Swisscontact-innovations

The coaching cycle for Albanian youth

Swisscontact is always searching for the best solutions to overcome local challenges. Sometimes, unconventional solutions are necessary for new approaches and concepts to come about. A recent example is the coaching cycle, which was developed 2009 for the AlbVET\(^1\) project and implemented by our Development Programme since 2015.

A coaching cycle graduate at his own hairdresser salon

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\(^1\) AlbVET funding: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

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Youth unemployment in Albania is around 32%. It is young people and those from disadvantaged and discriminated populations, such as the Roma, who suffer from the lack of opportunities. They often need remedial training in basic skills such as reading or writing. Discrimination renders their job search that much more difficult.

Swisscontact's experiences with these groups of young people has shown that technical skills development alone will not suffice for them to be able to find gainful employment. Their professional integration therefore should not be understood merely as a simple act, but much more as a multi-layered process. The coaching cycle address this reality head-on.

Training in key competencies
Together with the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HSLU), Swisscontact developed and implemented an 18-month coaching cycle in Albania. It is based on the concept of core competencies, which can be categorized roughly as follows: personal, social, methodological, and technical competencies or skills. Young people learn these skills during the coaching cycle in the classroom as well as hands-on training courses, extended internships, business startup trainings, individual business counselling sessions, as well as through small group activities and sharing.

The uniqueness of the cycle is how it combines various training components with individual career guidance for trainees under close guidance provided by a coach. The personal guidance is crucial for the young trainees as they are in unfamiliar territory: usually they have no real idea how to develop professionally.
Many concepts combined
Swisscontact and the HSLU incorporated several existing concepts into the coaching cycle and adapted them to the Albanian context. For example, they were inspired from the Swiss case management vocational education model and the socio-cultural animation method. What is innovative about the coaching cycle, however, is the participatory concept that permeates the entire programme. Partners from Switzerland and Albania worked together intensively for one year on this. Their efforts were successful in that our partner organisations have been able to identify completely with the concept from the very beginning.

The discussion about costs is omnipresent in these tailor-made programmes. However, they are the consequence of choosing this particular target group. Professional integration of marginalised groups is more expensive because of a lack of economies of scale in their case. This applies in Albania as in Switzerland. Just as in Switzerland, labour market integration of disadvantaged youth is a strategic objective of the Albanian government, which allocates funds accordingly.

60% labour market integration
Already more than 1,000 youth seeking employment have completed the coaching cycle. 60% found a job or started their own businesses. With the high youth unemployment rates in Albania referenced above, these are exceptional results, especially given the fact that this involves disadvantaged youth. With the National Office of Employment as the main project partner, good groundwork has been laid for the coaching cycle to receive formal accreditation and be incorporated into the state vocational education curriculum. Several district-level employment offices already have incorporated the coaching cycle.
Take-aways

Experience shows – Labour market integration is not merely a simple act, but rather a process lasting several months, especially for disadvantaged youth.

Sources of inspiration – Existing concepts might not be transferable 100%, but individual ideas can be combined and adapted to the local context.

Involving our partners – The participatory process of concept design requires a long time but also results in identification with the planned process.

Addressing specific needs – Marginalised groups are not included in courses offered to the majority. It is important to defend their need for specific courses.

A personal success story

Anila Dermishi, a young mother of two, is a member of the Balkan Egyptian minority in Kuçova. Thanks to the coaching cycle, she completed an internship as a bar waitress. Thanks to this hands-on practical training and improvements in her communications skills through group activities in the coaching cycle, Anila got a full-time job at the bar and overcame gender and ethnic barriers.