SWISSCONTACT IN KOSOVO

25 YEARS IN KOSOVO

We create opportunities

2001 – 2026

2001 • The start



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VET Modular Curricula

A plumbing student in Peja and one in Kaçanik could learn the same trade in different ways, depending on the school. Qualifications and competencies varied, making it difficult for employers to know what graduates were capable of doing.

Swisscontact partnered with vocational schools to break each trade into modules, practical units that students master one at a time. When technology or employers' needs change, a module could be updated, added or dropped. What started as a pilot in a few schools has spread across Kosovo's VET system and influenced the regulations and policies shaping VET nationwide.

The same approach now shapes short courses run by private training providers. Woodworking businesses around Gračanica needed people who could programme CNC machines, but there was nowhere local to learn. In 2025, with Swisscontact's support, the Gračanica Innovation Center teamed up with Shehu Academy, a provider that trains young people for the wood industry, to bring the course in Gračanica. Businesses gained the staff they had struggled to find, and trainees gained a skill local employers were asking for.



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More Than Woodworking: Skills That Bring Communities Closer

Wood-processing companies around Gračanica need workers who can operate and programme computer-controlled machines. Yet Serbian-speaking young people face language and transport barriers to accessing training, leaving local talent disconnected from job opportunities.

Swisscontact brought together Shehu Academy, an Albanian-led training provider, and the Gračanica Innovation Centre, rooted in the local Serb community. Together, they offered practical CNC training close to home, designed around employers' needs. The initiative developed local trainers who can pass these skills on to others.

The change goes beyond addressing a skills gap. Young people gain access to new opportunities, while training providers across communities increasingly share expertise and resources.

By strengthening local training capacity and connecting skills development with employers' needs, this approach demonstrates how vocational education can become more inclusive, accessible and responsive to the labour market, while fostering greater cooperation and trust between communities.



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A Virtual Company Where Everyone Learns

In many vocational schools, students once learned how businesses work mostly from textbooks. Sales, accounting, negotiation, and marketing were taught in theory, leaving few opportunities to practice running a company.

Drawing on Swiss experience, Swisscontact helped introduce practice firms: simulated businesses where students take on business roles, issue invoices, manage finances, and trade with other student companies, without risking real money. Initially used in economics schools, the approach also reached agricultural schools, where students apply entrepreneurship skills to farm management, production and sales.

What began in a few schools has become a nationwide network of more than 100 practice firms, coordinated through a national centre. Since 2016, Kosovo has been part of PEN Worldwide, allowing students to trade and collaborate with peers internationally. Practical entrepreneurship education is now part of a locally managed system that helps successive generations build confidence and business skills.



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Why a Welding Class Costs More Than a History Class

Learning to weld requires more than a teacher and a classroom. Students need equipment, protective gear and materials to practise with. Yet vocational schools often receive funding much like general education schools, leaving workshops short of essential resources.

Swisscontact worked with education authorities and municipalities to improve school financing formula and financial management for vocational education, prioritizing VET school financing and enabling students to practice their professions at school.

These changes strengthened financial management capacity within schools and municipalities, while bringing the specific costs of vocational education into wider policy discussions. The experience continues to inform the need for more responsive financing, where resources reflect the requirements of different vocational programmes.



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When One Door Closes

Despite having a university degree, Valon struggled to find stable employment and support his family. Uncertain about his career direction, he explored different opportunities before discovering his interest in furniture making.

Swisscontact introduced the Coaching for Employment approach in Kosovo, training Employment Agency counsellors to help jobseekers identify their strengths, explore career options and connect with employment opportunities. With this support, Valon found work in a furniture company, gaining financial independence and renewed confidence in his future.

The change extends beyond individual success stories. Employment counsellors are adopting more personalised approaches, helping jobseekers make informed career choices rather than simply searching for vacancies. By strengthening coaching capacities within public employment services, the approach makes employment support more responsive and accessible, particularly for people facing barriers to employment.

> **Never give up if one door closes, keep knocking on another."**
> – Valon, programme beneficiary.



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The Classroom Is Only Half the Lesson

In the early 2000s, many vocational students completed their education with limited experience in real workplaces. Employers needed practical skills, while graduates struggled to demonstrate what they could do.

Swisscontact helped schools connect vocational training with businesses. In Prishtina, an agricultural vocational school worked with retailers to develop practical food-retail training, drawing on Swiss expertise. By 2010, Swisscontact had also helped 100 graduates from ten schools secure internships in local companies and institutions.

Today, learning in the workplace is increasingly part of Kosovo's vocational education system. Dual education combines classroom instruction with training in companies, reaching more than 2,500 students across 32 schools in 2025/26. Swisscontact continues supporting vocational education reform and stronger connections between schools and employers. What began as early experiments in practical training reflects a broader shift towards skills that prepare young people for employment.



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From a Climber's dream to a Thriving Tourism Destination

Western Kosovo's mountains have always been breathtaking. Yet limited infrastructure and few organised activities meant local communities could not fully benefit from their natural beauty. Nol and Virtyt, two passionate climbers from Peja, dreamed of bringing via ferrata experiences to Rugova, inspired by Italian examples, but needed investment and support.

Swisscontact worked with local enthusiasts, outdoor associations, businesses, municipalities and communities to develop adventure experiences, including via ferratas, biking, zip lines, cave tours, adventure parks and winter activities.

Visitors now have more reasons to come, stay longer and explore further, creating opportunities for local businesses and employment. New enterprises are emerging, existing ones expanding, and municipalities and businesses increasingly investing in tourism. What began in Peja is inspiring similar initiatives across Kosovo, helping transform natural beauty into lasting economic opportunities.

> **In numbers**: More than 120 tourism experiences developed across Kosovo.



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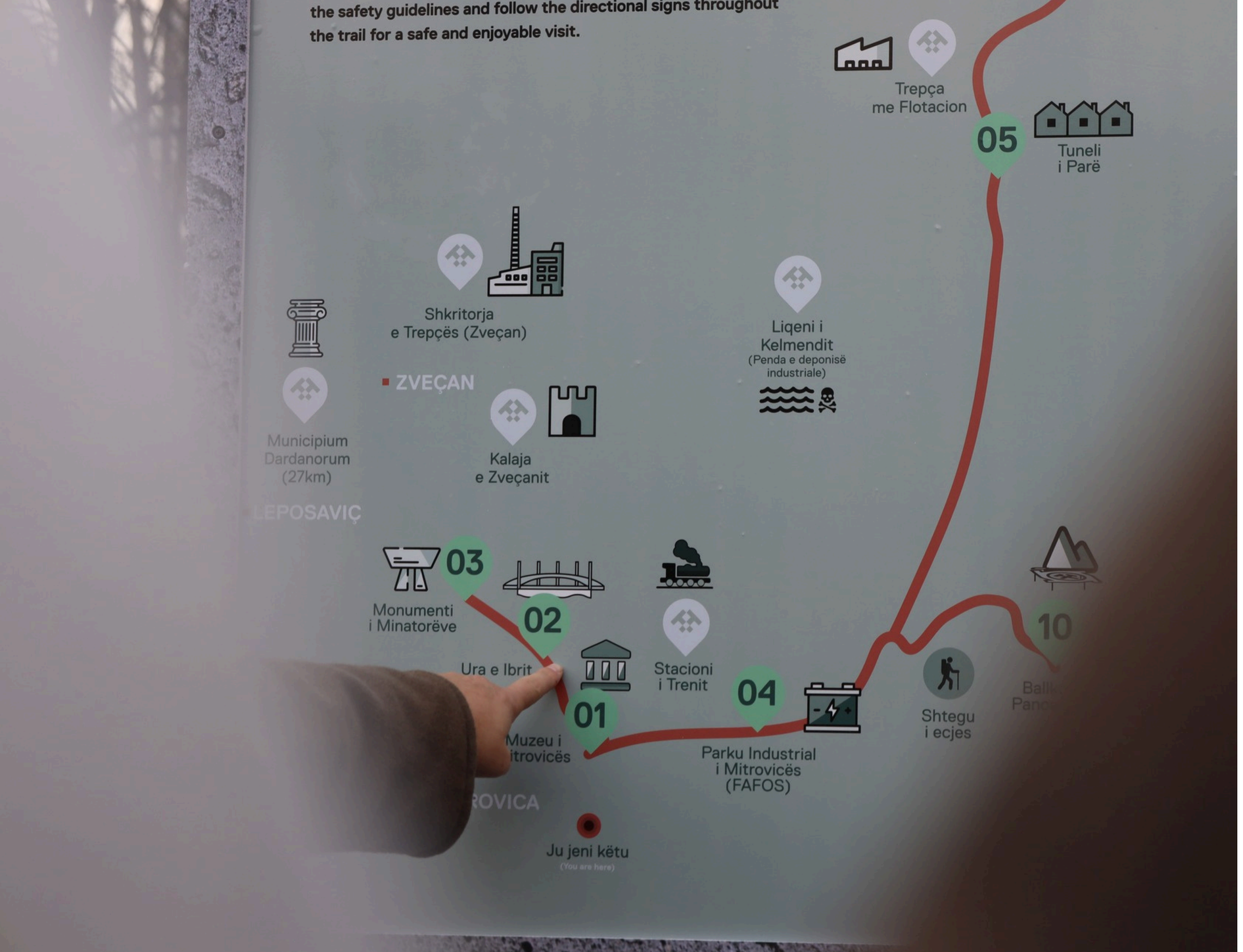
Guiding became a profession

Anyone could once call themselves a tour guide in Kosovo. Without recognised training, common standards or a professional association, visitors had little assurance of quality, while aspiring guides lacked a clear path into the profession.

Swisscontact supported the training of professional tour guides, bringing together young people from different communities. In 2018, graduates including Enes Toska established GuideKS, an association dedicated to raising professional standards, representing guides and supporting career development.

What began with a group of trainees has grown into a national professional association representing guides across Kosovo. GuideKS is now connected to European and global networks and has become an accredited provider of tourist guide qualifications. With tourism legislation introducing professional licensing and standards, guiding is gaining formal recognition and a stronger place in Kosovo's tourism industry. Guides from diverse communities help visitors discover Kosovo through authentic local perspectives.



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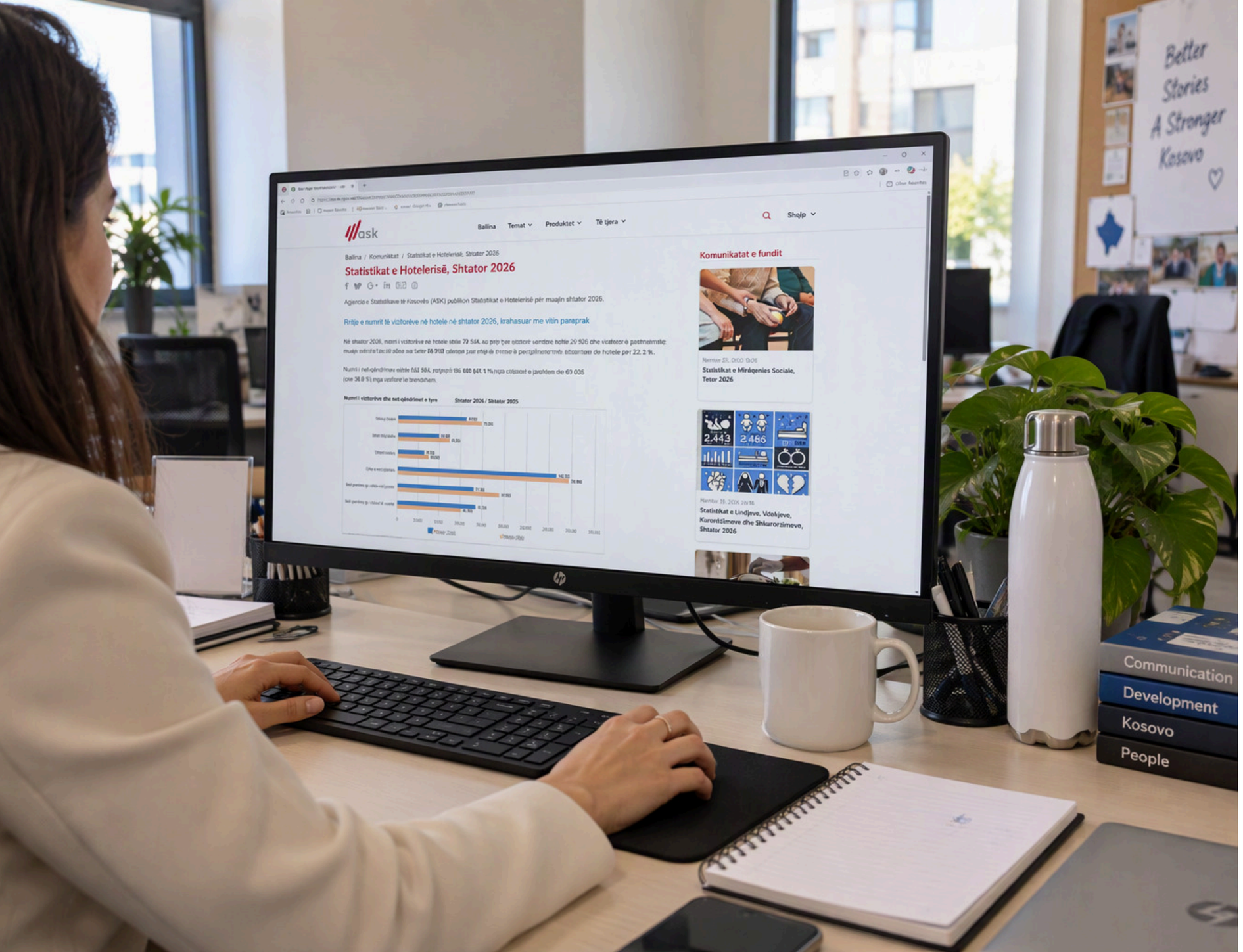
Municipalities Plan for Their Visitors

Kosovo had tremendous tourism potential, but no shared national vision for developing it. Municipalities lacked destination plans, while guesthouses, guides and restaurants largely worked independently, limiting opportunities to attract visitors and grow local economies.

Swisscontact brought municipalities, tourism businesses and associations together to develop shared priorities and destination management plans. It also supported national tourism policy development, helping establish a stronger framework for coordinated tourism growth.

Today, tourism is increasingly recognised as a driver of economic development. Kosovo has a Ministry of Culture and Tourism, a Tourism Law, a National Tourism Strategy and municipal destination plans. Municipalities are taking greater responsibility for tourism development, allocating resources and introducing accommodation taxes to finance promotion and attractions. What began with local planning initiatives is helping build a more coordinated tourism system, where institutions and businesses jointly shape the future of their destinations.

> **In numbers**: More than 15 local tourism plans and master plans developed with communities.



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Counting Visitors, Planning Better

How many tourists visit Kosovo, where do they come from, and how long do they stay? For years, limited and fragmented tourism data made it difficult for government institutions and businesses to plan with confidence.

Swisscontact brought together Ilir T. Berisha from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics and Slovenian tourism expert Janez Sirse to improve tourism measurement using methods aligned with European standards. It also supported cooperation between the Statistics Agency and Kosovo Border Police, strengthening the collection and use of visitor information.

Today, the Kosovo Agency of Statistics regularly publishes figures on visitors, their origins and overnight stays. Ministries, Municipalities, hotels, restaurants, and tour operators can use this information to understand tourism trends, plan investments, and prepare for changing visitor demand. What was once a significant information gap is gradually becoming a more reliable foundation for evidence-based decisions and coordinated tourism development.



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Kosovo on the World's Travel Map

Kosovo once appeared at international tourism fairs only occasionally, often when a project or sponsor covered the costs. Without a consistent presence, local tour operators struggled to build lasting relationships with buyers abroad.

Swisscontact helped tourism businesses and public institutions prepare for international fairs, present Kosovo's attractions, and connect with tour operators. At Travel News Market in Stockholm, mountain guide Uta Ibrahimi joined local businesses and Kosovo's Embassy in Sweden to introduce the country's adventure tourism experiences to Nordic markets.

What was once occasional promotion is becoming more coordinated. Tourism businesses and institutions are returning to international events such as ITB Berlin and Travel News Market, while Kosovo hosts its own international tourism fair, KIFT. These growing efforts give businesses repeated opportunities to build relationships, reach new markets, and position Kosovo as a destination worth discovering.



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Rules That Make Adventure Safer

Zip lines, climbing routes, and adventure parks were opening across Kosovo, but clear safety rules were missing. Visitors had to rely on trust, while one serious accident could undermine confidence in the entire sector.

Swisscontact brought engineers, tourism businesses, and public authorities together to develop safety regulations aligned with European standards. Professor Shpëtim Lajqi from the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering helped develop inspection procedures and strengthen local expertise in designing, maintaining, and inspecting adventure attractions.

Today, regulations establish safety requirements for adventure tourism facilities, while local specialists increasingly provide the expertise needed to design, inspect, and maintain these attractions. Kosovo is developing the capacity not only to build and operate safer adventure tourism experiences, but also to offer specialised technical services to neighboring markets. This growing local expertise reduces dependence on international providers, strengthens the tourism industry, and creates new opportunities for businesses and skilled professionals.



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Turning Climate Challenges into New Opportunities

Shorter winters and unreliable snowfall are putting Kosovo's mountain tourism businesses under pressure. For Lynx Freeride, a company built around skiing adventures, fewer snow days threatened a business model dependent on winter tourism.

Swisscontact supported tourism businesses to adapt by developing activities that attract visitors beyond winter. Lynx Freeride expanded into mountain biking, reaching new customers and diversifying its income opportunities. Swisscontact also helped businesses invest in renewable energy, adopt sustainable practices, and develop more diverse tourism experiences.

The change extends across the sector. Tour operators are shifting towards year-round activities, mountain accommodation providers are investing in cleaner energy, and institutions are increasingly integrating sustainability into tourism planning. These changes are helping Kosovo's tourism industry become more resilient to climate change, reduce its dependence on seasonal activities, and create more sustainable economic opportunities.



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From One Trade Fair to Customers Abroad

For Sheqer Ukaj of Elnor, the Stockholm Furniture Fair opened doors to Scandinavian buyers. But securing international customers takes more than one meeting. Building trust, understanding market requirements, and maintaining relationships are essential for Kosovo manufacturers seeking to export.

Swisscontact helped companies like Elnor access international trade fairs and business exchanges in Stockholm, Basel, Düsseldorf, and Lausanne. Repeated meetings, buyer visits, and follow-ups helped businesses develop relationships and turn opportunities into export orders. Elnor secured its first export order to Denmark.

The change extends beyond individual companies. Sector associations, including the Association of Wood Processors of Kosovo, increasingly organise trade missions, provide market information, and connect members with international buyers. These services are helping Kosovo manufacturers establish a more consistent presence in export markets and build lasting commercial relationships.



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Running a Factory from a Screen

In many Kosovo furniture factories, orders, quotations, stock, and production planning are still managed through paper records or spreadsheets. Disconnected processes create delays, errors, and waste, making it harder for manufacturers to meet international buyers' expectations.

Swisscontact works with local technology providers such as MIKASOFT to bring digital solutions to furniture manufacturers. MIKASOFT has developed an integrated system connecting customer requests, quotations, material optimisation, production processes, and machinery, enabling businesses to manage operations more efficiently.

The change goes beyond individual factories. Manufacturers are beginning to recognise digitalisation as an investment in productivity and competitiveness, while local technology companies are developing solutions tailored to industry needs.

By making these services more accessible and commercially viable, the approach is helping create a market for digital solutions that can support more businesses, reduce waste, and strengthen Kosovo's manufacturing competitiveness.



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From Small Workshops to Competitive Manufacturers

For Nallan, a growing Kosovo footwear brand, expanding into international markets meant producing more, maintaining consistent quality, and meeting buyers' expectations. Yet investing in modern machinery and technology remained a costly challenge, as it does for many local manufacturers.

Swisscontact supported Nallan to upgrade its production technology, alongside the company's own investments in digital systems, infrastructure, and market promotion. The improvements helped expand production capacity and strengthen its competitiveness. Across Kosovo, Swisscontact has supported hundreds of businesses to improve their capabilities, adopt modern technologies, and pursue new growth opportunities.

The change extends across the manufacturing sector. Businesses are increasingly investing in modern equipment, improving productivity and product quality, and expanding into new markets. As manufacturers grow, they create demand for skilled workers and specialised services, generating new employment opportunities, higher incomes, and a stronger, more competitive industrial sector.



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The Skills Behind Tomorrow's Fashion

For Miranda Zeqiri, years of making clothing patterns by hand met a new challenge: fashion businesses increasingly needed digital precision, but Kosovo had few specialists offering these services. Designers and manufacturers struggled to find the skills needed to modernise production.

Swisscontact supported Miranda to establish a digital pattern-making service, helping apparel companies turn designs into accurate, production-ready patterns. Training providers such as Diverse Academy are also now offering courses in digital garment design and CLO3D, equipping a new generation of professionals with industry-relevant skills.

The change goes beyond technology in individual factories. Skilled professionals and specialised service providers are becoming more accessible to apparel businesses, enabling them to reduce errors, improve quality, and respond to buyers more efficiently. As digital skills develop locally, new employment and entrepreneurship opportunities emerge, helping Kosovo's fashion industry become more innovative and competitive.



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From Grants to Investors

Starting a business in Kosovo often meant relying on donor grants, with few opportunities to access investors, experienced mentors, or international markets. Even promising startups struggled to find the support needed to grow beyond their early stages.

Swisscontact strengthened local incubators such as VentureUP at the University of Prishtina, helping them develop stronger programmes and support entrepreneurs. It also connected founders with international experts and supported new acceleration initiatives, helping startups prepare for investment, develop business models, and explore international markets.

The startup ecosystem is gradually moving beyond basic incubation towards more specialised support for business growth. Local incubators are expanding their services, international accelerators are entering the market, and investor networks are emerging. These developments are creating new pathways for startups to attract capital, expand internationally, and generate employment.



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Founders Walk Together

Starting a business in Kosovo could be a lonely journey. Entrepreneurs often saw one another as competitors, rarely shared experiences, and had few opportunities to learn from founders who had successfully expanded internationally.

Swisscontact began bringing entrepreneurs together through informal meetings in Prishtina cafés, gradually building trust and encouraging collaboration. International experts joined these gatherings, offering mentoring, practical advice, and connections to global networks.
What began as small gatherings has evolved into founder-led communities, including Founders Network Kosovo and ScaleUp Kosovo.

Entrepreneurs increasingly exchange knowledge, support one another, mentor emerging startups, and engage with policymakers. As experienced founders share their expertise and connections, Kosovo's startup ecosystem is becoming more collaborative and better equipped to support the next generation of entrepreneurs, creating opportunities for business growth, innovation, and employment.



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Beyond the Runway: Kosovo's Women Taking Fashion to the World

Behind Labentiné is a story of creativity, ambition, and determination. Like many women-led fashion businesses in Kosovo, the brand has developed distinctive designs, but limited access to international buyers and networks makes expansion difficult.

Swisscontact has helped open these doors, supporting Kosovo fashion brands to showcase their collections at London and Milan Fashion Weeks and fairs in Stockholm. Designers have gained international visibility, connected with potential buyers and partners, strengthened their brands, and explored new markets. This exposure also helps businesses become better prepared to compete internationally.

The change extends beyond the runway. Women-led fashion businesses are strengthening their market position and creating opportunities for growth and employment, including for other women. Meanwhile, international fashion platforms, business associations, and public institutions are working together to create more regular pathways to global markets. Individual successes are gradually contributing to a more connected fashion industry, where women's creativity can translate into sustainable businesses and jobs.



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When Women's Skills Become Livelihoods

Across Kosovo, many women have valuable skills, creativity, and entrepreneurial ambition, yet limited access to employment, finance, and markets prevents them from turning their potential into sustainable livelihoods. These barriers are particularly pronounced for women in rural areas and non-majority communities.

From the early 2000s until today, Swisscontact in Kosovo has supported women-led enterprises and businesses that create employment opportunities for women, helping them strengthen production, develop skills, and access markets. From NISA, which connects traditional craftsmanship with economic opportunities, to Dimali Tex, which creates rural employment through international supply chains, businesses are demonstrating how women's participation can drive economic growth.

The change reaches beyond individual enterprises. More women are gaining access to income, skills, and economic independence, while businesses increasingly recognise their contribution to growth and competitiveness.

As opportunities expand into underserved communities, women's economic participation helps create jobs, strengthen local economies, and promote more inclusive development.



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Farmers know their buyer before they plant

In 2013, most Kosovo farmers sold their produce through informal markets, while food processors relied heavily on imported raw materials. Farmers lacked reliable buyers, and businesses struggled to secure consistent local supplies.

Swisscontact piloted contract farming with 29 tomato farmers and two processors. Farmers agreed on quantities, quality, and prices before planting, while collection centres such as Agro Celina, led by Fehim Rexhepi, provided seedlings, advice, collection, and delivery to processors such as Ananas Impex.

What began as a small pilot has spread across the sector. Farmers gain greater certainty, collection centres provide essential services, and processors increasingly source locally. Today, around 85% of food processors purchase raw materials in Kosovo, strengthening local supply chains and creating more opportunities for agricultural production, business growth, and rural incomes.



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A good harvest starts with quality seedlings

Growing quality crops starts long before harvest. Many Kosovo farmers relied on home-grown seedlings or uncertain suppliers, leaving them exposed to plant diseases, unpredictable weather, and inconsistent yields.

Swisscontact supported Agrobora to establish Kosovo's first specialised vegetable seedling nursery, introducing modern technology and professional production methods. This inspired other nurseries to invest in equipment and technical expertise, giving farmers better access to quality seedlings and advice.

Seedling production has since grown into a specialised agricultural service. Farmers increasingly purchase reliable inputs from professional nurseries, improving productivity and crop quality. As specialised seedling nurseries expand across Kosovo, public funding schemes have also adapted to support investments in modern seedling production. What began with individual businesses is helping build a stronger agricultural supply system that responds to farmers' needs and changing climate conditions.



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Innovation Becomes Part of the Business

Bliff Organik started with seven varieties of herbal tea, but like many Kosovo food processors, faced challenges developing new products and reaching wider markets. Limited technology, expertise, and reliable supply chains often held back innovation.

Swisscontact helped food businesses access expertise in product development, packaging, branding, food safety, and modern production technologies. These improvements have enabled businesses to diversify their products, grow in domestic and European markets, and create new employment and income opportunities, particularly for women in rural areas.

The change extends across Kosovo's food industry. Companies are increasingly investing their own resources in new products, technologies, and production processes to meet changing consumer demand. Growing access to specialised services and stronger links between farmers and processors are helping businesses move towards higher-value products, strengthen their competitiveness, and create more employment and income opportunities.



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A Standard That Opens Doors

Kosovo's medicinal and aromatic plants have strong export potential, but limited access to affordable organic certification prevented many producers from reaching higher-value international markets. Farmers, collectors, and exporters also lacked coordinated support to meet international standards.

Swisscontact supported Organika, the sector association, to develop certification support services, provide technical advice, and connect businesses with certification providers and international buyers. By reducing costs and strengthening local expertise, more companies gained access to organic certification.

The change is visible across the sector. The number of certified organic operators grew from just two to more than 40, while organic cultivation expanded significantly. Organika increasingly leads certification support and market development, helping businesses meet international requirements and reach premium markets.

Organic certification is becoming an established business practice, strengthening Kosovo's position as a supplier of high-quality natural ingredients.

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25 Years in Kosovo

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