

ISSUE 2

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# Welcome to the 2nd Issue of B4Students Tales!

As we close the chapter on 2024, we are thrilled to present the second issue of B4Students Tales, capturing the energy, innovation, and achievements of the B4Students community over the last six months of the year. From creative competitions to empowering workshops and unforgettable events, the B4Students program has been buzzing with energy, ideas, and talent—and it's all thanks to you!

In this issue, we're diving into the highlights of what we've accomplished together. You'll meet the inspiring winners of our 5th Business Idea Competition, see how students like you are turning creative designs into reality. It's been all about learning, growing, and making connections that count.

This edition highlights the exciting journey of our students and partners, from entrepreneurial breakthroughs to impactful initiatives that embody the core values of B4Students—empowering youth, fostering innovation, and building a sustainable future.

B4Students is a community, and every one of you brings something special to the table. We hope these stories remind you of what's possible when passion meets opportunity. So, grab a coffee, dive in, and let these pages inspire your next big idea!

We hope this issue inspires you as much as it has inspired us!  
Here's to everything we'll build together in the new year.

Warm regards,  
The B4Students Team

# The 5th Business Idea Competition: B4Students' newest entrepreneurs

The 5th edition of B4Students' highly anticipated Business Idea Competition produced its next generation of young entrepreneurs. The demo-day placed the finalists in front of the jury, with the two best pitches winning funding and mentoring from the B4Students program, supported by Mane Foundation.

This competition has grown into a significant event for budding student entrepreneurs, offering them a platform to showcase their innovative ideas and gain valuable insights from industry experts, as well as financing.



To foster communication among the student community, 7 in-person information sessions were conducted across various universities in Albania. The call for applications, which opened in April, was met with enthusiasm, resulting in 36 submissions. After a rigorous selection process, 15 promising participants were chosen to advance in the competition.

During June, these participants attended two essential workshops: "Business Model Canvas" and "Pitching in front of Investors", designed to equip them with crucial skills in business model design, monetization strategies, and presentation techniques, ensuring they were well-prepared for the final event.

The competition culminated with the final presentation phase, where participants presented their seven-minute pitches to a panel of jury members from BALFIN Group: Andi Muhametaj, Project Manager at BALFIN Group; Matilda Elmasllari, Corporate Relations Manager at Tirana Bank; and Gjergji Spaho, Chief Information Officer at BALFIN Group.

The competition's top honor, a first prize of €5000, was awarded to Mexhit Kastrati from Tirana Business University for his project, Unify. Unify is a groundbreaking app aimed at simplifying life in Albania by revolutionizing the way businesses and tourists navigate restaurant reservations.

Mexhit Kastrati, a passionate business administration student, envisions Unify as a tool that will enhance the dining experience for users by making it easier to find and book restaurant tables.

The second prize of €3000 went to Xhulia Kurti from the Aleksandër Moisiu Durrës University for her project, Two Slots, One Sensor. This innovative project addresses the challenge of parking in urban areas. The system uses a unique parking sensor that covers two slots, helping drivers find parking spaces more quickly and efficiently.

The success of the 5th edition of the Business Idea Competition highlights the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit among students.

This B4Students component is just one of many initiatives undertaken by the program to empower the next generation of business leaders. With the continued support of organizations such as Mane Foundation, the future looks bright for aspiring young entrepreneurs in Albania.



# Celebrating Creativity

## Klea Leli Wins Design Competition for B4Students Tales

B4Students Tales, is a digital magazine that aims to amplify student voices and showcase opportunities for youth and education in Albania, supported by the Mane Foundation. The vibrant and cohesive visual identity of this inaugural issue is the work of none other than the talented Klea Leli, the winner of our design competition.

Klea, a 20-year-old student of Art and Design at Polis University, has been passionate about drawing from a young age, turning her passion into a lifelong dream of creating unique and innovative designs. With a love for graphic design, product design, and industrial design, she spends her free time exploring different forms of creativity, combining visual elements to create captivating and original projects.



### Klea's Vision & Creative Journey

Klea's goal was to craft a visual identity that truly captures the spirit of B4Students Tales. She successfully blended her creativity, originality, and eye for detail to deliver a visual language that not only complements the magazine's content but also reflects the vibrant energy of the youth it represents.

The magazine cover design is visually striking, while the interior artwork showcases a consistent visual style, making the first issue of B4Students Tales an engaging experience for all readers.

Klea expressed her excitement about this opportunity, saying, "This project gave me the chance to freely express my ideas, which is something I truly love. I always aim for my creations to help me take part in international design festivals, and I hope that this journey begins, perhaps, with a design festival in Albania."

We invite you all to explore the first issue of B4Students Tales 1st Issue and experience Klea's creative vision come to life. This is just the beginning of our journey to celebrate student creativity and foster opportunities for the next generation.

# In cooperation with Mane Foundation and B4Students, "Riciklo Kreativ" in TEG brings together the young architects of the region

For the third year in a row, "Riciklo Kreativ" activity took place at TEG, the largest shopping center in the country, continuing the fruitful collaboration between Mane Foundation, B4Students program and the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism in Tirana.

The third edition of this activity brought together 44 architecture students from Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo and, among dozens of projects, a selected jury announced the 5 best projects - three of which were awarded with prizes. All the projects were built with recycled materials and each one of them came with a unique structure, serving as seating for outdoor environments. These creative works not only unleash students' creativity, but also raise awareness of the importance of recycling and environmental protection.

"Riciklo Kreativ" activity, according to ACREM\* Marketing Director, Joana Korimi, is a sign of TEG's responsibility towards the community and especially young people. "TEG is a shopping center that always has a growing responsibility towards the community and especially towards young people, because young people are the inspiration, they are the energy, they are the ones who encourage us to go towards our goals to build a better society" , - said Korimi.

For the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism in Tirana, Armand Vokshi, the third edition of the activity has surpassed the previous ones, due to the expressed interest and high commitment of the students. "This year's participation was higher than other times and the students who came with their groups this year are from Albania... from different faculties of Architecture, we have them from North Macedonia, Tetova, as well as from Kosovo" - claimed Vokshi.

TEG remains the home of creative art, of architects of the country and the region, but above all of responsible citizens with whom we share the same vision: continuous work and awareness for a cleaner and greener environment, and therefore for a healthier society.

This vision is fully in line with the Mane Foundation's mission to engage and promote initiatives that support sustainable development. The Mane Foundation has a long history of supporting projects aimed at environmental education, improving infrastructure and raising awareness in the community.

\*ACREM is the management company of the TEG shopping center and is part of the BALFIN Group, one of the largest and most successful investment groups in the country and region.



# B4Students Entrepreneurs Unleashed: Inspiring the Next Generation of Innovators

In an inspiring exchange of ideas, experience, and ambition, “**Entrepreneurs Unleashed: Founder Stories and New Startups**” brought together 50 aspiring entrepreneurs, students, and established business leaders for a dynamic event aimed at empowering Albania’s entrepreneurial ecosystem. Organized by Mane Foundation, B4Students, and Tirana Business University (TBU), the event provided a platform for fostering mentorship, skill development, and meaningful connections.

The event opened with remarks from representatives of the organizing bodies, highlighting the importance of nurturing innovation and supporting the next generation of Albanian entrepreneurs. Attendees were then introduced to a panel of accomplished founders from diverse industries: Krista Bombaj (Krist Travel and Tours), Vullnet Kuci (n’Konak Guest House), Klejvi Pero (Pero Fragrances), Gertjo Cobo (VrapOn), Nadiela Ahmetaj (Living App), and Eriselda Gjepali (Rework).



Through engaging storytelling, these entrepreneurs shared their journeys—the triumphs, the failures, and the invaluable lessons they’ve learned. Their candid reflections gave attendees an authentic glimpse into the entrepreneurial world, sparking inspiration and providing actionable insights.

The highlight of the event was the **Pitch Session**, where budding entrepreneurs showcased their innovative business ideas. With constructive feedback from seasoned founders, participants gained guidance to refine their concepts and presentations, paving the way for future success.

The day concluded with an interactive Q&A session and networking opportunity, allowing attendees to connect directly with the speakers and fellow participants. Conversations flowed, ideas were exchanged, and collaborations began to form, embodying the spirit of the event’s mission. During the Global Entrepreneurship Week 2024 in Albania, “Entrepreneurs Unleashed” successfully demonstrated the power of storytelling, mentorship, and community in shaping the entrepreneurial leaders of tomorrow.



# Study Visit at BALFIN Retail: Connecting Students to the Future of Retail Innovation



As part of Global Entrepreneurship Week Albania, Mane Foundation and B4Students, hosted a Study Visit at BALFIN Retail Offices offering students from universities across the country a unique opportunity to explore Albania's dynamic retail sector. The visit brought together aspiring young professionals eager to deepen their understanding of retail operations, innovation, and career possibilities within some of BALFIN Group's key companies, including SPAR, Neptun, FGA, and Jumbo.

The day began with a warm welcome and opening remarks by representatives from the Mane Foundation, B4Students, BALFIN Retail, and company leaders. Their message highlighted the role of innovation, operational excellence, and talent development in driving the retail industry forward.

Following the opening session, students participated in a guided site tour, gaining first hand insights into the operations of BALFIN's leading retail companies. From SPAR's innovative grocery solutions to Neptun's cutting-edge electronics, Jumbo's family-friendly offerings, and FGA's fashion-forward approach, students were able to see the inner workings of businesses that set standards in Albania's retail landscape.

The event concluded with a networking and career exploration session, where students engaged directly with BALFIN Retail professionals and HR representatives. Discussions revolved around career opportunities, internships, and the skills needed to excel in the retail sector. These exchanges provided students with valuable perspectives on how their education and ideas can align with the dynamic needs of the retail industry.

By encouraging active engagement, curiosity, and dialogue, the Study Visit at BALFIN Retail successfully showcased the intersection of education and professional growth. For many students, this was an important moment to envision themselves as future leaders and innovators in Albania's retail sector.

The event underscored BALFIN Group's commitment to fostering the next generation of talent and supporting the entrepreneurial ecosystem—core themes of Global Entrepreneurship Week.



# Global Entrepreneurship Week: Samir Mane Inspires Young Talent at B4Students



As part of the Global Entrepreneurship Week, Samir Mane, President of BALFIN Group, held an inspiring session with young participants of the “B4Students” program, an initiative by Mane Foundation designed to support students. During the event, Mane shared his success story, motivating attendees to pursue their dreams and ambitions in the business world.

Mane reflected on key moments and challenges in his career, emphasizing his humble beginnings and how a single idea became the driving force behind a significant venture, overcoming skepticism and economic obstacles along the way. “Seeing so many students connected to BALFIN in various ways takes me back to my own beginnings. Today, we stand as a major group like BALFIN,” Mane remarked, highlighting the importance of courage and persistence.

He encouraged the students to follow their passions and work diligently to bring their ideas to life. “Success demands dedication and hard work, but it is always rewarded,” he said, adding “Your future starts with the focus you show during your studies, with each step and each new idea. We are here to support you and show you that perseverance and passion always pay off.”

The event concluded with a powerful message from Mane, urging the young participants to dream big, take bold steps, and face challenges head-on.



B4Students is more than just a platform for professional development; it is an initiative aimed at cultivating the leaders of tomorrow and fostering positive change in the community. The program offers mentorship, internships, and ongoing support for students aspiring to enter the business world.

Over 300 business ideas have been submitted by students, many of which have turned into successful ventures. Approximately 100 student groups have developed social-impact projects, receiving support for their initiatives. The program has facilitated over 1,400 internships and awarded more than 50 scholarships. Through these efforts, B4Students continue to inspire and empower young minds, paving the way for a brighter and more innovative future.







## B4Students Brings Product Development Expertise at the Faculty of Natural Sciences

More than 40 students from the Physics Department at the Faculty of Natural Sciences gathered for an inspiring workshop on Product Development, organized by BALFIN Group as part of its #Here2Empower initiative. The session featured Orhan Hajri, a seasoned expert in product development with extensive experience in designing information management systems for banking and retail industries. Hajri's impressive career except for BALFIN Group includes roles at Deloitte and Sisal, making him a valuable resource for aspiring innovators.

The workshop provided students with an in-depth understanding of product development strategies and tools, focusing on the practical skills needed to create impactful products in competitive industries. Orhan Hajri shared his insights on bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world applications, sparking lively discussions and interactive activities among participants. "It was an eye-opening experience to learn from someone with so much expertise," said one of the attending students. "The practical examples and actionable advice have motivated me to think differently about how to turn ideas into successful products."

This event is part of the ongoing #Here2Empower initiative, a flagship program of B4Students that has been fostering connections between BALFIN Group's industry leaders and university students across Albania for more than a year. The initiative aims to share knowledge, expertise, and best practices to empower the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs.

The workshop at the Faculty of Natural Sciences marks yet another successful collaboration between B4Students and Albanian universities, reinforcing BALFIN Group's commitment to youth empowerment and education. Through initiatives like these, the group continues to make a lasting impact on the professional growth of young talents in the country.



# Would you like to meet some of B4Students Interns?



## Eglantina Zajmi

Intern at Finance Department at BALFIN Construction

Eglantina Zajmi, a Finance student at Metropolitan University in Tirana, joined the B4Students internship program in June, stepping into the Finance Department at BALFIN Construction. This opportunity has given her the chance to explore the fast-paced and dynamic world of finance within one of Albania's leading companies in real estate development and construction. Being part of BALFIN Group, Eglantina quickly realized she was in a place where collaboration, innovation, and shared success are more than just words—they're part of everyday life.

For Eglantina, her time at BALFIN Construction has been about more than just numbers and reports. She's found a strong sense of connection and teamwork within the Finance Department, where colleagues support and motivate one another to achieve shared goals. As her internship nears its end, Eglantina reflects on how much she has grown, both personally and professionally. She feels more confident and prepared for the challenges of the job market, thanks to the hands-on experience and valuable insights she has gained along the way.

Since 2022, BALFIN Construction, part of the BALFIN Group, has established itself as one of the leading companies in real estate development and the construction industry in Albania and the region.

## Prishila Plaku

Intern at Finance Department at BALFIN Construction

Prishila Plaku, an intern in the Legal Department at SPAR Albania holds a bachelor's degree in law. During her internship, she discovered her passion for civil law and gained valuable insights into its practical applications. This experience has been an eye-opening journey, helping her connect her academic knowledge with real-world legal practices.

For Prishila, the energy at SPAR Albania's offices stands out as vibrant, dynamic, and far from monotonous. Every day brings new challenges and opportunities to learn, and the supportive work environment has made her internship a rewarding and enriching chapter in her professional development.

Since joining the BALFIN Group in 2016, SPAR Albania has grown into a leading brand in its category, with 85 markets and two hypermarkets across the country. By being part of this successful company, Prishila has gained both knowledge and inspiration for her future in the legal field.



## Era Shahollari

Intern at Finance Department at QTU, ACREM

Era Shahollari, a Finance student at the Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana, began her journey with the B4Students program in June, undertaking an internship in the Finance Department at QTU, managed by ACREM. During this time, Era discovered her passion for accounting, which became her preferred field within finance.

Through hard work, a strong desire to learn, and the support of the dedicated team at ACREM, Era not only gained valuable experience during her internship but also achieved a significant milestone—securing a position as Finance Assistant after completing her internship. This transition marks a pivotal step in Era's career, highlighting her determination and the opportunities that B4Students provides for young professionals.

ACREM, part of the BALFIN Group, is a leader in managing shopping centers, residential properties, and other real estate assets in Albania. Since 2007, the company has set high standards in real estate management across the country and the region, overseeing major assets like TEG, QTU, TLP, Rolling Hills Luxury Residences, and Galeria by TEG. Through programs like B4Students, ACREM continues to support and inspire the next generation of professionals.



DREAM  
BIG



## Domenik Baci

Intern at Digital Marketing Department at Tirana Bank

Domenik Baci, a Marketing graduate from Tirana Business University, joined the Digital Marketing Department at Tirana Bank through B4Students internship program. During his time at Tirana Bank, Domenik not only deepened his knowledge of digital marketing strategies but also developed his skills in customer relations, acting as a bridge between clients and the marketing team. This dual focus gave him a well-rounded perspective on the impact of digital marketing in shaping customer experiences.

Reflecting on his internship, Domenik shared his enthusiasm for the future of digital marketing, emphasizing its potential to transform how businesses connect with their audiences. With Tirana Bank's mission to "be close to the customer" and its ambitious goals for geographic expansion and high-quality products and services, Domenik's experience highlights how digital marketing plays a crucial role in achieving these objectives.

Tirana Bank, part of the BALFIN Group, operates 33 branches in key cities across Albania. As a leader in financial services, the bank continues to innovate and invest in customer-focused solutions, with talented individuals like Domenik contributing to its ongoing success.



## Renis Merlika

Intern at IT Department at BALFIN

Renis Merlika has become part of the IT Department at BALFIN, as an intern where he has gained knowledge about the problems of the group's companies and is now learning about business management through the use of Information Technology solutions.

The field of Information Technology continues to remain the most popular in Albania, where we have the most applications from students in the open calls for internships at B4Students.

His experience began in the Help Desk section for the various problems encountered by BALFIN companies and then Renis moved to the business applications section.

## Frenklin Bejtja

Intern at Communications Department at BALFIN

Frenklin Bejtja, a student at the Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana, joined the Communications Department at BALFIN Group through the B4Students program. Over the course of her three-month internship, Frenklin gained hands-on experience in various areas, including CSR, digital marketing, internal and external communication, and public relations (PR). Among these fields, external communication stood out as her favorite, sparking a deeper interest in how organizations build and maintain their public image.

Reflecting on her time at BALFIN, Frenklin expressed gratitude for the exceptional team that supported her learning and growth. "I've had the chance to learn from the best team," she shared. Her advice for future interns? "This is an opportunity created for us, we should make the most of it!"

As one of the largest and most successful investment groups in the region, BALFIN Group continues to inspire young professionals by providing meaningful opportunities to explore and excel in their chosen fields. Frenklin's experience highlights the transformative power of internships in shaping career paths.





## SOCIAL CLUBS 2024

# Skill Up Academy: The Winning Project of the B4Students Social Clubs 2024 Call

Skill Up Academy, the winning initiative of the 2024 B4Students Social Clubs call, is a project designed to equip students with essential life skills and practical knowledge to succeed in today's fast-paced world.

The project was created by a passionate team of students - Armelda Ago, Armando Lekaj, and Esmeralda Sherifi - who share a commitment to improving student life. Their experiences in youth activities and student councils inspired them to address key gaps in education through a program that combines real-world applications with personal development.

Skill Up Academy offers a series of engaging lectures on topics such as effective communication, financial literacy, developing a winning mindset, leadership, and balancing study, work, and life. Led by experienced mentors, these sessions provide students with practical tools they can immediately use to enhance their lives and seize opportunities.

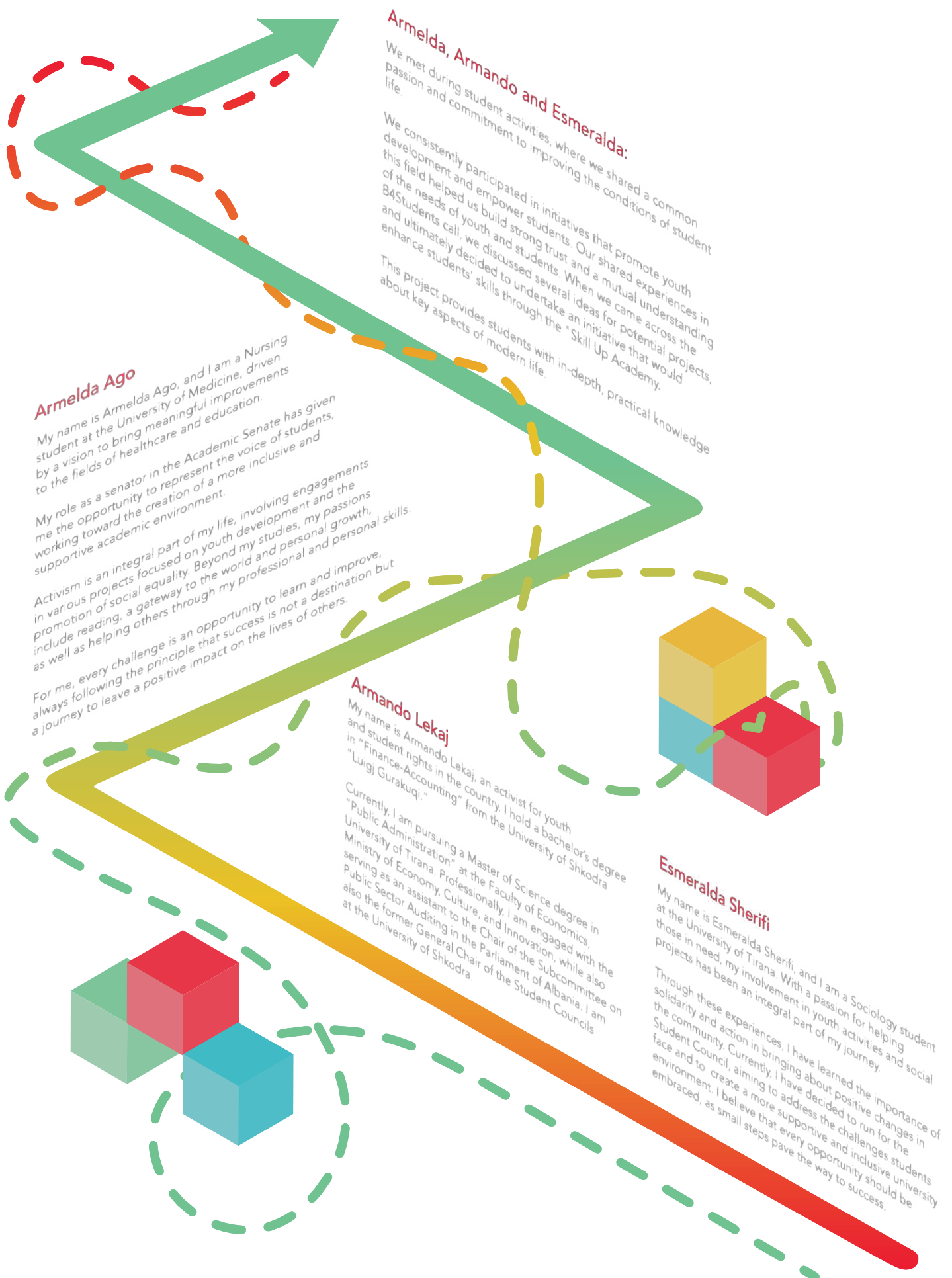
"Our goal is to prepare students not just for exams but for life," says Armelda Ago, nursing student and Academic Senate member. "We want to give them the skills they need to thrive."

The team's collaborative vision has already gained recognition through the B4Students program, which supports innovative student-led initiatives. Skill Up Academy is set to empower hundreds of students, fostering leadership and resilience while creating a stronger, more connected youth community.

Skill Up Academy is not just a project—it's a platform for growth, a bridge to opportunities, and a catalyst for positive change among Albania's students.



# Want to know more about the students behind Skill Up Academy?



## Armelda, Armando and Esmeralda:

We met during student activities, where we shared a common passion and commitment to improving the conditions of student life.

We consistently participated in initiatives that promote youth development and empower students. Our shared experiences in this field helped us build strong trust and a mutual understanding of the needs of youth and students. When we came across the B4Students call, we discussed several ideas for potential projects, and ultimately decided to undertake an initiative that would enhance students' skills through the 'Skill Up Academy.

This project provides students with in-depth, practical knowledge about key aspects of modern life.

## Armelda Ago

My name is Armelda Ago, and I am a Nursing student at the University of Medicine, driven by a vision to bring meaningful improvements to the fields of healthcare and education.

My role as a senator in the Academic Senate has given me the opportunity to represent the voice of students, working toward the creation of a more inclusive and supportive academic environment.

Activism is an integral part of my life, involving engagements in various projects focused on youth development and the promotion of social equality. Beyond my studies, my passions include reading, a gateway to the world and personal growth, as well as helping others through my professional and personal skills.

For me, every challenge is an opportunity to learn and improve, always following the principle that success is not a destination but a journey to leave a positive impact on the lives of others.

## Armando Lekaj

My name is Armando Lekaj, an activist for youth and student rights in the country. I hold a bachelor's degree in "Finance-Accounting" from the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi."

Currently, I am pursuing a Master of Science degree in "Public Administration" at the Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana. Professionally, I am engaged with the Ministry of Tirana. I am also serving as an assistant to the Chair of the Subcommittee on Public Sector Auditing in the Parliament of Albania. I am also the former General Chair of the Student Councils at the University of Shkodra.

## Esmeralda Sherifi

My name is Esmeralda Sherifi, and I am a Sociology student at the University of Tirana. With a passion for helping those in need, my involvement in youth activities and social projects has been an integral part of my journey.

Through these experiences, I have learned the importance of solidarity and action in bringing about positive changes in the community. Currently, I have decided to run for the Student Council, aiming to address the challenges students face and to create a more supportive and inclusive university environment. I believe that every opportunity should be embraced, as small steps pave the way to success.

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