



**Support of Educational and Employment Development
in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia**



The international cooperation programme **SEED – Support of Educational and Employment Development in Albania, Kosovo and Serbia** was initiated in 2014 by Volkshilfe Solidarität (Austria) with the support of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADA) in order to support the region in tackling some of its major socio-economic challenges.

The Western Balkan countries are still in transition to a market economy and market-oriented education systems. Despite past success, unemployment remains high, particularly among young people and women. Moreover, women are still disadvantaged in many areas although legal frameworks guarantee equal rights for men and women.

To counteract these social inequalities and to contribute to the development of a sustainable labour market, SEED supports educational and employment development measures in the target countries. From 2014-2016, the programme by means of education, training and counselling **supported women and young people to enter the labour market and also contributed to gender equality**. Another priority was capacity building at the project partner organisations.

The successful programme was continued with a second phase as **SEED Step II** (2017-2019). The main focus remained on the labour market access for women and young people. However, the **stronger involvement of local governments** and ministries right from the start **as well as the close cooperation with businesses, vocational schools and other relevant institutions** in the target municipalities also represent an important pillar of success.

The **programme objectives** were:

- Increased employability of women and young people
- Improved opportunities on the labour market and in self-employment – under decent working conditions based on gender equality
- Enhanced cooperation between local governments, educational institutions and business on employment policies in Local Partnerships for Employment (LPEs)
- Strengthened partner organisation through transnational cooperation and the transfer of knowledge and know-how

Publisher

Volkshilfe Solidarität
Auerspergstraße 4
1010 Vienna, Austria

Editors

Christine Gamper
Danijela Korać-Mandić

Layout & Design

Lea Panzenberger

Photos

Project Partners
Photo Nemanja Pajić © Jelena Ilic

© Vienna, 2020

The project implementation at the local level targeted women and young people (15 to 29 years), the staff of the project partner organisations, the project municipalities and their employees as well as local companies, public labour market and educational institutions and civil society organisations.

The activities included participatory support measures to strengthen the capacities of local actors and the partner organisations on the one hand and the establishment of seven LPEs in target communities and the development of Local Action Plans for Employment on the other. In order to further promote this, the transfer of knowledge and the exchange of experience between partners and actors took place at local level and across borders through professional trainings and study visits.

In addition, the implementation in each country component was also oriented towards specific priorities:

Albania: Improvement of standards for vocational training, employability of women and promotion of gender equality.

Kosovo: Support of dual education approaches in the tourism sector and integration of girls/women in this field.

Serbia: Development of Šabac as the LPE-pilot municipality, capacity building and development of local and social entrepreneurship.

What a great journey together over the past years!

The inspiring **success stories** in this booklet provide insights into SEED and its impact on the lives of some of our beneficiaries.

Project partners

- **Volkshilfe Solidarität**, Vienna, Austria
- **TARA International Consulting**, Novi Sad, Serbia
SEED municipality: Šabac
- **Community Development Center „Today for the Future“ (CDC-TFF)**, Tirana, Albania
SEED municipalities: Shkodra, Puka, Lezha and Korça
- **Syri i Vizionit**, Pejë/Peć, Kosovo
SEED municipalities: Pejë/Peć, Gjakovë/Đakovica and Prizreni/Prizren
- **Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre (NSHC)**, Novi Sad, Serbia
SEED municipalities: Apatin, Kula, Surdulica and Vladicin Han

The SEED programme's third phase started in 2020 and will continue its work towards sustainable local employment policy-making and initiatives in Kosovo and Serbia.

Nemanja Pajić _____

06

Branko Filipović _____

08

Edlira Sekaj _____

10

Zorica Cvetković _____

12

Alma Haraqija _____

14

Ilirjan Lleshi _____

16

Maja Đurđić & Olivera Kikanović _____

18

Elona Ndrecaj _____

20

Gresa & Elvira _____

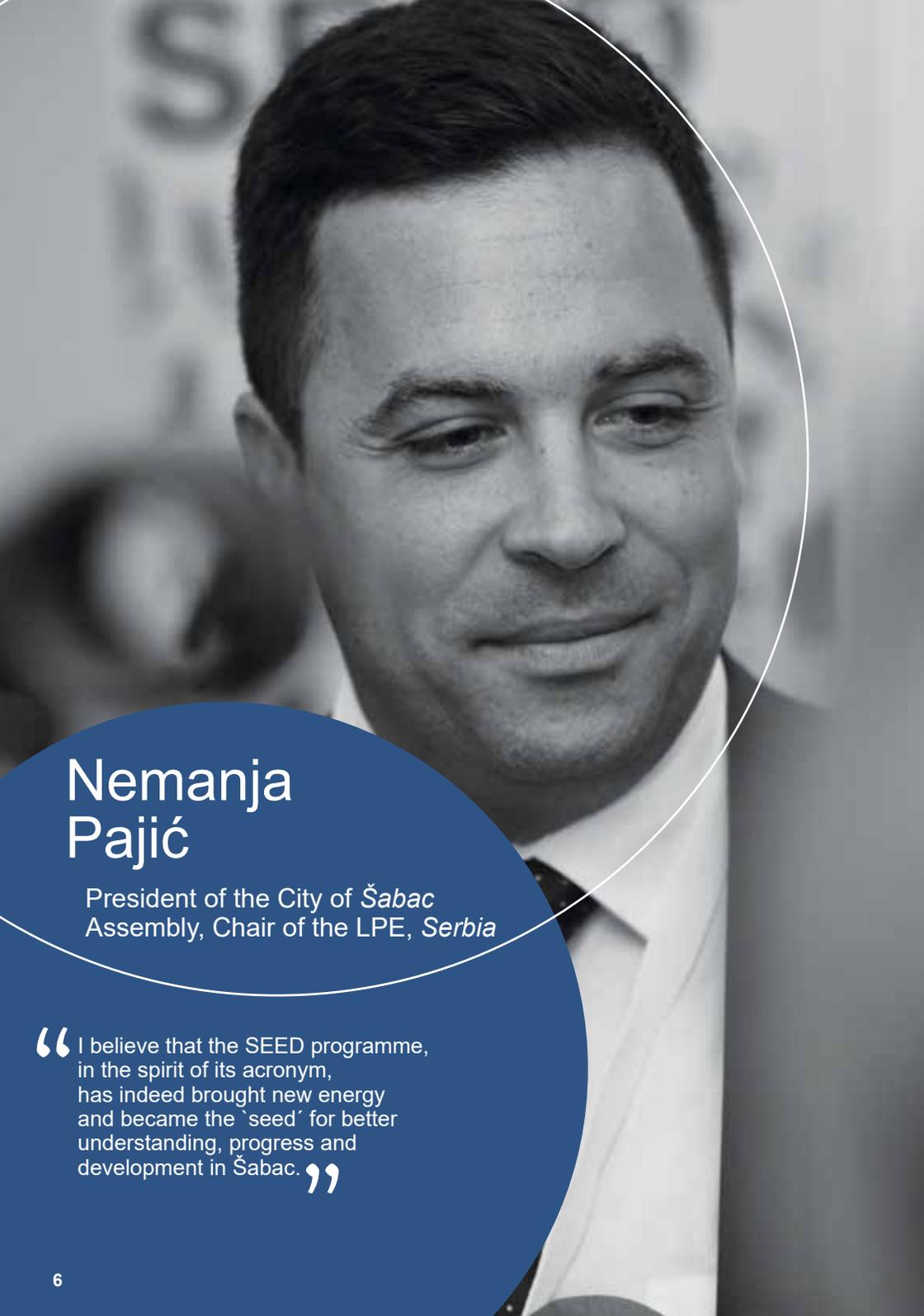
22

Shqipe Mula _____

24

Slavica Arizanović _____

26



Nemanja Pajić

President of the City of Šabac Assembly, Chair of the LPE, Serbia

“ I believe that the SEED programme, in the spirit of its acronym, has indeed brought new energy and became the ‘seed’ for better understanding, progress and development in Šabac. ”



Local Councils for Employment and Councils for Economic and Social Development are established in every municipality in Serbia, in accordance with the law. However, there often is a general lack of activities within these structures and lack of collaboration between the two Councils. One of the consequences is that the local employment measures are not adapted to the requirements and challenges of the labour market.

Local action plans for employment, mandatory annual documents of every municipality, are usually adjusted to the goals and measures foreseen in the national employment strategies, not actually reflecting the needs and resources of local communities.



Within SEED Step II, the City of Šabac was assisted by TARA Int. Consulting in establishing a Local Partnership for Employment (LPE).

It brings together all the key actors from the two Councils. Together with representatives of the business sector, the National Employment Service, VET providers and the civil sector the current labour market and employment needs are discussed and employment policies and initiatives planned.

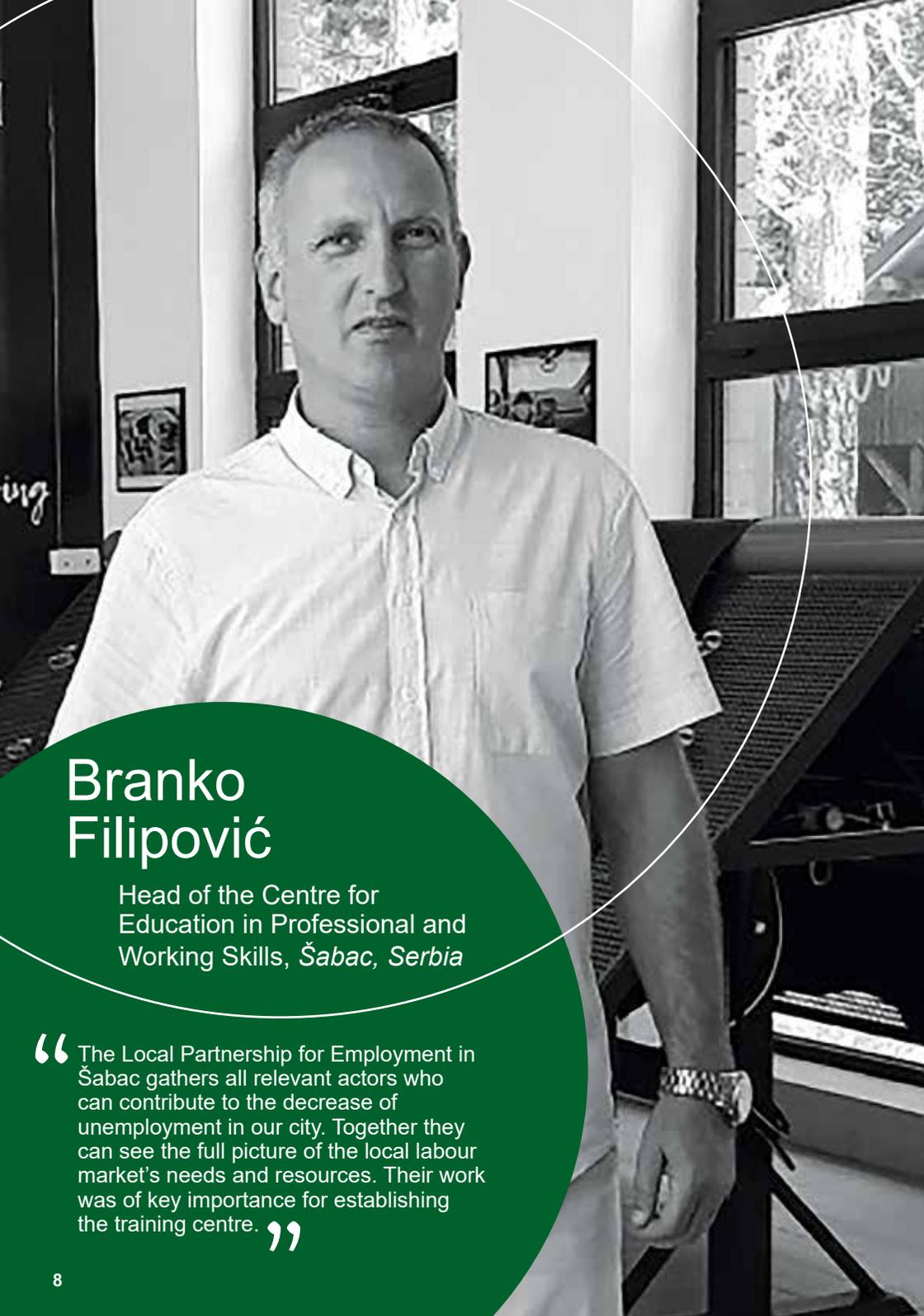
One of these initiatives was the decision to establish the Training Centre for Professional and Working Skills where the unemployed can acquire qualifications needed on the local labour market.



Being the project pilot, the LPE of Šabac shared its experiences and good practice with the other SEED municipalities. The learnings of the LPE establishing process, related documents and know-how were transferred to the project partners.

As a result, similar initiatives were started in other SEED municipalities followed by a first-time or improved local action planning process.

The LPEs enable the creation of a broader platform to enhance the local dialogue on employment. Better knowledge and skills open more perspectives for people especially also for vulnerable groups.



Branko Filipović

Head of the Centre for Education in Professional and Working Skills, Šabac, Serbia

“ The Local Partnership for Employment in Šabac gathers all relevant actors who can contribute to the decrease of unemployment in our city. Together they can see the full picture of the local labour market’s needs and resources. Their work was of key importance for establishing the training centre. ”



One of the greatest challenges in the Šabac labour market is a lack of skilled workforce with specific knowledge and skills needed by the main local employers.

This is the consequence of a formal education system which does not meet the real needs of modern and rapidly evolving production systems.

The dual education approach has been introduced in Serbia, but not as quickly as the labour market demands it. Therefore, a large number of unemployed people do not have adequate knowledge and skills, and have difficulties to find and keep a job.



In response to the growing demand, the City of Šabac decided to establish a **Training Centre for Professional and Working Skills** – a place for vocational education.

The city provided the premises and SEED Step II provided furnishing and equipment.

The training needs were identified in a survey among the 30 largest employers in Šabac. Many companies also expressed their willingness to support the implementation of the training programmes. The trainings were developed in collaboration with the Technical School in Šabac and comprise offers for CNC machine and 3D printer operators, leather processing for the automotive industry, and trainings for the youth to increase their employability.



The local companies Galeb group and Corten Art became involved in the CNC training programme providing the trainees with the opportunity to work on their CNC machines.

In 2019, the **trainings** for CNC and 3D printer operators, IT training, and English language training were **accredited** by the Accreditation Department of the Ministry of Education.

The City of Šabac continues to **follow the current demand** and supply of the labour market and **plans employment interventions accordingly**, with a special focus on women and youth.



Edlira Sekaj

Tailor, Shkodra, Albania

“ I had the opportunity to break my chains, so I did. Now I am making a true difference in my own life and the life of my family. ”



Edlira lives in a remote village in the mountains surrounding Shkodra.

At the age of 18 she got married and moved into the home of her husband's parents. There she was a housewife and mother with no income of her own. She was completely depending on her husband's family and had no voice in everyday family matters.

Without education and vocational skills, Edlira's life was full of frustration and desperation as she did not see a perspective for her future.

To increase the family income, her family registered her at the Regional Employment Office of Shkodra (NES) as low-skilled jobseeker.



Within SEED Step II Edlira was identified as a prospective candidate for skills development and employability – an intervention provided by NES Shkodra, the Regional Directorate of Public VET Shkodra (RDVET), and CDC-TFF.

A CDC specialist provided mentoring and psychological support in several counseling sessions including also her husband. This helped her to raise her personal and interpersonal skills.

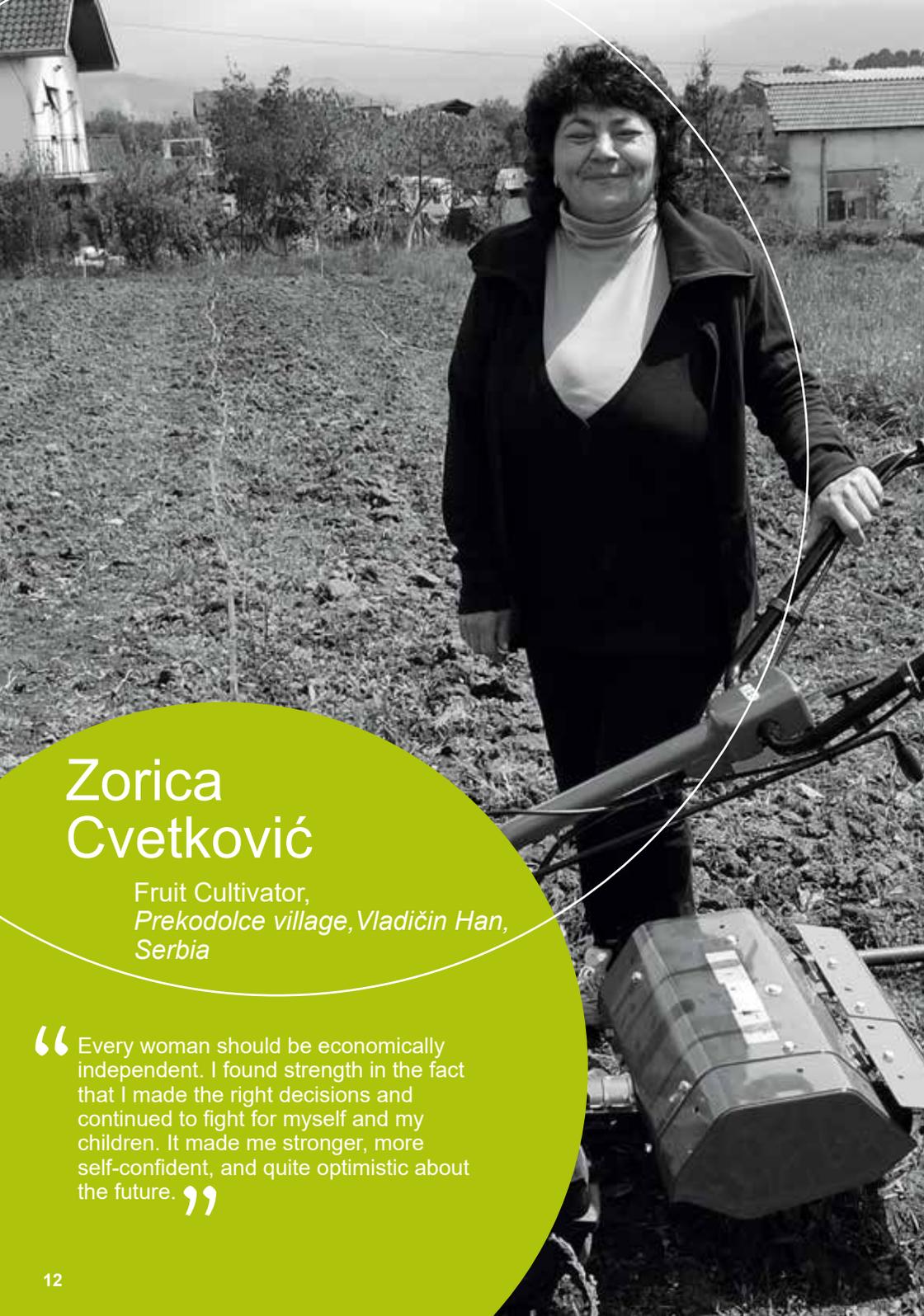
As a result, Edlira completed the textile professional course of RDVET in autumn 2018. After course completion, through employment mediation Edlira was offered a training internship at the First House of Modelling (fashion studio) in Shkodra. Soon afterwards, she got her first employment there.



In one year Edlira accomplished to change her entire situation by acquiring vocational skills and achieving personal growth.

Today she has a job, her family relations are better and she is much more respected in her household. Encouraged by such developments, Edlira started dreaming of having her own fashion atelier.

To that end, SEED assisted her in the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills and know-how on business registration, financial management, marketing etc. as well as in networking and promoting her work.



Zorica Cvetković

Fruit Cultivator,
*Prekodolce village, Vladičin Han,
Serbia*

“ Every woman should be economically independent. I found strength in the fact that I made the right decisions and continued to fight for myself and my children. It made me stronger, more self-confident, and quite optimistic about the future. ”



Zorica often faced difficult life circumstances: she was brought up by foster parents and due to poverty she was not able to attend higher education. She got married early but soon had to leave her abusive husband. As a single mother of two, she had to find a way to make a living.

Having inherited some land from her foster parents, she decided to start fruit growing.

Considering the large area that needed cultivation, her biggest challenge was the hard work of cultivating the land only with the use of simple tools.

Zorica could not afford to buy farming equipment and was also in doubt which fruits to cultivate.



As a SEED beneficiary, Zorica joined the trainings on organic food production.

There she learned what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur and which fruits are best suited for cultivation in an ecologically protected area as the one she lives in. Based on this knowledge she decided to grow cherries and raspberries. SEED supported her with a much needed set of equipment for land cultivation – a motocultivator with the corresponding components for plowing, rotary tillage, harrowing, planting, pumping, etc.

Within SEED Step II Zorica was further supported with advice on how to expand her production. She also received a grant in cherry seedlings from the municipality based on NSHC's recommendation.



All efforts paid off and enabled Zorica to expand her cultivation area by additional 30 acres. She planted 2,500 raspberry seedlings and 300 cherry trees. As a result in 2019 she had the first 500 kg yield of cherries and it will be even more in the following years.

Encouraged by her initial success, Zorica plans to plant another 300 cherry trees and further expand the production.

She can easily sell her entire harvest to the local fruit processing company as demand is higher than supply. Zorica has also become a role model for many new SEED entrepreneurs who can learn a lot from her experience and enthusiasm.



Alma Haraqija

Gastronomer,
Gjakovë / Đakovica, Kosovo

“Old houses need to be preserved to show to future generations how we lived, to learn about our traditions and history. I am proud to be able to contribute to this together with other female entrepreneurs.”



Alma was working in her family's restaurant in Gjakovë for thirteen years. Together with her husband and three sons, in 2016 she started the „Hani Shpija e Vjetër“ traditional food restaurant as their own family business.

In addition, Alma also graduated from the Faculty of Psychology earning a masters degree in organizational social psychology.

In the beginning of her undertaking, the main challenges were the lack of investment funds to increase the business capacity and the lack of qualified employees for the kitchen and service in the restaurant.



Within the SEED Step II programme Alma took part in trainings and received a grant to enlarge the kitchen capacities.

This possibility to cater for more guests also enabled the family to expand the restaurant's terrace. Very soon this resulted in an increased turnover of the restaurant and a higher monthly income.

In cooperation with the Employment Office in Gjakovë, Alma also took action and offered to train 30 female jobseekers in the field of gastronomy and service. So far, out of the first trained women, four got a job in Alma's restaurant and six were employed in other businesses.



Alma's restaurant is well known and popular in the town. Alma has set an example on how a woman can succeed in the hospitality industry.

She became a role model for other women interested in attending a training on gastronomy and service and following this career path.

The restaurant is located in a 200-year old house and focuses on preserving the tradition of how people used to live and eat in this region. Alma's vision is to further expand the capacity and also provide accommodation and a training space for visitors who would like to find out more about the local history and gastronomy.



Ilirjan Lleshi

National Employment Service, Puka, Albania

“ I am proud to be part of the Local Commission for Employment in Puka. Our new mission is to create a centre for innovative training, business meetings, employment mediation and experience sharing. Why? Because, ‘Our Mission is Your Employment’ . ”



The municipality of Puka is a challenging place when it comes to employment. Located in the remote, underdeveloped mountain area of Northern Albania, its population is yet living in poverty. Many young people are leaving the area in search for a better future. The local employers are mostly family-run small/medium businesses with limited job opportunities, and the labour market in Puka suffers from low-skilled workers.

The local employment office in Puka faces challenges in structure, capacities, financial resources and operational framework to undertake new employment initiatives. It is also limited by the objectives, measures and indicators set on the regional level with little consideration of specific local needs.



Within SEED Step II, partner CDC-TFF addressed some of the institutional challenges of the National Employment Services (NES).

This resulted in NES Puka introducing evidence-based analysis and screening of local needs, outreach activities to disseminate information and mediate employment, networking and cooperation with various stakeholders, involving the business sector into NES planning and providing opportunities for experience sharing with other NES offices.

Also the quality of services for registered jobseekers has improved and the number of employed jobseekers increased.



The NES Puka considers the established Local Commission for Employment (LCE) an outstanding and very much needed structure for improving the local labour market interventions.

The LCE is the appropriate structure for discussion, planning and efficient use of institutional resources and provides the NES with the opportunity to cooperate with all involved and interested authorities and stakeholders.

A first SEED supported joint initiative was the creation of the Centre for Tourism and Rural Development which also shows that the combination of the strengths of the institutional, private and civil sector generates the best impact for Puka.



Maja Đurđić & Olivera Kikanović

NGO EKOS, Šabac, Serbia

“ The SEED workshop on Blue Economy gave us direction, and the technology explained in this process fully complied with the mission of our organization. ”



Field and agricultural waste burning is still widely practised in Serbia.

Composting is a growing activity but still not sufficient enough. **Waste from horse stables, chicken farms, wheat and corn, as well as from ground coffee are widely available.** Fortunately, they **can be turned into resources** for the transformation into new consumable products.



EKOS, the NGO founded by Maja and Olivera **strives to become a social enterprise in the field of environmental protection, based on the Blue Economy principles.**

The potential focus was on mushroom cultivation using (agricultural) wastes such as wheat straw, corn straw, sawdust, grinded coffee, etc.

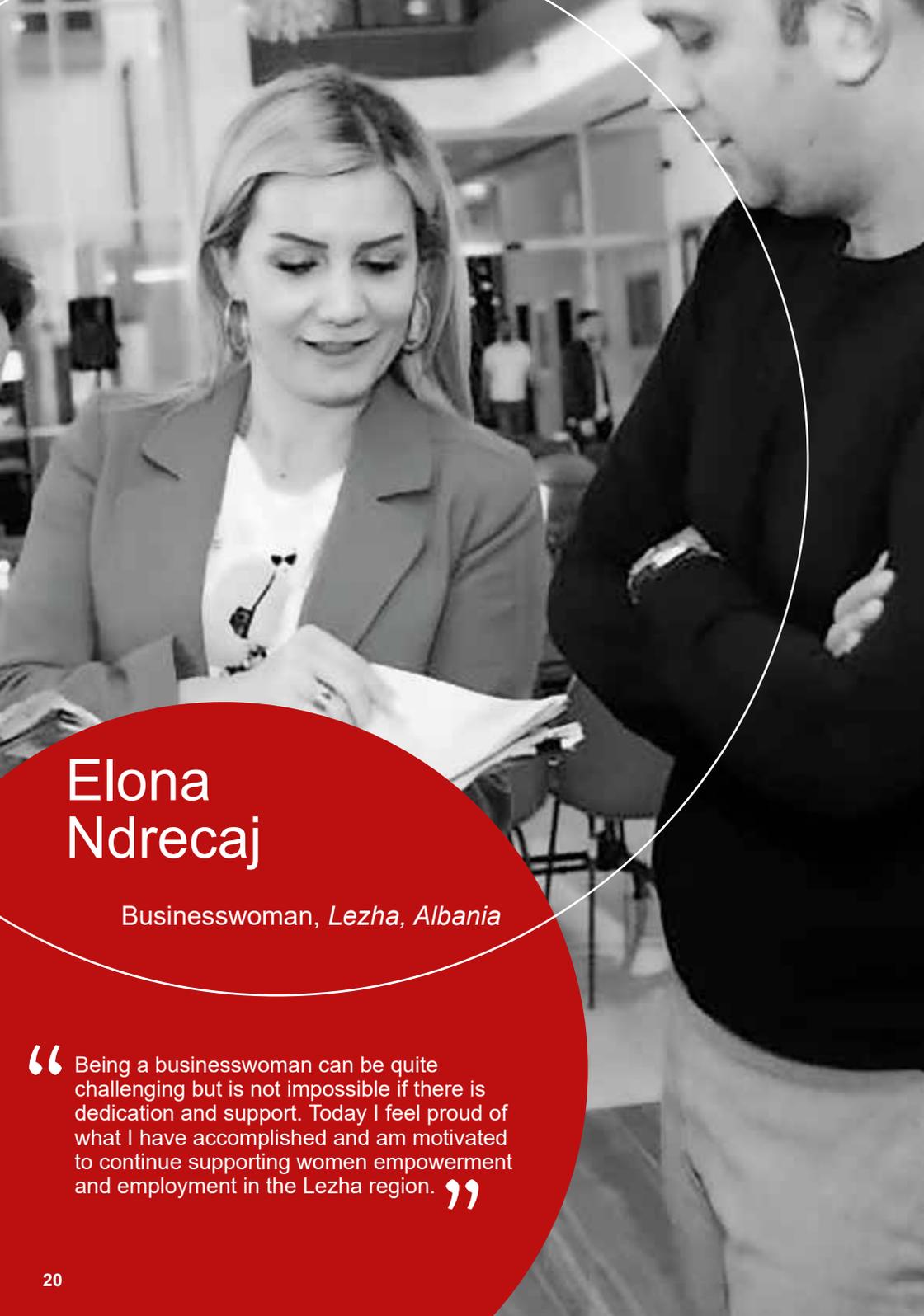
Both Maja and Olivera attended the **SEED Step II training** on the Blue Economy principles. It **provided them with information and knowledge** on how the problems of environmental degradation and pollution could be resolved if the agricultural production would secure raw material and would be based on natural processes common in nature itself.



The knowledge gained through the SEED professional trainings **was important for the further development of EKOS.** Mushroom production is the field the NGO will now continue to work in.

Agricultural wastes are easily available in the Mačva region and can be used as a cultivation substrate. This substrate enables a high yield of mushrooms and at the same time is the most ecofriendly method to convert the substrate into cattle food or field manure.

The female entrepreneurs also decided to **provide a training on mushroom production based on Blue Economy principles** further sharing the knowledge and promoting the “mushroom business”.



Elona Ndrecaj

Businesswoman, *Lezha, Albania*

“ Being a businesswoman can be quite challenging but is not impossible if there is dedication and support. Today I feel proud of what I have accomplished and am motivated to continue supporting women empowerment and employment in the Lezha region. ”



Elona, a social science graduate from Tirana, decided to leave her job at the Albanian Ministry of the Interior in Tirana and to move to the small city of Lezha where her husband lived.

Being **well-educated and a woman with entrepreneurial spirit**, she soon decided to start her own retail business.

Little did she know about small, **patriarchal communities** where women face numerous difficulties in employment and career development. As doing business with a woman was not common at all, she soon **faced strong resistance in the business environment** that impeded her from subcontracting companies, setting up the premises and purchasing supplies. But **Elona was not discouraged**, instead she signed contracts with distributors from Tirana and soon was able to open her “Big Market” supermarket chain in Lezha, Shengjin and Tirana.



Today Elona employs 180 staff, 90% women and girls. The SEED partner CDC-TFF collaborated with her to **provide capacity building for her employees** with special attention to the economic status of women and girls.

CDC supported 46 women and girls **through employment-related training, mentoring, and building life skills**.

That helped them improve the quality of work and contributed to an enhanced efficiency, time management and positive environment among co-workers.

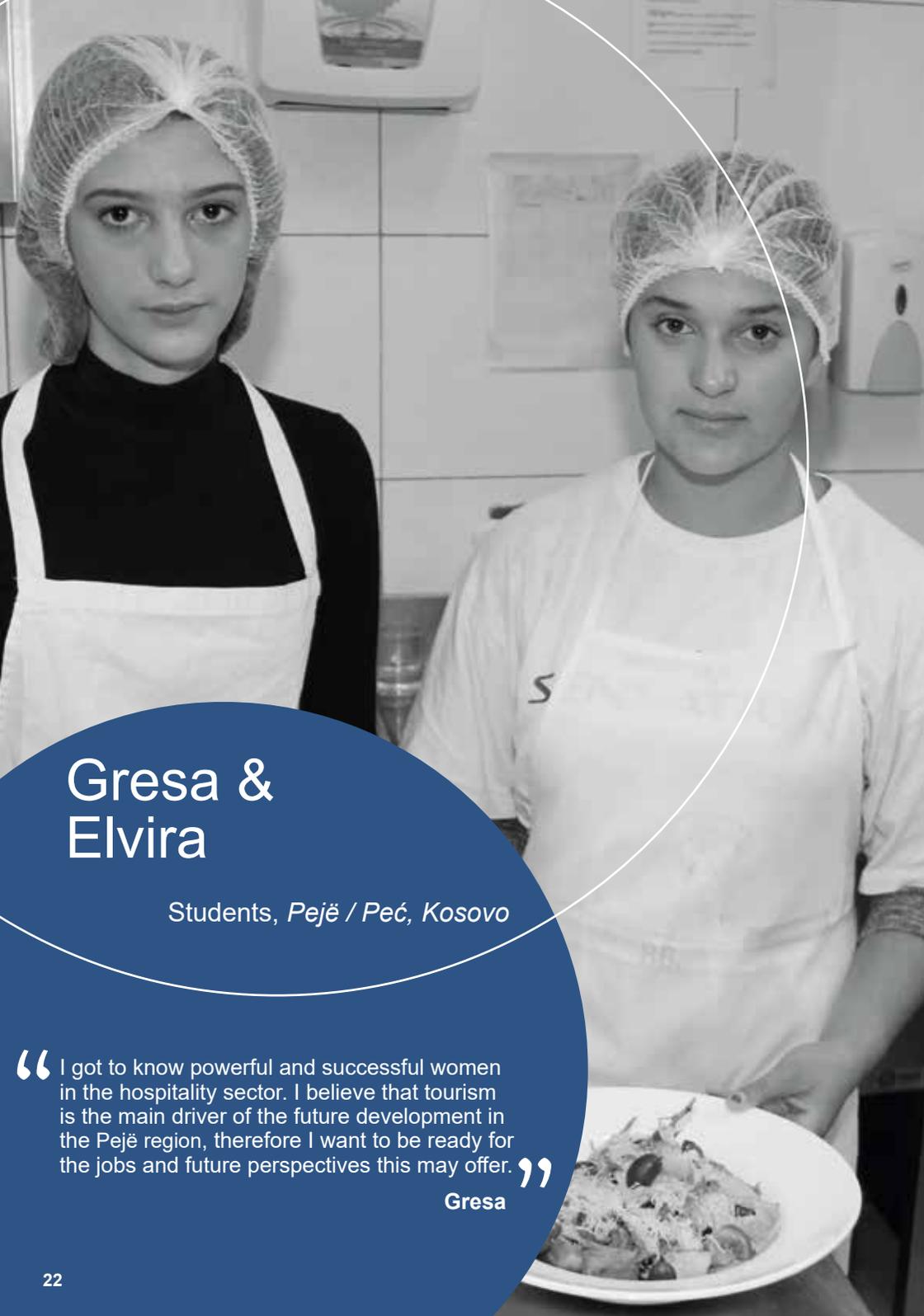
Moreover, the SEED business advisor **supported networking and creating business partnerships with women entrepreneurs from the other SEED municipality Puka**. Now agro-processing “Dalmacia” and agro-tourism “Devin” provide their organic food products for Elona’s markets.



The supported **employees demonstrated better performance, they were assigned higher responsibilities and roles, and finally benefited from a salary increase**.

Also the cooperation with the women entrepreneurs has been successful and they have started to plan joint marketing features for their organic food products.

In addition, in the frame of SEED, Elona **started cooperating with the Regional Employment Service of Lezha** to support them with knowledge on matching skill requirements for service related jobs.



Gresa & Elvira

Students, *Pejë / Peć, Kosovo*

“ I got to know powerful and successful women in the hospitality sector. I believe that tourism is the main driver of the future development in the Pejë region, therefore I want to be ready for the jobs and future perspectives this may offer. ”
Gresa



In the Pejë region, tourism is considered a promising sector, especially for the career development and employment of women. The story of the two students Gresa and Elvira demonstrates this very well.

Through SEED information activities, the girls heard about education and career options in the tourism industry. So they enrolled in the hotel and tourism course of the “Ali Hadri” school of economy in Pejë in 2017 and completed their secondary vocational education successfully in 2019. Back in 2017 they were the only girls of about 100 students in this study programme of the school. This also shows that in Kosovo the gastronomy and tourism sector is still mainly seen as an occupational field for men.



From 2017-2019 Syri i Vizionit in cooperation with local partners, the municipality of Pejë and schools carried out various awareness campaigns and activities to increase female participation and gender equality in the hospitality industry.

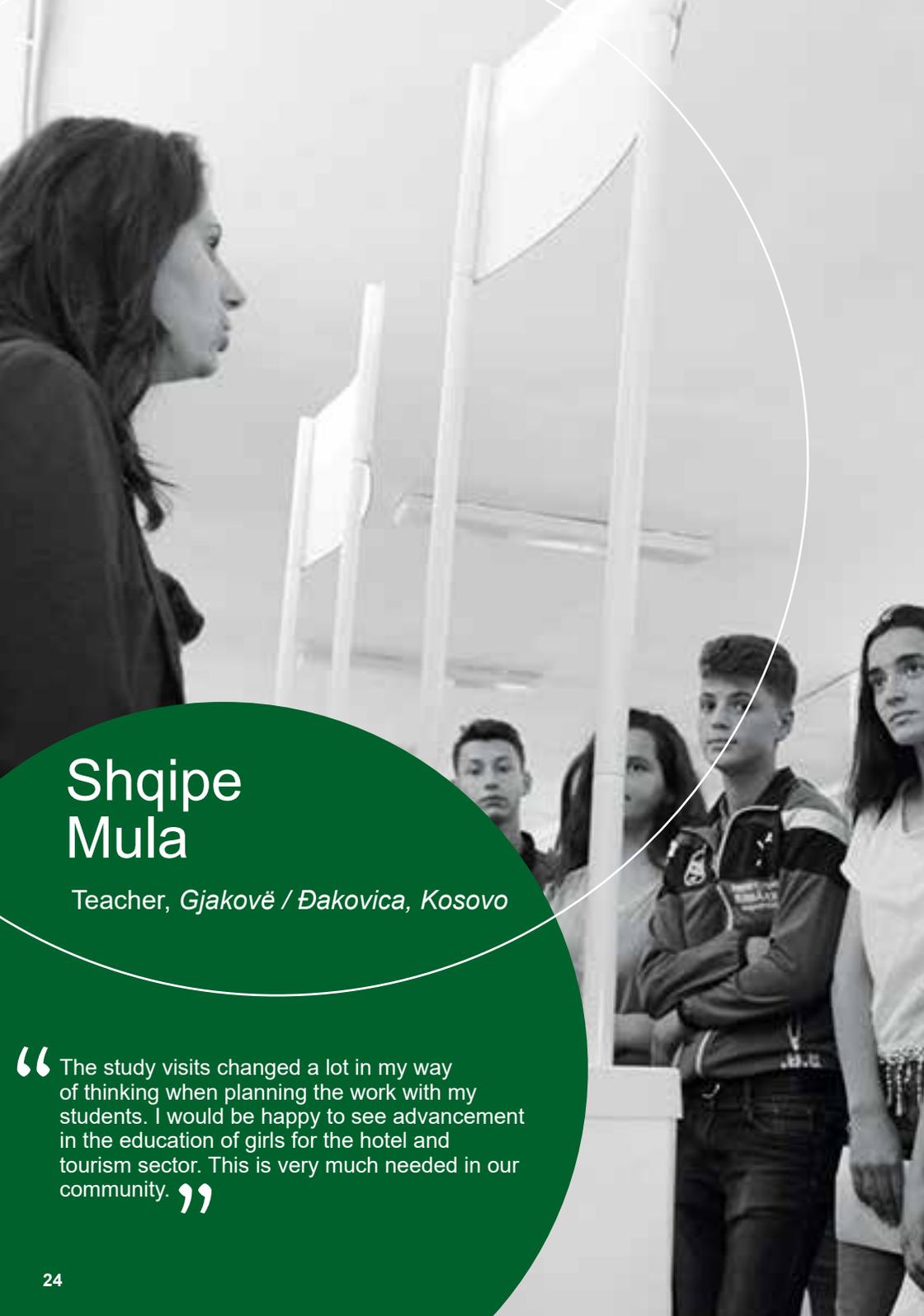
For the girls interested in this professional path meetings were organised, capacity building workshops and visits to successful women in the sector (role models).

Other actions focussed on the educational quality by supporting the improvement of the teaching practice according to the existing school curricula and by enabling more students to complete vocational practice in local companies. The enhanced programmes are more attractive and instructive for students and facilitate their access to the labour market.



In their first school year, Gresa and Elvira were assisted to complete vocational practice in the prestigious Hotel Dukagjini in Pejë. So, besides the mostly theoretical lessons in school, during the hotel internship they experienced everyday work processes and could notably improve their practical skills.

After graduating from high school, both girls also engaged as volunteers in the organization ‘Environmentally Responsible Action Group’ (ERA) taking part in various outdoor training and recreational activities to expand their competences in this area as well. Now, both girls plan to continue with university studies in the field of tourism, as due to their experience in practical and voluntary work they consider this to be a good career development opportunity.



Shqipe Mula

Teacher, Gjakovë / Đakovica, Kosovo

“The study visits changed a lot in my way of thinking when planning the work with my students. I would be happy to see advancement in the education of girls for the hotel and tourism sector. This is very much needed in our community.”



Shqipe was a member of the NGO “Çabrati”, when she first participated in SEED workshops and trainings. There she was selected to take part in a study visit to Vienna in June 2015, to learn more about the development of regular teaching and practice classes in school as well as about practical training of students in businesses.

Two years later, she started working as a teacher in the secondary school “Kadri Kusari” in Gjakovë and took part in two more study visits to tourism schools in Salzburg (Austria). The main challenge in her school’s tourism and gastronomy course was related to the lack of infrastructure. Having no classrooms equipped for practice oriented teaching and the low willingness of private businesses to cooperate in the development of the students’ professional practice made it difficult to reach the educational goals.



Through the continued support of SEED with teacher trainings, workshops, the “Open Doors” activity that was launched to familiarise elementary school pupils with secondary school branches, as well as study visits for teachers and two awarded grants, the school benefited in several ways.

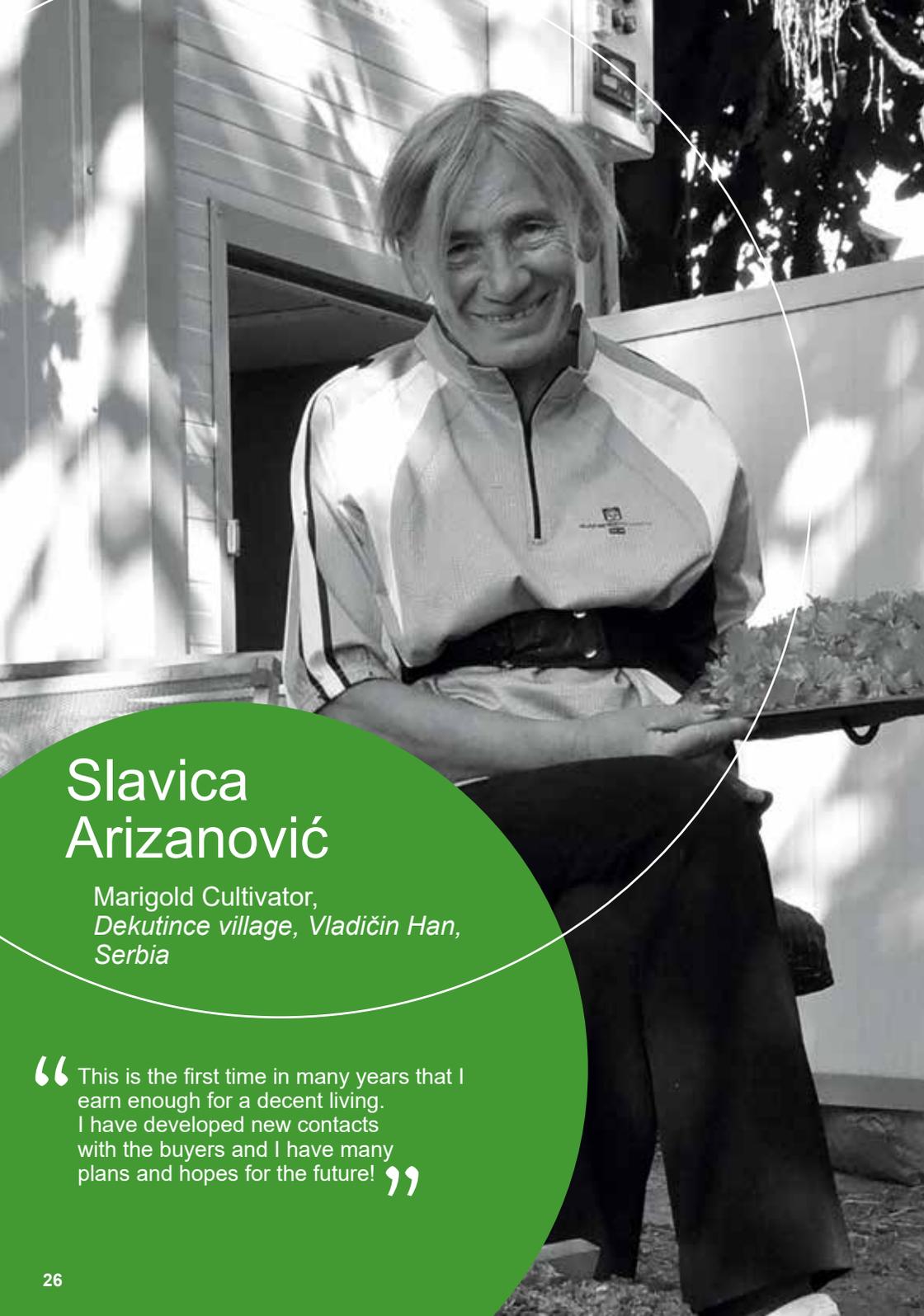
The first SEED grant was awarded for promotion purposes to encourage girls to enrol in the school’s tourism and hotel education profile. The use of the second grant was inspired by the visit to tourism schools in Austria: the school decided to establish a classroom for hotel services, to enable students to complete a practical training within the school. This new offer is available since the beginning of the school year 2019/2020.



The study visits to Vienna and Salzburg provided new insights and experiences which Shqipe already started using in her work. She is still struggling to adapt them to local conditions and to put them into practice with her students, but she sees the added value of supporting better learning approaches and more attractive lessons.

Shqipe’s vision and aim is to contribute to the change of the gender structure of the students in the tourism study programme of the school.

Girls (and their families) should perceive jobs in this growing sector as attractive and modern professional opportunities.



Slavica Arizanović

Marigold Cultivator,
Dekutinca village, Vladičin Han,
Serbia

“ This is the first time in many years that I earn enough for a decent living. I have developed new contacts with the buyers and I have many plans and hopes for the future! ”



After she lost her job, Slavica and her family decided to move back to the village where she was born and make a new living there.

Since both, she and her husband were unemployed, they had to live on subsistence farming first: they grew vegetables, kept goats and hens. Slavica started planting marigolds (*Calendula officinalis*) in a part of the field next to her house.

Marigold flower is widely used for cosmetic and medicinal purposes, so Slavica soon discovered that she was able to sell all the quantities she produced. This created the first small income for the family.



Before sale, the marigold flowers had to be dried outdoors or inside the improvised greenhouse. This took a lot of time and a significant quantity of flowers also had to be discarded during the process.

Moreover, the final product was not of very high quality. The SEED training on organic plant production gave her ideas on how to improve her production of marigold flower. The training was very useful, but the SEED grant in form of an industrial plant dryer made a big change and led to a significant increase in her production.



Before the SEED support, Slavica was able to produce around 30 kg of dried marigolds per season.

Today she produces and sells ten times more. All the marigold flower yield can now be dried quickly and in high quality. Therefore the buyers are also offering a higher price.

Slavica plans to additionally buy a grinding and a packaging machine for the plants in order to become even more competitive on the market.

Moreover, with her own marigold seeds for the next season, she also is independent and plans to sell the surplus of seeds.

SEED

SEED Step II implemented by

volkshilfe.



NSHC
NON PROFIT HUMANITARIAN CENTER



With funding from

 Austrian
Development
Cooperation