

Women in Online Work (WoW) Pilot

SNAPSHOT	
Organization(s)	Ministry of Economic Development of Kosovo
Project Name	Women in Online Work Pilot (WoW), Phase I
Location	Gjakova and Lipjan municipalities, Kosovo
Date(s) of Implementation	November 2015 – August 2016
Funding Amount	USD 140,000
Partner(s) / Funder(s)	World Bank Group; Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation; Gjakova VTC Center
Number of Youth Beneficiaries Trained	Total: 100 Women: 100 Men: 0
Number of Youth Beneficiaries Employed	Total: 54 Women: 54 Men: 0
Avg. Payment Amount (fixed contract)	USD 74
Avg. Payment Amount (hourly contract)	USD 129
Type(s) of Digital Work	Online Outsourcing – Freelancing
Source of Metrics	Impact evaluation

ABOUT THE WOMEN IN ONLINE WORK (WOW) PILOT

In 2012, the World Bank identified clear gender disparities in education, health, and economic opportunities in Kosovo.¹ The diagnostic recommended several strategies to improve employment outcomes for women, including launching active labor market programs that target women and establishing of skill-building programs as a strategy to improve women’s chances of starting their own business. Background research also identified three main obstacles to preventing more women from benefiting from online work opportunities: (1) Lack of awareness; (2) Lack of relevant technical and soft skills; and (3) Limited access to technology.

The pilot integrated findings from the World Bank’s 2016 World Development Report on Digital Dividends study on, in order to test out how digital economy jobs could assist in creating inclusive and better employment opportunities for women. The World Bank team concluded that the following factors proved sufficient grounds to test the possibility of using online work to connect young women with growing digital employment opportunities: (1) available talent with intermediate-level fluency in English; (2) rising access to broadband infrastructure and Internet-enabled devices; (3) availability of online payment systems; (4) lack of prohibitive regulations; and (5) a family-focused culture which drives demand for flexible work arrangements.

¹ World Bank (2012). Kosovo: Gender Gaps in Education, Health, and Economic Opportunities. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/371251468030245833/pdf/759300WP0ENGLI0Box0379792B00PUBLIC0.pdf>.

The Women in Online Work (WoW) pilot sought to generate awareness of online employment opportunities for underemployed and unemployed women in Kosovo. WoW targeted women aged 18-34 from rural areas in Gjakova and Lipjan who had completed or would complete university-level education, were under- or unemployed, and were seeking employment.

Overall, the project sought to:

- Improve skills for digital jobs;
- Raise awareness of online work platforms among beneficiaries;
- Raise awareness of online work platforms among local Kosovo ICT firms and raise awareness of Kosovo labor potential among international online work platforms; and
- Encourage mentorship and networking between beneficiaries and people in digital jobs.

PROJECT DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION

Program Design	Supply-Side Components		Demand-Side Components	
	Training & Skills Development	✓	Improving Access to Finance for SMEs	×
	Employment & Intermediation Services	✓	Capacity Building & Information Provision	×
	Subsidized Employment	×	Targeted Sector-Specific Approaches	×

ACTIVITIES

Capacity-Building Training Courses

WoW provided capacity-building training courses in soft skills, freelancing skills and programming skills to underemployed and unemployed women to increase their employability. The courses were composed of class-taught and self-learning modules.

- *Programming Skills Training:* Participants learned about the basic application of HTML and CSS3, as well as Responsive Web Design, Web Development Tools, Java Script and jQuery, Website Optimization, and Advanced Java Script.
- *Soft Skills Training:* Participants were trained in professional communication skills, business communication, creating personal branding statement, interaction with clients, confidence building and developing personal motivation, stress management and cultural awareness.
- *Freelancing Skills Training:* Participants were equipped with foundational knowledge of online freelancing marketplaces. They also learned how to write an effective cover letter and create a personal profile and portfolio for online freelancing opportunities.

Professional Mentorship

WoW provided participants with mentorship opportunities from accomplished peers and online freelancers. Mentors acted as trainers in the classroom, and were responsible for assisting participants with technical issues and online job bidding. Additionally, mentors provided guidance during the job

search process by helping trainees to identify online work opportunities that were good matches for their skills.

RECRUITMENT

1,105
women applied

227
passed screening

100
graduated program

WoW utilized a combination of media relations, social media engagement, participation in various ICT-related events, and organization of meetings with key pilot stakeholders (e.g. public employment service and youth centers, TVET centers, educational institutions, opinion leaders) to raise general awareness of the pilot among potential applicants. The training provider (Coders Trust) relied primarily on social media marketing to identify prospective participants. There were two main reasons: (1) Coders Trust generally relied on Facebook as a trainee recruitment platform; and (2) to ensure that a trainee pool have a minimum satisfactory level of digital literacy, some level of which was essential for the participation in the pilot. As a result, WoW anchored its online recruitment on the targeted Facebook ads.

The role of the Ministry of Economic Development of Kosovo in the recruitment and outreach process was indispensable. The Deputy Minister and staff of the Post-Telecommunications and Information Technology Department jointly led a pilot promotion campaign through traditional media, including TV, radio and the press, online and social media (especially Facebook). This strategy helped the program reach women who may not have been active internet users or who may have lacked internet access at home. Finally, the WoW program liaised with local advocacy groups representing the rights and voices of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, in an effort to be inclusive of those disadvantaged groups. The program's outreach campaign also relied on information sessions held at universities and other organizations. In total, the pilot generated extraordinary interest for a training program, a testament to which was 1,105 applications.

During the recruitment process, potential participants completed three online screening tests and a phone interview conducted in English. The three online tests assessed the participants' skills in English, logic (IQ) and basic understanding of HTML. Out of over 1,000 registered applicants, 227 total applicants completed the mandatory screening tests.

WoW initially accepted 131 under-employed and unemployed women into the program, including part-time and full-time students, and part-time and full-time workers. Over time, many participants dropped out or were expelled due to inadequate participation. In order to maintain their quota of 100 participants, WoW conducted two additional outreach campaigns. In total, WoW registered 192 women in the first quarter of the program; of these, 100 women successfully graduated from the program.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

- **High Dropout Rate.** Out of 192 beneficiaries recruited into the program during several waves of recruitment, only 100 participants successfully graduated from the program. Some dropouts lacked the sufficient English-language skills and motivation to pursue a challenging training

course, while others reported being unsatisfied with the intensive teaching approach and curriculum. Even though there was a multi-stage recruitment process, many did not have the level of English proficiency required to study front-end web development. The thresholds of the English and Logic tests may have been too low, causing applicants to underestimate the complexity of the program.² Moreover, some participants were disappointed with basic logistics such as the training facility location, transport, and facility conditions and decided to withdraw from the program.

- **Difficult to Effectively Teach Advanced IT Skills during a Short-Term Program.** Program staff faced a strong challenge in teaching essential and complex skills for online IT outsourcing during a brief period of time, following the model of coding bootcamp trainings which are gaining momentum in highly developed countries. Some critics argue, and program data affirmed, that the ambition to teach front-end web development to a largely unqualified audience (without proper academic underpinnings) over a brief period gives a superficial perspective and unreasonably heightened expectations about what it takes to become an IT professional. Approximately 75% of Phase I participants had limited or no programming skills necessary for online jobs. Despite training and high motivation, few beneficiaries were successful as online freelancers in front-end web development.
- **Under-representation of Minority Populations.** Program staff did not manage to recruit minorities and other vulnerable/marginalized populations. It should be noted that the target municipalities are predominantly Albanian, a minority population in Kosovo. Additionally, specific outreach activities were designed to target cultural communities and people with disabilities. However, only one trainee with a disability ultimately enrolled in the project.
- **Selection Bias.** The program's recruitment strategy resulted in a high number of female participants with a comparatively higher level of digital literacy. It is important to note that many the WoW participants had a high degree of access to ICT: this includes ownership of a computer and access to fixed and wireless Internet. 90% of the participants owned a phone which has Wi-Fi connectivity and an Internet connection. Thus, these participants may not have been entirely representative of the average young Kosovo woman who comes from rural areas. However, it is worth noting that the most successful active graduates had a comparatively lower level of digital literacy than the other graduates.³

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

Beneficiaries' level of education and area of study were two variables which largely affected the outcomes. Students with university or post-graduate degrees had more motivation to study than the others. Social Science and arts majors showed more focus than the STEM majors, as they saw this program as an opportunity to be more marketable in the market.⁴ Additionally, active graduates generated 9.6 times more online jobs than inactive graduates during the monitoring period. In terms of earnings, 66% of the active graduates passed the basic earning threshold of USD 100 during the same time. The average

² World Bank (2017). *Republic of Kosovo Innovative and Green Growth for Rural Kosovo: Women in Online Work Pilot, Impact Evaluation Report*. Europe and Central Asia: World Bank Group.

³ Ibid.

⁴ World Bank (2018b). *Innovative and Green Growth for Rural Areas: Investing and Scoping, Korea Green Growth Trust Fund, Grant Report and Monitoring Report*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

earnings of an active graduate were at USD 293. It has been estimated that active graduates earned 15 times higher average earnings than inactive graduates.⁵

ONLINE EMPLOYMENT LEVELS

67%
of graduates found
at least 1 online job

Students started gaining their first online contracts during the third week of training. 67% of graduates were able to obtain at least one online job during the program (February to August) or during the three months after its completion (September to November). Of those 54 women, 40 were moderately successful bidders (obtained 1-5 online contracts) and 14 were highly successful bidders (obtained 6-20 online jobs). Rates of online employment were even greater for active learners: 66% of active learners obtained at least one online job; and 20% of active learners obtained over 6 online job contracts.

ONLINE JOB EARNINGS

USD 20,423.53
in cumulative
earnings

WoW trainees generated USD 20,423.53 of earnings within 3 months of completing the pilot. Approximately 53% of WoW graduates and 66% of active learners passed the lowest earning threshold of USD 1. Active learners made up the largest share of successful earners, with approximately 30% of active graduates earning over 100€ (USD 111), with the highest earning reaching as high as EUR 4,140. Notably, active graduates were able to generate as much as 15 times higher earnings than inactive graduates: active graduates earned USD 19,610 while inactive graduates earned a total of USD 662.

FIXED AND HOURLY ONLINE CONTRACTS

USD 74
average pay
(fixed contract)

USD 1,377
maximum pay
(fixed contract)

USD 129
average pay
(hourly contract)

USD 4,327
maximum pay
(hourly contract)

Under WoW, online jobs earnings typically arose from fixed or hourly online contracts, or a combination of both. Ultimately, graduates benefited more from hourly contracts than from fixed contracts: graduates had higher average hourly earnings than fixed earnings (USD 129 vs. USD 74) and the maximum pay for hourly contracts (USD 4327) was 3 times higher than the maximum pay for fixed contracts (USD 1377).

With respect to fixed contracts, active graduates were much more successful in getting fixed online contracts than the inactive graduates, earning on average 8 times more on fixed contracts than inactive graduates (USD 104 vs USD 13). Cumulatively, active graduates earned 16 times more than inactive graduates (USD 6,930 as opposed to only USD 435 for inactive graduates).

⁵ Ibid.

Comparing the performance of active and inactive graduates on hourly contracts, active graduates were receiving much higher average hourly pay (USD 189) than the inactive graduates (USD 6.9). Active graduates also generated significantly higher summary earnings for hourly jobs: USD 12,681 as opposed to USD 228 generated by inactive graduates. The maximum earner, with USD 4,327, unsurprisingly came from the group of active graduates, whereas the highest earner among inactive graduates made 25 times less, or USD 168.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Age a Determinant for Success.** There was a strong relationship between a participant's age and her earnings/the number of online jobs. That is, more successful participants were older women (over 25). Therefore, targeting and engaging more mature female participants may bring about better program outcomes and sustainability. Other strong factors of success include an academic major and one's employment history (whether one worked in the year preceding the program).
- 2. Unemployed Women had Better Outcomes.** The program also found that unemployed young women were more likely to be active students and were more likely to graduate from the program, than women who were university students or who were under-employed. Unemployed women had more time to dedicate to the program and saw the program as their primary/only means to find employment.
- 3. Women with Lower Levels of Digital Literacy Were More Successful.** Most of the active graduates possessed relatively lower levels of digital literacy when entering the program, as compared to other active WoW trainees. These women were described as more motivated and more enthusiastic in their learning. As a result, they pursued more online job opportunities than other trainees who entered the program already having some familiarity with digital tools.
- 4. Providing financial stipends to beneficiaries carries risks.** Reducing financial barriers for enrolment and participation helped more trainees to become "active learners", who completed self-paced online lectures and videos, actively participated in classroom exercises and discussion, and successfully bid for digital jobs using an online freelancing platform. However, program staff also found that stipends disrupted the atmosphere of the training, as some beneficiaries complained that students were accepting the stipend then not attending training. The program team decided to discontinue paying stipends in subsequent phases of the training, to help ensure that beneficiaries were solely motivated by the value of the skills-training itself. Program staff also learned that training could be organized better without paying financial stipends, e.g. locations could be more convenient, and transportation services could be provided.
- 5. Many beneficiaries, apparently unsatisfied with existing labor market prospects, were open to a new career path.** Approximately one-third of beneficiaries had held jobs prior to participating in the pilot. For a large majority of participants, the WoW program was different from any of their previous academic or professional experiences, indicating that the mobilized participants were innovative job-seekers who actively sought new career opportunities. This motivation was possibly aided by the fact that many WoW trainees were young, their previous jobs or careers were temporary or short-term, and so were subsequently searching for a more permanent place in the labor market. The program also seemed to trigger interest in a demographic that was considerably different from the one usually

targeted by mainstream training providers, thus suggesting a significant scalability potential for a WoW-type program across Kosovo.

- 6. A cost-benefit analysis concluded that the WoW Phase I has positive impact net of costs and positive return on investment (ROI), with a relatively short payback period.** The program demonstrated rapid employability by linking its beneficiaries to online employment already in the third week of the training. This reflects positive employability outcomes and a significant improvement in earning capacity of the program graduates. Additionally, sensitivity analysis showed that the program is scalable and could deliver positive ROI for up to three times higher than the costs per beneficiary (holding the program outcomes constant).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Programs must employ thorough outreach strategies, in terms of scope and intensity, that utilize a variety of channels including, but not limited to, social and traditional media, digital marketing, information sessions, and brochures.** Promotional messages should communicate clear objectives and goals, as well as sufficient details with regards to the curriculum. Doing so may help programs to reach vulnerable populations with lower education levels and digital and linguistic competences, as well as those members of marginalized groups and those with disabilities.
- 2. Providing non-financial incentives can be an effective strategy for retaining some female participants.** For example, guaranteeing certificates of completion from the program start can serve as a powerful motivator for some participants to remain in the program throughout its entirety and to follow the training curriculum. Digital skills programs should also consider providing additional support services, such as food or travel stipends, or childcare support services, to minimize attrition and uphold motivation.
- 3. Establishing trust and transparency is critical to program success.** Maintaining transparent application processes and clear selection criteria for program participation helps build trust between the training provider and training participants and commitment of the latter. This transparency, especially coupled with early, robust results, can, in turn, help the program gain approval and support from the government. Moreover, establishing good relationship with the government, and if possible, having strong advocates of the program within the government itself can help increase the chance of success of the program.
- 4. Soft and freelance skills must be developed in tandem with technical skills.** Students need to acquire knowledge of and practice engaging with online freelancing marketplaces, as well as to learn the principles of online work. Finally, beneficiaries must develop crucial soft skills including: ability to brand themselves, creating online job portfolio, and develop motivation for online work.