

ONLINE WEBINAR



organized by

WESTERN BALKANS JUNIOR
WATER PROFESSIONALS

NAVIGATING EARLY CAREERS:

Challenges and Opportunities for
Young Water Professionals in the
Western Balkans

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER
18TH**



15:30 - 17:00 CET

More on:  jwp.westernbalkan2025@gmail.com

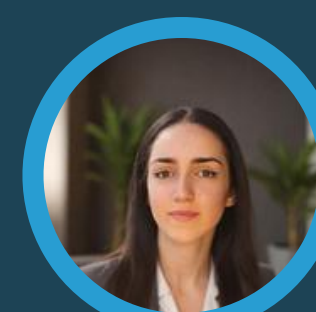
Speakers:



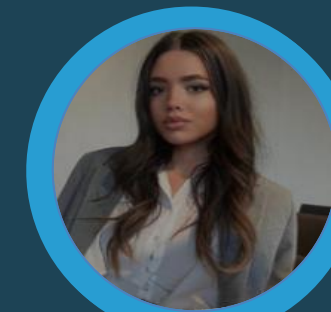
Nikola Stevanović
Master of Water Science and
Engineering



Almasa Muminović
Bachelor of Microbiology



Ksenia Malaj
Bachelor of Environmental
Engineering



Maša Tepavčević
Bachelor of Chemical
Engineering



Tanja Krsteva
Bachelor of
Biochemistry



Qëndresa Berisha
Master of Environmental
Engineering



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Introduction



Nikola Stevanović

Master of Water Science and
Engineering
YWP from Serbia



Almasa Muminović

Bachelor of Microbiology
YWP from Bosnia and
Herzegovina



Ksena Malaj

Bachelor of Environmental
Engineering
YWP from Albania



Maša Tepavčević

Bachelor of Chemical
Engineering
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Bachelor of
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Macedonia



Qëndresa Berisha

Master of Environmental
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Overview

From Education to First
Employment

Q & A

Career
Development and
Professional
Growth

Q & A

Equality,
Inclusion and
Recognition

Q & A



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1. From Education to First Employment – Bridging the Gap

- *Challenges in choosing and applying to Master's/PhD programs abroad;*
- *Importance of internships and practical experience;*
- *Adapting academic knowledge and overcoming barriers to enter the job market;*
- *Difficulties in securing the first professional job in the water sector;*



Nikola Stevanović
Almasa Muminović



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Federica Fontana/epa



The Journey Toward Studying Abroad

Choosing the Right Path – From Uncertainty to Opportunity

- Competitive academic background – *Mathematical Grammar School, Belgrade* – ~40% of classmates went abroad after high school, ~25% later for Master's studies
- BSc at University of Belgrade – gained diverse practical experience through multiple internships (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austria) and roles as Student Mentor and Student Teaching Assistant
- Joined the Flood Risk Management MSc – a joint program of 5 universities (TU Dresden, IHE Delft, FAU, UPC Barcelona, University of Ljubljana)
- Each step required exploring new opportunities, adapting to different systems and cultures, and stepping outside your comfort zone – a process that builds courage and independence
- In your 20s, there will be a plane taking you away from home (either for studies or for work), **take that plane!**



Finding your path is not a straight line – it's a process of exploration!

Challenges in Applying – Lessons Learned

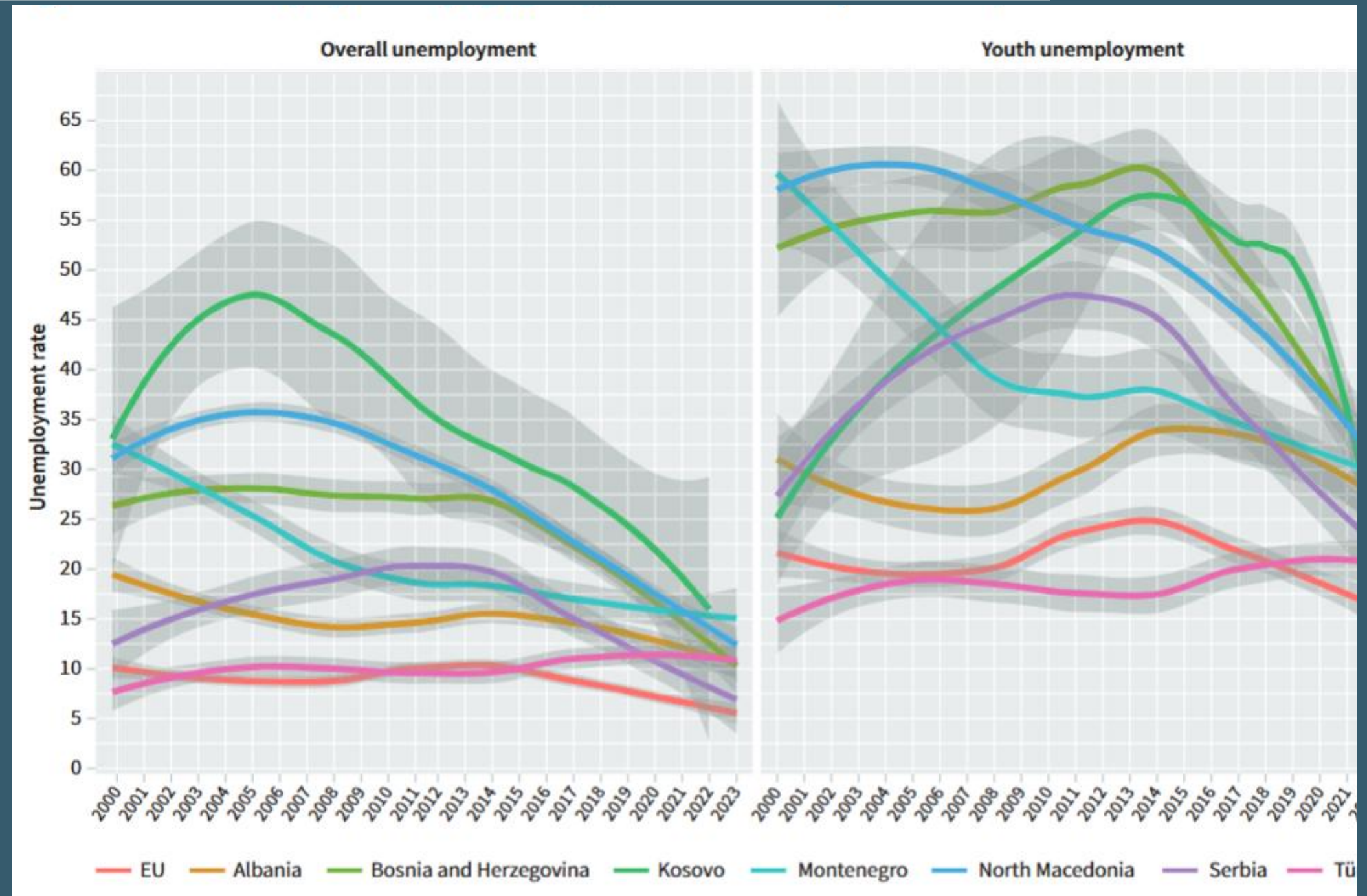
Applications as a Learning Process

- ✓ As graduation approaches, many students feel lost or uncertain about career direction – and that's completely normal
- ✓ Choosing an MSc program is just the start that requires a lot of research
- ✓ The application process is often bureaucratic and time-consuming (motivation letters, recommendation letters, transcripts, English certificates)
- ✓ The main challenge: securing scholarships, which are often decisive for students from the Western Balkans
- ✓ Looking back, applying for my MSc was an excellent training for current PhD applications

Through every application you build up your skills – do not take failure personally, it's all part of the process!

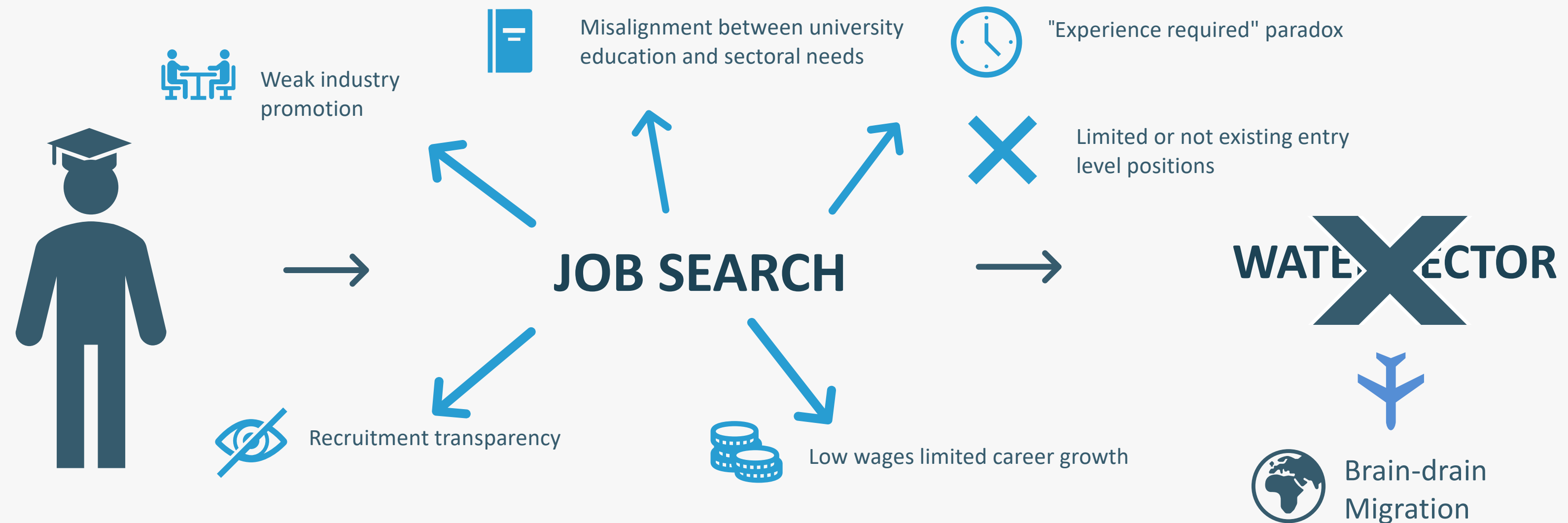
From Academic Knowledge to Professional Practice: Overcoming Barriers

- The youth unemployment rate in the region remains significantly higher than the overall unemployment rate, signaling persistent challenges in the school-to-work transition.
- This persistent gap reflects structural barriers for young people entering the labour market.



Total unemployment by age group, 2000–2023, %
Eurofound (based on World Bank data, 2024)

Entering the Water Sector: Barriers to the First Professional Role



Across the Western Balkans, high youth unemployment and outward migration are not just social statistics—they reflect the cumulative effect of limited entry pathways and unmet career expectations, draining the sector of its most valuable resource: its young professionals.

Discussion: From Education to First Employment

- How did internships (or lack of them) impact your readiness for your first job?
- For those who considered studying abroad: what were the main challenges and benefits you experienced?
- Which of mentioned challenges have you personally faced?
- Do you have any tips or experiences to share when it comes to entering the water sector?



2. Career Development and Professional Growth

- *Building on the first job experience: Navigating early responsibilities and expectations*
- *Access to mentorship, knowledge transfer and professional guidance*
- *Key areas related to professional growth*
- *Opportunities for knowledge development*



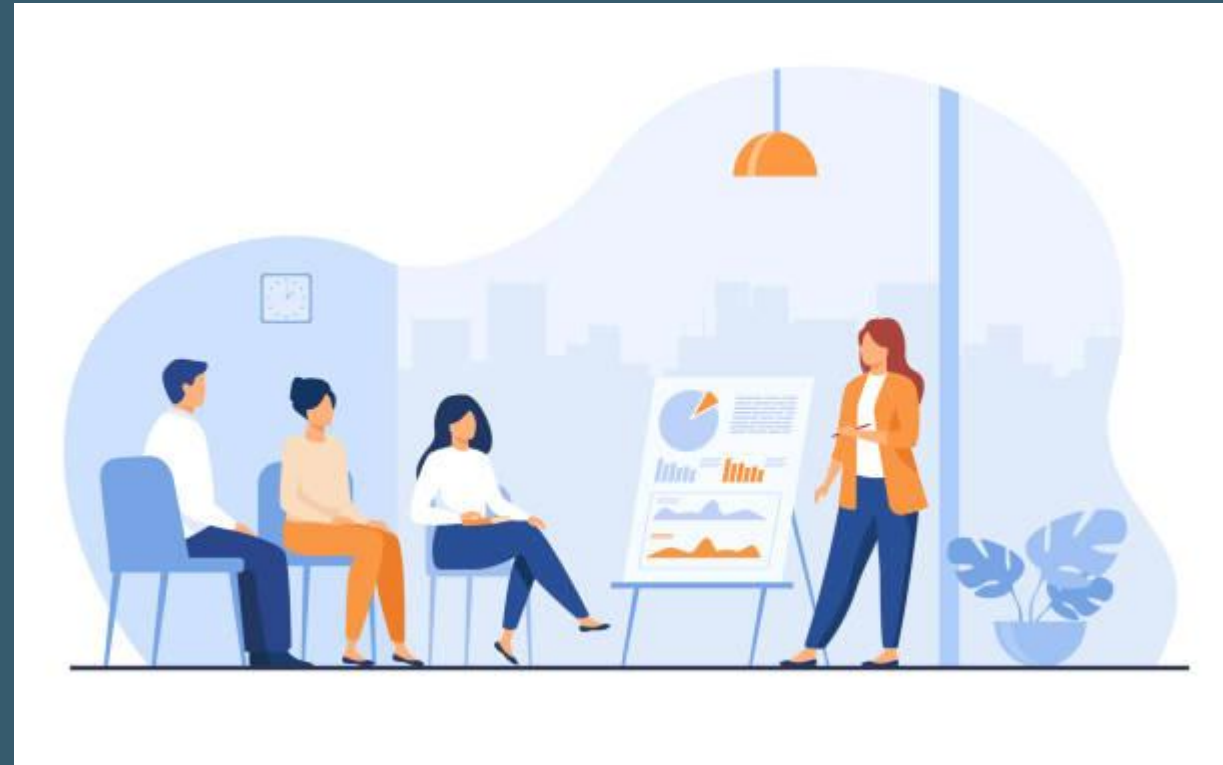
Maša Tepavčević
Ksenia Malaj

Building on the First Job Experience



- *Transition from theory to practice*
- *Understanding workplace expectations*
- *Taking ownership of early responsibilities*
- *Key learnings: adaptability, communication, initiative*

Access to Mentorship, Knowledge Transfer & Professional Guidance



- Mentorship builds confidence and direction
- Learning through shared experience

✓ *Stay curious, stay engaged!*

My Story

School's
schedule

Not enough
experience

Driving
license

Knowledge
lacking
related to
programs
(Revit etc.)

Why Water Sector?

- No need for a license/certification to work in the sector



- More space for young professionals

Key Areas related to Professional Growth

- Networking



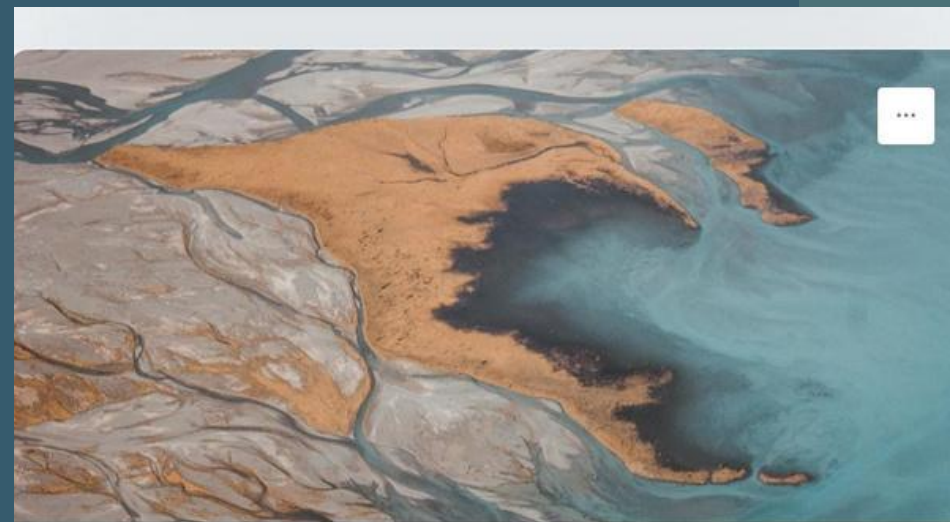
- Soft Skills

Communication
Time Management
Adaptability

- Knowledge
Development

IHE DELFT INSTITUTE

Knowledge Development



MOOC

Delta Planning and Management



Open Educational Resources

Water Transport and Distribution



OpenCourseWare

Understanding climate change basics



MOOC

Fundamentals of Freshwater Health

UDemy

Other Design > Water Treatment



Preview this course

The Complete Course in Water and Wastewater Treatment

Drinking Water: Fundamentals and Operation

Conventional Potabilization: Oxidation, Coagulation, Flocculation, Sedimentation, Filtration, and Disinfection.

Discussion: Career Development and Professional Growth

Which soft skills do you think are more useful in the workspace?

Did any course spark your interest? If yes, which one?



3. Equality, Inclusion and Recognition in the Water Sector

- *Promoting Gender Equality and Supporting young women in decision-making*
- *Ensuring fair recognition of contributions for all Young Professionals*
- *Addressing job insecurity and unstable employment conditions*
- *Creating an inclusive and supportive work culture for the next generations of water professionals*



Qendresa Berisha
Tanja Krsteva

EQUALITY, INCLUSION AND RECOGNITION IN THE WATER SECTOR

A definition:

EQUALITY:

Opportunity, fair access and support

INCLUSION:

A sense of belonging, voice and decision-making authority

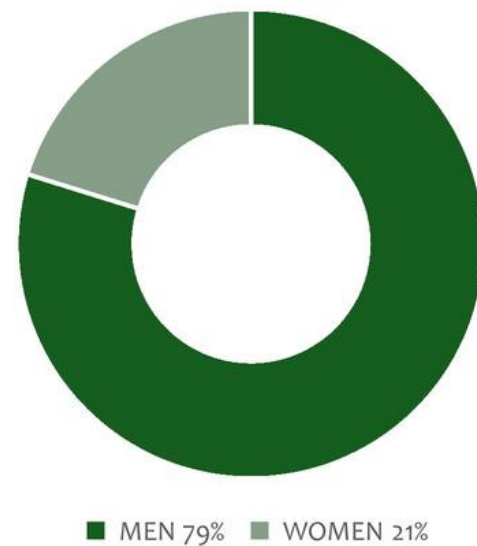
RECOGNITION:

Acknowledging, identifying or giving official approval or appreciation to someone for their qualities, achievements, status.

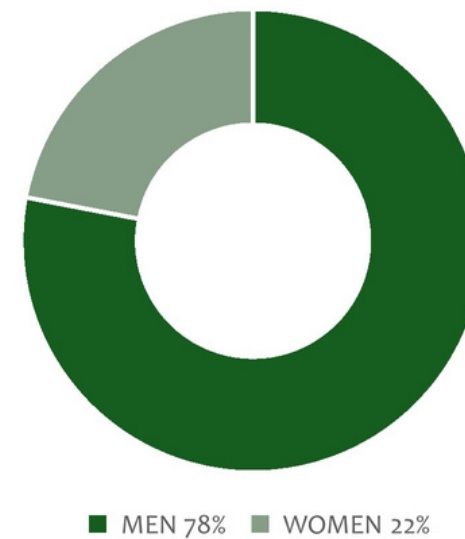
PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WATER SECTOR

Did you know that water jobs globally are almost entirely dominated by MEN?

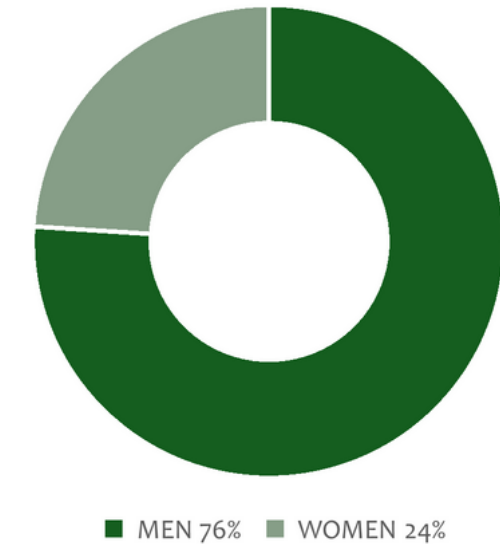
% OF EMPLOYEES THAT ARE WOMEN



% OF ENGINEERS THAT ARE WOMEN



% OF MANAGERS THAT ARE WOMEN



Source: world bank, Women in water Database 2024.

To tackle water and sanitation challenges, scarcity, and climate change, water institutions must modernize and build a skilled, diverse workforce that includes **WOMEN**.

Uneven waters: gender inequality across the Western Balkans



Bosnia and Herzegovina,

- Men hold 82% of engineering and 90% of IT roles. WOMEN represent 26% of staff in water utilities

North Macedonia

- WOMEN make up 31% of technical undergraduates, but only 11% of employees in the water and wastewater sector

Serbia

- WOMEN account for 19% of staff in water utilities

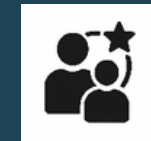
Albania

- WOMEN hold 15% of operations roles, in Tirana water companies.

Kosovo

- WOMEN hold 12% of operations roles respectively and none in upper or top management.

It's time to take actions!



Support systems and role models



EMPOWER WOMEN IN THE WATER SECTOR

Young women's growth and leadership in the water



Scholarships and Mentoring program



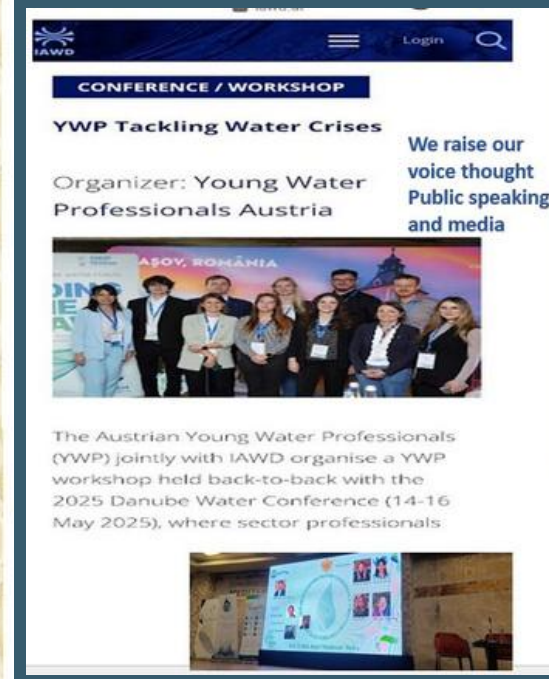
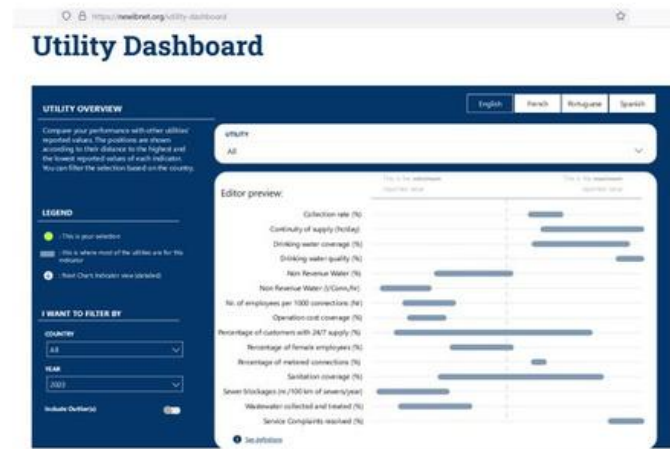
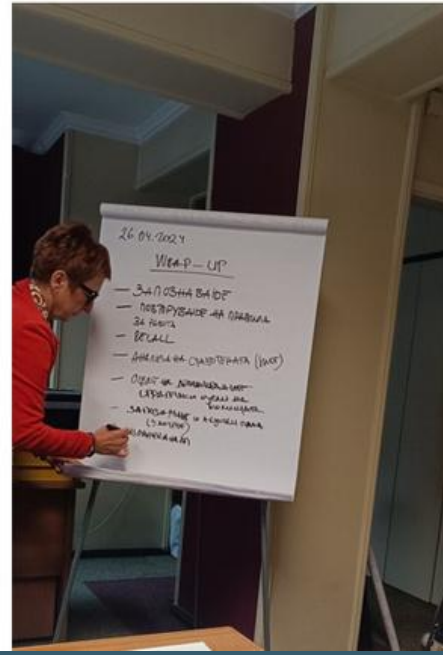
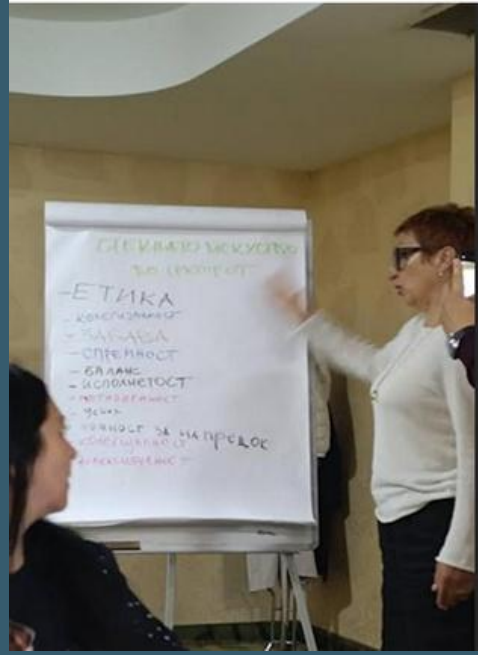
Women's networking opportunities



1.From Education to First Employment

2.Career Development and Professional Growth

3.Equality, Inclusion and Recognition



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With platform collaboration (LinkedIn), or
between your University and National/
Regional Association, you are a step closer to
be a part of Utility of the Future



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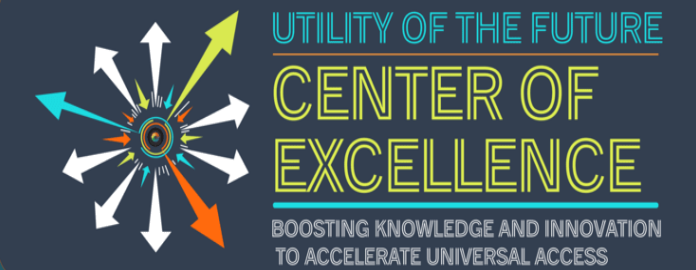
Platform collaboration



VET in the Local Association
will make you one step
forward to your first job in the
Water Sector



Structured Internship
between your Local and
Regional Association



Clear career pathways



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Mapping job insecurities and unstable employment conditions

Employment type and contract:
Temporary, fixed-term, seasonal contract
or permanent

Income and benefits:
Health insurance, retirements
plan and paid leave

Legal and policy content:
Minimum wage by job
position, social safety for underemployment
workers

Perception or psychological factors:
fear of losing the job due to political
structure in the sector, or process of the
automation

Organization factors: transparent
communication and mentorship programs.
Beneficial for the employee and for the
company's future

Career opportunities:
Limited promotion,
lack of advancement projects, developed
trainig program provided by company

Source://wbwaterdata.org/breakingbarriers/en/home/

1.From Education to First
Employment

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OUTREACHING

Our goal is to strengthen YWP leaders across all Western Balkan countries by providing capacity-building training and visibility platforms.

Expected result: Socializing and connecting with the same group from the region and beyond, better and easier communication, and joint development and ideas.

Successful examples: IAWD conference in Vienna (WB Utility of the Future MASTER program, link between Junior Water Professionals Western Balkan and

YWP from Country Association, peer-to-peer exchanges IAWD, YWP in Utility of the Future)



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PREPARATION

Increasing gender equality in the water sector is essential to achieve the
2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

The World Water Assessment Program analysis led by the UN experts,
UNESCO, and other stakeholders, shows that progress is off track.

*"Gender Inequalities in water remain widespread and
hinder global sustainable development efforts"*



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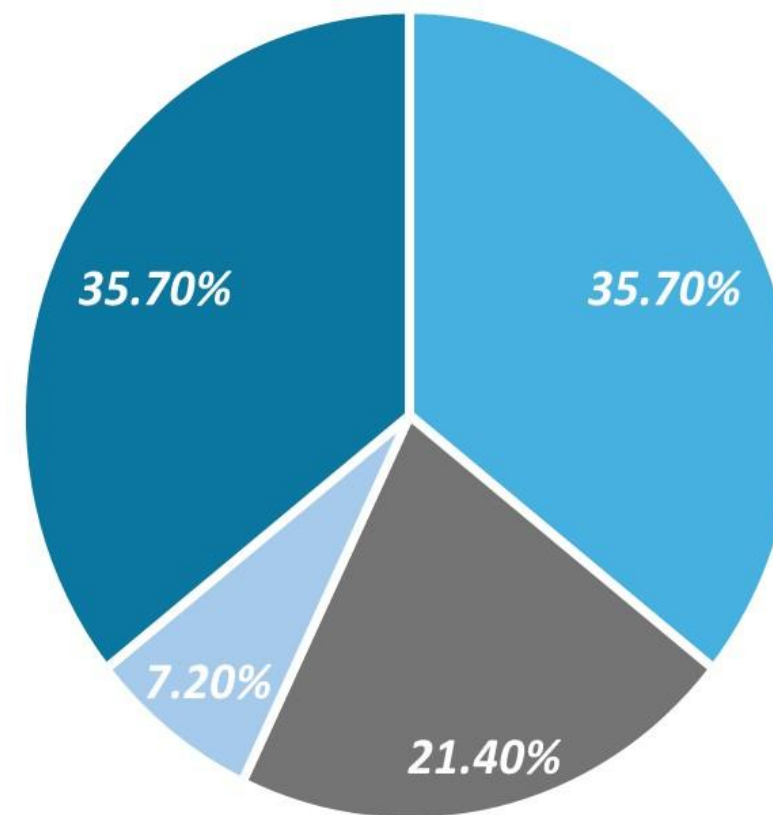
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Suisse Participations



Important factors who keep employees in Utilities

Motivation for work in the Water sector



■ Other ■ Safe work environment ■ Regular salary ■ Opportunities for career advancement

Creating an inclusive and supportive work culture

Companies with more gender diversity are more likely 21 %
to perform on profitability

Women tend to express themselves more eloquently, also have a
detail-oriented approach, and their soft skills such a empathy and
emotional intelligence is making the workplace better place for work.

Only 18% of water utility staff are women (2019). Few
women choose technical careers- only 38% of STEM
graduates worldwide are women

According new IBNET data for 23 Balkan Utilities. 23,6% are
women employees in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 23,12% Albania,
15,27%Kosovo, 21,42% N. Macedonia, 32,44% Serbia

<https://wbwaterdata.org/breakingbarriers/en/home/>

<https://www.iawd.at/eng/libraryresource/1097/details/w/0/securing-the-future-of-water-in-the-balkans-a-young-water-professionals-perspective>

- Although, still relatively low, there is visible growth for women in several countries (e.g., Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia).
- Some Western Balkan countries are slowly closing the gap with the EU average youth employment situation.

Key Areas Related to Companies and Decision-Makers for Water Sector Professional Growth ?



Increase the number of Young Professionals and make gender inclusion a core business goal.

We should ACT now for the FUTURE OF WATER.

By investing in YWPs, we are fostering inclusive workforce strategies to secure a sustainable and innovative future for the water sector.

Discussion: Equality, inclusion and recognition in the Water sector



We can secure the future of the water sector
by empowering the next generation through
inclusion and stability!

Thank You!



Email

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LinkedIn

[Western Balkan Junior Water Professionals](#)



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