



## SUCCESS STORY

Student demand for startup training exceeds university's expectations



Getoar Krasniqi (left), UP Venture team member reviews a student's idea.

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## Entrepreneurship Heats Up in Kosovo Via Venture Incubator

June, 2018—Late last year, the University of Prishtina, Kosovo's largest public university, launched an innovation and entrepreneurship center that has exceeded even the highest expectations of its founders.

While initial training events were planned for 100 students, demand mushroomed to over 1,000 applicants. Public presentations, such as Women in Entrepreneurship, played to a sold-out auditorium in the university that serves 50,000 students.

So, who's running this burgeoning juggernaut? Not surprisingly, graduates from USAID's Transformational Leadership program – Scholarships and Partnerships. Fis Malësori, Geotar Krasniqi and Erblin Hoxha all studied in the United States for Master's Degrees under the program. ( See [related story](#).)

The center, called VentureUP, offers options and ideas for new enterprises that students have long craved but never thought possible—most notably, the chance to build their own future through entrepreneurship instead of just waiting for a job.

“Through VentureUP, we now offer mentoring sessions, market research advice, trainings and workshops to University of Prishtina students looking to lift their startup ideas off the ground,” explained Krasniqi, who graduated with an MBA from Golden Gate University.

In just the past three months, the supercharged team of Venture UP has worked with over 700 of the university's students.

Demand for trainings in both workforce soft skills and computer programming is off the charts – and a whopping 80 percent of attendees are women.

“Twenty-five teams have already approached us with their new business ideas- and we're developing programs to help them build ventures that will create jobs in Kosovo,” said Malësori, who completed his MBA -Finance at the University of Missouri.

New venture ideas range from mobile apps to metal processing, to education and social enterprise, just to name a few. As Europe's

youngest country, Kosovo's youth are among its greatest assets. VentureUP is designed to nurture their creativity and dreams and to help them achieve greatness.

"These students have generated dynamism and energy," says Krasniqi. "And the feedback we've gotten so far is incredible. Everyone is excited about the possibilities that entrepreneurship presents, including University of Prishtina faculty and staff."

The VentureUP team's time in the United States, funded by both Kosovo and American taxpayers, was invaluable in helping them build and run the venture incubator. Collectively, the returned scholars absorbed numerous academic, professional, social and cultural experiences to drive change through entrepreneurship in Kosovo.

USAID's Transformational Leadership Program-Scholarship and Partnerships, which runs from 2014 to 2019, is a partnership co-funded by USAID and the Government of Kosovo. The project strives to develop skills, and a cadre of leaders, to drive change in priority economic, political and social areas in Kosovo. To date, in addition to 185 Master Degree scholarships, more than 100 professional certificate scholarships have been awarded, and four university partnerships established.