

## Dear friends,

The last few months have been tumultuous for all of us, to say the least. On top of putting health systems at strain, the COVID-19 crisis has triggered major disruptions in the economy, labor market, and the education system. From businesses and CSOs, to institutions, training providers and freelancers, everybody has been affected in one way or another, whether by business interruptions, turnover loss, or unemployment.

Many have lost their source of income, pushing them into unemployment. **IMF's recent forecast** shows that the current pandemic is reducing Kosovo's GDP by 5% in 2020, which is set to pick up by 7.5% in 2021, subject to the post-pandemic global economic recovery. The pandemic affected **most industries in Kosovo**, forcing many to rethink their careers while others will be left without jobs.

But here's a question that we thought about at length as the pandemic unfolded: How do you adapt to these uncertain times as a development cooperation project?

While the immediate aim of saving lives and minimizing the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is necessary, the long-term goal of sustainably addressing impacts shouldn't be put on hold. EYE has been focusing on a resilient and adaptive strategy. Our focus has been to navigate the uncharted territory with our partners who are reinventing themselves to respond to the demands and use the crisis as a source of innovation. We're taking what we've achieved so far and building on it so that our partners can withstand and in some cases even mitigate the crisis for other people.

Development is first and foremost about improving the quality of life of a community. But there can be no development if it's not sustainable. EYE has re-budgeted as we work to better navigate and understand the new economy and the growth opportunities it brings. We're constantly searching for areas to reinvest so that our actions are linked to long-term benefits.

Below, you'll find a few examples of what some of our partners have been up to during the past months!

**FAST-TRACKING  
THE DIGITAL TRANSITION**



**VIRTUAL CAREER  
GUIDANCE DURING COVID-19**



**VOCATIONAL SKILLS FOR  
A NEW GENERATION OF  
KOSOVAR PÂTISSIER CHEFS**



**FAST-TRACKING EMPLOYMENT  
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN  
THE BPO SECTOR**



**YOUTH, EDUCATION,  
AND EMPLOYMENT DATA  
IN ONE PLATFORM**



**DIGITAL SKILLS FOR  
YOUNG KOSOVO SERBS**



**KOSOVO'S FIRST CERTIFIED  
SOLAR ENERGY ENGINEERS**



# 1. Fast-tracking the Digital Transition



Digital transformation is a bit of a catch word these days, but what it means is that organizations are becoming increasingly dependent on technology to make sure their teams work efficiently. The workforce is changing in every way and employers are progressively looking to hire more remote or freelance workers. This diversity of the type of employee an organization employs means that it's also changing the way organizations manage, communicate, and grow.

At EYE, we make targeted investments in the labor market not only because we seek to stimulate sustainable development and connectivity in infrastructure, but also to promote digital firms and support the digitalization of the wider economy. To make this happen, we need a nimble skills training sector twinned with smart recruitment services that focus on an increasingly digitalized economy that keeps pace with the acceleration of technological development. The ability to provide access to training through digitalization and blended learning, providing modular training and investing in long-term sustainability is crucial.

As digitalization increasingly receives traction in Kosovo, the niche for online trainings grows with it. Over the years, one of the sectors that EYE has worked extensively in is non-formal education. From ICT, to BPO, to VET—we have supported partners big and small so that together, we can create a new generation of young people with skills better suited to the labor market needs. As demand for online training surges, we are reorienting support to digital services and working proactively with partners to identify opportunities.



With our help, recently the Swedish-Ukrainian IT Company Beetroot Academy's ICT training curriculum has been exported to Kosovo and is now being delivered here entirely through digital means. To achieve this, we partnered with **KUTIA**, a local business which creates web applications and e-commerce platforms, among a long list of other ICT services. We supported them to set up the necessary infrastructure to make the full digital transition to offer these trainings online and improve accessibility. The online training has already garnered the attention of 300 new potential participants, and the founders are hopeful that the online trainings will help young people adapt to the pandemic.

Another shift in recruitment and matching that EYE is fomenting in Kosovo is the move to digital Human Resource services. We've supported **Kosovajob**—a digital job-matching platform—to introduce a new software that combines recruitment, career guidance, and labor market information into one platform. The software is called SIMBA, and it is slated to support small and medium size companies to better manage recruitment, onboarding and contract management—entirely digital. SIMBA is now slated to not only simplify recruitment in Kosovo, but has also help keep everyone safe through removing any need for in-person recruitment.

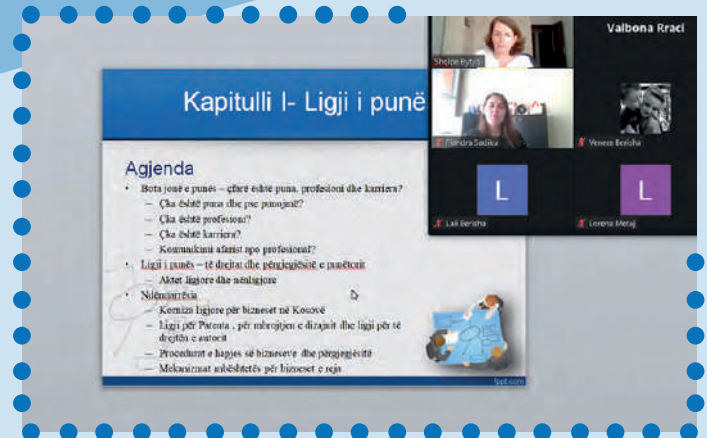
## 2. Virtual Career Guidance during COVID-19

The transition from school to work can be a challenging time for adolescents. From getting acquainted with labor rights to learning about business registration procedures, employer-employee relationships, and job ethics, it's easy to feel lost and unsure where to start.

The career we select in early adulthood will most likely follow us throughout our entire life. It's therefore important to identify our real potential and steer our efforts towards the right career path for ourselves. This is why career guidance services are so important: they help empower students and equip them to resiliently navigate the world of work. Over the past years, EYE has established career guidance centers in 9 Vocational Education schools across Kosovo.

We are particularly proud of this achievement as these centers now help hundreds of young people to identify their aptitude and strengths, and make informed choices about their career options. The centers employ professionally trained counsellors that help students select job-oriented courses which will kickstart their career. They also help link students with private businesses so that, through the Work-based learning (WBL) scheme that we helped introduce, students can not only gain a real-life job experience but also employment and income opportunities in the job market upon graduation.

In 2020, as the pandemic unfolded, teaching and learning experienced significant challenges and drawbacks. But there were opportunities as well. COVID-19 fueled an unprecedented shift to online formats, as people struggled to adapt. When it



comes to counseling, the possibility of sharing guidance and training resources digitally would offer innumerable opportunities to reach more young people and help them meet their career guidance needs. But these centers lacked the skills to integrate IT resources into guidance activities. So EYE came to their aid.

Together with the Kosovar Career Development Foundation (KCDF), we helped train 21 career counselors of school-based career centers to begin to offer virtual career services to VET students. Our goal was to ensure career centers can provide socially-distanced quality counseling even in times of uncertainty. Students in the 12th grade were a high priority as they graduated during the peak of the pandemic and the transition from school to work was slated to become particularly challenging for them.

With our help, career centers of VET schools provided online training to 218 students as they get ready to enter the job market! Additionally, as usual recruitment efforts were put to a halt by the pandemic, in the month of June, we developed a media campaign to promote the 9 VET schools and increase enrolment of new students. Although recently graduating seniors will bear the brunt of the pandemic's impact on the labor market, with the tireless help of counselors, we are confident that the students will confidently navigate the job market.

### 3. Vocational Education with a twist: preparing a new generation of Kosovar Pâtissier Chefs and Master Bakers



The pastry and bakery industry is growing fast in Kosovo. One needs little more than to take a quick walk in downtown Prishtina to be enchanted by sights of bakeries of all sizes serving delicious, savory pastries in every corner. And let's face it, who doesn't love the sight of a soft, buttery croissant in the morning?

But, what about making them? Let's say that you're a young chap aspiring to become a pastry chef; how do you go about learning the complex baking process that produces those savory croissants that people can't go without? Well, up until recently, the lack of training providers in the field meant opportunities to become trained in pastry and bakery were scarce. This was particularly concerning as, every year, thousands of young people in Kosovo enter the labor market and don't have the right skills for work.

For Kosovo businesses, a skilled workforce is essential, but is difficult to find and is difficult to build through on-the-job trainings, not least because of the cost-burden for employers. To us at EYE, it's important that the skills of young women and men meet the demand of business sectors.

Enter **Korabi Innovation Center**. It's a new state-of-the-art pastry training center which will provide hundreds of people with the full toolbox of pastry/bakery techniques and impact the whole market of bakery and pastry industry in Kosovo! We're particularly excited about this center as it will cater to a new target group of young people and employers.



Each training program will be offered in three levels: basic, semi-advanced, and advanced. So whether you're new or old to the art of culinary bakery and pastry, this state-of-the-art center will have something in store for everyone: from home cooks and part-time cooks who want to dip their toe in the water, to those wanting to delve more seriously into the craft and pursue a career in the field, perhaps even setting up their own businesses one day!

This center is slated to increase the inflow of qualified workers in the labor market, and effectively develop the skills of young women and men to better match the needs of business. Good luck to Korabi Training Center as they prepare a new generation of Kosovar Pâtissier Chefs and Master Bakers!



## 4. How trainings in the BPO sector are promising to fast-track employment for young people



In today's globalized world, markets are interlinked more than ever before, and advancements in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) have opened the floodgates for large companies to outsource business services internationally.

Due to its cheap labor, skilled workforce, and geographical proximity to Europe, Kosovo has become a regional nest for offshore outsourcing in recent years. The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector has the potential to boost economic development, increase exports, and create thousands of new jobs, especially in light of recent attention Kosovo has been receiving as a hub for tapping into a young, skilled workforce.

Education systems not always manage to keep up with the rapidly changing nature of work, which often makes it hard for employers to recruit. But where formal education is slower on the uptake, non-formal education can carry the torch and help fill in the gaps!

Among many of the existing BPO providers in Kosovo today, **SPEEEX** has earned a name for itself as one of the key players in the field, not least because of its innovative approach to training and employment.

Recently, EYE entered a partnership with the company to help them create SPEEEX Education. It's a spin-off non-formal education entity specialized in providing BPO training for young people. The innovative methodology employed allows job applicants to improve soft skills, language skills, and technical skills necessary to



reach the required threshold for employment in the BPO sector.

While SPEEEX Education provides participants with extensive theoretical know-how, it also makes sure that students develop the right practical experience. Working groups are small which allows for personalized coursework, and every participant gets the opportunity to interview for a job after they finish the training!

In May, 2020, we facilitated a landmark agreement between SPEEEX, SPEEEX Education and the Laboratory for Business Activities (an organization supported by the local company Sharrcem) which will bring jobs for hundreds of young people of the Elez Han region and will promote economic development. A new SPEEEX branch together with a training center is set to open in the city which will prepare young people for jobs in the BPO sector!

## 5. Making reliable data on youth, education, and employment accessible to everyone

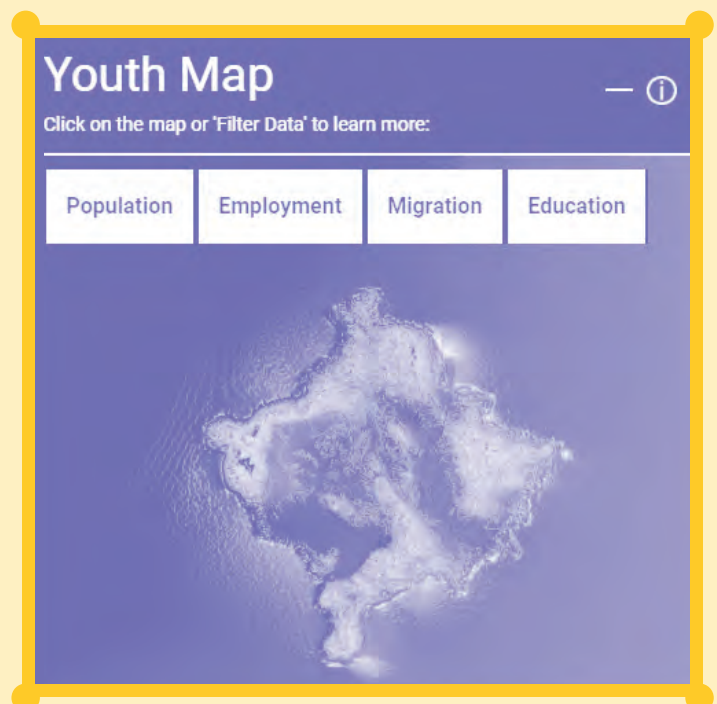


Data is a game-changing resource, and some are saying that it's the most valuable commodity in the world. Reliable data and information has the power to improve people's lives, inform the design of better policies, and find solutions to social problems. In Kosovo, access to reliable data can be a bit of an uphill battle sometimes. There's often a lack of research, and when there isn't, it can be strenuous to find the right information when it's scattered across multiple websites, pages and documents.

But what if there was a hub that compiles data from a wide range of sources into one easily navigable platform that journalists and researchers and the general public can use?

How many graduates are Kosovo's universities producing? Which industries suffer from skills mismatch most? What businesses are losing young workers to migration most? What fields are proving to employ most young people?

These are just some of the questions to which you'll find answers in Kosovo 2.0's new Interactive Youth Map, which we supported them to establish. The **Interactive youth map** is a database consisting of demographic data on population, employment, migration, and education of young people in Kosovo, all compiled in one easily navigable and accessible platform. The platform offers a comprehensive collection of data from multiple sources, and it is quickly becoming a hub of information that is not only helping researchers



and journalists, but also supporting young people to make well-informed career choices.

But numbers themselves are only part of the picture. The platform also features feature stories, articles, podcasts, and videos that amplify the unheard voices of young people who face the challenges of being young in Kosovo.

So whether you're a young person wanting to make sense of your future in the labor market, or a researcher working on a new study: the interactive youth map will be your best friend, so make sure to check it out!

## 6. Digital skills for young people of the Serbian community in Kosovo



It's a well-established fact that Kosovo faces substantial challenges with unemployment. An outdated education system, misalignment of education and training with labor market demands, and widespread cronyism are often cited as the main culprits behind one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe.

Young people from the Kosovo Serb population are often excluded and below the radar of non-formal education initiative that have the potential to generate employment. There has traditionally been a lack of non-formal training centers for the Serbian community in Kosovo, which is why we decided to team up with local actors and find a solution.

At EYE, we're always on the lookout for innovative non-formal training providers who offer demand-oriented and socially inclusive training packages. We've recently helped a passionate group of ICT professionals establish the **Gracanica Innovation Centre (GIC)** and now we're helping them impart vital skills of the 21st century—such as creativity, communications, and the basics of robotics and computer programming— to Serbian youth in Kosovo.

Using ICT from an early age is an essential skill. Together, we set up the necessary infrastructure and equipment, developed curricula and reached out to the community so that everyone knows about this new opportunity. The center has engaged 3 trainers who now work to instill ICT skills in the Serbian youth. The center's objectives



are now to identify, train, and certify 60 youth, and match tens of them with jobs in the local business ecosystem.

Many of the participants, who are mostly in their teens, have already begun offering services to local companies: from networking of IT devices with local hotels and graphic design for products, to website creation and maintenance, these bright young minds are doing it all!

As the COVID-19 crisis unfolded, it created a huge demand by hospitals and medical staff for protective equipment. As GIC already owned 3D Printers, they began printing face shields to help local hospitals who were struggling amid the shortage. The center donated more than 250 visors to medical staff and other institutions in need!



## 7. Kosovo's first certified solar engineers



The threat of climate change and air pollution on the world has never been more severe. Switching to clean, renewable energy is one of the most significant actions we can undertake to reduce our carbon footprint and impact on the environment. The Sun emits enough power onto earth to satisfy our entire energy demand. And with solar energy supply facilities getting cheaper and cheaper by the year, many say that the future of energy is solar.

In Kosovo, 250 out of 365 days are sunny, which means the conditions are ideal to set up a budding solar energy infrastructure. But lack of training and certification in the solar engineering field meant that very few Kosovo-based businesses were equipped with the skills to enter the solar energy market.

This is why EYE supported the training and certification of the first group of certified engineers in Kosovo for the design and installation of Solar Photovoltaics PV, a technology that converts sunlight into direct current electricity.

One of the main local private businesses to benefit from the initiative is **Elen Solar Power**. Five of their engineers—out of a total of 18—were trained and certified by international experts on the design and installation of solar panels.

With international certifications under their belt, the company is now equipped with the necessary expertise that positions them to work on both local and international projects. Elen has been helping



multiple businesses and private households move to greener energy sources and reduce their carbon footprint. According to them, the market for solar energy has been steadily growing in Kosovo, and a greener future is just around the corner!