

Asset Factsheet

Inclusive System Development in Labor Market Insertion



CONTEXT

Despite Albania's employment growth, *vulnerable groups remain underserved*, with youth unemployment and NEET rates stagnating. Long-term unemployment has worsened, rising from 63% in 2021 to 74% in Q3 2023. Half of the unemployed population is unregistered, leaving many—especially long-term unemployed and Economic Aid beneficiaries—without adequate access to support. These individuals often slip into inactivity due to the *absence of tailored opportunities and comprehensive services*. The current system struggles to meet their needs, with *significant gaps in service delivery*. A lack of effective profiling tools, inadequate service models, and undertrained employment counsellors hinder the provision of personalized support. Furthermore, unemployed individuals with low employability *do not receive the specialized counselling* needed to re-enter the workforce. The *disconnect between Public Employment Services (PES) and civil society organizations (CSOs)* exacerbates these challenges, leaving vulnerable groups without coordinated employment services. Albania has been proactive in *reforming its PES*, supported by the previous Swisscontact Coaching for Employment and Entrepreneurship (C4EE) project.

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

The project addresses several key development challenges:

- Unemployment and Labour Market Exclusion
- Social Inequality and Exclusion
- Capacity building and Quality of Employment Services
- Institutional Weaknesses and Policy Gaps
- Sustainable Economic Growth and Development

Short description of the asset:

We have successfully strengthened and improved policies, systems, incentives and human resources for public and non-public employment service providers to offer inclusive employment services and programs for long-term unemployed individuals (LTUs). Public Employment Services (PES) now provide quality services to LTUs in urban and accessible areas, supported by a robust system enhances with programs, tools and instruments, such and an Active Labor Marker Program, Individual Employment Plan, and a Performance Management Framework. These enhancements ensure the delivery and assurance of high-quality employment services. Meanwhile, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), serve LTUs in rural or hard-to-reach areas through a contracting model designed based on a previously developed approach from Swisscontact. These SCOs deliver specialized coaching for employment services and use referral system to address additional barriers, ensuring comprehensive support for all LTUs.

Title of the Project: **Boost Employment**

Implemented by [Swisscontact](#) in Albania

Funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Medicor Foundation, Canton of Zurich and City of Zurich, among other donors.

SHORT DESCRIPTION/OBJECTIVE

Enhance the coordination, performance, digitalization, and promotion of employment services, ensuring efficient, accessible and well-integrated solutions for jobseekers and employers.

COUNTRY: Albania and Kosovo

IMPACT: The Boost Employment project enhanced employment services by strengthening collaboration between PES and CSOs, integrating tools like IEPs, counselling modules, ALMPs, and PMF to provide personalized support to vulnerable groups, including LTUs, women, youth, and Economic Aid recipients. In Albania, it increased participation in job placement, training, and employment promotion programs, with 600 hard-to-reach LTUs receiving intensive counselling through specialized CSOs, for the first time. The methodology used - C4EE - has proven to be successful for 60 % of the LTUs receiving it. The project also advanced digitalization by embedding digital tools within PES and partner organizations in Albania and Kosovo, ensuring greater accessibility and a wider outreach of 500,000 people in both countries. These efforts are expected to secure employment for 10,350 individuals, in Albania and Kosovo, demonstrating the model's scalability and sustainability.

WHAT MAKES THE ASSET UNIQUE?

This asset stands out for its systemic approach to scaling proven concepts to expand access to employment services and opportunities for long-term unemployed individuals (LTUs). Building on successful earlier interventions, it **empowered system actors to integrate and upscale innovations at the national level, ensuring wider reach and sustainable impact.**

The project strategically combined **Public Employment Services (PES)** with specialized **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to serve both easily reachable and hard-to-reach LTUs.**

PES, equipped with new skills, tools, processes, and incentives, now delivers personalized, high-quality services.

Additionally, the intervention catalysed the creation of an Active Labour Market Program policy framework, introducing **a contracting model that enables PES to partner with CSOs to extend services to previously unserved LTUs.** By embedding these systemic changes within national frameworks, the project has transformed the way employment services are delivered across Albania. **The model ensures tailored, need-specific counselling for all jobseekers, regardless of employability levels, and promotes inclusion by integrating CSOs to reach remote and marginalized groups.** These innovations foster a robust, inclusive, and effective employment system, ensuring no one is left behind and positioning the intervention for impact at scale.

PARTNERS

- National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) for the improved service delivery model
- Specialised CSO for providing employment services to hard-to-reach LTUs

- Ministry of Economy Culture and Innovation (MECI) for the policy development on contracting model between those two actors.

POTENTIAL FOR REPLICATION

The systemic changes implemented in Albania—such as *improved tools, instruments, and manuals for employment counselling* (Individual Employment Plan, Counselling Module, Performance Management Framework)—offer a replicable model for countries with high unemployment and youth NEET rates.

The ALMP model, which fosters partnerships between Public Employment Services (PES) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for specialized counselling, provides a blueprint for enhancing service delivery through collaboration.

The project's replicability was demonstrated in Kosovo, where capacity-building initiatives and tailored tools prepared PES and CSOs to *adopt these innovations effectively.*

The experience in Kosovo underscores the need to adapt models to local contexts, considering the mandates of PES, the maturity of employment services, and the specific needs of target groups.

TARGET GROUPS

The LTUs or jobseekers that are at risk to become the LTUs such as women, young people with low qualifications, limited life and professional skills, and those from ethnic minority backgrounds or beneficiaries of social assistance programs (i.e. Economic Aid program).

They are disproportionately affected in the labour market and face longer spells of unemployment.

APPROACHES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The intervention *employed a systemic approach*, ensuring that *improved employment services are anchored within key system actors*, including the Public Employment Services (PES) - the National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES), Labour Offices and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). *By addressing capacity constraints*—skills, tools, and processes—and *aligning incentives*, the intervention ensured that these actors are empowered and motivated to continue service delivery according to the introduced model.

It was introduced an *Active Labour Market Program (ALMP)*, the *Individual Employment Plan (IEP)*, a *Performance Management Framework (PMF)*, and a *Counselling Module*, integrated into NAES's IT system, aligning with EU recommendations for LTUs.

PES employment counsellors received *continuous training*, enabling them to use these tools effectively and *provide personalized support through IEPs*. These plans outline service offerings, rights, and obligations, ensuring progress tracking and better alignment with job seekers' needs.

The *Performance Management Framework* not only *monitors service quality but also enhances performance incentives*, fostering a culture of continuous improvement through ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and refinement of processes. This has led to more individualized and higher-quality services, which, in turn, appears to have positively contributed to increased participation of vulnerable groups in job placement services, ALMPs, and vocational training programs (VTPs).

Beyond tools and policies, the intervention emphasized the importance of *incentivized actors to apply these frameworks effectively*. This was achieved by aligning capacities, resources, and performance indicators to ensure sustainable service delivery. *The partnership model between NAES and CSOs further expands services to hard-to-reach LTUs, promoting inclusion, through a newly established ALMP.*

The launch of this new Active Labour Market Program in June 2024, benefiting 600 individuals across 19 municipalities, exemplifies these achievements. The project continues to support NAES in establishing monitoring mechanisms for quality assurance while preparing CSOs to meet contracting criteria, ensuring effective service delivery across regions.

LESSONS LEARNT

Intervention Level: Applying Participatory Approach

Applying a participatory approach during the implementation of interventions (such as introduction of the IEP, delivery of trainings) within this asset influenced the success of the project. The project actively engaged NAES and employment counsellors in the diagnostic phase, decision-making and intervention implementation processes, which facilitated the adoption and use of the project's developed products.

Output Level: Adapting the Original Coaching for Employment (C4EE) Model to Accommodate the Needs of Marginalised Groups

The new ALMP which was designed to allow NAES to engage in partnerships with CSOs, was adapted to better suit the needs of LTUs and other vulnerable groups. The proposed programme, approved in June 2024, includes benefits to encourage LTU participation (since they are not covered by unemployment benefits), provides additional incentives to cover transportation expenses for those living in remote areas and offers added benefits for those caring for children or the elderly.

Strategy Level: Comprehensive Approach to Addressing Constraints in Provision of Employment Services

The project applied a comprehensive approach to address capacity constraints, encompassing more than just the skills and knowledge of employment counsellors. In addition to these human resource constraints, the project also examined the availability and adequacy of tools, processes, procedures, and IT systems, all of which can limit an organization's ability to effectively deliver its services. To address these broad capacity constraints, the project designed a broad portfolio of interventions. Furthermore, the project recognized that constraints may also stem from misaligned incentives and not only from weak capacities. Therefore, the project has facilitated the introduction of a performance management system within the PES to enhance incentives for improved provision of employment services.

Uptake Level: Reforming PES requires Time and a Conducive Context

Reforming Public Employment Services, as observed in Albania and in Kosovo, is a process that demands considerable time and a supportive environment. PES operate within government structures and are governed by a framework of laws and regulations, which often require revisions to accommodate reforms. Moreover, the implementation of reforms often requires changes in human capital, legal frameworks, tools and processes, and technological infrastructure, all of which takes time to secure and integrate effectively. The pace of reform is also influenced by political will. Thus, a supportive context plays a pivotal role. Environments that embrace reform and demonstrate political commitment to tackling change, facilitate project-based objectives.

In Albania, where such a context is conducive, progress towards achieving results has been more visible.

BENEFICIARY STORY

The story of Sabire: Empowered Through Employment Office Guidance



Sabire Shkembli's path to becoming a food biotechnology professional highlights the crucial role that local employment support played in her success. A graduate of the University of Tirana, Sabire was eager to apply her academic knowledge but felt uncertain about navigating the competitive job market.

Determined to gain practical experience, she sought help from the public employment office* in Korça, where she found more than just assistance with applications.

"The staff didn't just help me fill out forms," she explains. "They provided strategic advice on identifying opportunities that matched my skills and career goals. They also guided me through interview preparation and helped me improve my CV, which significantly boosted my confidence in approaching potential employers."

This support was a turning point in Sabire's career. The employment office not only connected her to opportunities but also equipped her with

the tools to approach the job market with clarity and confidence. Through their guidance, she secured an internship at Fix Pro, a food production company in her hometown of Korça. Starting as an intern, she honed essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Additionally, she developed stronger task management skills, enhancing her expertise in food safety and quality assurance.

With continuous support from the employment office and her proactive approach, Sabire successfully transitioned from an intern to a full-time laboratory technician and quality controller. "Their encouragement and practical advice were crucial in keeping me motivated and ensuring I seized every learning opportunity," she reflects.

Sabire's journey underscores the importance of remaining proactive and embracing growth opportunities with the right support systems in place. "It's essential to stay committed and take initiative in developing new skills," she advises. Her story demonstrates how determination, combined with professional guidance, can lead to career success and personal growth.

** The employment offices in Albania are part of the structure of the National Agency for Employment and Skills.*



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