**About** Innovations Lab Kosovo

UNICEF’s Innovations Lab Kosovo is helping UNICEF and partners rethink development. A unit of UNICEF Kosovo, the Lab is home to a multidisciplinary team working to unlock new uses of information and technology, effect substantive change through communication, and prepare and empower young people to be agents of change and partners in our pursuit of a Kosovo fit for children and youth.

The Lab’s flagship programmes—By Youth For Youth and the Youth Advocacy Platform—are the result of applying innovative thinking and methods to one of Kosovo’s most pressing challenges and most promising opportunities: its youth population.

**Why ILK**

People under the age of 25 constitute nearly *one half* of Kosovo’s population. Yet young people are largely unprepared and unable to realize the agency that is their right and responsibility, due both to a lack of *opportunity* to participate in the civic, political, and professional spheres, and the lack of *capacity* to assume the responsibilities inherent in participation. Kosovo’s youth are:

* **Excluded from the professional sphere** 73 percent of young people of working age are unemployed; employment is in low value-add sectors
* **Excluded from political decision-making** 48 percent of young people perceive “little” or “no” opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.
* **Poorly prepared by the formal education sector** Poor quality instruction, poor retention, and outdated pedagogy plague the primary through tertiary levels.

Moreover, while a nascent youth empowerment ecosystem is taking shape—with incubators, accelerators, advocacy trainings, internship programmes, and other youth capacity-building schemes—a majority of youth are unable to access these opportunities. Poverty, social exclusion, educational inequities, and rurality are among the many barriers preventing marginalized youth from engaging in existing schemes.

The Innovations Lab Kosovo’s By Youth For Youth and Youth Advocacy Platform programmes *meet youth where they are­*—in terms of location, social barriers, and capacity—to bridge that opportunity gap.

**By Youth For Youth**

The By Youth For Youth programme employs an experiential learning model to empower marginalized youth to identify and analyze issues in their communities, and to develop and lead projects that address these issues. Youth leaders work closely with a team of mentors during project implementation, and are additionally supported with up to EUR 2,000 in funding, a library of equipment, no-cost workspace, and are provided with workshops and trainings in key professional readiness skills to complement the experience.

**So What?**

For young people, participation in the BYFY programme results in an increase in four core elements of professional readiness:

1. **Problem solving skills** Young people are trained and supported in identifying and analyzing community challenges and developing and proposing solutions
2. **Management of Organizational Processes Youth** Leaders learn to navigate core organizational processes relevant to any career: principles of budgeting and financial management, reporting, and project management skills.
3. **Communications Skills** Programme participants learn to develop and deliver convincing, substantive, and audience-appropriate presentations, and to write and debate persuasively
4. **Relationship Management and Professional Conduct** Youth leaders are exposed to and given an opportunity to exercise relationship management and networking skills, as well as the principles of professional conduct—e.g. conflict resolution skills.

From youth centers encouraging Bosnian-Albanian interethnic dialog, to classes that combine hand-craft and entrepreneurial training, to increasing crop yields and profitability by teaching small holder farmers modern composting techniques, the projects developed and implemented by youth leaders are creating lasting social benefit in their communities. And for Kosovo, the programme’s impact is nearly inestimable: the BYFY creates a network of dynamic, impassioned young people with the skills, experience, and desire to effect meaningful, positive social change.

**Youth Advocacy Platform**

The Youth Advocacy Platform explores new models of advocacy training, emphasizing emerging technology-augmented advocacy (e.g. social media advocacy, open mapping, citizen science, and citizen journalism). Moreover, YAP creates opportunities for young people to realize their right—and exercise their *responsibility­­*—to speak and be heard, through projects including youth-led advocacy campaigns and youth journalism trainings.

**So What?**

YAP’s curriculum of trainings and its opportunities for youth address four fundamental aspects of youth participation:

1. **Informed** Young people understand their rights and entitlements under national law and international instruments (such as the CRC); moreover, young people have access to press and media, and they themselves have the opportunity to produce media for their peers.
2. **Connected** YAP supports the right of young people to convene, debate, and express dissent, and to organize and maintain membership and leader in youth organizations
3. **Included** YAP supports and creates opportunities for young people to be consulted in decision making and included in the formulation of policy, and to evaluate the provision of resources, services, and other entitlements
4. **Oriented toward Community and Voluntary Action** Both BYFY and YAP provide youth with an opportunity to identify and analyze community issues and organize to effect community impact; both programmes also support the right of young people to participate in the reproduction of culture.

From local community advocacy to the global post-2015 debate, YAP projects have connected young people to decision making processes ranging from the local to the supranational, and prepared participants—particularly those young people from historically marginalized communities—to effectively advocate with decision-makers for positive change. For Kosovo, an included, informed, and community good-oriented youth population can be a powerful force for stability and social good.

**Partnership**

A partnership between UNICEF and GIZ around Innovations Lab Kosovo would serve several objectives:

1. **Strengthening the equity focus of existing youth empowerment schemes** Anecdotal evidence suggests that, despite the successes of the existing LYAC scheme, a weakness persists regarding the involvement of marginalized youth in the programme. Capitalizing on the Lab’s success in engaging young people from marginalized communities, the Lab would build the capacity of LYACs and other youth empowerment programmes in broadening their reach and participation to address a more equitable cross section of the Kosovo’s youth population.
2. **Improving youth professional readiness and entrepreneurial capacity** GIZ technical and material support would serve to improve the BYFY model, particularly with regard to its targeting and its curriculum of training opportunities, and enable the programme to reach an even greater number of young people. Furthermore, UNICEF and GIZ’s combined influence would catalyze increased involvement by the private sector (e.g. internships and career placement), and strengthen the institutional linkages that are key to the sustainable of youth-led projects.
3. **Strengthening Kosovo’s youth participation “ecosystem”** Joint policy advocacy would further the integration of young people into decision-making and policy development processes—opportunities upon which the Youth Advocacy Platform projects can capitalize. As with BYFY, GIZ technical and material support would also improve the reach of the Youth Advocacy Platform. Cooperation would also provide new gateways—such as LYACs—for the implementation of YAP activities, resulting in the strengthening of LYACs’ core function—to represent the voice of young people.

**Way Forward**

In order to facilitate effective collaboration, the Lab proposes a series of “study visits” by the GIZ staff to the Innovations Lab Kosovo, to consist of a full day knowledge sharing session to introduce to the Lab programme and explore GIZ’s youth programming strategy, to be followed by a series of field visits to key Lab programme activities (including BYFY workshops, YAP campaign activities and trainings, and youth-led projects).

At the conclusion of these study visits, we propose a half-day partnership brainstorm to explore areas of strategic alignment, identify shared objectives, and develop principles of cooperation.

**Thank you**

UNICEF and the Innovations Lab Kosovo are grateful for GIZ’s consideration and look forward to the possibility of collaboration—let’s do great things together.