



# GAINING LABOR MARKET SKILLS THROUGH NON-FORMAL TRAINING

In partnership with:



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June 2022



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
1.	INTRODUCTION.....	5
2.	BACKGROUND .....	6
	2.1. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN ALBANIA.....	6
	2.2. RISIALBANIA.....	6
	2.3. NON-PUBLIC NON-FORMAL TRAINING IN ALBANIA.....	6
3.	RISIALBANIA’S TRAINING PROVIDER INTERVENTION .....	8
	3.1. BUILDING ON RESULTS OF PHASE 1.....	8
	3.2. STRATEGIC SUPPORT .....	8
	3.3. COLLABORATION WITH TRAINING PROVIDERS.....	9
	3.4. WHO PARTICIPATES IN THE TRAINING.....	11
	3.5. IMPROVING THE LINK WITH EMPLOYERS.....	12
	3.6. INNOVATIONS .....	13
	3.7. HOW THE PANDEMIC HAS CHANGED THE TRAINING DELIVERY....	14
	3.8. TRACING SYSTEM.....	15
4.	HOW THE SYSTEM HAS CHANGED.....	16
5.	YOUNG PEOPLE GET EMPLOYED.....	19
6.	LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS .....	20

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Equipping young Albanian jobseekers with the right skills serves a double purpose: the young people increase their employability and ultimately find employment or self-employment; the businesses get the workforce needed for sustained growth. Over the past four years, thanks to RisiAlbania's support, 1,975 young people acquired technical, entrepreneurial, and soft skills in hands-on trainings. 785 of them have found a job six months after having completed a training.

This case study looks at how RisiAlbania has collaborated with nine training providers in ICT, tourism, and soft skills over the last four years. As the formal and public education system needs time to react to the labour market demand, RisiAlbania's focus lies in the non-public non-formal niche market, which is expected to be more responsive to employers' needs. Increasing linkages between training providers and employers and fostering innovation through effective training methodologies has been at the core of RisiAlbania's intervention. RisiAlbania followed its facilitative approach and focused on building up the partners. Thereby, RisiAlbania tailored the support to the individual partner's needs.

The case study documents the story of the nine partner training providers. They are often market leaders in their segments, and thanks to their pioneer role and commitment enable innovation in terms of training content and training delivery in the Albanian non-public non-formal training sector.

While this case study focuses on the micro and meso level – the collaboration with the training providers – it is evident that efforts at macro level are crucial too for systemic change. RisiAlbania's has worked in parallel on channeling public funds to the non-public non-formal training market, has supported the Albanian government in piloting the first Sectoral Skills Committee in ICT, and will focus on aligning the non-formal qualifications into the Albanian Qualifications Framework. The combination of these efforts at all three level shall provide ground for another set of lessons learnt.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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Ina Gjeci, 21, and Sindi Blaceri, 19, are two young Albanian women, who recently started working in the fast-developing ICT sector as Digital Marketing Managers. They successfully completed the Graphic Design and Digital Marketing course at the Albanian ICT Academy in Albania's buzzing capital Tirana. Sindi says that *"when I first started the course, I was very happy because finally I could focus somewhere else rather than the pandemic. Initially it felt strange having online classes, but I got used to it quickly and I managed to learn graphic design programmes. Later we had the chance to take the course in classrooms and apply our knowledge."* Ina and Sindi show that if young women and men get the chance to participate in innovative courses based on modernized curricula and teaching material and tailored to the needs of the businesses, they acquire the skills required to find a job or open their own business afterwards.

RisiAlbania is a youth employment project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). RisiAlbania has been supporting non-public non-formal training providers (training providers in the following) in the ICT and tourism sectors since 2018. As of today, 1,975 (out of 1500 projected initially) young people acquired technical, entrepreneurial, and soft skills in hands-on trainings. 785 (out of 600 projected initially) young people have found a job six months after having completed a training, exceeding the projections in terms of number of people trained and employed.

This case study aims to identify, validate, and document experiences in the non-public non-formal training provision in Albania, leading to learning and identification of good practices. Knowledge is being generated all the time and at many levels. Though, a lot of knowledge is rarely captured, is not published or shared, and therefore remains largely unknown. Even when impact is measured and quantified, individual experiences – properly analyzed – can help in understanding the factors that contributed to success or failure, enabling the story behind the impact to be told. The individual experiences of the training providers that have been partnering with RisiAlbania are at the center of this case study. The identified and documented good practices can then be adapted, improved, adopted by others and upscaled, leading to a greater impact.

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## 2. BACKGROUND

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### 2.1. Youth unemployment in Albania

In the second quarter of 2021, the official unemployment rate of young people between 15–29 years was 19.9%<sup>1</sup> compared to 28.9% in 2017. Despite the decline of youth unemployment rate, the numbers of unemployed young people remain high. The unemployment rate remains high, particularly among young people, Roma, Egyptians, and people with disabilities. The proportion of the youth cohort (aged 15–24) not in employment, education or training (NEET) is problematic at 25.8%.<sup>2</sup> Youth unemployment is essentially due to low labour demand, ineffective job matching services and lack of skills. Youth employment remains a high priority of the Government of Albania in 2021 and the foreseeable future.

### 2.2. RisiAlbania

RisiAlbania aims to realize more employment opportunities for young women and men, aged 15 to 29, in a socially inclusive and sustainable way. It is doing so by:

- facilitating systemic change in the agrobusiness, tourism and ICT and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sectors (for new job creation);
- job intermediation and career guidance (more placement of young women and men in existing vacancies and enabling them to better choose a career); and
- improving labour market-oriented skills through non-public non-formal training.

### 2.3. Non-public non-formal training in Albania

The non-formal<sup>3</sup> training provision in Albania is still developing, and limited attention has been given in the country to it. The formal education and the public nonformal training system in Albania continue struggling for flexibility and effectiveness. The non-public non-formal niche market is expected to be more responsive to employers' needs and the constant changes in the labour market. The market segment is feeddriven and competitive.<sup>4</sup> The provider landscape are the training providers which are registered as providers by the Ministry of Finance and Economy. The Ministry is in charge of overseeing and licensing the providers, regulated by the law 15/2017 on Vocational Education and Training in the Republic of Albania.<sup>5</sup> Early 2017, RisiAlbania conducted a market research on non-formal training provision in Albania. The research showed that many of the registered private training

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1. <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/8916/lfs-q2-2021.pdf> [23.09.2021]

2. ETF Albania Education, Training and Employment Developments 2020, p. 9 [20.09.2021]

3. Non-formal education or training refers to learning which takes places outside of formal learning environments - such as schools, TVET colleges, and universities - but within some kind of organisational framework (i.e. the training does follow some form of curriculum and syllabus and may or may not have accreditation or certification).

4. Z. Kongoli Consulting Office, Research to explore and analyze prevailing financing models and recommend feasible financing models in ICT, Tourism and Agribusiness Skills Development, 2019.

5. <https://financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ligj-nr-15-dt-16-2-2017.pdf> [24.09.2021]

providers were inactive, i.e. early 2017 only 17 of the 42 tourism training providers and 14 of the 34 ICT training providers were active. In agribusiness, RisiAlbania’s third economic sector, regardless of constant efforts, no eligible part-ners could be identified in the market. The research identified the following four main constraints that have underpinned the performance of the sector:

1. **Regulatory processes:** Licensing from the Ministry of Finance and Economy, in charge also of labor policies, is the only regulatory process for this training market. It cannot guarantee the quality of the training. Unless the providers can or should refer to internationally standardized qualifications as per industry specifics (e.g. Cisco Certified Network Administrator), the providers do not have a reference framework for their training programs. The National Agency for Skills and Employment is currently reviewing its rather shallow procedures for licensing and intends to strengthen a monitoring role in the market.
2. **Training programs design and the respective learning methodologies:** The curricula are hardly designed in cooperation with business representatives.
3. **Financing models:** Training provided by private providers is paid for by employers (for their employees) and individuals. This largely excludes unemployed young women and men of few means.
4. **Tracing system:** As they are not in place, training providers are not able to track their student employment, thus lacking a feedback mechanism to feed the process of continuously improving the quality of the training offer and a targeted marketing to attract more trainees.

The following chart (figure 1) summarizes the training provision system.

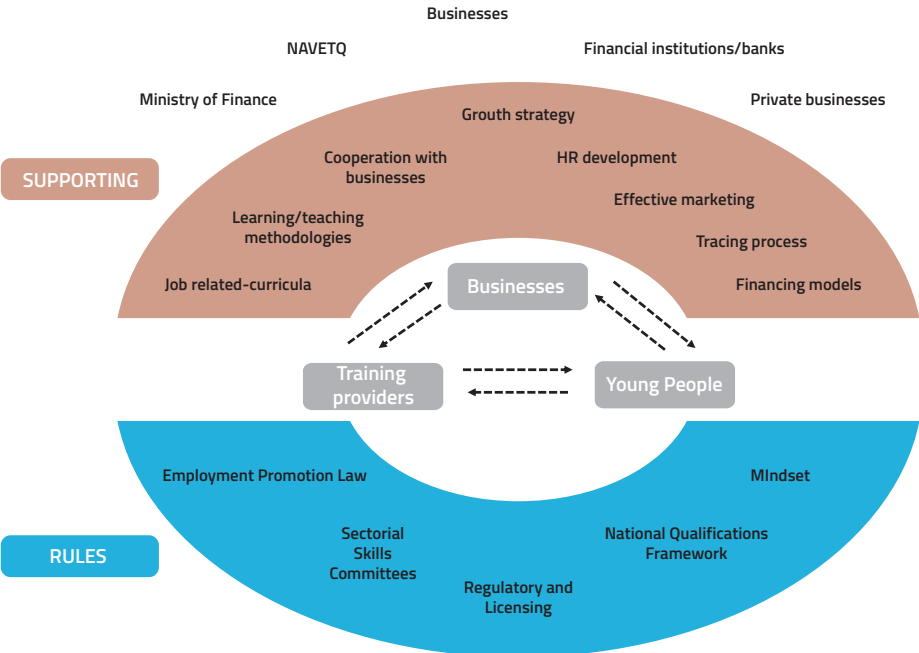


Figure 1: System at the beginning

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## 3. RISIALBANIA'S TRAINING PROVIDER INTERVENTION

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### 3.1. Building on results of phase 1

Phase 1 revealed how critical non-public non-formal training can be for developing economic sectors like tourism. To address the key constraint of lack of skilled workforce in the targeted sectors, RisiAlbania started collaborating with training providers in form of different skills-related interventions. By 2018, RisiAlbania achieved that

- Seven private and public education and training providers have successfully improved their offer based on the needs of the labour market
- Four new innovative courses were developed.
- 9738 young people (48% women) improving their skills. A Massive Open Online Courses in the ICT sector especially contributed to this achievement.

### 3.2. Strategic support

Building on the achievements of skills development as a cross-cutting support in the economic sectors, RisiAlbania placed skills development as a separate outcome in phase 2. To address the constraints identified in chapter 2.3, the core of RisiAlbania's strategic support is to enhance the training providers offers in tourism and ICT in terms of relevance, outreach, and inclusiveness.

To reach this, RisiAlbania identified the following areas to intervene (*see figure 2*):

#### Vision

Inclusive and job-related training offer for more young people through effective training methodology and by increasing the geographic coverage of the training providers

#### Guidance questions

- What to deliver (training content)?
- For whom to deliver (target group, outreach, inclusiveness)?
- With whom to deliver (training providers)?
- How to deliver (learning methods)?
- How to afford (inclusiveness, financing)?

- Establish linkages between training providers and businesses
- Effective training methodologies
- Promotion of training offers
- Channeling financial means to private training market.

Incorporating all interventions, RisiAlbania furthermore supported the set-up of Sectoral Skills Committees (SSCs), a formal mechanism which allows industry and actors in the education and training system to coordinate more effectively qualification, knowledge, and skills that industry needs. The SSC in ICT is the first one to be piloted by the Albanian government. This will ultimately

enable institutionalization of cooperation between education and training institutions and businesses at sector and national level.

This case study focuses on the first two of above-mentioned areas that aim to stimulate training providers' offers through innovative programmes and methodologies in high demand from businesses in the targeted sectors.



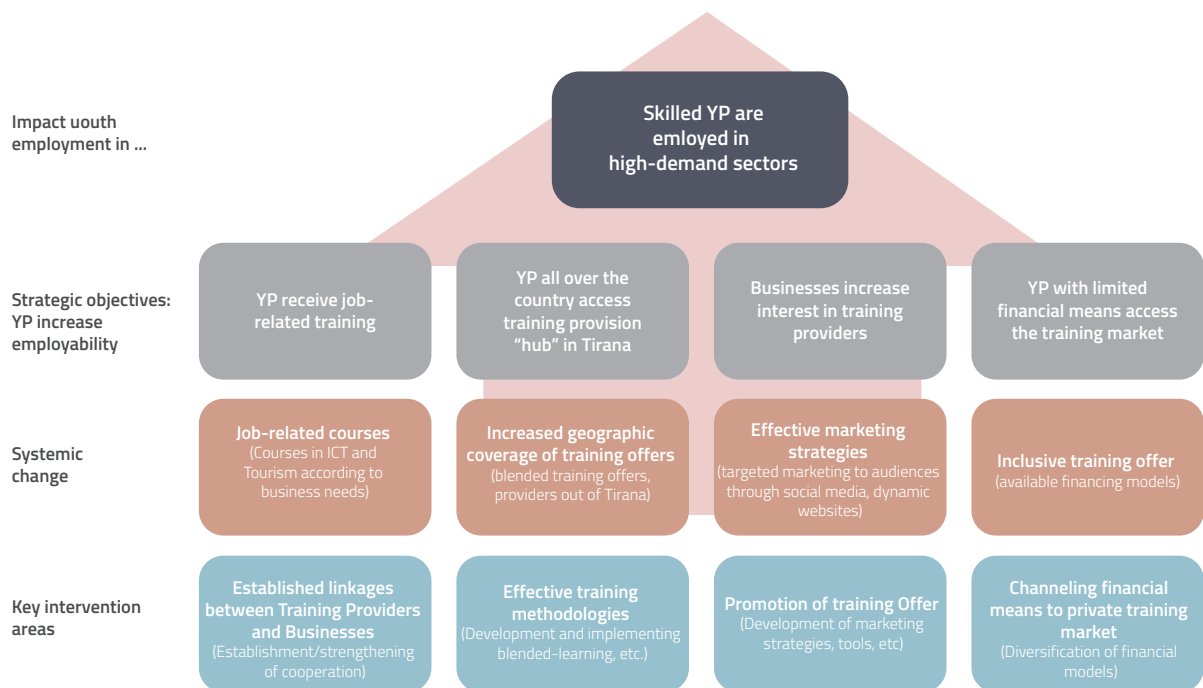


Figure 2: Skills development strategy

### 3.3. Collaboration with training providers

RisiAlbania has supported nine training providers in tourism, ICT, and soft skills:



Albanian Gastronomy Academy (AGA), Arber Avdija Vocational Culinary Courses (AA), Hospitality and Tourism Academy (HAT), and Association of Food and Wellbeing (SHUM)



Albanian ICT Academy, IkubINFO Academy, beta-Plan Coding Bootcamps, Tirana Center of Technology (TCT)



UniPro Balkan Academy

The training providers and RisiAlbania carefully identified those areas of support that, on the one hand, improve the performance of the provider and that, on the other hand, make the training provision more attractive, relevant, and affordable to young people, especially women, from rural areas, or with limited financial means. Most training providers were supported in several areas and RisiAlbania worked with all of them on their growth strategy and tracing system. RisiAlbania closed cooperation agreements (contracts) with all training providers, highlighting what was expected from the project and the partner (deliverables, milestones, types of support, amount of support). Contracts included a business plan for the new business model. Cofinancing along the entire process was a must. The following table shows how RisiAlbania supported two training providers.

### Albanian ICT Academy

The Albanian ICT Academy provides ICT trainings in Tirana. RisiAlbania has provided support in the following areas:

- i) Facilitate the professional know-how to identify and assess the ICT skills and training courses required by the labor market
- ii) Marketing strategy and media presence to attract more students
- iii) Increase capacities of Albanian ICT Academy staff to offer training in two innovative courses
- iv) Improve curricula as per market demand and tech-nology standards
- v) Enable a tracing system
- vi) Embed ICT Career Orientation Services



30 young women who finished an ICT-related training like Graphic Design, Digital Marketing and Web Design during 2020

### Arber Avdija Vocational Culinary Courses

Founded in 2016, Arber Avdija offers hospitality and tourism training programs in Lezhë in the North of Albania. RisiAlbania support focused on:

- i) Update curricula based on market demand
- ii) Introduce new market-oriented courses,
- iii) Capacity building of trainers to deliver the new and improved courses.
- iv) Marketing strategy to reach and attract more students
- v) Enable a tracing system



Dritan Kovacaj, 20 years old, has successfully pursued his passion for a career as a Cook, after being trained by our partner 'Kurse Profesionale Arber Avdija'. Dritan now works at Benelux.al Resort, Rana e Hedhun, Lezhë.

The collaboration with the training providers can be described in the following business model (figure 3), which shows that the interaction and improved connections between the training providers, businesses, and youth people is at the core of the intervention. The orange shapes represent the seven areas of support that have triggered the changes in the collaboration with the training providers. In blue, the two linked framework conditions (rules) of funding and SSC are highlighted.

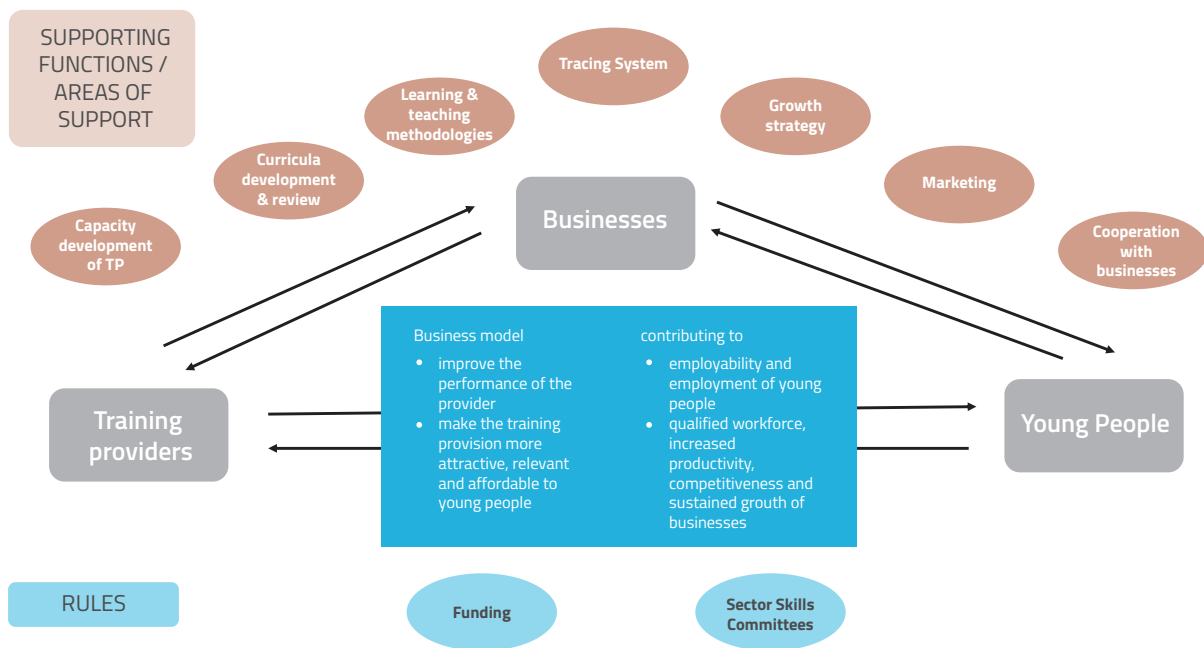


Figure 3: Business model

### 3.4. Who participates in the training

RisiAlbania’s target group are young people aged 15 to 29 years who can be categorized as follows:

- jobseekers,
- students/graduates of universities, especially in the ICT sector, where university graduates need specific courses for employment,
- employees who gain specific skills through tailormade offers, and
- people who want to increase their soft skills.

RisiAlbania, through ongoing discussion and different types of support measures provided to the training providers, has ensured that also youth who face special challenges can acquire skills. The following quote is from Hatixhe Bilibashi, who is the founder and director of the Albania ICT Academy. *“The initial idea came when we learned that the girls and boys in the orphanage after reaching the age of 18 should leave the orphanage, and from that moment have to provide everything for their living. We have always had willingness to promote girls in the field of ICT, and even more those that are more vulnerable. As such, the best promotion for these young girls will be to give them job-related skills and a safe profession for their future.”*

It is important to highlight that the costs of the trainings lie on the participants. All training providers cite the training fees as their main source of income. In most cases, it is the individual - the training participant - who pays the fees; hence, ensuring access to training in terms of affordability remains a continuous challenge. When employers

#### IkubINFO

IkubINFO shpk is the leading software development company in Albania. RisiAlbania supported the establishment of their Digital Academy through training of trainers, international certification of trainees, setting up technical knowledge communities, and marketing strategy.

pay, then for their own employees and not for prospective employees.

The only exception of the fee-based model is the academy of IkubINFO, which is free of charge for participants, and IkubINFO’s only cost-free training offer. Concretely, university students who succeed the competition to join the academy, complete the whole academy and appear to be of interest to IkubINFO in the role of the leading software company in Albania, accomplish a three-month internship. On average, out of 20-30 participants of a batch, IkubINFO employs six to eight graduates as junior software developers. Artan Malka, Key Account Manager of IkubINFO, summarizes it as follows: *“One of the most effective way to deal with the constant need of software engineers is to recruit young professionals through our own academy.”*

**3.5. Improving the link with employers**

Establishing and improving the link between training providers and businesses/employers lies at the heart of RisiAlbania’s intervention. To this effect, training providers have been supported in core steps in the education to employment transition: industry’s inputs when creating or revising curricula and teaching/training material and methods, trainers from the industry, internships in businesses, and ultimately recruitment by employers (see figure 4).

Before training	During training	During training
<p><b>Employers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Share their skills needs</li> <li>▪ Give feedback to curricula, teaching/training material and teaching/training methodologies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Employers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Train participants in their businesses (internships) and at the training provider’s premises</li> <li>▪ Get their own employees trained by tailor-made courses</li> <li>▪ Assess the practical skills of the participants</li> </ul>	<p><b>Employers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hire graduates</li> <li>▪ Give feedback to training providers (tracing system)</li> </ul>

*Figure 4: Role of employers in training*

Only experts from the industry can train according to the state-of-the art. At the Tirana Center of Technology (TCT), for instance, it is a must for trainers to be still working in a company. In case of SHUM, the associations of food & wellbeing and the chefs/cooks training center are behind the training initiative and use the center to get skilled staff. The trainers come from the industry and impart their hands-on experiences in the training, which is primarily practice-based. Training providers rely on a network of businesses for training delivery, as trainees accomplish internships at these businesses.

**Association of Food and Wellbeing (SHUM)**  
 SHUM is the association of more than 200 restaurants, bars, and hotels. RisiAlbania supported SHUM especially in their marketing strategy to increase the number of trainees.

beta-Plan Coding Bootcamps has been the latest partner of RisiAlbania. As their training is identical to the one in the Silicon Valley, of very high level but also expensive, their current focus is to convince companies to sponsor their students and recruit graduates from the bootcamp.

All training providers in tourism and ICT have exhibited exceptionally high employment rates of their graduates, some training providers even claim that 100% of their graduates get immediately employed and stay employed also at a later point of time. Before the pandemic, Arber Avdija's graduates trainees were often recruited while the training was still ongoing. The former trainees further take over a bridging function, and trainees often joined businesses of former graduates or where former graduates were employed.

#### Tirana Center of Technology

TCT is a career advancement training center specialized on informational technology (IT & Programming). They were the first ones to establish an online/blended learning training platform in Albania. RisiAlbania supported TCT in establishing the platform, updating their curricula to online delivery, establishing linkages with businesses (internships), increasing the capacities of the instructors, and in marketing and dissemination.

### 3.6. Innovations

When designing the intervention, the hypothesis was that by supporting the providers in distant/online/blended learning methodologies, young people living outside of Tirana and disadvantaged groups faced less access issues to job-related training offers. What are the different learning approaches?

- **Digital learning** is often used as an umbrella term covering anything that uses technology in the context of learning.
- **Online learning** usually refers to learning through a platform with an active internet connection.
- **Blended learning** refers to the combination of online learning with face-to-face learning, through classroom teaching, on-the-job learning, etc.

RisiAlbania aimed triggering innovation in training content and learning methods, reflecting the reality in the world of work. That is why it was so important for RisiAlbania to improve the links with the companies (chapter 3.5). To promote innovative learning methods, two kinds of innovative approaches have been promoted since 2018<sup>6</sup>:

#### Hospitality and Tourism Academy

RisiAlbania supported the design of an e-learning platform and the production of over 100 learning videos for the preparation and delivery of the first 4 online courses.

The first relies upon the virtual classrooms, delivered in real-time, with high interactivity and where generally one lecturer follows students. Gladiola Dona, the owner of Hospitality and Tourism Academy: *“Through an online platform, we wanted to enable participation in the training to people living outside Tirana. The opportunities are crucial for many young people who live outside*

*Tirana, the capital. They can't afford the costs of travel and accommodation. For some women,*

6. At the beginning of the pandemic, Risi summarized its experiences on innovative training approaches in the blog «The COVID-19 Pandemic and Accelerated Innovation: Learning and Training Anywhere, Any-time». Some analyses and quotes from the blog are used in the case study.

too, the lack of time to attend in-class training is an issue.” The Hospitality and Tourism Academy uses a hybrid model in training in tourism, having 30% of the training as practice in the classroom and 70% recorded videos.

The second innovation was the online platform of recorded videos. This approach is used especially for the training in soft skills through the UniPro Balkan Academy that aims to help individuals complete their professional and personal profiles to facilitate access to jobs or retain jobs. The training platform was designed online as a business model, considering digitalization as the future trend for youth. The objective was to increase flexibility and inclusiveness, lowering the costs.

#### UniPro Balkan Academy

The first and currently only Albanian platform offering online soft skills courses. Based on an Italian platform, the platform covers the whole training cycle from registration to certification.

### 3.7. How the pandemic has changed the training delivery

#### Albanian Gastronomy Academy

Training takes place in a blended form: students learn the theory online and practical skills are acquired online and face-to-face through a moveable cuisine (lab). This allowed reducing the costs per participant.

The pandemic has accelerated innovation. As in-class training has been suspended for all training providers, digitalization has increasingly become prominent and those training providers that had invested in digital learning were able to adapt fast to the situation and offer online training. The pandemic has accelerated the transition towards blended learning; the approach is no longer complementary but an important source of learning and training.

Shqipe Shehu, 24, is one of the trainees who had started online training in Front End Development at Tirana Center of Technology before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, was interviewed for a Helvetas blog. *“I enrolled in an online course because I live far away from the training center. So, the outbreak of the pandemic didn’t affect me. I have strong hopes of finding employment as a Developer once I complete the training,”* said Shqipe.

Not all courses can be delivered online: some processes can be learned only in classrooms, face-to-face, and need cuisines, dining rooms, or other places to gain the real experience of the training, like working in hotels, bars, and restaurants for tourism and hospitality training. Or they may need ICT labs with specific devices such as hardware for training. The Albanian ICT Academy and IkubINFO exemplify how adaptive the training providers have been in reacting to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Both providers conducted training face-to-face before the pandemic (though students from abroad could attend online in case of the Albanian ICT Academy), completely shifted to online training during the hard lockdown, delivered in a hybrid mode once the restrictions got released, and are now back in face-to-face delivery. The following figure (figure 5) classifies the nine training providers according to face-to-face, blended, and online training delivery, knowing that this figure simplifies the reality as just shown by the two examples. The figure furthermore shows that the type of vocational skills needed for professions in the tourism sector are best acquired in a physical mode (in grey), while in the case of ICT (in orange), training can take place more easily in blended modalities.

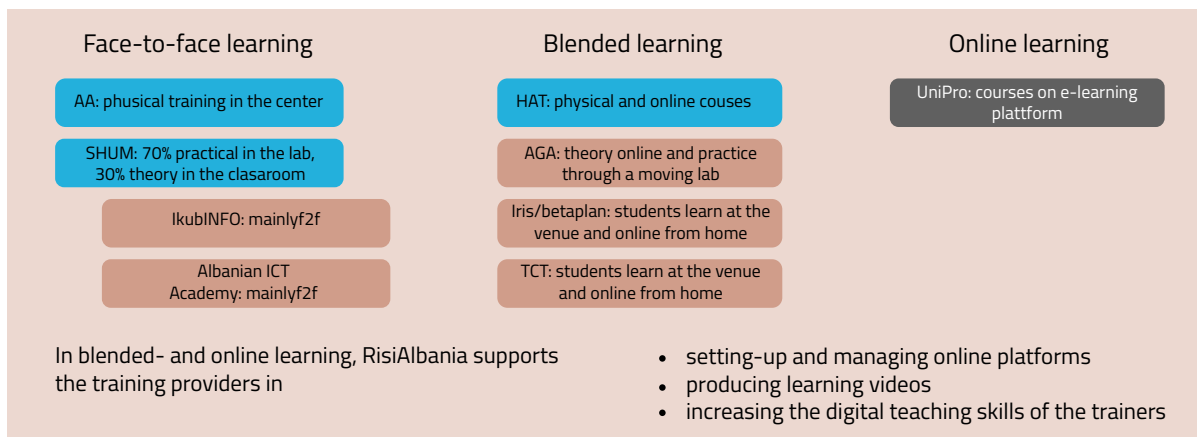


Figure 5: Learning modalities

Unipro, the platform provider of soft skills, states that while their business worked well in the first wave in Spring 2020 being the the only platform in Albania at that point of time, international platforms discovered the market in Albania during the pandemic. Unipro cannot compete with the fees of the international platforms, who are attractive for people without access difficulties, e.g. people who master English. However, Unipro still managed to keep the interest of individuals and companies to participate in their courses

### 3.8. Tracing system

#### beta-Plan Coding Bootcamps

Intensive (20 hours/week) bootcamp in cooperation with the Coding Dojo from the Silicon Valley. 70% get employed before the bootcamp ends. RisiAlbania financed the training of three instructors, which was the main bottleneck of iris/beta Plan and allowed the company to double its capacity to hold classes.

None of the training providers had a proper tracing system in place. RisiAlbania contracted the Tirana Center of Technology to develop a Student Administering & Tracking software, based on their own and the other training providers' articulated needs and experience with trainees. The other training providers gave feedback to the demo version, so that the software fits

to all training providers. According to the Founders & CEOs of Tirana Center of Technology, Mr. Rezart Alija and Mr. Gentjan Mejdani *"We and the other training providers were bottlenecked on the data and information flow. This is when RisiAlbania came into play. Now we can admin the students' data, track the students, track and save requests from companies and collaborate with them, and make survey questions to students to see how their experiences, life and career has moved on. It will help to keep history of everything."*

On an individual basis, such a tracing system will generate crucial information to continuously adapt the courses according to the trainees and businesses' feedbacks and can as such provide inputs for marketing strategies. Ms. Gladiola Dona of the Hospitality and Tourism Academy says that *"it's a system that makes you better. It asks you to implement a lot of new things."* On a more collective level, the development of this system led the nine training providers – who hardly seek exchange among themselves and see themselves as competitors in their economic sectors – bring together on a concrete issue and jointly contribute to solving it.

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## 4 HOW THE SYSTEM HAS CHANGED

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RisiAlbania's overall strategy is to work with a small number of innovators to pioneer and prove innovations and to expand this to the wider Albanian non-public non-formal training

The market has changed a lot in 5 years. 5 years ago, everybody can become a waiter. Now people know exactly that a trained staff makes a difference.

*Ms. Gladiola Dona, founder and CEO of Hospitality and Tourism Academy*

sector. The project aimed at facilitating models that are replicable and to support selected partners in such a way that the markets does not get distorted. The partners represent the top league of training providers.

RisiAlbania is one of the most important programs in skills development for enhancing employment. Its important contribution and intervention in the last years, has undoubtedly increased interest in the non-formal training segment. An expansion of both sectors has occurred, with 21 new entities licensed in the tourism sector and 18 in the ICT sector, in the past four years. It is safe to assume that Risi Albania's intervention has in some indirect ways also impacted their intentions and business model. Box 1 at the end of this chapter summaries the most important findings of a recent comparative analysis of the training providers' market.

The tested business models focus on bringing innovations on what is learnt and how it is learnt. This has resulted in training providers who are able to respond to the latest demands from the employers. It can be clearly stated that RisiAlbania saw the trend on distant/blended learning tremendously gaining importance coming well before the pandemic started, and thus made supporting training providers regarding these methodologies a core. Thanks to this, all training providers state that they were ready when the pandemic hit Albania. Training providers could increase their resilience as they were more broadly positioned thanks to diverse and future-oriented training methodologies.

In general, the training providers keep innovating and trying out new lines of business (adapt phase in the AAER framework<sup>7</sup>). By way of example, SHUM set up an employment portfolio, the Hospitality and Tourism Academy increasingly targets CEOs and executives as trainings for freshers are not the highest indemand, and Albanian ICT Academy invests in career orientation. The interviewed training providers stress that competition has increased lately, many of them shared examples of how new providers entered the market and copied the training offers (and tried to get the staff of some training providers). This would indicate to a certain degree that new training providers entered the ICT and tourism training market and got inspired by the accomplishments of the ones supported by RisiAlbania (expand phase in AAER framework). RisiAlbania staff confirm that more training providers than the ones who are partners have contacted RisiAlbania. The stage that non-competitive players, e.g. training providers from other economic sectors have adjusted their own practice in response to the changes in the system, could not yet be observed (response phase in AAER).

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7, Adopt Adapt Expand Response (AAER) framework is a framework for managing and measuring systemic change processes, <https://beamexchange.org/resources/130/>



RisiAlbania currently carries out a comprehensive market research to understand in how far the project has played a catalyst role in this system.

Even though the training providers consider themselves market leaders in their segments and want to keep that position, they assess themselves as small actors. They are often rather small businesses in terms of size, with hardly any full-time staff and working with pool of instructors who work on part-time basis. This has the big advantage that the instructors still fulfil a job in their industry and thereby manage to bring the latest industry knowledge to the training, thus guaranteeing the relevance and quality of the training offers. Financial viability of the training providers remains a challenge. A broad range of training offers including trainings at executive levels or tailor-made courses for companies ensures a larger customer segment; offering linked services like intermediary services is another solution to keep the business going.

There is fierce competition between the training providers in the two economic sectors. The training providers hardly see the advantage of exchanging or collaborating with each other, except when a product is developed that serves them all like the tracing system. Given the nature of the market – non-public and non-formal – the market is fee-based which makes it challenging for young people with limited means to access the trainings. Therefore, RisiAlbania has initiated the channeling of public funds into this market segment.

It's important to ensure that our standards are the European standards.

*Mr. Arber Avdija, founder and CEO of AA Vocational Culinary Courses*

Quality assurance remains a key issue to be addressed. Interaction with the Ministry is still limited to submitting the required documents to get the licenses. All interviewed training providers would like to see an increase of quality at sectoral level, which would imply the implementation of rules that are already in place.

Given that several training providers mentioned unfair competition and self-imposed quality standards to which they already adhere to, the call for quality assurance certainly aims to strengthen their positions in the market. There is high interest to learn more from countries, where the private training market is more dynamic and adheres to quality standards (e.g. the Swiss eduqua quality label in adult learning). In phase 3, RisiAlbania intends to strengthen the training providers to offer qualifications in compliance with the Albanian Qualification Framework.

The non-public non-formal training market in Albania is likely to gain importance in the future. The world of work is changing, the pandemic accelerated existing trends in remote work, e-commerce, and automation. For young people to benefit from the changing nature of the world of work, they need to be prepared, both in terms of skills acquisition and level of ambition and aspiration. Ori Hoxha of beta-Plan Coding Bootcamps puts his vision of the non-formal training ecosystem into the following words: "Eventually the market will switch from trainings that have been kicked off from academics who opened their own training center to supplement their classes to trainings that have been verified in developed markets and are tightly connected to the industry demand. What we have called non-formal trainings in the past will turn into courses for the younger generations who embrace technology much faster. Technology will be treated much more seriously through these

extensive and intense trainings that can enable you to join the workforce. What I want to happen is that people do highly technical trainings but also sign up for university for other subjects such as marketing, business, or social sciences where they acquire the social skills. Such rounded background can provide us the leaders of tomorrow. That could induce a shift, a reform on what we teach at university and who goes to university.”

**A gender-sensitive assessment of the non-formal skills supply for tourism and IT / BPO sectors**

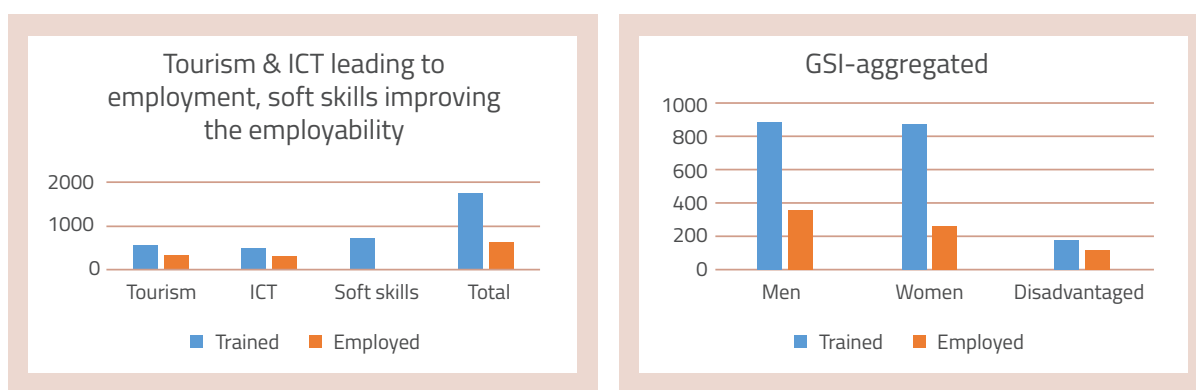
In September and October 2021, RisiAlbania conducted a comparative analysis of the current situation with the one assessed at the end of 2017. The results show an important increase in the number of training providers in the tourism and ICT sectors. The tourism sector increased by 100% with 21 new training providers entering the market and the ICT sector has increased by 46% with 18 new training providers.

The market growth in terms of number of training providers shows that there are more business opportunities for training providers. Factors that impacted this growth, include growth of tourism sector, growth of remote/outsourcing in ICT, and the echo of the developments that RisiAlbania’s partners have introduced in this market. The increasing number of trainees shows that more financing flows into this market for labor force development. The source of financing remains primary in individuals’ base and less in employers. The employers’ interest in cooperating with training providers, on the other hand, has experienced a remarkable growth. The assessment reports a new normal practice of a growing number of employers turning to training providers for the identification of their new recruits. RisiAlbania has its own contribution in this market size increase. Through the partner training providers, the project has shown that the latter serve as drivers of change when they are capacitated to identify and develop new training programs. This is achieved through a systemic regular communication with employers and regular feedback through tracing process.

**Box 1: Comparative analysis of training providers’ market**

## 5. YOUNG PEOPLE GET EMPLOYED

From 2018-2021, 2,013 trained, half of them being female (49. % women). 181 persons from marginalized groups<sup>8</sup> have improved their skills and increased their opportunities for employment. 785 young people were employed (46% women), while 118 have been from marginalized groups. The two economic sectors of tourism and ICT show similar patterns when it comes to the ratio of young people trained vs. young people employed. RisiAlbania differentiates between training that leads to employment (in tourism and ICT) and training that contributes to employment (in soft skills). Hence, while the young people who participated in soft skills training improve their employability – and given the future of work likely to a very considerable extent – RisiAlbania does not claim employment this category (see figure 6).



**Figure 6: Number of young people trained and employed 2018-2020**

The interviews confirmed that young persons beyond Tirana, some of them even from outside of Albania, could attend the training as they could save on the travel/accommodation fees. Additionally, training providers have decreased the training fees for distant modalities, e.g. the online courses of HAT are 75% lower than the face-to-face courses.

“After finishing high-school I had no idea what to do in my life. One day, although i was not 100% convinced, i decided to give it a try and follow AA Cooking Course in Lezhë. I learned that cooking is not only frying a couple of eggs in the kitchen at home. I found employment one week before finishing the course thanks to the skills i gained there and the high demand in my profession in Lezhë. Now i am also able to create my own dishes”.

*Ladovik Syku, Chef at Poseidon Restaurant, Lezhë*



8. Marginalized groups are defined based on their social background, such as: internal migrants; rural women; Roma & Egyptians; orphans; returnees; women victims of domestic violence; formerly trafficked women and LGBTQI.

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## 6. LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS

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We can draw the following lessons:

1. Non-formal training in Albania in the tourism and ICT sectors offers young people opportunities to quickly develop skills linked to the requirements of employers. Hands-on trainings in ICT give young people the complementary skills that they need for a profession. In tourism, young people gain a profession. Soft skills increase employability of the youth as they complement their profiles.
2. The partners are the top league of training providers in tourism and ICT. They are very close to the world of work and immediately feel the consequences of the unavailable skilled persons, either because they are directly linked to a business or because they have built up a close network with businesses. This close linkage to the employers explains the exceptionally high employment rates in ICT and tourism.
3. The training providers and RisiAlbania carefully assessed and identified the needs for support. As a result, there is not a standard support package provided, but the type of support as also the deliverables vary from provider to provider. The partners appraise this tailored and flexible approach. The results-based contracting is unusual and might be one of the factors of the very positive employment results.
4. Even if the training providers have strong market positions and are pioneers in their segment, their financial viability remains a challenge. To enlarge their customer segment and to increase their resilience, many added new value services linked to the core business of training.
5. RisiAlbania followed its facilitative approach and focused on building up the partners. Motivation of partners is key. This case study confirms that the partners showed huge commitment enabling innovation of the training content and training delivery. RisiAlbania tried to bring together partners and foster exchange among them through different formats. Cooperation among the training providers remains scarce, which is not surprising, given the fierce competition among them. Cooperation however emerges if a product like the tracing system serves them all.
6. The partners, supported by RisiAlbania, initiated a shift to online and blended learning already two years ago (before the pandemic). This has paid off for several training providers who did not completely suspend their activity, and rather retained their trainees, and in some, cases even acquired new ones.
7. To achieve systemic change, working at the micro and meso level is not sufficient. To make the market more inclusive, RisiAlbania has aimed efforts to facilitate that more finances are channeled through the public agencies. The Government has now taken up this issue and is preparing a legal framework that will regulate public procurement of skills development from non-formal private providers. Furthermore, the first SSC is currently piloted, and phase 3 will put a focus on aligning the non-formal qualifications into the Albanian Qualifications Framework.

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We're a powerhouse in foreign language speaking people. This shows up in the industry of call centers. I don't see why we can't use the same strength as call centers to train European youth who compete to Asian and US youth. European universities do a lot of generic. There is a gap that we can fill.

*Rezart Alija & Gentjan Mejvani, Founders & Co-CEOs of Tirana Center of Technology*

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