

Design Challenges for Students in Kosovo

Increasing students' practical skills by confronting them with real-life challenges faced by companies



Why Design Challenges and how?

Providing a fertile ground for economic innovation is a key factor for Kosovo's future development. To promote innovation, design challenges can be a fruitful instrument. In design challenges, young people learn skills and methods to approach real-life challenges and develop their own solutions to tackle these problems.

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH supported with its project Creating Employment Through Export Promotion (CETEP) the implementation of a design challenge project through the locally operating IPKO Foundation (IF). With the support of CETEP, IPKO Foundation implemented the project called KosLift. It is a project that helps students to acquire practical skills for real-world challenges in companies from various sectors such as energy, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and manufacturing. In workshops, trainings and design challenges, students acquired skills and capacities to support, for examples, research and development in the respective sectors. Thereby, not only the competitiveness of Kosovar businesses is promoted, but also the students' competitiveness on the labour market.

The project ran from June 2019 until February 2021. As part of the project, KosLift planned and carried out four rounds of design design challenges. CETEP supported from the second round onwards. Over the course of the project, 288 students received the opportunity to compete in various challenges, motivated by a reward of a 2,000 Euro grant and an internship position for the winners.

Project name	Design Challenges for Students
Commissioned by	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ)
Project region	Kosovo
Lead executing agency	KosLift
Duration	June 2019 – February 2021

How did the design challenges work?

KosLift planned and performed the four rounds of design challenges. For the first two rounds, KosLift selected companies which provided the students with real-life challenges from their day-to-day business. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the format has been adapted for the last two rounds towards more general challenges to develop innovative solutions, which can be beneficial for the Kosovar people and businesses in times of crisis.

Each round of the design challenges consisted of four consecutive steps, starting with the application process, and ending with awarding the winning teams of the design challenges. Steps of a Design Challenge

Design Challenge procedure	Duration	Activities
Workshop	2 days / 4 days virtually during pandemic	Develop product or service, supported by mentors and experts.
Best solution awarded	1 day	Select best solutions; grant 2,000 Euro to winning teams; winning teams receive internship-option.

Application process

KosLift recruited students between 18 and 25 from the Rochester Institute of Technology Kosovo (RIT) as well as from the University of Pristina (UP) via an application process. The application process consisted of an online form, which the students had to fill out. In this application, they had to create a team, list their current skills as well as select one of the provided real-life challenges and describe their suitability. For the second design challenge round, more than 300 students applied, of which 72 were accepted.



Design Challenge Workshops

For the design challenges, KosLift provided real world challenges for the students. The participating students then competed with their group in creating products and services as a solution to these challenges of Kosovar companies in the sectors energy, ICT and manufacturing. Over the course of this process, the competitors received further technical support from experienced mentors as well as representatives of the company. This took place in two-day workshops facilitated by mentors and experts.

Best Solution Award

After the two-day workshops, the most promising teams with the best solutions for the presented challenges were selected. Therefore, the selected groups pitched their ideas to a jury comprised of IPKO Foundation and RIT representatives. Each winning team received grants of up to 2,000 Euro to further develop the solution. Also, the winners received offers for internship positions at respective companies.

The Results and Benefits

To the three rounds of design challenges supported by CETEP 80 different groups applied. 56 groups with 159 students were accepted to participate in the design challenges. Of these 56 groups, 37 submitted a project proposal. Students came from various disciplines, such as

engineering, graphic design, and computer science. In the end, 18 groups were awarded.

Design Challenge	Duration	Awarded Products	Proposals	Teams	Students	Applications
#2	Dec' 2019 Jan' 2020	5	12	19	56	24
#3	May 2020 Jun' 2020	6	12	18	47	28
#4	Dec' 2020 Jan' 2021	7	13	19	56	28
SUM		18	37	56	159	80

Thereby, the success of KosLift is not limited to the project duration. Instead, many students used these workshops to get in touch with companies which enabled many of them to work as interns. In total, the project helped around 20% of the students to get an internship position.

The project results of the four rounds of design challenges exceeded the expectations as can be seen in the table below:

Objective	Expectation	Result
Participating students	200	288
Internships	30	48
Grants	15	24

In conclusion, the project had a positive impact on the companies' resilience as it supported many different ideas to deal with current challenges. Furthermore, the possibility for students to get in touch with companies created a positive long-term impact on the job perspectives of the young people.

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