

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT IN ALBANIA



Save the Children

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Help for Children FOUNDATION (HFC)

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This booklet shows cases of vulnerable youth who succeeded to develop basic life skills, learn professional abilities and start a business, with the help of Youth Empowerment Project in Albania.



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT IN ALBANIA

Background

Youth Empowerment project aims to guide and support youth pathway from basic education age all the way through adulthood. It focuses on the empowerment of the most vulnerable youth by enabling an environment that is inclusive and helps them to overcome obstacles and realize their job aspirations.

The project builds upon three aspect of youth empowerment: Personal development, Education and Training on life skills and vocational skills, Economic Empowerment. To support youth involvement, during these interventions, the project engages with families and community, institutions and private sector. The project is being implemented in Cerrik/Elbasan and Bushat/Shkoder.

From 2016 - 2020 the project plans to empower:

Direct beneficiaries

Youth out of education system: 200

Youth within the education system: 600

Parents: 200

Teachers: 30

Indirect beneficiaries

Youth: 1600

Community members 8000

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT MODEL

The project aims to support youth through three pillars



Supporting personal development

By fostering positive thinking patterns, communication and problems solving skills, nourishing constructive attitudes toward professional education and labor market through life skills and livelihood trainings



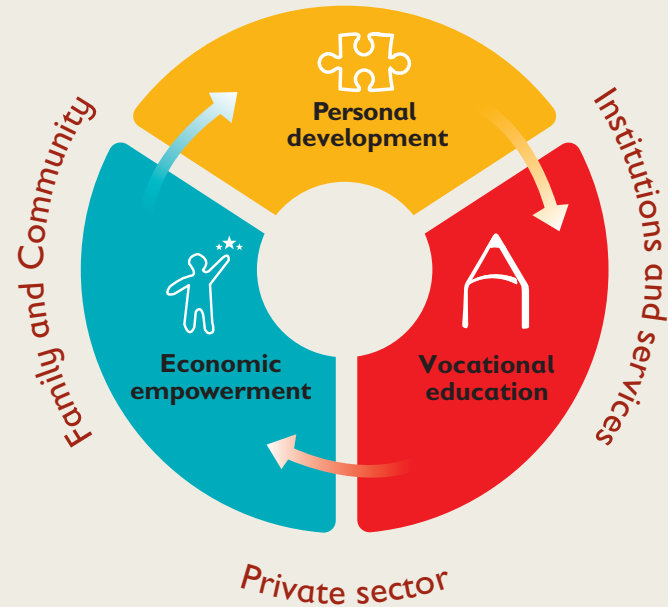
Enhancing the quality of vocational education

By improving the vocational schools' infrastructure and the education curricula as well as building capacities of teachers.



Boosting youth economic empowerment

By supporting youth vocational education trainings (VET) as well as development and implementation of business plans, awarding the best business plan, helping youth to find a job place, job shadowing, organizing employability fairs.



Partners and collaborators

State institutions, private businesses, vocational schools, families, community members and Non –Governmental Organizations (NGO-s).

YOUTH WHO RECEIVED TRAININGS:



210 Number of youth who received life skills training



135



75

210 Number of youth who received livelihood training



135



75

59 Number of youth who attended vocational courses



32



27

YOUTH ECONOMICALLY EMPOWERED



Number of employed youth

36



23



13

Number of youth who started a business

11



9



2

PROJECT INTERVENTION IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

The project aims to improve the quality of vocational education as an efficient means to lead vulnerable youth out of poverty.

Therefore, the intervention is focused also on the two vocational schools situated in the areas where the project is implemented.

Number of Youth who benefit from the improved teaching and learning facilities such as new veterinary and food processing labs



314



Number of youth who benefit from enhanced professional capacities of vocational schools' teaching staff

314



300



14



Number of youth who will benefit from the improved livelihood academic program in the vocational high schools nationwide:

24,756





Fullfilling dreams

Manjola Korra, a 20 years old young Roma girl from Elbasan, who struggles every day with poverty, achieved to develop skills and fulfil her dreams to develop skills and become a cook.

Manjola is born and raised up under extreme poverty and very difficult living conditions. Manjola is the oldest daughter of the family composed of parents, grandmother, two sisters and a brother. Manjola's family life has been very challenging and they struggled to survive. They used to live in a tent near the river. Their life has been many times at risk of snakes, rats and insects, cold and humidity. She used to beg with her mother and sell sunflower seeds in the streets with her younger sister, as the only way to ensure the daily food for the family.

When Manjola was 10 years old, her family moved to Elbasan and rented a small first floor apartment, which used to be a storage space, located in one of the suburban areas of the city of Elbasan, one of the Albanian cities with the highest concentration of Roma and Egyptian communities. Like the majority of Roma families, Manjola's family

earn their living mostly by collecting and selling plastic recyclable materials, usually collected in garbage bins. Due to the extreme poverty, Manjola dropped out of school at fifth grade and used to sell sunflower seeds or begging in the street during the day to help her family living. Then when she was an adolescent started working as a house cleaner for different families. It was a very hard and long hours' job for her age and at a very low payment about 7 Euros per day. She didn't like it and felt exploited and underpaid for her work that started in the morning up to the evening, but she had no other choice but to continue doing it for helping her family.

Manjola's lack of choice and opportunity to education and development for a better job was the main reason that her mother wanted her daughter to join the youth empowerment project.

When Manjola was 18 years old, she joined Save the Children's project aiming to develop her learning, reading and writing, professional skills and be part of a group of peers and meet new friends. Manjola

has regularly attended the activities of the program through which she has learned how to identify the means to reach her goals, how to work in a group, and identify her weaknesses and strengths. She has learned how to use her strengths, such as persistence and willingness to learn in overcoming her weaknesses, such as low self-esteem and self-confidence. Through the livelihood trainings and individual consultations, she has obtained information how to approach the labor market. Participation in the life skills training sessions has encouraged her to actively engage and learn how to speak openly and express her opinion. Manjola has completed a 6 months illiteracy course, where she was helped to improve her reading, writing and math skills. She is now able to read fluently, write simple content and conduct basic math exercises. In addition, Manjola was registered in the vocational training center, where she successfully completed the 5-months vocational course for cooking, one of her big wishes.

“My favorite part of the project has been the cooking vocational course, because there I learned how to become a cook. I learned how to use and combine various ingredients. The teacher even sent us to the market, and showed



us which best assortments for different recipes are. I learned to cook different kinds of pasta and different types of seasonings, that I had never seen before and I did not know they even existed. Another interesting thing I have learned is how to plan. When the trainer asked me about where I see myself in 5 years, I had no answer. Gradually I started to think about a plan and how to find ways to realize it. Together with the teacher and the youth coaches I designed for the first time my individual development plan. I was very happy to make this plan because it was based on my real wishes and dreams. For the

first time in my life I was able to freely express my dreams and to openly say what I wanted to become. Based on this plan, I completed the cooking course and learned a profession, which I love so much. Now I am applying my new cooking skills and I really like it”-Manjola.

After completing the vocational training, Manjola has been in an internship in different local businesses, in order to gain experience and get prepared for the labor market. Currently, she is in the probationary period prior to the full employment at one of the well-known restaurants in the city. She has now the necessary knowledge, skills and experience, and she feels ready to start a job, as a cook.

The speaking and communication skills she has gained have helped her to better interact and communicate with colleagues and the supervisor. Now Manjola believes in herself and is not afraid to seek what she deserves. She feels like an integral part of the society, far from the prejudices and discrimination that her community faces.

“This project changed my life. Before, it was hard for me to understand that

I possessed positive qualities, because no one had talked to me about my abilities. But the participation in this project made me discover my potential skills. It made me love myself more and think that I’m worth it now. Before I used to work or stay at home all day long. I was timid and had no friends. Now I’ve made new friends.

I feel more confident and express my opinion openly even in group discussions, because I have an extended vocabulary and more knowledge on various topics related to the daily life. Even in my family, my parents and siblings appreciate me and now they ask my opinion for different things. They also ask me to cook in the house, because they say I prepare very delicious meals. Thanks to the project, I have learned a profession and now I am able to start a real job and contribute to my family. My dream is to buy a house for my family to make sure that we will not return in the street again, with no place to live, even after my father passes away and we remain without incomes to pay the rent. I do not want my little brother to experience living on the street, where I and my sisters have grown up.”

In the framework of the family empowerment component of Save the Children’s program, the project staff has facilitated even the part-time employment of Manjola’s mother as a charwoman in a social center for elderly people in Elbasan.





Achieving to bring hopes for a skillful beekeeper

Flogert Ndou is a 21 years old young man, who lives with his parents, two sisters and one brother in Kuç, a small village in Shkodra city northern Albania.

Kuç is located near the riverbank of Drin River, which during the precipitation seasons overflows and floods the entire area. In the last three years, Flogert's house has been flooded four times, causing a lot of damages, in house infrastructure, equipment and furniture, as well as to the small farm around the house destroying all the crops. Flogert's house is in very bad conditions, as after the last floods they didn't have the means to restore it and buy new appliances. Furthermore, they know that the floods will occur again, and it is useless to invest there. The only solution is to live in another house, but this is impossible for the family, as they have no income to afford a new house. The house has humidity and mould in the walls, which has affected the health of Flogert's younger sister. Flogert is the oldest child of the family, and as such, feels responsible

to help his family to overcome the difficult economic situation they are living. Flogert's parents are unemployed. His father did random jobs in construction, but seven months ago he was diagnosed with high blood pressure, and since then he hasn't been able to work anymore, as construction works require strength and hard physical work. While his mother cares for the house cores and farm works.

When Flogert was a small kid, his father used to cultivate bees and maintained the family with the income derived from selling the honey. However, because of a financial crisis, he sold all the beehives, and since that time, they have hardly made their living mostly by selling few products that Flogert's mother cultivates in their small farm, and from his father's temporary jobs in construction.

Flogert was referred to the project by his friend, a beneficiary of the first phase of the program. He joined Save the Children's

project in January 2017 at the age of 20, hoping to change his life. He said: *“Before being part of this project, my life was so monotone and empty. We were living in poverty and our house was in very bad conditions due to floods. I used to stay all day inside my home, as I had no reasons to go to the city. I needed a change in my life, and I am very happy that this opportunity was presented to me at the right moment. I have enjoyed very much the training sessions and I have made new friends during this period. I gained a lot of important and necessary*

information and knowledge that is useful in my life, such as identifying and appreciating my strengths and my personal skills, which helped me boost my self-esteem and feel more confident. Besides my personal growth, this project has helped me tremendously with my professional development. I was trained and supported to start-up my business, which was my dream and plan for the future.”

The program connected Flogert with a local online sales business, where he

conducted a 6-months internship to gain work experience. He has learned many practical and theoretical things about beekeeping business and knows how to take care and feed the bees, how to protect them from insects and seasonal diseases, and everything else related to beekeeping.

Appreciating his dedication to work and the good performance, the business employed him part-time, as a sales agent. Flogert's employment was a big help for his family,



which had unpaid debts due to the attempts to restore the house after the first flood. Even though Flogert has finished the mechanic's vocational high school, he does not intend to be a mechanic. He has clear ideas and wishes, he wants to become a beekeeper.

Flogert is a smart, ambitious and very cautious young man. His passion and love for beekeeping has grown and has become the goal of his life. Besides learning and practice on beekeeping he has also developed negotiation skills and learned everything regarding small business start-up and management, during the livelihood training program.

Appreciating his passion, desire and abilities for this kind of business, the project supported him financially by providing 10 beehives, protective gears, smoker, and honey extracting equipment to Flogert and his family. *“That was the biggest support I’ve ever had in my life, and I’m very grateful to everyone for what they have done for me. I’ve always had plans to establish a beekeeping business with my family, but we never had the financial means to buy beehives. I am very happy and I will work hard to double the number of beehives within one year, to make my business a success.”*

Flogert's business is going very well. During the past winter, while bees from other families in Flogert's village died due to cold weather and lack of care, Flogert's bees survived and remained healthy, due to the constant care from Flogert and his father. Currently, the business' expert is following-up Flogert's business progress. He is providing him with the necessary advice and expertise, in order to make Flogert's business succeed, by teaching him how to promote the products and access sale's market, teaching him about prices and sale's season, as well as providing him with technical information regarding the honey and other products such as bee milk and propolis.

Flogert's day has become very structured. Every morning he controls the beehives with his father, to see if everything is going well with the bees. Then he goes to work in Shkodra. After work Flogert turns to the village and helps his parents with the farm chores. He also regularly attends the project activities, such as meetings and workshops on life skills and livelihood.

Being the only one who works and earns family incomes, Flogert says he feels very happy that he is contributing to his family. He is helping the family not only financially with his part-time work earnings, but will soon bring home the profits from the sales of the first round of the honey production.





Developing confidence and skills for future goals

Nikoleta, age 16, is a student in the 2nd grade of the Vocational High School in Bushat. She is enabled to follow education, develop skills and work towards her future goals to become a baker and run her own business.

Nikoleta and her family live in an informal area, in Shkodra, the biggest town in Northern Albania. Her family comes from a very rural and mountainous area where poverty and lack of services dominated. But even in Shkodra, life for the family is still very challenging. They started their living from scratch and can hardly make their ends meet. Nikoleta's family is composed of four people, her parents and little brother age 14.

Besides poverty and unemployment issues that the family faces, Nikoleta's father suffers from cerebral palsy and is unable to work. Her mother is unemployed but occasionally she takes, from the shoe manufacturing factory, work to do at home. She sews shoes by hand and Nikoleta and her brother often help her achieve the

required quantity. The whole family income is their father social assistance of about 70 Euro per month, which is mostly used for her father's medications.

"Life cannot be more difficult. At home, we don't have drinking water and money to pay electricity. I used to do my homework by candlelight, waking up with red eyes due to the candle smoke. My father cannot work due to paralysis and my mother is the only one who can take care of us."

Her hands are always swollen because of house cores and shoe sewing works. I try to help her but shoe hand sewing is very hard and fingers often got wounded. I used to work in the afternoon, but studying after such work has always been too hard for me. I could hardly get concentrated. My mother couldn't afford school materials and I wasn't able to study as much as I needed to."

Nikoleta joined the project when she was in the eighth grade, at age 14. She was enabled to finish the 9-grade school with good results and enroll in the vocational high school for food technology and is

progressing very well there. Nikoleta regularly frequented the Life skills and Livelihood training program for youth and was part of every other capacity building and project community activities.

"I feel privileged to be part of the Youth Empowerment project. The project staff has been in my house very frequently to discuss with my parents about my involvement in the project. I was supported with school books and materials as well as daily transportation to go to school. Thanks to this support, I have successfully completed the 9th year school and I'm continuing the vocational high school for food technology.

In few months, soon after I got involved in the project, I changed completely my school results and I was so happy to become a good student in math, language and chemistry.

I participated in the life skills and livelihood trainings with other peers



as well as in different activities. I have gained very useful knowledge on different topics and developed my skills in communication, group collaboration and cooperation. Before I was very timid and shy, but now I like to be part of the group discussions in class and other environments.

I'm using the knowledge and the information I've obtained in life skills and livelihood trainings and sessions every day in school, and I feel more advanced than my peers, because I have more knowledge than them. Due to my gained knowledge, often my teachers and classmates choose me as leader of group works, because they trust me. This makes me feel very confident and appreciated.

The part I enjoy most during my studies is the practice we do in the new food processing laboratory set up and equipped by Save the Children. There, I have learned a lot regarding food processing, and I have practiced the preparation and the processing of different types of dough that are used for various cooking recipes. Furthermore, in school I have learned a lot about preservation and food safety, which is very important for a healthy life. I will never forget what I have learned and I will always be careful regarding food safety in the future, when I work in my own bakery shop.

Education is helping me to pave the way towards the realization of my dream such as to work and run in my own bakery shop in the future. This is my greatest achievement during the course of my involvement in the project."

"Thanks to this program, I feel better regarding my personal and professional development and education achievements. I've made new friends, I belong to a social group and feel more confident to express my opinions without embarrassment in family and school, because I have more information and knowledge about different topics. I am learning a profession now, which will improve my future and will help my family to have a financially stable life.

I don't want to be like my neighbourhood friends, which start their marital life at a very young age, away from their families. They become mothers at very young age and stay at home as



housewives, closing the window for personal and professional development. I want to be educated and have a business that will improve not only my life, but also my family's life, so that we can live a normal life, out of poverty".



Empowering youth to alleviate poverty from development of skills to employment

Ilia, a 20 years old guy from Egyptian community living in Cerrik, was enabled to alleviate poverty through development of proper skills and startup of his own business.

Ilia's family, two parents and a sister younger than him, used to live in Leskovik for 11 years, in a very small town in south eastern Albania. There, the family faced with lack of services and unemployment.

In seek for a job and better life opportunities, Ilia's family moved to Korca, one of the biggest southern towns of Albania. In Korca, life for the family was turning for better. Both parents were employed. His father found a job in a construction company while his mother worked at an olive oil processing company. Additionally in the afternoon, his father could also practice his passion as a barber at home. The family was able to pay the rent of the house, afford the basics for living and their children's education.

When Ilia finished his 9th grade of the primary school and was making up plans to follow higher education, suddenly and unfortunately the father got sick and within three weeks he passed away. The family was devastated by his loss both at psychological and economic level. His mother got very sick and was unable to work anymore. Angela, his sister, dropped off schooling, at age 11, and fell almost in depression. At this point, the family was unable to afford the house rent, school expenditures and overall their living in Korca. So, they decided to leave Albania and go in seek for asylum in Germany. After 6 months of a very difficult living time in the refugee camp, the family asylum was rejected and they were obliged to return in their home country.

In Albania, they had no place to go and stay. The only convenient solution for them was to go and live in Cerrik, near Ilia's aunt. There, the aunt found them a very small and old room for living, which is still their rented house today.



At a young age of 17, the burden of caring for his mom and sister fell on Ilia. As soon as Ilia's family started living in Cerrik, he began looking for a job, but could not find any. Aside from his family survival issues and hardships he was getting desperate. *"I felt as trapped in the grip and could hardly breathe and do anything to get out of it. I cried and felt lost at that time"* said Ilia.

When Ilia was 19 years old, Ilia was identified and persuaded by the project coordinator to join the project. Initially, he was very skeptic and passive. But, very soon due to the professional support and daily coaching, he gained new knowledge and raised his interest to develop skills through his involvement in the Life Skills and Livelihood Training sessions and later on the formal vocational training for a barber.

During his participation in project activities he showed to be very interested and committed to learning and youth involvement activities. He was able to receive excellent result in his vocational course for barber and with the support of the project consultant in a very short time he was able to design his business plan. Due to his developed skills, commitment to work, ability to define goals and persistence in achieving those goals



as well as his proven talent for barber, Ilia became a successful candidate was chosen by the project for further financial support to start up his business.

“Initially, I was very hesitant and doubter that my involvement would help me improve my

skills, my vision for life and life in itself. Due to help provided by Alketa and Erion {Project Coordinator + Coacher/Trainer} I started to ease my stress and learned how to build confidence.

I learned to analyze options that helped me cope with difficult situations occurred and can happen in life. The knowledge I gained in the trainings helped me to manage my time, to develop negotiation skills, to adapt to different roles in the group, as a leader and as member of the group. I improved my communication skills with the others and understood how the business environment functions.

During the free time in the center with peers, I also developed my passion to play the guitar. It was fun and created a more relaxed and entertained atmosphere in the center with my peers. I also enjoyed becoming one of the most favorite and respected friend for my peers. Moreover, sharing life experiences and issues together with peers, it made us know and support each other better.

One of the most useful knowledge I received during my involvement in the project was how to manage budget, expenditures and incomes, how to make a business plan and deal with administrative procedures. I also learned that everything that occurs to us in life must be seen as an experience that we can learn and grow

from and never lose hopes. The Barber vocational was the greatest opportunity given to me. It was my passion and dream that came true. Becoming a barber, I also fulfilled my father's wish for me”.

Ilia has now opened and is running his own business the “Barber shop”. The project supported him with the shop rent payment, has bought all the furniture and supplies and facilitated all legal and administration procedures needed for a new business. Ilia and family are very happy with such an exceptional opportunity that is helping them getting out of poverty and can lead Ilia toward the economic empowerment. So far, Ilia is very satisfied with his first earnings. He has become one of the most well-known barber in the town. *“The knowledge I received in the trainings was very useful for my business. I now know how to communicate with clients and satisfy their needs. I know how to keep track of my daily expenditures and earnings and am able to do a monthly financial and work review”.* With his initial earnings he has bought the medicines for his mother and clothes for his sister and ensures everyday food for his family. With the support of his project peers, Ilia's business is being further promoted to the community and he feels optimistic that his business will be going smooth and stable, all he dreams to be.



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