

EMBRACING THE DIGITAL AGE: THE FUTURE OF WORK IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

NEW FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT AND PLATFORM WORK

Implications for youth employment policies and
skills development

COUNTRY REPORT: KOSOVO

Disclaimer

This report was prepared for ETF by PPMI

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PREFACE

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is engaged in the international debate about the future of work in developing and transition countries, in particular in the EU Neighbourhood and Central Asia. It has launched several actions analysing global transformations that impact labour market performance and skills demand, identifying the implications for workers and learners. Updating and consolidating the knowledge on recent changes in work patterns driven by digitalisation sheds light on key issues for employment and skills development.

This report is a part of the ETF study conducted in the 6 Western Balkan countries, following the work in the 6 Eastern Partnership countries [The future of work: New forms of employment and platform work in the Eastern Partnership countries](#). The country-specific research and consultations in Kosovo took place between December 2021 and May 2022. The manuscript was completed in June 2022.

The analysis confirms the huge impact of technological change on Western Balkan economies, including Kosovo¹, with the Covid-19 pandemic accelerating digitalisation trends and increasing labour flexibility. New economic models with efficient matching of labour and skills demand and supply provide online-based employment opportunities and, to some extent, skills development. Young people take up those opportunities, which open up new markets and new ways of work, often becoming an alternative to migration. Therefore, beyond the inherent volatility of contractual relationships, issues of quality and inclusiveness, new forms of work are an important source of income, a place to use and develop skills, and a chance to harness entrepreneurial potential.

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¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence, hereinafter 'Kosovo'.

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INTRODUCTION

Social, economic, and technological changes within the EU and Neighbourhood countries, including the Western Balkans, have fostered a notable increase in **labour market flexibility**. New and non-standard forms of employment² have grown in scale and prominence in recent years. Many of these new forms of employment deviate from traditional conception of work, both in terms of their legal and contractual form, as well as in practical working conditions.

Some of the most notable non-standard forms of employment include temporary employment, part-time and on-call work, temporary agency work, and other multiparty employment relationships, as well as dependent self-employment. Besides the general trend of increasing flexibility in the labour market, digitalisation enhances the development of non-standard forms of employment. Work through digital labour platforms is one of the more notable manifestations of such transformations in the employment landscape in recent years, especially given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Platform work is a new and expanding phenomenon and the key focus of this report. It can be defined as services provided on demand and for remuneration by people working through digital labour platforms. These platforms can facilitate the provision of both remote and on-location services requiring diverse skills levels, and – depending on the business model of the platform – exerting different levels of algorithmic control over workers. Platform work can also be referred to as gig work, online freelancing, app work; or is simply better known by the brand of individual platforms such as Uber, Glovo, Upwork, and many others.³

This report examines the emergence of new forms of employment and platform work in Kosovo by relying on a mixed-method approach to data collection and analysis, involving desk research, interviews, and analysis of automatically collected data from the platforms. The in-depth research was complemented with a survey to identify priorities for policy actions.

The desk research and interviews were conducted in English, Serbian, Bosnian, and Albanian between December 2021 and February 2022. Interviews were targeted at policy makers, representatives of business and worker associations, as well as platform companies operating in Kosovo and people working through these platforms.

The automatic data collection was conducted between November and December of 2021 and targeted four platforms that are popular among the freelancers from the Western Balkans – Freelancer.com, People Per Hour, Guru.com, and Hubstaff Talent. These platforms were selected based on the number of people from the region working through them, as well as the possibility to collect data in an automated way from the platforms. Upwork, one of the major platforms, could not be scraped due to measures implemented by the platform to limit such activities at the time the automated data collection took place. Therefore, Upwork platform could not be covered within the research in Kosovo.

² Mandl, I. (2020). New forms of employment: 2020 update. New forms of employment series. Publications Office of the European Union. Luxembourg.

³ The conceptual framework of platform work included in ETF (2021): The future of work – New forms of employment in the Eastern Partnership countries: Platform work, Annex I, available at <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/future-work-new-forms-employment-eastern-partnership>

SETTING THE SCENE

As the youngest country in Europe, Kosovo has witnessed notable economic growth in recent years, especially before the COVID-19 pandemic. The country's economy declined by 3.9% in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but quickly recovered to pre-pandemic levels with GDP expected to grow to 7.1% in 2022.⁴ Despite such progress, Kosovo remains one of the least developed countries in Europe with a very high level of unemployment.

Kosovo has an open economy that is highly dependent on imports. As a result, the economy is very sensitive to fluctuations in international markets. The service sector accounts for the largest share of the Kosovar economy, making up 47.5% of GDP and employing 65% of country's workers.⁵ Kosovo's growth model relies heavily on **remittances** to fuel domestic consumption and reduce poverty. As an important source of financing private consumption, remittances increased to 15.1% in 2020 (in comparison to 6.4% in 2019).⁶

High levels of informality make it harder to accurately measure Kosovo's economic activity, as informal employment is underreported. One outcome of low skill levels and a mismatch of skills in the labour market is that hiring remains highly informal and reliant on personal contacts.

The population of Kosovo was 1,820,600 in 2020 and, according to figures from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS), two thirds of the population are of working age.⁷ Within the working age population, the rate of participation in the workforce was only 38.3% in 2020. Inactivity in Kosovo is high, particularly among women on account of family responsibilities, insufficient public provision of child/elderly care services, and employers' biases. This is also due to employers' poor perceptions of formal education and vocational training institutions that are not seen as equipping employees with the necessary skills. According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the rate of employment among those aged 15-64, was 28.4% in 2020. The highest employment rate was reported among males (42.8%) while employment for females was only 14.1% in the same year.⁸

Furthermore, in 2020, the unemployment rate in Kosovo was 25.9%. It was also higher among females (32.3%) than males (23.5%). The highest unemployment rate was reported among youth aged 15-24 (49.1%). Within this age group female unemployment was 57.2% and male unemployment was 45.2%.⁹ Therefore, youth unemployment represents one of the biggest challenges in the country, considering that they represent 60% of the population. In addition, 33.6% of youth aged 15-29 were not in employment, education, or training.

To some extent, the reasons for unemployment are different for males and females, according to the 2018 Labour Force Survey.¹⁰ The reasons cited by men are predominantly related to labour market factors and regulations (dismissal or redundancy, limited contracts, inadequate education or training, etc.). Whereas females, in addition to these reasons, are more likely to also report family responsibilities as the reason for their unemployment, such as looking after children.¹¹

⁴ Western Balkans Regular Economic Report No.20 Greening the Recovery, fall 2021 World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/900381634670558017/pdf/Greening-the-Recovery.pdf>, p. 5

⁵ Central Bank of Kosovo (2020). Annual Report 2020. https://bqk-kos.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CBK_AR_2020.pdf

⁶ OECD (2021), "Kosovo profile", in *Competitiveness in South East Europe 2021: A Policy Outlook*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/573f3543-en>.

⁷ The working age population includes people aged 15 to 64 years, LFS 2020.

⁸ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2021). Labour Force Survey. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6259/labour-force-2020.pdf>

⁹ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2021). Labour Force Survey. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6259/labour-force-2020.pdf>

¹⁰ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2019). Labour Force Survey. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5026/labour-force-survey-2018.pdf>

¹¹ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2019). Labour Force Survey. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/5026/labour-force-survey-2018.pdf>

The high level of emigration is further undermining growth prospects, despite temporarily relieving labour market pressures from the growing labour force. Migration is especially common among the young population due to experienced unemployment. According to opinion polls from UNDP's Public Pulse project conducted in 2018, 58% of the population aged 18-35 years were thinking about migrating in the following years.¹² The four sectors with the highest risk of the workforce leaving are ICT, catering, engineering, and health care. Surveys of private sector employees revealed that low wages, poor living conditions, and lack of opportunities in Kosovo were among the main reason for emigrating.¹³

Migration is becoming a serious problem for the future development of the country. In the Labour Market Needs and Skills Analysis report for Kosovo (LMNSA)¹⁴, the migration of skilled workers was highlighted as an important issue to address in terms of the country's competitiveness. The employers' survey conducted for the LMNSA report confirmed similar concerns in the private sector. In the survey, 47.9% of employers stated that some of their employees left companies to go abroad. The net emigration is highest among those with medium general and low education levels, according to the recent ETF report.¹⁵ Almost 11% of the entire workforce left Kosovo in 2018 posing a serious obstacle to the growth of businesses. In addition, entrepreneurs reported that their most productive employees left their jobs to migrate, mainly to EU countries. The manufacturing and food processing sectors were hit the hardest by workforce migration. Considering this, future intervention programmes should account for the potential threat of skilled labour migration.¹⁶

Kosovo's labour market also suffers from a **mismatch of skills**. According to the Public Pulse analysis,¹⁷ businesses are often unable to find new employees with profiles that match their specific skills requirements in Kosovo. The incompatibility between supply and demand in the labour market is due to the **inadequate educational curricula** that do not align with labour market requirements. There are few vocational schools offering relevant training and cooperation between existing schools and the private sector is lacking. There is also a shortage of highly skilled workers, as reported by the majority of employers.¹⁸ Due to the lack of skills in Kosovo's labour market nearly two thirds (63%) of companies reported settling for less qualified employees, while 19% said that additional duties were assigned to existing staff.¹⁹ Some companies cope with the deficit by investing in training and certifications for workers.

The extremely high youth unemployment rate in Kosovo also indicates **problems with the transition from school to work**. Deficiencies in the education system and discrepancies between the labour market and educational institutions have resulted in mismatches. Aside from occupational skills, personal characteristics also have a strong association with access to jobs in Kosovo.²⁰ For example, private companies that offer positions that require higher qualifications (e.g., ICT companies) often consider young people as their preferred choice for employment, regardless of their lack of

¹² UNDP (2018). Public pulse analysis: Correlation between labour market of Kosovo and outmigration.

https://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/library/democratic_governance/public-pulse-xvi.html

¹³ Koha (2022). Mbi 56 mijë kosovarë aplikuan për terminë, për viza pune në Gjermani. <https://www.koha.net/arberi/304658/mbi-56-mije-kosovare-aplikuan-per-termine-per-viza-pune-ne-gjermani/>

¹⁴ B. Krasniqi (2019) IESB Institute: Labour Market and Skills Needs Analysis; Perspective for the future. Kosovo: Publication of "Aligning Education and Training with Labour Market Needs 2" project. ISBN: 978-9951-8990-0-0 https://alled.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Report-Draft-215x215mm_print30092019.pdf

¹⁵ ETF (2021). How migration, human capital and the labour market interact in Kosovo. <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/how-migration-human-capital-and-labour-market-interact-2>

¹⁶ B. Krasniqi (2019) IESB Institute: Labour Market and Skills Needs Analysis; Perspective for the future. Kosovo: Publication of "Aligning Education and Training with Labour Market Needs 2" project. ISBN: 978-9951-8990-0-0

¹⁷ UNDP (2020). Public pulse analysis: Correlation between labour market of Kosovo and outmigration.

www.ks.undp.org/content/dam/kosovo/docs/PublicPulse/PPAnalysis19/PPAnalysisEng.pdf

¹⁸ STIKK (Kosovo ICT Association) (2019). Kosovo IT Barometer 2019. <https://stikk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/IT-Barometer-2019.pdf>

¹⁹ UNDP (2020). Public pulse analysis: Correlation between labour market of Kosovo and outmigration.

www.ks.undp.org/content/dam/kosovo/docs/PublicPulse/PPAnalysis19/PPAnalysisEng.pdf

²⁰ OECD (2021), "Kosovo profile", in *Competitiveness in South East Europe 2021: A Policy Outlook*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/573f3543-en>.

experience. This is because young people show more interest in these positions and can easily adapt to the company's culture.²¹

On a positive note, widespread access to the internet in Kosovo serves as a starting point for greater digitalisation in the economy. The Agency of Statistics of Kosovo reported that in 2019 internet penetration in the country was 93%, which is among the highest in Europe. Concurring results were reflected in the representative sample conducted by the Kosovo Association of Information and Communication Technology (STIKK) which revealed that 96% of Kosovar households are connected to internet and more than 90% have 3G and 4G coverage across the country.

Therefore, the **technology sector is thriving** despite many roadblocks. The low cost of building digital products and services has enabled the sector to grow rapidly, spurring job creation, improving the export market, and increasing incomes. Rapid growth has also been enabled by the fact that 70% of the population under 35 years of age are interested in new and innovative employment opportunities such as those offered by the digital sector. Kosovo ranked 44 out of 190 economies on the Ease of Doing Business Index thanks to its business-friendly regulatory environment, especially in the technology sector.²²

Given the opportunity to work for international companies, the **demand for ICT** studies has increased in recent years. A 2019 study conducted by STIKK (Kosovo ICT Association) in 38 ICT companies, found that 61% of companies work with international clients, mainly in the following services: custom development services through outsourcing (42%), business process optimisation (34%), web design, development, and IT consulting. Therefore, prospects in the Kosovo market are very good for well-trained ICT specialists, while overall the ICT industry continues to suffer from a shortage of skilled workers.²³

²¹ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/31720/Kosovo-Skills-Towards-Employment.pdf?sequence=4>

²² Talia Dweck (2020). Digital Development in the Western Balkans: Kosovo. DAI. <https://dai-global-digital.com/digital-development-in-the-western-balkans-kosovo.html>

²³ Institute for Entrepreneurship and Small Business (2021). Kosovo Skills Barometer 1.0. Kosovo: Publication of "Aligning Education and Training with Labour Market Needs 2" project.

NEW FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT

Work organisation in Kosovo is predominantly based on traditional contracts and working hours. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic enhanced labour market flexibility and increased awareness among firms about the possibility of working online and having more flexible working hours.

Apart from self-employment and part-time work, statistical data regarding atypical and new forms of employment in Kosovo is lacking. Therefore, this report investigates how widespread new forms of employment are through data collected from desk research and interviews conducted with employees and employers engaged in new forms of employment in Kosovo's labour market. Desk research shows that, similarly to EU countries, youth in Kosovo often turn to alternative ways of finding jobs, such as social media, referrals from their friends, and especially through online marketing. Young people are also more open in taking up new opportunities of new non-standard employment. Below we review the existing information on new forms of employment in Kosovo in more detail.

Temporary employment is common in Kosovo especially among the younger population. According to the 2020 LFS data, only 42.3% of employed persons had a permanent contract for their main job, while 57.7% were working under temporary contracts.²⁴ Out of the employees on temporary contracts, 89.5% reported that there was no other type of contract available to them. According to the 2018 Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC Kosovo) Labour Force and Time Use Study, the ratio of permanent versus temporary work was nearly equal among employed individuals: 51.3% identified their jobs as temporary, compared to 48.8% who identified them as permanent, with no difference between males and females. Notably, 85% of youth aged 15-24 and 66% of those aged 24-54 were employed in temporary jobs, while only 26.3% of those aged 55-64 were in temporary employment. As to the reasons why, the majority of respondents defined their contracts as temporary but subject to regular renewal, indicating that many jobs are temporary in nature, but still can provide a longer-term employment. However, temporary work for lower skilled workers typically offers very few opportunities for skills acquisition or career development.

The finding that non-standard (and informal) employment is common among Kosovar youth is corroborated in other sources. Young people who are employed often work on temporary contracts with a duration of up to one year. More than half of the youth are either self-employed, unpaid family workers, or work in very small firms. While close to 60% work without a contract, among those that do approximately 80% are working under a temporary employment contract.²⁵

Part-time and on-call work arrangements are also widespread in Kosovo. According to LFS data from 2020, 92.5% of those employed full-time and 7.5% part-time.²⁶ Gender differences were not observed, with women slightly more likely to work part-time than men (7.6% compared to 7.2%). The reasons for working part-time, differed between men and women. Women play a greater role in family care which reduces the hours available for paid work. However, the main reason for not working full-time, for both men and women, was the limited availability of such work. According to the World Bank, part-time employment in Kosovo constituted 14.9% of total employment in 2019 and, 78.9% working part-time were underemployed.²⁷ This means that there is an undersupply of full-time of jobs in the labour market.

²⁴ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2021). Labour Force Survey. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6259/labour-force-2020.pdf>

²⁵ World Bank Group (2020). Making Employment Services and Active Measures Sensitive to the Needs of Young People Recommendations for Youth Employment Programs in Kosovo. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/273531592973030076/pdf/Making-Employment-Services-and-Active-Measures-Sensitive-to-the-Needs-of-Young-People-Recommendations-for-Youth-Employment-Programs-in-Kosovo-Technical-Note.pdf>

²⁶ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2021). Labour Force Survey. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6259/labour-force-2020.pdf>

²⁷ World Bank (2019). Part time employment, total (% of total employment) – Kosovo. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.PART.ZS?locations=XK>

Temporary agency work is another type of work arrangement becoming more popular, especially among youth. It has been identified as a growing sector for employment, starting from seasonal, on-site work in trading and hospitality (usually during the summer season), to work as website developers and social media managers. There are also temporary work agencies specialised in care services for children and older people.²⁸ **On-call work** is more widespread in occupations such as nursing of children and cleaning.

Self-employment is seen as way to increase employment, especially with regards to young people. In line with the economic development priorities of Kosovo's government, the Self-employment Programme aims to tackle unemployment by offering grants for those willing to become entrepreneurs or self-employed in six priority sectors: tourism, food processing and packaging, metal processing, wood processing, information and communication technology, and textiles.²⁹ The programme offers many opportunities for youth employment, training for entering the labour market and networking. Further capacity building for entrepreneurship. In 2020, self-employment represented 22.1% of total employment in Kosovo.³⁰, 9.6% had employees and 12.5% were solo self-employed. Females were less likely to be self-employed as the share of self-employed women was 10.3% in 2020, compared to 26% among men.³¹ According to data from the LFS, 4.5% of employed Kosovars were family workers in 2020.³²

The self-employment trend is favoured by a positive administrative environment. Many self-employed deliver services to foreign clients with freelancing consequently growing in Kosovo. Business environment is changing as well. New firms emerge and offer shared, community-driven workspaces to serve workers' needs. In co-working spaces, independent workers have their own desk, access to the internet, and use of a printer and scanner. Prices range from EUR 10 per day to EUR 50-70 per month. Examples of organizations that offer co-working spaces include Open Data Kosovo,³³ Innovation Centre Kosovo³⁴ and Haptaz-Trembelat.³⁵

Outsourcing is another growing trend in employment that has created jobs for various service providers in Kosovo. This is popular in the telecommunication sector with international call centres (e.g., Teleperformance Kosova³⁶ which requires German and English skills), as well as in the ICT³⁷ (e.g., ABC Software Development Kosovo, Appstellar, Coda Technology L.L.C) and digital marketing (e.g., Tactica, New Jersey SEO Company).³⁸ According to some media articles, Kosovo has become an attractive destination for companies from North America and Europe thanks to its educated workforce, extensive internet penetration, and low labour costs.³⁹

²⁸ See more: https://www.instagram.com/babycare_agency/?hl=en. Also, some Facebook pages as <https://www.facebook.com/edukimkujdesjeperfemije>.

²⁹ Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (2015). Operational Guidelines on the implementation of the Self-employment Programme-Ministry of labour and Social Welfare Kosovo. http://www.undp.org/content/dam/kosovo/docs/almp2/SelfEmpl_Manual_Eng_web.pdf

³⁰ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2021). Labour Force Survey. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6259/labour-force-2020.pdf>

³¹ These percentages include both those self-employed without employees and self-employed with other employees. Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2021). Labour Force Survey. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6259/labour-force-2020.pdf>

³² Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2021). Labour Force Survey. <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/6259/labour-force-2020.pdf>

³³ Kosovo Digital Agenda Observatory (2020). Report project –Open Data Increasing Civic Engagement in the digital Agenda Open Data <https://opendatakosovo.org/portfolio/digital-agenda-observatory-2020/>

³⁴ See more: <https://ickosovo.com/co-working>

³⁵ See more: <https://trembelat.com/En/blog/152/haptaz-coworking-the-creative-and-tech-community>

³⁶ See more: <https://people.humanpowerks.com/job-application-form?id=582>

³⁷ See more: <https://www.outsource2kosovo.net/en/kosovo-companies/>

³⁸ Novinite.com (2021). How Kosovo Became an Outsourcing Magnet. <https://www.novinite.com/articles/212737/How+Kosovo+Became+an+Outsourcing+Magnet>

³⁹ Novinite.com (2021). How Kosovo Became an Outsourcing Magnet. <https://www.novinite.com/articles/212737/How+Kosovo+Became+an+Outsourcing+Magnet>

PLATFORM WORK

Platform work has been growing recently with on-location and online platforms present in the country- Although the developments are in the initial stage of development more and more people are going online in search of employment opportunities. Architects, designers, programmers, and translators are among those who are venturing into these new markets.⁴⁰ However, most platform work activities take place as informal employment.

Digital labour platforms are not very present in public discourse and are rarely mentioned in the media, apart from some recent interviews regarding on-location platform work.⁴¹ Nevertheless, platform work has become more visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among the younger population. Youth have turned to freelancing online, and more recently to on-location platform work.

Platform work has also received the attention of policymakers in the country. Since Kosovo has a very young population, local authorities and developmental agencies plan to increase the participation of young people in digital platform work. In its Kosovo Digital Economy (KODE) programme, the Ministry of Economic Development specifically mentions online freelancing as a potential source of income for unemployed and underemployed citizens.⁴² Furthermore, statements have been made by the government that freelancing, especially in the ICT sector, is one of the possible jobs for the future, considering the country's young population and their advanced IT skills.

Remote platform work

When it comes to the scale and scope of remote platform work, there is a considerable amount of evidence that online freelancing is a growing in popularity in Kosovo.⁴³ Remote work is most popular among the younger generations who have basic to specialist level ICT skills. This is because access to jobs is easy and the qualification requirements on platforms are usually compatible with their skills. Remote platform work is also a way to find more work options without having to move to a different area. Although no local remote labour platforms have been identified, evidence does show that international platforms are popular among students and fresh graduates in fields ranging from web design and programming to translation.

It is difficult to estimate the scale of online work in Kosovo due to the lack of data. Kosovo is often excluded from research on platform work. For example, the Gigmetar report⁴⁴ on gig work in Southeast Europe excludes Kosovo. In addition, Kosovar freelancers may be engaged on several online platforms that do not allow Kosovo to be selected as a country where the freelancer is based, e.g., profiles of freelancers registered on Upwork and Hubstaff Talent platforms cannot be filtered for Kosovo. Kosovar freelancers on such platforms must indicate a different country in their profiles, making it difficult to analyse their profiles. Meanwhile, some freelancers have demanded Kosovo to be included in the country list.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Johannes Stenlund (2018). Being Your Own Boss Online. Kosovo 2.0. <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/being-your-own-boss-online/>

⁴¹ Private TV, ATV interview.

⁴² Johannes Stenlund (2018). Being Your Own Boss Online. Kosovo 2.0. <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/being-your-own-boss-online/>

⁴³ This statement is based on analysis of [Online Labour Index](#) data, [Gigmetar reports](#), and automatically collected data in Kosovo as well as interviews conducted for the purpose of this report.

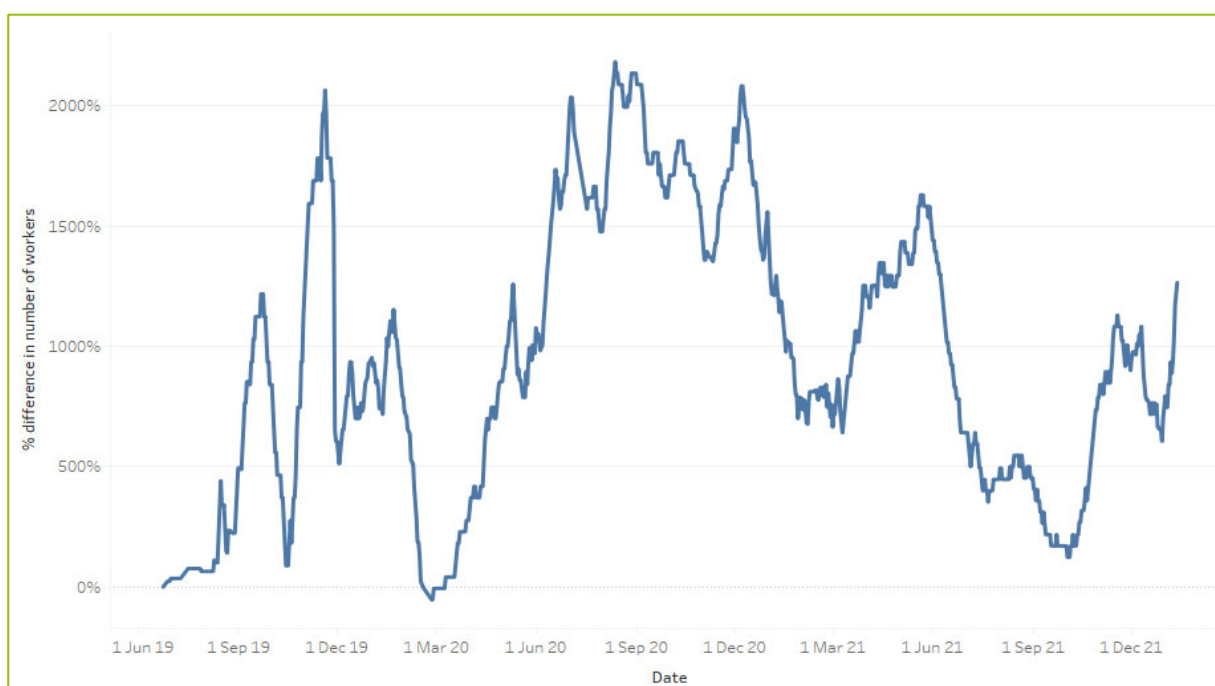
⁴⁴ Public Policy Research Center. Gigmetar. Retrieved from: <http://gigmetar.publicpolicy.rs/en/region5-2/>

⁴⁵ See more: <https://community.upwork.com/t5/Freelancers/Why-isn-t-Kosovo-in-the-list-of-countries-in-Upwork/m-p/996545/highlight/true>

Despite the limitations, we investigated online work present in Kosovo. The following findings on remote platform workers in Kosovo are based on two available sources – the Online Labour Index (OLI) data⁴⁶ and data automatically collected for the purpose of this study. It is important to note that while the data from the two sources complement each other and provide accurate indications on the scope of online work, the findings are not directly comparable. Data automatically collected in November 2021 represent registered Kosovar platform workers on Freelancer.com, Guru.com, and People Per Hour platforms. The OLI data presents information on active (not just registered) platform workers on four English language web-based freelancing platforms Fiverr - Freelancer.com, Guru.com, and People Per Hour.⁴⁷

According to the OLI data, engagement in projects online has fluctuated over time between 2019 and 2022.⁴⁸ However, a slight overall growth in engagement levels can be observed throughout this period (see the figure below). Some of this growth could be explained by the fact that the pandemic forced many people to look for work opportunities online.

Figure 1. Fluctuation of engagement in online work among Kosovar workers on digital remote labour platforms over time, relative to 2019



Note: The graph represents the percentage change between the number of active workers from Kosovo on a specific day compared to the number of active workers at start of data collection in 2019, which is used as a reference date. This graph was based on OLI data which calculated a weighted estimate of currently active workers by periodically sampling workers on the four largest online platforms once every 24 hours.

Based on the data scraped from the web in November 2021, 891 of Kosovars were registered on Freelancer.com, Guru.com and People Per Hour (PPH). Considering the country's total working age population (aged 15-64) in 2020, the share of remote platform workers on the selected three platforms was 0.07%.

It is important to note that this data does not accurately represent the total population of platform workers from Kosovo, as some may be registered on other platforms. According to desk research, among the **most popular online platforms** in Kosovo are Freelancer.com and Guru.com, as well as

⁴⁶ Kässä, O.; Hadley, C.; Lehdonvirta, V. (2019). Online Labour Index: Measuring the Online Gig Economy for Policy and Research. figshare. Dataset. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.3761562>

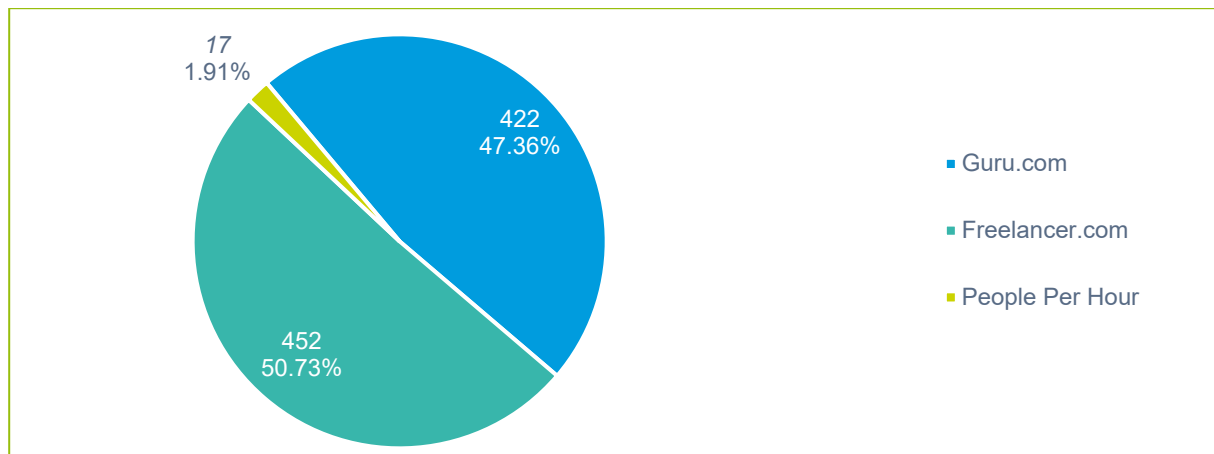
⁴⁷ Kässä, O.; Hadley, C.; Lehdonvirta, V. (2019). Online Labour Index: Measuring the Online Gig Economy for Policy and Research. figshare. Dataset. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.3761562>

⁴⁸ Kässä, O.; Hadley, C.; Lehdonvirta, V. (2019). Online Labour Index: Measuring the Online Gig Economy for Policy and Research. figshare. Dataset. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.3761562>

Upwork which was not covered by the data collection for this study due to the outlined limitations. However, Kosovar freelancers working through this platform have a private Facebook group with 3,345 members as of January 2022.⁴⁹

Based on the data retrieved from the three selected platforms only 5% of users were identified as active, which constitutes just 44 Kosovars. The most popular platform among registered workers from Kosovo was Guru.com (452 freelancers), closely followed by Freelancer.com (422 freelancers), while only 17 workers were registered on PPH.

Figure 2. Number and share of registered platform workers from Kosovo, by platform (November 2021)



Based on interviews conducted for the purpose of this study, the primary reason behind the attractiveness of remote labour platforms is the variety of the jobs offered compared to the domestic job market. Other reasons include appreciation for the work conducted, flexibility of working hours, higher payment compared to local wages, payment security, and the ability to acquire digital skills (especially for the younger generation). Furthermore, international level of pay (which is usually higher than the wages in the domestic market), opportunity to familiarise oneself with global trends in the respective professional fields and flexibility of working hours are cited as key **motivation** aspects.

People usually learn about work through remote labour platforms from their friends who have experience in such work. For example, some interviewees said that their friends from university suggested registering and helped them create a profile on the platform. This appears to be the most common way of being introduced to online platform work in Kosovo. Others responded that they learned about online platforms through social media, such as Facebook and Instagram.

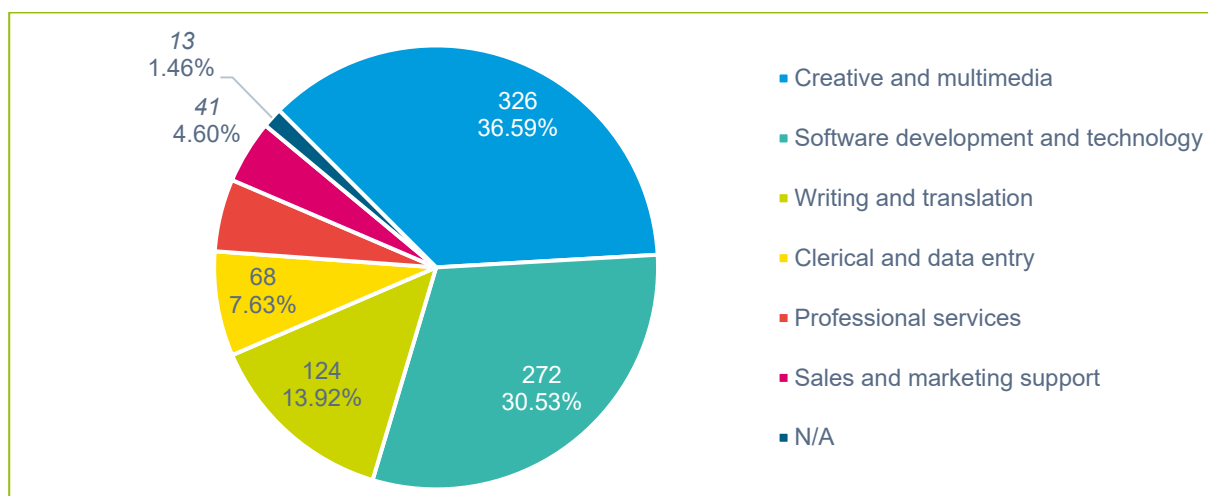
The services that Kosovars provide online vary from highly skilled services, such as business consulting, graphic design, web design, programming, interior design, exterior design, 3D modelling, and NFT (non-fungible token) design; to more elementary tasks such as data entry, video editing, photo editing, and social media management.

The automatically collected data from three selected platforms showed that the most popular occupation among Kosovar freelancers was creative and multimedia work, with 36.6% of all registered workers engaged in this occupation (326 freelancers). The second most popular occupation was software development and technology work, represented by 30.5% of registered online workers. Around 14% were engaged in writing and translation and 8% in clerical and data entry tasks. The least popular occupations were professional services and sales and marketing support, that each made up around 5% of registered Kosovar platform workers.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ See more: <https://www.upwork.com/>, and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/upworkkosovo/members>

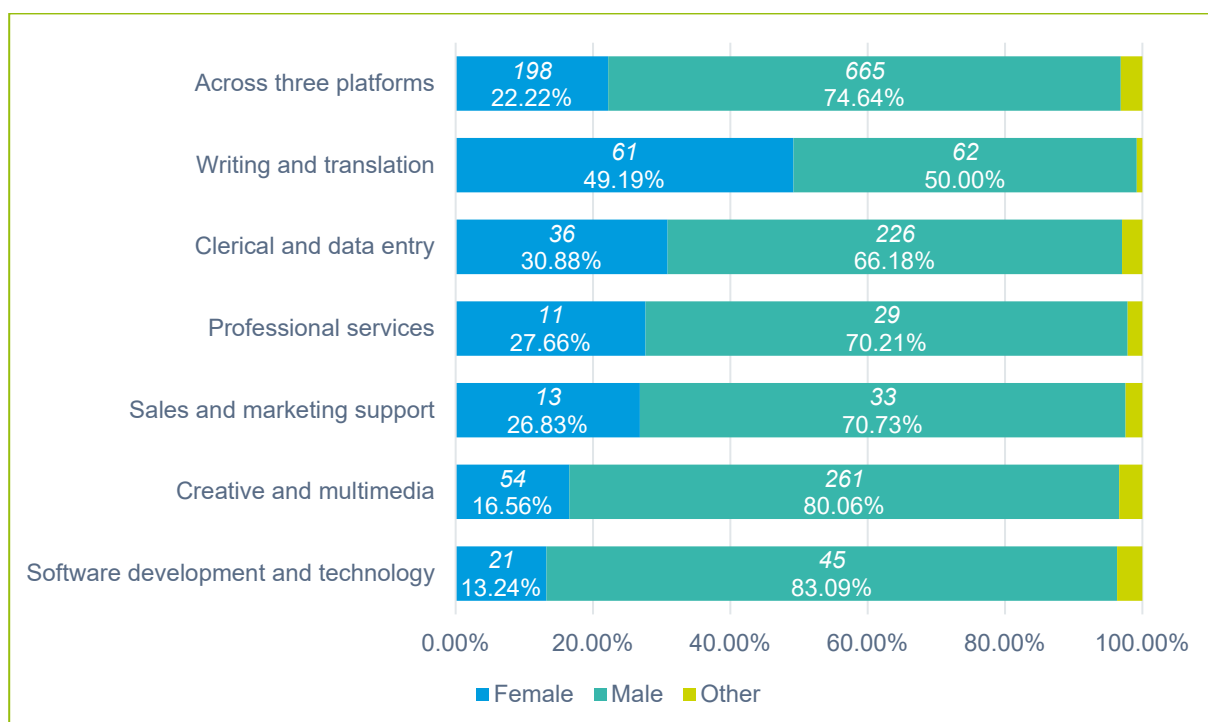
⁵⁰ Freelancer.com, Guru.com and PPH.

Figure 3. Occupations of all registered platform workers from Kosovo on Freelancer.com, Guru.com and People Per Hour platforms (November 2021)



Furthermore, all occupations were dominated by male workers. They were 3.4 times more likely than women to engage in freelancing on the three selected platforms and, thus, represented the majority of registered workers – 74.6% (see the figure below). In most occupations, except writing and translation, males represented more than 65% of the registered workers. The gender difference was most notable in creative and multimedia and software development and technology work.

Figure 4. Gender of registered Kosovar platform workers on three selected platforms, by occupation (November 2021)

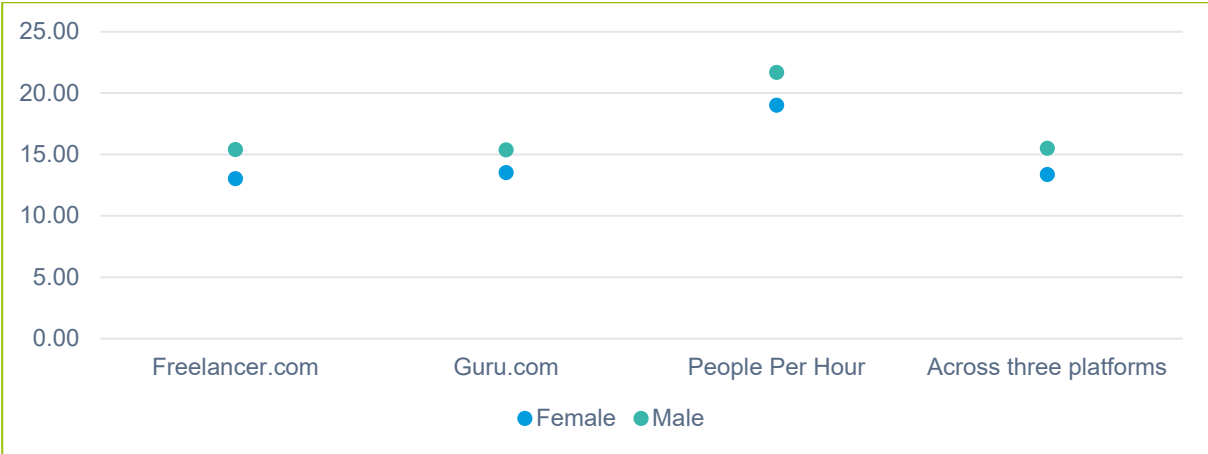


Note: "Other" category shows worker profiles for which gender could not be identified.

If we consider all Kosovars that work through remote online platforms, both genders are represented to some extent. By contrast, in on-location platform work, especially in ride hailing or delivery services, men significantly dominate. When it comes to age representation, most remote platform workers are between 20 and 50 years old.

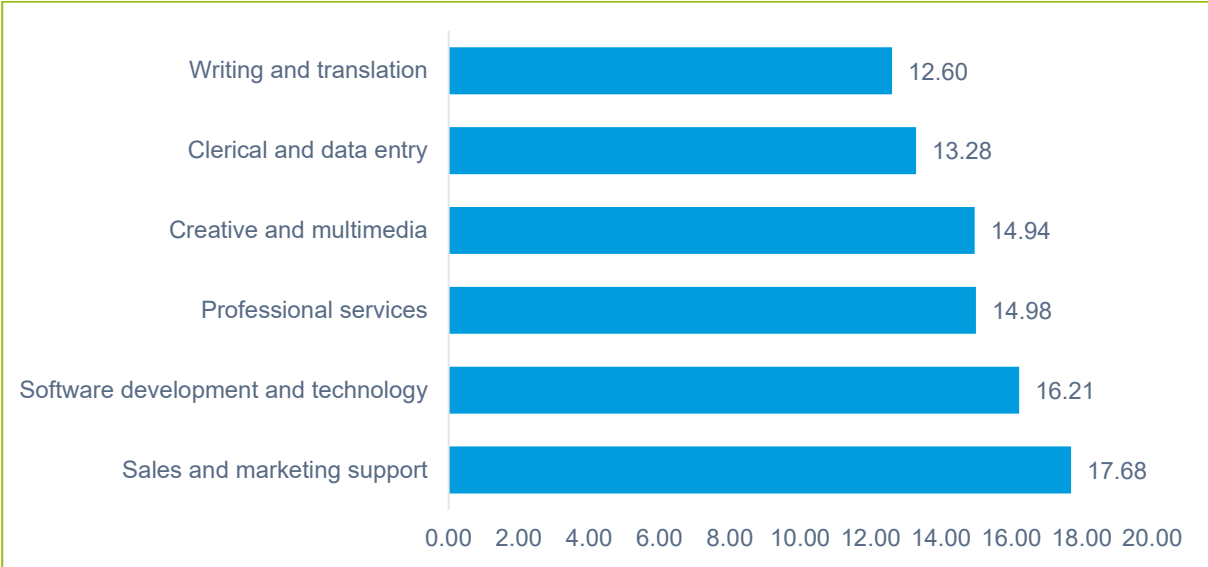
The average earnings of remote platform workers differ significantly across occupations and platforms. Sometimes they are paid by the hour and other times they agree on a set pay for the entire project. The pay earned through platforms is usually much higher than performing the same job locally. Based on the automatically collected data, the average hourly rate demanded by Kosovar remote platform workers was USD 14.9 in November 2021. A gender pay gap was also observed as, on average, male workers demanded USD 15.5, while female workers requested USD 13.4 per hour (see the figure below for the average rate across the three platforms). The average hourly rates significantly differed by platform. For example, the rate requested on People Per Hour was USD 6 higher than the average requested on Freelancer.com and Guru.com.

Figure 5. Average hourly rate in USD demanded by Kosovar platform workers on three selected platforms, by platform and gender (November 2021)



Hourly rates also varied across occupations. The highest rates were demanded by workers in sales and marketing and software development and technology occupations, USD 17.7 and USD 16.2, respectively. The lowest average hourly rates were demanded by platform workers in writing and translation and clerical and data entry work, USD 13.3 and USD 12.6, respectively. It is important to note that the requested hourly rates on platforms may not accurately indicate the actual earnings of the people working through remote labour platforms. These are simply the hourly rates that online workers indicate on their profiles; however, the client might offer a lower or higher payment for a specific task. They also do not consider the unpaid time spent securing the tasks.

Figure 6. Average hourly rate in USD demanded by Kosovar platform workers on three selected platforms, by occupation (November 2021)



For remote platform workers the biggest obstacle to working full-time is the intense competition in the global online market. For some freelancers work through online platforms is a secondary job. Nevertheless, most interviewed freelancers⁵¹ said they started working part-time as students to explore the online labour market and gain additional income, but over time it became a full-time job. Often this includes two or more projects, for clients in Western Europe, the US, or Australia, with whom the freelancers aim to build longer-term relationships.

However, the career prospects in remote platform work are limited because platforms do not offer specific trainings. Upskilling and building a professional portfolio are solely the responsibilities of the freelancer. As a result, various international donor organisations provide free trainings in Kosovo for digital skills and soft skills that allow people to improve job-related competencies.

When it comes to the impact of COVID-19, interviewed remote platform workers reported that during the pandemic they had more time to search for projects and to upgrade their skills.⁵² During that time, they found many free online trainings, some of which improved their skills in programming and helped them gain new clients.⁵³

On-location platform work

On-location labour platforms are becoming increasingly popular in Kosovo, as they provide new opportunities for job seekers with low skills. The country experienced a boom in the uptake of such work during the COVID-19 pandemic and most of these platforms have been continuously expanding since then. Some of the fastest growing services are food delivery platforms and taxi services, as well as fast postal deliveries. The most popular on-location labour platforms in Kosovo are the following:⁵⁴

- **Kupohajna** – offers food delivery services from restaurants and grocery deliveries through the work of couriers. The Kupohajna app can be downloaded on Apple Store or Google Play.
- **Blue Taxi** – offers taxi services. The app can be downloaded on Apple Store or Google Play. The platform has more than 100 drivers and more than 80,000 customers.⁵⁵
- **Filikaqa** – offers a variety of on-location services.⁵⁶ As of early 2022, Filikaqa.com had over 2,300 freelancers registered and looking for work, as well as 239 daily visitors/clients looking for a variety of services.
- **Taprrap** – offers delivery services from any restaurant or supermarket in Pristina.⁵⁷
- **Kujdestarja** – connects clients with caretakers for elderly people and children. People also provide cleaning services on the platform. The platform operates throughout Kosovo.⁵⁸
- **Apodel** – active since April 2020, this platform offers food delivery services from restaurants, supermarkets, and pharmacies in the city of Peja. It also allows users to pay for the bills and courier services of elderly clients.⁵⁹
- **Shoferi im** – offers taxi services. The app that can be downloaded on Apple Store or Google Play.⁶⁰

⁵¹ Interviews conducted with freelancers conducted 12.01.2022, 13.01.2022, 14.01.2022.

⁵² Interviews conducted on 12.01.2022.

⁵³ Interviews conducted on 12.01.2022.

⁵⁴ Also, some Instagram and Facebook pages as “Gjirafa.biz” are popular for food delivery services. The Gjirafa.biz has partnerships with 258 restaurants <https://gjirafa.biz/Kategori/Ushqime/Dergesa-te-Ushqimeve>

⁵⁵ See more: <https://www.facebook.com/BlueTaxi.pr>

⁵⁶ See more: <https://www.filikaqa.com/>

⁵⁷ See more: <https://www.instagram.com/taprrap.prishtine/?hl=en>

⁵⁸ See more: <https://kujdestarja.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/kujdestarja/>

⁵⁹ See more: <https://www.facebook.com/apodel.delivery/>

⁶⁰ See more: <https://www.facebook.com/shoferiim>

Local on-location platforms dominate the markets in Kosovo. However, measuring the size of the on-location platform economy in the country is difficult, as most platforms do not disclose the number of people working through them. The available data indicates that the number of platform workers can range from 100 (on Blue Taxi) to 2,300 (on Filikaqa). Most of the on-location platforms specialise in a specific service e.g., taxi or delivery services, although some also offer a wider range of services (e.g., Filikaqa).

Filikaqa⁶¹ seems to be the most diverse Kosovar platform in terms of services offered. On the platform, self-employed workers offer services ranging from auto mechanics, house cleaning, personal training, photography, event planning, violin lessons, accounting services, and even medical services. The clients have the chance to evaluate and review workers' skills, and then make their choice. The most requested services on the platform are electrician, helper, cleaning, and photography services.

On-location platforms also vary in terms of the **fee** applied to platform workers. The creators of Filikaqa noted that during its first year on the market, workers did not need to pay a subscription fee. This allowed the platform to build its worker base quickly. Once the platform was one-year old, a commission fee for the workers offering services was introduced. Meanwhile, on delivery and courier service platforms, a fee is commissioned for each delivery.⁶²

The main factors that influence the **popularity of work through on-location platforms** are decent working conditions, flexible working hours, and the opportunity for young people to work and earn money with no formal skills requirements. For example, to work as a delivery service provider one need to have a driver's licence, knowledge of the area, and basic communication skills. On-location platforms, such as Filikaqa⁶³, Kupohajna,⁶⁴ and Blue Taxi⁶⁵ are also attractive because they have secure and reliable websites, friendly user interface and a good reputation in Kosovo. On-location platforms provide job opportunities in the formal economy as well. This assures workers that they will get paid for the work done. Other factors, mentioned by both users and workers included being mobile friendly, having optimized content, accessibility, and overall good user experience.

According to interviews conducted with platform workers, the most common way of learning about on-location platform work was through digital marketing⁶⁶ and referrals on social media (e.g., from Facebook friends or Instagram posts).⁶⁷ There have also been cases where people have been referred by friends and family, although they still needed to go through an interview and screening process before starting the work. This is different from traditional and part-time work in which, especially in small and micro businesses, getting a referral from friends or family is enough to avoid the official application process.

Delivery platforms, such as Kupohajna, Apodel, and Shoferi Im, mostly recruit young workers (aged 18-30) who often contact the platform after seeing an announcement on social media.⁶⁸ The gender distribution of on-location platform workers in Kosovo differs depending on the services offered. On the delivery platform Apodel, 35% of platform workers are female, while the average age is 18-25.⁶⁹ On platforms like Filikaqa, workers of both genders are also present, although males dominate (approximately 75%), and the majority of workers are aged 30-35. On the platforms providing taxi services, platform workers are overwhelmingly male - 95%.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, on-location platforms offering care services are largely dominated by women.

⁶¹ See more: <https://www.filikaqa.com/>

⁶² Interviews conducted with Apodel 14.01.2022 and Shoferi im 19.01.2022.

⁶³ See more: <https://www.filikaqa.com/>

⁶⁴ See more: <https://www.kupohajna.com/>

⁶⁵ See more: <https://www.bluetaxipr.com/>

⁶⁶ Interview conducted with worker who works part-time on Filikaqa and is self-employed 06.01.2022.

⁶⁷ Interviews conducted with freelancers on 22.12.2021, on 12.01.2022, and 14.01.2022.

⁶⁸ Interviews conducted 14.01.2022 and 19.01.2022.

⁶⁹ Interview conducted with the founders of Apodel platform on 04.01.2022 and 14.01.2022.

⁷⁰ Interview conducted on 19.01.2022.

The ethnicity of on-location platform workers is largely Albanian - more than 95%. But there are also workers from Bosnian and Serbian minorities who live in Kosovo. In addition, some workers come from other communities, such as Roma and Ashkali.

The education level of platform workers depends on the type of services they provide. If they work through on-location platforms as drivers or couriers, no specific qualifications are required. However, if they work as an electrician or violin instructor they must have certain skills, although no certifications are required to subscribe to the platform.

When it comes to the **duration of work**, the length of engagement on platforms varies in on-location platform work. It can be both temporary (e.g., when students are working as couriers), or a full-time job. Those who work through on-location platforms providing a domestic service and demonstrate that their work meets and/or exceeds client expectations, have no problems in establishing a steady customer base. An interviewee using Filikaqa noted that workers who manage to build their portfolios with good reviews are likely to get enough orders to make their work a full-time activity, as there are enough clients using this platform to purchase services.⁷¹

While the **earnings** of on-location platform workers vary, usually people can earn higher wages working through platforms than in the traditional labour market. Those working through on-location platforms with contracts as employees are paid per working hours. Meanwhile those that work from time to time or on-call are paid by working hours or a fee based on service contracts. On-location platform workers earn approximately double that offered by local jobs with similar skills requirements. For this reason, this kind of work has become attractive to young people in Kosovo.

The career and upskilling prospects in on-location platform work are limited as platforms do not offer specific trainings, except for limited on-the-job orientation trainings (e.g., how to communicate with the clients or how to work in a team). This is especially relevant for younger platform workers who do not have prior work experience. For instance, Filikaqa offers tips to workers providing services in auto mechanics, plumbing, and cleaning, on how to make their profile more attractive to clients, for example, mentioning their skills and prior work experience on their profile.⁷²

⁷¹ Interview conducted with Filikaqa worker on 06.01.2022.

⁷² Interview conducted on 04.01.2022.

CURRENT REGULATION, POLICIES AND STRATEGIC APPROACHES

Since the level of unemployment is high in Kosovo, the focus of public policy discussions are measures to increase employment in general, with specific emphasis on tackling youth unemployment. New forms of employment are seen as an opportunity for jobseekers since they offer easier access to jobs that match their skills.

Labour market, skills development, and youth policies

The Sectorial Strategy 2014-2020⁷³, developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW), was the main strategic document addressing citizens' needs and the internal reforms required to improve services. It took into consideration the employment strategy, vocational training strategy, and national youth strategy. The Strategy was accompanied by an inter-sectorial Action Plan on Increasing Youth Employment 2018-2020⁷⁴. More recently, improving the employment situation for young people has been featured as a key objective in the MLSW's Sector Strategy 2018-2022, as well as in the Employment Policy for the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo 2019-2022. Initial assessments show slow implementation of the goals set in these documents.

Importantly, none of these documents directly mention new forms of employment or platform work, although some of them are still relevant. For example, the Youth Employment Action Plan 2018 – 2020 provided around 1,400 young people with career guidance activities, soft skills training, and other youth activities organised in collaboration with youth centres around Kosovo. Around 2,400 young job seekers completed internships and over 600 start-ups received kick-starter funding which allowed most people to become self-employed.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS) supports **active labour market measures**, specifically targeted at youth (aged 18-24). These also include internships, soft skills trainings, as well as a self-employment programme (entrepreneurship training and grant provision). The internship scheme supported by MCYS is implemented by the Employment Agency of Republic of Kosovo (EARK), whilst the soft skills training and self-employment programmes are implemented by private providers. The goal is to give more opportunities to youth to develop the skills needed in the labour market. Such opportunities also relate to the skills that young jobseekers need in the new forms of employment.

One of the achievements outlined in the government of Kosovo report regarding youth employment, were agreements with businesses to provide internship opportunities for students. In total about 300 agreements were concluded between schools and companies with the support of the Enhancing Youth Employment (EYE)⁷⁶ programme and GIZ⁷⁷ project 'Creating Employment Perspectives for Youth in Kosovo', in addition to the initiatives from schools and municipalities.

Career management trainings, skills development and internships for young students and graduates are increasingly supported by the use of online tools. Throughout 2018, a project that supported the development of the Training Needs Analysis, and Skills and Knowledge Needs Analysis component used Busulla⁷⁸ – a website which offers the opportunity to update the standards of professions and skills needed by companies in the relevant sector. As of early 2022, a similar website is being developed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology for professional orientation,

⁷³ See more: <https://mpms.rks-gov.net/en/wpdm-package/strategjia-sektoriale-e-ministrise-se-punes-dhe-miregenies-sociale-2018-2022/>

⁷⁴ See more: <https://mpms.rks-gov.net/en/wpdm-package/plani-i-veprimit-per-punesimin-e-te-rinjve-2018-2020/>

⁷⁵ See more: <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/66634.html>

⁷⁶ See more: <http://helvetas-ks.org/eye/>

⁷⁷ See more: <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/66634.html>

⁷⁸ The LuxDev KSV / 020 Project <https://busulla.com/>

education, and career counselling. This website will contain information on the labour market, including education, job vacancies, etc. Among other things, this site will aim to digitally conduct surveys to provide analysis on the need for training, as well as skills and knowledge. Businesses will have the opportunity to present the skill gaps of their employees. “My Business” is another example of a Kosovar website aimed at increasing employment among women and youth.⁷⁹ Funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC), the website follows the successful Austrian model of “Gründerservice” used by the Austrian Federal Chamber of Commerce. It promotes the creation and development of businesses by offering a range of digital services, from assistance for developing a business idea to services that support relevant planning and fundraising.

Furthermore, some examples exist of multiple match-making websites connecting businesses with interns from Kosovo and **facilitating the transition from school to work**, such as the Kosovo Generation Unlimited⁸⁰ (implemented by Kosovo CSR Network and supported by UNICEF Kosovo Programme and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) and Mentorship for Youth⁸¹ (implemented by Kosovo CSR Network and supported by UNICEF Kosovo Programme).

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government encouraged registration at the Public Employment Services (PES) by offering a monetary subvention for registered jobseekers. It encouraged many, predominantly young, unemployed people to come forward and register, even though PES had previously been perceived as providing little support for job seeking.⁸² Kosovo has no unemployment benefit system, although benefits were allocated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reforms to the social protection system are planned and would introduce unemployment benefits. The reform should introduce both, an unemployment benefits scheme and a general healthcare scheme, and ensure the social assistance scheme better targets the poor.⁸³

Digitalisation, digital skills and online work

Several steps have also been taken to promote **digitalisation**, the development of digital skills, and employment in online work in Kosovo. In 2013, the Kosovar government adopted its own Digital Agenda, namely the “Kosovo’s Digital Agenda 2013-2020”, aiming to define the priorities, objectives, and tasks of the ICT sector’s development in order to maximize the social and economic advantages provided by technologies. The Kosovar government has repeatedly recognised that digital innovation is among the priority areas for the country’s economic development.⁸⁴

This is also the area in which various international donors are active. For example, an EU-funded project, ‘EU Support for the Competitiveness of Kosovo’s ICT Sector’, aims to enhance the competitiveness of Kosovo’s digital and traditional businesses by supporting the country’s ICT sector to drive growth and job creation. As of early 2022, it focused on trainings and courses on ICT, digital skills, and business management.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the widespread internet penetration in Kosovo is a result of the implementation of the **Kosovo Digital Economy Project**⁸⁶ (KODE) which has been financed by the World Bank. Interestingly, in the KODE project, the Ministry of Economic Development specifically mentions online freelancing as a potential source of income for unemployed and underemployed citizens. The Youth Online and Upward (YOU) programme, which is part of the KODE Project, focuses on increased access to knowledge, information, and online services and their

⁷⁹ See more: <https://biznesi.rks-gov.net/>

⁸⁰ See more: <https://kosovogenu.com/>

⁸¹ See more: mentorship4youth.net

⁸² RCC (2019). Labour Markets in The Western Balkans 2019 and 2020. Study are Author and lead editor: Dr. William Bartlett Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in the framework of the Employment and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP 2), regional project, funded by the EU. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/LSEE-Research-on-South-Eastern-Europe/Assets/Documents/Staff-activities-docs/2020-21/Labour-Market-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>

⁸³ OECD (2021), “Kosovo profile”, in *Competitiveness in South East Europe 2021: A Policy Outlook*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/573f3543-en>.

⁸⁴ Top Channel (2021). Kurti: Digjitalizimi një nga objektivat kryesore në programin e Qeverisë. <https://top-channel.tv/2021/10/22/kurti-digjitalizimi-nje-nga-objektivat-kryesore-ne-programin-e-qeverise/> <https://flossk.org/>

⁸⁵ See more: <https://e.ictkosovo.eu/jobs/page/courses-importance-to-job-market>

⁸⁶ See more: <https://kodeproject.org/en/digita-work-and-empowerment/>

connection to online working opportunities. The programme aims to develop skills to work online, including performing basic IT and IT-enabled services as online freelancers.

The YOU programme builds on the successes and lessons learnt from other innovative measures implemented in Kosovo with the aim of enhancing IT skills and opportunities for online work for those who are highly skilled in the country. For instance, the [Women in Online Work \(WoW\)](#)⁸⁷ project is considered a good practice example in terms of effectively ensuring the employability of women online through targeted training. Another good practice example is “ICT for Kosovo’s growth”, a website for IT training developed with financial support from the EU.⁸⁸ The site facilitates the ‘offer-demand’ matching of young ICT professionals with businesses. It is seen by some as a public sector-supported platform for remote freelancing.

Overall, the strategic approach of the Kosovo Government to prioritise the ICT sector and invest in relevant training has positively impacted the level of digital skills among young people in Kosovo. Based on data from Eurostat, the increase in the development of digital skills in Kosovo was particularly prevalent among individuals aged 16 to 24, whose ‘above basic overall digital skills’ increased from 34% in 2017 to 58% in 2019. More importantly, their ‘above basic software skills’ have also increased from 24% to 58%.⁸⁹ For the age group 25-34 ‘above basic overall digital skills’ also increased from 32% in 2017 to 42% in 2019, and ‘above basic software skills’ increased from 22% to 41%.⁹⁰ Despite this, the ICT sector in the country continues to suffer from a shortage of skilled workers.

Regulating new forms of employment and platform work

The Kosovar government as well as various international actors have taken steps to promote employment in new forms of work. However, relevant regulation is lacking. The new forms of employment in Kosovo are only covered by the existing regulation to some extent.

The Kosovar system provides for two employment statuses: employment and self-employment, which differ in rights and obligations (see more in the table below). People engaged in employment can conclude an **employment contract** (full-time or part-time) or a **service contract**. A service contract is concluded for a specific task or job which will last no longer than 120 days out of the year. For both, the employed and self-employed, personal income tax pension contributions are obligatory, however, healthcare contributions are not. Healthcare for those in an employment relationship is either covered by collective agreements or some employers choose to pay healthcare contributions on a voluntary basis. The self-employed can also make voluntary contributions to receive healthcare benefits.

Table 1. Labour market statuses of platform workers

Labour market status of a person	Applicable regulation	Types of contracts	Obligatory social security/ healthcare contributions	Is it a common status among platform workers?
Employed	Law No.03/L –212, Law on Labour	Employment contract may be concluded for: an indefinite period; a fixed period; or specific tasks and duties. Service contracts.	Personal income tax is obligatory and paid by the employer. Pension Contributions are obligatory, and payments are divided	Yes, among on-location platform workers.

⁸⁷ There were 4 pilots of the Women in Online Work Project realized. The result was that in each pilot project there were around 100 trained women in ICT, which were then employed in ICT sector.

⁸⁸ See more: <https://e.ictkosovo.eu/jobs/page/courses-importance-to-job-market>

⁸⁹ Eurostat Note (divided by age groups, year 2017 & 2019) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/isoc_sk_dskl_i/default/table?lang=en

⁹⁰ Eurostat Note (divided by age groups, year 2017 & 2019) https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/isoc_sk_dskl_i/default/table?lang=en

Labour market status of a person	Applicable regulation	Types of contracts	Obligatory social security/ healthcare contributions	Is it a common status among platform workers?
			between the employer and employee. ⁹¹ Healthcare contributions are not obligatory.	
Self-employed	Law No.03/L –212, Law on Labour no definition Law No. 05/L -028 on Personal Income Tax	Full-time and part-time employment contracts. Service contracts	Personal income tax and pension contributions are obligatory and paid by the self-employed.	Yes, among remote platform workers.

The **contractual agreements** between platforms and their workers are based on the platforms' Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) that can be found on their websites. The online platform acts as an intermediary and sheds the role of the employer since the client is the one hiring the freelancer. Most remote platform workers from Kosovo are self-employed and adhere to the T&Cs provided by platforms. On account of their short-term service contracts and self-employment status, remote platform worker experience low job security compared to traditional employment. These workers are deprived of such benefits as paid holidays, social security, and public healthcare. As self-employed workers, they must also pay personal income tax and pension contributions. There is no data on how many self-employed online workers declare their income and pay taxes and contributions in Kosovo. Working conditions on digital labour platforms are largely defined by the T&Cs which are determined by the platforms, rather than employment regulation. In addition, many hours of unpaid work are spent constantly looking for new contracts which can be energy and time-consuming.⁹²

Contractual agreements between workers and on-location platforms differ depending on the platform. Some on-location platforms have part-time workers that provide services only during the summer season. Other on-location platforms, such as taxi services, mostly have full-time employees, but also hire self-employed drivers. For example, workers using the Filikaqa platform are self-employed. This indicates that there is no uniform approach to the status of on-location platform workers since they can work as both employed and self-employed even on the same platform.

Overall, working conditions in on-location platform work provide more flexibility than in traditional jobs. However, the security of the jobs and contracts is lower compared to traditional jobs for those who are self-employed or conclude service contracts. This also depends on the platform since some on-location platforms offer longer contracts which provide more job security.

Moreover, the broad range of contractual arrangements and the lack of regulation in both remote and on-location platform work leaves opportunities for **informal work**. There is no data in Kosovo regarding the level of informality in platform work. However, according to social media one can assume that there is a degree of informality associated with these types of work. Unregistered employment is more likely among those pursuing flexible employment. Also, part-time workers are more likely to be engaged in unregistered employment than full-time employees.⁹³

⁹¹ Pension funds are 10% of the wage. Employer pays 5% of the market value of the payments in kind and the employee pays 5% of the market value of payments in kind.

⁹² Johannes Stenlund (2018). Being Your Own Boss Online. Kosovo 2.0. <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/being-your-own-boss-online/>

⁹³ Gashi, A., & Williams, C. C. (2019). Evaluating the prevalence and distribution of unregistered employment in Kosovo: lessons from a 2017 survey. *The South East European Journal of Economics and Business*, 14(1), 7-20. <https://sciencdo.com/article/10.2478/jeb-2019-0001>

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Despite recognising that new forms of employment like international freelancing or work through labour platforms significantly contribute to Kosovo's economic growth, the regulatory framework in the country lacks a strategic policy approach to address the opportunities and challenges brought by the new phenomena.⁹⁴

Firstly, weaknesses in the current labour market need to be addressed to ensure citizens are aware of the job opportunities available in the new form. Studies suggest that young people in Kosovo feel they do not have access to information on job opportunities, internships or counselling services for career planning. The labour market is perceived as heavily reliant on family connections, which limits their understanding of available opportunities and their willingness to relocate within Kosovo for work. Making youth employment programmes more effective will require making them more client-centred and sensitive to the specific preferences and needs of young people. Making employment services and activation measures more effective will require several reforms, including a strong programme design, as well as consideration of new opportunities, including new and flexible forms of employment.

In line with insights from a recent ETF review,⁹⁵ creating a unified model of career education and advice at all levels and types of school can help prepare the ground for a successful ability to manage manifold transitions and dealing with insecurity and change. A stronger focus on career management skills development complementing fast activation is recommended. consideration of employment services. There is a need to develop specific services and outreach strategies within employment services for workers in informal employment integrate them into further learning and into the formal sector.

Secondly, Kosovo continues to face structural labour market challenges stemming from the rapid growth of the working-age population, which was not matched by sustained job creation, persistently low participation of women, and generally precarious employment opportunities. Unemployment is even higher (over 90%) among members of the Roma and Ashkali communities. Members of these communities usually work in the informal sector, holding insecure, low-skilled, and low-status jobs and few of them are registered as unemployed. The strategic approach to new forms of employment should better target vulnerable groups and ensure they have access to opportunities online. Similar initiatives to the WoW project could be considered to develop targeted programmes and have a positive impact on the employment of marginalised groups.

In addition, the results of active labour market policies indicate that the employment offices have increased the likelihood of employment for persons in specific target groups. The success was higher among jobseekers from rural areas, especially women, and those with only a mandatory⁹⁶ education level⁹⁷. Additionally, the public employment services need to be reformed and modernized by increasing the quality and variety of employment services provided to the clients – employers, the unemployed, and jobseekers. One of the possible reforms could be to include platform work in such services. Also, PES should increase cooperation with employers and adapt its services to the private sector to obtain vacancies.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ OECD (2019). Policy Responses to New Forms of Work. OECD Publishing. Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/0763f1b7-en>.

⁹⁵ ETF (2022) National Career Development Support System Review. Kosovo Report <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/document-attachments/career-development-support-system-review-kosovo>

⁹⁶ In Kosovo, the primary education (years 1-5) and lower secondary education (years 6-9) is mandatory for everyone.

⁹⁷ Gashi, A., & Williams, C. C. (2019). Evaluating the prevalence and distribution of unregistered employment in Kosovo: lessons from a 2017 survey. *The South East European Journal of Economics and Business*, 14(1), 7-20. <https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/jeb-2019-0001>

⁹⁸ Aliu, Y., & Skenderi, N. (2020). THE ROLE OF PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICE IN A TRANSITION STATE. THE CASE OF KOSOVO. In *Proceedings of FEB Zagreb International Odyssey Conference on Economics and Business* (Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 92-109). University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics and Business.

Furthermore, grants for start-ups could help the development of new jobs, including online platform work. For example, the interview with Apodel's creator and founder indicated that he had a business idea for this on-location platform since 2018 but lacked the finances to develop it. Thus, he applied for a grant in 2019 and succeeded in receiving it to develop the platform in 2020. Public support for the development of start-ups could further incentivise unemployed youth to become more creative and innovative with their business ideas and pursue self-employment instead of traditional employment.

At the same time, it is important to address informality within the labour market in Kosovo, which may further increase with the growing prevalence of new forms of work. The context in which platform work functions lacks a clear regulatory framework and governmental funds for monitoring new forms of work in Kosovo. An interviewed expert noted that the government should make efforts to recognize platform work so that freelancers can pay their pension contributions and be able to transfer those years of experience into their pension schemes. Even more importantly, measures to increase the clarity of contractual agreements in platform work are important to ensure this form of work does not perpetuate the issue of informality.

Another challenge is related to the policy approach to education and training. The main issue with the labour market strategy and policy approaches is that policy makers are concentrated on creating jobs, but do not focus on investing in education and matching the labour market needs with skills. The approach to education should take into consideration skills development opportunities, as well as skills requirements in new forms of work. Overall, Kosovo should use its whole education and training infrastructure, including vocational education and training (VET), to provide adults with remedial education and improve their vocational skills. According to the World Bank, Kosovo's education system needs to ensure that students develop a wide range of skills including lifelong skills. Efforts should be focused on targeting disadvantaged groups and investing in quality-enhancing measures, such as teacher policies and training, curricula reform, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Given the high levels of informality, in order to build on the working population's existing skills and knowledge, the authorities should develop a framework that can combine the recognition of prior learning with up-skilling activities.⁹⁹ Recognition of flexible learning pathways and prior learning experience is an important element for those who enter the labour market through platform work. This is especially important for young people who tend to obtain skills through various informal and non-formal trainings (e.g., ICT skills, communications skills).

High levels of unemployment, especially among those with the highest skills in Kosovo, often lead to brain drain.¹⁰⁰ Supporting new forms of work could help **reduce outward migration**. Kosovo has long sought solutions that would enable citizens to find work without leaving the country.¹⁰¹ Interviews with remote workers, revealed that the flexibility and high pay in online work are the main factors for avoiding migration. According to an interviewed labour mobility expert, some of the main issues that should be addressed by policy makers regarding online platform work is to create opportunities and find ways for qualified professionals in Kosovo to be financially incentivised.¹⁰² This is especially important for ICT professionals who often tend to emigrate from Kosovo.

Finally, it is essential that investment and training are **further developed** in the **ICT sector** considering the job creation possibilities and the enormous importance of the industry in the country. Overall, promoting and supporting the development of the ICT sector would foster job creation, reduce emigration, and contribute to skills development in line with national and international market demands. As mentioned in the first section of this report, most ICT companies in the sector lack skilled workers who would provide software/IT services or have skills in cyber security, customer care, BPO, e-procurement, digital marketing, and document management services, among others. Freelancers on

⁹⁹ OECD (2021). "Kosovo profile", in *Competitiveness in South East Europe 2021: A Policy Outlook*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/573f3543-en>.

¹⁰⁰ Interview conducted on 17.01.2022.

¹⁰¹ Johannes Stenlund (2018). Being Your Own Boss Online. Kosovo 2.0. <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/being-your-own-boss-online/>

¹⁰² Interview conducted on 17.01.2022.

online global platforms can engage in software development and technology work and gain relevant experience to enter the local ICT sector and further strengthen its development.

SOURCES

List of interviews

Organisation	Title	Date of the interview
Apodel	Delivery driver	2021-12-18
Guru.com	Freelancer	2021-12-20
Filikaqa	Self-employed accountant	2021-12-21
Filikaqa	Creator of Filikaqa	2022-01-04
Filikaqa	Platform worker providing social media marketing and web maintenance, part-time	2022-01-06
Upwork	Freelancer architect	2022-01-12
Upwork	Freelancer 3D design	2022-01-13
Freelancer	Web developer	2022-01-14
Apodel	Founder	2022-01-14
Independent consultant	Labour market mobility expert	2022-01-17
Shoferi im	Self-employed owner	2022-01-19

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