employment offices and youth centers. Furthermore, the project seeks to strengthen the systems and implementation capacities of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) and their agencies in delivering quality services and offers to young people.
Addressing concerns of the private sector over a skills mismatch, project activities aim to improve the quality of vocational education and training. Better industry-school linkages, stronger involvement of the private sector in the development and adaptation of standards and curricula will result in a higher practice orientation of vocational training in Kosovo. Throughout implementation, improving the quality and recognition of Kosovar qualifications has to take into account the frameworks, trends and realities of regional labour migration.

In the field of youth employment promotion, the project supports measures that provide young people with the opportunity to experience the world of work through setting up internship schemes or job fairs with the participation of local businesses. Youth participation and empowerment activities are facilitated through close collaboration with Youth Centers and actors from the ICT sector. The project also supports the organizational development of the newly established Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo and its Public Employment Offices.

The project promotes the interfaces between vocational education provided by VET schools and Vocational Training Centers and youth employment by strengthening cooperation between public and private actors. Career guidance and counselling is an example for which the VET schools get linked up with businesses.

**Achievements**

In its first year of implementation the project reached around 250,000 young people with employment relevant information campaigns and events like job fairs. More than 1,600 young people benefited directly from a range of youth employability and promotion measures.

- Together with the MLSW and the newly established Employment Agency of Kosovo, the programme implemented an internship programme in sectors with high employment potential: the textile, metal processing, wood processing and ICT sectors.
- Different entrepreneurship training and academies have been initiated and the best business ideas were kick started with financial support. Innovative formats such as a televised start-up battle or the 'Green Entrepreneurship Academy' were tested.
- The programme supported several job fairs in close cooperation with the municipalities, local businesses and business associations. On average, 40 companies and approximately 400 students and jobseekers attended job fairs.
- Inclusiveness is key to success: of the participants in the employability measures 40% were female, over 25% were returnees and 10% were from ethnic minorities. The project supported vocational training and internships for people with Down's syndrome.
- Local stakeholder meetings are a new format that facilitate dialogue on youth employment, better information on respective mandates of the institutions and networking with each other.
- Supporting returning migrants, the programme introduced soft skills training and entrepreneurship training, and issued grants for innovative business ideas. For this particular purpose, the project supports the Ministry of Internal Affairs in its reintegration efforts.
- The project will collaborate with a range of technical and economic VET schools in implementing school development plans, increasing workplace based training opportunities and strengthening the competencies of professional practice teachers in line with the new Core Curriculum for VET.
- In the construction sector, a pilot programme was initiated in cooperation with the German Information Point on Migration, Vocational Training and Careers (DIMAK), the MLSW and the private sector to improve the pathways for vocational training and the recognition of Kosovar qualifications in Germany.