

Navigating Labor Markets Through School-*Based Career* *Guidance in VET Institutions* *in Kosovo*

A Case Study on Research, Vision/Strategy, and Interventions

Part 1

Enhancing Youth
Employment
(EYE) project

July 2024



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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HELVETAS

Management
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Acronym

AI	Administrative Instruction
AVETAE	Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education
CHF	Swiss Franc
CoP	Community of Practice
CVETA	Council for VET and Adults
EYE	Enhancing Youth Employment
MDA	Management Development Associates
MBCC	Municipality-Based Career Center
MED	Municipal Education Directorate
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation
MSD	Market Systems Development
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NQA	National Qualification Authority
SBCC	School-Based Career Center
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
VET	Vocational Education and Training
CoC	Center of Competence
MFLT	Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transactions
EARK	Employment Agency of Republic of Kosovo

Acknowledgment

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Prishtina and Bern
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Executive Summary



Introduction and overview

In the bustling streets of Prishtina, Kosovo, the struggles and aspirations of its youth are vividly embodied in their stories. These journeys reflect the broader narrative of balancing educational aspirations with the harsh realities of employment. Against a backdrop of tradition, evolving peer dynamics, economic challenges, and technological shifts, these stories touchingly highlight the complexities within Kosovo's youth labor market.

This case study shows how the Enhancing Youth Employment (EYE) project supported young women and men to get the benefits of career guidance. Through extensive interviews and secondary data, the case study presents how the EYE project's facilitator (the Intervention Manager) worked to achieve this aim. The case study answers questions such as what the project did and why, if the project's actions worked or not, and how key stakeholders were engaged and how they responded.

Challenges in Kosovo's Youth Labor Market

Kosovo's youth face obstacles in securing decent employment opportunities. The country's youth unemployment rate was at a staggering 21% as of 2022. Despite efforts to modernize the economy, persistent mismatches between educational offerings and job market demands have worsened employment prospects. Temporary and informal job opportunities further deepen the issue, leaving many young Kosovars navigating a labor market full of uncertainties. Social media influence and rising living costs add more layers of complexity, forcing young people to seek alternative ways for skill acquisition and entrepreneurial pursuits.

EYE Kosovo: Addressing the Challenges

In response to the above challenges, the EYE project, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by HELVETAS and Management Development Associates (MDA), has facilitated bridging the gap between education and employment since its inception in 2013 until now in 2024 when its mandate ends. By integrating standardized career guidance into Kosovo's vocational education and training (VET) institutions, EYE facilitated reducing the disconnect between educational offerings

and industry demands.

Key pillars of EYE's strategy for career guidance in VET institutions include:

- The provision of effective career services through the School-Based Career Center (SBCC) and qualified career advisors,
- The empowerment of municipal leadership to support the sustainability of career services,
- The establishment of sustainable funding mechanisms, and
- The alignment of educational curricula with the evolving needs of the job market.

The Case Study

The case study looks into the EYE project's performance. The study is structured and presented as a two-part series. Part One covers the objective of the case study and its methodology. It also details the research (diagnosis), vision/strategy, and interventions of the EYE project in career guidance in VET institutions.¹ Part Two discusses the results, lessons, and recommendations, as well as the future directions of career guidance in Kosovo.

The case study reveals notable successes in addressing challenges related to career decision-making, mobilizing

¹ VET institutions in Kosovo consist of 63 VET schools that are managed by municipalities and 6 Competence Centers (CoCs) managed by the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adults Education (AVETAE).

stakeholder support, and institutionalizing career services within Kosovo's VET system. While acknowledging potential biases inherent in the case study process (e.g., sampling bias, focus only "before-after" rather than "with" or "without" career guidance services), the findings underline the tangible impact of EYE's interventions and provide valuable insights for future initiatives aimed at enhancing youth employment opportunities.

The achievements in career guidance services in VET institutions have been impressive, especially during the period 2021-2024 when the institutionalization of career services in the VET system has been achieved. The number of financially

sustainable SBCCs established has reached 19 in EYE's partner VET schools which have around 12,000 students, while another 6 SBCCs have been established by other donors, copying the SBCC model supported by EYE.

Since the first SBCC started operating in 2016, around 150,000 career services have been provided to VET students and 9th graders. 41% of users are women, while 2% are minorities.

The number of businesses involved in the activities of VET schools through SBCCs has reached over 2,300, offering

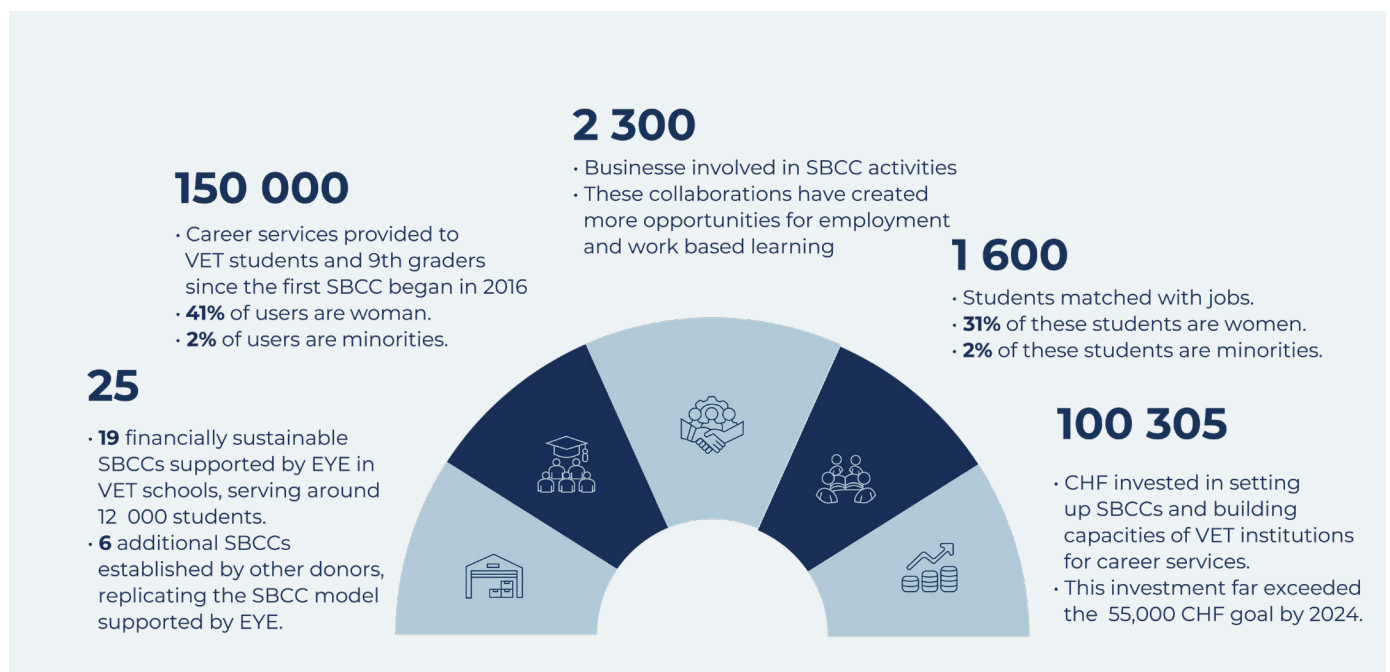


Figure 1: Key achievements of the EYE project

VET students more opportunities for employment and work-based learning. This collaboration with businesses has resulted in approximately 1,600 students being matched with jobs. 31% of participants are women, while 2% are minorities.

Public funds invested for setting up SBCCs and building capacities of VET institutions for the provision of career services reached 100,305 CHF by June 2024, far exceeding the phase target of 55,000 CHF. These achievements highlight the project's impact on labor market access and support for youth and businesses in Kosovo.

Vision, Findings, and Recommendations

The project's vision is for all VET institutions to provide career guidance services that would support all students find a job. There is a strong emphasis on social inclusion, institutional sustainability, and employer participation. Through a long, patient, facilitated journey, the foundations for this vision have been laid.

The case study's findings highlight systemic deficiencies within Kosovo's career guidance infrastructure, necessitating targeted interventions to address disparities among vulnerable groups.

Through the SBCC model, the project facilitated the effective integration of career

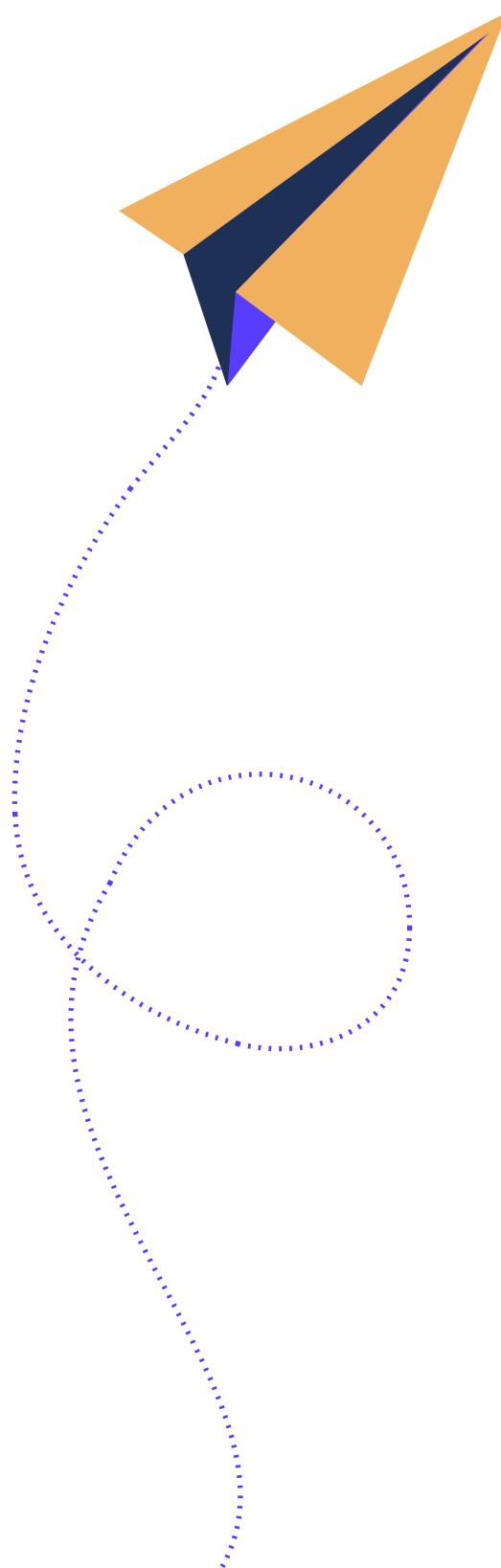
guidance into Kosovo's VET institutions. It championed operational excellence, quality assurance, and stakeholder engagement as cornerstones of its implementation strategy. EYE's facilitation, based on strong local ownership, contributed to significant advancements. The European Training Foundation recognized these efforts as shown in the performance monitoring report of the VET system in Kosovo within the Turin Process (2023). This has led to inclusive, accessible, and high-quality career guidance in Kosovo. To date, this is possible across 25 VET institutions in different municipalities in Kosovo.

Improving career guidance in Kosovo's 69 VET institutions (63 VET schools and 6 Competence Centers) requires a systemic approach. This approach should leverage current progress to address present challenges and future aspirations of Kosovar youth. It involves sustainable funding through public-private partnerships and government investment. Ensuring standardized quality across schools is essential. Engaging the private sector for practical experiences is also crucial. Strategic partnerships, parental engagement, and tailored interventions for youth migration are important. Overcoming challenges like gender norms and funding sustainability necessitates ongoing dedication.

Future Directions and Conclusions

Looking ahead, the trajectory of Kosovo's career guidance system depends on proactive and demand-driven measures. These measures should anticipate labor market trends, promote entrepreneurship, and enhance stakeholder engagement. By leveraging lessons learned from the EYE project, Kosovo is well-positioned to embrace a collaborative approach to youth empowerment. This puts the country on course toward a more vibrant and inclusive economy.

As young people continue their journey through the bustling streets of Prishtina, their stories serve as a reminder, highlighting the resilience and determination embedded within Kosovo's youth. The work of EYE is one of the efforts in Kosovo that gives hope that young people are poised to shape the future of the country's labor market landscape through relevant, functional, and sustainable career guidance.





Section 1:
OVERVIEW



1.1 Introduction

Embark on a journey through the streets of Kosovo, where taxi rides offer more than just transportation—they provide a glimpse into the pulse of the country's current trends and burning topics.

Ermir, a 22-year-old final-year university student, navigates the roads of Prishtina, Kosovo's vibrant capital, as a taxi driver to support his studies in computer science. His story mirrors the aspirations and challenges of countless young Kosovars trying to bridge the gap between education and employment. Driven by a passion for programming, Ermir dreams of a future career in computer science.

Yet, like many others, Ermir faces the challenges of securing internships and then well-paying jobs. He decided to study computer science, not due to support from a well-developed career guidance system, but because he was inspired by his teacher, who had returned to Kosovo from Germany and taught computer science.

Ermir's journey is just the surface of a deeper narrative. Across Kosovo, a generation stands at the crossroads of education and career paths, dealing with the influences of tradition, parental expectations, and evolving peer dynamics.

As societal norms shift and social media shapes individual choices, young Kosovars are increasingly carving their paths to join VET or pursue gymnasium. Like some years ago when gymnasium was clearly a popular

choice – and it is today as well— there are now indications of change as more and more young people join VET institutions.

The statistics for 2020/21 show that 53% of students in upper secondary schools continue their education in VET institutions and 42.3% are girls.² This has been a welcoming trend; it not only addresses the employability of young people but also responds to the demands of employers.

However, Kosovo's employers struggle to find skilled talent. The demands of employers do not meet the supply of skilled workforce. And that is why many young people are unemployed and migrate to Western Europe and other countries embracing the hopes of finding better opportunities. The unemployment rate among young people aged 15 to 24 in Kosovo has dropped significantly from 55% in 2012 to 21% in 2022.³ This is still a higher figure showing the seriousness of youth unemployment.

Talking to young Kosovars like Ermir provides a window into the dynamic nature of the country's changing youth employment situation. It reveals the dreams, challenges, and ambitions of the youngest people in Europe. The young people navigate through a period of transition and uncertainty. Put simply, there have been suboptimal career choices, prolonged unemployment, and increased reliance on external support systems (mainly development financing by donors).

² Kosovo Education Strategy 2022 - 2026

³ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2022). The 2022 Labor Force Survey <https://ask.rks-gov.net/Releases/Details/6714>

Against the above challenges, there is also optimism. The growing demand for career guidance and the importance of aligning educational curricula with local job market demands are positive signs. Since the decentralization of educational governance in 2008, municipalities in Kosovo now play an important role. They shape the education system to better cater to local employment opportunities. This is done by managing and funding the current 63 VET schools.⁴

For over a decade, the EYE project has facilitated the empowerment of young Kosovars. It supported them to navigate their educational and career paths effectively. Since its launch in 2013, the project has focused on a core objective: integrating standardized career guidance services into VET institutions. The career guidance services are offered by career professionals and supported by sustained public funding. This strategic effort improves access to career advice. It also facilitates smoother and faster transitions from education to employment. Furthermore, it promotes fruitful collaborations between VET institutions, government agencies, and industry players.

This case study explores the career guidance interventions of the EYE project. The project was executed from 2013 to 2024 by a partnership between HELVETAS and MDA. Through narratives gathered from several people, the study offers insights. It shows how the EYE project identified and addressed key challenges within the labor market system. The project collaborated

with the public and private sectors to develop tailored solutions. It also provided ongoing support for their implementation. Throughout these efforts, the main aim has been consistent: promoting inclusive, relevant, and sustainable employment opportunities for young people.

Over the past decade, global studies have shown the positive impact of career guidance. It improves students' skills, knowledge, and career-related decision-making. Those who received such guidance showed better outcomes compared to their counterparts.⁵ These findings emphasize the importance of refining policies and practices within educational institutions.

This case study also outlines key milestones, achievements, and challenges in transforming career guidance to tackle youth unemployment in Kosovo. It highlights both successful and unsuccessful strategies of the EYE project. The focus is on standardizing career services, qualifying career advisors, and securing funding for school-based initiatives. Aimed at audiences in Kosovo and beyond, the study showcases the EYE project's impact. It facilitated the empowerment of young Kosovars through improved career guidance practices.

⁴ Law No.03/L-068 on Education in the Municipalities in Kosovo.

⁵ Sharapova, N., Zholdasbekova, S., Arzymbetova, S., Zaimoglu, O., & Bozshatayeva, G. (2023). Efficacy of School-Based Career Guidance Interventions: A Review of Recent Research. *Journal of Education and e-Learning Research*, 10(2), 215-222.

1.2 Youth Labor Markets in Kosovo

Youth labor markets are “two steps forward and one step backward”. This is how leading labor market experts described in 2019 the realities of finding a decent job for young people in Kosovo.⁶ Many young Kosovars struggle to secure employment, especially young women and disadvantaged groups, because of their socioeconomic status, where they live (rural or urban), or health reasons. Additionally, a significant portion of jobs available to youth are temporary,

leading to unstable employment conditions.

Over the past twenty years, Kosovo's economy has been shifting towards a more private market system. It has also been focused on rebuilding and developing after the war. During this transition, the links between the education system and businesses weakened. Consequently, vocational education curricula became outdated. This left young people ill-prepared with the skills needed to enter the job market smoothly.



⁶ Arandarenko. M. and Brodmann. S. (2019). Job Opportunities for Youth in Kosovo: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back? Brookings Future Development Blog. Available here

Labor market figures are stark. According to the Labor Force Survey 2022, the unemployment rate was 12.6% which was 8.1% lower than the previous year. However, the inactivity rate was high at 61.4% and the youth unemployment rate was 21.4%. Temporary contracts were common, with over half of workers (56%) employed under such arrangements in 2021.⁷

Several factors contribute to the seriousness of youth unemployment in Kosovo. For instance, certain skills are abundant in the job market, while the skills employers need are often in short supply. Even when job seekers possess the right skills, employers struggle to identify them. Part of the problem is ineffective matching job search services and career guidance support. Few

employers utilize these services, and they rather rely on personal connections and networks. There is also a lack of effective mechanisms or platforms for dialogue between employers and educational institutions. Students, mainly influenced by parents and peers, choose subjects or profiles with less demand from employers after graduation. Specifically, VET institutions have long struggled to attract students.

Post-pandemic Kosovo, like many countries, has experienced shifts in the labor market. A recent survey in 2023 found that half of the respondents were learning new job skills, indicating young people are taking charge of their futures.⁸

WHY?

Living costs have increased, and people want more independence. Families and young people are focused on finding work and starting businesses independently. Social media has played a crucial role, in showing young people new opportunities and inspiring big dreams. Employers are also taking notice. They are adapting their hiring and team management strategies because many skilled individuals are leaving Kosovo, and the job market is evolving.

All the above factors demonstrate how education, training, and labor market systems are increasingly tested by global developments such as digital transformation, globalization, demographic shifts, climate change, and global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁷ European Commission. (2022). Commission Staff Working Document Kosovo. 2022 Communication on EU Enlargement policy. Available here.

⁸ European Commission. (2023). European Skills and Jobs Survey Statistical profile: Kosovo. Available here

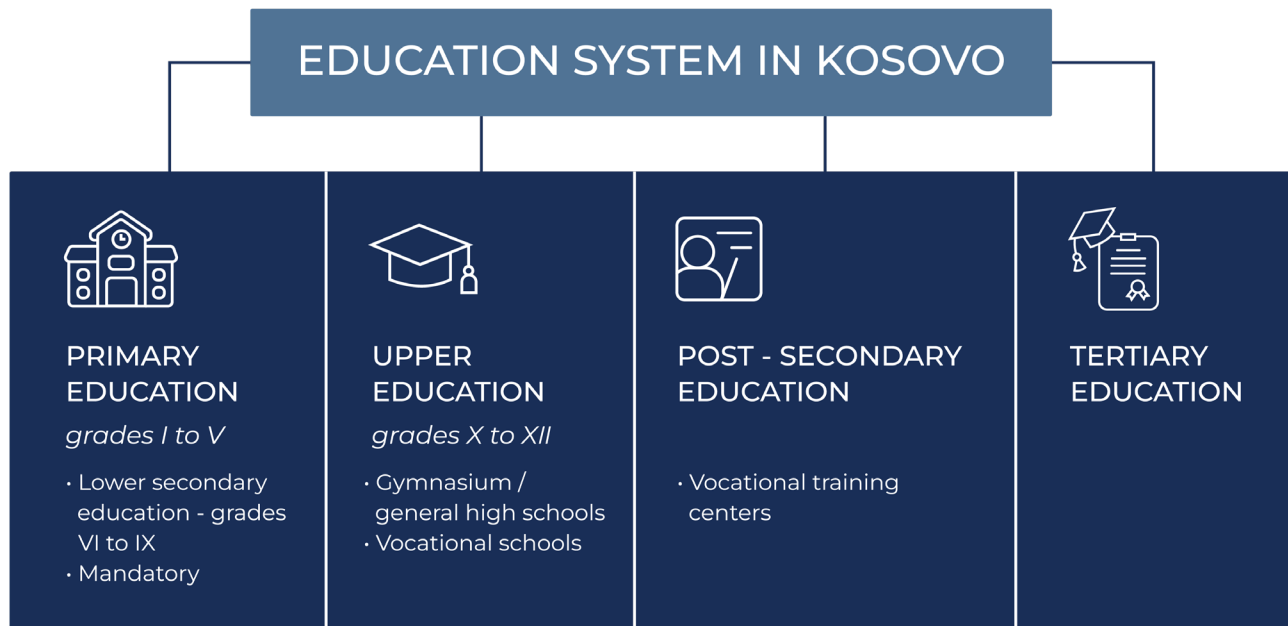


Figure 2: The education system in Kosovo

1.3 The EYE project

Kosovo has received substantial development funding from donors, leading to numerous projects addressing various issues, including youth unemployment. However, many of these projects operate independently, without effectively tackling the main constraints of unemployment. This situation has persisted since the inception of the EYE project in 2013 and continues as the project concludes in 2024.

We spoke to several people to understand the realities on the ground. One interviewee summed up the trends in Kosovo's education system and development financing:

“

Despite all the funding and projects, Kosovo's job market still struggles because many initiatives do not work together. EYE stands out by facilitating dialogue between policymakers and businesses. When everyone understands the needed skills and how to guide young people, we see updated laws, relevant courses, and practical career advice. Who knew that getting people in a room to talk could be more effective than a hundred fancy reports?”

So, what sets the EYE project apart?

EYE has closely collaborated with both the public and private sectors to understand the barriers young people face in securing better jobs. The project identified a major issue: a significant communication gap between policymakers and businesses regarding necessary skills and career guidance for young people. This gap has led to outdated laws, curricula, less relevant guidance, and insufficient financing. EYE aimed to address these challenges by promoting collaboration among labor market stakeholders to develop joint solutions.

The project used an approach known as Market Systems Development (MSD). This approach involves understanding and addressing systems like labor markets through collaborative efforts to bring about “system changes” – such as shifts in behaviors and practices (e.g., professional development opportunities for career guidance advisors), improvements in norms and values (e.g., challenging traditional gender roles and shifting perceptions about vocational training), and changes in structures and processes (e.g., redefining relationships between educational institutions and employers).⁹

Throughout its operation, EYE viewed labor markets as dynamic entities needing rapid adaptation to thrive in today’s world. Therefore, EYE has taken an approach that supports the evolution of these markets by exploring innovative solutions and embracing promising ideas as they arise.

In technical terms, these actions reflect an understanding of complexity and an adaptive approach to designing and implementing effective solutions tailored to the labor market’s intricate dynamics.

An interview with a labor market expert simplifies the role of the EYE project:



Think of the labor market like a houseplant—EYE realized you cannot just water it once and hope for the best. You need to trim the dead leaves, rotate it for sunlight, and maybe even talk to it a bit. By treating the labor market as a ‘living thing,’ EYE helped it grow stronger and adapt to new challenges. In fancy terms, that is understanding complexity and being flexible. In normal terms, it is about not letting your plant—or job market—wither on the window ledge!”

Career guidance has been a crucial aspect of the EYE project within Kosovo’s broader labor market system. Despite efforts from various groups like the government, businesses, and NGOs to establish an inclusive, relevant, and sustainable career guidance system, these initiatives have not sufficiently supported young Kosovars. As a result, many young people choose careers without adequate information or advice. They might select schools or training programs without considering their strengths

⁹ Please see Part Two of the case study for more on system changes and the role of the EYE project

or available job opportunities. Many young women and men experience prolonged unemployment periods, leading to frustration and dependency on family or government support. Only a few VET institutions and local areas offer these services, primarily relying on donor funding.

Given the above challenges, a teacher expressed frustration, saying,

“

Waiting for a job is like waiting for a bus that never arrives. Many young people find themselves in this difficulty, feeling unproductive and frustrated. Without proper guidance, they are left stranded at a stop with no signposts.”

On a positive note, there is an increasing demand for career guidance as young people transition from school to work. With Kosovo's decentralized education system, local municipalities now manage and fund education, including VET, aiming to align it better with local job market needs.

EYE has been working with local stakeholders to develop a model for municipalities to adopt and expand upon to meet this growing demand for career guidance. The project provided technical support and collaborated with donors at the central level to establish a robust legal framework for accessible career guidance.

Since 2013, EYE's strategy has focused on integrating standardized career guidance into the VET system, training career advisers, and securing ongoing public funding through secondary legislation. The goal is to make career guidance sustainable and available throughout vocational education, facilitating smoother transitions from school to work. These changes aim to make VET institutions more appealing by offering clearer pathways to employment and enhancing collaboration opportunities with businesses to ensure educational programs meet industry needs.





Key Messages of Section 1

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT GAP

- **Issue:** High youth unemployment in Kosovo due to the skills mismatch between the education system and employer demands.
- **Importance:** Enhanced career guidance can reduce youth unemployment and support economic development.
- **Trends impacting youth employment:**
 - Shifting societal norms influence youth career choices.
 - Kosovo's education system adapting to job market demands.
 - Regional/global emphasis on education-labor market link.

LEADERSHIP SHIFTS TO MUNICIPALITIES

- **Initiative:** Municipalities leading career guidance enhancement for VET since 2016.

EYE'S APPROACH TO CAREER GUIDANCE DEVELOPMENT

- **Impact:** The EYE project worked with stakeholders to develop school-based career centers VET at municipalities.
- **Focus:** The project provided technical support and coordinated with central government and donors.
- **Goal:** To establish a robust legal framework and central funding for effective career guidance.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

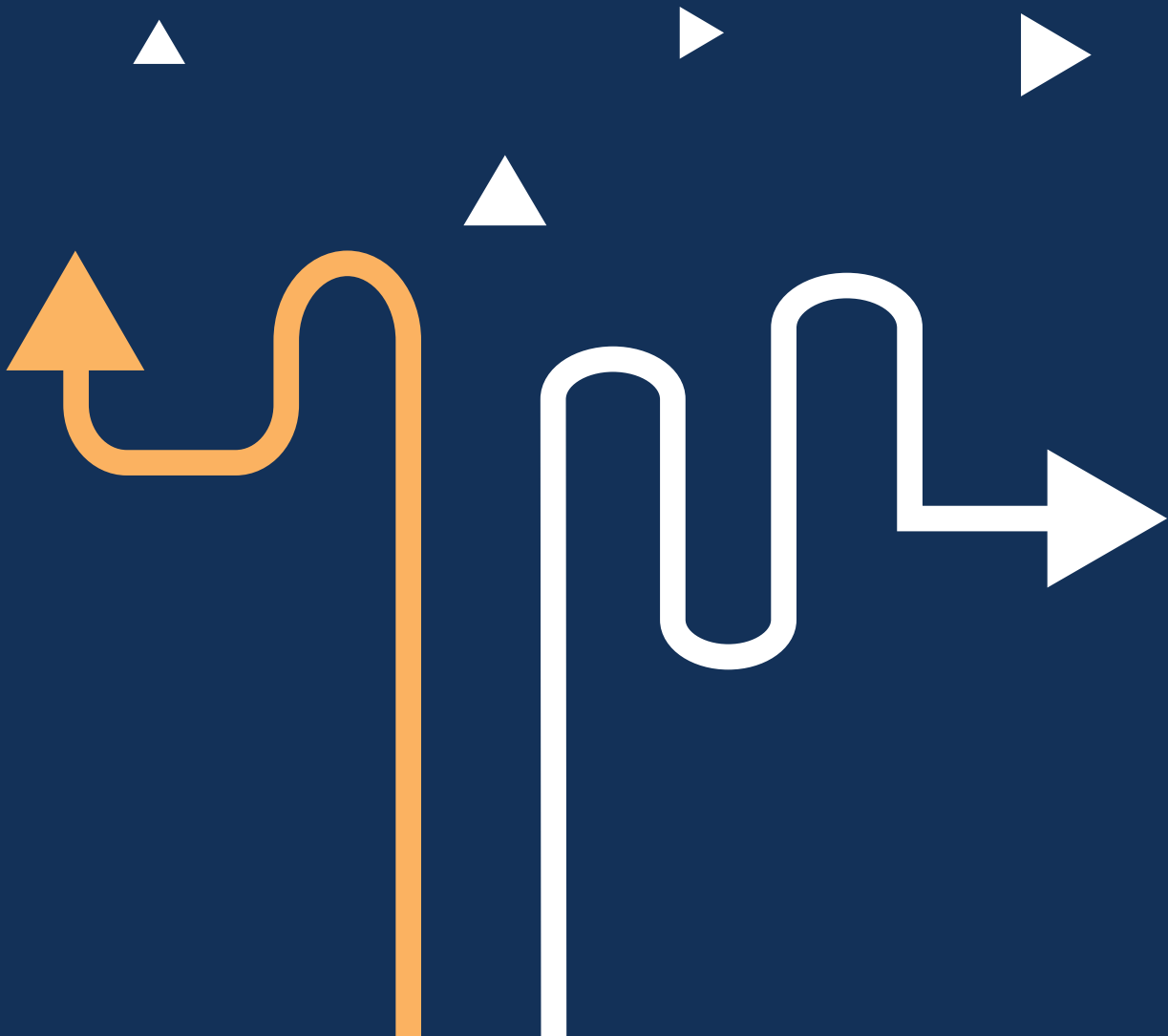
- **Initiative:** EYE's strategy has integrated standardized career guidance into VET since 2013.
- **Objective:** Ensure ongoing public funding via secondary legislation.
- **Outcome:** Sustainable, accessible career services for students' vocational education journey.

ENHANCED ATTRACTIVENESS OF VET INSTITUTIONS

- **Objective:** Make VET institutions more attractive by aligning programs with industry needs.
- **Result:** Increase collaboration opportunities between VET institutions and businesses.



Section 2:
THE CASE STUDY



2.1 Objective

The case study examines EYE's overall performance and the impacts of its career guidance interventions. It analyzes the rationale behind the project's interventions, methodologies used, and their impacts. Insights into the sustainability of changes are sought, along with lessons for stakeholders in Kosovo and the Western Balkans.

Beyond statistical analysis, the study emphasizes the human impact of EYE's work. It showcases compelling narratives of the project's efforts in delivering relevant, inclusive, and sustainable career guidance. Methodologically, it employs process tracing, counterfactual analysis, and comparative analysis to build a narrative supported by evidence.

Various demographic and socioeconomic factors influencing career guidance are considered. These include Kosovo's youth population demographics, persistently high youth unemployment rates, evolving aspirations influenced by social media, and changing needs of youth and employers. Parental norms, institutional commitments, and societal values are also noted as critical factors impacting the effectiveness of career guidance initiatives.

2.2 Methodology

Data for this study was gathered through extensive consultations with stakeholders, including students, teachers, career advisors, administrators, businesses, parents, and government officials involved in career guidance initiatives. Interviews with stakeholders provided primary data, emphasizing cultural sensitivity and language considerations.

This study aims to guide future projects promoting sustainable youth employment in Kosovo and beyond, offering insights into the impact of career guidance initiatives like the EYE project. It seeks to understand how the EYE project's career guidance initiatives have contributed to youth employment in Kosovo. It offers a detailed picture by examining key aspects such as objectives, methods, and results. To achieve this, the case study uses a combination of methodological approaches, including process tracing, counterfactual analysis, and comparative analysis. These methods show causal linkages, unique value propositions, and wider contextual factors shaping career guidance in Kosovo.

In-depth interviews and participatory techniques helped gather genuine feedback from project partners and target groups. This approach provided a valuable opportunity to understand the contributions and impacts of the EYE project. The ultimate aim is to produce evidence-backed insights that can guide decision-making. Additionally, it aims to facilitate learning within the project and share knowledge with donors, practitioners, and academics.



2.3 Limitations

This case study tried to provide a balanced and clear story of the EYE project's impact on career guidance in Kosovo. Firstly, there was a potential for sampling bias because the study focused on a "before-after" scenario. This involved mainly individuals engaged in the project rather than a broader comparison. Secondly, despite efforts to ensure objectivity and accuracy in translation and cultural understanding, some details might have been lost. This could impact the reliability of the data. Moreover, since the study exclusively examined the EYE project in Kosovo, its findings may not extend to other settings in the Western Balkans or beyond.



Section 3:
RESEARCH: SEEING WHAT
IS BELOW THE SURFACE



3.1 Getting the Analysis Right

In Kosovo's VET system, the absence of inclusive, relevant, and sustainable career guidance was a major obstacle. Without proper support, students navigated a maze of educational choices without clear direction. This led to decisions that did not match their interests, talents, or job market demands.

Imagine a young person trying to decide what to study or what kind of job to pursue. Influenced by family expectations or peer pressure, students sometimes chose courses or training programs that did not align with their ambitions or industry needs. As a result, they graduated with skills that were not in

demand, leaving them unprepared for the competitive job market.

In 2013, Kosovo's career guidance system lacked crucial elements. VET institutions provided no career guidance, public funding for such services was absent, and there was a severe shortage of career professionals. Instead, decisions often came from donor priorities and central government directives, leaving VET institutions to navigate uncharted territory in their career guidance efforts.

Recognizing this issue, the EYE project set out to understand its main causes. One key problem was the lack of

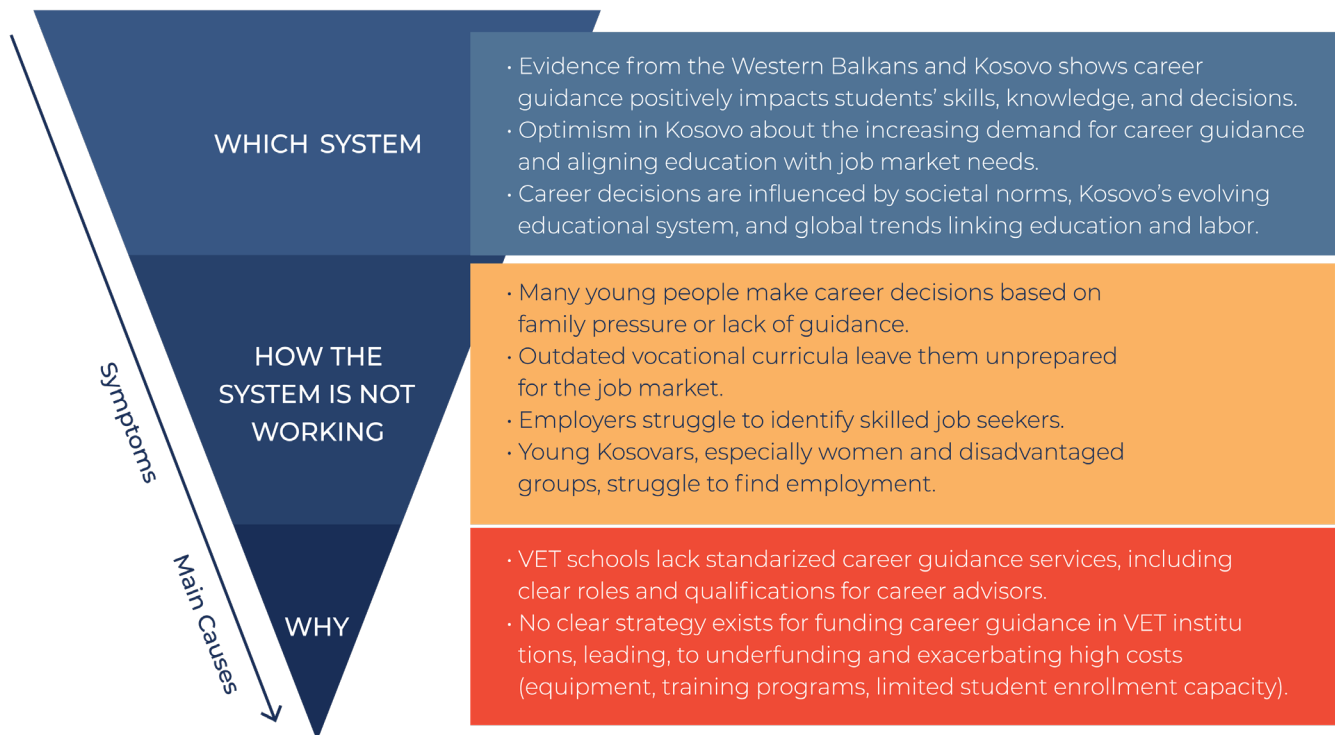


Figure 3: Symptom-cause analysis of career guidance in the VET system in Kosovo

integration of career education into the VET system. Without this integration, students lacked access to important career guidance resources, leaving them feeling lost in their pursuit of meaningful careers. Financial constraints added to the challenge. Limited public funding made it difficult for VET institutions to establish effective career guidance services. This lack of resources meant that crucial support systems were slow to develop, leaving students to make important decisions about their futures on their own.

Without accredited training for career practitioners, those guiding students lacked the necessary skills and knowledge. This left students without experienced mentors when making crucial career decisions.

Additionally, a lack of collaboration between VET institutions and businesses widened the gap between education and industry needs. Students often graduated without exposure to real-world career opportunities or insights into what industries were looking for in new hires.

3.2 The Theory of Change

Responding to the increasing demand for career guidance, and to achieve lasting and system-level changes in VET career guidance, EYE developed the theory of change which has as a focal point the institutionalization of career services

within the VET system and the investment of public funds to make these services sustainable.

IF: public funds are allocated to standardized career services integrated into the VET system and regulated by secondary legislation, ensuring the sustainability and quality provision of services by qualified career advisers.

THEN: diversified and socially inclusive career services will become available in VET schools for all students, leading to greater employer engagement with VET schools, informed career choices resulting in increased enrollment in VET programs, and improved personal and professional development for VET students.

CONTRIBUTING TO: a quicker transition from school to work, which will produce a qualified workforce, increase business competitiveness in the private sector, and foster overall economic growth in the country.

From the start, the EYE project articulated its career guidance vision as “a sustainable career guidance service capable of providing tailored advice to young people regarding career paths aligned with their skills.” This vision aligned with stakeholders’ (e.g., municipalities, VET institutions) main goal of boosting job opportunities for young people.

To achieve the vision, the project focused on two main areas. Firstly, EYE worked on enhancing the job skills of young people in Kosovo. It did this by making it easier for them to access training programs led by industry experts and non-formal educational institutions.

Secondly, the project strengthened the career guidance system. This aimed to enable young people to make informed decisions about their careers. Additionally, EYE sought to improve the labor market information system's efficiency, making it easier for everyone to find the right job.

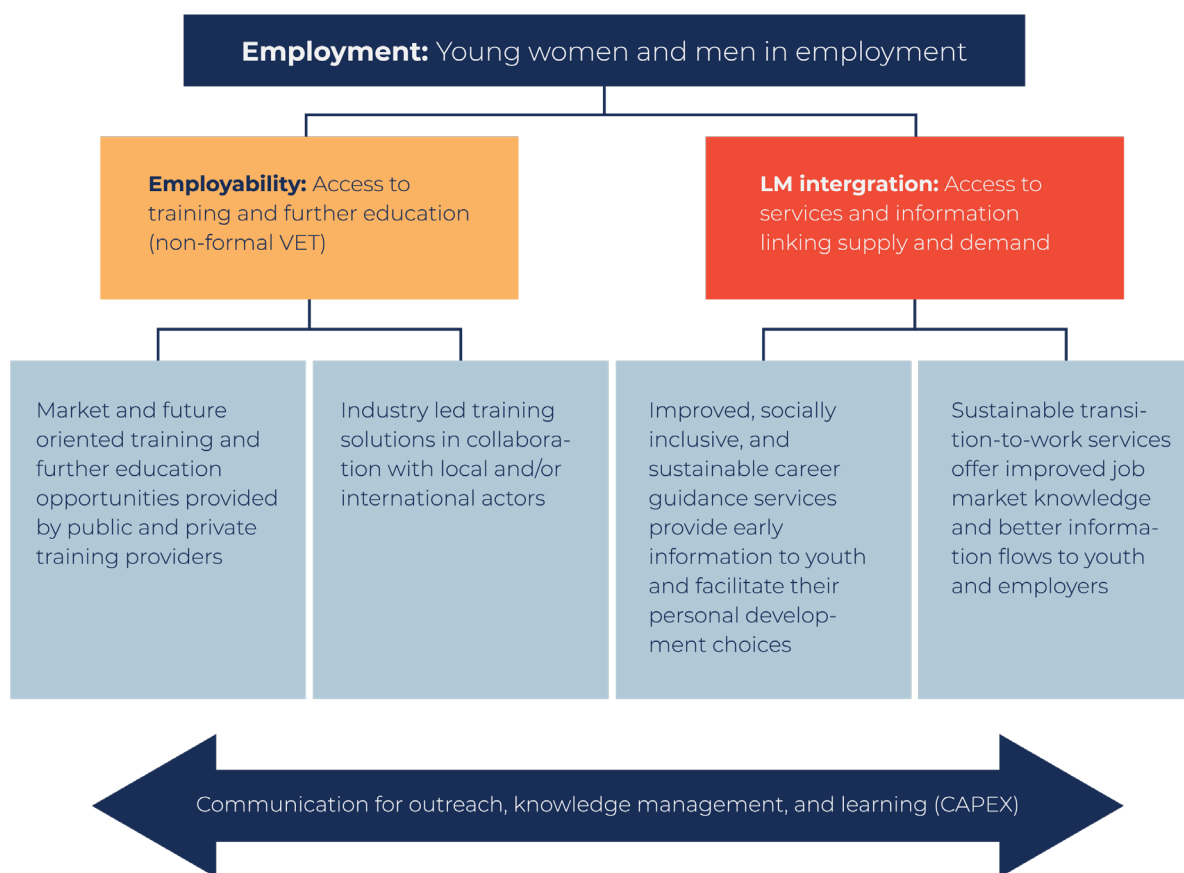


Figure 4: Theory of change of the EYE project VET system in Kosovo

3.3 The Strategy

The project knew exactly where to direct its efforts. It aimed to support young people in sectors offering ample job opportunities. EYE began this by supporting the setting up of the SBCC model within VET institutions. Work-Based Learning was implemented to connect schools with businesses and prepare students for their needs. Despite these successes, young people still need to find the right employers. As demand for accessible and relevant labor market information grew, new service providers specializing in labor market integration, including career centers, emerged.

During Phase II of the project, EYE's approach was not supported by adequate economic and political analysis. Consequently, it did not always yield successful results. This was evident in locations like Kaçanik, which had limited economic growth prospects. In Phase III (2021-2024), the project shifted its focus to areas with viable economic opportunities. This involved collaborating at the local level to promote social inclusion. Partner municipalities were chosen through a competitive process based on specific criteria.

In Phase III, EYE had big plans. The project did not just stop at what it had already built. It supported existing centers to offer even more services, like specialized training for girls and minorities. Also, the project spread its reach to more municipalities. This was done in two ways.

Firstly, the project teamed up with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) to make career guidance a standard part of the VET system across Kosovo. However, there was a catch. While the Ministry said it was onboard, things might change down the road. The project included this uncertainty as part of its adaptive management.

To tackle the uncertainty, EYE had another idea in mind. The project kept expanding the SBCC model. This time, it picked new partners through a competitive process. This ensured everyone got a fair shot, especially municipalities with diverse communities. On top of this, career guidance services remained a new concept for all stakeholders.

EYE's work extended beyond its initial scope by reaching out to donors and other partners. The project shared its knowledge and experiences to improve municipal career guidance services. This effort aimed to stimulate scale by bringing onboard other players, ensuring a wider impact and more sustainable development in career guidance services. By involving moreers, EYE sought to enhance the quality and reach of these services, benefiting a larger population.¹⁰

¹⁰ Solidar Suisse, Syri Vision, GIZ, USAID, LuxDev

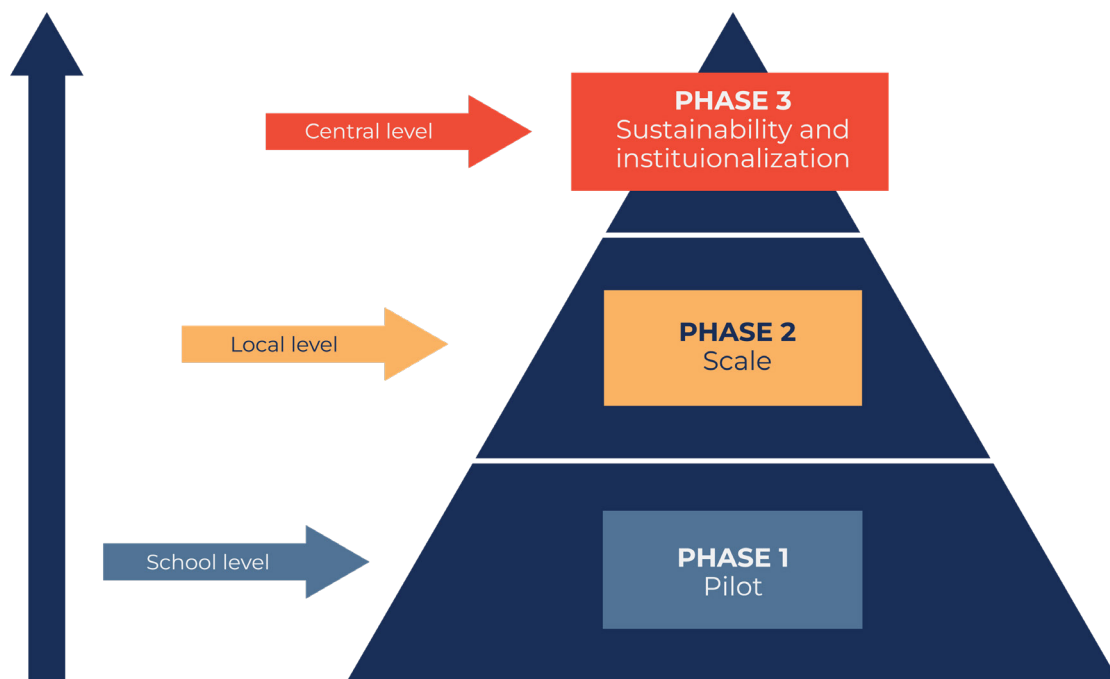


Figure 5: The intervention strategy of the project

Secondly, EYE facilitated adequate investment in the national accreditation of the training program for the qualification of career advisors. It also pushed for the inclusion of this new profession in the List of Regulated Professions in Kosovo. EYE worked with local experts, the Centre of Competence in Prizren, and the National Qualification Authority (NQA) to ensure career advisors were well qualified. To keep things running smoothly, EYE ensured municipalities provided funding for future training sessions for the qualification of career advisors and further professional development. Using this vision and strategy, EYE contributed to building stronger career pathways for Kosovo's youth, brick by brick.

3.4 Zooming into Key Constraints



Architecture is not for you. School is not your thing. You are just a girl with no skills."

These discouraging words were spoken to a Roma girl in Gjakovë city by her elementary school teacher.

From a minority background with limited financial resources and connections, it is easy to see how she could lose hope. Yet, she remained committed to her dream of becoming an architect.

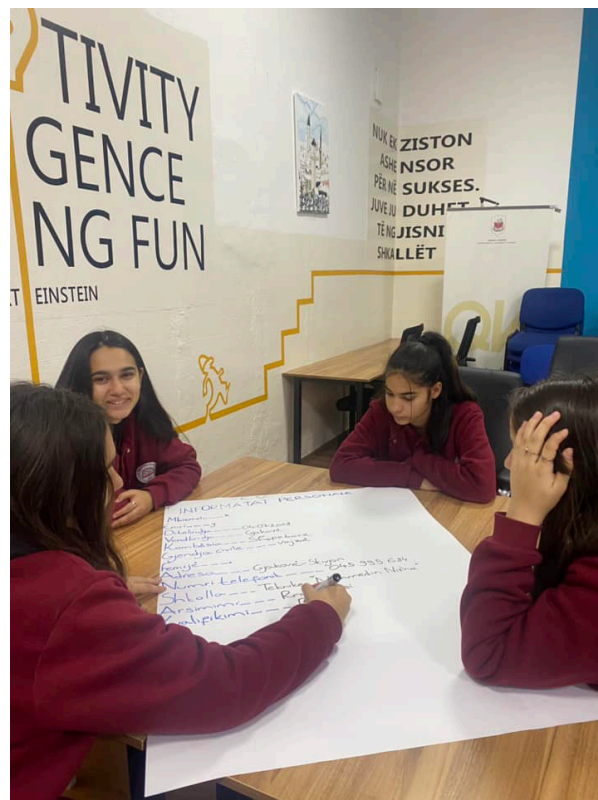
Now 17 years old, she is on the brink of realizing her ambitions, thanks to the invaluable career guidance from the “Nexhmedin Nixha” career center at her VET school in Gjakovë.

In Kosovo, assuming uniform problems across regions is tempting but misleading. The EYE project’s analysis revealed a different reality. Instead of a “one size fits all” approach, the project focused on understanding unique challenges faced by different groups and municipalities. This tailored approach was crucial for effectively meeting diverse needs.

Young Kosovars, especially women, minorities, those from low-income families, and those Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), face socioeconomic gaps. In municipalities like Fushë Kosova, Kamenicë, and Kaçanik, these inequalities are stark. Geographical location also significantly impacts rural youth, internally displaced persons, and migrants. Health conditions further hinder access to career guidance services, particularly for those with physical or mental challenges.

EYE’s extensive research identified two main constraints.

Firstly, a major challenge was the lack of unified, standardized career guidance services in VET institutions. This includes unclear legal frameworks and procedures for integrating career services into these institutions.



Secondly, adequate financing is crucial for sustainable career guidance in Kosovo’s VET system. Despite its importance, there has been no clear strategy for comprehensive funding, resulting in underfunding and complicating an already costly system.



Key Messages of Section 3

Vision alignment: EYE's vision has been to facilitate the establishment of inclusive, relevant, and sustainable career guidance tailored to young people's skills, aligning to increase job opportunities for youth.

Strategic focus areas: The intervention of the project focused on enhancing young Kosovars' job skills through accessible training programs and strengthening the career guidance system to facilitate informed career decisions and improve labor market efficiency.

Targeted approach: Efforts were strategically directed towards sectors offering abundant job opportunities, utilizing initiatives like the SBCC model to guide youth effectively.

Adaptation and evolution: Recognizing the evolving landscape, EYE adjusted its focus in Phase III towards regions with viable economic prospects, promoting social inclusion and implementing competitive selection criteria for partner municipalities.

Expansion and collaboration: The project collaborated with the Ministry of Education to integrate career guidance into the VET system and to establish secondary legislation and regulations, engaged with local governments to ensure funding and effective governance and management of SBCC, and fostered partnerships to enhance career guidance services.

Capacity building: EYE emphasized investment in training programs for career advisors, ensuring they were well-equipped to guide youth effectively, thus contributing to Kosovo's youth's career development and economic empowerment.



Section 4:
PUTTING RESEARCH
INTO PRACTICE



4.1 EYE's Value Proposition

This section describes the activities that contributed to making the strategy come to life.

The career guidance intervention stood out because it promoted sustainability and scalability through a bottom-up, low-cost, participatory model. Unlike direct approaches that risk fragmentation and financial unsustainability, the EYE project facilitated a model that empowers local authorities and uses pilot projects to demonstrate feasibility before scaling up. This approach fostered ownership, reduced dependency on external funding, and ensured a lasting impact on Kosovo's VET institutions.

The project's value proposition centered on delivering a high-quality, well-funded solution by leveraging the benefits of decentralized governance and empowering local municipal authorities. Additionally, it emphasized the importance of guiding partners through patience and evidence-based decision-making processes.

Without this strategic intervention, there was a clear risk of fragmented, financially unsustainable models emerging, thereby risking the continuity of career guidance in VET institutions in Kosovo. However, with the introduction of the EYE proposal, the trajectory of career guidance within Kosovo's VET education system shifted positively, offering a more organized and optimistic outlook for the future.

With funding in short supply, donors held – and still hold – considerable influence over the fate of these initiatives, shaping them according to their own visions. But in this process of influencing the career guidance initiatives within VET institutions, various approaches emerged, each competing for attention, each adding layers of complexity to the search for consistency and quality. EYE has tested different approaches, for example, the Municipality-Based Career Center (MBCC) and the School-Based Career Center (SBCC). SBCC has been chosen to be replicated and institutionalized due to the mode's several benefits shown in the sections that follow.

In the municipality of Gjakovë, a teacher-turned-career advisor reflected on the hurdles her school faced.



Student enrolment has been dropping, impacting our funding,”

she noted. Funding to the VET institutions was tied to the number of students enrolled. Despite capable teachers eager to take on career advising, the lack of official recognition of career adviser's profession held them back.

This meant that teachers, eager to embrace the responsibilities of career advisors, found themselves hesitant due to concerns about job security in a role/profession that lacked official recognition.

It was as though the EYE project had come across the uncharted territories of VET education, where uncertainty existed. However, in this vast and complex VET system, a crucial question remained unanswered: how could career guidance be standardized in VET institutions to shape the futures of the next generation, all while ensuring adequate funding?

EYE's proposal offered clarity and structure, presenting a strong argument that outlined a path forward:

- Municipalities, recognizing the value of career guidance, would invest public funds in establishing and sustaining career centers.
- A qualification program for career advisors would be established and accredited by the NQA so this qualification gets official recognition.
- The Ministry of Education would formally integrate career guidance into the VET system.

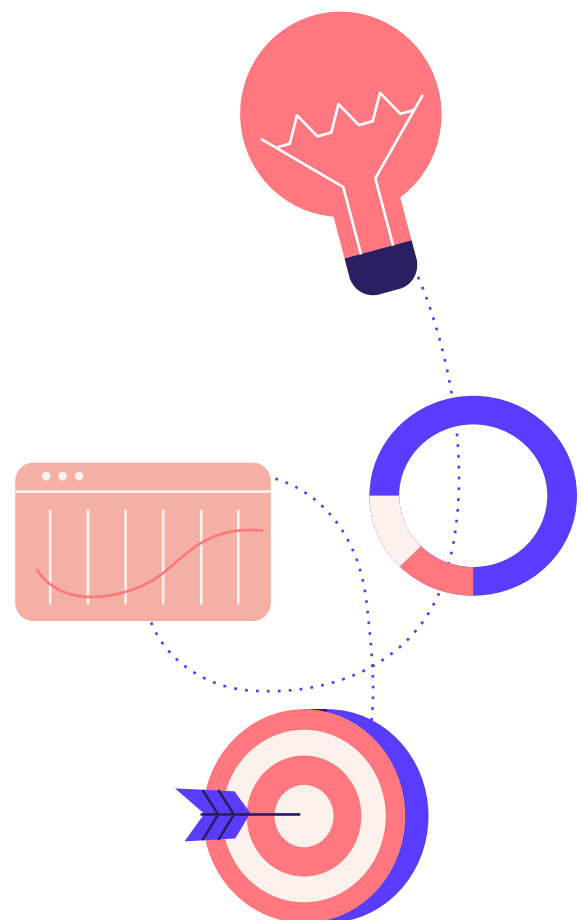
With the above assumptions met, a system of possibilities was expected to emerge:

- Diverse and high-quality career guidance would flourish in VET institutions, guided by qualified professionals.
- Employers would forge stronger connections with VET institutions.
- More students would choose VET paths, armed with informed decisions and parental support.
- VET students would undergo richer personal development, smoothing their transition into the workforce.

To bring about lasting change, EYE embarked on a journey of collaboration and innovation:

- Locally, municipalities, VET institutions, and businesses would form vital partnerships to ensure sustainable career centers.
- Nationally, strategic alliances with the Ministry of Education (MESTI) and key agencies like the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAЕ) would drive the integration of career guidance into the VET system.

Through a detailed four-phase approach, from initial development to nationwide institutionalization, the EYE project initiated the SBCC model tailored to Kosovo's needs.



Problem Statement	Career guidance in Kosovo's VET sector lacks funding, professional recognition, and standardized approaches, leading to fragmentation influenced by external donors and government directives, causing uncertainty and underperformance
Value Proposition	The EYE project offers clarity and structure, aiming to institutionalize career guidance within Kosovo's VET system, a model not tested and introduced in Kosovo. By securing public funds, establishing professional recognition for career advisors, and integrating guidance into the VET system, the project seeks to create a sustainable and standardized approach that benefits key stakeholders – from students to businesses, parents, municipalities, and career guidance professionals.
Primary Stakeholders	Young women and men, including disadvantaged and excluded groups
Partners and their roles	• Municipalities: Provide funding and support for the establishment of career centers. • VET institutions: Implement career guidance programs and facilitate student engagement. • Businesses: Forge partnerships with VET institutions to enhance student pathways into the workforce. • Ministry of Education and other key agencies: Drive the integration of career guidance into the national VET framework. • Career guidance networks and professionals: Offer expertise and networking opportunities to enhance the quality of career guidance services. • Parents and communities: Influence/support students in making informed decisions and advocate for the importance of career guidance.
Impacts	• Improved student decision-making and enrollment rates in VET pathways. • Strengthened connections between VET institutions and employers. • Enhanced personal development for students transitioning into the workforce. • Sustainable and standardized career guidance initiatives within Kosovo's VET system.
Resources	• Public funding from the central government and municipalities for career center establishment and maintenance. • Accredited qualification program for career advisors. • Collaboration with the Ministry of Education and key agencies for national integration and standardization. • Expertise and support from the EYE project for implementation and institutionalization.

Tabke 1: Main elements of the proof of concept

4.2 Designing the Interventions

In 2014, the pilot began under strong local leadership. The director of the VET school in Vushtri highlighted,



“Being the first VET school in this pilot program was challenging.”

They faced numerous obstacles, but EYE tackled issues by maintaining high standards and collaborating strategically, ensuring equitable access to career guidance resources for all.

EYE’s impact pathways focused on three main areas.

Firstly, the project supported the development of a sustainable solution for VET teacher training in career guidance, accrediting a qualification program through a public institution to minimize costs and swiftly equip teachers with vocational qualifications. This excluded unsustainable, costly short courses from external providers.

Secondly, EYE facilitated the institutionalization of the SBCC model within VET institutions, formalizing their role to efficiently use project resources for standardizing career advisory roles, SBCC processes, and VET career guidance services through administrative instructions approved by MESTI. EYE provided technical

assistance, external expertise, and project staff knowledge to support this initiative.

Lastly, EYE aimed for sustainable national-level expansion, partnering with municipalities to jointly invest in VET capacity building. This approach reduced dependence on donor funding alone, enhancing accountability in managing and delivering quality career guidance services aligned with MESTI’s strategy, and minimizing divergent donor agendas.

4.3 Success Factors of the SBCC Model

The career centers, as highlighted by a group of parents and students interviewed, stand out for their strong commitment to quality and sustainability. They are staffed with experienced professionals who possess pedagogical expertise, ensuring they offer highly relevant support. Continuous professional development keeps them updated on industry trends and best practices, ensuring top-tier guidance.

Accessibility is crucial to their mission. Located on school campuses, these centers are easily reachable by all, promoting inclusivity and eliminating entry barriers. They welcome a diverse range of students, from prospective and current VET enrollees to seasoned professionals aiming for career advancement.

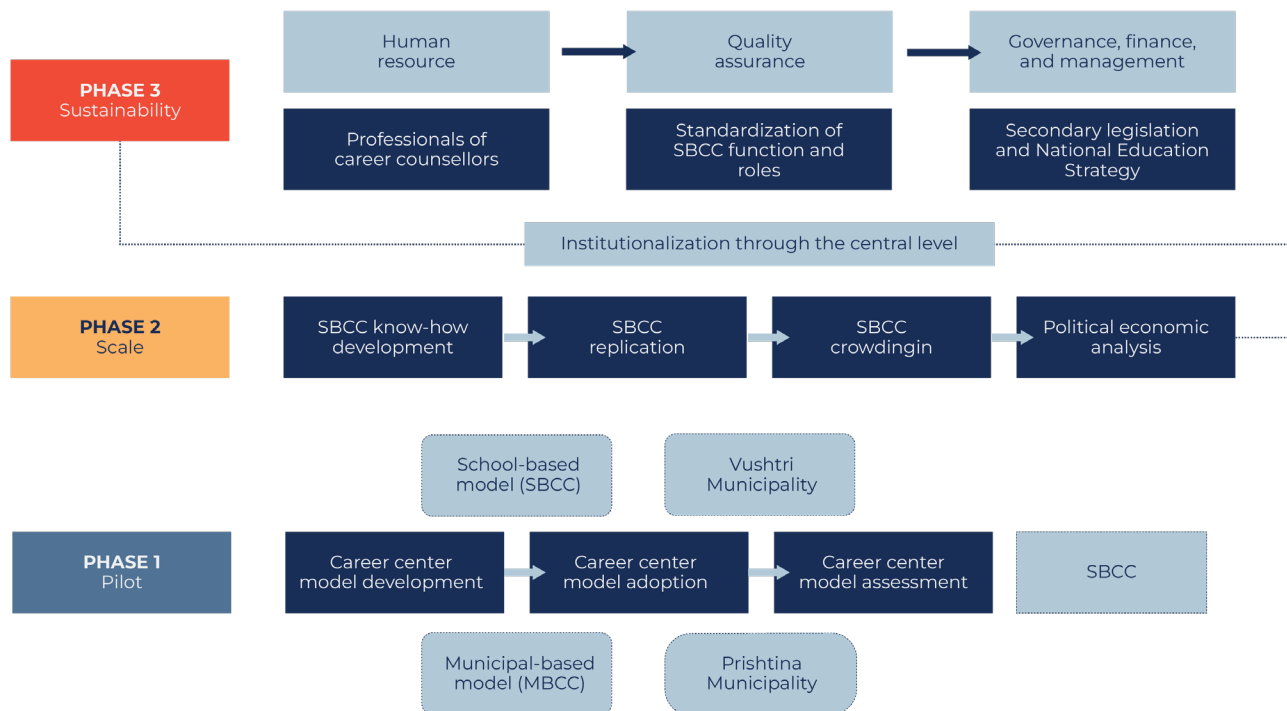


Figure 6: The intervention from pilot to scale and sustainability

Collaboration is central to their approach. By forming strategic partnerships with businesses, the centers aim to bridge the gap between academia and industry, aligning their services with the evolving needs of the job market. Additionally, their engagement with the parents' council underscores their commitment to involving families in their career development journey.

This case study carefully identified six factors that contributed to the model's success. It also highlighted that, despite its effectiveness, this successful model has not received enough attention or recognition for its importance in improving Kosovo's labor market.

Using existing experience and partnerships:

As shown in the next section, the SBCC model started by using local experience. The model brought on-board government agencies, VET institutions, private sector enterprises, and community leaders together. This teamwork made sure their plans fit the trends and shifts, as well as key challenges and solutions. Together, they set clear goals for career guidance and youth support.

Careful selection and training of career guidance advisors:

The SBCC model carefully picked teachers to be career guidance advisors. The ones who were chosen,

for the most part, were experts and loved working with youth. The selection process was strict. Chosen teachers got thorough training to become certified career advisors to guide students well. They became key supporters in students' career paths.

Flexible service delivery: The SBCC model made sure career guidance advisors offered both in-person and online help. This made it easier for all students, even in remote areas, to get career advice. This flexibility was crucial, especially during global challenges needing virtual connections (e.g., COVID-19).

Innovative and locally based career guidance: The SBCC created new ways to offer career advice. The model integrated mixed global best practices with local needs. This made the guidance modern and relevant to Kosovo's economy and culture.

SBCC's approach made career guidance more engaging and effective.

Support from local institutions: Local schools, governments, private sector enterprises, and community groups strongly supported SBCC. Their dedication contributed to creating a strong support system for career guidance. This ensured the program's success and lasting impact.

Cooperation and unified efforts: SBCC worked with other partners to avoid repeating efforts. This cooperation created a strong network for career guidance. It made the model more efficient and increased its reach and effectiveness, with the persistent efforts and strategic thinking of the Intervention Manager of EYE.





Key Messages of Section 4

Contextualization of the problem: EYE highlighted the key deficiencies in Kosovo's career guidance system within VET institutions, emphasizing the absence of essential elements such as funding, trained professionals, and institutional recognition.

EYE's value proposition: EYE proposed solutions to address the deficiencies, focusing on three main pillars: municipal investment in career centers, qualification program for career advisors, and formal integration of standardized career guidance into the VET system by the Ministry of Education.

Anticipated impact: The projected outcomes of EYE's intervention included improved career guidance quality, stronger connections between VET institutions and employers, increased student enrollment in VET paths, enhanced personal development for students, and smoother transitions into the workforce.

Approach and implementation: EYE adopted a collaborative approach involving local institutions, schools, businesses, and key agencies to ensure sustainable career centers. The project outlined a four-phase approach, from know-how development to nationwide institutionalization, tailored to Kosovo's needs.

Clarity and feasibility of the impact pathways: The SBCC model aimed to be compelling and feasible due to its integration within VET institutions, operational excellence, commitment to quality, accessibility, and collaboration with stakeholders.

Formulation of interventions: EYE's interventions included the development of a sustainable teacher training program for career guidance, institutionalization of SBCC by the Ministry of Education, and sustainable national-level expansion through partnerships with municipalities.



Section 5:
ADOPTING INNOVATIVE
PARTNERSHIP: HOW TO
MAKE IT WORK

EYE has followed one or more of the “Partnership Brokering Practices”, mainly, according to the project staff, pushing boundaries to guide effective practice in partnership and brokering roles. These practices include being principled and accountable, maintaining reflective practice to adapt to evolving needs, challenging inequities (pushing boundaries), and building skills in oneself and others. continuous learning and awareness of biases ensure respectful engagement, while timely delegation and inclusive transitions foster sustainable partnerships.¹¹

5.1 Complexity: Navigating and Maintaining Partnerships

This case study is not about the VET system which is by far more complex than the SBCC model of career guidance within the VET institutions. However, for the SBCC model to function effectively and efficiently, the project had to consider the different partners in the broader VET system and manage their expectations and priorities. To help readers understand the complexity, below is a simple description of the VET system and how EYE managed the partnerships for career guidance.

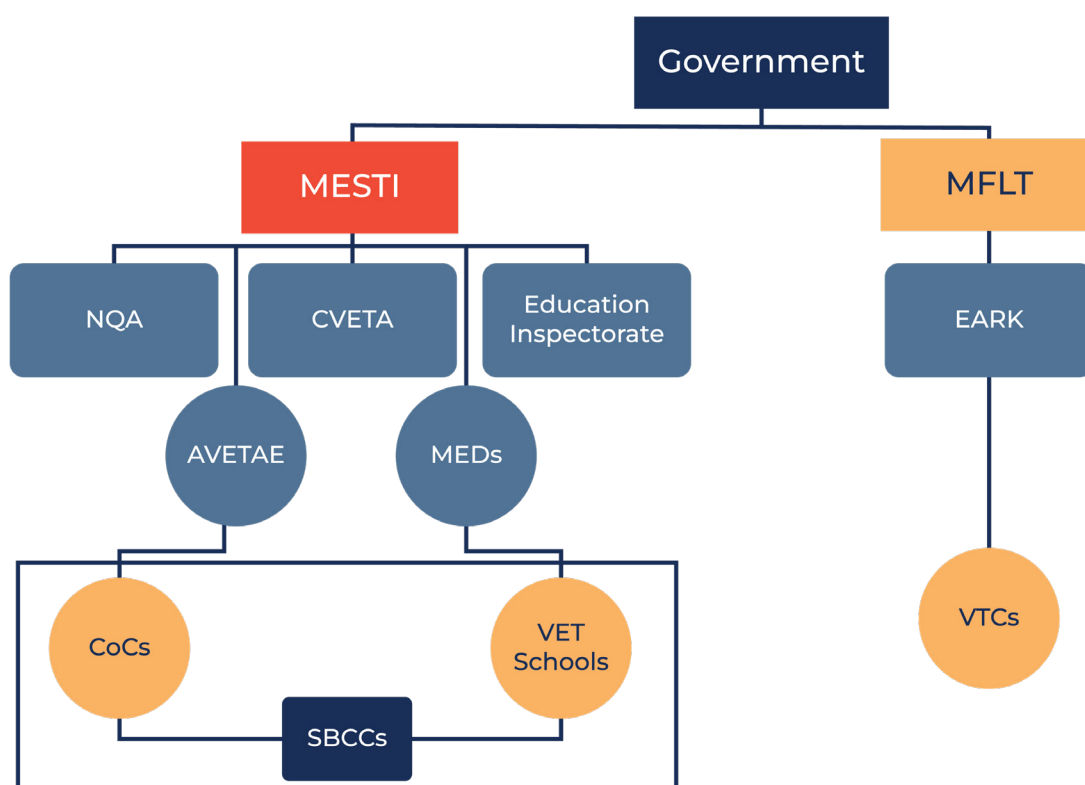


Figure 7: Management structure of the VET system in Kosovo

¹¹ Partnership Brokers Association (PBA). PBA 7 Commitments to Ethical Partnership Brokering Practice. Available here.

The VET system in Kosovo is overseen by a consortium of governmental bodies. Foremost among these is MESTI, which holds primary responsibility for policy formulation and legislative drafting about VET, alongside other educational matters. Supplementing MESTI's efforts are various departments and divisions specializing in VET affairs. The Council for VET and Adults (CVETA) operates as a tripartite advisory entity, tasked with offering counsel to governmental stakeholders on VET and adult education issues and endorsing occupational standards.

At the same time, the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (AVETAE) assumes a role in the administration of Competence Centers, as well as adult education VET establishments. Its responsibility spans financial oversight, human resource management, and infrastructure development for public VET institutions. Presently, AVETAE manages six Competence Centers (CoCs).

The MED in Kosovo has a range of responsibilities regarding the operation of public pre-university educational institutions, including vocational schools. These responsibilities cover the construction of education facilities, student enrolment, employment of teaching and management staff, training, and supervision. 63 VET Schools fall under the jurisdiction and management of respective Municipal Education Directorates (MED).

The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare is tasked with drafting employment and vocational training policies. The

implementation and coordination of these policies is handled by the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo, which operates through 38 employment offices and eight regional vocational training centers. These centers provide training and support to adult job seekers, helping to enhance their employment prospects.

5.2 Roles of Actors in the Partnership

Reforming the VET system in Kosovo demands a collaborative effort that utilizes the strengths of various stakeholders. An effective and efficient partnership depends on several key rationales:

Firstly, municipal authorities, operating through education directorates, are essential for providing local-level support. They ensure that resources are allocated effectively, and policies are integrated seamlessly, laying the groundwork for sustainable reform.

Secondly, VET institutions themselves are integral to the process. They implement career guidance programs and embed them within their curriculum. By actively engaging with industry stakeholders, they ensure that educational offerings remain relevant to the demands of the job market.

Thirdly, the private sector shapes the curriculum to meet industry needs. Businesses contribute to the practical relevance of

vocational education by offering valuable internships and work-based learning opportunities and pinpointing areas for skill development.

Moreover, career advisors (and their networks) deliver personalized guidance directly to students, with active involvement from students and parents in shaping education and career decisions. This ground-level support is indispensable for guiding students toward meaningful career pathways.

Additionally, MESTI provides the overarching framework, setting policies and collaborating to ensure the long-

term sustainability of reform initiatives. The Community of Practice (CoP) and Network of Career Centers further drive ongoing improvement across Kosovo's VET landscape through knowledge exchange and professional growth.

The above rationales for partnerships are an ideal scenario that EYE has included in its vision. The project aimed to create a replicable model of SBCCs for VET institutions, promoting early information provision and facilitating students' school-to-work transition. By involving diverse stakeholders and adopting a bottom-up approach, the project





supported the establishment of SBCCs in VET institutions across Kosovo, providing thousands of students with career services, enhancing their employability, and contributing to socio-economic development.

The key factors for the multi-stakeholder initiative of SBCC were clear criteria for career guidance advisors' selection, state-of-the-art career guidance concepts, committed local institutions, cooperation with development partners, and the dedication of career guidance facilitators.

How did the project walk the talk to realize its vision?

5.3 Facilitation in Practice

We visited over eight VET institutions, interacting with students, teachers, directors, and career advisors. Many students were starting their journey, some with clear goals, others needing guidance. SBCC felt not just procedural but vital—a lifeline ensuring smooth success. The stories narrated gave the impression that SBCC was not just a process—it was a lifeline, a means that ensures young women and men reach their destinations smoothly and successfully.

The project's strategies represented entrepreneurial thinking by creating opportunities and solving problems using

available resources while planning for the future. Here are some of the key tactics employed by the project:

- **PILOTING:** At a VET school in Vushtri, EYE partnered to pilot the SBCC model for the first time. This initiative united students, teachers, and local businesses, creating a vibrant and collaborative community. We spoke with several students, parents, teachers, advisors, and the director. One student enthusiastically shared, **“I discovered my dream of designing clothes,”** while sitting in her workshop, surrounded by the buzz and click of sewing machines.
- **LEARNING AND ADJUSTMENT:** EYE embraced a mindset that valued learning from every experience, even during setbacks. In Vushtri, the SBCC model worked, becoming a proven path forward. **“There is no doubt that, from our experience, the SBCC model offered tailored guidance, vocational training opportunities, and strong support systems,”** argued the director to the VET school in Vushtri. **“This has enhanced the school’s appeal to prospective students,”** he continued. The project took a “lemonade” mindset—turning setbacks into steppingstones.
- **CONTINUOUS FACILITATION AND PERSISTENCE FROM THE INTERVENTION MANAGER:** The resilience of the EYE project was

personified by the Intervention Manager, Valbona Rraci, whose determination and positive outlook inspired everyone around her. Her story shows resolve, signifying that every challenge is an opportunity to grow. Her unwavering resolve and positive outlook not only motivated but also galvanized everyone involved. Through her story, she demonstrated that every challenge encountered was not a setback but rather a steppingstone for growth and improvement. Her leadership underscored the project’s ethos of perseverance and adaptation, ensuring that obstacles were met with innovation and a proactive approach. Her role was pivotal in fostering a culture of resilience within the team and community, driving forward the project’s mission to empower and support VET institutions and their stakeholders.

- **REFINING AND EXPANDING INTO MORE VET INSTITUTIONS:** EYE tried to break away from conventional methods used by other actors like municipality-level career services, youth career centers, and online career platform Busulla.com.¹² The EYE project used the lessons from the first pilot to refine the SBCC model. The project worked on developing detailed operational manuals, designing infrastructure plans, enhancing the branding, and establishing training programs.

¹² Busulla.com: The official platform of MESTI for occupational orientation, education, and career guidance.

A career advisor summarized the experience nicely: “ **When we crossed paths with the EYE project team, we knew that the project was determined to ditch the ‘same old, same old’ methods like municipality-level career services and those online platforms that make you feel like you’re wandering through a digital maze. Instead, we went for something fresh—like the first cup of coffee in the morning.**” EYE brought together different stakeholders. It tried to create diverse voices. This collaborative effort set the foundation for rolling out and pushing forward the SBCC model.

- **SCALING SUCCESS:** EYE’s vision extended far beyond local success. The project aimed to replicate the SBCC model across many municipalities and at the national level, generating and sharing evidence to build momentum. A total of 25 SBCCs (19 facilitated by EYE and 6 by other actors that copied EYE’s model) were established. A Network of Career Centers member stated, “**Career centers have made recruiting interns and graduates easier, and the center also helped companies to promote themselves to students.**”

The EYE project commissioned a Political Economic Analysis, focusing on sustainability by embedding career advisors into the fabric of the VET system. The career advisors were officially recognized, and their roles were standardized. Their capacities, services, workplaces (career centers), and

monitoring systems were brought into an institutionalized framework, thanks to Secondary Legislation. An NGO staff member who replicated the EYE project’s SBCC approach remarked, “**We chose to align with the EYE project because we were confident it would deliver results. The model presented a viable solution to address the needs of our local VET. However, we were also aware that uniting various stakeholders would be no small feat.**”

Conducting a Political Economic Analysis was necessary to ensure institutionalization through technical assistance and coordinated donor efforts at the central level. This would establish a robust legal framework supporting the widespread expansion of SBCCs across VET institutions, ensuring sustainable operational funding and mitigating political risks. Collaborating with AVETAE-CoCs and MEDs-VET schools, particularly in minority-led municipalities, was crucial. Additionally, providing technical assistance to support demand-driven functions for SBCC core services would diversify EYE’s interventions, effectively aligning labor supply with demand.

Annex 1 presents in detail the following four key ingredients (the objectives and strategies) of career guidance that shape its success (or not) in making career guidance sustainable and available to students throughout their vocational education, supporting them to transition smoothly and quickly from school to work.

ADMINISTRATIVE INSTRUCTION ISSUED

BY MESTI: The Administrative Instruction issued by MESTI was a significant step in integrating career advisors and the SBCC framework into Kosovo's VET system. This initiative involved collaborative framework development with stakeholders such as MESTI, VET institutions, and career advisors. The aim was to refine regulatory frameworks specific to Kosovo's educational landscape. This process included continuous refinement and co-development of guidelines to ensure effective implementation and alignment with national educational goals. The goal was to foster a structured approach to career guidance within the VET system.

LEADERSHIP: Municipalities in Kosovo, specifically MED: Under the leadership of municipalities, particularly MED, efforts were focused on aligning local and national objectives for career guidance. This included the development of unified standards and functional models for career centers and advisors within municipal boundaries.

Multistakeholder collaboration was facilitated to enhance career services, fostering partnerships among VET institutions, local businesses, government agencies, and community stakeholders. This approach aimed to tailor career guidance initiatives to meet the specific needs of local communities while ensuring alignment with broader national educational strategies.

BUY-IN: Businesses/Employers: Engaging businesses and employers played a crucial role in shaping Kosovo's VET curricula

to meet industry demands effectively. Through regular market assessments and partnerships for work-based learning, businesses provided insights into various career paths, industry trends, and job requirements. This collaboration aimed to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application, preparing students with the skills and experience necessary for successful transitions into the workforce. By promoting buy-in from businesses and employers, Kosovo aimed to ensure that its VET graduates were well-equipped to meet current and future labor market needs.

INCLUSIVE, ACCESSIBLE, AND HIGH-

QUALITY CAREER GUIDANCE: Network of Career Centers and Professionals: Efforts to enhance career guidance focused on building a network of career centers and professionals across Kosovo. This network facilitated stakeholder collaboration, ensuring continuous improvement and access to up-to-date resources. By developing strategic partnerships with government agencies, educational institutions, employers, and NGOs, Kosovo aimed to provide inclusive and accessible career guidance services. This approach supported the adaptation of career guidance programs to address evolving labor market trends, technological advancements, and the changing needs of individuals and communities, thereby promoting lifelong learning and career development opportunities for all.



Key Messages of Section 5

Partnerships for SBCC: Why they matter – improving Kosovo’s career guidance needed strategic partnerships to influence improvements and support students’ smooth transition from school to work.

Partnership reasoning: Municipal authorities support at the local level; VET schools link education with job market needs through programs; the private sector shapes the curriculum and offers internships; career advisors give students personalized support; and MESTI sets policies for sustainable reforms.

EYE project’s journey: Started SBCCs in VET schools, supporting thousands of students. Key factors for the establishment included choosing the right advisors, using modern guidance, and security community cooperation.

Facilitation tactics: The piloting approach led to the first successful SBCC initiative. The learning and adjustment approach encouraged reflecting on the setbacks. The expansion approach sought diverse partnerships for better solutions. And scaling up phase aimed to spread the SBCC model nationally.

Handling complex partnerships: The VET system’s complexity requires managing different partners’ expectations for career guidance to function well. EYE managed these partnerships effectively within the broader VET system. Key bodies like MESTI, CVETA, and AVETAE, alongside Municipal Education Directorates and the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers, play crucial roles.



Overall summary and conclusion of part one



Kosovo's youth employment landscape is shaped by complex dynamics, as illustrated through the introduction of Ermir, a taxi driver and computer science student. This narrative highlights the disconnect between educational outcomes and job market demands. Educational choices are often influenced by societal norms and evolving career preferences, exacerbated by the pervasive impact of social media.

Key insights of the case study reveal the crucial role of VET institutions in addressing youth unemployment. However, significant challenges persist, including skill mismatches and inadequate career guidance. Despite efforts since Kosovo's educational decentralization in 2008, which empowered municipalities to better align educational offerings with local job market needs, integrating effective career guidance into educational frameworks remains a systemic issue.

This case study examines the performance of the EYE project, spanning from 2013 to 2024. The project aimed to enhance career guidance within Kosovo's VET system. The case study used methodologies like process tracing, counterfactual analysis, and comparative analysis to evaluate the project's impact.

The findings of the case study highlight the project's success in promoting collaboration between the public and private sectors. This collaboration aimed to bridge the skills gap, improve accessibility to career advice, and enhance the relevance of educational curricula. Despite these achievements,

challenges such as sustainability, funding continuity, and scalability across Kosovo and the Western Balkans persist, pointing to the need for ongoing support and strategic adaptation.

The EYE project emphasized the critical need for sustained investment in career guidance to effectively reduce youth unemployment in Kosovo. It facilitated stakeholder collaboration, updated educational curricula responsive to industry needs, and enhanced public-private partnerships.



The EYE project served as a model for leveraging development financing to catalyze positive systemic changes in youth employment. Moving forward, recommendations include continuous support for career advisors, adaptation to evolving labor market demands, and broader dissemination of successful strategies to empower youth across the region.

The project conducted a deeper analysis of Kosovo's VET system, highlighting significant obstacles. The absence of inclusive, relevant, and sustainable career guidance poses a major challenge. Without adequate support, students often make uninformed educational choices that do not align with their interests or market demands.

Financial constraints further hinder progress, limiting the ability of VET institutions to establish effective career guidance services. Moreover, a lack of accredited training for career practitioners leaves students without experienced mentors during critical decision-making moments. The section also addresses the gap between education and industry needs, exacerbated by limited collaboration between VET institutions and businesses.

The complexity of Kosovo's VET system necessitates effective partnership management. Multiple stakeholders, including municipalities, VET institutions, businesses, and governmental bodies like MESTI, play integral roles in educational reform.

Strategic alignment among these entities is crucial for implementing initiatives like the SBCC model for career guidance within VET institutions. This model promotes early career planning and facilitates seamless transitions from school to work by leveraging partnerships to ensure educational curricula meet current industry demands.

Community engagement and stakeholder buy-in enrich the inclusivity and relevance of career guidance initiatives, fostering broader support for educational reforms. Continuous capacity building among career advisors and educational leaders ensures that services remain responsive to evolving educational and labor market needs.

Adaptive management practices allow stakeholders to learn from feedback and adapt strategies, accordingly, enhancing the sustainability and effectiveness of career guidance services. Visionary leadership is highlighted as important in navigating complexities and driving meaningful educational outcomes for Kosovo's youth.



Annex 1

Key areas	Administrative Instruction issued by MESTI ¹³	
	Objective	Strategy
Collaborative framework development	Shaping and regulating the organization and functioning of career advisors in VET institutions, including the role of SBCC within VET institutions.	Regular engagement with representatives from MESTI, VET institutions, and career advisors to co-develop and continuously refine the regulatory framework by secondary legislation, the AI 18/2023 was approved by MESTI in June 2023.
Clear communication channels	Guidelines and directives for educational institutions regarding the organization and functioning of career advisors, and establishment, operation, and enhancement of career centers and guidance services (e.g., standards, qualification and standards of staffing, infrastructure).	Facilitate dedicated communication channels, such as regular meetings to create shared understanding; review existing guidelines and directives from international organizations, other countries, and reputable educational institutions. Analyze successful models and case studies to inform the development of comprehensive guidelines tailored to the context of Kosovo.
Integration into VET institutions	Integration and standardization of career guidance into VET institutions	Engagement of key decision makers to embed career guidance modules into the VET system through collaborative lesson planning, incorporating career guidance activities into existing subjects, and ensuring that career development is a core component of students' educational journeys.
Sustainable funding models	Funding of career guidance into the overall educational experience within VET institutions by generating evidence from pilots.	Advocacy for funding sources by generating evidence from pilots, exploring, and securing financial support, and ensuring that career guidance services are (a) sustainably funded and integrated into the VET system and (b) institutionalized for scaling up at the national level through public funds.

¹³ See section 4.3. The Administrative Instruction and associated standards regulate the organization and functioning of Career Advisers in VET Institutions, while SBCC is only one part/standard of that.

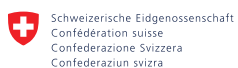
Key areas	Leadership: Municipalities in Kosovo, specifically MED	
	Objective	Strategy
Career guidance development and alignment	Closer collaboration between central and municipal education authorities to develop guidelines for the organization and functioning of career advisors and the establishment and operation of career centers within VET institutions.	Regular exchanges to ensure alignment with national and municipal VET system goals and local needs about career guidance.
Functionality of Career Advisors, including SBCC	Unified standards for services, management, financing, monitoring, and quality assurance.	Building on the strengths of decentralized and empowered municipal government, facilitate the design, testing, and scaling up of a low-cost, sustainable model of a careers center within the VET institutions, and organize an effective functionality of career advisors.
Multistakeholder collaboration at the municipal level	Identification of the incentives and capacities of key stakeholders that need to work with municipalities.	Facilitate collaboration between VET institutions, local businesses, industry associations, and government agencies to enhance career guidance services, including engagement with parents, students, educators, and community members.
Sustainable funding models	Funding of career guidance into the overall educational experience within VET institutions by generating evidence from pilots.	Advocacy for funding sources by generating evidence from pilots, exploring, and securing financial support, and ensuring that career guidance services are (a) sustainably funded and integrated into the VET system and (b) institutionalized for scaling up at the national level through public funds.
Key areas	Buy-in: Businesses/Employers	
	Objective	Strategy
Driving and shaping career guidance programs	Insights into various career paths, industry trends, and job requirements.	Regular market assessments and facilitation of partnerships with businesses to offer hands-on experiences that expose students to real-world work environments, tasks, and challenges (through work-based learning).

Provision of input into the design of VET curricula	VET institutions meet industry standards and fulfill current market needs.	Facilitate quality assurance processes and continuous improvement efforts through feedback from employers about the performance of VET institutions.
Linkages to the world of work	Garner support and involvement in work-based learning and dual education.	Facilitate the transition from school to work through cooperation with businesses, enhancing students' readiness for the job market.
Key areas	Inclusive, accessible, and high-quality career guidance: Network of Career Centers and Professionals	
	Objective	Strategy
Wider and deeper linkages with key stakeholders	Collaboration with various stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, employers, and NGOs.	Development of a stakeholder map to understand their roles, interests, and potential contributions to career guidance efforts by developing strategic partnerships.
Continuous improvement of career guidance	Ensuring career guidance remains relevant and effective in addressing evolving labor market trends, technological advancements, and changing needs of individuals and communities.	Capacitating the network for the assessment, adaptation, and enhancement of the effectiveness of career guidance services to better meet the evolving needs of individuals and the labor market (through soliciting feedback from various stakeholders).
Hub for career-related information and resources	Access to up-to-date labor market information, educational and training opportunities, job search resources, and other relevant materials to support informed decision-making.	Support a community of career professionals by facilitating networking opportunities, discussion forums, and knowledge-sharing (exchange of insights, best practices, and resources, leveraging the collective expertise of the network).
Peer learning among career professionals	Professionals share knowledge, insights, best practices, and experiences related to career development	Strengthening the network as a platform for professionals to discuss common challenges and brainstorm solutions collaboratively.

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