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Top Ten European Chances of Kosovo



European Union

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European Union

Introduction

Yes, we can do miracles – together!



Samuel Žbogar,
Head of the European Union Office
and EU Special Representative
in Kosovo

When one is confronted with a summary of European Union funded projects in Kosovo, such as this booklet, there are at least two thoughts that cross our minds. First, how much money has in fact already been invested in this future member of the European family. And second, when European experiences and expertise get together with the dynamic and ambitious people of Kosovo, miracles are possible!

Having three harvests instead of one; moving from the lead-contaminated camp to a proper house; opening of a coal mine with an exploitable capacity of 124 million tons of coal; restoring a 200-year old kulla into a three-storey library; winning a national quiz for schools that will send a child on an adventure trip all over Europe; writing a “letter to myself in the future” – aren’t all these achievements a kind of modern miracle?

They were made possible because of the joint efforts of decision-makers, pre-accession funds, experienced experts and people of good will to change Kosovo into a better place to live, study, work, raise children and simply to enjoy. This booklet is full of such stories. But what makes them real, are the people. A 9th-grader, Diellza Kastrati, winner of the quiz; 58-year old carpenter Ahmet Topaj; new resident of Roma Mahalla Sedat Bahtiu and many, many other individuals are the real heroes of these stories. Because EU investments in various fields literally changed their lives – and changed their private histories into success stories.

And that is why we, the European Union, are here: to help change the lives of the people for the better. In one year that I have been in Kosovo as Head of the EU Office and EU Special Representative, I had the opportunity to visit many municipalities of Kosovo. Wherever I saw EU-funded projects or met the people that were involved in some EU-funded activities, our mutual feeling was always pride. They were proud of the outcome that will help improve their lives – and we were proud to be part of that process. It is nice when mutual trust is born out of pride. That is how long-term friendships are born and futures created. Because the future of Kosovo is a European one – and Kosovo is our, European future.

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EDUCATING FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE



The future prosperity of any country, in terms of economic growth and social and political stability, rests largely in the hands of its young people. This is especially true of Kosovo. Demographically speaking, the population of Kosovo is the youngest in Europe, with approximately half the inhabitants under the age of 25. Investment in the youth of Kosovo is therefore crucial for the development of a forward-looking European state.

The digital future

In response to the needs of children and young people in Kosovo, the European Union (EU) has provided funding for vocational training, students with disabilities, and the upgrading of educational infrastructure to create better learning environments.

In more recent years, education in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has become a focus of EU investment. Countries across Europe have recognised the importance of preparing their children and young people for a digital future – and Kosovo is following suit. Through the Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), the EU is promoting e-Learning and ICT literacy through a EUR 3-million project.

The initiative began by supplying 40 schools and educational institutions with ICT equipment. Meanwhile, 2,000 classroom teachers were trained in ICT and e-Learning protocols. Training was also given to e-Content developers to ensure compatibility of teaching material and textbooks. Teachers and students that have used the new ICT and e-Learning equipment in the classroom say that interactive pictures and videos help to bring topics alive. “Now it is much easier for us to understand the lessons because they are more interesting and attractive, and the issues being taught are clearly illustrated,” says student, Engjell Hamiti.

A modern curriculum framework

Besides the digitalisation initiative, the EU is helping Kosovo carry out a more general modernisation of its educational system. Thanks to a EUR 3-million project, a Kosovo Curriculum Framework has been introduced. Core-curricula syllabuses are currently being developed by MEST with the support of experts from the EU Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) Education initiative.

According to Ramush Lekaj, head of the Curriculum Department at MEST, EU support has helped to introduce modern methods of teaching in Kosovo - in particular, competency-based and child-centred approaches to learning.

A European adventure

For Diellza Kastrati, a 9th-grader from the village of Karaqeva in Kamenica, an 11-day sightseeing tour through Europe was a life-changing experience. Together with four fellow students from her school, she visited some famous European cities, including Paris and Munich, as well as the EU institutions in Brussels and Luxembourg. The experience improved Diellza’s already sound theoretical knowledge of Europe and its history.

The tour was the prize for Diellza and her classmates for winning a national quiz for schools called the “Europe Quiz”. The quiz was devised in direct response to young people’s growing interest in the European Union. Twenty-four schools competed in the first “Europe Quiz”, which took place in 2011. Diellza and her “Avni Rrustemi” team won the trophy – and the chance for a great European adventure.

The questions and answers in the quiz were drawn from a textbook entitled Let’s Head to Europe, produced and distributed to competing schools by the European Union Perspective in Kosovo (EUPK). “This book has provoked students’ curiosity to learn more about Europe,” says Ramush Lekaj, who heads the Curriculum Department at MEST.

The Ministry is planning to distribute the book to all primary schools in Kosovo before the start of the academic year 2012-13. It is also considering using the book as an optional part of the curriculum for Grade 9.

Getting to know Europe through study opportunities

Thanks to a EU-funded postgraduate programme, a group of 222 Kosovo students have already been given the chance to experience best educational practices in EU countries. The Young Cells Scheme organises placements for Kosovo postgraduate students at selected universities in Europe. The students are bound to work in public administration on their return to Kosovo.

Around 80 percent of Young Cells Scheme graduates currently work for the government of Kosovo at various levels, both in ministries and specialised agencies. The aim of the Young Cells Scheme is to widen the expertise of civil servants in key sectors of Kosovo’s public administration. The graduates will be able to use their first-hand knowledge of EU countries and policies to help the Kosovo government meet its obligations during the EU Integration Process.

Some quotes from the “Europe Quiz” winners:

- “My dream is to study European architecture.”
- “Seeing and learning about European cultures changed my opinion about Europe for good.”
- “I was impressed by the European Parliament.”
- “We have learned more about possibilities to study in Europe.”
- “I am impressed by European cities now I have seen them.”

YOUNG CELLS SCHEME GRADUATE

Valeza Ukaj

- Studied EU Economy and EU International Relations in Leuven, Belgium
- Works at the Department for European Integration and Policy Coordination, in the Ministry for Culture, Youth and Sports

“Apart from the lectures from the world’s leading professors in the field of EU issues, we also had special legal clinics, which were of great benefit.”

YOUNG CELLS SCHEME GRADUATE

Vjosa Beqaj

- Studied Management and the Environment at the University of Lancaster, United Kingdom
- Works as Acting Director for the Department of Infrastructure and Natural Resources in the Ministry of European Integration

“Whilst enjoying the excellent lectures, coping with a different education system and exploring the local culture, I also gained insight into how environmentalism can be successfully applied in developed countries. As policy-makers, we are trying to improve society’s approach to environmental issues.”

YOUNG CELLS SCHEME GRADUATE

Florim Canolli

- Studied European Studies at the University of Westminster in London, United Kingdom
- Works at the Ministry of European Integration

“My experience with the Young Cells Scheme reminds me of Julius Caesar’s famous saying, “Veni, vidi, vici” (“I came, I saw, I conquered”). The experience and academic qualifications have helped me to develop a sustainable career within the Kosovo public administration. Now I am actively and successfully promoting the best European values and practices in Kosovo.”



MORE PLAY AND LEARN OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN



Regular participation in sports and recreational activities brings children together and keeps them healthy and active. It can also help to shape thriving and inclusive communities. Recognising the shortage of adequate sports and recreational facilities for young people in Kosovo, the European Union has provided funding for the construction of new sports fields, playgrounds, and recreational centres across the country.

The “Youth in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica” initiative is an excellent example of the benefits of EU investment. One of the city neighbourhoods now has a brand new sports facility. There are now regular football and basketball matches, and tennis lessons are offered to local children of all ages. The site also includes a children’s playground. In appreciation of the EU investment, the municipal authority takes pride in maintaining the premises to the highest possible standard.

A new Sports and Cultural Centre in the village of Llabjan/Labljane in the municipality of Novobërdë/Novo Brdo, was also made possible by EU funding. This ultra-modern facility includes a multi-purpose games court for basketball, handball, volleyball, and football, and can accommodate up to 320 spectators. The Centre also houses a ballet and dance studio, and a library.

New sports fields and playgrounds have also been created in Prishtina/Priština, Peja/Peč, and Prizren. All these new facilities were constructed with strict adherence to EU guidelines on safety and durability.

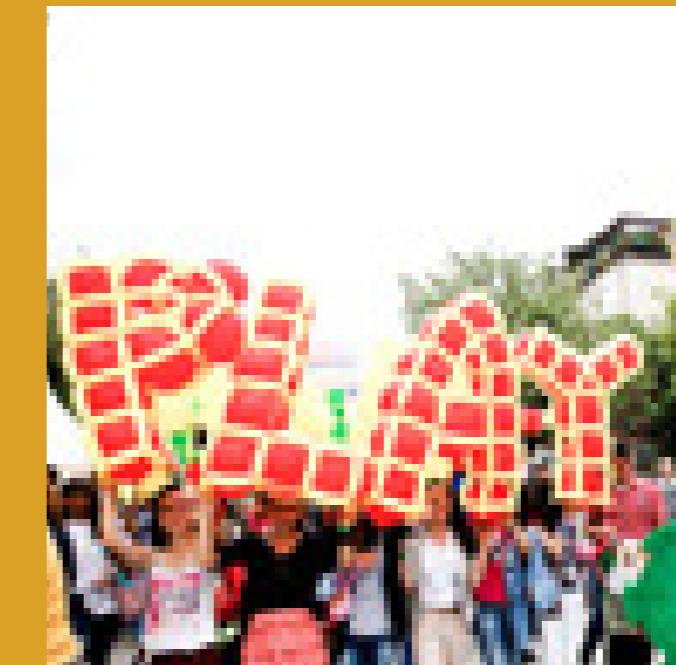
“Play 4 All”

June is a special month of the year for the children of Kosovo. The “Play 4 All” Children’s Festival encourages children of all ages to hit the streets of Prishtina/Pristina for a week of activities, parades, and celebrations.

The festival is a EU-funded project implemented by SOS Children’s Villages Kosovo and the Centre for Visual Arts Multimedia. Now in its third year, “Play 4 All” brings children together from all over Kosovo to take part in creative workshops, watch movies, and attend theatre and street performances. The aim is to give young people an opportunity to learn through educational and recreational activities, as well as a chance to express their own artistic talents and creativity.

The project is unique of its kind in Kosovo because it offers a large number of activities that involve children from all social groups working together. The inclusion of children with disabilities or from minority communities helps to foster confidence between future generations.

The “Play 4 All” Children’s Festival has become a tradition, and has put Kosovo children on the European map with a special national event of their own. When the festival week is over, children can continue to take part in the various prize-winning competitions that take place in Kosovo throughout the year. For example, in 2011 five schools received investment grants from the EU after winning an open competition for ideas to improve the environment in public spaces. Prizes were also awarded for the three best essays on the topic “A letter to myself in the future”.





SUPPORTING RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CULTURAL INITIATIVES





The cultural life and heritage of a country are an important part of its national identity. They also offer an opportunity to develop tourism, and to involve local communities both socially and economically.

With support and encouragement from the European Union, Kosovo's cultural profile is now being actively developed – both at a regional and European level. Besides funding various cultural activities, the EU is also assisting with the restoration of castles, monuments, and other important heritage sites. Kosovo is regaining pride in its rich cultural heritage.

Beledije

The city of Prizren on the banks of the river Lumbardhi has long been an important economic and cultural centre in Kosovo. Beledije, an 18th-century mansion, is a prominent landmark in the historic Old Quarter of the city and a fine example of Kosovo's architectural heritage. During the Ottoman Empire, Beledije was used as a municipal office. However, following EU-funded restoration work in 2011, it has now become the first cultural heritage training centre for the Balkan region.

The centre offers specialist training for builders and architects in the delicate techniques used to restore ancient buildings and monuments. There are also training courses in other fields of cultural activity; for example, museum management and the conservation of ancient artefacts. To generate additional income, Beledije will also host cultural events for countries outside Kosovo.

Whilst Kosovo currently has only a limited number of heritage experts, Vjollca Aliu, Head of the Cultural Heritage Division in the Ministry of Culture, anticipates that the Beledije centre will play a vital role in developing capabilities in this sector. Kujtim Gashi of the culture section of Prizren municipality is also optimistic for the

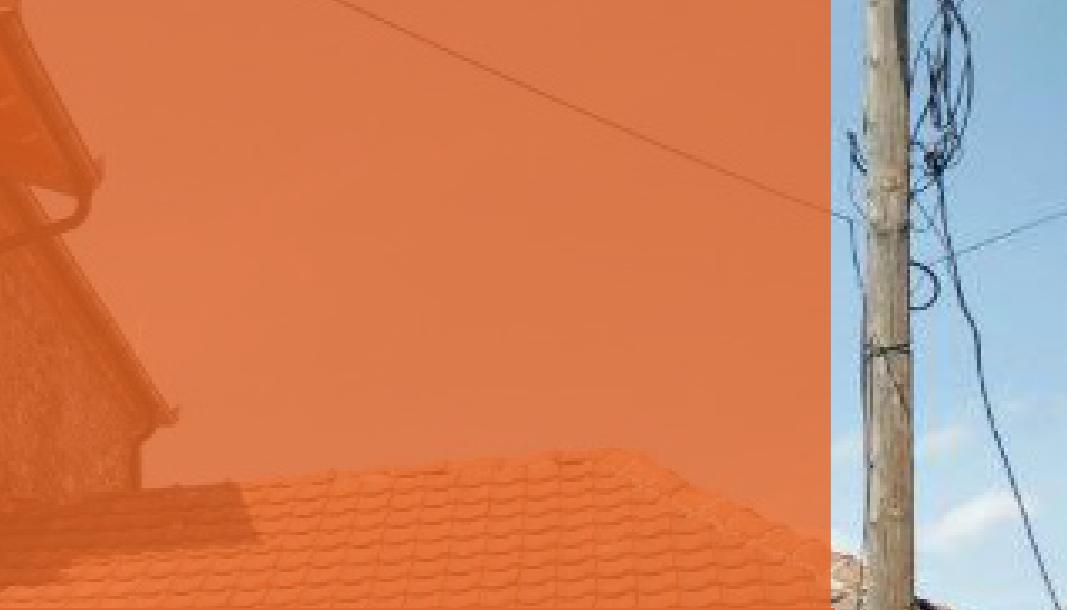
future: "As a regional centre, Beledije provides real opportunities for the development and conservation of our cultural heritage," he says.

Restoring traditional houses in Junik

For hundreds of years the Albanian people of western Kosovo used traditional building methods to construct houses out of just stone and wood. This ancient craft is no longer practised in Kosovo today, and the majority of the old Albanian stone buildings (called kellas) have either been destroyed, or are falling into disrepair.

The municipality of Junik was once home to over 200 kellas and more than a dozen stone mills. Unfortunately the vast majority have been demolished over the years – and with them much of Junik's architectural heritage. Today there are only around 20 kellas still standing in Junik.

Thanks to EU funding, these few remaining kellas are now being given a new lease of life. A programme of restoration work is underway to convert damaged or derelict kellas into fully functional modern buildings. The mayor of Junik, Agron Kuçi says, "Whilst modern construction methods are being used to restore the buildings, great care is being taken to maintain their traditional appearance."



Kulla e Hoxhajve

One of Junik's old Albanian stone houses – Kulla e Hoxhajve – has been restored with financial assistance from "Beautiful Kosovo", a EU-funded initiative set up to improve urban infrastructure and at the same time provide employment for local people.

The inhabitants of Junik now have a brand new, three-storey library with capacity for thousands of books and a staff of three full-time librarians. The kulla can also be used as a gallery and for other cultural events.

Carpenter Ahmet Topaj, 58, carried out the final quality inspection of the woodwork in the newly renovated kulla. Ahmet has lived in a similar building for many years, and was delighted to have helped in the restoration of this 200-year-old stone house for his community. "It was in a pretty bad condition. I never thought it could be turned into such a lovely space," he said.

This short-term project was welcome employment for Ahmet and 33 others workers from the area, who were mainly selected through the local job centre.







Dokufest

The International Documentary and Short Film Festival, Dokufest, is the most renowned and established film festival in Kosovo. For over a decade visitors have flocked to the city of Prizren to watch new films and documentaries in the various indoor and outdoor screening venues.

The EU Office in Kosovo and the organisers of Dokufest have established a strong cooperation to promote human rights through the arts. During the 2012 festival, six documentaries about human-rights issues were produced with EU funding. Over the years, the EU has also focused its support on regional cultural exchange. "The European Union has contributed to the growth of the festival, especially by helping us to strengthen the regional competition," says Aliriza Arenliu, executive director of Dokufest.

Culture for all

Kosovo's cultural identity is taking shape. The "Culture for All" initiative, funded by the EU and implemented by various NGOs, has so far promoted 30 small-scale, nationwide projects. Meanwhile, the government of Kosovo has also pledged support for all cultural activities.

Ideas for new cultural activities encourage a European dimension. Valeza Ukaj, Acting Director for European Integration and Policy Coordination at the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports, says: "The 'Culture for All' initiative not only raises awareness of the internal cultural diversity of Kosovo, but also cultural diversity in the EU."

Information about nationwide cultural organisations and activities will be compiled into a "cultural map" to make it easier for people to find local or national activities that interest them.

Promoting tourism in Dukagjin

In the Dukagjini region of Western Kosovo, another kulla is destined to become a coordinating office for tourism. The building's superb location at the foot of the Gjeravica peak (the highest mountain in Kosovo at 2,656 metres) makes it ideal for this purpose.

The "See you in Dukagjin" initiative aims to revitalise a long tradition of tourism in the region. Implementing partner, Cultural Heritage Without Borders, sees tourism as an important tool for the economic growth and preservation of cultural heritage in Kosovo. The new tourist office will be run by professionally trained staff and provide a first-class service for visitors to the region. The area's many tourist attractions include world heritage sites, traditional houses, hammams, glacial lakes, and other areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Pristina Jazz Festival

Unlike the rest of Europe, regular jazz events are hard to come by in Kosovo. However, for one week of each year Pristina becomes the exciting hub of the universe for the country's jazz lovers.

The Pristina Jazz Fest has evolved into one of the most important cultural events in Kosovo. Since 2005, jazz lovers have flocked to the city for seven days of jazz concerts, jam sessions, and workshops. For some, the festival week is the only chance they get to listen to live jazz performances.

Promoting young artists is a key objective of the festival's organisers. Taulant Mehmeti, a 20-year-old jazz guitarist, performed his compositions for the first time at the 2011 Festival. "It was a great feeling to play in front of an audience that appreciates jazz, and we enjoyed it," he said. "The concerts during the festival are our only opportunity to enjoy live jazz in Kosovo," he added.

Other features that make the event so special for young jazz musicians are the opportunities to play in jam sessions with international artists, and the discussions of jazz-related issues during workshops. Director Ilir Bajri says the festival stresses the importance of stimulating artistic collaboration and exchange between countries and cultures.

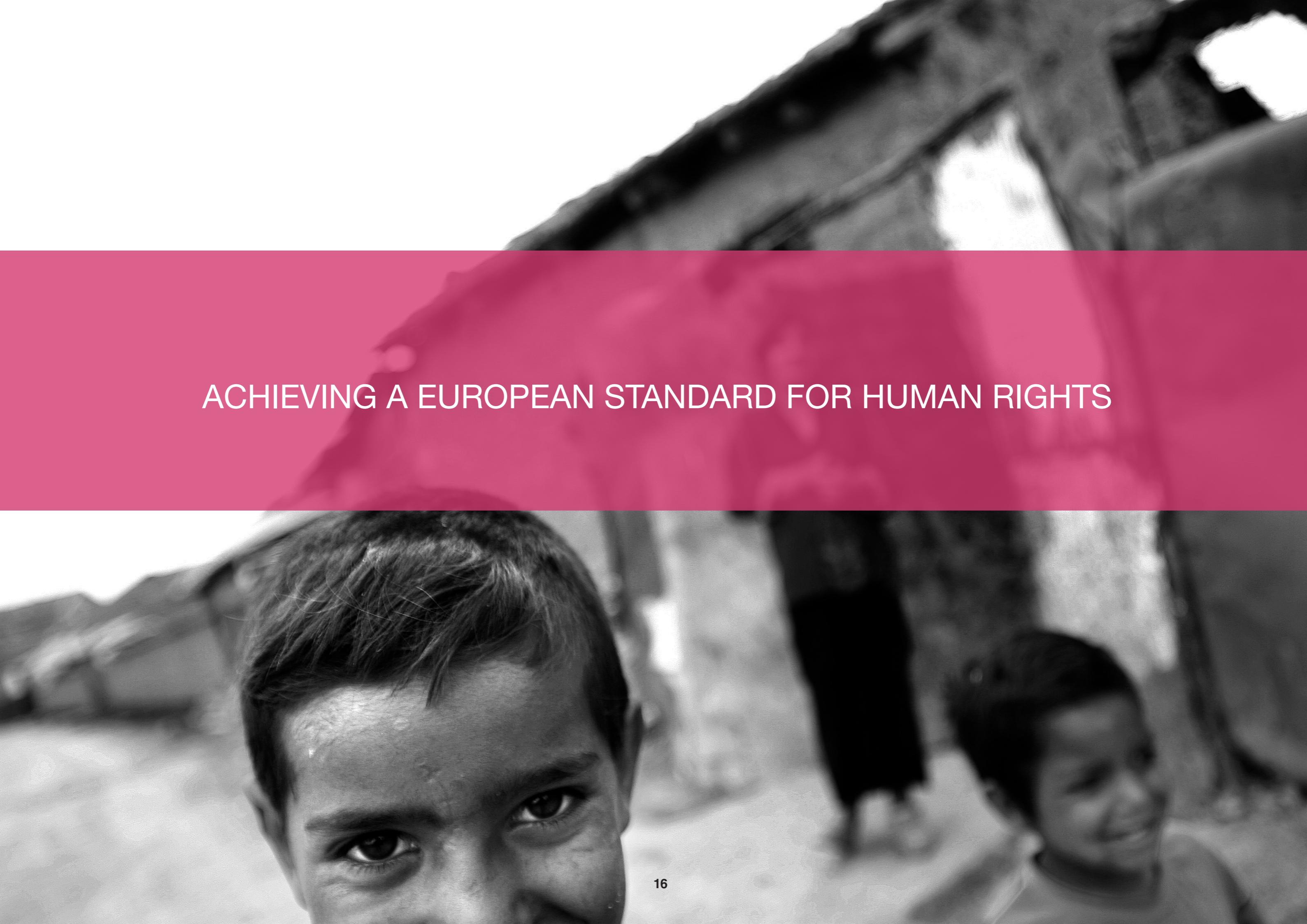
Young creatives

In line with the EU trend of using creative approaches to critical thinking and writing, the NGO Integra has devised an interesting new idea for tackling social issues in Kosovo.

Young people are asked to produce a number of quick-fire slogans on the subjects of education, corruption, and European integration, amongst others. The groups of young people are gathered together to discuss and produce the slogans in a series of meetings. Once they have exhausted a topic and decided on a slogan, they move on to the next issue.

Thousands of slogans have been printed and distributed in cities across Kosovo, and also given radio coverage. The slogans are designed to raise public awareness of various social concerns. One slogan reads "The EU dream is killing me" – which refers to the complex issues surrounding Kosovo-EU relations; for example, restrictions for Kosovo citizens wanting to travel to the EU.

If someone stops and spends few seconds thinking about the slogan and the issue it addresses, then the goal has been achieved. "The style of the slogans are witty, combined with a simple but artistic design," says Kushtrim Koliqi, Director of Integra. He adds, "This is an innovative and unique format for tackling social issues. It makes people think – but we are not part of the solution."



ACHIEVING A EUROPEAN STANDARD FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



There are approximately 40,000 Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian (RAE) people living in Kosovo today. These minority communities are the poorest and most vulnerable sector of society, with a range of social problems that include unemployment, inadequate housing, and limited access to education and healthcare. Improving the socio-economic wellbeing and protecting the human rights of these marginalised communities is the focus of several initiatives funded by the European Union.

Roma Mahalla

One example is Roma Mahalla in the suburbs of Mitrovica – a new development, built to re-house displaced Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian people from nearby refugee camps. The local authorities allocated a site for the development, and the EU invested EUR 5 million in the project.

The new neighbourhood has a complete urban infrastructure and easy access to the city centre. “We have provided a first-class location for this human initiative. The Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities enjoys the best living conditions by far compared to the rest of the region, or even to other European Union countries,” says Avni Kastrati, Mayor of Mitrovica.

Seventy-one families from the communities have now moved to Roma Mahalla. One new resident, Sedat Bahtiu, is grateful that his family can now live a normal life, and that his four children have access to full-time education. “Everything has changed for the better,” he says. “One cannot compare life in a camp with the house we live in now.”

A brighter future for Avdyl

Five-year-old Avdyl spent the first years of his life in a refugee camp just north of Mitrovica. Although he looks like a healthy young boy, clinical tests revealed excessive levels of lead in his blood as a result of lead contamination in the camp. But life is improving for Avdyl. He and his family were recently relocated to Roma Mahalla, and he is now receiving appropriate medical treatment. Avdyl’s medical care

is part of a wider EU-funded project to support the resettlement of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities from the lead-contaminated camps of Osterode and Cesmin Lug. In addition, the World Health Organization, in partnership with the Kosovo authorities, has adopted a screening and treatment programme for children suffering from lead poisoning.

Finding a vocation

Part of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities reintegration process is a programme of vocational education and training. For example, a professional hairdresser in Mitrovica offers apprenticeships to young mothers from the communities. She sees real career potential in some of the trainees.

Fatime Jahirovic is one of 30 women who enrolled on the training course. She has done well – and is now looking forward to a career in hairdressing, and one day owning her own beauty salon. Fatime is among the many people who received EU grants for vocational training and are also eligible for grants to finance new small business ventures.

Education

Elsewhere in Kosovo the EU, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), have awarded 220 secondary school and university scholarships to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students. The initiative is part of an Action Plan formed by the Ministry of European Integration and the European Commission to promote integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The ultimate aim is to recruit members of the communities into the public sector, and thus increase their representation in civil processes and local decision-making. Improved access to education is crucial to help move the communities towards full equality in Kosovo society.

Safeguarding cultural heritage

Raising awareness of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian culture and traditions can also help to enhance the status of these minority communities in Kosovo. The Festival of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian Culture, now in its second year, is an important celebration of the communities’ heritage. During the 2011 and 2012 festivals, a wide range of cultural events, including plays, movies, concerts, poetry reading, photo exhibitions, was staged in Prishtinë/Priština, Prizren, and Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.

Successful progress towards EU membership will depend on Kosovo’s ability to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all its citizens. Specifically, safeguarding the human rights of minority communities is an important challenge for Kosovo society as a whole.



INITIATIVES FOR GREEN KOSOVO



Capital investment in a range of infrastructure projects in Kosovo has made a positive difference to the quality of the environment. Cleaner air, soil, and water are helping to improve the everyday lives of citizens.

Improving waste management

The seven years between 2001 and 2008 saw the closure and rehabilitation of 21 uncontrolled, hazardous landfill sites, and the construction of six new managed waste-disposal plants in major cities across Kosovo. The investment was granted by the European Union to bring Kosovo's waste management systems into line with EU policies on environmental protection, pollution, and the processing and recycling of waste.

This environmental improvement received a boost when the EU also funded a project to close and rehabilitate eight further uncontrolled landfill sites in Prishtina/Priština, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Gjakova/Đakovica, Kaçanik/Kačanik, Kline/Klina, Lipjan/Lipljan, and Podujevë/Podujevo by the end of 2011. Construction work to clean and cover the sites began in 2010. New drainage systems, groundwater monitoring systems, and biogas wells were installed, and the areas prepared for planting and landscaping.

A cleaner capital city

The enormous size of the uncontrolled landfill site in Prishtina/Priština forced the project to focus more than 40 percent of the work and funding on this location. Pollution of the surrounding air, soil, and water had reached such alarming levels that hundreds of local residents were unable to open their windows. Some even moved to live elsewhere.

Now local people have returned to the area. "Before the old dumpsite was closed we were in daily risk of suffocation from the smoke coming out of the garbage. Now we have our lives back again!" says a local inhabitant who lives close to the site. Management of the new plant will be transferred to the municipality of Prishtinë/Priština. "The municipality plans to landscape the site to create a green space for recreational activities," says Mr. Agim Gashi, Director of Public Services.

Sewage treatment and water quality

Effective, sustainable sewage collection and treatment is a core objective in the EU's environmental policies. Existing sewage systems in Kosovo are inefficient and inadequate for current or future usage. The EU has identified an urgent need to upgrade this sector, and is investing in various initiatives across the country.

Water quality in the River Klina that flows through central Kosovo has significantly improved since December 2011. Thanks to EU investment, the municipality of Skënderaj/Srbica now has a new sewage treatment plant that serves around 8,000 inhabitants. The new system ensures that only environmentally safe, treated water is discharged into the nearby River Klina and small streams.

Four smaller sewage networks and treatment plants are currently under construction in Kuk/Kukovce (Dragash/Dragaš), Skivjan/Skivjane (Gjakovë/Đakovica), Junik/Junik, and Medvec/Medvece (Lipjan/Lipljan). The new plants will serve populations varying from 1,100 to 3,400 inhabitants. Meanwhile, a survey of sewage systems is being carried out in seven major towns and cities – including Prishtina/Prishtina/Priština, where significant investment is needed to meet the needs of a growing population.

Forestry

Around 41 percent of Kosovo's territory is covered by forest. It is important to protect these forests, while at the same time ensuring that the forestry sector plays a role in strengthening the economy.

Kosovo is committed to conserving its forests and promoting their potential for tourism. EU-backed projects offer guidelines for local authorities on how to manage state and privately owned forests and stimulate rural development according to best European practices.



SOWING THE SEEDS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT



The agriculture industry is regaining its position as a major employer. The European Union has to date invested around EUR 70 million to support agricultural and rural development in Kosovo. Part of the EU funding has been put towards establishing regional development agencies, grant schemes, and training farmers in modern agricultural methods.

More than 30 farmers and many small- and medium-scale rural enterprises in Kosovo have now been introduced to European agricultural standards through EU-funded projects and expert advice – leading to increased job opportunities and prosperity across Kosovo. Helping farmers to increase their production efficiency will also play a crucial role in replacing imported foodstuffs with home grown agricultural produce.

Model farms

Many of the grant-sponsored rural projects are run by NGOs. One EU-funded project was entrusted to the Initiative for Agricultural Development in Kosovo (IDAK), an NGO with more than 10 years' experience of supporting the agriculture sector in northern Kosovo. Four model farm units – for fruit processing, cattle farming, apple growing, and greenhouse cultivation – were established under IDAK's supervision. The model farms are used to demonstrate modern agricultural methods and technologies. "Many farmers have benefited from these demonstrations, as certain techniques were unknown to them before," says IDAK director, Zenel Bunjaku.

Farmers are subsequently offered training by farming associations, in cooperation with IDAK. One of the training courses is specially tailored to teach women fruit and vegetable processing skills. A new training manual for farmers will be published in the near future.

Bumper crops!

In the Mitrovica region, grant schemes and professional training have produced impressive results. In the village of Çaber/ Čabra, just north of Mitrovica, a new 500-square-metre greenhouse unit can be seen from a distance. Despite sub-zero conditions outside, the temperature inside the greenhouse is maintained at a constant 25°C to keep the spinach crops growing.

Ahmet Uka, 42, now uses new cultivation methods to prepare his seedlings. "A grant has helped me to maximise production and grow my business. Now I harvest three times a year, instead of just once," he says.

Uka returned to Kosovo in 2000 after more than 20 years' experience of farming in Germany. A few years ago he started selling seedlings to other farmers. He had initial sales of around 500 seedlings per year. This year he plans to sell 20,000 seedlings, with projected sales of 30,000 per year in the future. Mr. Uka also produced more than 10 tons of tomatoes in the autumn of 2011.

A new approach to distribution

In the fertile agricultural regions of southern Kosovo, a new fruit and vegetable collection and processing plant has been set up in the village of Xerxe/Zrza.

An existing building was renovated and equipped with modern weighing machines, refrigerators, and forklift trucks. Now produce from local farms arrives at the collection point to be selected, graded, packaged, and labelled before being sent out to wholesalers or exported.

The plant serves as a collection point for farmers from the regions of Rahovec/Orahovac, Mamusha/Mamuša, Prizren and Suhareka/Suvarka, who grow peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, grapes, and cabbages. Farmers now know the final destination of their produce before they even plant the seed. The ability to plan in advance helps farmers minimise wastage, employ labour more efficiently, and thus improve their revenues. "We used to throw away leftover fruits and vegetables when there were no buyers. This collection point gives us confidence that all our produce will be sold," says local farmer, Nebih Morina. Besides familiarising farmers with the new concept of a collection point, special training in modern cultivation methods is helping to guarantee high-quality produce. Around 200 farmers have completed the training, and now regularly supply the plant.

The project was made possible with EU investment together with a small contribution from the local authorities of Rahovec/Orahovac. The plant expects to process approximately 2,000 tons of fruits and vegetables seasonally. Market opportunities have already opened up, and there are new contracts with regional and European wholesale buyers.

Small grants, big impact

Small grants have also been instrumental in revitalising the rural economy in the region of Prizren. These cash injections have proved invaluable for small businesses and small-scale farmers, helping to boost their productivity and competitiveness in the market.

From manual to automatic

Wine producer, Florim Shulina, is a very happy man. He no longer has to label each bottle of wine by hand! Situated in the Rahovec region, famous for its high-quality wines, Shulina's business received a boost when a EU grant supplied him with an automatic labelling machine.

"It used to take us all day just to label few crates of wine. Now it's a matter of seconds," he says. His "Shulina" wines can now meet market needs in sufficient quantity – and he no longer has to worry whether the labels are the wrong way round!

Bees: turning a passion into a business

It is March, and in the village of Mirditë just outside Prizren, beekeeper Ndue Nokaj is opening his hives for the first time in 2012. He needs to check that the bees are healthy after the long, freezing winter.

This year he will collect more honey than usual. "A grant has helped me to increase the number of hives just at the right moment," says Mr. Nokaj, who supports his family through his passion for beekeeping. The grant scheme has also provided beehive maintenance training for Nokaj and many other beekeepers in the region.



UPGRADING KOSOVO'S INFRASTRUCTURE



Since 1999 a pressing need to upgrade roads, airports, railway networks, hospital buildings, water supply networks, and sewage systems has made capital investment in infrastructure a high priority in Kosovo.

The creation of a modern infrastructure is essential for Kosovo's economic growth. The European Union is supporting projects to help Kosovo upgrade its infrastructure and meet European standards.

Improving road transport

The EU has allocated EUR 50 million for the improvement of the road networks alone. To date around 300 kilometres of main highways and 30 local by-roads have been repaired or reconstructed across Kosovo.

A major project was the reconstruction of 17 bridges on the M2 – a major arterial road that connects Kosovo with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The bridges were strengthened and repaired in accordance with the Eurocode Standards required for heavy traffic and military vehicles.

Recent improvements in the quality of the roads have increased opportunities for economic development and created better conditions for cross-border cooperation. In addition, easier access to towns and cities has enhanced the quality of life for rural populations. As another positive spin-off, the roadworks have provided employment for countless people – and given them the opportunity to upgrade their skills in line with European construction and safety standards.

A new healthcare centre

In November 2011, a new healthcare centre was opened in Vushtrri/Vučitrn. The facility serves more than 100,000 local inhabitants, and was financed by the EU at a cost of around EUR 800,000.

The new centre offers comprehensive healthcare services; for example, an accident and emergency department, X-ray facilities, and microbiology laboratories, plus clinics for paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, general medicine, and dentistry. There are also student doctors' rooms, nursery rooms, and spacious administrative offices. Construction of the centre was in strict compliance with European building standards, which include suitable access and internal facilities for disabled people. The building has also been fitted with solar panels to make it energy efficient.

People are delighted with their new, user-friendly healthcare centre. Patients like the comfortable waiting rooms and the clear signage that directs them to the various departments. Fifty-six-year-old Asllan needs regular medical check-ups for his chronic respiratory disease. He is relieved to have the new centre close at hand and enjoys the warm reception he receives on his visits.

Water supply networks

Other infrastructure projects have focused on improving water supply networks and sewage systems. The EU has invested an overall total of EUR 60 million to rehabilitate and extend water supply networks across Kosovo.

Two million euros of this funding were spent on replacing two kilometres of aging water pipes in Prishtinë/Priština. The results have improved water quality, reduced water losses, and increased water capacity for an estimated 70 percent of city dwellers.

Another EUR 13-million project is working to rehabilitate and extend water supply networks and upgrade the water-treatment plant in Mitrovica. The plant serves four municipalities with a total of 250,000 inhabitants, and has doubled the processing capacity since its completion in 2012.



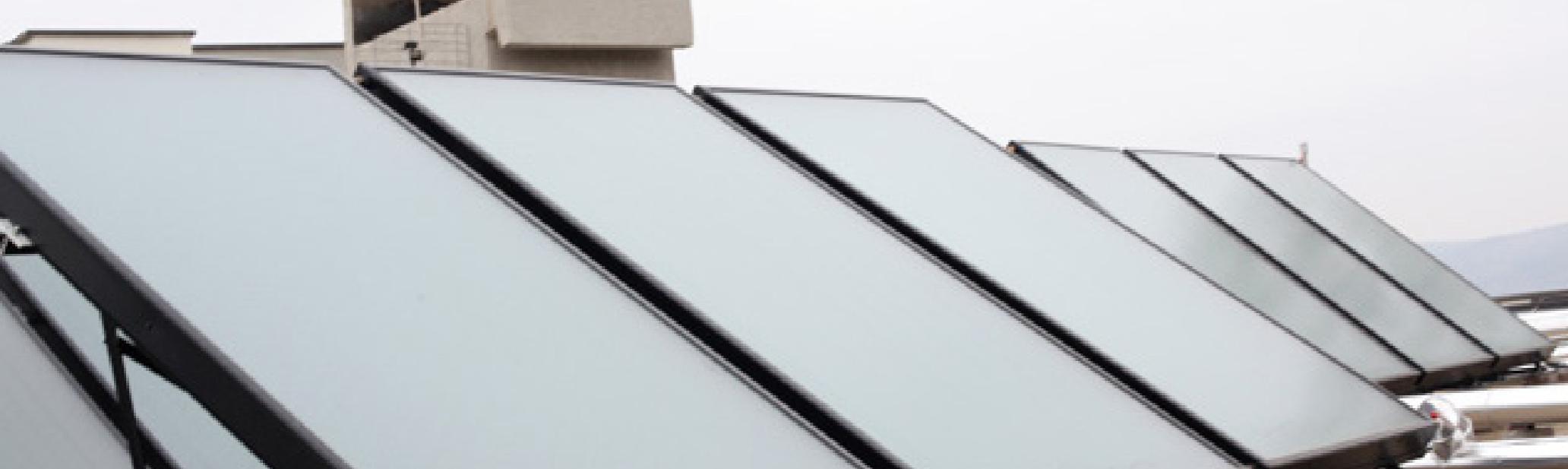
Improving water quality

The National Institute for Public Health received a set of new laboratory equipment for testing water quality. The donation came from the EU following recommendations from a feasibility study on public health in Kosovo. Other recommendations included investment for refurbishing treatment plants and pumping stations, and installation of water meters.

"People have always been aware of public health issues, but EU projects are helping us to adopt European standards for public health," says Burbuqe Nushi-Latifi, Chief of the Water-Sanitary Department at the National Institute for Public Health.



DEVELOPING A CONSCIENTIOUS USE OF ENERGY



Kosovo's energy sector continues to face difficult challenges. With low energy production and high energy consumption, power cuts in Kosovo are routine. Historically, the country's main source of energy has been its indigenous coal mines. However, these have neared depletion in recent years.

One of Kosovo's key objectives is to reduce energy consumption by nine percent by 2018. Increased energy efficiency is a vital part of the overall plan. A EU EUR 2-million project is supporting the training and certification of 55 energy auditors who will identify potential for energy-efficient measures. The project also includes a public campaign to encourage energy saving and the use of renewable energy resources.

The Energy Community Treaty

Kosovo is part of the regional Energy Community Treaty that seeks to incorporate south-eastern countries of Europe into the wider European energy market. The aims of the Treaty are to increase investment in the sector, and thus enhance planning capabilities and improve the reliability of regional energy supplies. In compliance with EU energy and environment legislation, an agreement to cut energy consumption and improve energy efficiency in Kosovo was signed in November 2011.

In line with the agreement, the EU is providing technical support for a new heat-production system in Prishtinë/Priština. This innovative system uses the by-product heat from coal-powered generators that would normally be released into the air. Prishtinë/Priština public district heating company will be able to deliver sustainable heating to the population of Prishtinë/Priština through integrated, fuel-efficient technology.

Comfort in the classroom

Improving energy efficiency in public buildings is another major challenge in Kosovo. With around 2,500 students, Ismail Qemajli is one of the largest elementary schools in Prishtinë/Priština. Until recently the school's winter fuel bills constituted a major part of its annual expenditure. However, despite this huge financial outlay students and teachers were forced to wear coats in the classrooms to keep warm.

Thanks to EU investment Ismail Qemajli school is not only warmer but more energy efficient. The building has been fitted with new doors and windows and the walls and roof have been properly insulated. A new set of solar panels contributes a low-cost energy input. The optimum temperature indoors is now constant throughout the building – and students and teachers are at last able to concentrate on their lessons, rather than the cold!

Since refurbishment, the school has reduced its energy consumption by more than 50 percent, and its CO₂ emissions by about 260 tons. "Our energy expenses have dropped by almost a half," says the school vice-director, Bajram Vrapçani, adding that the school requires heating for a much shorter period thanks to improved insulation.

Similar energy-saving measures have been carried out in another school in Pristina, as well as two more schools in Gjakovë/Đakovica, and the maternity ward of the Gjilan/Gnjilane regional hospital. Not only will the new refurbishments improve levels of comfort for the buildings' occupants, energy consumption is expected to drop by at least 40 percent, with a significant reduction in CO₂ emissions.

A new mine in Sibovc

The EU has responded to an application from the Kosovo authorities to open a new coalmine in Sibovc village. The new mine has potential to provide sufficient coal to run existing power plants when current supplies run out. The initiative includes updating existing mining machinery – a measure that will improve safety and increase excavation capacity by an estimated 50 percent.

"The Sibovc Mine is the biggest energy project in Kosovo over the last two decades. The mine has an exploitable capacity of 124 million tons of coal," says Arben Gjukaj, Managing Director of Kosovo Energy Corporation (KEK).

The project was valued at over EUR 17 million and has been co-sponsored by the Kosovo Budget. It is anticipated that the new mine will help to stabilise electricity supplies and improve living conditions for the people of Kosovo. It will also provide an attractive opportunity for investors both in and outside the region.

Using the newly refurbished machinery, the initial phase of work to remove soil from the surface of the site was started in 2011.



INSTILLING CONFIDENCE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION



Administrative reform is a continuous process – and usually fraught with difficulties. Kosovo currently has a large network of administrative bodies whose costs far outstrip their allocated budgets. As a first step towards stimulating socio-economic prosperity, the public administration in Kosovo needs to improve its efficiency and accountability, cut internal costs, and provide a more effective public service.

Public procurement

The European Union is helping Kosovo's administration to become more familiar with European legislative processes, and to carry this knowledge and expertise into its own policy making.

In October 2011 the Kosovo Assembly adopted a new Public Procurement law, thus marking the end of a 10-year EU campaign to encourage reform in this sector. The new legislation is designed to ensure efficient and transparent use of public funds, plus an proportional use of resources. Tightening the public procurement processes will help in the fight against corruption, and pave the way towards economic and political stability in Kosovo.

The EU has also focused special attention on local government, which is responsible for front-line public service delivery. The European Cooperation for Stronger Municipalities is a EU project that aims to strengthen the effectiveness of local government administrations in Kosovo. Many municipalities have now set up EU coordination offices. However, much more still needs to be done to improve services for local citizens.

Supporting the Auditor

Continued support for the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) is another EU priority in the drive to improve management of public funds in Kosovo.

With help and guidance from Member States experts, the legal framework of the OAG has been reformed. Previously under the sole auspices of UNMIK, it has now become a national institution. Moreover, there has been significant improvement in the management, administrative, and auditing skills of OAG officials. The OAG is now able to deliver high-quality reports – on time! The public now has a better understanding of the function of the OAG, and it has become a well-respected organization.

A new Census

The first national Population and Housing Census for three decades was conducted in Kosovo during April 2011. Census data is an important tool for many sectors of society, including businesses, international organisations, research and academic institutions – and most especially for policy makers at municipal and government level. The 2011 Census will provide a snapshot of modern Kosovo and the socio-economic profile and housing conditions of its inhabitants.

A team of 27 census experts from the International Monitoring Operation monitored the Census to ensure that it met professional standards of quality, transparency, and impartiality. The EU provided EUR 3.8 million to fund the process. “The expertise provided by EU over the years has been essential to obtain statistics according to international standards,” says Isa Krasniqi, Executive Chief of the Statistical Agency of Kosovo. “The Agency has collected trustworthy data that can be used both domestically and outside Kosovo.”

Accurate demographic data for the population of Kosovo will influence government planning and policy making over the next decade. It will also update statistical data for Kosovo in EUSTAT and other data agencies worldwide.

A positive spin-off from the Population and Housing Census has been a better understanding of the needs of disabled people in Kosovo.

Support for the disabled is administered by the Prime Minister's Office for Good Governance, which has been responsible for implementing a national Action Plan on disability since 2009.

The Census questionnaire included a list of chronic difficulties likely to be experienced by disabled people. Participants were asked to tick a box beside any that might apply to them individually. The results highlighted the crucial importance of allocating resources where they are most needed, and called for a complete revision of the Plan's existing policies.

The Italian government is supporting implementation of the new Disability Action Plan. “Data from the Census will be critical for redefining the policies and services for people with disabilities,” says Dolores Mattosovich, manager of a project supporting the Kosovo National Disability Action Plan.



REBUILDING CONFIDENCE IN THE RULE OF LAW



The rule of law in Kosovo is fighting to retain credibility. Widespread reforms are crucial to bring the country's justice system into line with European standards. The European Union is helping to achieve this end by assisting in the drafting of new laws, contributing capital investment for legal infrastructure, and supporting a new approach to the selection and vetting of judges and public prosecutors.

Screening legal candidates

Devising new procedures that scrutinise the professional and ethical standards of members of the judiciary has been a major achievement of joint effort between the EU, the United States government, and the legal institutions of Kosovo. More than 300 candidates for appointment to the judiciary were put through a new vetting system. They included existing judges and public prosecutors and first-time applicants.

The candidates sat an exam on legal codes of ethics. Only those that passed the exam were eligible to apply for office. Investigations were then carried out to check the background of each candidate. This was followed by in-depth interviews, and a review of the performance record of each individual.

At the end of the selection process, some 60 percent of the successful candidates were new to office – thus injecting vital new blood into Kosovo's judiciary. The whole procedure was co-financed by the EU and the US government at a cost of nearly EUR 5.9 million.

Raising standards

European standards of legal objectivity were applied as part of the vetting procedure. "Above all, clear evidence of transparent and objective standards and procedures is vitally important to restore the

credibility of the justice system," says Musa Dragusha, President of the Chamber of Advocates. He feels optimistic that this stringent vetting of the judiciary will give the citizens of Kosovo more confidence to take their cases to court.

Submitting judges and public prosecutors to closer professional scrutiny has also been welcomed by the Anti-Corruption Agency. "The judiciary has been the most criticised branch of administrative power, and it is important to restore its credibility," says Mentor Borovci, the Agency's deputy Head. The Anti-Corruption Agency has referred several cases to the Prosecutor's Office in the past. However, few resulted in prosecutions.

On-going training

Strengthening the judiciary is a continuous process. Judges and public prosecutors (both current and aspiring) are expected to participate in regular internships and training courses to improve their expertise. Special emphasis is placed on issues surrounding future EU integration and European laws on human rights where they apply to women and minority groups.

Meanwhile legal publications are being developed through the Kosovo Law Centre to fill the gap in existing resources in the area. Laws will be published alongside bulletins of court judgments.

The reforms taking place in the rule of law sector are unquestionably moving the judiciary in the right direction.



Reforming the juvenile justice system

The Juvenile Justice Reform Project is a joint EU-UNICEF initiative that is working to bring about reforms in the Juvenile Justice Code. It aims to improve treatment for children that brush up against the law, and bring current procedures up to European and international standards for juvenile justice.

The project places special emphasis on training those in direct contact with children at risk; for example, teachers, social workers, and police officers. It is also pressing the judicial authorities to develop specific referral protocols for the legal representation and treatment of children during arrest or prosecution.

The measures for reform will fill an institutional gap in the legal directives for treatment of juvenile offenders, victims, or witnesses to crime. Child-friendly interview rooms have been set up in police stations in Prishtinë/Priština, Prizren, Pejë/Peč, Vushtrri/Vučitrn, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Ferizaj/Uroševac, and Graçanicë/ Gračanica.

A new Palace of Justice

Upgrading the legal infrastructure is one of the principle challenges of the sector. Construction work is currently underway for a new Palace of Justice in Prishtinë/Priština to provide adequate premises for the judicial authorities and enhance their independent status.

Upgrading services and reducing the backlog of cases will help to improve confidence in the judiciary. The EU is also commissioning and funding the construction of a High Security Prison.

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