

Kosova Business Forum

Full Report

23 – 24 – 25 January, 2024

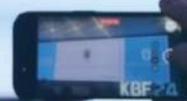


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Message from the Executive Director



In a world where change is the only constant, it is imperative that we continually adapt and evolve to stay ahead. With this ethos in mind, we convened the inaugural of Kosova Business Forum – a platform designed to foster dialogue, to inspire learning, learning, and to create a networking within the private sector.

We are deeply gratified by the overwhelming response and engagement we witnessed at the KBF. Your active participation and contribution highlight the vibrant spirit and potential of Kosovo's private sector. It is through platforms like these that we can collectively prepare for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, ensuring that our companies are ready for their next level of growth and success. I am confident in the capabilities of our private sector not only to thrive within Kosovo, but also to make significant progresses on the global stage.

Together, we can elevate Kosovo's presence and reputation on the global economic landscape. Change, however, requires collective effort! The Kosova Business Forum serves as a nexus for collaboration between the public and private sectors, empowering change-makers to drive meaningful progress. It is a testament to our shared commitment to advancing the economic prosperity of our nation.

We believe that each of you found value in the engaging discussions, insightful keynote addresses, presentations on investment opportunities, and fruitful networking sessions. Your active participation has been instrumental in making this inaugural edition a resounding success. Also, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our partners who believed on our vision and supported us in organizing first edition of KBF.

As we reflect on the success of the KBF 2024, we are filled with optimism and enthusiasm for the future. The energy and commitment demonstrated by our participants reaffirm our belief in the transformative power of collaboration and dialogue within the private sector. Looking ahead, we are excited to announce that plans are already underway for an even bigger and more impactful second edition of KBF 2025.

In the meantime, we remain dedicated to providing you with valuable business insights in our website and to facilitating further networking opportunities within our dynamic community.

Thank you once again for your unwavering support and commitment to the Kosova Business Forum. Together, let us continue to drive innovation, growth, and prosperity for Kosovo's private sector and our country as a whole!

We look forward to welcoming you to an even greater Kosova Business Forum in 2025.

Sincerely,

Astrit Panxha

Introduction

Kosova Business Forum (KBF), which took place in Prishtina January 23rd to 25th, 2024, emerged as a pivotal platform aimed at catalyzing business and economic transformation, while fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders.

With a robust agenda, the central theme of this year forum was:

“PRISHTINA 2030 – LEADING THE WAY TOWARDS A CAPITAL OF THE FUTURE”

The Forum opened with the reception organized by the Mayor of the Capital, Mr. Përparim Rama. With the presence of other Mayors from Kosova and Albania, participants from the diplomatic community and private sector, organizers highlighted the potentials of Prishtina. The opportunities for investment are significant considering that the Prishtina is selected as a European Sports Capital for 2024 and is hosting Mediterranean Games in 2030.

The opening session of the Kosova Business Forum was led by Mr. Astrit Panxha, founder of the Kosova Business Forum, and was joined by distinguished partners including Mr. Përparim Rama, Mayor of the Capital; Mr. Nicolas Marquier, Regional Manager for the Western Balkans at the International Finance Corporation (IFC); and Mrs. Arnhild Spence, United Nations Development Coordinator in Kosovo; thus embarking upon a journey with a firm focus on economic development through public-private partnerships.



For Mr. Astrit Panxha, the Founder of Kosova Business Forum, the mission was clear: *“to empower change-makers and elevate Kosovo's economic development to new heights, by providing a platform for dialogue, idea exchange, and actionable collaboration.”* At the core of KBF's mission is the unwavering conviction in the transformative potential of the private sector and industries to lead progressive economic initiatives.

The Mayor of the Capital invited the national and international investors to become partners in the development journey of Prishtina. Whereas Ms. Spence highlighted that Prishtina has what it takes to become a hub of innovation, development and sustainable living; while Mr. Marquier emphasized that IFC strongly believes that the private sector can play a significant role in mobilizing capital and in financing investments.

In pursuit of its objectives, KBF upheld values of collaboration, excellence, global perspective, professionalism and integrity, inclusivity and diversity, empowerment, and community engagement. These values underpinned every aspect of the forum, from content curation to event execution, ensuring a high standard of quality and relevance.

Powered by AE Consulting Group, KBF benefited from the wealth of professional expertise and hands-on experience of its dedicated team. AE Consulting Group remains committed to leverage opportunities for cooperation, innovation, and growth for all Kosova's business ecosystem and beyond.



Overview of Discussions

Kosova Business Forum covered a wide range of topics and themes aimed at fostering dialogue, promoting investment, and enhancing economic development in the capital city of Prishtina and Kosovo as a whole. Mayor of Prishtina, Mr. Përparim Rama, presented 15 projects geared towards reshaping the socio-economic developmental trajectory of our capital in the forthcoming years.

Robust discussion panels delved into both regional and global perspectives, furnishing attendees with exclusive insights and compelling addresses from domestic and international experts. On the last day of the event, the President of the Republic of Kosovo, Mrs. Vjosa Osmani addressed to the audience her remarks at the special panel titled "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress," in collaboration with UN Women.

Below is an overview of the main discussions:

DAY 1 – Welcome Reception:

The event kicked off with a welcome reception, offering an opportunity for select invitees to network and engage in informal discussions.

The opening remarks were delivered by Mr. Astrit Panxha, the Executive Director of the Kosova Business Forum; Mr. Përparim Rama, the Mayor of the Capital, Prishtina; and Mr. Erion Veliaj, the Mayor of the Municipality of Tirana. Their speeches served as a catalyst for meaningful discussion about the challenges and opportunities facing our economies in general and capital cities in particular.

DAY 2

Opening Remarks: The forum formally began with opening remarks, setting the tone for the discussions ahead.

Panel 1 - Dialogue on business climate and investment attractiveness: Participants engaged in discussions focused on evaluating the current business climate in Kosovo and exploring ways to enhance its attractiveness for investment. Also, the regional investment climate was discussed with the panelists from regional Chambers of Commerce.

Panel 2 - Leading the way towards capitals of the future in the region: This panel delved into strategies and initiatives aimed at positioning Prishtina and other capitals in the region as hubs for future economic growth and innovation.



Panel 3 and 4 - Investment Opportunities in the Capital City Prishtina: Mayor Mr. Përparim Rama presented investment opportunities within Prishtina, highlighting key sectors and projects open for investment.

Panel 5 - Construction Sector: Discussions centered around the potential of modular construction to stimulate Kosovo's exports, possibly exploring innovative approaches to boost the construction industry.



Executive Breakfast - *"Women in Leadership"* with the President: An event with successful guests from public and private sector focusing on the role of women in leadership, featuring insights from President Mrs. Vjosa Osmani.

Keynote Speech by the President of the Republic of Kosovo, Ms. Vjosa Osmani. President Osmani delivered a keynote address highlighting the importance of women's leadership and participant in economy in driving economic and social progress.

Panel 6 - Invest in Women – Accelerate Progress: Discussions centered on accelerating progress by investing in women, possibly exploring initiatives and strategies to empower women entrepreneurs and professionals.

Panel 7 - Manufacturing Sector: Participants discussed ways to enhance the competitiveness of Kosovo's manufacturing sector and increase export opportunities.

Panel 8 - Access to Finance: The focus was on building a framework to facilitate new financing opportunities in capital markets, essential for supporting businesses and driving economic growth.

Panel 9 - Retail in Digital Era: Discussions revolved around the transformation of the retail sector in the digital age and the opportunities and challenges it presents.

Closing Remarks: Conclusion of the forum with final thoughts and reflections on the discussions and outcomes.



Workshops: Several workshops were conducted in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), covering topics such as: enhancing public-private partnerships, structuring corporate governance, and upgrading the manufacturing value chain.

These workshops provided participants with in-depth insights and practical strategies for addressing key economic challenges and opportunities.



Statistics from the Forum



606 +
Participants



260 +
Businesses

3



Workshops

38



Panelists

9



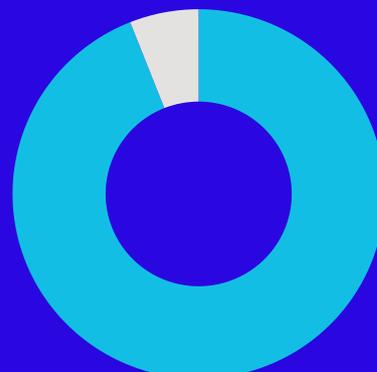
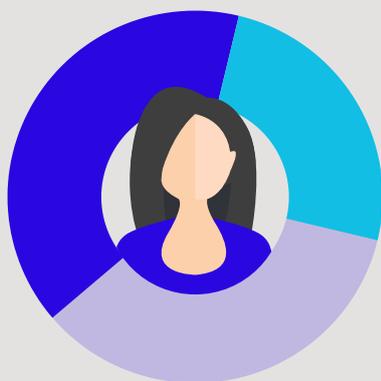
Pannels

40%

Women
Panelists

25%

Women
Participation



94%
Recomend

The statistics present a promising outlook: with a total participation of 606 attendees, a diverse representation of 260+ businesses from different sectors and an inclusive approach of female participation.

Key Findings

Amidst the overarching theme of **"Prishtina 2030 – Leading the way towards a Capital city of the Future"** the first edition of the Kosova Business Forum began, heralding a new chapter in Kosovo's business ecosystem. Based on the discussions at the Kosova Business Forum, several important conclusions, emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities can be highlighted:

Regional Cooperation for Business Climate Improvement: The need for regional cooperation between countries in the region to enhance the overall business climate emerged as a significant theme. Access to the European Single Market was identified as a favorable opportunity for attracting investment. Also, the reform of public administration was elaborated by reducing administrative burden for 152 services and reform in the field of inspections, focusing on structural, methodological and digitalization aspects.

Capitals of the Future in the Region: The panelists emphasized the importance of digital transformation for the development of capital cities in the region and the shift to the digital economy, suggesting that even smaller towns can leverage technology for significant progress. They also highlighted the potential of regional cooperation among capital cities in the Western Balkan and the key drivers of growth and development in the respective countries. It was agreed that what brings us together as countries in the Western Balkan, is always more than what keeps us apart and particularly the population in capital cities can serve as driving force to bring countries even closer. Lastly, they emphasized the need to continue investment in culture and sports, as paramount of development, apart from just infrastructure investments.

Investment Opportunities in Pristina: The Mayor of Pristina presented 15 development projects aimed at transforming the city by 2030. These projects, discussed with local and international investors, underscore the potential for public-private partnerships in infrastructure, urban development, technology, and public services.

Modular Construction for Export Growth: Panelists discussed the economic potential of modular construction and emphasized the importance of improving the legal infrastructure in this industry. It was highlighted that Kosovo's companies have a comparative advantage in this sectors and this should be used as a catalyst for Kosovo's export growth. Modular construction is also aligned with environmental goals, and this should be translated in more support through different incentives from government and more financing opportunities from banking sector.





Women's Empowerment and Business Participation: There was a strong emphasis on women's participation in business and the labor market, with discussions centered on the need for equality in opportunities. The empowerment of women was identified as crucial for unlocking the country's full development potential, with concrete actions taken not only by the public sector, but also and particularly by the private sector to promote gender equality. It was also mentioned that the private sector should be attractive for women and supportive towards maternity leave and opportunities for promotion within the company.

Manufacturing Sector Competitiveness and Export Expansion: The discussions emphasized the importance of cooperation to enhance infrastructure and competitiveness in the manufacturing sector. The local manufactures should remain the real pride of Kosovo's economy, as they are the ambassadors of Made in Kosovo Brand and should be prioritized in any governmental initiative – ex. subsidies for installing solar panel energy production. Initiatives like "Superpuna" were recognized as key for youth empowerment and sector growth and should continue as such.

Capital Market Development for Finance Access: Building a framework for new financing opportunities within capital markets was highlighted as an important focus area to support business growth. Panelists agreed on Kosovo's progress in cultivating a strong and stable banking system. Despite banking sector is adapting to new technologies and AI, there is still a need to diversify the traditional banking with other developments in the capital market.. Important projects like Investment Promotion and Access to Finance from USAID are in the pipeline for the next 5 years.

E-commerce and Digital Retail Dynamics: With the increasing preference for e-commerce, the dynamics of online retail sales were discussed, including regulatory, security, and logistical challenges faced by sellers and consumers in Kosovo and the region. As the panelists navigated the complexities of digital transformation, particularly after Covid-19, it became evident that agility, innovation, and customer-centricity are paramount for success. For small businesses it was highlighted the need to remain unique and to have a personalized story behind the good and service that they to offer online.

Conclusion

With an impressive turnout of 606 participants, the debut of the Kosova Business Forum set a new standard as the country's premier networking and collaboration business event. Over three days, influential business leaders, experts, and policymakers engaged in insightful discussions led by esteemed panelists and speakers. These exchanges not only inspired attendees but also laid the groundwork for enhanced dialogue and fruitful public-private partnerships.

Key insights underscored the potential of regional collaboration to bolster the business climate, the imperative of digital innovation for urban centers like Pristina, the opportunities for investment in modular construction to drive export growth, the vital importance of women's empowerment to accelerate socio-economic developments, the strategies to enhance manufacturing competitiveness, the necessity for capital market development, and the evolving landscape of e-commerce.

In conclusion, as we reflect on the success of the Kosova Business Forum 2024, we are filled with optimism and enthusiasm for the future. The energy and commitment demonstrated by our participants reaffirm our belief in the transformative power of collaboration and dialogue within the private sector. Looking ahead, we are excited to announce that plans are already underway for an even bigger and more impactful Forum in 2025.

Building upon the momentum generated this year, we are dedicated to enhancing the Forum's scope and reach, ensuring that it continues to serve as a leading platform for innovation, learning, and growth. Together, let us embark on this journey towards a brighter and more prosperous future for Kosovo's business community!



Acknowledgments



On behalf of the organizers of the Kosova Business Forum, we want to thank all the esteemed participants, speakers, sponsors, and contributors who played integral roles in making the inaugural event a resounding success.

To our distinguished speakers, thank you for sharing your expertise, insights, and vision for Kosovo's economic future. Your thought-provoking presentations and engaging discussions have enriched the forum and inspired all attendees.

We express our sincere appreciation to our partners and sponsors for their generous support and unwavering commitment to advancing economic development in Kosovo. Your contributions have been instrumental in bringing this event to fruition and facilitating meaningful dialogue and collaboration.

We also extend our gratitude to all participants for your active engagement, valuable contributions, and commitment to driving positive change in Kosovo's business landscape. Your presence and participation have made the Kosova Business Forum a vibrant platform for idea exchange, networking, and collective action.

Lastly, we would like to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of the organizing team, volunteers, and partners who have worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the forum. Your professionalism, creativity, and attention to detail have been crucial in orchestrating a seamless and impactful event. As we reflect on the insights and discussions from the Kosova Business Forum, let us remain committed to translating ideas into action, fostering collaboration, and driving sustainable economic development in Kosovo. Together, we can build a brighter future for our nation and empower change-makers to lead us towards prosperity.

Thank you once again for your invaluable contributions, and we look forward to continued collaboration and success in the journey ahead!

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