Self – Employment
Programme
by UNDP’s Skills Development for Employment (SD4E)
The Self-Employment Programme
Supporting and encouraging young people to become entrepreneurs.

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UNDP’s Approach

UNDP globally and regionally has built a strategic vision that recognizes the importance of creating employment opportunities as a means to addressing both poverty reduction and inequalities and exclusion. Interventions focus on factors that affect labour demand and supply, policies conducive to job creation for young people, as well as improvements in the general quality of employment.

UNDP Albania’s strategic vision is to contribute to building a labour-market focused skills development system that is suited to enhance the employment and entrepreneurship aspects of the unemployed in urban and rural areas, while simultaneously addressing the skills needs of those employed in the formal and informal sectors and emerging entrepreneurs.

Self Employment project was supported by UNDP ‘Skills Development for Employment (SD4E)”

2016 -2019
Economic Development Context

Albania is a middle-income country that over the past two and half decades has made significant stride in establishing a consolidated market economy. Prior to the 2008 global crisis it was one of the fastest growing economies in Europe, averaging an annual GDP growth rate of over 6%.

Despite the slowdown that followed, today the economy continues to grow in an upward trajectory with growth estimates for 2017 standing at 3.5%.

The structure of the Albanian economy is dominated by small and medium enterprises (96%), which despite having a substantial contribution in terms of both economic growth and employment, have limited potential for job creation. With a narrow export and production base, and limited innovation capacities, the competitiveness of Albania’s economy is weak.

Labour market data suggest that the economic growth experienced during the last two decades has not been translated into significant labour market improvements. In 2015, labour force participation rates remain below European averages, with women participation rates significantly lower than men’s. Youth participation rates are even lower and data indicate that since 2007 Albanian youth face increased difficulties in the labour market compared to other adults. Despite a recent decline, the youth unemployment rate stands at 27.4%, nearly double the national average.
Self-Employment Programme
Youth Unemployment Rate

2015

27.4%
Only in 2013, during the Future We Want consultations, 500 youth across the country expressed that jobs were one of their main concerns about the future and reflected on how their needs could be included into the post-2015 development agenda. Youth often indicated a strong desire for public administration jobs, and rarely recognized the benefits (both in financial terms and independence) that could arise from entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, state institutions in charge of employment and vocational training were described as apathetic, old-fashioned and incapable of meeting the needs of the younger generation.

Lack of professional services in support of entrepreneurship was identified as an additional barrier for young people considering setting up their own enterprises.
Why self-employment?

In 2018, labour force participation rates remain below European averages where youth participation rates are even lower, and data indicate that since 2007 Albanian youth face increased difficulties in the labour market compared to other adults. Albania’s educational system too often fails to equip students with the requisite knowledge, competences and skills for a successful transition into the labour market. This results in an unsuitably qualified labour force, skills shortages and soaring youth unemployment that hamper the growth and modernization potential of Albania’s economy.

In the frame of the Skills Development for Employment (SD4E) Programme, UNDP has designed a self-employment measure as an alternative way of employment generation for youth, encouraging young people to take that decisive step from idea to creating their own business.

Jointly with the Ministry of Finance and the National Employment Service (NES), UNDP has been implemented three rounds of the measure, supporting young people in finding viable and skills-building routes to employment, rather than relying on informal patronage networks for jobs in the public sector.
Skills Development for Employment (SD4E) is UNDP’s most recent intervention in the field of youth employment and skills development.
Starting in mid-2016, three phases of the self-employment measure have been launched targeting young people in the 18-30 age group.

Potential applicants have been invited to apply through the SD4E programme platform www.aftesi.info/vetepunesimi. Once selected, the participants have embarked on an intensive training, learning on key entrepreneurial concepts and tools such as business minimal viable product, business model generation and business canvas, targeting general creativity concepts, prototyping and customer journey.

Participants have been assessed during the training based on their attendance; group participation; discipline and idea feasibility.

Following training, a pre-selected team of business mentors supported the selected beneficiaries in developing fully elaborated business plans. Those youth whose business plans were deemed sustainable received a grant up to the amount of ALL 500,000 (approximately USD 4,000). The grants took the form of assets, materials and equipment, and were allowed only after the business has been formally registered. The established businesses have been monitored and receiving additional business development services during the first year of activity. Each of the beneficiaries also benefited 10 hours of mentoring during the first two months of their business activities.
1. **Call for Application**
   Youth aged between 18-30 years old with a sustainable business idea.

6. **Contracting and Distribution of Grants**

7. **Monitoring Process Throughout the First Year Following Registration at QKB**

5. **Selection and Announcement of the Awardees**
2. Process of Selecting the Applications which fit the criteria of the programme

3. Training on Entrepreneurship and business plan development

4. Business Plan Development and Mentoring
The programme contains four key elements.

1. Training on Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship
2. Support to Business Plan Development
3. Mentoring and Assistance Towards Business Registration
4. Financial Grant Towards the Purchase of Equipments
Self-Employment Programme

1st Phase

800 Applications accepted

Finalists

150 Grants
Up to 500,000 Lek

1,700 Applicants
18–39 Years Old

540 Trained Entrepreneurs

800 Applications accepted

150 Grants
Up to 500,000 Lek

1,700 Applications accepted

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150 Grants
Up to 500,000 Lek
Types of Businesses

- Agribusiness: 19
- Arts & Crafts: 25
- Social Business: 7
- e-Commerce: 10
- ICT: 7
- Marketing: 10
- Retail: 25
- Services: 36
- Innovation: 2
- Tourism: 9
Stories

13 Entrepreneurs tell their story...
Vasjan Broka, 30, started his professional career abroad, in Ireland, and continued to develop his path working for esteemed organizations, specializing in the field of personalized training. He decided, later on, to return to Albania, bringing with him this innovative approach which stands as his strongest marketing point. With the start-up fund that Vasjan received from the Self-employment programme, he invested in only a few services, like personalised training for high school students preparing them for the English but also for the life that awaited them abroad. With time and hard work, Vasjan extended his business by also offering trainings for children from a young age and added fields of training like mathematics, entrepreneurship, work interviews, football, book clubs, english language, etc. ‘I have already opened another enterprise inspired by the success of this one’ he says, ‘And my plan for the future is to turn my business into a full personalized training school’. The advice he would give to anyone thinking of opening a business for the first time?

Date of establishment: November 2017
Business name: smarted.al
City: Tirana
Client growth: 50 ongoing clients through 3 years
“Follow your ideas, work hard to achieve them, trust yourself and to believe in what you think will be successful.”

Vasjan Broka
Aida Isaraj

Date of establishment: **December 2016**
Business name: **APA**  
**(Agjencia per Zhvillimin Psikosocial dhe Profesional)**
City: **Tirana**
Client growth: **5-10 contracted clients, depending on the season.**

Aida Isaraj, 35, is a social work graduate with an experience in child protection services with different international organizations. She decided to open her social center to bring her own input into the field by developing an innovative way of training through a playing technique also known as the ‘non-formal’ education. Starting at first with a few simple services, the agency has extended to three main programs: i) positive parenting program (seminars, coaching, etc.); ii) the program of the ability of life for the child, developed throughout different acts, such as summer camps; and iii) the program for professional capacity growth. Aida’s dream faced many challenges at the beginning, especially with marketing and promotion, but its success has extended beyond her original plan and has already given her the opportunity to employ 5 other people. Working continuously to improve her agency, Aida hopes that it will grow with several representational offices throughout the country, but also abroad in neighbor countries like Kosovo or Macedonia.
“If there is one thing I want to say to people who want to start a business is to be brave and try their ideas. There is no way you can progress in life without exploring. There are so many opportunities out there for you to grab.”

Aida Isaraj
Xhulia Mecaj, 30, has always been passionate about dancing. She grasped the opportunity to grow a business out of her passion as soon as she saw the call from the self-employment programme. Skeptical at first and with little experience in the area, Xhulia managed to grow her one-dimensional business from simple zumba classes to organizing dance courses, latin dance events, in-pool children animation, etc. She was very satisfied with the training provided by the programme which she thinks prepad her as a first time business owner. The first true challenge that Xhulia had to face, was the Covid-19 pandemic, where her line of business was one of the most affected. However, she sill managed to stay afloat and see through it, not only for herself but also for her 4 other employees. ‘This venture has been so fulfilling for me’ Xhulia says, ‘that I can see my future focusing all on it. I am hoping to expand it with more events and introduce a personalised training programme for my most talented clients, in order to help them with competitions.'
“To not be afraid, to take that first step on a business that they are very passionate about. Plan it well and just go for it.”

Xhulia Mecaj
Sokol Kuqi

Date of establishment: **June 2017**
Business name: **Krem-Al**
City: **Durres**
Client growth: **90 active clients**

Sokol Kuqi, 33, is one of the many applicants who successfully applied for and completed the second call of the Self-Employment programme. With a degree in public administration but no previous business experience, Sokol recommends the programme to any first-time business owners.

Sokol’s business has been successful according to the initial plan, hiring 2 employees and having at least 90 active clients. ‘We are planning to do more than just distribution, we also want to import products in order to have exclusivity, hire more employees and buy more distribution vehicles,’ he says. Sokol encourages anyone who wants to start a business to always do what they believe in.
"We learned new marketing techniques and most importantly, made new business contacts with whom we’re planning on collaborating in the future."

Sokol Kuqi
Francesko Lamce

Date of establishment: May 2018
Business name: Web Prom
City: Tirana
Client growth: 5 clients and growing

Francesko Lamce, 22, is the youngest grantee of the self-employment programme, but one of the most successful, nonetheless. With a diploma in marketing and business administration and lots of knowledge on start-ups, it was not that hard for him to succeed, even as a first-time business owner. ‘Initially we started as a marketing agency, but with time, growing and understanding our clients’ needs, we developed into a web advertising agency and network, offering to businesses the opportunity to advertise their products and services in many online portals by spending less and guaranteeing more results,’ says Francesko. Following this first success, he is also developing a wi-fi network through his website ‘WebPro’ to be available in the main areas of Tirana for free. Francesko is very satisfied with the success of his business that he has already taken on board two other young professionals like him, and his ambition for the future is to transform his agency into the main online marketing agency in the country.
“What I want to say to other people wanting to start a business, is to take the courage and put your ideas into action. With time you will realise that you can get through every challenge.

Francesko Lamce
Pranvera Guxho

Date of establishment: **May 2017**
Business name: **Fraise Handmade Gifts**
City: **Elbasan**
Client growth: **30 monthly clients**

Pranvera Guxho, 24, was still a finance student when she first heard about the self-employment programme and applied. She was very excited to be part of the beneficiaries and was able to transform her hobby of creating handmade gifts, into a remunerative business. Even though unexperienced, she managed to develop a successful business that survived even tough times such as the Covid-19 pandemic. At first, Pranvera’s plan was to have exclusively handmade products but with time she understood the market’s needs and decided to capitalize on 3 best-selling gifts. Even though there have been struggles, such as finding the right marketing strategy for her business, Pranvera is satisfied with success achieved, also considering that it is only a side project for her, as she is already employed elsewhere. She has already hired one person and is in the process of bringing onboard a second one. “I plan on expanding my business into a mall kiosk soon and employing more people by creating more job opportunities’ says Pranvera.
"I encourage everyone to take a chance and take this opportunity as it will be the greatest personal achievement you will have."

Pranvera Guxho
Enxhi Dyrmishi, 27, is no stranger to owning a business as she is an entrepreneur who is managing a few businesses simultaneously. She started this business as a social media managing agency, creating online content for different companies and ensuring good online design. She also plans on adding advertising videos with time. Enxhi has also been working with companies abroad and has already hired two employees. She plans on expanding her international services in the future, but also her staff with 3 more young professionals in the early future. ‘My biggest struggle is dealing with the public institutions when it comes to taxes, as we are an online operating business.’ Enxhi says, ‘Other than that I would consider my business successful when it comes to its implementation, but yet not financially, as Albania is still not there yet when it comes to online marketing. My advice to others who want to start a business would be to undertake a business risk with a small amount of money loss at first and to not be afraid to fail.'
“Undertake a business risk with a small amount of money loss at first and to not be afraid to fail. Failing teaches you and helps making you more successful in the future.”

Enxhi Djrmishi
Nerada Kulla

Date of establishment: September 2016
Business name: Marigo
City: Durres
Client growth: Can not say exactly as she has daily clients changing everyday

Nerada Kulla, 34, is a law graduate, but not new to the business scene as she comes from a family of entrepreneurs. Her shop, which trades souvenirs, but also artisanal and local products, has been quite successful this far, with plenty of products being added constantly and a new employee hired recently. She really appreciates the programme because even though she was prepared to start a business, she sure needed that initial fund to get her started. Nerada encourages everyone to give their maximum and to appreciate every fund they get when it comes to their business.
“Had it not been for the pandemic I would have expanded already into a second shop but I will make that happen in the future anyways as the business now is doing well.”

Nerada Kulla
Elvisa Xhaferri

Date of establishment: December 2018
Business name: Moon Creation
City: Tirana
Client growth: Can not say exactly as she has daily clients changing everyday

Elvisa Xhaferri is a fine arts graduate with experience in the production of artisanal products, so it’s no surprise that she decided to open her own shop when the opportunity presented itself. Elvisa used the funds she received from the Self-employment Programme to open her shop, where she and her husband make all kinds of personalized gifts. ‘Initially we only wanted to have artisanal products in our shop, but we had to adapt to the market needs and added other products products as well’ Elvisa says, ‘However our goal is still to have an all artisanal products shop in order to stand out to big companies as they are our biggest competitors.’ Elvisa has struggled with big competitors from the establishment of her business but she is still satisfied with her success. This artist has big plans for the future, as she plans to diversify her products with a new marble technique which is very unique and new to the local market.
"Small ideas reveal to be oftentimes big ideas, you just need the courage to put them into action."

Elvisa Xhaferri
Erlinda Saci

Date of establishment: **July 2017**
Business name: **Smiling Hands Nail Saloon**
City: **Tirana**
Client growth: **5 daily clients**

Erlinda Saci, 29, is an engineer graduate, but she always wanted to start her own business one day. She thinks of this path as the most rewarding financially as opposed to being employed somewhere. Erlinda’s plan, when she applied to the Self-employment programme, was to own a nail saloon that would also offer professional training courses. From the beginning her business has been quite successful, exceeding her initial expectations, and she was also able to hire four other young women like her. At first she struggled to comply and familiarize with all the “the complicated” financial and tax regulations, but also with the lack of training for her line of business in Albania. Despite all the difficulties the business continued to grow, and now Erlinda plans on opening a new nail studio soon adding new services and expanding the business further. She encourages everyone thinking of owning as business to listen to their heart and to insist on what they want.
“In the future I want all of this to turn into a cosmetic academy.”

Erinda Saci
Viola Thoma

Date of establishment: May 2017
Business name: GS Solutions
City: Tirana
Client growth: 15 clients

Viola Thoma is a business administration graduate with experience in working with NGO’s but no previous experience in business. With the start-up fund and the entrepreneurial training from the Self-Employment programme, Viola planned to open her very own digital marketing agency. And while it started like this, it has now grown into multidepartment agency with three main ones, consisting of digital marketing, web development and project writing services. Viola’s business has been quite successful, with nine new young and energetic hirings and continues growing, turning the three departments into baby start-ups within the agency.
“If you have an idea, just go with it. Owning a business is a school on its own. Don't just start something just to take a fund.”

Viola Thoma
Ina Veliu is a 31-year-old woman who has had a good deal of experience in the line of business she chose to undertake after receiving the start up fund by the Self-employment Programme. Inva has been able to grow her business throughout these years and has now a business partner, Leandro. What started as a simple web development company, ketri.alb, has now transformed into an online hosting service, marketing, and employment portal. Inva and Leonardo have also been able to welcome onboard three new employees. ‘We plan on continually expanding in order to manage big projects, and to have a diversified portfolio of clients as 80% of our income comes from them,’ says Inva, satisfied with the company’s success. There have been struggles though. It is very difficult for a small new business to get recognition and try to approach new clients, but with persistence and hard work, they have managed not only to stay afloat, but also to grow.
“If you have an idea, just try it, don’t be afraid.”

Ina Veliu
Rigers Male

Date of establishment: May 2017
Business name: Freskia e Detit
City: Tirana
Client growth: 5000+ clients

Rigers Male, 35, started his career as a bar manager. When he saw the call to be a part of the Self-Employment Programme, he saw an opportunity to grow more financially and professionally. His simple business plan consisting of a fish shop/restaurant, turned out to be a very successful one. During these few years the business has expanded with a second restaurant, distribution with many other restaurants in Tirana, delivery, and he has also employed 9 people. Rigers is very satisfied with his venture and has big plans for the future. ‘We plan on opening a third new location in the next few months and opening a fish market in the future, thus creating even more job opportunities,’ he says. Of course the business started with many struggles, but we look forward as we managed to from 50 clients to 5000 and counting.
“Never give up! Never let anyone make you think you are not worth it! I am here today because I believed in myself.”

Rigels Malw
“Encouraging young people to take that decisive step from idea to creating their own business.”

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