

Kosovo Startup Ecosystem Guide 2025
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Key Startup Cities

Prishtina - As the capital and economic engine of Kosovo, Prishtina is the epicenter of startup activity. It's home to the country's most active innovation hubs and associations, including Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK), VentureUP, The Kosovo Association of Information and Communication Technology (STIKK) etc. A high concentration of tech universities, co-working spaces, and a vibrant student population make Prishtina a dynamic base for early-stage ventures.

Gjakova - This western city is building a reputation as an emerging innovation hub. Local institutions, including Bonevet Gjakova, are driving grassroots education in STEAM and entrepreneurship. Municipal support for youth engagement and digital initiatives is helping foster a community of creative problem-solvers.

Peja & Prizren - Both cities are evolving into creative-tech and tourism innovation centers. Prizren's cross-cultural energy, including the regional hub Innovation & Training Park Prizren, Makerspace Innovation Center Prizren and Peja's eco-tourism assets are attracting digital nomads, social enterprises, and startups focused on sustainability and impact.

Regional Ecosystem Connections

Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia – Kosovo's startup ecosystem is increasingly interconnected with those in Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. These connections are supported by shared languages (Albanian), cultural ties, diaspora bridges, and cross-border startup programs. Initiatives like the **Western Balkans Startup Alliance (WBSA)** and other **Networks**, and EU-funded projects are playing a key role in cross-border collaborations and knowledge exchange.

What Sets Kosovo Apart

- **Youth-Driven Innovation** - Kosovo is recognized for having one of the youngest populations in Europe, with approximately 55% under the age of 30. This youthful demographic contributes to a dynamic and innovative startup culture, as young entrepreneurs bring fresh perspectives and a strong sense of purpose to their ventures.
- **Diaspora Engagement** - Kosovo's diaspora, especially from Switzerland, Germany, the UK, and the US, plays a pivotal role as investors, mentors, and connectors. Initiatives like Germin's Diaspora Engagement programs are formalizing these relationships into tangible startup support.
- **Digital-First Culture** - Kosovo consistently ranks high in internet penetration and digital literacy in the Western Balkans. With a mobile-first population and strong ICT curricula in schools and universities, the foundation for a digital economy is already in place.
- **English Fluency** - English is widely spoken among young professionals, particularly in tech. This provides a major advantage when scaling abroad or attracting global investors and partners.

Challenges to Navigate

Market Constraints - With a population of under 2 million, Kosovo offers a limited domestic market. Startups must think regionally or globally from day one, often building for export.

Access to Finance - Early-stage funding remains scarce. Most seed capital comes through donor programs (e.g., GIZ, USAID, EBRD) or pitch competitions. A lack of local angel investors and venture capital slows growth.

Policy Gaps - The absence of a dedicated startup law and insufficient tax incentives hinder ecosystem development. Stakeholders are advocating for a legal framework to support innovation more systematically.

Retention of Talent - Emigration remains a persistent issue. Many skilled young professionals leave for better job opportunities abroad, putting pressure on startups to retain or re-attract talent from the diaspora.

Ecosystem Overview

Kosovo's startup scene is still maturing, but it's marked by energy, collaboration, and a do-it-yourself spirit. Ecosystem enablers like ICK, J-Coders, VentureUP, MakerSpace Innovation Centre, and BONEVET are helping individuals and startups move from idea to scale. Events like Global Entrepreneurship Network, Startup Europe Week, KosiCT Tech Festival etc., have become fixtures on the calendar, bringing the community together.

Universities are increasingly engaged, and partnerships with the private sector and donors are expanding access to entrepreneurial education and technical training. Despite limited public funding, civil society and the private sector are stepping up to build the backbone of the ecosystem.

Kosovo's small size is often a strength, allowing for agility, quick decision-making, and tight-knit collaboration.

Internationalization: The Next Big Leap

Kosovar startups are increasingly participating in global accelerators, EU innovation programs, and international expos. However, more structured support is needed to help companies scale beyond national borders.

Key needs include:

- Investor readiness support;
- Soft-landing partnerships in key European cities;
- Cross-border peer learning;
- Export mentorship and EU market navigation;
- Access to EEN (Enterprise Europe Network), EIC and Digital Europe opportunities.

Innovation and Performance

As of 2025, Kosovo is not yet included in the Global Innovation Index (GII) rankings published by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

Similarly, Kosovo is not currently part of the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS), which assesses the innovation performance of European countries. However, efforts are underway to integrate Kosovo into the EIS framework. The Kosovo government's Economic Reform Programme outlines plans to apply for EIS membership and establish an inter-ministerial group to facilitate data collection and submission necessary for inclusion.

In the interim, Kosovo continues to develop its innovation ecosystem, aimed at improving data collection and analysis in the research and innovation sectors. These efforts are expected to enhance Kosovo's readiness for future inclusion in international innovation assessments.

What's Next for the Ecosystem in 2025

- **National Innovation Strategy 2030**

The Kosovo National Innovation Strategy 2030 is expected to be adopted, establishing clearer roles and policies for innovation support.

- **New Financing Instruments**

Early-stage capital is being mobilized through public-private partnerships, new angel networks, and blended finance mechanisms, including diaspora-backed initiatives.

- **Green & Circular Economy Startups**

Interest in sustainability is growing, with startups innovating in green energy, waste recycling, and agri-tech. EU Green Agenda alignment is spurring funding in this area.

- **Inclusion-Focused Programs**

New incubators and training programs are targeting women, youth, and rural entrepreneurs.

- **Diaspora-Driven Acceleration**

Different structured platforms are scaling investment and mentorship opportunities through the diaspora.