



KOSOVO AMERICAN EDUCATION FUND

Quarterly Newsletter, December 2020



KOSOVO'S FUTURE BEGINS WITH EDUCATION

The Kosovo American Education Fund has launched the **'Kosovo's Future Begins with Education.'** an online fundraising campaign at GoFundMe, to support scholarships for exceptional young students and professionals with the potential to make a change in Kosovo and the world. Through this initiative, KAEF aims at raising \$50,000, an ambitious but necessary goal, that meets the program's critical needs and adds to its longevity.

Like many non-profits and institutions in higher ed around the world, KAEF too has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As all of its physical fundraising activities have halted, the program seeks to engage its entire community of alumni, friends, and supporters to come together and contribute in a tangible way by educating the emerging leaders of Kosovo.

As this year the program is celebrating its 15th cohort, it has become clearer than ever that an investment in KAEF pays the best interest. For the past 15 years, the program has provided merit-based fully-funded fellowships to more than 100 students, who upon returning from their studies have worked to bring social and economic prosperity in Kosovo.

Through the generosity of our donors, within the first two months, we have reached a little over 30% of our campaign goal. We hope that more of you will join us and help us reach our goal.

Click [here](#) to read our co-chairs' note on the occasion of achieving the first milestone.

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To harvest economic prosperity, we must increase the opportunity for everyone to participate in the economic activity. At KAEF, we believe this is best facilitated by equipping our youth with marketable skills through an inclusive and equitable education process.



A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR CAMPAIGN SPONSORS!

Investing in education benefits us all. We could not have accomplished our first milestone without the support, involvement, and passion of our donors. Here are some short stories for you to get to know them!



Banka e vendit tënd

BPB is a local commercial bank operating in Kosovo since 2001. Their strategic goal is to support the development of Kosovo's economy and businesses. BPB seeks credible and long-term cooperation with SMEs to support their growth and development through specifically designed, responsive, and innovative products and services.

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"We are proud to have had the opportunity to help the development and advancement of young Kosovars in their academic journeys. As a local bank, we believe that the future of the country is in the hands of our ambitious young people who are pushing the boundaries in search of knowledge. This is not our first cooperation with institutions that provide or facilitate higher education and we are sure it will not be our last." - Arton Celina, CEO of BpB.

FINCA Kosovo is part of the FINCA Impact network, a group of 20 microfinance and financial institutions that provide financial services with social responsibility, enabling low-income entrepreneurs and small business owners to invest in their future. Founded in 1999, it is one of the largest Microfinance institutions in Kosovo, which currently provides financial services in 26 cities, offering credit products to micro-entrepreneurs. It consists of more than 220 dedicated and experienced professionals in building a sustainable microfinance program and providing long-term solutions to the needs of its clients.



FINCA[®]

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR CAMPAIGN SPONSORS!



"I believe that Kosovo has become a better place with the contribution of more than 100 KAEF fellows to Kosovo's economy. As a result, donating to KAEF is an investment in Kosovo's future." - Pleurat Halili, CEO of NOVUS.

NOVUS is a service-oriented firm, providing clients with a mixture of consulting services and technology solutions to effectively address the challenging needs of today. At Novus, we value the power of insight for our clients and apply audacious thinking to create a long-lasting impact. We believe that knowledge and insight, through thoughtful and systematic analysis, bring sustainable solutions to our everyday challenges. We help transform businesses into agile organizations through our strong commitment to innovative research techniques which propels us to provide real-world solutions to our clients.

Meridian Express was established in October 2012, as a chain of neighborhood stores, and it is now present in eight major cities of Kosovo. With the motto 'N'dere te shtepise - at the door of your house' Meridian's goal is to serve customers in every neighborhood, saving you time, offering you the freshest products, and a very pleasant and friendly environment for shopping. The goals and true values of social responsibility are what define and guide Meridian - and it is these values of innovation that make this company stand out in the entire Kosovo market. Meridian Express has already developed not only as a company but also as a leader of Corporate Social Responsibility in Kosovo.



"We are glad to have the opportunity to support the online campaign "Kosovo's Future Begins with Education" by KAEF and we are honored to be part of a lifelong investment of the future leaders of Kosova. We see our contributions to the development of Kosova community as an obligation and an honor and we will continue to do so in the years to come". - Agon Gashi, CEO of Meridian Express.

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ProCredit Bank is a development-oriented commercial bank. A Frankfurt-based German Group, ProCredit Bank provides quality services for small and medium businesses as well as for private clients who have the capacity to save and prefer to bank through electronic channels.

As a bank of many innovations, ProCredit Bank is the first bank in Kosovo to offer a digital platform that provides 24-hour direct access to all banking services with which customers can manage funds and have full control over their finances. Among their values and principles, stands their commitment to invest in the local economy by supporting SMEs, taking care of the environment, investing in the constant development of their staff, and providing educational opportunities to qualified students through their Internship Program and the 6-month ProCredit Onboarding Process Program.



UCX is a technology company that offers premium quality services to businesses globally, ranging from custom software development and technical consultation to digital marketing services. Among our core company values is the pursuit of growth and knowledge so we recognize the importance of continued education. KAEF has proven successful in developing a cadre of highly trained individuals that are contributing to organizations like ours and generally to the economic and social prosperity of Kosovo.



"Educating our youth is paving our way to a self-sustainable economy and prosperous future. To prepare the doctors we want to take care of our family, the politicians we want to lead our state-building processes, the business leaders we want to employ and train our children, we must begin with educating this generation." - Jeta Zagragja, Director of Business Operations at UCX Market.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND RECRUITMENT UPDATES

SHARING KNOWLEDGE THROUGH KAEF INSIGHT LECTURE SERIES

With the launch of the online fundraising campaign 'Kosovo's Future Begins with Education,' KAEF also initiated the 'KAEF Insight Lecture Series,' a series of wide-ranging discussions featuring KAEF alumni, leading diaspora members, and prominent local and international professionals.

The first panel delivered an outlook on how the novel coronavirus pandemic has affected the global economy, in particular the economy of Kosovo, and outlined a number of suggestions and policy priorities to overcome this economic crisis.

The second panel provided perspectives on important questions on fiscal discipline, sustainable public debt, and financing growth-enhancing reforms. Three lectures were also organized to mark the Global Entrepreneurship Week and International Education Week, on the topics of digitalization of higher education in Kosovo, women in entrepreneurship, and philanthropy.

Our last panel for this year, 'Building Alliances: Kosovo's First Diplomatic Missions in the World' discussed the challenges that Kosovo's ambassadors have faced upon establishing the first missions.

Kosovo American Education Fund
in partnership with

Save the Date
Challenges and Opportunities on Digitalization of Higher Ed in Kosovo

November 16, 2020, 4:00 PM Prishtina Time

Join us for our Insight Lecture Series with Mr. Abol Jalilvand, Professor of Finance at Loyola University Chicago, Armend Muja, Rector at Riinvest College, Ermal Sadiku, Lecturer at Universum College, and Besart Konushevci, Founder and CEO at Akademia.al.

International Education Week

GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP WEEK KOSOVO

FINAL STAGES ON THE SELECTION PROCESS

Since September, the shortlisted candidates from the 2020/2021 KAEF selection process entered the final stages of TOEFL exams, interviews, and standardized exams of GRE and GMAT. Due to the spread of the pandemic and the inability of our selection committee to travel safely to Kosovo, the interview phase was conducted online.

The 2021 cohort of KAEF Fellows is expected to be announced by the end of the year!



KAEF FELLOWS' NEWS

We asked some of our fellows how their fall semester has been with adjusting to online and hybrid classes. Here are the stories of Egzon Osmani who is currently studying in Waltham, Massachusetts, and Yllza Hoti, who is pursuing an online MBA based in Prishtina.



EGZON OSMANI
MSc. Finance
Bentley University '21

"It's certainly been an interesting semester! As long as classes go, I don't think we have missed much. At Bentley, we have already had the chance to take hybrid classes, so switching completely online wasn't such a problem. Anyhow, we have come to understand how important those events and/or encounters with one-another at school are. I hope this time makes us realize the importance of empathy moving forward."



YLLZA HOTI
Online MBA
Carlson School of Management
University of Minnesota '22

"My first semester as an online MBA student has been a great experience. Despite my initial concerns of having to work in a group of people residing in 3 different timezones, our cooperation was excellent regardless of this fact. However, I admit, it was a bit of a challenge having to wake up at 2 AM for Zoom meetings! Overall, I feel very grateful for the great people I've met so far in my program and the knowledge I've gained in such a short period of time. I'm already excited for next semester!"

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS: SHARING THE KNOW-HOW



ARIANA DAKA

**MSc. Information Science and Technologies
Rochester Institute of Technology '20**

Upon her return to Kosovo, Ariana continued working on her capstone project idea in developing a platform that provides an opportunity for elementary occupations (such as electricians, plumbers, cleaners, etc.) to promote their services. She believes that such platform will have great benefits for Kosovo's community and plans to launch a beta version next year.

Currently, she works as a front-end developer at KODE Labs, a U.S. based company that offers building management solutions to their U.S. based clientele. She is part of the team which develops a platform that gives portfolio owners and operators full access to the work that is needed across their properties, such as renovations, roof maintenance and unplanned emergency services.

Ariana is using her in-depth knowledge of web development, gained during her studies, to be a productive team member for the company she works for and to push forward her business idea.



ALBULENA BASHA

**MSc. in Economics and Sustainable Agriculture
Iowa State University '19**

Albulena Basha works as a junior advisor at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) in the "Creating employment through export promotion" project funded by the German government.

In her role at GIZ, Albulena assists the core project team in identifying needs for capacity development and technical assistance and areas for intervention in primary agricultural production, agro-processing, and innovative initiatives. The project in which Albulena works supports smallholder farmers, national sector associations, and government partner institutions with in-kind grants, advisory services, and export promotion activities.

Albulena is using her KAEF-funded education and passion for agriculture to improve rural economic development in Kosovo.

ALUMNI BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: PLARENTINA DESKU

Driving Economic Development through Entrepreneurship

Plarentina Desku's accomplishments are matched by a commitment to Kosovo's economic growth and the betterment of its neediest citizens. Upon returning home to Kosovo after the completion of her undergraduate degree at American University in Washington DC, she co-founded Kosovo's Philanthropists, a charitable organization dedicated to creating a summer camp and providing scholarship support for minority children while fostering greater understanding across ethnic lines. In 2013, Plarentina also co-founded Smart Center, a test prep center located in Prishtina, which has enabled hundreds of students to study abroad through scholarship programs.

Plarentina holds an MBA from Syracuse University, made possible by the KAEF scholarship.

Smart Center is a Test Prep Center, based in Prishtina, Kosovo. It operates mainly in the field of standardized test preparations, including, but not limited to TOEFL, SAT Reasoning, SAT Subject Tests, IELTS, GRE/GMAT and ACT among others. It also is an accredited English and German language course center for all CEFR levels, and takes pride in offering Math in regular standard levels, IB, and AP. Since its existence, through meticulously crafted programs, Smart Center has been able to, through its students, achieve remarkable results. Smart Center also partners with 38 higher education institutions abroad, offering students from Kosovo a wide range of studying and scholarship opportunities for all levels of study.

Pictured here is Plarentina (6th from the right) and her team at Smart Center.





Learn more: kaef-online.org

To support our program and latest initiative, visit:
<https://charity.gofundme.com/o/en/campaign/kaefonline>

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