

Increasing Women's Access to Employment



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Increasing Women's Access to Employment

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Brief description of the project objectives and purpose

The project "Increasing Women's Access to Employment" implemented by the Institute for Democracy for Development (D4D) and the Gender Alliance for Development (GADC), supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway in Pristina, aims to increase women's access to the labor market in Kosovo and Albania, through the identification of gender discrimination and the development of strategies for increasing women's access to the labor market in the context of gender equality. The purpose of this project is to analyze and identify a subset of recommendations based on the project findings regarding the employment policies which aim to help detect situations and factors deriving from the pandemic from the perspective of the women's employment, so that common demands and recommendations can be addressed to relevant institutions in Kosovo and Albania to help with the growth of women's employment.

The main activities undertaken within this project include:

- Training and coaching for smaller organizations focused in the area of improving the women's access in the labor market;
- 40 small grants provided to local NGOs and/or informal groups;
- Articles, analysis and animations created to raise public awareness and identify problems concerning women's access to employment;
- Joint workshops with representatives of relevant Ministries and Agencies (organized for several days) to

discuss women's employment and come up with recommendations on government policy documents related to this matter;

- Omnibus surveys and infographics conducted to evaluate citizens' perceptions of women's employment barriers;
- Online and roundtable discussions.

Introduction

In recent years, there have been a number of developments in the context of global and national economies, including the development of strategies and policies with regards to women's access to the labor market in Kosovo and Albania. This paper aims to conduct a comparative analysis and study the approach, employment opportunities and participation of women in the labor market, through examining national strategies, state and institutional policies, as well as actions taken by institutions and other societal actors in eliminating gender barriers. Finally, it aims to provide recommendations on actions needed to be taken to improve women's participation in the labor market and to increase women's access to employment in Kosovo and Albania.

As a democratic value, gender equality has a direct impact on social and economic development. Therefore, the equal participation of women in the labor market and the provision of equal opportunities, in addition to improving the position of women in society, have an impact on their economic empowerment. For societies in Kosovo and Albania this continues to be a challenge, despite the fact that women overall have higher educational qualifications and professional training compared to men, while the legal framework in both countries is advanced for guaranteeing equal opportunities for women and men. The spread of COVID-19 has worsened the situation, particularly in the context of women employment as well as their career advancement and overall economic wellbeing.¹

Increasing women's access to employment is a challenge which obviously requires the involvement of all state and social actors, institutions, universities, businesses, media, and other influential actors. In particular, their support should be invested in promoting gender equality in the labor market as a value and preventing gender-based discrimination that directly endangers the democracy in

Kosovo and Albania.

Current State of the Labor Market

Kosovo:

Kosovo has the youngest population in Europe, while it is the country with the highest rate of poverty² and unemployment in the region and Europe.³ The labor market in Kosovo is characterized by high rates of general unemployment and youth unemployment, high gender discrepancies in employment, and especially high rates of labor inactivity of the working age population. Since declaring independence in 2008 when the unemployment rate was 47.5%⁴, data from the third quarter of 2020 show that unemployment continues to be extremely high. In 2020, 24.6% of the population was unemployed, while unemployment among young people aged 15-24 was 37.7%. Labor market indicators show a high unemployment gap among women with 33.1% compared to 21.5% of men, while in the employment rate only 14.4% of women are employed compared to 46.2% of men.⁵

Given the state and level of unemployment in the country, the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the economic situation and has deepened gender inequality in the labor market. Compared to the previous situation, the labor market has deteriorated, particularly when it comes to affecting the economic wellbeing of women (e.g., women losing their jobs or unable to access the labor market). According to the data, the deteriorating labor market against women has been observed in a number of aspects that continue to be an obstacle for the economic empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equality in the country.⁶

- **Employed women are largely unpaid:** The largest percentage of employed women are employees (83.9%) with a relatively low number of self-employed women (10.4%) and a high number of unpaid employed women which work in family businesses. The highest percentage

of unpaid women employees have primary education (48.9%) while 9.7% of them have a university qualification.⁷

- **The labor market reflects the division of professions based on gender stereotypes:** There is a deep division of professions grounded on gender-based stereotypes. Women continue to be underrepresented in the field of industry, construction and other sectors that are considered male professions. The labor market continues to reflect the division of occupations by gender, resulting in a high representation of women (49.7%) employed in the education, trade and health care sector. The latter are professions or occupations which are traditionally considered suitable for women.⁸
- **Traditional stereotypes continue to be high:** Sharing responsibilities related to family commitments and family care continue to reflect deep inequality, which reflects on women's ability to access full-time work. Statistics show that in 2020, 25% of women work part-time due to family commitments compared to only 2.3% of men.⁹
- **Women are more educated than men, but this does not necessarily reflect employment trends:** In 2019/2020, women in Kosovo completed their university education at public universities by a margin of 60% more than men (about 65% of bachelor's graduates were women) but only 48.9% of women with a university education were employed compared to 70.5% of men.¹⁰
- **Women underrepresented in managerial positions:** Men hold 75.8% more senior managerial positions than women. Only 5.8% of employed women

hold senior managerial positions compared to 10.2% of men.

- **The small number of women who own and inherit family property is an obstacle to the economic empowerment of women and the rise of women entrepreneurs:** By 2019 only 17% of women had registered property in their name (land, apartment or other capital), and about 18% of them were business owners, out of which only 15% received bank loans for business development.¹¹

Levels of Qualifications	Women
Unqualified	44,824
Elementary and middle school (Grade 1-9)	16,324
Professional/vocational education	14,083
High school (gymnasium)	5,910
Bachelor	8,660
Master	659
Ph.D.	0
Total	90,460

Table 1. Women job applicants based on the educational qualifications: Cumulative, October 2020¹²

Albania:

Although women's participation in the labor market in Albania has improved significantly in recent years, Albania continues to face many challenges with regards to lack of equal representation and equal access of women to employment. Key indicators for women's participation in the labor market show that gender inequality continues to be high, and women continue to be underrepresented in a significant proportion in economic sectors. The COVID-19 pandemic situation has had a negative impact on the labor market, marking a decline in employment during the third quarter of 2020 by 1.2% compared to the same period of the previous year.¹³

While Albania has made progress in empowering women in the economic sector if compared to Kosovo and other countries in the region, a number of challenges remain to be addressed, mainly related to the safety of women at work, the percentage of women in the informal sector and the gender pay gap. Meanwhile, the burden of family responsibilities continues to fall on women, where family care discourages women and girls from being part of the labor market. Among the main challenges identified which continue to hinder women's equal access to employment, and consequently their economic empowerment, have been identified through several key indicators:

- **Unequal participation of women in the labor market:** Only 61.8% of women of working age are part of the labor market, compared to 77.8% of men of working age. The overall unemployment rate for women is 11.8%. The highest unemployment rate of 21.4% is observed among women aged 15-29. Among unemployed women, 13.1% of them have higher education, 14.6% have secondary education and 10.3% have primary education. The rate of inactivity among women continues to be high

(38.2%), out of which 70.2% of the age group 15-24 years. Family responsibilities and low incentives to participate in the labor market through low wages are among the main reasons that keep women out of the labor market.¹⁴

→ **Gender wage and representation gap:** In 2020 (Q3), there were 54.2% of employed women compared to 68.7% of employed men,¹⁵ with a gender gap of 13.2%, (2019) which is relatively high compared to the average of EU countries. The gender gap is smaller for women or men who have completed higher education.¹⁶

→ **Unemployment rate:**

- ~ Structural youth unemployment continues to be high.
- ~ Higher education increases employment among women at a rate of 69%.¹⁷
- ~ There is a small difference between women and men in long-term unemployment.

→ **High informality in women:**

- ~ Women are more likely to work in unpaid family businesses or in the informal sector.
- ~ Informality among women is estimated to be from 25 to 50% of GDP, mainly in the agricultural sector, which creates barriers and restrictions for women especially with regards to accessing paid maternity leave.¹⁸
- ~ About 1 out of 4 employed women are self-employed (self-employment with higher education is lower for women at 6.7% in Q4-2020 compared to 20.5% of men).¹⁹

	2020-1 - 38,1%	2020-2 - 39,3%	2020-3 - 38,2%
Elementary school education (8/9 years)	44,1	45,5	43,0
High school education	43,7	44,4	45,0
College education	17,3	18,6	19,7

Table 2. Inactivity rate of women 15-65 years old based on the level of education in the Republic of Albania (Q1-Q2-Q3-2020)20

Legal Framework and Current Employment Policies

Kosovo:

The legislation in Kosovo provides a good basis for encouraging and supporting women's participation in the labor market as well as in decision-making positions. The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, in addition to its gender sensitive language, also has a gender balance in structure or content, by respecting and promoting the principles of gender equality, which are also internationally accepted. Although Kosovo is not a member of the UN and the EU, it has adopted international human rights standards in its Constitution, which derive from conventions and international law. In addition to the Constitution and applicable laws, the institutional framework and national strategies that directly or indirectly affect the issue of gender equality in the labor market, constitute a set of acts which through various policies, aim to improve the current state of the labor market in Kosovo.

The legislative framework that defines, protects and promotes the employment of women in Kosovo includes the *Labor Law, the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Protection from Discrimination, the Law on Kosovo Heritage, and other laws*. This legal framework directly promotes, guarantees and protects gender equality as a societal value, and as an obligation for institutions to act based on principles of gender equality in creating and implementing employment policies and promoting equal opportunities for women.

In addition to the legislation, the main legal mechanisms dealing with the implementation of the law on gender equality are the Agency for Gender Equality (within the Office of the Prime Minister of the RKS), offices for Gender Equality

within the ministries of the Government of the RKS, Office for Good Governance, Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination; The Ombudsperson Institution and the Office for Gender Equality within this institution, as well as the offices for gender equality at the local level.

A number of documents and programs have been created by the Kosovo government in the last half-decade, aiming to guarantee gender equality, increase women's access to employment, improve social welfare for women, and increase and improve conditions for women's access to property and inheritance. Drafting and adapting labor market policies for advancing higher and vocational education, increasing women's entrepreneurship, and improving and enhancing women's access to employment, providing transportation, and increasing the number of childcare centers and institutions are part of government priorities to promote gender equality in the labor market.

The main documents and strategies that address these issues include:

- National Development Strategy - 2016-2021
- Program for Gender Equality - 2020-2024
- Concept Document for the National Development Strategy 2030
- Sectoral Employment Strategy 2018-2022
- Program for Economic Reform - 2021 – 2023

The main policy documents related to employment, which also affects women's access to the labor market and employment, is the National Development Strategy 2016 – 2021 as well as the Concept Document for the National Development Strategy 2030.²¹ According to official statistics, many policies which have been designed to improve women's

employment have been partially implemented. The main current policies and priorities to change the current employment situation arising from these documents include:

- **Improving the quality of education by creating an educational system that meets the demands of the labor market**²² - Having an educational system that help develop professional capacity to meet the demands in the labor market continues to be a setback for the Kosovo government. This has had a negative impact on the country's economy – a contributing factor in unemployment, mainly among youth. The gap between higher education and vocational education programs and market demands has led to many sectors experience professional staff shortages, while some sectors faced new inflows of graduates and professionals who were either not needed or the labor market did not have the capacity to engage them. As a result, in Kosovo there is an increase of unemployed with a high level of education (university and post-university).

Based on the total number of Active Labor Market Measures, 37% women benefited in 2019 as part of the reform to improve employment services and vocational training and increase employment for the long-term unemployed, youth and women and other marginalized groups, through contracting vocational training programs and private providers. Such measures aim to include 39% of women in 2021 and 41% in 2023²³. Vocational Training Centers, which represent the state policies for vocational training of jobseekers for their preparation for the labor market, aim to offer courses, programs, and trainings that are in line with labor market requirements in order to reduce the gap between the profiles of the jobs offered and current requirements. One of the main challenges of these

programs is monitoring of the trainings offered and professional advancement of women. Therefore, training and empowerment of women remains limited to professions that are considered “suitable” for women.

→ **Adopt data-driven policies, strengthening of the property rights system, and increasing the efficiency of the judiciary and fight informality through the creation of a single database:**²⁴

Governments in Kosovo do not yet have a Gender Assessment Report, initially related to gender implications of adopted policies and laws, but also regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment and employability of women in Kosovo. As a result, the Government of Kosovo under the Economic Recovery Program has allocated only EUR 2 million for the financial demands of women during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data shows that the vast majority of women-owned businesses are small businesses, a category that has suffered the most as a result of government’s preventive measures against the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the main obstacles in the development of women's entrepreneurship is the unequal rights of women to property, where it is estimated that only 17% of women have property registered in their name²⁵. Due to traditional patriarchal property and cultural norms regarding property and inheritance, only 3.8% of women in Kosovo are heirs of family property.²⁶

→ **Addressing informal employment and creating appropriate working conditions:**²⁷

Combating informal employment remains a challenge for governments and institutions in the future. Currently, there is no official document or detailed market analysis to determine the exact percentage of women employed in

the informal sector. Therefore, the informal sector, which accounts for a high percentage of the economy, continues to be an unknown sector and not observed. The D4D Institute during the COVID-19 pandemic period in 2020 has raised concerns about the high number of women who have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, but even more so about women who have been part of the informal economy, who have remained unemployed and who have not benefited from the government recovery packages. Consequently, the workers' rights and rights at work continue to not be monitored, and, as a result, the rights of a large number of employees in the informal sector have been violated.

The working conditions in the labor market in Kosovo are still far from international human rights standards and EU standards. The lack of sufficient implementation and monitoring mechanisms but also the non-functioning of the existing ones (e.g., the lack of capacities in the Labor Inspectorate), further challenge this policy. This continues to harm the workers of the private sector and those of the informal economy.

The main challenges regarding employment and social policies is the lack of clarity in terms of responsibilities and mandates of the Ministries responsible for drafting employment and social policies. The Government of the Republic of Kosovo, which approved the Government Plan 2021-2025 in May, 2021, decided that the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare – which was responsible for drafting and implementing labor and social policies, including policies aimed for increasing gender equality in the labor market, increasing women's access to employment, maternity leave and parental leave, and a range of other policies which directly affect the equal active participation of women in the labor market – be divided into different ministries.²⁸

Consequently, the responsibility for preparing, drafting and setting the standards **for social policies, regarding occupational safety, employment relations, social dialogue, employment, and vocational training** falls under the responsibility and the mandate of the Ministry of Finance, Labor and Transfers,²⁹ while **some labor policies related to the internal market, the private sector, and entrepreneurship** fall under the mandate of the Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade, as part of the area of economic development.³⁰ At the same time, the protection of workers' rights includes the issue of maternity leave and parental leave.³¹

Therefore, the labor market sector and employment policies and social policies are currently not functional because there is still no assessment regarding the harmonization of the mandates of these two ministries in the area of employment and social policies, and the conflicting implications that may be raised due to inconsistencies in the mandate and mission of the relevant Ministry with these two important sectors.

Albania:

The legislation in Albania is in line with international standards and European Union standards for gender equality. Albania is a member of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which requires that the national legislation is harmonized with international standards that derive from this convention. There are special articles on the requirements of member states with regards to women employment, including special measures which aim to recognize equal rights of women. The legal framework in Albania is all-inclusive in promoting gender equality and guaranteeing protection against gender-based discrimination.

The Law on Employment Promotion of 2019 aimed to

increase the existing employment programs. Through these programs, women and girls can benefit from financial support for childcare, subsidizing the payment of daycare centers, and transportation services for women and girls from rural areas. The law also provides for the creation of a legal space for the involvement of civil society and third parties in order to include more effective practices at the local and central level to increase the success of these programs.³²

In 2019, in adherence to Law on Employment Promotion, the **Active Labor Market Programs** were approved, which aimed to increase the diversity of partners, access and subsidies related to employment, promoting a comprehensive approach to include organizations, institutions and civil society. Through 36 employment offices, the National Employment Agency provides information and advice on employment opportunities and special services and programs for people with disabilities.

One of the most observed and analyzed strategies is the National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2019-2022 initiated in 2014, which led to the increased involvement of civil society in improving policies and programs related to the women employment. The main priorities of this strategy include:

- 1. promoting the opportunity for decent work though effective labor market policies through:**
 - ~ *modernization of the employment services;*
 - ~ *expanding the active labor market services and programs;*
 - ~ *guaranteeing decent work through on-site inspection;*
 - ~ *inclusion and development of gender sensitivity in active labor market programs.*

2. providing quality vocational education and training for young people and adults through:

- ~ *increasing the quality of education and vocational training providers;*
- ~ *improving VET information management;*
- ~ *VET delivery based on quality framework;*
- ~ *strengthening of the link between studying and working;*
- ~ *professional development of managerial and educational staff;*
- ~ *improving the image of the VET system.*

3. promoting social inclusion and territorial cohesion through:

- ~ *social expansion of employment services and VET;*
- ~ *promoting reintegration into the labor market.*

4. strengthening the labor market and qualification systems through:

- ~ *increasing the performance of the labor market and the qualifications system through the National Agency for Employment and Skills;*
- ~ *Strengthening the role of social dialogue in governing the labor market.³³*

In order to achieve these objectives, the coordination of policies, programs and action plans has made progress to some extent, some of which have achieved their purpose, while others such as on-the-job training have been considered ineffective. The **Training and Professional**

Development Program aims to provide vocational education and training support in order to help participant gain the necessary skills and knowledge so that they are prepared to meet the needs of the labor market. However, the data has shown that only 16% of high school students choose vocational education, making this field inefficient.³⁴

In the National Employment and Training Strategy 2019-2022, the Ministry of Finance and Economy paid more attention to gender efficiency and responsibility for the development of employment and training policies but did not provide specific measures to address gender inequalities in the labor market. However, the existing policies were reinforced to address the specific needs of women regarding their access to employment. In particular, data on women's participation in the labor market were given a special importance. They were researched, monitored, collected and analyzed. Hence, the data on women's participation in the labor market, employment, unemployment, wage gap, and other indicators that highlight gender-based inequalities in the labor market are measured and addressed through specific policies. Examples of special incentive measures such as financial support for childcare and transportation, special programs for women victims of domestic violence or trafficking, and incentives for women through scholarships to study the areas that are traditionally considered men's professions. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection is at the same time drafting the new National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030, in line with the European Strategy and Development of Sustainable Objectives (SDG).

For the economic empowerment of women, the State Administration of Social Services has provided social economic assistance to mothers in families who qualify for social assistance. However, many of these social services do not have a clear legal definition, and lack funding, and therefore, they rely heavily on donor support and civil society.

The challenges of implementing the legislation remain the same, largely to limited implementation and lack of response from relevant institutions and mechanisms to address problems that relate to women's access to employment.

Progress and Challenges

Kosovo:

Although in recent years a number of laws, strategies and programs have been drafted and implemented, women continue to face many problems while exercising their rights in their workplace. These are problems that relevant institutions in Kosovo and Albania should address.

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's employment still remains unrecognized. This is because the number of women employed in the informal sector who suffered the most from the preventive measures imposed by the Government of Kosovo during 2020 and 2021, still remains unassessed and analyzed. There is no accurate data on the number and percentage of women employed in the informal sector;
- Closing of kindergartens during the pandemic - COVID-19 has directly endangered the employment of women in Kosovo. It also has increased the burden on women and unpaid work, endangering the psycho-emotional health of women;
- Single mothers are found to be the most disadvantaged in this framework, as they have not benefited from the economic recovery program
- Lack of effective mechanisms for implementing the laws guaranteeing gender equality;
- Lack of gender-based budgeting according to the legal provisions under the Law on Gender Equality;
- Low level of women's representation in decision-making processes at local and central level; consequently, women

interests remain unrepresented and their needs unaddressed;

- Failure to exercise the right to property and inheritance that restricts access to finance and weakens the economic situation of women;
- Lack of public transportation is a contributing factor that affects the extent women are active in the labor market, especially women that live in rural areas and suburbs;
- Lack of road safety.

Albania:

- Strategic goal 1: Economic empowerment of women and men of the National Strategy and Action Plan 2016 - 2020 has been achieved at 75% and the implementation of the objectives of the National Action Plan for Women Entrepreneurs 2014-2020 has continued;
- The National Agency for Employment and Skills in Albania through the package of gender equality indicators and active measures for vocational training and employment has largely implemented the basic part of the legal framework for gender equality. The provision of services and the manner of their realization according to the needs and requirements has proved to be insufficient for women, due to a number of factors that influence women's access to the labor market;
- Albania has a functional legal framework in the context of gender equality while the Commission for Gender Equality has taken the initiative to review the law on gender discrimination at work;

- Challenges remain as far as providing treatment, counseling and support to increase the access of women in the labor market;
- Based on the monitoring and measures taken by institutional mechanisms, the Labor Inspectorate in Albania considers that the large difference in the level of employment of women and men is still present;
- The amendment of the Labor Code by addressing the provisions and EU directives on the inclusion/non-discrimination in employment, parental rights, the right to information, employer-employee relations and telework;
- Education – Labor division based on gender stereotypes (low enrollment of women in vocational schools, construction, electro-mechanics and manufacturing are considered male professions);
- Consolidation of the legal framework regarding working conditions and health and safety at work and equal opportunities.

Recommendations for Improving and Increasing Women's Access to Employment

Kosovo:

- Draft specific policies that respond to the current employment situation of women;
- Conduct a general gender assessment with accurate data on women's employment, including women's representation in the informal sector;
- Initiate a comprehensive approach for drafting of the new Employment Strategy, with cross-sectoral involvement and increased participation of women in the labor market;
- Address specific issues related to the current barriers to women's access to employment (subsidizing kindergartens and childcare institutions, addressing the issue of parental leave);
- Harmonize education policies that are in line with labor market demands, including strengthening existing career counseling services;
- Provide vocational training services based on labor market demands and deficit areas;
- Strengthen and improve the capacity of the Labor Inspectorate to monitor employers regarding the endangerment of workers' health and labor rights according to applicable laws;
- Involve institutions such as the Ombudsperson and civil society in monitoring and reporting cases concerning gender-based discrimination in the field of employment;

- Create special programs for funding and increasing credit support for women entrepreneurs and women in business;
- Increase the representation of women in labor unions, and adequately addressing the needs and interests of women.

Albania:

- Increase transparency and monitoring with regards to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment and employment of women;
- Ensure the implementation of laws, documents, legal framework and international conventions (CEDAW and ICESCR) related to the promotion of gender equality;
- Continue with government support programs for formal employment of women and combating informal employment;
- Help advance digital skills among young women;
- Provide counseling related to vocational training, employment and career advancement;
- Increase labor monitoring, identification and access of women to reporting violations of rights at work and employment, endangering the health of workers and providing compensation in cases of violations;
- Increase the capacity of the Labor Inspectorate, monitoring and evaluating and monitoring compliance with employment contracts;

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- Involve the institution of the Ombudsman and civil society, for continuous reporting and cooperation on issues of violations of women's and workers' rights;
- Provide adequate information for women jobseekers about employment opportunities by place of residence;
- Undertake public awareness and information campaigns in order to promote women's access in government employment programs, by designing specific skills development programs for women who have been laid off;
- Monitor local government institutions (central and local) for the implementation of employment policies and skills development.

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