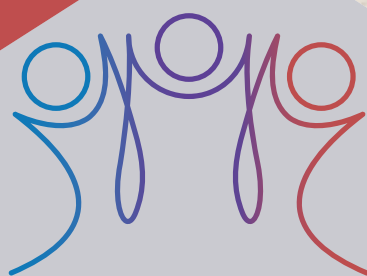




Funded by
the European Union

Success Story Booklet



United towards empowering youth
women and disadvantaged groups



**Funded by
the European Union**

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union.
Its contents are the sole responsibility of Jakova Innovation Center and do not
necessarily reflect the views of the European Union

Initiators of the project

The project “United towards empowering youth, women and disadvantaged groups” is an EU-funded project managed by the European Union Office in Kosovo and implemented by Jakova Innovation Center (JIC) and the Municipality of Gjakova.

Apart from the collaborative efforts of Jakova Innovation Center (JIC) and the Municipality of Gjakova, the project has been designed through collaborative efforts of other stakeholders to meet country-specific needs for economic development. JIC represents a cross-sectoral consortium that brings together local government, national agencies, CSOs/NGOs, and local businesses with experience in capacity building for women and youth, project management, multi-stakeholder collaborations, and environment actors, in the West Economic Region of Kosovo.

Jakova Innovation Center (JIC) is a non-profit organization serving as a business incubator that supports new and innovative start-ups. JIC supports young entrepreneurs by offering them working space with 24-hour access, counseling support, and tailor-made training programs in business management, market research, finance, marketing, and other areas related to business-making. JIC has collaborated with various local and international organizations, which have led the way for many new companies to access the world market. Additionally, Jakova Innovation Center strives to position itself in the market by positively affecting Kosovo's economy through significant ideas, people, and resources.

On the other hand, the Municipality of Gjakova continuously intends to improve the business environment and reduce local unemployment by applying various active labor measures. The vision of the Municipality of Gjakova is to accelerate economic development by creating partnerships between the public and private sectors, increasing opportunities in education, and continuous care for health, culture, youth, and sports.



Aims of the project

The main aim of the project “United towards empowering youth, women, and disadvantaged groups” was to analyze the current labor market in Kosovo and create new opportunities for youth, women, and disadvantaged groups. Additionally, the project aimed to provide the affected social groups with the necessary skills needed for the labor market, connecting and match-making employers with employees for on-job training, internships, and regular employment and financing new innovative ideas for creating new start-ups.

The first step for this project was to analyze the current labor market in Kosovo in order to determine its needs. Henceforth, Jakova Innovation Center (JIC) conducted the Labour Market Analysis, research that led to the understanding that the Kosovo labor market has the highest unemployment rate in Europe (around 30%) and a low employability perspective. While the unfavorable social and economic conditions have impacted the entire society, the Labour Market Analysis highlighted that the most affected social groups were youth, women, and disadvantaged groups (generally minorities and people with disabilities). This is due to the underrepresentation of these social groups in the Kosovar labor market.

According to the Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Kosovo 2019*, Kosovo's unemployment rate as of 2017 reached 52.7% among young people. When dividing this rate by gender, we end up with a 63.5% unemployment of young females. While keeping such alarming data in mind, this project took action to increase employability and sustainable employment prospects for disadvantaged groups in Kosovo, namely youth and women.





United towards empowering youth
women and disadvantaged groups

Targeted groups

The project “United towards empowering youth, women, and disadvantaged groups” has benefited five targeted groups:



01

YOUTH, WOMEN, AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

These were the primary target group which consisted of young people of ages 15 to 24. The project was focused on this particular age group since Kosovo has a young population (53% of the population is under the age of 25) and a high unemployment rate of youth (as of 2018, 51.5% male and 64.7% female of age 15 – 24 were unemployed).

The high youth unemployment rate of youth and graduates demonstrates a misalignment between the education system outcomes and labor market needs. Moreover, there is a mismatch between student qualifications and skills and the job market needs. Hence, through this project, Jakova Innovation Center (JIC) aimed to create the conditions for youth, women, and disadvantaged groups to access the labor market and create self-employment opportunities. Additionally, to overcome the skills misalignment, JIC planned specific skill-based trainings, on-job training, internships, and grants for start-ups.

The action area of the project covered the municipalities of Gjakova, Juniku and Deçan. Thus in total around 28,580 young people of these three cities have been the targeted groups.

02

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR - LOCAL COMPANIES

Over 4,000 enterprises established in the Municipality of Gjakova were a potential target group for consultations towards potentials and constraints of improving the labor market. After discussions with local businesses, JIC noticed that the skills misalignment also affected the private sector. According to the owners/directors of the local companies, when they have a job opening there is a sufficient number of interested candidates; however, there is a low number of qualified candidates. Hence, the private sector faces a lack of qualified workforce where there is quantity but not quality in the labor market.

Through understanding the skill-based needs of the businesses in the private sector, JIC was able to tailor and offer specific skill-based trainings for future employees to meet the skill-based needs of the labor market. Thus, the project has specific trainings for the local youth in accordance with the labor needs and demands of the local businesses. Henceforth, there will be MoU and agreements with local businesses for hiring new employees (either regular employment, internship, or on-job training) who previously took training from JIC. Additionally, the most outstanding trainees were recommended by JIC to the local businesses.

03

LOCAL YOUTH ACTION COUNCIL (LYAC/KVRL)

LYAC/KVRL is a well-known network of local youth NGOs focused on empowering young people, with its headquarters in Gjakova. Hence, as such, this target group helped JIC to better understand the needs of youth for a variety of professional trainings and internships. During the meetings with LYAC/KVRL, the importance of youth trainings in the fields of entrepreneurship, business communication, project management, digital transformation, and IT was discussed. Moreover, LYAC/KVRL pointed out the lack of practice-based internships which gets in the way of new graduates achieving regular employment.

04

CAREER CENTERS

This target group includes the Economical High School “Kadri Kusari” and High School/Gymnasium “Hajdar Dushi,” which together make up to 4,000 students in total. These centers have been selected due to their design to assist students with improving their job search skills, identifying and working toward finding suitable careers, referring students to potential employers, and boosting networking skills. Throughout the years these two career centers have collected and understood the gap between the workforce and the labor market. As such, their involvement in the project helps to identify and analyze the actual local economic situation and the needed improvements to be undertaken and reduce the misalignment between education and labor market skills.

05

LOCAL NGOS

The “Safe House” NGO and “Handikos” NGO have been selected as the target group for collaborating on this project due to their aims and focus on working with youth, women, and people with disabilities. NGO “Safe House” is a specific NGO/safe house with the mission to eliminate discrimination against women and children, empower women, and promote gender equality. This NGO aims to offer shelter to those women who are victims of domestic abuse and also offer them opportunities for building their professional capacities so that women there will be able to create their own living. On the other hand, NGO “Handikos” focuses on the prevention of disabilities, promotion, and provision of services, as well as recognition and full participation of people with disabilities. This NGO currently provides services to 170 people with disabilities, including youth within disadvantaged groups.

In collaboration with the above-mentioned local NGOs, JIC focused on creating new employment opportunities for youth, women, and people with disabilities by matching them with local businesses and companies.

Project objectives

This project has included a variety of fields, from advocating for an entrepreneurial mindset in the Gjakova region, fostering innovation, linking education and markets, utilizing academic research and know-how for start-up venture creation, to creating jobs, improving the employability of trainees, as well as minimizing the gender and disadvantaged group employment gap. However, the overall objective of the project was:

“To contribute to the development and improvement of employability potential for youth, women, and disadvantaged groups by investing in skills and knowledge necessary to become self-employed, excel in the local labor market of Kosovo, and adapt to the rapid development of innovation and technology.”

The project's main goals were:

- To provide active labor markets measures, such as tailor-made training and workshops to youth, women, and disadvantaged groups (age 15 – 24) based on market analysis;
- To improve the skills of youth, women, and disadvantaged groups by providing on-job training and internships at local companies;
- To create job opportunities for youth, women, and disadvantaged groups by developing their capacities and financially supporting them in starting their own businesses;
- To empower youth, women, and disadvantaged groups by establishing a long-term cooperation framework across the NGOs, public, and private sectors.





United towards empowering youth
women and disadvantaged groups

INTERNSHIP AND ON JOB-TRAINING



TRAINING



MENTORING



EMPLOYMENT
OPPORTUNITY



STARTUP
GRANTS

Activities

According to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, the percentage of youth unemployment in Kosovo is about 51.6%. The reason for such high statistics is the considerable mismatch of labor needs and the education skills of students in Gjakova and other areas around the country.

For this matter, the project first scans and analyzes the actual situation concerning the youth's capabilities and needs and the demand for labor. Then there is the preparation and organizing of tailor-made trainings, workshops, internships, and coaching to prepare the youth for the labor market.

Activity 1

Labour market analysis and needs assessments of the public and private sector in relation to the skills and knowledge required to be competitive in the job market.

The report focused on skill mismatch and adaptability of the workforce in Kosovo in general and in the Gjakova region, aiming to identify hindrances and propose initiatives to reduce the skills gap. Additionally, the report constituted the basis for developing training curricula tailored to the needs of the private sector, On-The-Job training (OTJ) programs, and offering small business grants.

Activity 2

Development and implementation of the tailor-made training and workshop in accordance with the findings of activity one (8 training modules and workshops)

After conducting the research in the Labour Market Analysis, the following eight training modules were categorized as the most requested skills in the current labor market in Kosovo. Hence, as the most in-demand skills, Jakova Innovation Center with the financial support of the European Union, insisted on implementing the following training modules:

1. Project Management; 2. Time Management; 3. Business Planning; 4. Negotiation Skills; 5. Financial Literacy; 6. Sales Skills; 7. Digital Transformation Skills; 8. Artificial Intelligence basics

Activity 3

Organization of on-job training programmes and establishment of agreements with local companies for internships.

Signing of MoUs with local businesses and intermediary institutions – for the creation of at least 100 on-job training and internship opportunities; selection of the participants, monitoring of interns; Creation of 30 regular job opportunities.





United towards empowering youth
women and disadvantaged groups



*The conference hall above and all of its equipment have been funded by the European Union and were used during the conducted trainings.



Activity 4

Development of coaching programmes for start-ups and provision of 16 small-scale grants.

These grants were third-party financial support funded by the European Union, provided to youth, women, and disadvantaged groups, with the ultimate goal of helping to develop their ideas and be self-employed.

Activity 5

Advocating and establishing a working body composed of the public, private, and NGO sector

The organization of two round tables with relevant stakeholders to create a working body composed of members from the local government, local NGOs, and local businesses that are responsible for managing the employability issues of the youth in Gjakova.

Activity 6

Drafting and implementation of the Strategy for the Development of a Qualified Workforce for the Municipality of Gjakova (100 copies of this Strategy - Multimedia content production for the visibility of the action and awareness raising the development of the project web page; Matchmaking and Networking event bringing all stakeholders together and finding new cooperation opportunities between them)

The Strategy explores innovative ways of attracting, retaining, and training employees, which will help employers overcome labor force challenges. Grounded in the latest data and research, the Strategy describes the current climate, including service employment area gaps; verified and further refined through consultation with local industry stakeholders and community organizations.

Activity 7

Raising awareness of the employers and the local Governments of Gjakova, Junik, and Deqan on the importance of human capital by developing, empowering, and promoting the youth, women, and disadvantaged groups.



United towards empowering youth
women and disadvantaged groups

Outcomes

This two-year project funded by the European Union has had a great impact on the socioeconomic growth of the Municipalities of Gjakova, Junik, and Deçan. While the primary target group was young people of ages 15 to 24, as demonstrated, this project has benefited various social groups. The project has benefited youth, women, and disadvantaged groups, local companies in the public and private sectors, Local Youth Action Council (LYAC/KVRL), Career Centers (Technical High School "Nexhmedin Nixha" and Gymnasium "Hajdar Dushi"), and local NGOs (the "Safe House" NGO and "Handikos" NGO).

Through this project, Jakova Innovation Center (JIC) with the financial support of the European Union, developed an environment for youth, women, and disadvantaged groups to access the labor market and create self-employment opportunities. The first step towards such action was the creation of eight (8) training modules and workshops in the following fields: project management, time management, business planning, negotiation skills, financial literacy, sales skills, digital transformation skills, and artificial intelligence basics. These trainings benefited 257 participants, from which 252 were youth, 142 women, and 25 people with disabilities. After their training, the most outstanding participants were recommended as potential employees/interns to local businesses and intermediary institutions which have signed MoUs with JIC. The collaboration with local businesses and institutions has resulted in the regular employment of 31 individuals, offered internship opportunities to 105 individuals. Additionally, 16 start-ups have been funded in a variety of industries, such as food processing, IT, art, speech therapy, nutrition consultancy, business growth, and many more.




257

Participants in trainings


31

Employed individuals


105

Participants in on-job
trainings and internship


16

Subgrant beneficiaries



United towards empowering youth
women and disadvantaged groups

Success Stories

A few words from our participants...



Etnika Beqrama

Participant of trainings

"When it comes to the trainings conducted by Jakova Innovation Center, they were extremely helpful and motivating for the creation and development of business ideas. The trainings had an outstanding positive energy and understandable materials which led to further development of our business ideas. A message I would give to all youth that are thinking of building a new business is to participate in as many trainings as possible."

Blin Sahatqija

Intern/participant of trainings

"From the organized trainings, I got to socialize with other participants and learn many new things about making business. JIC has given us the correct way to enter the labor market by teaching us certain business-making skills."



Buna Ferizi

Intern/participant of trainings

"As a young person who didn't have previous experience, the internship at Jakova Innovation Center has helped me to grow professionally and personally."



Fjoralba Musa

Intern/participant of trainings

“Taking part in these trainings was the best decision I have made. Apart from the trainings, I got the opportunity to gain one month of on-job experience in the Municipality of Gjakova. I would encourage all youth to take part in such trainings since they will learn a lot and gain experience which they will need in their future careers.”



Suela Çarkaxhija

Intern

“As an undergraduate student in the process of developing my academic skills, the internship at Jakova Innovation Center has allowed me to apply my current knowledge and skills in the work environment. I am thankful to JIC for giving me the opportunity to join their team and together help on improving the socioeconomic situation of youth, women, and disadvantaged groups in the Gjakova region. It was a great pleasure to work with such professional people.”



Shpresa Lota

Subgrant beneficiary

“While the business of Lota Mania has had many challenges, especially due to the challenges raised during the covid-19 pandemic, the support of Jakova Innovation Center has helped me achieve my business goals.”

Startup “Lota Mania” - Fruit processing



Success Stories



Fabiola Morina

Subgrant beneficiary

“A very good message for everyone, especially young people and those with fresh and original ideas, is that the trainings and financial support opportunities are a fantastic base which will help you realize all of your innovative ideas.”

Startup “Mind World Clinic” - Speech therapy and psychological services

Era Shyti

Subgrant beneficiary

“I am thankful to Jakova Innovation Center for the assistance and European Union for offering the financial opportunity for the implementation of my business; a dream of mine since the first day of my studies. Therefore, as a young entrepreneur, I encourage all young people to not stop until they realize their dreams, regardless of the challenges.”

Startup “Zëri Im” - Speech therapy services



Edenja Haxhikadrija

Subgrant beneficiary

“Jakova Innovation Center and the European Union have been quite helpful, starting with financial support for my start-up, which is something that every new entrepreneur needs for the development of their ideas. Likewise, there has been continuous moral support where, through monitoring, we have collaborated and talked about the things that are necessary for creating the best and most comfortable conditions for our young people.”

Startup “Blue Note Music Corner” - Music class for piano and guitar

Ermal Tahiri

Subgrant beneficiary

“As a beneficiary of the trainings and the financial support from the European Union, I would like to thank Jakova Innovation Center also for their continuous moral support and assistance on business management in the most professional way.”

Startup “Learn Academy” - English Language Academy



Dion Bardhi, Egzon Pallaska

Subgrant beneficiary

“In the trainings organized by JIC we learned about how to create a business strategy, marketing strategy, and financial management, all of these skills which have helped us overcome the difficulties of opening and managing our new business.”

Startup “Partners in Diet” - Nutritional guidance



Yllka Haxhiu

Subgrant beneficiary

“I am thankful to the team of Jakova Innovation Center for the trainings and the European Union for the financial support which has helped me achieve the goals of my business. Also, I want to point out that every dream, in the beginning, has its challenges. However, with the help of other people, you will achieve all your dreams and goals.”

Startup “Avancimi” - Tailoring



Success Stories

Ferdinand Kolaj

Director for Economic Development (Municipality of Gjakova)

“The trainings conducted by JIC are an excellent learning resource for young individuals interested in entering the field of business. Also, these trainings are necessary for all those who want to enter the labor market.

This project has had a great impact due to the conducted Labour Market Analysis and Workforce Development Strategy which has helped us as a Municipality to better understand the current gaps and needs in the labor market. Additionally, through this understanding, we can focus on particular aspects and issues in order to further develop our socioeconomic situation. Moreover, the continuous collaboration between the Municipality of Gjakova, NGOs, and local businesses is crucial for the creation of new start-ups and the development of small businesses.”



Workforce Development Strategy

As the Labour Market Analysis demonstrated outstanding effectiveness in better understanding the labor market and filling its gaps and needs, it became clear that such economic growth initiatives must be continued.

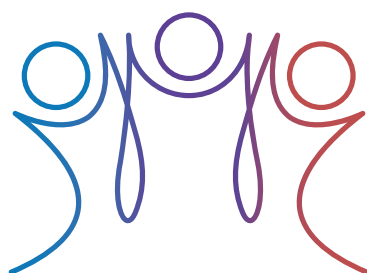


As the final stage of the project, Jakova Innovation Center developed the Workforce Development Strategy, a strategy that foresees the gaps and demands of the Kosovar Labour Market in the future and provides step-by-step required measures for achieving socio-economic progress. Furthermore, this strategy encourages all municipalities, local businesses from the public and private sectors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to gather their efforts and collaborate on creating an environment that allows direct communication flow between the market demanders and suppliers. Hence, such action will permit the creation of new employability and business opportunities for all citizens.

When discussing the importance of new initiatives for supporting economic development, the Municipality of Gjakova and its representatives have agreed that the Workforce Development Strategy conducted by JIC will be an extraordinary help for them. Moreover, the Municipality of Gjakova will be using this strategy as a gradual integration for advancing each socioeconomic sector towards raising employability.



United towards empowering youth,
women and disadvantaged groups



United towards empowering youth
women and disadvantaged groups



Funded by
the European Union