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Sida Decentralised Evaluation

Tana Copenhagen

Evaluation of Sida Core Support Programme to ICK in Kosovo

Final Report



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**Final Report
February 2026**

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICK	Innovation Centre Kosovo
ITP	Innovation and Training Park (Prizren)
KIESA	Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency
KII	Key Informant Interview
ME	Ministry of Economy (Kosovo)
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
STIKK	Kosovo ICT Association
ToC	Theory of Change
VAT	Value Added Tax

Preface

This evaluation was contracted by Cowater Sweden, together with Tana Copenhagen and Kantar Public (Kantar) through the Sida Framework Agreement for Evaluation Services, and conducted by Tana Copenhagen.

The Evaluation Team consisted of Katerina Stolyarenko, Team Leader and Lendita Kastrati, Team Member. The Final Report was quality assured by Ingela Ternstrom, whose work was independent of the evaluation team. Nadia Siegler-Lathrop provided project management support.

Executive Summary

This evaluation assesses Sida's core institutional support to the Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK) over the period 2019-2024. ICK is one of Kosovo's flagship institutions for digital skills, startup incubation, and innovation promotion. Sida has been ICK's longest-standing and most strategic development partner, providing SEK 21.6 million in flexible core support to strengthen its organizational capacity, service delivery, and ecosystem positioning. As Sida concludes its engagement, the evaluation offers an independent assessment of ICK's performance, the results achieved through Sida's support, and the institution's readiness for long-term sustainability.

Evaluation Objectives and Audience

The evaluation had four main objectives: to validate results achieved through Sida's core support, assess performance against the OECD/DAC criteria, ensure accountability for the use of resources, and generate evidence to inform Sida's future programming in Kosovo's innovation and economic development. The primary audience is Sida and the Embassy of Sweden, with ICK and other ecosystem stakeholders as secondary users.

Methodology

The evaluation used a theory-based, mixed-methods approach, guided by a reconstructed Theory of Change and applying contribution analysis to understand Sida's influence in a complex multi-actor environment. Data collection involved a comprehensive document review of more than 80 documents, 28 key informant interviews with Sida, ICK, government, other donor agencies, private sector and ecosystem actors, and four focus group discussions with 25 ICK trainees and startups. Two surveys were also administered, reaching 81 respondents. Triangulation was used to strengthen the validity of findings.

Key Findings

Relevance: Sida's core support remained highly relevant to Kosovo's innovation landscape and ICK's primary target groups. Training was widely seen as practical and aligned with market needs. However, inclusion of marginalized groups depended largely on donor projects rather than an organisational strategy. ICK also lagged in offering more advanced digital skills. Its strategic relevance declined after 2020 as newer actors gained prominence, underscoring the need for ICK to reposition and re-engage in ecosystem leadership.

Effectiveness: Sida enabled ICK to deliver significant services to nearly 7,000 trainees and over 300 startups, strengthening skills and early entrepreneurship. Yet

programme quality weakened over time (incubation support declined, alumni follow-up was limited, and there was no MEL system to track outcomes). Internal constraints (HR, roles, governance) reduced the translation of support into deeper results.

Efficiency: ICK operated efficiently with limited resources and strong financial discipline, and Sida’s support ensured continuity during COVID-19. But deeper inefficiencies persisted. High rent costs, overstretched staff, and failure to secure municipal premises limited sustainability. Governance bottlenecks (slow decision-making, outdated statutes, and unclear roles) were the major constraint.

Impact: Sida’s long-term support made a meaningful contribution to Kosovo’s innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem by ensuring continuity in essential services and maintaining ICK’s capacity during a period of transition. The centre played a foundational role in building Kosovo’s early startup culture, and many established companies trace their beginnings to ICK’s training and mentorship programmes. Despite these important contributions, the impact achieved during 2019-2024 was largely incremental rather than transformative. ICK’s policy influence declined, and newer hubs and donors took a larger role. Systemic constraints (lack of seed funding and scale-up pathways) limited broader ecosystem effects.

Sustainability: Sustainability represents the most critical area of concern. Sida’s core support covered up to 80 percent of ICK’s operational costs, providing stability but also creating dependence. Financial stability is uncertain due to high rent and limited revenue diversification. Governance instability further threatens institutional sustainability. While ICK retains strong brand and staff capacity, major reforms in governance, strategy, and cost structure are needed to ensure long-term viability.

Conclusions

Sida’s core support helped ICK remain a relevant and trusted actor in Kosovo’s innovation ecosystem, enabling continuity of services and contributing to digital skills and early-stage entrepreneurship. However, institutional and structural weaknesses (particularly declining incubation quality, weak monitoring, high costs, and governance constraints) limited sustained outcomes and wider impact. Going forward, ICK’s relevance and sustainability will depend on modernizing governance, reducing financial vulnerabilities, and repositioning within a more competitive ecosystem. Strengthening these foundations is essential for ICK to build on past investments and continue contributing to Kosovo’s digital and entrepreneurial development.

Recommendations

The evaluation recommends that Sida shift from a single-institution model toward a broader ecosystem approach, focusing future support on coordinated interventions that strengthen Kosovo’s innovation system. Any future institutional funding should be preceded by stronger governance due diligence, ensuring partners have clear structures, transparency, and compliance. If Sida considers renewed support to ICK, it

should set clear preconditions related to governance reform, strategic clarity, and financial restructuring. Future investments should target systemic gaps such as advanced digital skills, employability, scale-up support, and public-private innovation. Sida should also require partners to have robust MEL systems that collect outcome-level and disaggregated data and report consistently on results.

For ICK, the priority is to reduce financial vulnerability by securing subsidized or public premises. Governance modernization is essential, including updating statutes and procedures, separating oversight from management, and improving transparency. The Board should be strengthened and diversified, with dedicated committees for finance, HR, and audit. Leadership roles and HR systems need clearer authority and professional standards. Finally, ICK should enhance transparency and compliance by obtaining Public Beneficiary Status, publishing annual reports, and regularly conducting governance audits.

Key Lessons Learned for Sida

Several key lessons emerged from the evaluation. Strong governance arrangements are essential when providing long-term institutional support; Sida's observer role ensured transparency but offered limited ability to address governance challenges. The sustainability of innovation hubs also depends heavily on secure, subsidized premises, an issue that remained ICK's most persistent constraint. Finally, while core support was transformative for institutional development, long-term resilience requires diversified funding, strengthened internal systems, and stable leadership.

1 Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND, PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

This evaluation is commissioned by the Embassy of Sweden in Pristina as an **end-of-programme assessment** of Sida's core institutional support to the Innovation Centre Kosovo for the period 2019–2024. Over this period, Sida contributed SEK 21.6 million in flexible core funding to strengthen ICK's internal capacity, enhance its programmatic delivery, and position it as a sustainable and credible driver of digital innovation, startup development, and youth entrepreneurship in Kosovo.

The rationale for this evaluation is fourfold:

1. **Validation of Results:** To confirm the extent to which planned outputs, outcomes, and intended impacts have been achieved, and to provide an evidence-based account of Sida's contribution.
2. **Learning and Lesson Extraction:** To consolidate lessons learned from nearly a decade of partnership with ICK, particularly regarding the effectiveness of core support as a modality and its implications for exit strategies. The evaluation will capture what worked well, what did not, and why, in order to inform the design of future engagements in the innovation, digital skills, and startup sectors-whether through ICK, other partners, or new modalities of support.
3. **Transparency, Accountability, and Ownership:** To provide a transparent, evidence-based account of results achieved with Swedish taxpayer funding and generate a shared understanding among Sida, ICK, and other stakeholders about the impact and sustainability of the intervention. The evaluation will also serve as a reference point for ICK's own internal learning and institutional development.
4. **Closure and Forward-looking Use:** To ensure responsible closure of a long-term strategic engagement by capturing institutional memory and stakeholder perspectives before Sida's support ends, while also offering lessons to inform Sida's potential future engagement in Kosovo's innovation ecosystem.

The evaluation is summative, not formative, and was not intended to inform a new phase of Sida funding. Instead, it contributed to Sida's broader knowledge base for future engagements in the innovation, digital skills, and entrepreneurship sectors.

1.2 EVALUATION OBJECT AND SCOPE

The evaluand is Sida's **core institutional support** to ICK (2019–2024), focusing exclusively on activities financed under Sida's core contribution. The evaluation:

- Covered the **entire funding period** (original for 2019-2021 and extended for 2022-2024) and the results achieved in ICK’s three strategic pillars: (i) Digital skills development; (ii) Startup support and incubation; and (iii) Innovation ecosystem development and partnerships.
- Considered cross-cutting priorities such as gender equality, youth inclusion, environmental sustainability, human rights, and conflict sensitivity throughout evaluation process.
- Excluded short-term or side-funded ICK initiatives not financed by Sida unless they demonstrably contributed to institutional sustainability or are essential to understanding Sida-supported outcomes.
- Geographically, focused on ICK’s headquarters in Pristina and activities nationwide that were directly funded by Sida.

1.3 EVALUATION CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS

The evaluation was guided by the OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, ensuring a comprehensive assessment of Sida’s support to ICK in line with international evaluation standards.

The evaluation questions were based on Sida’s Terms of Reference but refined during inception for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the reconstructed Theory of Change. The questions were consolidated to avoid overlap, sharpened to focus on contribution, and expanded to address inclusion and ecosystem dynamics. The revised evaluation questions were discussed and approved by the Embassy of Sweden. Governance, particularly decision-making, transparency, and accountability, was added as a cross-cutting area in response to Sida’s request and interview evidence highlighting its importance for ICK’s performance and sustainability.

Table 1. Evaluation Questions

Criteria	Key Evaluation Questions (EQs)
Relevance	To what extent was the support to ICK aligned with the needs of its target groups and with Kosovo’s evolving development context and priorities, including shifts in the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem?
Effectiveness	To what extent have the planned results been achieved, for whom, and with what contribution from Sida’s support?
Efficiency	How well were resources (financial, human, and institutional) used in delivering results, and were there significant factors that supported or hindered efficient implementation?
Sustainability	To what extent is the institutional and financial sustainability of ICK likely after Sida support ends, and is it positioned to adapt to future entrepreneurship ecosystem changes?

Impact	What contribution has Sida’s support made to strengthening Kosovo’s innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem, including its capacity to adapt to change?
Learning	What are the key lessons from Sida’s use of the core support modality in Kosovo?

The detailed evaluation matrix is presented in Annex 2.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The report is structured to provide a coherent assessment of Sida’s support to ICK. It opens with an Executive Summary, followed by an Introduction outlining the evaluation’s scope and objectives. The Methodology section describes the mixed-methods approach and limitations. The core Findings section is organised around the OECD/DAC criteria and synthesises evidence from stakeholders and documentation, with particular emphasis on governance, financial sustainability, and policy engagement. The Conclusions summarise key judgements on strengths and weaknesses, while the Recommendations focus on sustainability, governance, and strategic positioning for Sida and ICK. Annexes include methodological details and supporting information.

2 Methodology

2.1 OVERALL APPROACH

The evaluation was designed to produce credible and useful findings, aligned with Sida's utilisation-focused principles and centered on the needs of key users (the Embassy of Sweden, Sida, and ICK). Early consultations clarified the evaluation's scope and ensured participation from secondary stakeholders, while ongoing feedback and check-ins kept the process aligned and actionable.

Methodologically, the evaluation used a summative, theory-based design supported by a reconstructed Theory of Change for Sida's core support to ICK. This guided the evaluation matrix and assessment of relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability.

Contribution analysis was applied to determine how Sida's support plausibly contributed to observed results, using evidence from interviews, surveys, focus groups, and document review. Alternative explanations and the role of other ecosystem actors were tested to understand Sida's value-added, with findings triangulated and evidence weighted.

The evaluation did not seek to attribute changes solely to Sida, but to understand whether its support was influential or catalytic. It also took a forward-looking perspective by identifying lessons on the core support modality. Cross-cutting issues (including gender, youth, human rights, conflict sensitivity, and environment) were integrated throughout, with disaggregated data and attention to inclusion. The approach ensured rigor, contextual relevance, and learning for future programming.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

A **mixed methods approach** to data collection and analysis was used to triangulate various sources of information (document review, interviews with Sida, ICK, public institutions, other donors, private sector, ecosystem actors, direct beneficiaries, surveys results analysis), and perspectives by drawing on quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive, robust, and evidence-based understanding of the programme under evaluation. This in turn enabled developing insightful findings, reliable conclusions, relevant lessons learned, and targeted recommendations.

Triangulation was particularly critical given the inconsistencies identified between official documents, internal reports, and interview testimony, especially regarding governance arrangements, rent negotiations, and internal decision-making processes. This systematic cross-checking helped ensure that the analysis accurately reflected the dynamics shaping programme's implementation.

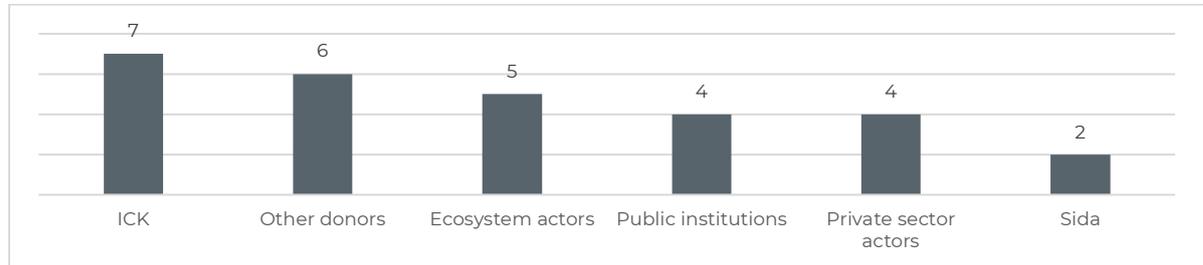
2.3 METHODS AND TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

The evaluation drew on a variety of mixed methods for data collection to support reliability of findings with triangulation across methods and data sources.

Document review. More than **80 ICK documents** (strategic plans, project proposal, annual narrative and financial reports, audits, risk analyses, ICK governance documents and internal regulations, conclusion on performance reports, Sida-ICK agreements and amendments, ecosystem studies) were reviewed by the ET. Programmatic documents were made available to the evaluation team by the Sida and ICK team. The list of documents reviewed and synthesized to inform the final evaluation is presented in Annex 4.

Semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs). The ET conducted **28 KIIs with 30 stakeholders** (37 percent female; 63 percent male). The interviews included ICK staff, Sida, public institutions, other donors, private sector and ecosystem partners. Targets for key informant interviews were informed by stakeholder mapping and a purposeful sampling strategy focused on ensuring diversity of stakeholder groups to capture multiple viewpoints and experiences. The interviews were conducted between October 13 and November 6, 2025.

Figure 1. Number of KIIs conducted disaggregated by stakeholder group (N=28)



For details on stakeholders consulted refer to Annex 5.

Focus group discussions (FGDs). The evaluation team conducted FGDs with the (i) ICK -supported startups, and (ii) youth and women trained by ICK in digital and entrepreneurial skills using a purposeful sampling strategy. In total, **four focus groups were conducted with 25 beneficiaries** (44 percent female; 56 percent male). Annex 3 contains the list of FGDs participants. The focus groups were conducted between October 21 and October 30, 2025.

Online surveys. In order to augment its findings, the evaluation implemented online surveys to obtain feedback regarding the experience with the ICK. The online surveys targeted ICK beneficiaries (startups and trainees). In total, **81 respondents took part**

in the surveys (50 percent female; 50 percent male)¹. Quantitative results from the surveys were collated and synthesized as part of the evidence base to support findings.

2.4 PROCESS OF ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPING CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation team applied a systematic process from data collection to validated findings, using triangulation to ensure credibility. This included methods triangulation (interviews, focus groups, survey data) and data source triangulation (primary data compared with reports and programme documents). Overlapping questions and semi-structured guides allowed themes to be explored from multiple angles and discrepancies to be probed.

Analysis followed the evaluation matrix and Theory of Change. Qualitative data were coded thematically, and quantitative data were summarised using descriptive statistics. Evidence from different sources was then cross-checked and triangulated to produce balanced, well-substantiated conclusions and recommendations.

2.5 ETHICS AND PARTICIPATION

Ethical considerations and safeguards were designed to ensure informed consent, confidentiality and data protection; cultural sensitivity and fair identification of participants; and adherence to “do no harm” principles. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all the study participants. All data were handled confidentially and used solely for the purposes of the evaluation.

2.6 LIMITATIONS

The methodology was appropriate for the evaluation’s purpose, though several limitations were noted.

Response and stakeholder bias: Reliance on retrospective and self-reported data created risks of recall and positive bias. These were mitigated by validating evidence through multiple sources and maintaining transparency and objectivity.

Selection bias: FGD participants were likely to be those still engaged with or positive about ICK. Interviewers therefore explicitly asked about weaknesses and negative experiences.

¹ Trainees came from a wide range of ICK programs in ICT and creative fields. Most completed web and software development courses, while others trained in design, media, and social media, and a smaller group in AI, data, and entrepreneurship. This reflects ICK’s broad approach to building digital skills. Most respondents completed their training in the past four to five years (largest share in 2024), aligning with Sida’s support period. Surveyed startups were founded between 2017 and 2024, with most launched in 2022–2023. They operate in diverse sectors, mainly ICT and cybersecurity, plus healthcare, green furniture, upcycling, technology, and food processing.

Low survey response rates: While the trainee survey was sufficient, the partner survey received no responses and the startup survey had only about 3% participation. This reduced the volume of quantitative data, so greater emphasis was placed on qualitative evidence (KIIs, FGDs, documents).

These limitations affect the breadth and representativeness of the evidence, but do not undermine the credibility of findings. Mitigation through triangulation, probing for balanced perspectives, and diverse data sources ensured the evaluation remained robust and reliable.

3 Evaluation object

This evaluation concerns Sida's core institutional support to the Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK) delivered over the period 2019-2024. The support aimed to strengthen ICK as a national hub for digital innovation, startup development and youth-focused entrepreneurship, enabling the organisation to operate as a credible, capable and sustainable driver of Kosovo's innovation ecosystem. Sida's contribution was provided as core funding, giving ICK flexibility to allocate resources across institutional development, operational costs, and programme delivery.

3.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION AND THEORY OF CHANGE

Sida's core institutional support was grounded in the assumption that a strengthened and well-functioning ICK would expand opportunities for young people, women, startups and emerging enterprises to participate in Kosovo's digital and innovation-led economy.

The reconstructed Theory of Change of Sida core support programme is presented in Annex 6. The programme was fully aligned with Sweden's Reform Cooperation Strategy for the Western Balkans and Turkey (2021–2027)², particularly with priorities on inclusive economic development, productive employment, private-sector development and digital transformation.

3.2 TIMEFRAME, GEOGRAPHY AND FUNDING

The Sida core institutional support programme covered the period 2019-2024³, including an extension initially justified by COVID-19 disruptions and later by institutional instability linked to the dissolution of the Ministry of Innovation in 2020. Activities were implemented primarily from ICK's premises in Pristina, with outreach across Kosovo through training delivery, startup engagement and ecosystem partnerships. The total Sida contribution amounted to SEK 21.6 million, delivered through a core support modality rather than earmarked project funding.

² Sida Decision 182022 Amendment ICK, 8 December 2022

³ Sida Appraisal of Intervention, March 2019; Amendments to the Grant Agreements

3.3 TARGET GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS

The intervention engaged a wide spectrum of actors within Kosovo's innovation ecosystem. At the core were ICK's own staff and management, who benefited from institutional strengthening and capacity-building, alongside startups and entrepreneurs who received incubation, mentorship and acceleration support. Youth, women and professionals participating in digital-skills training formed another central group of direct beneficiaries. The intervention also reached broader end beneficiaries, including young people across Kosovo seeking improved employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, as well as startups and SMEs operating in emerging digital and green sectors. More broadly, the wider innovation ecosystem (comprising employers, investors, universities and diaspora actors) stood to gain from a more capable and resilient ICK.

3.4 ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP AND IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

ICK was established in June 2012, ICK was launched with financial support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in collaboration with the Kosovo Association of Information and Communication Technology (STIKK) and Crimson Capital LLC. ICK operates as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) governed by a Board and executive management team. Its operations are structured around three core pillars: (i) Digital skills development; (ii) Startup incubation and entrepreneurship support; and (iii) Ecosystem development and partnerships. Sida's core support enabled organisational flexibility, covering operational costs, human resources, institutional strengthening and activities defined annually through work plans. Oversight arrangements included regular dialogue with Sida, annual narrative and financial reporting, risk analysis, external audits and monitoring of work-plan implementation.

3.5 POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The intervention took place within a dynamic and evolving policy landscape. The dissolution of the Ministry of Innovation in 2020 disrupted institutional coordination and temporarily weakened ICK's government partnerships, prompting Sida to extend the support period. Kosovo's innovation ecosystem also shifted significantly during 2019–2024, with the emergence of new donor-funded hubs (such as ITP Prizren) and increased competition for talent, partners and funding. At the same time, external

political factors, such as EU restrictive measures affecting Kosovo⁴, limited access to some regional programs and funding opportunities.

Despite these challenges, ICK continued to operate as a recognised actor within the ecosystem, supported by multiple donors and private-sector partners. Sida's support aimed to consolidate ICK's role amid these changes and strengthen its long-term organisational resilience.

⁴ The EU has imposed restrictive measures against Kosovo since June 2023, including suspending the [Stabilisation and Association Agreement \(SAA\)](#), limiting high-level meetings, and freezing funding and projects, in response to escalating tensions with Serbia. These measures were triggered by events in the Serb-majority north, such as the entry of Albanian mayors into municipalities. The financial impact is significant, with estimates showing projects worth over €613 million have been affected

4 Findings

This chapter presents the main findings of the evaluation, organised around the OECD/DAC criteria. The findings draw on triangulated evidence from documents, interviews, focus groups, surveys, and financial and institutional analysis. They reflect both the results enabled by Sida’s core support and the contextual and institutional factors shaping performance. The chapter traces how ICK’s role and capacities evolved between 2019 and 2024, highlighting strengths, such as relevance, operational resilience, and contributions to Kosovo’s innovation ecosystem, as well as constraints, including governance challenges, declining incubation quality, unmet demand for advanced skills, and sustainability risks. The analysis balances internal and external perspectives to provide an evidence-based understanding of ICK’s trajectory and Sida’s contribution.

4.1 RELEVANCE

To what extent was the support to ICK aligned with the needs of its target groups and with Kosovo’s evolving development context and priorities, including shifts in the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem?

Sida’s support to ICK has been largely relevant, with programmes well aligned to the needs of youth, startups, and jobseekers and responsive to Kosovo’s digital and innovation priorities. However, overall relevance is tempered by several gaps: inclusiveness relies heavily on donor projects, advanced and specialized training options remain insufficient, and post-training support is weak. At the ecosystem level, ICK’s policy visibility has declined, while competition from institutions like ITP Prizren, VentureUP, and private academies has increased. Although ICK has shown adaptability to emerging trends, it now needs clearer strategic positioning to maintain its role in a rapidly evolving innovation landscape.

Relevance to target groups

Across interviews and focus groups, stakeholders emphasized that ICK’s programmes have consistently addressed the needs of its core target groups, particularly young people, startups, jobseekers, and women, by offering accessible, practical, and market-driven digital and entrepreneurial training. Donors and private sector representatives confirmed that ICK designs its services based on ongoing consultations with employers, startups, and beneficiaries. Although these needs-assessment processes are often informal, they have enabled ICK to remain responsive to shifting labour market trends.

As one donor observed, “*ICK listens to companies and tailors its programs accordingly. That’s why its courses remain in demand.*” Private sector

representatives similarly described ICK as “*a bridge between education and employment,*” emphasizing that its courses provide practical skills not commonly acquired in universities.

University partners viewed ICK as an important complement to formal education, exposing students to hands-on entrepreneurial experiences rarely embedded in academic curricula. Alumni likewise highlighted the practical value of the trainings, noting that ICK equipped them with “*usable skills, not just theory.*” As one focus group participant explained, “*Universities give you diplomas, but ICK gives you skills.*”

According to the trainee survey, 86 percent of respondents rated ICK’s training content as highly relevant or relevant to their personal and professional development, confirming the strong alignment of ICK’s programs with participant needs.

Moreover, 79 percent of surveyed trainees perceived ICK’s trainings as fully or mostly aligned with current market and technology trends, suggesting that the centre’s programs remain responsive to evolving labour market demands.

Beneficiaries also acknowledged ICK’s inclusive environment, particularly for women and youth. However, the evaluation also found that inclusiveness has largely been donor-driven rather than systematically embedded in ICK’s core support model. Core funding did not explicitly or consistently prioritize vulnerable groups, and inclusion efforts tended to rely on donor-funded projects, not institutional strategy. Participants also expressed a strong demand for more advanced and specialized training pathways. Focus group discussions repeatedly highlighted that while basic courses are strong, ICK does not yet offer sufficient depth in areas such as advanced programming, cybersecurity, AI, or data science. Many trainees felt they needed “next-level” modules to deepen their expertise and remain competitive in the labour market.

Additionally, while trainees praised the relevance of the training itself, they consistently pointed to weak post-training support mechanisms. Alumni stressed the need for structured internship opportunities, mentorship, job placement services, and systematic follow-up. The absence of a dedicated post-training pathway limits the extent to which skills acquired at ICK translate into employment or entrepreneurial outcomes. As one participant put it, “*ICK gave me skills, but after the training you are largely on your own.*”

Alignment with the evolving innovation ecosystem

Donor partners and government stakeholders agreed that ICK’s mission is well aligned with Kosovo’s national strategies, including the Digital Agenda for Kosovo, the SME Development Strategy, and the Innovation Strategy 2030. ICK’s focus on digital skills, entrepreneurship, and innovation also aligns with Sida’s results

framework for Kosovo, especially in relation to inclusive economic growth, gender equality, and sustainable innovation.

Nonetheless, the evaluation revealed a notable decline in ICK’s policy visibility and engagement. Both government and donors repeatedly stated that ICK is “*no longer visible*” in policy dialogue and national-level innovation discussions. While ICK was once a prominent actor shaping Kosovo’s startup and digital agenda, its policy presence has diminished in recent years, in particular since 2020. Several officials remarked that although the government is open to collaboration, ICK has not been proactive in formalizing partnerships, participating in policy forums, or advocating for ecosystem-level reforms. As one official remarked, “*We are open to cooperation, but ICK has not been proactive in formalizing partnerships.*”

Across stakeholder groups, ICK was described as an anchor institution within Kosovo’s growing innovation ecosystem. Donors, private sector and ecosystem actors, and government officials recognized that ICK played a foundational role in shaping the country’s startup culture and entrepreneurial identity. One donor observed, “*The concept of startup culture in Kosovo largely began with ICK. It set the tone for others that followed.*” However, they note that the ecosystem has evolved and become more competitive. Between 2020 and 2024, ICK’s influence appears to have diminished, with fewer startups entering incubation, reduced seed funding, weaker convening power, and a more limited role in major ecosystem initiatives. Specifically, new actors such as ITP Prizren⁵, VentureUP⁶, and several privately run academies have reshaped the landscape. These institutions offer a mix of training, incubation, and sector-specific specialization that increasingly competes with ICK’s traditional areas of strength. Private academies now deliver intensive, advanced-level ICT programs, while university-affiliated centres like VentureUP have expanded their entrepreneurship and employability programmes.

Comparative assessments show that ITP Prizren operates as a large-scale technology park with substantial physical infrastructure and multi-tenant services⁷, whereas ICK remains a programme-based hub operating from a single facility in central Pristina. While ICK’s integrated model of training, incubation, and networking remains

⁵ The ITP Prizren was established in 2019 through a bilateral agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kosovo and the Federal Republic of Germany, represented by the German Development Agency (GIZ) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

⁶ The VentureUp is the the Entrepreneurship & Innovation Center and official Incubator of the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”, which serves as a bridge between education and the labor market for over 50,000 young Kosovars. It was established in 2017 by World Learning and the University of Prishtina.

⁷ ITP Prizren functions as a fully integrated technology and innovation park, managing a 40-hectare campus with over 50 buildings located outside Pristina. It provides physical infrastructure for multiple tenants and combines industrial, educational, and R&D functions. In contrast, ICK operates from a single multi-purpose facility in central Pristina, focusing on training, incubation, and early-stage startup development.

valued, stakeholders stressed that newer ecosystem players are rapidly innovating, raising concerns about ICK's competitive positioning. For example, ITP's fully funded premises, international partnerships, and government backing give it a strategic advantage that ICK cannot match under current conditions.

In this changing context, several development partners cautioned that ICK must now actively reposition itself, deepen its specialization, and strengthen partnerships with private companies and other innovation centres. As one donor stated, *"ICK's relevance is unquestioned, but maintaining leadership will depend on how well it integrates and innovates within the new ecosystem."*

Adaptation to ecosystem changes

Stakeholders consistently acknowledged ICK's agility in responding to shocks and emerging trends. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ICK seamlessly transitioned to online operations, ensuring uninterrupted delivery of training and incubation services. Donors praised this adaptability, noting that ICK *"kept the ecosystem alive when most institutions went silent."*

ICK has also adapted to broader trends including digitalization, the green transition, and evolving regulatory frameworks. Programmes such as BOOST x Kosovo and GOV4SAA demonstrate ICK's ability to integrate emerging themes like circular economy solutions and public-sector innovation into its portfolio. Training curricula have also evolved to include emerging technologies such as ReactJS, Laravel, Python, AI, and data analytics.

However, despite this adaptability, several companies and ecosystem actors stressed that ICK must continue expanding into more advanced technical fields, customize training for corporate partners, and explore deeper specialization in high-demand sectors. Larger firms emphasized that ICK risks losing relevance if it does not keep pace with rapidly advancing corporate training models.

4.2 EFFECTIVENESS

To what extent have planned results been achieved, for whom, and with what contribution from Sida?

Evidence from document review, interviews, survey data, and focus groups indicates that ICK achieved a significant share of its planned outputs, but progress toward intended outcome-level results was uneven. Sida's core support played an essential role in maintaining ICK's operational continuity and enabling a wide portfolio of trainings and entrepreneurship services. However, several systemic, institutional, and programmatic constraints limited the depth, sustainability, and long-term impact of Sida-supported interventions.

In startup development, ICK continued to support early-stage entrepreneurs, incubating more than 305 startups and mobilizing EUR 842,288.58 in external

investment meeting its output targets. Approximately half of the supported startups were still active two years after assistance, aligning with international survival benchmarks, although this rate is self-reported and not independently verified. Survey and interview data highlight that these achievements reflect ICK's enduring capacity to attract aspiring entrepreneurs and introduce them to foundational concepts of startup development.

However, the quality of incubation services declined significantly after 2021. Key informants described a gradual erosion in programme structure and support depth, noting *“there are fewer structured programs now... incubation feels lighter than before”* and *“startups no longer receive the mentorship intensity they used to.”* The absence of a seed fund and limited access to experienced mentors further weakened ICK's ability to support growth-oriented ventures. Several incubated founders noted that follow-up was rare or nonexistent, and ecosystem leaders reported that ICK's role has stagnated. As one interviewee observed, *“The leadership in the ecosystem has shifted - ITP and VentureUP are driving things now; ICK is no longer the central actor it once was.”* Sida's support helped maintain ICK's visibility, yet the centre struggled to keep pace with an increasingly competitive ecosystem and to retain its earlier influence.

These trends are closely tied to ICK's lack of institutional reform, which impeded progress on strategic improvements. Internal stakeholders and partners pointed to an outdated HR system, unclear responsibilities, and governance bottlenecks that slowed decision-making and hindered modernization. Despite repeated recommendations, ICK did not establish a functional M&E unit or update its performance management practices. This severely limited its capacity to innovate and directly constrained ICK's ability to translate Sida's support into stronger institutional performance. Monitoring and evaluation gaps affected all programme areas. ICK does not have a learning outcomes framework, does not conduct tracer studies, and does not track post-training employment or startup performance. The alumni database is outdated, and course impact data is not collected. As a result, ICK cannot substantiate long-term results or demonstrate outcome-level changes attributable to Sida's support. This absence of evidence limits institutional learning and reduces the evaluability of the programme.

In skills development and employability, ICK delivered 458 courses to 6,974 participants (45 percent of whom were women) and organized 489 public events reaching over 39,000 people. Survey results show strong perceived value: 67 percent of trainees expressed high confidence that their skills will remain useful in the future, and 55 percent reported that ICK trainings had a moderate or significant positive impact on their employability and 44 percent stated that they regularly apply learning from ICK trainings in practice. ICK trainees during focus groups described substantial gains in digital and creative competencies. As one trainee stated, *“From*

empty-headed to having considerable knowledge of front and backend. Now I have a clearer picture of my next steps.” Another explained, *“I have applied what I learned by developing small web projects using React and Node.js. The training helped me write cleaner and more efficient code.”* These reflections illustrate Sida’s important contribution to strengthening Kosovo’s digital skills base.

At the same time, a major finding across focus groups was the strong demand for more advanced and specialized training. Participants repeatedly emphasized that while ICK’s courses provided valuable foundations, they were insufficient for advancing into higher-paying or specialized ICT roles. Requests were frequent for advanced modules in AI, machine learning, DevOps, data analytics, full-stack development, and high-end creative technologies. As one participant noted, *“ICK helped me get started, but the market needs deeper expertise now. We need more advanced courses.”* Limited practical depth in some trainings, inconsistent course duration, and insufficient academic structure was also widely reported.

The programme’s contribution to employability was further constrained by missing post-training support systems. ICK has no Career Services office, no structured internship placement mechanism, and no alumni engagement system. Where internships did occur, they were typically arranged informally by trainers or through project-based partnerships. Although 24 out of 72 survey respondents (one third) reported receiving scholarships, most of these were financed through UN Women, UNICEF, or corporate partners rather than Sida’s core support. These scholarships and internships were highly effective in creating pathways to employment: *“My mentor recommended me for an internship, which turned into a full-time job,”* noted one trainee, but Sida’s contribution to these results is indirect.

Despite the challenges, the centre’s learning environment is widely perceived as inclusive, supportive, and equitable. ICK has consistently promoted gender equality, with women’s participation in its programs reaching 50 percent in recent years, a substantial improvement. The centre has also engaged marginalized groups through partnership-based projects, such as digital literacy programmes for women with disabilities and inclusion-focused initiatives with UNICEF involving youth from disadvantaged communities. Trainees reported feeling respected and welcomed, with one participant remarking, *“Everyone is treated equally. There is no difference between genders or backgrounds here.”* Nevertheless, these inclusion efforts are not embedded in ICK’s core monitoring or strategic frameworks, and outreach remains concentrated in Prishtina.

Overall, Sida’s contribution helped ICK maintain its role as an accessible skills provider and an entry point for aspiring entrepreneurs. The centre’s broad reach, high participant satisfaction, and inclusive learning environment represent meaningful achievements. However, the absence of institutional reforms, the decline in

incubation quality, the stagnation of ecosystem leadership, unmet demand for advanced training, and the lack of post-training follow-up and M&E systems collectively limited the extent to which intended results were achieved. As a result, Sida's support produced important outputs and short-term benefits, but fell short of enabling ICK to deliver stronger, sustainable, and demonstrable outcomes in entrepreneurship development and employability.

4.3 EFFICIENCY

How well were resources (financial, human, and institutional) used in delivering results, and were there significant factors that supported or hindered efficient implementation?

Evidence from financial records, institutional documents, and interviews with staff, donors, and ecosystem actors indicates that ICK used its financial, human, and institutional resources with notable discipline and operational commitment. However, efficiency was significantly constrained by high fixed costs, overstretched human resources, and an outdated governance structure that slowed decision-making and created systemic bottlenecks. While Sida's core support, which was revised and increased during implementation to respond to COVID-19 impacts and rising operational pressures, played a critical role in sustaining ICK's operations, the centre's ability to optimize these resources and strengthen institutional efficiency was hindered by longstanding structural weaknesses.

Financial Efficiency

Financially, ICK demonstrated prudent and reliable use of donor resources. According to audited financial statements, the total Sida core support budget was fully utilized by the end of 2024. The initial agreement, covering 2019–2021, provided 14 million SEK in core funding. In response to the unexpected financial strain caused by COVID-19 (particularly the burden of maintaining ICK's premises) Sida and ICK jointly reviewed the situation during the annual programme meeting. As a result, Sida decided in 2022 to extend and increase core support for an additional two years (2023–2024) with additional 10.5 million SEK.

The budget for implementing ICK's Strategic Plan 2019–2022 amounted to EUR 5.3 million, of which Sida was originally expected to cover 26 percent (14 million SEK, approximately EUR 1.4 million). The largest share of Sida's support (around 38 percent) was allocated to salaries, followed by approximately 26 percent for office rent. ICK's own revenue streams contributed 11.5 percent of the overall budget, derived from service income (35 percent from rents, 25 percent from trainings, and 40 percent from events).

Sida's funding was fully executed as planned, and expenditure patterns remained consistent with programme objectives, prioritizing training, incubation, and public events even in years of significant income fluctuation as evident from Sida audit reports. Interviewees repeatedly highlighted ICK's financial discipline. One donor noted, *"They always deliver exactly what they commit to; financially they are one of*

the most well-managed NGOs we fund.” Revenue volatility (total income nearly halved after 2020, falling from EUR 1.99 million to EUR 0.9 million in 2024) did not interrupt service delivery, reflecting careful financial management.

Nonetheless, financial efficiency was constrained by rising fixed costs and structural limitations. Rent expenses increased by 31 percent from 2019 to 2024, outpacing ICK’s ability to generate self-financed revenue.

Multiple stakeholders criticized the heavy rent burden, with one describing it as *“money burned each year on something that adds no value.”* The most significant inefficiency noted across interviews was the missed opportunity to move to municipal premises. Despite winning the tender, ICK did not finalize the transfer. An ecosystem leader remarked bluntly, *“That single decision cost them years of financial stability. It would have freed resources for staff, systems, and innovation.”* Sida’s increased support temporarily softened the impact, but the centre remained vulnerable to rising operational costs and donor fluctuations.

Human Resources Efficiency

Human resources were used with extraordinary operational efficiency, but the model is not sustainable long-term. ICK operates with a core team of around five full-time staff, yet delivers hundreds of trainings and events annually. Stakeholders frequently described this as exceptional. One of the ecosystem partners stated, *“We have 280 employees and still can’t match what ICK does with five people.”* Staff loyalty was also exceptionally high, driven by a strong commitment to ICK’s mission. As one internal staff member put it, *“You don’t work at ICK for the salary. You work here because you believe in the impact.”*

However, this efficiency was achieved through overextension and pressure. Staff interviews described a near-constant “delivery mode,” leaving little time for internal development. Critical institutional functions (M&E, fundraising, business development, HR, and data management) remained underdeveloped or absent, creating dependence on individual commitment rather than organizational systems. The extensive use of external trainers and mentors, some pro bono, kept costs low but reinforced a fragile operational model reliant on goodwill.

Institutional Efficiency⁸

Institutional efficiency was most significantly hindered by governance and structural issues. A detailed review of ICK’s Statute, Board regulations, HR Manual, the Employment Process document and the Executive Director ToR revealed systemic gaps, outdated legal references, and inconsistent provisions that do not align with Kosovo’s updated NGO and labour legislation. Decision-making authority is

⁸ Detailed analysis of institutional efficiency is presented in Annex 7

concentrated in a small, long-standing group, and governance documents still reference the abolished 2011 NGO law.

Board mandates are inconsistently defined, some documents describe a 3+3-year term⁹, others a 4+4-year term¹⁰, and conflict-of-interest safeguards, eligibility criteria, and oversight provisions are incomplete. The Board appoints its own successors, limiting renewal and diversification. Several ecosystem actors described the governance structure as “*closed*,” “*opaque*,” or “*stagnant*.” One interviewee summarized, “*Leadership changes in name, but not in practice. It’s the same people making decisions.*”

The Executive Director’s Terms of Reference remain marked as “preliminary,” lacking clear provisions for delegation of authority, recruitment responsibility, financial approval, and internal accountability¹¹. This creates blurred lines between governance and management.

These governance issues had direct effects on efficiency. Donors observed that procurement, contracting, and partnership negotiations could be slow. One partner noted, “*They deliver quality, but the governance setup slows them down and prevents strategic decisions.*” A donor emphasized the stagnation more bluntly: “*The team is excellent, but the governance system has not evolved. It is the main barrier to efficiency.*” Governance weaknesses also contributed to the delayed or unsuccessful pursuit of strategic opportunities, including the municipal premises transfer, which was described by multiple stakeholders as a governance failure.

Compared to newer institutions such as ITP Prizren, which operates under a modern, bi-national governance model with clear division between strategic oversight and executive functions, ICK’s governance structure appeared rigid and overly dependent on individual actors. This reduced institutional agility, slowed strategic adaptation, and constrained the organization’s ability to leverage Sida’s increased core support for institutional strengthening.

Despite these challenges, several factors supported efficient implementation. ICK’s strong reputation, accumulated institutional knowledge, and long-established partnerships enabled it to maintain donor trust and secure cost-effective contributions from trainers and mentors. Corporate representatives described ICK as “*a reliable*,

⁹ ICK Statute

¹⁰ Internal Regulation

¹¹ While the Executive Director (ED) is recognized as the organization’s legal representative and signatory, the ToR does not clearly specify staff recruitment authority, financial accountability mechanisms, internal reporting, or conflict-of-interest provisions. This creates ambiguity between governance and executive functions, as the Board currently retains authority over staff appointments, while the ED supervises staff operationally. Such an overlap blurs lines of accountability and could expose ICK to management and compliance risks.

disciplined partner that always delivers.” Ecosystem leaders acknowledged ICK’s foundational role, calling it *“the organization that built Kosovo’s startup movement.”* On the whole, ICK demonstrated high operational efficiency (delivering substantial outputs with limited staff and modest resources) but faced structural inefficiencies related to rising fixed costs, donor dependency, governance stagnation, and a lack of modern administrative systems. These limitations restricted the organization’s capacity to convert Sida’s increased support into more robust, long-term institutional efficiency and resilience.

4.4 IMPACT

What contribution has Sida’s support made to strengthening Kosovo’s innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem, including its capacity to adapt to change?

Between 2019 and 2024, Sida’s core support to the ICK provided critical continuity and stability to the country’s rapidly evolving innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. During years marked by fluctuating donor engagement and the emergence of new institutional actors, Sida’s predictable funding enabled ICK to remain a central platform for skills development, early-stage startup support, and ecosystem coordination. Stakeholders across government, donors, and the private sector consistently emphasized that without Sida’s support, ICK would not have been able to sustain the scale and consistency of its programmes or maintain the institutional expertise that has long defined its role in Kosovo’s digital transformation.

Government representatives frequently highlighted ICK’s historic importance for national ICT and innovation policy. Several senior officials recalled that ICK was instrumental in shaping Kosovo’s first ICT Strategy and Action Plan, serving as a convening space for policy dialogue between ministries, the private sector, and international partners. One official noted, *“ICK and STIKK were the backbone of Kosovo’s ICT policy discussions. They helped us draft the first ICT Strategy and were always in the room when we needed expert advice.”* Another described the early period as *“a golden time of cooperation,”* emphasizing ICK’s leadership in mobilizing youth, tech companies, and civil society around a shared policy agenda. Sida’s support helped preserve this institutional memory and technical expertise. However, officials also agreed that ICK’s policy engagement diminished in recent years. As one respondent observed, *“We still respect them, but we don’t see them anymore in our policy meetings... STIKK is present, ITP Prizren is very active, but ICK seems absent.”* From the public sector perspective, ICK remains credible but passive - an institution with the capacity to contribute more strategically, yet not consistently present in coordination processes where new digital and innovation policies are being shaped.

Donors expressed similar views. Many praised ICK’s professionalism and reliable delivery, attributing this directly to the stability offered by Sida’s long-term support. *“When ICK was established, it was the spark for Kosovo’s innovation agenda,”* one

donor recalled, describing it as a model for the Western Balkans. Yet donors also commented on ICK's gradual shift from policy actor to project implementer, noting reduced visibility in legislative consultations and strategic policy forums. "They are still professional and reliable," a donor stated, *"but less strategic. They don't initiate dialogue with government anymore. They wait to be invited."* Some attributed this trend to internal governance issues, arguing that the organisation had become "too centered around personalities," making it harder to function as a policy institution. Sida's support was therefore crucial for sustaining core operations, but it did not catalyze a strategic repositioning of ICK as a national policymaking partner. Donors increasingly compared ICK to newer institutions such as ITP Prizren, which, backed by German cooperation, has developed formal partnerships with government agencies and emerged as a more visible player in innovation policy. As one donor put it, *"ITP Prizren has positioned itself as the government's main partner for innovation policy, while ICK remains an NGO on the sidelines."*

The private sector provided a similarly dual assessment. Entrepreneurs spoke of ICK with deep respect and gratitude, describing it as the institution where many of Kosovo's early digital innovators received their first training, mentorship, and exposure to entrepreneurial methods. One founder remarked, *"The place where everything started for us - trainings, mentors, networking."* Yet private actors also echoed concerns that ICK's advocacy role has weakened. *"They don't advocate for us anymore,"* said one ICT company representative. *"They are more of a training center now."* Several noted that the once-strong alliance between ICK and STIKK, which had formed the backbone of ICT sector advocacy, had diluted over time. At the same time, these actors continue to view ICK as one of the most competent and trustworthy implementers in the ecosystem—an organisation that consistently delivers high-quality programmes even amid funding uncertainties. As one founder summarized, *"Even if they don't do advocacy anymore, when I see an ICK project, I know it will be done well."*

From the perspective of startups and beneficiaries, Sida's contribution is seen as pivotal in enabling their growth and resilience. Survey and focus group findings indicate that ICK's training, incubation, mentoring, and small grants were decisive for many early-stage entrepreneurs. Dozens of startups highlighted that ICK was the catalyst that allowed them to move from concept to functioning business. Companies such as Behemix expanded from a team of four to around twenty employees and now serve international clients in AI and analytics, growth the founders link to ICK's mentorship and international exposure opportunities. Revive/Imedic credited ICK with helping them professionalize and scale across Kosovo, Albania, and North Macedonia. Green and circular economy startups such as Simply Green gained market visibility and export readiness, while health-tech entrepreneurs secured foreign investment through ICK's pitching events. Even highly experimental

ventures, such as insect-protein production or vertical rotary parking systems, reported reaching stages “unthinkable” without ICK’s structured support. These examples reflect a broader pattern: Sida’s support helped ICK create or strengthen a generation of startups that contributed to Kosovo’s economic diversification and regional visibility. Beneficiaries consistently described ICK as the bridge that connected them to knowledge, networks, and initial financing. At the same time, many noted that the ecosystem’s needs have evolved. After 2022, fewer donor-backed grants were available, and founders felt that fewer new startups were emerging. *“In 2020, ICK helped create a generation of startups,”* one focus group participant said. *“Now, I don’t see new startups coming out of ICK because of the lack of donors.”* Entrepreneurs also argued that the ecosystem now requires less training and more financial instruments for growth. As one founder put it, *“Mentorships are good once. After five years of running a business, repeating the same programs makes no sense. Give us EUR 5,000 to scale and we will learn more than in another workshop.”*

These perspectives point to both the strengths and limitations of Sida’s contribution. On one hand, Sida’s core support strengthened ICK’s operational capacity, enabling it to adapt to emerging themes such as the green economy, digital transformation, and new entrepreneurship models. This adaptability enhanced the resilience of Kosovo’s talent pipeline and early-stage innovation environment. On the other hand, the Sida core support did not create sustainable financing mechanisms for startups, nor did it stimulate a revival of ICK’s earlier policy influence. Kosovo’s broader ecosystem still lacks public-private investment instruments, structured scale-up programmes, and regulatory improvements, factors that lie partly beyond ICK’s mandate but directly shape the long-term impact of any early-stage support organisation.

Taken together, stakeholders agree that Sida’s core support made an important and measurable contribution to strengthening Kosovo’s innovation ecosystem during 2019-2024. It enabled ICK to preserve institutional expertise, deliver high-quality programmes, and support a generation of startups whose growth has contributed to employment, exports, and technological advancement. At the same time, the Sida support was not transformative at a systems level. ICK’s reduced engagement in policy processes, combined with gaps in national financing instruments, limited the extent to which Sida’s investments could translate into deeper structural change. Sida helped maintain and strengthen one of Kosovo’s key innovation institutions, but revitalizing policy leadership and enabling scale-up pathways will require complementary reforms and targeted investments beyond core institutional support.

4.5 SUSTAINABILITY

To what extent is the institutional and financial sustainability of ICK likely after Sida support ends, and is it positioned to adapt to future ecosystem changes?

The institutional and financial sustainability of ICK after the end of Sida's support is widely perceived by stakeholders as fragile and uncertain. Sida's core funding acted as a stabilizing anchor that covered the bulk of operational costs and allowed ICK to maintain continuity, retain experienced staff, and uphold its reputation as a key ecosystem actor. With Sida's withdrawal, ICK has entered a period of heightened vulnerability, marked by internal governance turbulence, structural cost pressures, and growing exposure to external political risks. While ICK has demonstrated an ability to secure short- and medium-term project funding, stakeholders across government, donors, and the private sector expressed concern about whether the institution can sustain itself and adapt to future ecosystem demands without substantial internal reform.

Institutional Sustainability

The period from 2023 to 2025 was characterised by leadership instability, governance fragmentation, and internal resistance to change - factors that directly weakened ICK's institutional resilience precisely as Sida support was coming to an end. Sida had expected ICK to enter the final phase of core support with strengthened leadership, clearer internal structures, and a strategic plan that could guide a transition toward sustainability. Instead, this period became, as one donor described it, *"the most uncertain moment in ICK's institutional history."*

The resignation of the long-serving Managing Director in April 2023 was viewed by many as an opportunity to modernize ICK's governance and management systems. A competitive recruitment process was launched, attracting 56 applicants, and culminating in the appointment of a new Managing Director who assumed office in January 2024. Several stakeholders, including donors, had seen this transition as a potential turning point. As one government official noted, *"It looked like ICK finally had a chance to reset and rebuild its internal systems."*

However, the new leadership's ability to implement reforms was quickly constrained by entrenched power structures, overlapping roles, and the lack of role separation within ICK's governance framework. Interviews consistently highlighted that the former Managing Director retained significant informal and formal influence, including board membership, legal representative status, advisory roles, and project management responsibilities. As a donor emphasized, *"You cannot have a new director while the old director still controls the wires. It was structurally impossible for her to lead."*

These dynamics created operational ambiguity and weakened executive authority. Board members were frequently involved in operational decisions, particularly concerning HR and financial matters, blurring the distinction between governance and management. As one ICK senior manager put it, *"We couldn't implement a sustainability model without an approved strategy and a functional governance system. Donors and corporates expect clarity."*

The lack of an approved strategic plan further undermined institutional direction. Although a new Strategy (2025-2030) was drafted with EBRD support, board-level disagreements repeatedly delayed approval. By late 2025, the plan remained unendorsed, leaving ICK without a unified vision during a period of organisational transition.

Financial management during this period also suffered from restricted access to documentation, parallel reporting channels, and unclear expenditure tracking. Several staff described instances where revenue figures were presented without corresponding cost data, impeding realistic financial planning. These governance and management shortcomings eroded donor confidence. A donor representative stated, *“The problem is not lack of competence, it is lack of internal transparency.”*

The suspension of the Managing Director in November 2024, followed by two legal cases initiated by the former director, amplified institutional instability. Although an Acting Director ensured short-term operational continuity, the unresolved governance issues, including due process concerns, continued to raise red flags for donors. As of late 2025, ongoing investigations related to financial and procedural irregularities further contributed to uncertainty about institutional integrity.

Across stakeholder groups, there was consensus that without substantive governance reform, ICK’s institutional sustainability remains at risk. One donor summarized: *“ICK has the brand, but the system behind the brand is cracking.”*

Financial Sustainability

Stakeholders were equally concerned about the financial sustainability of ICK after Sida’s withdrawal. Sida’s core support funded up to 80 percent of annual operating costs, including salaries and rent - costs that ICK has historically struggled to cover independently. After Sida’s exit, ICK became heavily reliant on project grants, co-working rentals, paid training, and intermittent corporate partnerships. While this has supported survival in the short term, most interviewees emphasised that it does not ensure long-term stability.

The rent burden was universally described as ICK’s single largest structural barrier to sustainability. ICK’s commercial premises absorb a substantial share of the annual budget, significantly limiting investments in innovation services and staff development. As one manager stated, *“No incubator in the world is 100 percent sustainable, but ICK’s rent burden makes the challenge even harder.”*

Multiple attempts to secure public premises, particularly within the Youth Palace¹², failed due to a mix of administrative delays and lack of follow-through from ICK. Stakeholders from the municipality and Sida stressed that ICK had been selected through a public tender but did not complete the necessary steps to finalize the agreement. One public institution representative commented, *“We were ready to proceed, but ICK did not meet the administrative requirements. The opportunity was real, but it was not taken.”*

The absence of Public Beneficiary Status has further limited ICK’s ability to access VAT exemptions and fiscal incentives that would have eased operational costs. While statute amendments have been initiated, progress has been slow and inconsistent. Despite these challenges, ICK has shown resilience in mobilizing donor-funded projects. Its portfolio, ranging from Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs to AI-focused initiatives and partnerships with LuxDev and the U.S. State Department, provides a financial buffer until approximately mid-2026. Yet this pipeline is vulnerable to external political developments. Several interviewees noted that EU measures against Kosovo had already restricted funding opportunities. A staff member described a recent setback: *“We were informed we won a three-year EU project for EUR 2.5 million, but it was cancelled because the municipality couldn’t provide a letter of intent during the election period.”*

ICK has also intensified efforts to expand private-sector partnerships. While two corporate agreements (worth EUR 20,000-50,000 annually) were under negotiation in 2025, stakeholders acknowledged that the sponsorship model is still nascent. Applications under the Law on Sponsorship were rejected due to administrative details (e.g., youth organization classification), underscoring the need for internal alignment and compliance.

Overall, stakeholders agreed that ICK is at a decisive juncture. As one donor put it, *“ICK is at a do-or-die moment. If they secure the right partnerships and premises, they can thrive; if not, they will struggle to survive.”*

Positioning for Future Ecosystem Changes

ICK remains partially positioned to adapt to future ecosystem trends. Stakeholders acknowledged its ability to pivot toward emerging themes such as green economy skills, AI, and digital transformation, capacities enabled in large part by Sida’s long-term investment in institutional development, staff retention, and operational stability. As a private-sector partner explained, *“ICK still has the talent and credibility to stay*

¹² The initial agreement envisioned an allocation of approximately 1,800 square meters at a proposed rental rate of EUR 15 per square meter, amounting to a total monthly cost of EUR 27,000. This rent was to be fully covered by the Municipality of Prishtina, with the arrangement intended to span a ten-year period. ICK, in turn, was expected to cover the refurbishment and ongoing maintenance costs associated with the facility.

relevant. The question is whether they can fix the internal issues to use that potential.”

However, ecosystem actors increasingly emphasised that Kosovo’s startup landscape is maturing, and ICK must evolve accordingly. The demand is shifting from training-heavy support to scale-up financing, investment readiness, and internationalization, areas where ICK is not yet structurally equipped. Donors noted that institutions like ITP Prizren¹³, with rent-free infrastructure and a cost-recovery model, are better positioned to address the next phase of ecosystem development.

As one donor concluded, *“ICK can adapt, but only if it resolves its governance bottlenecks. The ecosystem is moving forward and ICK needs*

¹³ The ITP Prizren is located on the premises of the former German KFOR military camp “Prizren”, which was handed over by the German Government to Kosovo to be repurposed for civilian, economic, and educational use. ITP is registered as a Kosovo-based NGO managing state-owned property under a 99-year agreement. It collects rent and service fees from tenants to cover operational costs (utilities, salaries, maintenance). The ITP Prizren generates a stable stream of revenue from its tenant base, which includes 61 organizations, comprising private companies, universities, and NGOs. The rental fee is set at EUR1.5 per square meter in 2025, with a planned increase to EUR2 per square meter in 2026. The rental price is inclusive of maintenance and shared utility services, with an additional EUR0.20 per square meter covering green space upkeep, outdoor lighting, cleaning, and other communal services.

5 Conclusion

The conclusions presented below synthesize evidence from the evaluation and respond directly to the key evaluation questions.

1. Sida's core support to ICK was broadly relevant and responsive to Kosovo's evolving innovation landscape, but gaps in inclusiveness, strategic positioning, and advanced skills development reduced overall relevance.

Evidence shows that ICK's programmes remained strongly aligned with the needs of youth, startups, jobseekers, and private-sector actors, who consistently valued the practical and market-driven nature of its trainings. Sida's support also aligned with Kosovo's national digital and innovation strategies. However, relevance was constrained by structural gaps: inclusion of marginalised groups was largely donor-driven rather than institutionalised; training pathways did not keep pace with the rising demand for advanced and specialised technical skills; and ICK's policy visibility and ecosystem leadership diminished over time. These factors underscore the need for a clearer strategic focus and strengthened institutional anchoring as the ecosystem becomes more competitive.

2. ICK achieved many of its planned outputs, but progress toward sustained outcome-level change was uneven due to declining programme depth, limited post-training pathways, and significant institutional constraints.

The evaluation finds that ICK's long-standing operational capacity, supported by Sida's predictable core funding, enabled the organisation to deliver a wide range of trainings, events, and incubation services. Beneficiaries reported meaningful gains in skills and early entrepreneurial competencies. However, the depth and structure of incubation services weakened after 2021; demand for more advanced training remained unmet; and the absence of a career services function, mentorship structures, and follow-up systems limited longer-term employability and startup growth. These limitations were compounded by weak monitoring and evaluation systems, which prevented ICK from demonstrating and learning from outcome-level results.

3. Sida's support was used with discipline and high operational efficiency, but systemic inefficiencies stemming from governance weaknesses, high fixed costs, and outdated internal systems hindered institutional performance.

Evidence confirms that ICK managed donor resources prudently, delivered outputs cost-effectively, and operated with exceptional human-resource efficiency despite its small core team. Yet these strengths masked deeper vulnerabilities. Rising rent costs, inability to secure public subsidized premises, and reliance on project-based funding

created financial strain. Governance arrangements (characterized by blurred roles, outdated statutes, concentrated decision-making authority, and limited internal transparency) consistently delayed strategic decisions and undermined institutional agility. As a result, Sida's increased core funding could not be fully leveraged to strengthen long-term efficiency and institutional resilience.

4. Sida's support made an important contribution to sustaining Kosovo's innovation ecosystem during a period of transition, but it did not generate transformative system-level change.

Sida's long-term funding ensured continuity in skills development, entrepreneurship support, and ecosystem convening at a time when Kosovo's innovation environment was evolving rapidly. ICK played a foundational role in building the early startup culture and nurturing a generation of entrepreneurs who continue to contribute to economic diversification. However, ICK's reduced presence in policy forums, combined with emerging competitors such as ITP Prizren and specialized private academies, diminished its influence as a national innovation leader. Moreover, persistent gaps in startup financing, regulatory frameworks, and scale-up support are systemic issues that Sida's support to a single institution could not resolve. While Sida helped preserve an important ecosystem actor, broader structural change requires coordinated and multi-actor interventions.

5. Without substantive governance reform and a shift in strategic direction, ICK's institutional and financial sustainability remains fragile and uncertain.

The evidence indicates that ICK has entered a period of heightened institutional vulnerability following Sida's exit. Leadership turnover, blurred governance–management boundaries, contested authority, and unresolved legal disputes have weakened internal cohesion and donor confidence. Financially, ICK remains heavily exposed to rent pressures, fluctuating donor priorities, and political developments affecting funding streams. Although the organisation has been proactive in mobilising short-term project funding, these efforts are unlikely to ensure long-term sustainability in the absence of structural reforms, a clarified strategic direction, and reduced dependence on core donor support. ICK retains strong brand recognition and technical credibility, but these assets are at risk unless governance, financial models, and institutional systems are strengthened.

6. The evaluation identifies a persistent gap between internal and external narratives, underscoring the need for stronger self-assessment, communication, and transparency.

Interviews reveal a consistent divergence between how ICK staff perceive performance and how external stakeholders (donors, government, and ecosystem actors) assess the organisation's trajectory. While the internal narrative emphasises continuity, adaptability, and commitment, external actors increasingly highlight stagnation in strategy, governance, and ecosystem leadership. This misalignment

signals insufficient internal reflection, weak M&E practices, and limited stakeholder communication. Addressing this gap is critical for rebuilding trust, securing future partnerships, and ensuring that institutional reforms are grounded in realistic appraisal.

On the whole, Sida's core support enabled ICK to remain a relevant, highly valued, and operationally resilient actor in Kosovo's innovation ecosystem. It ensured continuity, strengthened human capital, and contributed to the emergence of a generation of startups and digital professionals. However, systemic institutional weaknesses (especially in governance, strategic positioning, and internal systems) limited the depth and sustainability of results. As the ecosystem evolves and competition intensifies, ICK's future relevance and survival will depend on its willingness and ability to undertake meaningful governance reforms, refine its strategic focus, and develop sustainable financial and programmatic models.

6 Lessons Learned

What are the key lessons from Sida's use of the core support modality in Kosovo?

Lesson 1: Core support is transformative for institutional maturity but must be accompanied by clear “graduation” criteria and time-bound sustainability indicators.

Sida's flexible, multi-year core support enabled ICK to develop a stable team, institutional systems, and credibility within Kosovo's innovation ecosystem. This flexibility proved critical during crises (COVID-19, economic shocks) and allowed ICK to pivot rapidly to online delivery and new thematic priorities (green, AI, public-sector innovation). However, the absence of jointly defined *sustainability benchmarks* (e.g., revenue targets, premises solution, governance reform) limited Sida's ability to manage an orderly transition out of support.

Lesson 2: The comparison between ICK and ITP Prizren demonstrates that long-term institutional sustainability in innovation ecosystems depends heavily on structural conditions, particularly public ownership of premises, diversified revenue models, and strong government anchoring.

A comparative look at Kosovo's innovation ecosystem reveals important contrasts between ICK and the Innovation and Training Park (ITP) Prizren. While both institutions share similar mandates to foster entrepreneurship, digital skills, and technology transfer, their institutional trajectories have diverged in recent years. ITP Prizren has achieved faster institutional consolidation, supported by its clear governance model, government-owned infrastructure, and stable tenancy-based revenue. Its MakerSpace incubation and tenancy approach has enabled a continuous pipeline of startups and SMEs, linking incubation directly to production, prototyping, and commercialization. This model has ensured both operational sustainability and visible economic outputs.

By contrast, ICK's incubation activity has slowed in recent years, reflecting both resource constraints and strategic repositioning following Sida's phase-out. The centre has increasingly relied on short-term donor-funded training and public events, maintaining visibility and outreach but with fewer startups entering sustained incubation or acceleration. While ICK remains the ecosystem's most recognized innovation brand, its institutional model has proven more vulnerable to fluctuations in donor funding and the lack of a permanent physical and financial base. The comparison illustrates how structural factors, particularly ownership of premises, revenue diversification, and government engagement, have enabled ITP Prizren to

consolidate faster, while ICK's impact has become more project-driven and less continuous in its startup pipeline.

Lesson 3: Donor ecosystems benefit when one funder provides core institutional stability and others finance complementary thematic components, but clear division of roles and exit strategies are necessary.

Sida's institutional funding enabled ICK to coordinate inputs from multiple partners (LuxDev, EBRD, UNDP, USAID). Other donors confirmed that Sida's core support gave confidence for joint programming. *"Sida core support was rare here; it helped us align partners and define our mission. Those were the golden years of the startup ecosystem."* This model works best when all partners agree on a shared results framework and when the core funder has a clear exit timeline tied to institutional milestones.

Lesson 4: The ICK experience shows that while Sida's observer role on the Board contributed to transparency and continuity, it provided limited ability to influence governance or respond to emerging risks. Future core support programs would benefit from clearer and more structured engagement mechanisms that enable Sida to more effectively support oversight and accountability.

The experience at ICK illustrates that an observer role, while valuable for ensuring continuity and maintaining insight into institutional developments, offers limited scope for influencing governance practices or addressing emerging risks. Sida's presence on the ICK Board was viewed positively and contributed to maintaining transparency; however, the absence of decision-making authority meant that certain governance challenges, such as ambiguities in role division, overlapping responsibilities, and delays in updating internal regulations, could not be proactively addressed.

This highlights an important consideration for future Sida core support programs: long-term investments may benefit from more clearly defined governance engagement mechanisms. These could include structured advisory functions, agreed reform milestones, or other modalities that enable donors to support partners more effectively in strengthening oversight, accountability, and timely decision-making. Overall, Sida's observer role contributed to stability and institutional memory, but its limited mandate constrained its ability to guide governance improvements. Future support models could be enhanced through clearer expectations and more structured avenues for engagement, ensuring that donors can provide meaningful support when governance challenges emerge.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations for Sida

The following recommendations for Sida are derived from the evaluation's findings and conclusions and are intended to inform future decision-making. They address strategic positioning, funding modalities, governance due diligence, sustainability, and broader ecosystem engagement in Kosovo's innovation and private-sector development landscape.

Recommendation 1. Adopt a more strategic, ecosystem-level approach to future support for innovation and entrepreneurship in Kosovo.

Given the increasing complexity of Kosovo's innovation landscape and the emergence of new actors (e.g., ITP Prizren, VentureUP, private academies), Sida should consider shifting from institution-focused support toward a coordinated ecosystem approach. This may include:

- Supporting collaborative platforms and partnerships among key innovation actors rather than concentrating resources through a single institution.
- Investing in ecosystem-level public-private initiatives, particularly in areas such as AI, data, green innovation, and digital governance.
- Encouraging co-financing arrangements among donors to reduce fragmentation and increase coherence.

This would ensure that future Swedish investments contribute to systemic change rather than relying on the performance of a single organisation.

Recommendation 2. Apply strengthened governance due diligence and clear preconditions for any future core or institutional support.

The evaluation highlights that governance weaknesses were the main barrier to ICK's institutional performance and sustainability. For any future institutional funding (whether to ICK or other organisations) Sida should place stronger emphasis on governance readiness by requiring:

- Updated and compliant statutes and governance frameworks aligned with relevant legislation.
- Clear separation between governance and management, and transparent Board appointment processes.
- Defined roles, decision-making procedures, and conflict-of-interest safeguards.
- Evidence of internal transparency in financial reporting, HR procedures, and strategy implementation.
-

Where governance issues are identified, Sida could consider providing targeted technical assistance to support governance reform before or alongside financial support.

Recommendation 3. Encourage institutional reforms as a condition for any future engagement with ICK.

If Sida considers re-engagement with ICK in the future, it should do so only under clear, mutually agreed conditions. These could include:

- Adoption and implementation of a revised strategic plan with measurable objectives.
- Completion of a governance reform process ensuring clarity of roles and accountability.
- Reduction of fixed-cost vulnerabilities (e.g., securing public premises or alternative facilities).
- Establishment of a functional monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system.

Such conditions would ensure that ICK is institutionally prepared to translate support into sustainable results.

Recommendation 4. Prioritise funding modalities that directly address ecosystem gaps, particularly scale-up financing, advanced skills, and post-training pathways.

Findings show that Kosovo's ecosystem is transitioning from early-stage incubation toward scale-up needs. Sida's future support could focus on areas with the highest value-added:

- Investment readiness and scale-up programmes, including blended finance models.
- Advanced and specialised technical training, aligned with labour market growth sectors (AI, data science, cybersecurity).
- Structured employability pathways (internships, apprenticeships, corporate partnerships, mentorship networks).
- Support to gender-responsive and inclusive innovation programmes, ensuring inclusion is institutionally embedded rather than donor-driven.

This would ensure that Swedish support meets the evolving needs of the ecosystem rather than duplicating existing services.

Recommendation 5. Strengthen the use of contribution analysis and robust MEL systems in future programmes.

Given the limitations in outcome evidence from ICK, Sida should require future implementing partners to:

- Develop clear results frameworks, including outcome-level indicators and contribution pathways.

- Institutionalise tracer studies, alumni tracking, and startup performance tracking.
- Use disaggregated data for gender, age, and marginalised groups.
- Produce annual learning reports to support adaptive management.

Investing in monitoring systems early will enhance accountability, evaluability, and learning for both Sida and its partners.

Recommendation 6. Mainstream governance, financial sustainability, and institutional resilience as assessment criteria for core support across programmes.

The evaluation shows that core support is powerful but high-risk when governance and financial vulnerability are present. Sida should incorporate into its future core support frameworks:

- Risk assessments of fixed-cost exposure, especially rent and staff costs.
- Requirements for diversified revenue models and realistic financial sustainability plans.
- Periodic governance reviews as part of annual monitoring.
- Early-warning mechanisms for institutional instability (leadership turnover, Board paralysis, legal disputes).

This would reduce the likelihood of Sida’s support being used to compensate for structural weaknesses that institutions are not addressing.

Recommendation 7. Support policy engagement and institutional coordination at the national level.

To contribute to Kosovo’s long-term innovation policy environment, Sida can:

- Support structured public–private dialogue platforms involving key ecosystem actors.
- Facilitate cooperation between ministries, universities, the private sector, and innovation hubs.
- Promote evidence-based policymaking on innovation, digital skills, and entrepreneurship.

This would help re-establish coordinated national-level direction and reduce fragmentation.

Recommendation 8. In any future partnership, encourage more realistic self-assessment, communication, and openness among implementing partners.

The evaluation revealed a persistent gap between internal narratives and external perceptions at ICK. Sida should encourage future partners to:

- Conduct periodic self-assessments and stakeholder perception surveys.
- Use independent facilitators to support internal reflection and organisational learning.
- Increase transparency in strategic decisions, financial reporting, and progress updates.

This will help align internal and external expectations and prevent similar narrative gaps from undermining credibility and partnerships.

Recommendations for ICK

The conclusion of Sida’s core support funding underscores the need for ICK to build long-term independence and institutional resilience. The recommendations below set out the key steps necessary to achieve this shift.

Recommendation 1. Secure rent-free or subsidized long-term premises through renewed negotiations with the Municipality of Pristina and central-level institutions:

- Re-open discussions based on documented public interest and ICK’s economic-development mandate.
- Consider phased relocation to reduce financial risk.

Reducing rent costs will significantly strengthen ICK’s long-term financial stability and free resources for strategic growth.

Recommendation 2. Reform and align ICK’s Statute and internal governance framework:

- Align the statute with the amended Law on NGOs (2019, 2022).
- Clearly separate governance (Board) from executive management roles.
- Introduce term limits, role definitions, and conflict-of-interest clauses linked to the NGO Complaints Commission (Regulation No. 01/2024).
- Reconcile inconsistencies across governance documents, especially between the Statute and the Internal Regulation, ensuring unified interpretation of Board term duration, appointment procedures, and decision-making powers.
- Ensure that all governance documents are publicly available.

A modern, legally aligned governance framework will enhance ICK’s institutional credibility, reduce risks, and support more effective strategic leadership.

Recommendation 3. Expand and diversify the Board to strengthen oversight and accountability:

- Increase the number of board members to at least 5 with expertise in finance, technology, legal affairs, and organizational governance.
- Ensure inclusion of independent members with no direct operational involvement.
- Establish separate committees for finance, HR, audit and a requirement that Board members must sign annual conflict-of-interest declaration.

A more diverse and professional Board will improve oversight, strengthen accountability, and support high-quality decision-making.

Recommendation 4. Clarify and formalize executive authority and management roles:

- Finalize and formally approve the Executive Director’s ToR with clear delegation of authority.
- Appoint a Managing Director with a clear mandate, delegated authority, and performance accountability.
- Eliminate overlap between Board members and operational staff positions.
- Introduce transparent HR procedures for recruitment, performance evaluation, and contract renewal.
- Recruit or designate an HR Officer with responsibility for compliance with labour, gender, and data protection laws.

Clear leadership structures and professional HR systems will enhance operational effectiveness of ICK, staff motivation, and internal coherence.

Recommendation 5. Institutionalize transparency and compliance mechanisms:

- Apply for Public Beneficiary Status to reduce operational costs through VAT exemptions.
- Conduct an independent governance audit every two years.
- Publish annual reports with financial statements and performance data at ICK website.

Strengthening transparency and compliance will boost donor confidence, safeguard institutional integrity, and reinforce public trust.

Annexes

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Introduction

This evaluation concerns the Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK) and the core institutional support provided by Sida between 2019 and 2024. The evaluation is commissioned by the Embassy of Sweden in Pristina as an end-of-programme assessment, with the aim of confirming achieved results, consolidating learning, and supporting responsible closure of a long-term strategic partnership.

Since 2015, Sida has supported ICK as a strategic actor in Kosovo's entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem. From 2019 to 2024, Sida provided core support totalling SEK 21.6 million, focused on strengthening ICK's institutional capacity and enabling quality programming in areas such as startup incubation, tech-oriented training, and ecosystem development.

Sida's support aligns with the Strategy for Sweden's Reform Cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey (2021–2027), particularly the goal of inclusive economic development and productive employment with decent working conditions. It also complements Sweden's broader engagement in private sector development, digital transformation, and democratic governance in Kosovo.

Initially planned to end in 2022, the support was extended through 2024 due COVID-19- related disruptions and the dissolution of the Ministry of Innovation in 2020, which fragmented institutional responsibilities and hindered ICK's ability to align with government counterparts. These developments hampered ICK's institutional coordination efforts and delayed strategic progress. Sida concluded that an extension would provide ICK time to rebuild public partnerships, stabilize operations, and move toward greater financial sustainability, given its increasing demand for tech-related services.

An efficiency audit conducted by Sida in June 2022 confirmed that ICK's internal systems and controls were sound and capable of ensuring quality delivery. The extension was assessed as both justified and necessary to allow ICK to fulfill its strategic objectives and further consolidate its position in Kosovo's innovation and entrepreneurship landscape.

While other donors (such as GIZ, EU, USAID, UNDP, Lux-Dev, and the Norwegian Embassy) have contributed to the wider ecosystem, this evaluation will focus exclusively on Sida's core funding support to ICK

Evaluation object: intervention to be evaluated

The evaluation object is Sida's core institutional support to the Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK), implemented over the period 2019–2024, with a total Sida contribution of SEK 21.6 million. This support was provided through a series of multi-year agreements and amendments, focusing on strengthening ICK as a national hub for digital innovation, startup development, and youth-oriented entrepreneurship in Kosovo.

Goals, objectives, and theory of change

The objective of Sida's core support to ICK was to strengthen the institution's internal systems, human capacity, and programmatic delivery to position it as a credible and sustainable driver of inclusive

digital and economic development in Kosovo. ICK's theory of change rests on the following causal pathway:

Inputs: Core funding from Sida and other donors to support ICK's institutional development, program delivery, and operational flexibility.

Activities: Capacity building for staff; startup incubation and acceleration; delivery of ICT- related training programs; ecosystem facilitation; policy dialogue; gender and youth outreach; piloting of green and digital initiatives.

Outputs: Improved internal governance, delivery of high-quality training and startup services, enhanced visibility and partnerships, improved access to digital and entrepreneurial skills for youth and women.

Outcomes: Strengthened human capital and institutional resilience within ICK; increased employment and market participation among youth and women; growth of startups and innovation-based enterprises.

Impact: Contribution to inclusive and sustainable economic development in Kosovo through entrepreneurship, innovation, and digital transformation.

Target groups

The direct target groups of the intervention include:

ICK staff and management, who benefit from strengthened institutional systems, professional development, and capacity-building support.

Startups and entrepreneurs receiving services through ICK's incubator, mentorship programs, and seed funding schemes.

Youth and professionals participating in training programs and skills development courses in areas such as cloud computing, design, software development, and IT project management.

End beneficiaries

The end beneficiaries are:

Young people, including women, across Kosovo seeking access to employment, entrepreneurship, and digital skills.

Kosovar startups and SMEs, particularly those in emerging sectors such as green tech, software services, creative industries, and digital commerce.

The broader innovation ecosystem, including potential investors, academic institutions, and local government stakeholders engaging with ICK programs and graduates.

Other key stakeholders

Public institutions (e.g., Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Industry, entrepreneurship and Trade, municipality of Prishtina) engaged in policymaking or regulatory frameworks for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Donor organizations (e.g., Lux Dev, GIZ, Norwegian Embassy, EU, UNDP) working in parallel sectors or co-investing in initiatives like Electric Mobility or joint training programs.

Private sector partners and companies absorbing ICK-trained graduates or collaborating with startups.

International networks, including diaspora-linked businesses, that expand market and learning opportunities for ICK beneficiaries.

Implementation set-up

ICK operates as a Kosovar NGO, governed by a board and executive management, with a core team delivering its programs across three strategic pillars:

- Training and skills development
- Startup support and incubation
- Innovation ecosystem development and partnerships

Sida's contribution was provided as core support, allowing for flexible use across administrative, strategic, and programmatic areas. Sida staff engaged in regular dialogue and reporting with ICK. Oversight was based on annual work plans, narrative and financial reports, risk analysis, and external audits.

Funds budgeted and spent

Total Sida budget: SEK 21.6 million (2019–2024)

Type of funding: Core support (not earmarked per activity)

Budget absorption: As reported in financial documentation and annual budget comparison for 2024. Spending has generally been in line with work plans.

Geographical area

ICK is headquartered in Pristina and delivers programs throughout Kosovo, targeting young people, startups, and aspiring entrepreneurs from across the country.

Support from other donors

- GIZ Kosovo: Co-funded green innovation and startup support (e.g., Electric Mobility infrastructure and joint hackathons)
- Norwegian Embassy: Previous support to institutional development and digital training
- UNDP and local actors: Occasional coordination on digital inclusion and employment promotion
- At present Lux Dev is supporting ICK with 2-year program.

Specific issues/challenges for evaluators to consider

Ecosystem dependencies: ICK's impact is influenced by external factors such as labor market demand, policy frameworks, and donor trends.

Sustainability: ICK remains donor-dependent and is exploring diversified income streams (e.g., paid training, consulting, sponsorships).

Scalability: Several initiatives show promising growth, but require validation of ICK's support role and impact.

Gender and inclusion: Sida emphasized inclusion, but uptake and measurable impacts among disadvantaged groups may vary.

COVID-19 disruptions: Between 2020–2022 digital transformation accelerated but also caused delays in face-to-face delivery and startup scaling.

Sustainability and exit risks

ICK has demonstrated limited progress in establishing a sustainable operational model independent of Sida funding. It remains highly reliant on donor support for core functions, including rent, staff salaries, and operational costs. Despite longstanding efforts, ICK has not secured free premises from government institutions, a critical issue given its stated strategic dependency on such support. Evaluators should assess the realism and credibility of ICK's long-term sustainability plans and investigate the implications of ongoing donor dependency.

Implementation gaps in financial strategy and ownership

Despite previous calls for financial diversification and strategic repositioning, ICK has not materialized alternative revenue streams or donor partnerships. The promised strategic plan, being developed with

EBRD support, may be too late to mitigate the exit risks associated with Sida's funding phase-out. Evaluators should consider whether there was an adequate response to early warnings and if ownership and accountability mechanisms functioned as intended.

Shifting ecosystem and competitive positioning

The innovation ecosystem in Kosovo has evolved. Other players, including municipal innovation hubs and donor-supported centers like ITP in Prizren, have entered the space. ICK's relative dominance has eroded. Evaluators should assess whether ICK has adapted strategically to this new competitive landscape or if its theory of change remains anchored in a previous ecosystem configuration.

Inclusion and reach challenges

While ICK has reported on activities promoting women in tech and entrepreneurship, inclusion of minorities and marginalized groups remains weak. The CoP notes a low level of understanding and capacity to engage these target groups effectively. Evaluators should assess to what extent the inclusion objectives were integrated into operations and programming, and whether sufficient measures were taken to overcome structural or attitudinal barriers.

Governance and institutional support uncertainty

The government of Kosovo has so far failed to formally back ICK, despite broad rhetorical support. There is ambiguity around whether this is due to political unwillingness, strategic misalignment, or weak advocacy. Evaluators should consider to what extent institutional support was realistically planned for and actively pursued by ICK, and whether governance dialogue and engagement strategies were effective.

External political and donor context

The evaluation should also consider the impact of exogenous factors, such as recent EU restrictive measures toward Kosovo, which have limited ICK's ability to apply for EU funding or engage in regional programming. The degree to which this external context was foreseen, mitigated, or strategically managed by ICK should be part of the analysis.

For further information, the intervention proposal is attached as Annex D.

Evaluation purpose: intended use

This evaluation is an end-of-project evaluation of Sida's core support to Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK) for the period 2019–2024. Its main purpose is to assess the extent to which the intervention achieved its intended results, whether the core support modality proved effective and justified, and if a continued partnership with ICK aligns with Sida's strategic objectives for Kosovo going forward.

The evaluation will capture key learnings from nearly a decade of Sida's core institutional support to ICK. It will help Sida and the wider development community understand what worked well, what did not, and why. These insights will inform the design of future engagements in the innovation, digital skills, and startup sectors, whether through ICK, other partners, or new modalities of support.

The evaluation will provide a transparent, evidence-based account of results achieved with Swedish taxpayer funding and generate a shared understanding among Sida, ICK, and other stakeholders about the impact and sustainability of the intervention. It will also serve as a reference for ICK's own internal learning and institutional development.

This is a summative, external evaluation commissioned specifically to close Sida's 2019–2024 contribution and inform any future engagement.

Evaluation purpose and intended use

The evaluation is not intended to inform a potential continuation of support. Instead, its purpose is to help Sida validate achieved results, capture lessons learned, and ensure responsible closure of the partnership.

Extract lessons for future programme design

The evaluation will capture key learnings from nearly a decade of Sida's core institutional support to ICK. It will help Sida and the wider development community understand what worked well, what did not, and why. These insights will inform the design of future engagements in the innovation, digital skills, and startup sectors—whether through ICK, other partners, or new modalities of support.

Enhance transparency, accountability, and ownership

The evaluation will provide a transparent, evidence-based account of results achieved with Swedish taxpayer funding and generate a shared understanding among Sida, ICK, and other stakeholders about the impact and sustainability of the intervention. It will also serve as a reference for ICK's own internal learning and institutional development.

This is not a midterm review or a monitoring report, but a summative, external evaluation commissioned specifically to close Sida's 2019–2024 contribution and inform any future engagement.

Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation should be grounded in a utilization-focused and participatory approach, designed to ensure that findings are relevant and actionable for Sida, ICK, and other stakeholders. The evaluator is expected to combine retrospective performance analysis with forward-looking reflections on institutional relevance, capacity, and strategic positioning. This is an end-of-programme evaluation, so the emphasis is on summative assessment and strategic decision-making.

Minimum methodological expectations include:

Desk review

The evaluator shall review all relevant project documents provided by Sida and ICK, including but not limited to:

- Project proposal and strategic plan
- Annual narrative and financial reports
- Risk analyses and audit reports
- Conclusion on Performance reports (2022, 2023)
- Sida-ICK agreements and amendments.

Key informant interviews

Interviews should be conducted with:

- ICK leadership and staff
- Sida programme officer.
- Selected ICK beneficiaries (startups, trainees)
- Partner organizations and donors (e.g., Lux Dev, GIZ, EBRD)
- Relevant public institutions
- Other actors in the innovation ecosystem (as needed)

A clear plan for stakeholder mapping and sampling should be proposed in the inception report.

Field visit

A field visit to ICK headquarters in Pristina is expected, including interaction with ongoing programs. Virtual interviews may be used for out-of-town stakeholders or diaspora actors.

Use of DAC evaluation criteria

The evaluation must use the OECD/DAC criteria:

- Relevance
- Effectiveness
- Efficiency
- Impact
- Sustainability

Cross-cutting issues, gender equality, youth inclusion, and environmental sustainability, must be integrated into each criterion, not treated as stand-alone questions.

Triangulation and validation

The evaluator must ensure that findings are based on triangulated data and well-substantiated evidence. Sida encourages use of structured interview guides, systematic coding of responses, and clear traceability of conclusions.

Limitations

Any methodological limitations, especially those related to attribution, generalizability, or missing data, should be clearly stated and discussed in the final report.

Evaluation users

This evaluation is primarily intended for internal learning and accountability by the Embassy of Sweden in Pristina. It is not intended to prepare for a new phase of support to ICK but to confirm results, draw final lessons, and ensure responsible closure of a long-term partnership.

User	Type	Role and use
Embassy of Sweden in Pristina	Primary	Commissioning and managing the evaluation. Will use the findings to validate the results of Sida's support to ICK from 2019–2024, extract lessons for future programming in the innovation/startup sector, and support a responsible closure of the contribution.
Sida Evaluation Unit	Primary	Will use the evaluation as an internal learning case on core support and exit strategies.
Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK)	Primary	The implementing partner. Will be engaged in interviews, validation, and review of findings. May use the evaluation for its own institutional learning and documentation of achievements, but
		the evaluation is not intended to shape a future Sida-funded phase.
Other donors and ecosystem stakeholders	Secondary	May consult the final report to understand ICK's performance and role in the broader innovation landscape in Kosovo. No active involvement is expected.

NOTE: This evaluation is not intended for external advocacy, new funding preparation, or strategy design, but for internal consolidation and responsible closure

Evaluation purpose: Timing

This evaluation is being commissioned at the conclusion of Sida's core support to Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK), which covered the period 2019–2024. The timing is directly linked to the end of the contribution and is intended to serve as a final, independent assessment of the results achieved, institutional progress made, and lessons learned during this long-term partnership.

Conducting the evaluation now allows Sida to:

- Consolidate performance data and validate reported results across the full implementation period;
- Ensure institutional memory is captured while relevant personnel and partners are still accessible;
- Document learning and accountability for internal and external stakeholders at the close of the support;
- Support responsible closure, with evidence-based conclusions that may be useful for ICK, other donors, and the wider innovation ecosystem in Kosovo.
- No continuation or new phase of support is under consideration, making this a summative, end-of-intervention evaluation serving internal purposes of assessment, learning, and closure.

Evaluation scope

The evaluation will cover the entire core support period from 2019 to 2024, corresponding to Sida's direct core funding of 21,6 million SEK to ICK. It will exclude all short-term or side-funded ICK initiatives that were not financed through Sida's core contribution, unless clearly relevant to institutional performance or sustainability.

Specifically, the evaluation will cover:

The entire period of Sida's core support from 2019 through 2024, including strategic plans, annual work plans, and implementation during the original and extended periods of the agreement.

Only activities and results financed under Sida's core support shall be included. The evaluation will exclude side-funded or short-term initiatives that were not financed by Sida, unless they directly affected the sustainability or institutional performance of the Sida-funded intervention.

Geographical area

The evaluation will focus on Pristina based activities, which represent ICK's operational base. Activities conducted outside Pristina, such as regional outreach or trainings delivered online, will only be considered to the extent that they are part of Sida-supported programming.

Target groups

The evaluation will examine ICK's results with respect to:

- Primary target groups that consist of startups, digital skills trainees, youth and women participants, and ICK's internal staff and teams.
- End-beneficiaries that are broader communities of aspiring entrepreneurs and youth in Kosovo.
- Other stakeholders such as public institutions, donors, private sector actors, and ecosystem collaborators that interacted with or were influenced by ICK.

Programmatic focus

The evaluation will assess progress and learning across ICK's core pillars:

- Digital skills development
- Startup support and entrepreneurship incubation
- Institutional development and ecosystem positioning

A.

Cross-cutting elements such as gender inclusion, youth outreach, organizational sustainability, and stakeholder collaboration will be assessed as integral dimensions of the intervention.

Donor-funded activities or partnerships not financed by Sida (e.g. with EBRD or GIZ) will only be considered if they demonstrably contributed to ICK's institutional sustainability or are necessary for understanding Sida-supported outcomes

If needed, the scope of the evaluation may be further elaborated by the evaluator in the inception report.

Evaluation questions

The evaluation will respond to the following key questions. These questions are directly aligned with the intended purpose of the evaluation, to validate results, extract learning, and support institutional accountability at the end of Sida's core support to ICK (2019–2024).

1. To what extent have the planned results been achieved, for whom, and with what contribution from Sida's support?
2. To what extent was the support to ICK aligned with the needs of its target groups and with Kosovo's evolving development context and priorities?
3. To what extent is the institutional and financial sustainability of ICK likely to be maintained following the end of Sida support?
4. How well were resources (financial, human, and institutional) used in delivering results, and were there significant factors that supported or hindered efficient implementation?
5. What contribution has Sida's support made to strengthening Kosovo's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem?

Questions are expected to be further developed in the tender by the tenderer and further refined during the inception phase of the evaluation. Please note that in line with Sida's utilisation-focused approach, the final evaluation questions should always serve the overall purpose of the evaluation (the intended use and the primary users).

Evaluation quality

Evaluation quality concerns both the **evaluation approach**, i.e. how the evaluation work is implemented, and **evaluation methodology**, i.e. how the conclusions are made.

When it comes to the **evaluation approach**, the evaluation shall:

- be utilisation-focused
- take Sida's development perspectives into account
- make sure no one is harmed

The evaluation shall be utilisation-focused which means that the evaluators must facilitate the entire evaluation process with careful consideration of how all aspects of the evaluation will affect the use of the evaluation. Therefore, the evaluation must be planned and conducted in ways to enhance the utilisation of both the findings and of the process itself, to inform decisions and improve performance. This approach entails close interaction between the evaluators and the primary users in the evaluation assignment. The interaction must last throughout the entire evaluation process. An important component of this participatory approach is to enable joint knowledge creation between evaluators and the users of the evaluation. The evaluation process shall be adapted to major context changes if needed, so that the evaluation always continues to serve the overall purpose/intended use.

Whenever relevant the evaluation shall take Sida's five development perspectives into account, when they design and implement the evaluation.¹ The perspectives shall be integrated in all Sida's operations and shall therefore be considered in the evaluation design and implementation of the evaluation.

The evaluators must consider if any part of their work can harm any group, especially groups that face discrimination. If so, they need to mitigate these risks. In cases where sensitive or confidential issues are to be addressed in the evaluation, evaluators have to ensure an evaluation design and process that do not put informants and stakeholders at risk in any step of the evaluation process.

When it comes to **evaluation methodology**, the evaluation shall:

- be reliable
- be transparent

Reliable means that the ambition at the outset is that the evaluators will handle all relevant methodological challenges so that each conclusion can be trusted beyond reasonable doubt and can hold up against external scrutiny. A lower level of reliability for specific questions is only acceptable if it is due to reasons that was not foreseeable at the outset or if it was agreed at start of the evaluation.

¹ The five development perspectives are: poor people's perspective on development, human rights-based approach, the conflict perspective, the gender equality perspective and the climate and environment perspective. Please note that what we are speaking of here is how the evaluation is implemented. Any of the perspectives could also be examined by one or several of the evaluation questions.

Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation question	Indicators	Data collection instruments	Sources of information	Data analysis
Relevance	To what extent was the support to ICK aligned with the needs of its target groups and with Kosovo's evolving development context and priorities, including shifts in the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem?	<p>Existence of needs assessments.</p> <p>Degree of alignment with national and Sida strategies, including Kosovo's national strategies (Digital Agenda, SME Development Strategy, Innovation Strategy).</p> <p>Evidence of adjustments made in response to ecosystem changes (e.g., digitalisation trends, regulatory frameworks, market dynamics).</p> <p>Stakeholder perception ratings.</p> <p>Evidence of ICK's positioning/differentiation within the evolving ecosystem (e.g., vis-à-vis other hubs, like ITP Prizren, municipal hubs).</p> <p>Alignment of ICK services with HRBA principles (participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency).</p>	<p>Desk review, Sida agreements, ICK strategies, national policy documents.</p> <p>KIIs with Sida, ICK staff, public institutions, other donors, ecosystem actors.</p> <p>FGDs with beneficiaries.</p> <p>Online surveys with ICK partners and beneficiaries.</p> <p>Contextual analysis.</p>	<p>Sida agreements, amendments, reports.</p> <p>ICK strategy, monitoring reports.</p> <p>Kosovo national policy and strategy documents (Digital Agenda, SME Development, Innovation Strategy).</p> <p>Donor reports.</p> <p>Feedback from beneficiaries, partners, and independent experts.</p>	<p>Compare identified needs with activities delivered.</p> <p>Triangulate beneficiary feedback with national strategies.</p> <p>Analyse gaps in responsiveness to ecosystem shifts.</p> <p>Assess ICK's positioning against other hubs.</p>
Effectiveness	To what extent have planned results been achieved, for whom, and with	<p>Achievement of planned outputs/outcomes.</p> <p>Evidence of direct benefits to target groups (e.g., change in</p>	<p>Desk review of ICK annual reports, SIDA performance evaluation.</p>	<p>Sida reporting documents.</p> <p>ICK monitoring reports.</p>	<p>Aggregate output achievement data with survey/FGD evidence.</p>

	what contribution from Sida?	<p>skills, employment, startup growth rates).</p> <p>Beneficiary satisfaction levels (start-ups, trainees, private sector partners).</p> <p>Evidence of adaptive capacity built among startups and entrepreneurs to ecosystem changes (e.g., market shifts, technological transitions).</p> <p>Long-term outcomes (e.g., job creation, sustained startup survival rates).</p> <p>% of women/minority/other marginalized groups (e.g., LGBTQI) participation in incubation and training.</p> <p>Achievement of outputs/outcomes for different groups (women, youth, minorities (if applicable).</p> <p>Stakeholder feedback on inclusivity, equity, and adaptability.</p> <p>Evidence of conflict-sensitive approaches in engaging diverse groups.</p> <p>Environmental policies and practices applied by ICK.</p> <p>Number of green startups incubated or supported.</p>	<p>KIIs with Sida, ICK staff, public institutions, private sector, ecosystem actors.</p> <p>FGDs with beneficiaries.</p> <p>Online surveys with ICK partners.</p>	<p>Beneficiary feedback, disaggregated data.</p> <p>Donor feedback report.</p> <p>Disaggregated data (gender, age, minority groups).</p>	<p>Analyse disaggregated results by gender/youth/minorities.</p> <p>Conduct contribution analysis to assess Sida's role versus other donors.</p>
Efficiency	How well were resources (financial, human, and	Budget vs actual expenditure (deviation, underspending/overspending).	Desk review ICK financial reports, Sida financial	ICK financial reports and budgets (2019–2024).	Conduct cost-effectiveness comparisons (budget vs. outputs achieved).

	<p>institutional) used in delivering results, and were there significant factors that supported or hindered efficient implementation?</p>	<p>Delivery vs work plan timelines.</p> <p>Adjustments in resource use reflect ecosystem changes (e.g., COVID-19 disruptions, digital/market shifts).</p> <p>Audit compliance ratings.</p> <p>Stakeholder satisfaction with Sida’s flexibility and adaptive support.</p> <p>% of Sida core support allocated to rent annually (2019–2024)</p> <p>Trend analysis of rent costs as a share of total ICK budget</p> <p>Stakeholder perceptions of the opportunity costs of Sida’s support being used for rent (e.g., what alternative uses were foregone)</p> <p>Evidence of attempts made by ICK, Sida, and partners to secure rent-free premises and their outcomes.</p> <p>Comparative analysis of overhead costs at ICK vs. similar innovation hubs in the region.</p> <p>Proportion of resources allocated to outreach and inclusion activities.</p>	<p>reports and audits.</p> <p>KIIs with Sida, ICK staff, other donors.</p> <p>Comparative cost analysis.</p> <p>Survey/ interview with beneficiaries on adequacy and timelessness of resources.</p>	<p>Sida Audit and compliance records.</p> <p>ICK workplans, Audit reports, stakeholder interviews.</p>	<p>Analyse timeliness against workplans; assess adaptive reallocations during crises (COVID-19, market shifts).</p> <p>Audit/ financial compliance review.</p> <p>Triangulation of financial data with stakeholder perceptions.</p>
<p>Impact</p>	<p>What contribution has Sida’s support made to</p>	<p>Growth rates of supported startups.</p>	<p>Desk review of ICK reports.</p>	<p>ICK annual and impact reports.</p>	<p>Map ecosystem-level changes (institutions, networks, startups).</p>

	<p>strengthening Kosovo's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem, including its capacity to adapt to change?</p>	<p>Stakeholder perceptions of ICK's role.</p> <p>Number/type of policy or ecosystem initiatives influenced (e.g., Kosovo ICT Strategy, entrepreneurship laws)</p> <p>Examples of adaptation in ecosystem actors (new services, pivots, partnerships)</p> <p>Perceptions of government, donors, and private sector on ICK's policy role</p> <p>Perceptions of ICK's role in promoting inclusive participation in the ecosystem.</p>	<p>KIIs with Sida, ICK staff, public institutions, other donors, ecosystem actors; FGDs with beneficiaries; online surveys with ICK partners and beneficiaries.</p> <p>Online surveys with ecosystem partners and beneficiaries.</p>	<p>Sida progress reports and evaluation.</p> <p>National policy (Kosovo ICT Strategy, SME).</p> <p>Beneficiary feedback.</p>	<p>Analyse policy documents for ICK contributions;</p> <p>Trace spillover effects through case studies.</p> <p>Findings will be tested against the reconstructed ToC to trace causal pathways from Sida's support to ecosystem changes.</p> <p>Contribution analysis will triangulate stakeholder perspectives, assess alternative explanations, and establish Sida's plausible influence (e.g., through ICK's institutional resilience, flexibility, and credibility). Adaptive capacity will be examined to see how support enabled response to emerging opportunities and challenges.</p>
Sustainability	<p>To what extent is the institutional and financial sustainability of ICK likely after Sida support ends, and is it positioned to adapt to future ecosystem changes?</p>	<p>Quality of ICK long-term strategic plan and viable financial sustainable plan.</p> <p>Diversified income sources and reduced dependency on donors (% of budget from non-Sida sources; revenue diversification (training, consultancy, services).</p> <p>Level of donor dependency.</p>	<p>Desk review of ICK financial strategies, sustainability/exit plans and partnership agreements.</p> <p>KIIs with Sida, ICK staff, other donors, public institutions, ecosystem actors.</p>	<p>ICK financial reports and sustainability strategies.</p> <p>Sida evaluations and exit planning documents.</p> <p>MoU's and partnership agreements with private sector, municipalities, and donors.</p>	<p>Examine financial data for diversification trends.</p> <p>Test sustainability projections (with/without donor support).</p> <p>Analyse governance/OCA data for institutional capacity.</p>

		<p>Evidence of partnerships/MoU's sustained beyond Sida's support.</p> <p>Rent-free premises secured.</p> <p>Institutional sustainability in terms of governance, adaptability, and staff retention.</p> <p>Evidence of institutional governance aligned with HRBA (participatory decision-making, accountability mechanisms).</p>	<p>Comparative sustainability analysis.</p> <p>Surveys with partners and beneficiaries on confidence in ICK's long-term viability.</p>	<p>Stakeholder feedback (partners, donors, beneficiaries).</p>	<p>Assess credibility of exit strategy with partner feedback.</p> <p>Risk analysis of future ecosystem changes and ICK's adaptive strategies.</p>
Learning	What are the key lessons from Sida's use of the core support modality in Kosovo?	<p>Critical lessons identified by stakeholders.</p> <p>Stakeholder reflections on Sida's core support modality.</p> <p>Credibility of ICK's long-term sustainability strategy.</p> <p>Examples of application of Sida's core support in other contexts.</p> <p>Lessons on integrating gender equality and HRBA into core support.</p>	<p>Desk review of Sida learning papers, ICK strategic plans and evaluations.</p> <p>KIIs with Sida, ICK, other donors, public institutions and ecosystem actors.</p> <p>FGDs with beneficiaries to capture perceptions of what worked well and what could improve.</p> <p>Online surveys with partners and ecosystem actors on lessons learned.</p>	<p>Sida's internal learning documents and evaluation reports.</p> <p>ICK strategic plans and sustainability/exit strategies.</p> <p>Stakeholder interviews (Sida, ICK, donors, public institutions, beneficiaries).</p>	<p>Synthesize lessons from stakeholder interviews and Sida papers.</p> <p>Analyse ICK's sustainability plan for realism.</p> <p>Identify transferable insights applicable to other contexts (e.g., donor dependency, innovation ecosystems).</p> <p>Reflection on challenges (e.g., reliance on Sida, policy gaps) to inform future strategies.</p>

Annex 3: Data Collection Tools

KII Guide for Sida

Relevance

1. To what extent was Sida's core support to ICK aligned with the needs of target groups and Kosovo's evolving development context?

Probes:

- How did ICK assess the needs of entrepreneurs and startups?
- In what ways did Sida ensure alignment with Kosovo's Digital Agenda, SME Development, and Innovation strategies?
- How did ICK respond to contextual changes such as digitalisation trends or regulatory shifts?
- How does Sida perceive ICK's role compared to other hubs (e.g., ITP Prizren, municipal hubs)?

Effectiveness

2. To what extent have the planned results of Sida's support been achieved, for whom, and with what contribution from Sida?

Probes:

- What outputs/outcomes were most successfully achieved?
- How has Sida's support contributed to tangible benefits for startups (skills, jobs, funding, growth)?
- How Sida's support has contributed to ICK as an organisation?
- How satisfied are beneficiaries with ICK's services How has Sida's core support supported inclusion (women, youth, minorities, LGBTQI)?
- Has Sida enabled startups to adapt to market or technological shifts?

Efficiency

3. How efficiently were Sida's financial, human, and institutional resources used by ICK in delivering results?

Probes:

- How would you assess budget allocations vs. actual expenditures?
- What factors influenced Sida's flexibility and responsiveness (e.g., during COVID-19)?
- How do you view Sida's role in covering ICK rent — what opportunity costs or trade-offs were involved?
- How efficient is ICK in comparison with hubs in the region (e.g., ITP Prizren, municipal hubs)?

Impact

4. What contribution has Sida's support made to strengthening Kosovo's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem?

Probes:

- What ecosystem-level changes can be traced to Sida's support?
- Has Sida's involvement enhanced ICK's influence on policies (ICT Strategy, SME policies)?
- How do government, donors, and private sector actors perceive Sida's contribution?

- Can you share examples of spillover effects (e.g., partnerships, new services, pivots)?
- Are there any unexpected or negative effects of Sida core support?

Sustainability

5. How sustainable is ICK likely to be after Sida's support ends?

Probes:

- How do you assess ICK's long-term financial and strategic planning?
- Has Sida encouraged income diversification beyond donor funding?
- What partnerships or MoUs will continue after Sida exits?
- How does Sida view ICK's institutional capacity (governance, adaptability, staff retention)?
 - How credible is ICK's exit/sustainability strategy from Sida's perspective?

Cross-Cutting Issues

6. How has Sida's support to ICK addressed gender equality, youth inclusion, environmental sustainability, conflict sensitivity, and human rights?

Probes:

- How ICK covered these issues?
- What strategies did Sida encourage for inclusion of women, minorities, and marginalized groups?
- How effective has outreach been to underrepresented groups (e.g., Roma, Serb, youth)?
- Has Sida promoted environmental or "green" innovation through ICK?
- How did Sida ensure conflict-sensitive and equitable approaches?

Learning

7. What key lessons has Sida learned from providing core support to ICK in Kosovo?

Probes:

- What aspects of core support worked well, and what challenges arose?
- How might these lessons apply in other contexts where Sida uses core support?
- What insights could inform future Sida strategies in innovation ecosystems?

Closing

- Are there any other reflections you would like to share about ICK's role, Sida's support, or Kosovo's innovation ecosystem?
- Thank the participant for their time and input.

KII Guide for ICK

Section I: ICK Senior Management

Relevance

1: How has ICK's work aligned with the needs of target groups and Kosovo's innovation/entrepreneurship priorities?

Probes:

- What evidence do you rely on to identify target group needs?
- How has ICK adapted to contextual changes (e.g., digitalisation, new competitors like ITP Prizren)?
- How do you position ICK compared to other hubs?

Effectiveness

2: What major results has ICK achieved with Sida's support?

Probes:

- Which programs/activities have been most impactful for startups, women, youth, minorities?
- Can you provide examples of beneficiaries' growth (skills, jobs, business survival)?
- How has ICK supported startups to adapt to market/tech shifts?
- How did Sida's support help ICK achieve these results?

Efficiency

3: How efficiently has ICK made use of Sida's resources (financial, human, institutional)?

Probes:

- What were the main challenges in budget use (e.g., rent, COVID-19 disruptions)?
- Were there trade-offs in resource allocation (e.g., rent vs program funding)?
- How does ICK compare to other regional hubs in cost structure?

Impact

4: How has ICK contributed to strengthening Kosovo's innovation ecosystem?

Probes:

- Has ICK influenced national strategies or policies (ICT, SME, innovation)?
- Can you share examples of partnerships, spillovers, or ecosystem-wide impacts?
- How do external stakeholders perceive ICK's role?
- What would not have been achieved without Sida's support?
- Has the support had any negative or unexpected effects? Which?

Sustainability

5: What are ICK's plans for long-term institutional and financial sustainability?

Probes:

- How diversified are ICK's funding sources beyond Sida?
- What is being done to secure rent-free premises or alternative financing?
- How strong are ICK's governance and staff retention mechanisms?

Cross-cutting Issues

6: How does ICK integrate gender equality, youth inclusion, minority participation, and environmental sustainability?

Probes:

- What strategies have worked well to reach women, Roma, Serb, and other minorities?
- How many "green" startups have been supported?
- How does ICK ensure conflict sensitivity and equitable access?
- What is the share of startups with minorities, women, youth?

Learning

7: What lessons has ICK learned from Sida's core support?

Probes:

- What worked best in Sida's funding modality?
- What would you recommend changing for future donor support?
- Are there insights transferable to other hubs or contexts?

Section II: ICK Staff (Mentors/Trainers /Consultants)

Relevance

1: How well did Sida's core support meet the needs of startups and entrepreneurs you work with?

Probes:

- How did you identify participants' needs (before/after training)?
- Have you noticed changes in demand for certain skills (e.g., digital, green, AI)?
- How do you ensure programs are relevant to women, youth, and minorities?

Effectiveness

2: What results do you see among participants after your training/consultancy support?

Probes:

- Examples of improved skills, jobs secured, or startups growing.
- Do women and minority participants benefit equally?
- How do you adapt your training to changing technologies or markets?

C. Efficiency

3: How do you assess the resources available for program delivery?

Probes:

- Are training materials, equipment, and facilities adequate and timely?
- Have budget or space constraints (e.g., rent) affected your work?
- Do you feel your time/expertise is used effectively?

D. Impact

4: From your perspective, how is ICK contributing to Kosovo's entrepreneurial ecosystem?

Probes:

- Do participants apply what they learn beyond ICK (new businesses, partnerships)?
- Have you seen any policy or ecosystem changes linked to ICK's work?
- How do employers or private sector partners respond to ICK graduates/startups?

E. Sustainability

5: How confident are you in ICK's ability to continue programs without Sida funding?

Probes:

- What other revenue sources (training fees, consulting, partnerships) are promising?
- How does ICK's staff retention affect continuity of services?
- Do you feel ICK is adapting well to future ecosystem needs?

Cross-cutting Issues

6: How are inclusion and sustainability addressed in your programs?

Probes:

- How do you market, target, and select participants?
- Do you adapt training for women, youth, or minority groups?
- How does ICK support environmentally sustainable/green startups?
- Are conflict-sensitive approaches used in participant engagement?

Learning

7: What lessons have you learned from delivering Sida-supported programs?

Probes:

- What worked best in training or consultancy delivery?
- What challenges did you face (e.g., participation, resources, expectations)?
- What improvements would you suggest for future program design?

Closing

- Are there any other reflections you would like to share about ICK's role, Sida's support, or Kosovo's innovation ecosystem?
- Thank the participant for their time and input.

KII Guide for Public Institutions

Introduction

- Thank participant and explain the purpose: to understand their views on ICK's role, Sida's support, and the broader innovation/entrepreneurship ecosystem.
- Clarify confidentiality; responses will be used for evaluation purposes only.

Relevance

1: From your perspective, how relevant has ICK's work been to national priorities and strategies in innovation, entrepreneurship, and digital transformation?

- **Probes:**
 - How does ICK services align with national strategies (Digital Agenda, SME Strategy, Innovation Strategy)?
 - Has ICK adapted to shifts in Kosovo's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem?
 - How does ICK's positioning compare to other hubs (e.g., ITP Prizren, municipal hubs)?

Effectiveness

2: How effective has ICK been in contributing to skills development, employment, and startup growth in Kosovo?

Probes:

- What results or outcomes do you observe among ICK-supported startups or graduates?
- Have women, youth, and minority groups been effectively reached?
- How do you see Sida's contribution compared to other donors?

Efficiency

3: How do you view ICK's use of resources and Sida's core support?

Probes:

- Have you observed efficient delivery of activities in relation to ICK's resources?
- Sida's support has partly covered rent - what do you see as the opportunity costs of this?
- Has ICK shown adaptability in reallocating resources during disruptions (e.g., COVID-19)?

Impact

4: In your opinion, what has been ICK's contribution to Kosovo's broader innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem?

Probes:

- Has ICK influenced policy or ecosystem-level initiatives (e.g., ICT Strategy, entrepreneurship legislation)?
- Have you seen examples of spillover effects (new services, partnerships, ecosystem collaborations)?
- How is ICK perceived by government, academia, and the private sector?

Sustainability

5: How sustainable do you consider ICK beyond Sida's core support?

Probes:

- Do you see ICK diversifying funding sources (training, consultancy, partnerships)?

- How confident are you in ICK's long-term viability as an ecosystem actor?
- Are there opportunities for stronger public-private partnerships or municipal-level support (e.g., rent-free premises, joint programs)?

Cross-Cutting Issues

6: How do you assess ICK's role in advancing gender equality, youth inclusion, minority participation, and environmental sustainability?

Probes:

- Has ICK supported inclusion of marginalized groups (Roma, Serb, women, youth)?
- Do you see ICK supporting green startups or environmentally friendly innovation?
- Has ICK shown sensitivity in addressing potential conflict dynamics?

Learning

7: What lessons can be drawn from Sida's core support to ICK from your institution's perspective?

Probes:

- What has worked particularly well in Sida's core support model?
- What could have been done differently by ICK or Sida?
- Are there lessons that could inform broader government programs for innovation and entrepreneurship?

Closing

- Are there any other reflections you would like to share about ICK's role, Sida's support, or Kosovo's innovation ecosystem?
- Thank the participant for their time and input.

KII Guide for Other Donors

Introduction

- Thank the interviewee and explain purpose: to assess Sida's support to ICK, and gather donor perspectives on ICK's role, results, and sustainability.
- Clarify confidentiality and that responses will inform the evaluation, not be attributed to individuals.

Relevance

1: From your perspective, how relevant has ICK's work been to the needs of Kosovo's entrepreneurs and innovation ecosystem?

Probes:

- Do you see ICK's activities as aligned with Kosovo's strategies (e.g., Digital Agenda, SME, Innovation)?
- How does ICK compare with other hubs (e.g., ITP Prizren, municipal innovation hubs)?
- Has ICK adapted to changes in the ecosystem (digitalisation, regulatory, market shifts)?

Effectiveness

2: How effective has ICK been in achieving meaningful results for startups, entrepreneurs, and the ecosystem?

Probes:

- What results have you observed (skills development, jobs, startup growth, ecosystem capacity)?
- How inclusive has ICK been in reaching women, youth, minorities?
- From your perspective, how has Sida's support contributed to these results versus other donor contributions?

Efficiency

3: How do you assess ICK's use of resources and Sida's support modality?

Probes:

- Has ICK been cost-effective compared to other hubs or donor programs?
- What are your views on Sida's funding being used for rent - was this an efficient allocation?
- Has ICK shown flexibility and efficiency during challenges (COVID-19, market disruptions)?

Impact

4: In your view, what has been ICK's contribution to strengthening Kosovo's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem?

Probes:

- Has ICK influenced policy, strategies, or ecosystem-wide initiatives?
- Have you seen spillover effects (new partnerships, new services, pivots among startups)?
- How is ICK perceived by government, private sector, and donor community?

Sustainability

5: How do you see ICK's prospects for long-term financial and institutional sustainability?

Probes:

- Is ICK diversifying income sources (training fees, consultancy, services, partnerships)?
- How realistic do you think their sustainability/exit strategies are?
- Do you see ICK as a credible long-term player without Sida support?

Cross-Cutting Issues

6: How well has ICK addressed gender equality, youth inclusion, minority participation, and environmental sustainability?

Probes:

- Have you observed outreach or participation of women, Roma, Serb, and other minorities?
- Has ICK supported "green" or environmentally sustainable startups?
- How does ICK's approach to inclusivity compare with other donor-supported initiatives?

Learning

7: What lessons do you draw from Sida's support to ICK, and from ICK's model more broadly?

Probes:

- What has worked particularly well in Sida's partnership with ICK?
- What could Sida or ICK have done differently?
- Are there insights transferable to other donor programs or ecosystems?

Closing

- Is there anything else you would like to add about ICK's role, Sida's contribution, or the innovation ecosystem in Kosovo?
- Thank them for their valuable time and insights.

KII Guide for Private Sector

Introduction

- Explain purpose: "We are here to explore how ICK has contributed to Kosovo's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem and to collect perspectives for future support."
- Confidentiality & voluntary participation explained.

Relevance

1: How relevant are the skills and capacities of ICK graduates/startups to your company's needs?

Probes:

- Which skills are most valuable (technical, digital, entrepreneurial, soft skills)?
- Are there skill gaps you still notice?
- How well do ICK-trained graduates compare with others you've hired?

Effectiveness

2: What benefits have you seen from hiring ICK graduates or collaborating with ICK-supported startups?

Probes:

- Have you observed improvements in employee performance, innovation capacity, or business outcomes?
- Are ICK graduates more adaptable to market/technology changes?
- Can you share concrete examples of successful collaborations or hires?

Efficiency

3: How do you perceive ICK's responsiveness and collaboration with the private sector?

Probes:

- Is ICK flexible in adapting training or support to industry needs?
- How efficient is communication and partnership with ICK?
- Have you provided input into ICK's training or startup support design?

Impact

4: In your view, how has ICK influenced Kosovo's entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem?

Probes:

- Has ICK improved the overall quality of the workforce or startup ecosystem?
- Do you see ICK contributing to sectoral innovation (ICT, green economy, creative industries, etc.)?
- How is ICK perceived by businesses in your industry?

Sustainability

5: How confident are you that ICK will continue to provide skilled graduates and strong startups in the future?

Probes:

- Do you see ICK building lasting partnerships with the private sector?
- Are there examples of sustained collaborations (e.g., internships, co-designed trainings, joint projects)?
- What role should the private sector play in supporting ICK's sustainability?

Cross-Cutting Issues

6: How inclusive and forward-looking do you find ICK's programs?

Probes:

- Have you hired women, youth, or minority group graduates from ICK?
- Have you seen ICK support green or environmentally sustainable startups?
- Do you think ICK is equipping graduates with skills for the future (digitalisation, green economy, AI, etc.)?

Learning

7: What lessons or recommendations would you give to strengthen ICK's role in preparing talent and supporting startups?

Probes:

- What should ICK continue doing?
- What should they change or improve in training/collaboration?
- How could ICK better align with private sector demand in the future?

Closing

- Is there anything else you would like to add about ICK's graduates, startups, or collaboration with the private sector?
- Thank them for their time and contribution.

KII Guide for Ecosystem Stakeholders

Introduction

- Explain purpose: “We are here to explore how ICK has contributed to Kosovo’s innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem and to collect perspectives for future support.”
- Confidentiality & voluntary participation explained.

Participant Background

1. Please introduce yourself: institution, role, and nature of engagement with ICK.

Relevance

2. How do you view ICK’s role in Kosovo’s innovation ecosystem?
Probes: leader, collaborator, niche actor?
3. How well is ICK aligned with national strategies (Digital Agenda, Development Strategy)?
4. From your perspective, which groups (youth, women, IT sector, startups) benefit most from ICK?

Effectiveness

5. In your view, what are ICK’s most significant achievements?
Probes: policy influence, startup growth, visibility of Kosovo abroad. How Sida’s core support contributed to it?
6. Has ICK filled gaps left by other institutions (universities, ministries, donor projects)?
Probe: examples of complementarity.
7. What areas did ICK underperform in, or where impact was limited?

Efficiency

8. How effective has ICK been in collaborating with your institution or other ecosystem actors?
Probe: partnerships, joint activities, donor coordination.
9. Were resources (time, funding, institutional support) well leveraged by ICK?

Impact & Sustainability

10. How has ICK contributed to building Kosovo’s innovation ecosystem capacity?
Probe: human capital, investor climate, entrepreneurship culture.
11. Do you see ICK as financially and institutionally sustainable as a result of Sida support?
Probe: private sector sponsorship, government buy-in, other donors funds.

Future Outlook

12. What role should ICK play in the next 5-10 years?
13. Which types of partnerships or support are most strategic moving forward?
14. If Sida and other donors continue support, what priorities should they focus on?

Closing

- Is there anything else you would like to add about ICK’s role, Sida’s contribution, or the innovation ecosystem in Kosovo?
- Thank them for their valuable time and insights.

FGD Guide for ICK-Supported Startups

Introduction & Consent (5–10 min)

- Thank participants for joining.
- Explain purpose: ***“We are here to understand your experiences with ICK support, whether your startup is still operating or has ceased operations. Your input will help us learn what worked well, what challenges exist, and how ICK and its partners can improve support in the future.”***
- Emphasize confidentiality and voluntary participation. No right or wrong answers, we want honest feedback.
- Ask for consent for audio recording.

Note

- Recommended duration: 90 minutes.
- Group size: 6–8 participants (separate FGDs for operating vs. ceased startups if possible).
- Materials: participant list (coded, no names), sector check boxes, consent forms, notetaker template with columns for *question, summary of responses, key quotes*.

B. Background & Sector Mapping (for all participants) (10 min)

1. Please introduce yourself (name, surname) and briefly describe your startup, sector, and stage of your startup
 - Which sector were/are you involved in? (e.g., ICT/software, digital media, creative industries, green/circular economy, services, manufacturing, education tech, other).
 - At what stage was your startup when you engaged with ICK (idea, prototype, early growth, scaling)?
2. How did you first hear about ICK, and what motivated you to join?

C. Relevance of ICK Support

3. Which ICK services did you benefit from (incubation, training, mentoring, networking, seed funding, co-working, events)?
4. To what extent did ICK’s services meet your immediate needs as an entrepreneur?
 - Relevance of training to the business sector, mentorship matching, and access to networks.
5. Which services were most valuable? Which were least relevant?

D. Effectiveness & Results

6. What specific results have you achieved since working with ICK?
 - Revenue growth, clients acquired, products launched, and employees hired.
 - Gender/youth participation in your team.
 - How ICK contributed to this?
7. Did ICK open opportunities for partnerships, markets, or investors? Please give examples.
8. How useful were the skills and knowledge gained through ICK in your daily operations?

E. Efficiency

9. How would you describe the balance between resources invested to participate in the ICK support (time, money, effort) and benefits gained?
 - Was the application/selection process relevant, fair and transparent?
 - Was mentorship accessible and responsive to your needs?
10. Were there overlaps with support you received elsewhere (e.g., ITP Prizren, donors, accelerators)?
 - What are advantages/disadvantages of ICK support and support from others?

F. Impact & Sustainability

11. How has ICK support helped you position your business within your sector and the wider ecosystem?
 - Contribution to Kosovo's innovation ecosystem, visibility, and sector reputation.
12. Do you feel your startup is more resilient and sustainable because of ICK support? Why or why not?
13. Looking ahead, what kind of ongoing or new support would help you grow further?

G. Future Directions

12. What could ICK do differently to better support entrepreneurs?
13. What additional services would be most useful (e.g., legal, financial literacy, export facilitation)?

Cross-Cutting Themes (ask both groups if time allows) (10–15 min)

- Gender & inclusion: Did women- and youth-led startups face different challenges or opportunities at ICK?
- Sector dynamics: Which sectors have the best potential to grow with ICK support, and which are most vulnerable?
- Ecosystem links: Did ICK help connect you to universities, government, donors, or other hubs (e.g., ITP Prizren)?

Closing (5 min)

- Summarize the main points raised in the discussion.
- Ask: *"Is there anything we haven't asked that Sida or ICK should know about your experience?"*
- Thank participants for their time and contributions.

FGD Guide for ICK Trainees

A. Introduction & Consent (5–10 min)

- Thank participants for joining.
- Explain purpose: ***“We are here to understand your experiences with ICK support, whether your startup is still operating or has ceased operations. Your input will help us learn what worked well, what challenges exist, and how ICK and its partners can improve support in the future.”***
- Emphasize confidentiality and voluntary participation. No right or wrong answers, we want honest feedback.
- Ask for consent for audio recording.

Notes

- Duration: 90 minutes total.
- Group size: 6–8 participants (if possible, separate FGDs for self-employed vs. employed).
- Materials: consent forms, notetaker template (columns for *question*, *summary*, *verbatim quotes*), sector checkboxes.

B. Participant Background & Training Experience (for all participants) (10 min)

1. Please introduce yourself briefly (first name optional, age, sector of training).
 - Which ICK training(s) did you attend? (e.g., ICT, coding, digital marketing, design, entrepreneurship, green/circular economy, other).
2. What motivated you to participate in ICK training?

What specific skills or knowledge did you expect to gain?

Relevance of Training

1. How relevant were the ICK training programs to the job you found?
 - Technical match, soft skills, digital literacy.
2. Did the training improve your employability or confidence to apply for jobs?

Effectiveness & Results

3. What specific skills gained from ICK helped you to secure employment?
 - Coding, digital marketing, problem-solving, and teamwork.
4. Did employers recognize and value the training certificate from ICK?
5. Did the training help you negotiate better job positions, salaries, or career growth opportunities?

Challenges & Barriers

6. What challenges did you face in finding employment after training?
 - Limited job openings, lack of work experience, gender/youth bias.
7. How did ICK support (career counselling, networks, events) help you overcome these challenges?

Sustainability & Outlook

8. How do you see your career progressing in the next 2–3 years?
9. What additional support would help you advance in your professional path?

Future Directions

10. What could ICK do differently to better support entrepreneurs?
11. What additional services would be most useful (e.g., legal, financial literacy, export facilitation)?

Cross-Cutting Themes (ask both groups if time allows) (10–15 min)

- Gender & inclusion: Did women- and youth-led startups face different challenges or opportunities at ICK?
- Sector dynamics: Which sectors have the best potential to grow with ICK support, and which are most vulnerable?
- Ecosystem links: Did ICK help connect you to universities, government, donors, or other hubs (e.g., ITP Prizren)?

G. Closing (5 min)

- Summarize the main points raised in the discussion.
- Ask: *“Is there anything we haven’t asked that Sida or ICK should know about your experience?”*
- Thank participants for their time and contributions.

Survey for Startups/Entrepreneurs

Introduction

As part of the end-of-programme evaluation of Sida's support to Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK) (2019–2024), we are gathering feedback from startups and entrepreneurs who have engaged with ICK through training, incubation, mentoring, or other support services.

Your experiences and perspectives are essential to understand how ICK's services have met your needs, contributed to your business growth, and influenced the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem. The evaluation, commissioned by the Embassy of Sweden in Pristina, focuses on assessing achieved results and learning from ICK's role in Kosovo's innovation landscape.

The survey will take around 5-7 minutes to complete. All responses will be kept confidential, and no individual business will be identified in the reporting. Your honest feedback will play an important role in ensuring a thorough and transparent evaluation.

Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. The results will be analyzed collectively and used only for evaluation and improvement purposes.

What is the year of establishment of your startup?

What sector does your startup operate in?

What is the number of employees at your startup?

What stage is your startup currently in?

- Idea stage
- Early growth
- Scaling

How did you first engage with ICK? (Select all that apply)

- Training
- Incubation
- Networking
- Mentoring
- Event participation (hackathons, fairs, competitions)
- Other (specify)

How well did ICK's services meet your immediate needs as an entrepreneur?

- Very well
- Somewhat well
- Neutral
- Not very well
- Not at all

Which ICK services have been most valuable to your startup?

Which ICK services have been least relevant to your startup?

What business outcomes have you achieved as a result of ICK's support? (Select all that apply)

- Increased revenue
- Gained new clients
- Hired employees
- Accessed funding
- Improved visibility or media exposure
- Other (please specify)

Did ICK connect you to new partnerships?

- Yes (please specify)
- No

Did ICK connect you to markets?

- Yes (please specify)
- No

Did ICK connect you to new investors?

- Yes (please specify)
- No

To what extent have you applied new skills or knowledge gained from ICK?

- Not at all
- To a small extent
- To some extent
- To a large extent
- To a very large extent

Overall, how do the benefits you gained from ICK compare to the time, money, and effort you invested?

- Much greater than what I invested
- A bit greater than what I invested
- About the same as what I invested
- A bit less than what I invested
- Much less than what I invested
- Not applicable / I did not invest resources

How easy was it to access ICK's services?

- Very easy
- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult
- Very difficult

How would you rate the organization of ICK trainings?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor

How satisfied are you with the responsiveness of ICK's staff?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

In your view, how has ICK influenced Kosovo's entrepreneurial ecosystem?

- Very positively
- Positively
- Neutral
- Negatively
- Very negatively

Do you feel your business is more sustainable and resilient because of ICK support?

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, somewhat
- No

Do you plan to maintain collaboration with ICK in the next 2 years?

- Yes

- No
- Not sure

What additional services should ICK provide in the future? (Select all that apply)

- Legal support
- Financial literacy
- Digital marketing support
- Investment readiness
- Green or circular innovation support
- Export facilitation
- Other (please specify)

What could ICK do differently to better support entrepreneurs?

Survey Form for ICK Trainees

Introduction

As part of the **end-of-programme evaluation of Sida's support to the Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK) (2019–2024)**, we are gathering feedback from individuals who have participated in **ICK's training programs, workshops, or other learning activities**.

Your experiences and perspectives are essential to help us understand how ICK's training has supported your **skills development, employability, and career growth**, as well as how it contributes to **Kosovo's wider innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem**.

This evaluation, commissioned by the **Embassy of Sweden in Pristina**, aims to assess the results achieved and to draw lessons from ICK's role in building digital skills and promoting innovation in Kosovo.

The survey will take around **5–7 minutes** to complete. All responses will be kept **strictly confidential**, and no individual will be identified in the reporting. Your honest feedback will provide valuable input for ensuring that ICK's future trainings are even more relevant, inclusive, and impactful.

Which ICK training course(s) did you attend?

When did you complete your ICK training? (Select all that apply)

2024 2023 2022 2021 2020 2019 Other (specify the year) _____

Gender

Female Male Prefer not to say Other: _____

How relevant was the training(s) content to your personal or professional goals?

Not relevant Somewhat relevant Relevant Highly relevant

How would you rate the quality of training(s) delivery (trainers, materials, organization)?

Poor Fair Good Excellent

Did the ICK training(s) respond to current market or technology trends (e.g., digital skills, green jobs, AI)?

Not at all Partly Mostly Fully

What new skills or knowledge did you gain through the ICK training(s)?

To what extent did the ICK training(s) improve your employment, self-employment opportunities or career opportunities?

No improvement Some improvement Moderate improvement Significant improvement

Comments (if any)

Have you applied what you learned in your work, studies, or personal projects?

No Partially Yes, regularly

If yes or partially, please describe briefly:

Did you benefit from any ICK scholarships or internships following the training?

Yes No

If yes, please describe briefly:

Do you feel ICK training contributes to Kosovo's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem (e.g., startups, digital transformation, green economy)?

Not at all To some extent Largely Very strongly

To what extent did you feel included and supported during the training (in terms of gender equality, accessibility, and fairness)?

Not at all To some extent Largely Very strongly

How confident are you that the skills and knowledge you gained will remain useful for your future career?

Not at all To some extent Largely Very strongly

Would you recommend ICK trainings to others?

Yes No Maybe

What improvements would you suggest for future ICK trainings (topics, delivery, partnerships or support)?

Annex 4: Documentation

Government of Kosovo

Government of Kosovo. *National Development Strategy and Plan 2030 (NDP 2030)*. Pristina: Government of Kosovo, April 2023.

Government of Sweden – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Government of Sweden – Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Strategy for Sweden's Reform Cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey (2021–2027)*. Stockholm: Government of Sweden, 2021.

Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK)

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Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK). *Annual Schedule of Mandatory Meetings of the Board of Directors (2023)*. Pristina: Innovation Centre Kosovo, 2023.

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Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK). *Budget 2019–2021*. Pristina: Innovation Centre Kosovo, 2019.

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Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK). *Financial Statements and Independent Auditors' Report 2019*. Pristina: Innovation Centre Kosovo, 2019.

Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK). *Financial Statements and Independent Auditors' Report 2020*. Pristina: Innovation Centre Kosovo, 2020.

Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK). *Financial Statements and Independent Auditors' Report 2021*. Pristina: Innovation Centre Kosovo, 2021.

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Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK). *Five-Year Strategy of Innovation Centre Kosovo*. Pristina: Innovation Centre Kosovo, n.d.

Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK). *HRM Manual v1.02*. Pristina: Innovation Centre Kosovo, n.d.

Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK). *Operating Reserve Policy v1.02*. Pristina: Innovation Centre Kosovo, 2023.

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Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK). *Statute of the Innovation Centre Kosovo Foundation (Amended 2014, 2016)*. Pristina: Innovation Centre Kosovo, 2011/2014/2016.

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Riinvest Institute / Other Research Institutions

Riinvest Institute. *The Innovation Support Ecosystem and the Draft Law on Innovation and Entrepreneurship (POLICY ANSWERS – Deliverable D3.X)*. Pristina: Riinvest Institute, January 2025.

Riinvest Institute. *The Research and Innovation Sector in Kosovo from the Perspective of the Research Community (POLICY ANSWERS Deliverable D2.5)*. Pristina: Riinvest Institute, 2023/2025.

Riinvest Institute / NALED / BFE Project. *Blueprint: Advancing Support for Innovation Development in Kosovo*. Pristina: Riinvest Institute, May 2024.

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

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Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). *ICK Core Support – General Conditions (Annex A to Grant Agreement)*. Stockholm: Sida, 2018.

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). *Statement on Annual Financial, Audit, ML and MR Report of the Core Support to ICK 2023*. Pristina: Sida, 2024.

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). *Statement on Report: ICK Annual Progress and Financial Report for the Year 2022*. Pristina: Sida, 2023.

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Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). *Statement on Report: ICK Audit and Unaudited Financial Report for the Year 2020*. Pristina: Sida, 2021. (duplicate entry)

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). *Statement on Report: 2023 ICK Narrative and Financial Reports*. Pristina: Sida, 2024.

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). *Statement on Report: ICK Work Plan and Budget 2024*. Pristina: Sida, 2024.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *Digital Skills Profile – Kosovo*. Pristina: UNDP, 2023.

Annex 5: List of Interviewees

List of interviewees

Name	Position / Organization	Date of Interview
Jonathan Sigvant	Second Secretary / Programme Officer, Sida	13/10/2025
Fatos Mulla	Programme Manager, Sida	13/10/2025
Venera Aqifi	GiZ	13/10/2025
Leonora Kusari	EBRD	13/10/2025
Shpend Lila	Training and Events Manager, ICK	13/10/2025
Kujtim Kerveshi	ICK Mentor	14/10/2025
Visar Dobroshi	ICK Mentor	14/10/2025
Leart Zogjani	ICK Mentor	14/10/2025
Frosina Islami	Coca Cola	24/10/2025
Dorina Grezda	Acting Executive Director / Incubator & Project Manager, ICK	14/10/2025
Fatmire Asllani	Finance & Administration, ICK	14/10/2025
Kujtim Sermaxhaj	LuxDev	14/10/2025
Artan Sadiku	LuxDev	14/10/2025
Daniella Huhmann	EUD Kosovo	15/10/2025
Vlora Tuzi Nushi	UN Women	15/10/2025
Skender Rama	USAID	15/10/2025
Vjollca Cavolli	STIKK (ICT NGO)	21/10/2025
Lirim Krasniqi	Germin (Diaspora NGO)	16/10/2025
Astrit Leti	Tive	16/10/2025
Agon Kabashi	Raiffeisen Bank	16/10/2025
Vigan Budima	ICK Mentor	17/10/2025
Uranik Begu	Chairman of the Board / Former Executive Director, ICK	20/10/2025
Agim Kukaj	Ministry of Economy	20/10/2025
Zef Dedaj	Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship & Trade (KIESA)	29/10/2025
Valon Canhasi	Hallakate	23/10/2025

Blerim Rexhaj	University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”	24/10/2025
Alejtin Berisha	Universum College (private university)	31/10/2025
Metihe Kastrati	Former CEO of ICK	28/10/2025
Muhamed Rexhepi	ITP Prizren	29/10/2025
Mrika Macula Gashi	Former Director, Youth Center “Pallati i Rinies”	29/10/2025
Mimoza Sylejmani	Municipality of Prishtina, Director for Strategic Planning	30/10/2025

List of FGD participants

Name	Gender	Type of FGD	Date of FGD
Mendim Abdylil	m	ICK supported startup	21/10/2025
Mentor Dida	m	ICK supported startup	
Dorina Davies	f	ICK supported startup	
Shkelzen Nuza	m	ICK supported startup	
Flamur Xhafa	m	ICK supported startup	
Florian Krasniqi	m	ICK supported startup	
Hana Arapi	f	ICK supported startup	22/10/2025
Niki Murseli	f	ICK supported startup	
Florent Hoti	m	ICK supported startup	
Endrit Ameli	m	ICK supported startup	
Karsten Klapp	m	ICK supported startup	
Shkelzen Nuza	m	ICK supported startup	
Fjolla Avdiu	f	ICK Trainee	29/10/2025
Erisa Selimi	f	ICK Trainee	
Eris Veliu	m	ICK Trainee	
Sara Kastrati	f	ICK Trainee	
Olti Gjaka	m	ICK Trainee	
Violeta Kosumi	f	ICK Trainee	
Ermira Shantiri	f	ICK Trainee	30/10/2025
Sara Shala	f	ICK Trainee	
Olsa Begu	f	ICK Trainee	
Syarta Pajaziti	m	ICK Trainee	
Oniks Islami	m	ICK Trainee	
Fabian Berisha	m	ICK Trainee	
Sara Zejnullahu	f	ICK Trainee	

Annex 6: Reconstructed Theory of Change

The Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK) programme seeks to accelerate the transformation of Kosovo's economy by strengthening the startup and innovation ecosystem, equipping young people and entrepreneurs with skills, and promoting the application of technology across key sectors. The program builds on ICK's role as the leading national hub for entrepreneurship and innovation, with a proven track record in incubation, training, networking, and ecosystem development.

Kosovo's economy continues to face structural challenges related to unemployment, particularly among youth, and the limited competitiveness of the private sector. The overall unemployment rate stood at 10.8% in 2024, with young people disproportionately affected, recording significantly higher levels of joblessness compared to the general population¹⁴. In addition, labour under-utilization remains a persistent issue, with nearly 29.7% of the working-age population considered under-utilized due to unemployment, underemployment, or disengagement from the labour force¹⁵.

On the other hand, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) dominate the business landscape in Kosovo. SMEs account for 99.8% of all registered enterprises, employing approximately 75.5% of the business sector workforce¹⁶. Their role is equally critical in terms of economic output: SMEs generate more than 80% of the total value added within the non-financial business economy¹⁷. This illustrates both the importance of SMEs in driving growth and employment, as well as the need for tailored policies to enhance their competitiveness, access to finance, and integration into regional and global value chains.

Problem Context

Kosovo is recognized as having the youngest population in Europe, a demographic characteristic that provides both opportunities for economic growth and challenges for policy design. As of 2024, Kosovo's population is approximately 1.6 million, with a median age of 34.8 years. Children and youth remain a large share of society: 27.2% of the population is under 15, 66.1% are of working age (15–64), and only 6.7% are over 65¹⁸. This youthful structure positions Kosovo as a potential source of dynamic labor supply in the region.

In terms of education, Kosovo has achieved high levels of enrollment in primary education; however, participation significantly declines at the upper-secondary level¹⁹. Equity concerns persist, particularly for children from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, as well as those from rural areas, who face barriers to quality education and digital resources²⁰. Labor market outcomes reveal a persistent skills mismatch: the unemployment rate for those with tertiary education is around 18%, considerably higher

¹⁴ Focus Economics (2024). *Kosovo – Unemployment Rate*. Retrieved from [Focus Economics](#).

¹⁵ Government of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister (2024). *Employment Strategy 2024–2028*. Available at [kryeministri.rks-gov.net](#).

¹⁶ OECD (2022). *SME Policy Index Roundtables – Kosovo Presentation*. Retrieved from [OECD](#).

¹⁷ European Commission (2019). *Kosovo – SBA Fact Sheet 2019*. Retrieved from [EC Enlargement](#).

¹⁸ Wikipedia (2024). *Demographics of Kosovo*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Kosovo

¹⁹ UNICEF Kosovo (2023). *Education in Kosovo: Towards Inclusion, Equity, and Digital Readiness*. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/press-releases/education-kosovo-towards-inclusion-equity-and-digital-readiness>

²⁰ UNICEF Kosovo (2023). *Education in Kosovo: Towards Inclusion, Equity, and Digital Readiness*. Retrieved from [UNICEF](#)

than the 4.6% average in OECD countries. Similarly, individuals with upper-secondary education face unemployment levels of 28.4% compared to the OECD average of 7%²¹.

Economically, Kosovo's structure is dominated by the services sector, which contributes approximately 70-74% of GDP, followed by industry at 17-18% and agriculture at 11-12%²². Within services, the ICT and digital outsourcing sectors have emerged as leading areas of competitiveness. Exports of ICT services reached USD 309 million in 2023, underscoring the sector's growing role in driving innovation and regional integration²³. Meanwhile, industrial production remains anchored in the extraction and processing of minerals and metals, while traditional exports include food and beverages, plastics, textiles, and construction materials²⁴.

This combination of a youthful population, evolving education system, and emerging ICT sector highlights Kosovo's potential to transform demographic advantages into sustainable economic growth, provided that structural reforms and targeted investments are pursued.

Kosovo's economy is constrained by high unemployment, especially among youth and women, weak private sector competitiveness, and a mismatch between education and labour market needs. Startups face barriers such as limited access to finance, fragmented support services, and weak connections to investors, academia, and government. In addition, political instability poses risks to policy continuity and investor confidence. The ecosystem is further challenged by donor dependency, with many initiatives reliant on external funding rather than sustainable domestic resources. At the same time, brain drain reduces the availability of skilled professionals, as many young and educated Kosovars seek opportunities abroad. Despite these challenges, opportunities exist: Kosovo has a young, tech-literate population, high internet penetration, and a culture that is open to entrepreneurship. The government has also recently prioritized innovation and entrepreneurship, though institutional capacities remain limited.

Sida Core Support Programme Theory of Change

***IF** the Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK) provides high-quality incubation services, ICT and entrepreneurship training, seed-funding opportunities, networking platforms, and policy advocacy (2019–2021), **THEN** startups, youth, and the broader innovation ecosystem will gain stronger skills, resources, and institutional support.*

***IF** ICK is able to extend its programme for two additional years (2022–2024) while securing rent-free premises, diversifying revenue streams, and consolidating its internal systems,*

***THEN** it will transition into a financially viable and institutionally resilient sectoral hub capable of sustaining results beyond external donor funding.*

*THEREFORE, with Sida's **core support programme**, ICK is able to:*

- **Operate flexibly and strategically** by covering essential institutional costs (e.g., rent, salaries, governance systems) that other earmarked donor funds do not address.
- **Strengthen institutional capacity and credibility**, positioning itself as a leading national actor in digital innovation, startup development, and youth entrepreneurship.
- **Ensure inclusivity and sustainability** by mainstreaming gender equality, youth participation, and social inclusion across its programmes.
- **Leverage and attract complementary resources** from other donors, private sector partners, and diaspora networks by providing a credible institutional anchor in the ecosystem.

*Consequently, Sida's core support not only enables the delivery of immediate outputs but also creates the enabling conditions for ICK to evolve into a **self-sustaining innovation ecosystem hub in***

²¹ ETH Zurich (2020). *Factbook Education System – Kosovo*. Retrieved from [ETHZ](#)

²² Outsourcing Journal (2023). *Analysis: Kosovo's ICT Sector*. Retrieved from [Outsourcing Journal](#)

²³ Trading Economics (2023). *Kosovo ICT Service Exports*. Retrieved from [Trading Economics](#)

²⁴ Wikipedia (2024). *Economy of Kosovo*. Retrieved from [Economy of Kosovo](#)

Kosovo, continuously driving employment, inclusive growth, and innovation-led development beyond the duration of Sida's engagement.

Pathway to Change

Inputs and Activities

ICK provides four integrated sets of interventions:

Enabling Environment for Startups: incubation, grants, technical services, tenant collaboration, and new services.

Capacity Development: professional ICT trainings, soft-skills workshops, diaspora networking, and women-focused programmes.

Promotion and Advocacy: hackathons, international entrepreneurship events, campaigns, and policy engagement.

Innovation in Priority Sectors: grants for cross-sectoral projects, R&D partnerships with universities, and sector-specific pilots (Edu-Tech, Health-Tech, Agri-Tech, Green Tech).

Outputs (Direct Results)

These activities result in a pipeline of incubated startups, trained youth and professionals, new financial instruments for entrepreneurs, regular innovation events, policy papers, and cross-sectoral innovation projects. Specific planned outputs for 2019-2021 include²⁵:

- 140+ start-up teams supported (incubation, virtual services, and seed-funding).
- €500,000+ in in-kind technical support and €200,000+ in grants delivered.
- 120+ ICT and entrepreneurship trainings for 1,200+ participants (at least 30% women).
- 20+ hackathons and 60+ networking events engaging over 1,000 participants.
- Annual Global Entrepreneurship Week and Startup Week Kosovo institutionalized.
- Policy papers and advocacy initiatives contribute to ICT strategy reforms.
- Five consecutive OCAs strengthen organizational governance and adaptability.

B.

Outcomes (Medium-term Changes by 2024)

Institutional Sustainability of ICK

- ICK transitions into a financially self-sufficient institution by securing rent-free premises and diversifying its revenue streams (training, consultancy, services, events), while maintaining its core programme free of charge for start-ups and MSMEs.
- The organization's governance, management, and systems are further strengthened through annual Organizational Capacity Assessments (OCAs), ensuring efficiency, accountability, and adaptability.

Strengthened Startup and Innovation Ecosystem

- A critical mass of start-ups, SMEs, and entrepreneurs gain access to incubation, grants, mentoring, and technical services, enabling them to survive, grow, and create jobs.
- The ecosystem becomes better connected, with stronger B2B partnerships, international linkages, and investor networks.
- ICK's expertise informs national policies, including the Kosovo ICT Strategy and related laws, creating a more enabling environment for entrepreneurship and innovation.

Enhanced Human Capital and Social Inclusion

- Young people acquire ICT, entrepreneurial, and soft skills that increase their employability and self-employment opportunities.
- Dedicated programmes ensure that women and marginalized groups participate meaningfully in entrepreneurship and ICT, through women-only calls, targeted trainings, and mentorship schemes.
- Knowledge and capital from the diaspora are mobilized to support start-ups through mentoring, networking, and investment.

Innovation Across Sectors

- ICT-based solutions are increasingly applied in sectors such as health, education, agriculture, and financial services, boosting modernization and competitiveness.

²⁵ The ET has included targets only for initial programme duration, i.e., 2019-2021. The data was requested from ICK on the targets for the extension period (2022-2024). The data on the overall planned targets was not available in the programme's documents.

- Public institutions, universities, and the private sector collaborate on cross-sectoral innovation projects, creating systemic change beyond ICT.

Impact (Long-term Change)

These outcomes contribute to contribute to an **inclusive, innovation-driven economy in Kosovo**, where start-ups and MSMEs thrive, youth and women are empowered through technology and entrepreneurship, and the private sector becomes more competitive at regional and international levels. By 2024 and beyond, ICK will be positioned as a **self-sustaining gravity hub** for the ICT ecosystem, continuously driving new job creation, innovation across sectors, and policy reforms that strengthen the enabling environment for entrepreneurship.

Underlying Assumptions

Level	Underlying Main Assumptions
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Target audiences (youth, women, minorities, startups) have sufficient creative capacity and willingness to participate in ICK programmes. - Local social and cultural norms remain broadly supportive of entrepreneurship and ICT engagement. - Training content and incubation services are relevant and adapted to labour market and startup needs. - Startups have at least minimal access to complementary resources (finance, mentoring, networks) to apply acquired skills. - Beneficiaries possess baseline digital literacy and language skills to engage effectively in ICK opportunities. - ICK retains adequate staff capacity and institutional knowledge to deliver quality services.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kosovo's economy continues to demand ICT/digital skills and innovation-driven entrepreneurship. - The broader innovation ecosystem actors (government, donors, private sector, academia, diaspora) remain engaged and open to collaboration. - The Government of Kosovo and municipalities remain broadly supportive of entrepreneurship and innovation, despite limited internal capacities. - Global technological trends (digitalisation, fintech, agro-tech, health-tech, etc.) continue to expand opportunities for startups. - Competition among hubs strengthens complementarity rather than undermining ICK's relevance. - Women and marginalized groups face fewer barriers to participation, allowing inclusion targets to be met.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political and economic stability in Kosovo is maintained, without major crises undermining growth and employment prospects. - Kosovo's EU integration trajectory and regional cooperation remain broadly positive, supporting market access and funding opportunities. - Donor community and private investors remain engaged in Kosovo's innovation ecosystem during ICK's transition to financial sustainability. - ICK secures rent-free premises and diversifies revenue sufficiently to sustain its institutional functions beyond Sida's support. - Recognition of innovation as a driver of modernization remains strong among policymakers and the private sector.

Cross-Cutting Principles

Gender equality and inclusion: At least 30% of participants will be women, with dedicated calls for women-led projects and trainings for women in ICT.

Partnerships: Collaboration with diaspora, universities, civil society, and private sector actors will ensure sustainability and shared ownership.

Sustainability: ICK will work toward financial self-sufficiency through revenue generation, rent-free premises, and diversified funding sources.

Annex 7: Detailed Analysis of ICK Institutional Efficiency

The ICK Statute still refers to the abolished 2011 law (No. 04/L-057) and omits several key provisions now required under the updated legislation, most notably, an appeals and oversight clause linking to the NGO Complaints Commission (Regulation No. 01/2024). It also lacks clear eligibility criteria for Board members such as integrity standards, conflict-of-interest safeguards, and background requirements. Furthermore, the Statute is not publicly available online, which, although not mandatory, reduces transparency compared with other major NGOs in Kosovo. Articles 8 and 14 of ICK's Statute formally assign the Board of Directors responsibility for appointing executive officers and determining employment terms and conditions through contracts. However, this provision is interpreted broadly and has not been operationalized into clear HR governance mechanisms. The Board's exclusive authority to appoint or dismiss staff, combined with the lack of defined HR oversight or delegation procedures, reinforces centralization and weakens procedural independence in hiring.

The HR Manual (Version 1.02, 2018) is similarly outdated and lacks legal, ethical, and procedural depth. It predates all major reforms affecting employment and NGO operations in Kosovo, including the updated Labour Law (2023), Administrative Instruction No. 12/2022, and AI No. 02/2025. As such, it does not reflect modern HR principles of gender inclusion, data protection, digitalization, or ethics. Key legal references are missing entirely, and the manual provides no formal basis for employee rights, grievance procedures, or internal oversight mechanisms. While the manual adequately describes recruitment, onboarding, and evaluation processes, it does so in descriptive rather than normative terms focusing on procedure rather than legal or ethical compliance. It omits explicit reference to equal pay, parental leave, non-discrimination, and termination protections, all of which are required under Articles 5–9 of the Labour Law. Similarly, it does not reference data protection obligations under the Law on Protection of Personal Data (2022) or the establishment of an internal HR or ethics function responsible for compliance.

The review of ICK's Employment Process document (2018) and HR Manual (Version 1.02, 2018) further shows that both frameworks are operationally clear but legally outdated. While they demonstrate a structured and transparent approach to recruitment and staff management, neither aligns with Kosovo's current labour, NGO, gender equality, or data protection legislation. As a result, the HR framework no longer provides adequate legal safeguards, compliance assurance, or ethical standards for a mature institution operating in a donor-supported environment. The Employment Process document outlines recruitment steps in a methodical and merit-based manner, reflecting ICK's intent to ensure fair and transparent hiring. The process includes detailed procedures for vacancy announcements, selection panels, and contract approvals. However, the document was approved in March 2018, predating the major reforms introduced under Law No. 06/L-043 on NGOs (2019) and the amended Labour Law (2023). Consequently, the policy still references old HR frameworks and lacks updated legal citations or compliance references. The section on Legal Framework is generic and omits specific laws governing

employment, NGO management, gender equality, and data protection. It should reference: Law No. 03/L-212 on Labour (2010, amended 2023); Law No. 06/L-043 on NGOs (2019); Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality; Law No. 06/L-082 on Protection of Personal Data (2022); and Applicable tax and pension regulations. Recruitment procedures also reflect outdated communication practices, including physical newspaper publication of vacancies, no longer a cost-effective or inclusive method in the digital era. Moreover, the policy lacks explicit equal opportunity, gender equality, and anti-discrimination clauses, which are now mandatory under Kosovo's Labour and Gender Equality Laws. No formal reference is made to an HR unit or officer; responsibility is instead assigned to the "Admin/Finance Manager," an outdated role title that does not reflect current HR specialization standards. The section on appeals and complaints is particularly weak. Under the 2019 NGO Law and Regulation No. 01/2024, NGOs are required to have internal procedures for administrative review and access to the NGO Complaints Commission. ICK's process does not yet provide a compliant internal grievance or appeals mechanism, leaving a gap in accountability and employee protection.



Evaluation of Sida Core Support Programme to ICK in Kosovo

Purpose and use

This evaluation assesses Sida's core institutional support to the Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK) over the period 2019-2024. The evaluation offers an independent assessment of ICK's performance, the results achieved through Sida's support, and the institution's readiness for long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

Sida's core support helped ICK remain a relevant and trusted actor in Kosovo's innovation ecosystem, enabling continuity of services and contributing to digital skills and early-stage entrepreneurship. However, institutional and structural weaknesses limited sustained outcomes and wider impact. ICK's sustainability will depend on modernising governance, reducing

financial vulnerabilities, and repositioning within a more competitive ecosystem. Strengthening these foundations is essential for ICK to build on past investments and continue contributing to Kosovo's digital and entrepreneurial development.

Recommendation

Sida shifts from a single-institution model toward a broader ecosystem approach, focusing future support on coordinated interventions that strengthen Kosovo's innovation system. Any future institutional funding should be preceded by stronger governance due diligence, ensuring partners have clear structures, transparency, and compliance.

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