ACRONYMS

OJT – On the Job Training
IET – Institution and Enterprise Based Training
VTC – Vocational Training Center
PES – Public Employment Services
ALMP – Active Labour Market Programmes
ILO – International Labour Organization
MEST – Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs
MLSW – Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
LMIS – Labour Market Information System
EMIS – Employment Management Information System
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During its eight-year lifespan (2005-2013), the Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMP) directly served 11,241 individual beneficiaries and numerous enterprises by placing jobseekers in enterprises through one of its employment measures. The project also supported the development of critical technical capacities within Kosovo’s institutions (Public Employment Services, Vocational Training Centres, line ministries, etc.) for the administration of active labour market measures. This included not only the provision of trainings for personnel, but also substantial financial and technical support for the development of the legal and administrative basis for ALMPs (laws, regulations and operational guidelines) as well as critical information tools for labour market administration and policy-making, such as the Labour Market Information System (LMIS) and the Employment Management Information System (EMIS). 1

The project managed to, on average, reach 94% of targeted beneficiaries each year, while also succeeding to achieve its demographic objectives, especially with regard to more vulnerable groups such as women (45%), minorities (14%) and youth aged 15-29 (65%). External evaluations confirmed that the project had a considerable impact on the long-term job prospects of beneficiaries, as 38-46% of them found jobs after being placed in one of the schemes, compared to 19-20% of those from control groups.

The project managed to achieve considerable success while operating in a challenging institutional environment. ALMPs represented a challenge because brand new government services, involving a complex web of actors, were introduced and managed for years by fragile young institutions which had limited technical and financial capacities and often showed difficulties in coordination and commitment due to numerous priorities. In addition, the project was implemented in a context of a considerable lack of systematic information on the labour market. Nevertheless, the project was able to overcome such challenges mainly due to a strong monitoring system and a flexible approach to design and implementation that was based on continuous learning and response to changing needs and realities.

1 Photos Credit: Alexia Skok.
THE PROJECT

The Active Labour Market Programmes (2005-2013), initially called the Employment Generation Programme (2005-2007), strived to address one of Kosovo’s main development challenges – namely, the “supply side” causes of the high rate of youth unemployment, which are related to the employability of its workforce and the institutional links for their inclusion in the labour market, especially of vulnerable groups facing high risks of long-term exclusion. It attempted to ameliorate this problem by creating functional institutional links between young jobseekers and employers that would enable the former to gain skills and critical first experiences in the labour market.

The project’s strategic approach was to engage with beneficiaries at different levels: a) by developing systems and providing direct service delivery for unemployed youth through active labour market measures; b) by providing capacity building for local institutions that would eventually enable them to manage active labour market policies and programmes on their own.

On the service delivery front, the project implemented various schemes through the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) and the Public Employment Services (PES) during different periods, such as: Institution and Enterprise Based Training (2008-2012), On-the-Job Training (2007-2013), Wage Subsidies (2005-2008), Pre-employment training (2007-2008), Internship Scheme (2006-2013), Public Works Projects (2005-2006) and trainings at Don Bosco vocational school (2009-2010). These schemes had a well-defined target group of beneficiaries who needed to fulfil certain eligibility criteria. Its main target group were young people aged 15-29 who were officially unemployed for at least six months. The program gave priority to job seekers without skills, working experience and with low education, as well as to those whose family received social assistance. At the same time striving to achieve gender balance and reach a considerable number of minorities and people with disabilities.

The project later developed two other schemes. The Professional Practice in private sector enterprises for Vocational Education Students (2009-2013), had a specific target group, that of students of the Vocational Education Schools (VES), and was implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), the vocational education schools and the private sector. This measure was utilized to prevent increase in the number of potential passive jobseekers in the PES. The project also supported VES in developing a stronger communication strategy. The second scheme targeted the Reintegration of Readmitted Persons (2012-2013 and was implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), municipal offices for returns and reintegration for readmitted persons and PES.
On the capacity building front, in close partnership with the MLSW, ALMP mainly focused on developing the capacity of the Public Employment Services (PES) to provide individualized and efficient services, as well as on strengthening the capacities of the MEST and Vocational Schools and improving their links with private enterprises. It did so by providing continuous trainings for the staff of local institutions, developing operation manuals and guidelines for sequenced case management, supporting the development of technological information tools (i.e. Labour Market Information System and Employment Management Information System), developing capacities for skills needs assessments, stimulating cooperation and coordination between in the complex web of local and national level institutions, etc.

As illustrated by the various ALMP schemes that were implemented over the years, the project continuously evolved and adopted an innovative approach in response to lessons learned and feedback from stakeholders. New schemes were frequently piloted and ones that were deemed to be less effective were discontinued. Innovation was also continuously introduced to improve efficiency of project implementation and the achievement of intended outputs, such as, for example, in improving the mechanism of accountability in implementation through monitoring or in reaching the intended targets for women and minority beneficiaries.
FACTORS AFFECTING IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTPUTS

The implementation of the project did not generally face any extraordinary internal or external problems that seriously impeded the achievement of the intended outputs or reduced its overall impact. One of the main reasons for this was the fact that the project addressed very pressing needs for the direct beneficiaries of active labour market measures: unemployed youth and enterprises seeking qualified workers. Youth unemployment stood at 73% in 2009 (the mid-point in the project’s lifespan) whereas a large number of companies even to this date continue to stress that they have a difficulty finding qualified workers. There was, therefore, a significant buy-in from both the direct beneficiaries and the public institutions involved in implementation.

Throughout the project period, the ALMP project team established a close and fruitful cooperation with local partner institutions (either state institutions or private sector enterprises) which were as cooperative and effective during implementation as their financial and technical capacities allowed them to be. To this end, numerous MoUs were signed between the project and local partners, a system of coordination was developed for the implementation of active labour measures through the Public Employment System (PES), and a continuous dialogue was waged to improve effectiveness of ALMPs and the capacities of local institutions, with the project being flexible and responsive to the latter’s needs.

Cooperation with other donors or international organizations was also very influential at the level of project and activity design – especially with the ILO – which was reflected in the introduction of new pilot schemes after 2008 and which improved quality of capacity building efforts. Coordination was also fruitful with other projects which started implementing ALMPs after 2009 (Lux Dev and European Commission’s KOSVET VI project), although the existence of several similar projects did limit the absorption capacities of local partner institutions. Areas of overlaps were however addressed through coordination efforts that will, for example, lead to the establishment of unified operational guidelines.

Generally speaking, the macroeconomic context created a neutral to positive enabling environment for the project. During the project’s lifespan, Kosovo witnessed a significant yearly growth rate (average yearly growth rate was 4.6% for 2006-2012 period) which caused poverty levels to decrease (poverty decreased from 45.1% in 2006 to 28% in 2012). Nevertheless, growth was not associated with any marked increase in job creation and there has been a lot of discussion about Kosovo experiencing a jobless growth syndrome.

Data from the latest Labour Force Survey in 2012 indicated that the unemployment rate during this period decreased (from 45% in 2005 to 30% in 2012), but only due to a methodological change in calculating the size of the labour force. The absolute number of employed persons remained pretty much stagnant throughout the project period, which means that new jobs merely compensated for ones that were lost. The relevance of this fact for the ALMP project is that it operated in a context in which there was no steep decrease in demand for workers, thus creating a conducive environment for the project to address the supply side barriers in the labour market and engage young jobseekers in the schemes.

The political and institutional context was somewhat complex, as Kosovo faced great political challenges and continued the difficult process of establishing its institutional structure, accelerated after the declaration of independence. During this period the resources and the attention of policy-makers...
had to be directed in too many priority areas, leaving the issue of unemployment and workforce skills as just one among many. When serious delays or failures in implementation occurred, they were thus mostly the product of reasonably limited financial and technical capacities of fragile local partner institutions.

Throughout the project period the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and Public Employment Services faced great budget constraints for operational costs and investments. This limited its ability to perform at optimal levels. For example, in 2007 budget cuts were introduced, causing a restructuring and reduction of personnel – including those that had undergone training through the project – as well as reduction of funds available for logistics such as telephone or fuel costs for regional and municipal employment offices. This reduced the numbers and capacities of local employment counselors to provide qualitative services and monitor the implementation of ALMPs.

In some cases, it was not only the lack of funds, but the complexity of the institutional architecture required to implement ALMPs and the difficulty of ensuring coordination between various institutions which made some target groups - such as, for example, social assistance beneficiaries - hard to reach. Employment and welfare offices, for example, could not effectively share information that would allow for suspension of welfare payments for those beneficiaries engaged in ALMP schemes.

Another way in which the external political environment impacted implementation was by reducing the desired level of participation among minority beneficiaries, especially in the early years of the project. The main difficulty was with the engagement of the Serbian minority. For a large part of the project duration, jobseekers and businesses had political objections to being registered with Kosovo institutions as jobseekers or legal enterprises, which made them ineligible to benefit from the schemes.

The participation of women also represented a challenge, although, in this case, the problem was more of a socio-cultural nature and related to women's generally lower participation rate in the labour market, as well as their lower share among the unemployed. In 2012, Kosovo had the lowest female labour force participation rate in Europe – at 18%. On the other hand, in 2005, the year of the project’s initiation, among the registered unemployed, 46% were female and 54% were male.

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Labour Force Survey 2012, Kosovo Agency for Statistics
Despite such obstacles caused by the external environment, the project made extra efforts and found ways to ensure equal representation of women among the beneficiaries, especially in the second half of the project’s lifespan (57% in 2012). Improvements were also made in the representation of minority groups (14% in 2012).

Another important factor in the external environment which might have impeded the results of the project was the fact that some of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups might have been out of reach, because they had a higher than average tendency to remain unregistered as jobseekers. This suggestion was made by the external evaluation conducted for the project period 2005-2007.

Nevertheless, one of the key factors which made sure that the project was ultimately successful despite external constraints was the realistic approach in the design of activities. The latter took into account risks, absorption capacities and the constraints of the external environment. As such, the project was marked by a high degree of flexibility, innovation and reflection from lessons learned or consultations with stakeholders. This was also confirmed by the external evaluation of the project conducted in 2012 which stated that ALMPs are extremely well designed and in line with international best practices.

An indicator confirming the flexibility of the project is the gradual move away from less effective schemes such as public works projects (2005-2006) and wage subsidies (2005-2008) and the piloting of other schemes which were then proven as more effective. Wage subsidies, for example, were gradually phased out since employers (who could choose between schemes) preferred to use on-the-job trainings. Another indicator illustrating good planning is the solid achievement of yearly targets for the number of beneficiaries, or the activities foreseen for capacity development of institutions (see Figure 1 for reference).
UNDP was aware from the outset about the wide range of risks that a project of this nature could face, especially from an operational standpoint, since brand new government services were being introduced in the context of fragile young institutions. That is why a strong emphasis was put on the development of a strong monitoring system that was able to quickly identify bottlenecks and allow for necessary adjustments in implementation within a project year, or the redesign of activities for future years.

For example, one of the immediate risks that were identified in early 2005 with the wage subsidies scheme was the potential for abuse by beneficiary businesses. Through its monitoring system the project found in the first part of the year that about 31% of applicant firms were registering their existing employees as unemployed with PES in order to “hire” them through the scheme and claim the financial benefits. These applicants were immediately rejected.

Nevertheless, one of the greatest risks that the project faced throughout the implementation process was related to the financial and technical capacities of local partners and the way in which this would impact timeliness and quality of project services, and especially the sustainability of ALMPs in the long-run.

There were several cases when such risks did materialize. For example, during the implementation of public work projects, there were systematic delays in payments destined for workers. These payments were supposed to be processed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare themselves, however, due to internal processes and capacities, these delays were causing frustration among persons engaged through public works projects.

Given the fact that the project was not in a position to influence in the internal processes of the ministry, treasury etc, and the need for a quick reaction, the project responded to such a problem by administering payments for subsequent schemes on its own. Difficulties in coordination between a complex range of actors also led to delays in selecting beneficiaries for the professional practice of VET students in 2011.

While implementing a long-term project with institutions undergoing a process state-building, it is natural to expect ups and downs in terms of commitment, attention and continuity. Leaders and managers of public authorities often change and most have to juggle between a wide range of priorities, often conflicting ones, as well as many donor projects which stretch their absorption capacities to the limits. This often impacted the project and, in most cases, there was no way to mitigate such external risks except to work within the limits of the operating environment.

For example, with the advice of the IMF, the government introduced budget cuts in 2007 which led to the reduction of the PES budget and staff, including many that had undergone training through the project. This caused significant problems in the implementation of the ALMP schemes. Limited absorption capacities also caused delays in developing strategic documents at the policy level and the institutional architecture necessary for the long-term sustainability of ALMP schemes.

Nevertheless, the project attempted to address as much as possible those risks that were within its domain of control. One of the most effective ways in which it did so was by initially piloting schemes to test their feasibility before scaling them up. This was the case, for example, with the internship scheme (piloted in 2006) or the Institution & Enterprise Based Training (piloted in 2008). The professional practice for VET students was piloted in 2009 and underwent an evaluation before being scaled up in 2011 and 2012.
This was not the case, however, with the reintegration of readmitted persons. This scheme represented a matter of greater urgency for public authorities as part of the EU visa liberalization process and was not well-designed due to lack of information on the target group and was not properly tested before being introduced, which to a certain extent explains the greater problems in implementation and the failure to meet beneficiary targets.

Another way in which risks of failure were averted was through the flexibility in the design of activities. Several schemes were implemented at the same time so that unexpected problems with one would be compensated by having more beneficiaries placed in other schemes, thus allowing beneficiary targets to be met in a given year. For example, in 2011 there was a problem recruiting candidates for the Institution and Enterprise Scheme - as most VTC students failed to meet the eligibility criteria – and thus only 27% of the target was reached for this scheme. This was compensated by placing more beneficiaries through the On-the-Job training and Internship Schemes. The second important factor related to flexibility was the possibility to phase out inefficient schemes in subsequent years, which is what happened with the Institution and Enterprise Scheme in 2013.
ASSESSMENT OF OUTPUTS

The ALMP project reached a significant number of beneficiaries through its various active labour schemes, professional practice placements of VET students in enterprises and public work projects. As illustrated by Table 1, a total of 11,241 young people benefited from the project during its lifespan. The largest share benefited through the public works programmes (28%), followed by On-the-Job Training (25%), Wage Subsidies (19%), Internship Scheme (10%) and Professional Practice for VET students (10%).

Table 1: Total numbers of beneficiaries in ALMP project (2005-2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Beneficiaries</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public Works Project (2005-2006)</td>
<td>3194</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-the-Job Training (2007-2013)</td>
<td>2773</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage Subsidies (2005-2008)</td>
<td>2138</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship Scheme (2006-2013)</td>
<td>1175</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Practice in Enterprise for VET students (2009, 2011-2012)</td>
<td>1138</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Employment Training (2007-2008)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Scheme (2009)</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution &amp; Enterprise Based Training (2008-2012)</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reintegration of Readmitted Persons (2012-2013)</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training at Don Bosko (2007-2008)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL BENEFICIARIES</strong></td>
<td><strong>11241</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: ALMP Project Data*

The project was generally very effective in achieving its goal of placing young people in any one of its schemes and having them complete their engagement at the workplace. This is demonstrated by the fact that, on average, the targeted number of beneficiaries at the beginning of each year was achieved by 94% by the end of the year. The yearly percentages of the project’s target achievements are graphically illustrated in Figure 1. It shows that only in two years (2005 and 2010) was target completion lower than 90%. It must be noted that these percentages reflect only the active labour market measures implemented through the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare –excluding specific schemes such as the reintegration of readmitted persons, and professional practice for VET students.

Figure 1: Percent of target number of beneficiaries reached every project year (2005-2013)
The project also demonstrated considerable success in achieving one of its other main strategic objectives - namely meeting the quotas for the demographic characteristics of the beneficiaries in indicators such as age, ethnicity and gender. With regard to age, the project's strategic aim was to primarily target the age group of 15-29. As illustrated by Figure 2, in total, 65.3% of all beneficiaries belonged to this age group, whereas only 34.7% of beneficiaries were older than 30. It must be noted that age requirements were often waived for other strategic reasons – i.e. people older than 30 admitted - in order to achieve more equitable representation of women and minorities.

**Figure 2: Project beneficiaries by age groups (2005-2013)**

The project was also considerably successful in including minorities among its beneficiaries. As illustrated by Figure 3, in total 14.4% of all project beneficiaries were members of minority communities. Similarly, as illustrated by Figure 4, the gender target (50%) was missed by a small margin, as women represented 45% of project beneficiaries, compared to 55% who were men.

**Figure 3: Project beneficiaries by ethnicity (2005-2013)**

**Figure 4: Project beneficiaries by gender (2005-2013)**

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the total percentages of minority and women representation throughout the project period hide the significant improvements that were made over time as a result of the project's extra measures to reach the intended targets and ensure equity in service delivery. Figure 5 illustrates the percentage of women and minorities in each of the project’s years of implementation. It shows that women's share was much lower in the first half of the project’s duration (35-46% in the period 2005 - 2009) but that it surpassed the target of 50% every year in the second half (2010-2013). The representation of minorities witnessed ups and downs, mostly as a reflection of political developments related to Kosovo’s status.
One of the main strategic priorities of the project was to include among the beneficiaries as many persons as possible whose families were benefiting from social assistance schemes. In 2008, in cooperation with ILO, the project has conducted an initial assessment in view of integrating the social assistance category II beneficiaries in the labour market. In close consultation with the local partners, the assessment report revealed several obstacles in implementing a “welfare-to-work scheme”. The level of the social assistance in monetary terms was more or less equal to a minimum wage of the private sector. In addition, there were also coordination and administrative issues which made efforts in this direction difficult. The lack of a functional electronic registration system that could be shared by welfare and employment offices made it difficult for the former temporarily freezing welfare payments for those placed by the latter in active labour market schemes, or to restart payments once trainings were completed and beneficiaries were unable to find work.
Taking into consideration these factors, the beneficiaries saw no incentive from engaging in active labour market programs and were thus harder to reach than any other target group. As a consequence, the project together with ILO has organized several trainings to employment counsellors on provision of employment services to this category of jobseekers as well as produced a compilation of good practices of welfare to work schemes, implemented in the region and beyond. This particular scheme was not piloted, however, the project didn’t limit the opportunities for this category to apply and benefit from the project. From an operational perspective, the project gave a lot of effort to ensure quality services by the Public Employment Services and the Regional Advisory Boards by providing continuous trainings and developing accountability mechanisms. It also put a strong emphasis on the monitoring of beneficiaries once they were placed in enterprises.

The active labour market measures were implemented through operational guidelines developed in cooperation with local labour market institutions. These guidelines outlined the concrete sequencing steps in the process of matching employers and job-seekers through the schemes. The project provided continuous and updated trainings and workshops for responsible institutions (PES, MLSW, Vocational schools, etc.) in the implementation of the schemes.

With time, as with all administrative processes, the processes implemented through the PES were improved. However, budgetary constraints led to limitations in the numbers and capacities of councilors, and, as a result, often to insufficient time devoted for case management, imperfect matching between jobseekers and employers and a range of other problems.

A significant bottleneck in the speed and quality of the individual case management process was caused by the lack of a functional electronic management system such as the Employment Management Information System (EMIS). The functionalization of the latter would have streamlined the administrative process significantly. Another problem was the weak capacity of institutions to gain updated labour market information at local levels that would have improved the ability of PES to provide better guidance to jobseekers and the ability of VTCs to update curricula. Support for the establishment of EMIS and LMIS came only at a later stage of the process.

Nevertheless, even these problems did not hamper project implementation significantly. This is confirmed by the fact that once jobseekers and employers were matched and placed in an active labour market scheme, dropout rates were marginal. This may also be attributed to the effective monitoring system that was put in place and which will be discussed in more detail in later sections of this report.

The schemes implemented through PES had been started earlier, therefore the process of their administration had sufficient time to be perfected during the project’s lifespan. This was not the case, however, with smaller ones that were started later in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and VET schools (“professional practice in private enterprises for VET students”) or the Ministry of Internal Affairs (“Reintegration of readmitted persons”).

The scheme of placing VET students in enterprises involved a wider and more complex range of actors (VET schools, PES, enterprises, Municipal Education Directorates etc.) in the administrative process. Operational guidelines were only drafted in 2011, so there were greater delays in the selection of beneficiaries and lower achievement of beneficiary targets in the two years that the scheme was implemented (74%). The scheme also witnessed a lower participation of women (31%) and minorities (2%) due to their lower attendance in VET schools. The reintegration of readmitted persons on the other hand faced other challenges due to the complex context of beneficiaries, including here their lower interest in the schemes, which resulted with low achievement of targets in 2012 (only 37%) and in 2013 (25%).

In conclusion, it should be noted that the capacity building efforts of ALMP (2005-2013) and the other
projects implementing active labour market measures since 2009 (Lux Dev and EC KOSVET VI) were tailored to, and have managed to, create sustainable capacities and mechanisms for the administration of ALMPs at the scale of the currently existing projects. Local institutions (PES, VTCs, line ministries) have all received continuous and updated training, whereas the regulatory and institutional framework for the effective implementation of ALMPs has by large been established. A comprehensive list of strategic operational and policy documents that were produced with the support of the ALMP project are outlined in Annex 2 of this report.

Nevertheless, the long-term sustainability and continuation of the project activities under the full management of local institutions is dependent on various factors that are beyond the project’s control. The most important factor is the greater allocation of financial resources in Kosovo’s budget for the implementation of ALMPs in order to compensate for the potential retreat of donor projects and to increase the currently limited operational costs of the PES and VTCs. Increased funding would also ensure the sustainment and empowerment of the existing technical capacities of the PES and VTCs for efficient and effective implementation. A critical factor is also the development of better information tools to aid the policy-making and administrative process.
**OVERALL IMPACT OF THE PROJECT**

It can be stated with a high degree of confidence that the ALMP project had a significant development impact for Kosovo. Beneficiaries of the ALMP schemes had a significantly higher likelihood of finding employment due to the project than those who did not benefit from the project. As a result of the project intervention, many people today have jobs which they would not have had. In addition, the project helped central level institutions such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, including their subordinate bodies at the local level (ex. PES, VTCs) develop systems and mechanisms that link jobseekers with enterprises, even if they remain imperfect.

The project conducted two external evaluations of the project’s impact for two different periods of the implementation – one for the year 2007, and the other for the period 2008-2010. The project monitoring process itself incorporated impact evaluation tools, as it followed up with beneficiaries after they had completed the training and compared their performance with control groups. This created an excellent opportunity to ensure empirically based evaluations of the project’s impact.

The first evaluation, conducted in 2008 for the beneficiaries of year 2007, included a survey among beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (control group) and found that the beneficiaries of active labour market measures had a significantly higher rate of employment than non-beneficiaries. At the time of the survey, 46% of the project’s beneficiaries were employed, compared to 20% of the control group. Three fourths of those who were employed had been able to gain full-time employment. The evaluation also concluded that the project provided equal opportunities for men and women, while in control groups men were predominantly employed (see Table 2). Another positive finding from the survey with beneficiaries was that 90% of them were satisfied with the trainings provided through the project.

Table 2: Employment by gender: impact on project beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (first phase 2005-2007)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Beneficiaries (%)</th>
<th>Control Group (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
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</table>

Another indicator of the project’s impact is the net positive benefit gained from the investment. The evaluation conducted in the project’s first phase noted that the project generated a positive benefit that was 1.42 times greater than the investment costs. It also showed that the indirect cost per beneficiary was 184 EUR, whereas within this cost the contribution of MLSW was 93 EUR. The contribution of partners therefore represented half of the cost, thus increasing the return on investment for donors.

The second external evaluation, conducted for the three year period 2008-2010 also arrived at similar positive conclusions regarding the impact of ALMPs. As illustrated by the data in Table 3, the evaluation pointed out that 38% of the beneficiaries continued to be employed, compared to only 19% among the control group. Furthermore, the relevance of the on-the-job trainings that were provided to beneficiaries proved to be high: 81% of the beneficiaries who were still employed after the programme indicated that they were using the skills learned during the programme in their present job. Another indicator of the project’s success is the fact that about 49% of those who were employed were still working in the same enterprises where they undertook on-the-job training.

There were significant differences in impact depending on the active measure implemented: for instance, the measure targeting graduates through the internship programme had better employment
outcomes compared to the other measures. Likewise, the graduates of the internship programme have had considerably sustained results, as proven by the fact that 54% of the 2008 cohort were still in employment three years later. The evaluation also concluded that the project produced significantly positive impacts and outcomes for disadvantaged and minority groups in Kosovo.

Table 3: Employment of project beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Period</th>
<th>% employed (project beneficiaries)</th>
<th>% employed (non-beneficiaries, control group)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005-2007</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2010</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The scheme of placing VTC students in professional practice was also estimated as being successful. An external evaluation of the pilot scheme initially implemented in 2009 found that the scheme contributed to the creation of a structured link between vocational schools and the private sector. Impact evaluations of this scheme on long-term employment or cost-benefit analysis have not been possible due to the fact that most beneficiaries continued further education (university).

Regardless of its effectiveness and impact on beneficiaries, the project nevertheless had natural limitations as it could only reach a limited number of the unemployed in Kosovo. The evaluation conducted for the year 2007 noted that, for example in the year 2007, the project reached around 13% of the new entrants in the labour market. Nonetheless, it should be noted that it would not have been realistic to expect higher reach than the existing cohort of beneficiaries due to factors such as limited financial resources, limited absorption capacities of local institutions, an external environment that was not conducive to high rates of job creation, etc.

At the institutional level, the impact of the project was that it built from scratch the skills, the mechanisms and practices with the institutions responsible to provide employment services and link jobseekers with enterprises, therefore setting the seeds for long-term implementation of active labour market measures. The development of operations manuals which are utilized by PES and VTCs, and the provision of continuous trainings for their personnel and other relevant stakeholders, created a critical institutional tradition and practice of labour market interventions.

The employment offices and vocational training centers had very limited skills and experience to deliver employment services to jobseekers. Following good practices in the region and beyond, the project together with the partners at central and local level, have established the mechanisms and built the capacities of PES to deliver targeted individualized employment counselling to jobseekers.

Several tools introduced, such as the Individual Employment Plans and Individual Training Plans are considered as very important instruments for PES to be able to increase the effectiveness of service provision. Individualized service provision is also in line with the practices implemented by EU Employment Agencies. Further, in addition to introduction of instruments, design of employment measures and training provided on implementation of these different measures, the joint implementation of those in practice has further strengthened the capacities of employment offices and VTC trainers throughout the years.

Through the project support, the employment offices that were seen from the community as registration offices for mainly receiving unemployment statements to fulfill the criteria for benefiting from social assistance (and not only), became offices that offer support to jobseekers to enhance their skills and abilities thus enhancing their employment prospects.
One of the major achievements of the project, worth highlighting in the report is the upgrade of the Employment Management Information System (EMIS). This system is a tool used by the employment counsellors on daily basis to deliver services in a more efficient way as well as to monitor and report activities in a modernized and effective fashion. The system allows for several automatic functions such as matching between jobseekers and employers based on predefined criteria, easier case monitoring and automatic reporting – considered by PES as burdensome and time consuming manual exercises - thus allowing the employment counsellors to dedicate their time in actual provision of employment services to their clients (jobseekers and employers). Development of the Employment Management Information System also provides the basis for next interventions towards modernization of Public Employment Services, such as: introduction of profiling mechanism, better targeting of the most disadvantaged among unemployed, introduction of a performance evaluation framework allowing for enhanced accountability, establishment of a training system for PES, introduction of multi-channel service delivery etc.

Despite parallel implementation of other donor funded projects in the area of active employment measures, the project made efforts to coordinate and complement rather than duplicate activities. As a result, several policy documents, including strategies and action plans, regulations etc were produced as a result of joint efforts in cooperation with the World Bank, the Lux-development project, several EC funded projects, twinning projects etc. As a concrete example, is the development of the Operational Guidelines on implementation of active employment measures, developed in cooperation with the EC funded Kosvet 6 project. These guidelines are adopted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and shall be a guiding document for implementation of active employment measures by the Public Employment Services, irrespective of the organization supporting them through technical and financial assistance in implementation of such measures. Another example of coordination efforts to ensure aid effectiveness and maximize results is the development of the Strategy and Action Plan for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons 2014 – 2020. This activity was implemented in close cooperation and coordination with the Twinning project within the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The impact of the project was more limited in terms of the efforts to make the administrative process more streamlined and efficient, largely due to delays in introducing electronic management systems and the insufficient financing (thus insufficient technical capacities) of labour market institutions through Kosovo’s budget. Impact was also more limited at the critical level of policy development by central level institutions simply because the involvement of the ALMP project in this area was more limited and came in at a later stage through support for some of the components of the Employment Strategy of Kosovo, such as the improvements in labour market information through the LMIS, or the development of a strategy for professional practice for VET students. The remaining gaps in the efficiency of labour market institutions and their capacities for policy making will be addressed through the ALMP 2 project.
LESSONS LEARNED

When the ALMP project was first initiated, the underlying assumption, based on experiences from other countries, was that the labour market does not automatically match supply and demand for workers. It assumed that mechanisms needed to be put in place to make sure that workers – especially those who live in a context of social exclusion and have less opportunities for personal development – become employable by gaining skills and practical experiences, and that businesses have a chance to find and test these skilled workers, potentially keeping those whom they find to be useful. As the external evaluations showed, eight years and more than 11,000 beneficiaries later, the ALMP project reconfirmed the initial assumption as true.

For development professionals working on labour market issues, this is certainly not a novel finding. But what could be of use are the lessons learned from the specific successes and failures of implementing ALMPs in the unique political, social, economic and institutional context of Kosovo. To this end, the most important lessons are related to the importance of having strong accountability mechanisms, understanding the incentives and motivations of beneficiaries, having a flexible project design, developing information tools and having strong institutional commitment from local partners.

Good monitoring is critical for accountability in a complex institutional arrangement

As noted earlier, the project put a lot of effort in developing strong accountability mechanisms during implementation, with a particular emphasis on its monitoring system. Every project year around 80-90% of the beneficiaries from the schemes were reached through the monitoring system. The latter proved to be very effective in making sure that no abuses occurred during implementation. The way in which the system functioned is as described in the next paragraphs and is graphically illustrated in Figure 6.

Once the list of beneficiary workers and enterprises was confirmed, the project team, in coordination with regional and municipal employment centers, organized monitoring visits on a regular basis so as to ensure that they were fulfilling their commitments to employ/train beneficiaries for the period agreed in the MoU. Any enterprise and individual found misusing the system was “blacklisted” and excluded from future schemes. Depending on the level of misuse, exclusion was applied on a range from one year or more.
The project had established two monitoring mechanisms, one performed independently by the counsellors of PES and the other by the project team and PES jointly. As far as the monitoring by counsellors of employment offices was concerned, they were organized by each employment office individually during the time when counsellors were conducting labour market research. They used this occasion to also monitor beneficiaries. They submitted reports to the project office which were then compared with the reports from joint visits by counsellors and the project team, and with the direct phone calls placed to beneficiaries. This allowed for a triangulation of sources.

The project team also monitored the beneficiaries in cooperation with the employment offices. This was done in order to make sure that the beneficiaries fulfilled the criteria and met demographic targets. After a beneficiary was approved, the ALMP project called to see if they matched the criteria. Only then could the candidates start training/work in the enterprises and could they sign the contract with enterprise and the latter could sign the MoU with the MLSW and UNDP. During the training/work period, the project team organized at least one field visit together with employment office counsellors in order to see if workers are present at the workplace, if they are paid regularly, if safety standards are implemented and if the scheme is being implemented based on operational guidelines.

During the visits, if the project team found that a trainee/employee was withdrawn from the scheme, and that the employment office was not notified by the employee or enterprise, the file on the case was closed and payments were suspended. Beneficiaries were also contacted after their training/work had been completed in order to check whether they had gained full-time employment or whether they were paid at the end of the project period.

**Figure 6: ALMP Project monitoring process**

**Beneficiary motivations and incentives must be properly understood**

One of the key factors in ensuring the success of a complex project like ALMP is the proper understanding of the incentives of all relevant stakeholders and the subsequent design of activities so that incentives are met and behaviors are altered in line with desired outputs. To this end, it should be noted that the financial incentives that were introduced were effective in attracting both the beneficiaries and enterprises to most of the schemes. This was confirmed by the external evaluation reports, which specifically noted the good design of the schemes.
Nonetheless, there were some schemes in which incentives were not properly understood, or the financial means available were insufficient to modify behavior. One such case is the project’s failure to attract sufficient numbers of social assistance beneficiaries or mothers. The latter found the scheme’s financial incentives to be insufficient to cover for the social assistance benefits or the costs of child care. Another instance of improperly understood or insufficient incentives was the case of readmitted persons. That is why any future projects or the continuation of ALMPs should take into account a better understanding of the motives of these beneficiaries so that schemes would be designed accordingly. One way in which this can be achieved is by initially piloting schemes before scaling them up.

**Technology and information tools are critical for the efficiency and sustainability of ALMPs**

Another important lesson from the ALMP project was the importance of developing and using technology and information tools to support implementation and programme design. It was noted earlier in this report that one of the main causes for the delays and the quality of case processing during the project’s lifespan was the lack of a functional Employment Management Information System (EMIS). The lack of such integrated information tools also impacted the implementation of some schemes which required coordinated efforts and sharing of information between different departments (ex. “welfare-to-work programmes”).

The late establishment of the Labour Market Information System (LMIS) also impacted the ability of the project and of labour market institutions (PES, VTCs, etc.) to have updated and detailed information on the needs of enterprises and workforce skills, so that they could adjust their actions accordingly (i.e. matching schemes, curricula, etc.). Skills assessments or labour force surveys were sporadic and their data not systematically shared. LMIS was established only in the last year of the project’s lifespan and together with the EMIS form the backbone for the long-term efficiency, impact and sustainability of ALMPs, which is why their proper utilization will be addressed in the ALMP 2 project.

It is worth noting that a simple excel database of beneficiaries such as the one kept by the ALMP project was very useful in gaining critical information about the project, including here impact indicators. By simply contacting beneficiaries to ask whether they had gained employment after their inclusion in the scheme, and comparing the data with specially designed control groups, the project was immediately able to assess its impact on beneficiaries.

**Proper design of active employment measures, continuous learning and flexibility is critical to achieve intended outcomes and impact**

The ALMP project evolved continuously in response to needs identified during implementation and to unexpected barriers or opportunities. Proper initial design of such projects in order to allow measuring of the impact as well as cost effectiveness is very important. To this end, the project had initially introduced the so called ‘control group’ in order to measure the success and failures of each employment measure. This has helped the continuous learning and adaptation of the project activities in order to maximize the impact. The original project design had also incorporated a risk log and had established a good monitoring system which allowed for a quick identification of bottlenecks. Of critical learning importance in this regard were also the periodic external evaluations, end-of-year analyses and cooperation with other donors or international agencies with technical expertise in labour market issues (for example, the ILO).

This approach of having the project on “permanent monitoring and review” enabled the project to introduce necessary changes in the operational procedures; to test and scale up some schemes while phasing out others; to understand and respond to the capacity building needs of local institutions; to better understand the interventions that were necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of ALMPs once donor support is phased out. In more practical terms, it was this flexibility that allowed reaching output targets by, for example, softening eligibility criteria to increase participation of minorities or by increasing number of beneficiaries in one scheme when another became less popular.
Institutional commitment and ownership is critical for efficiency in implementation and sustainable capacity building

Ultimately, no project can achieve optimal success or become sustainable if there is no strong and continued commitment and ownership throughout the hierarchy of local authorities. As noted at the beginning of this report, there was significant buy-in for the project as the issue of youth unemployment is a public policy priority. Nevertheless, it was one among many and often conflicting priorities that were being addressed in a context of limited absorption capacities and considerable institutional volatility, which often caused difficulties in implementation. While many of these issues were addressed during project’s lifespan, they do represent a particular concern for long-term sustainability as donor projects working with ALMPs scale down or retreat.

One of the most important aspects of ALMPs is that they are implemented through the cooperation of a wide range of actors and in such cases it does not suffice to simply have a well-designed monitoring system. What is also needed is the kind of strong commitment and local ownership that ensures continuous top-down accountability, pro-activeness, coordination and leadership by all of the parties involved, especially central level institutions which supervise local level bodies involved in implementation such as the PES or VTCs. Although in most cases operational guidelines were created, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities between various institutions, difficulties in coordination often emerged as a result of externalization of responsibilities and lack of leadership.

For example, during the implementation of professional practice for VET students, it was noticed that the organisation was left largely at the discretion of school managements, while other institutions such as employment offices and central level institutions took on a more passive role, often due to limited capacities.

Similarly, coordination difficulties existed between employment and welfare offices at the local level in the implementation of welfare-to-work schemes, or during the installation of intermediary databases for the LMIS in different institutions (several government agencies were not cooperative during the installation of intermediary databases which would feed data to the central LMIS database at the MLSW). In such cases, coordination between local-level implementing agencies can only be addressed if the central level managers in their institutional hierarchy take up a more pro-active role, but also if capacity-building efforts and funding are done in concert across all of the institutions that are involved.

A crucial way in which commitment impacts efficiency and long-term capacity building is by not ensuring proper financing for the implementation of ALMPs. In 2007, budget cuts reduced even further the already limited operational capacities of the PES, not to mention their opportunities to invest in technical or infrastructure needs. Currently, for example, the implementation of the EMIS in many employment offices is dependent on infrastructure investments by the MLSW. The development and sustainment of technology and information tools; the introduction of new schemes; or the potential future financing of ALMPs through the Kosovo budget all require that planning be followed up by a commitment to the established legal basis and budgetary allocations if capacities are to be actually build and sustained.

Ultimately, the greatest challenge in sustaining and empowering the achievements of the project will be the sustained financial and political commitment by higher level institutions, especially having in mind the wide range of actors involved in implementation. That is why it is of critical importance for projects seeking sustainability to include in their governance actors such as the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Prime Minister.
CONCLUSION

The achievements of the ALMP project during its implementation were considerable as it reached more than 11,000 beneficiaries and leaves behind a legacy and tradition of implementing active labour market measures. The development of operational guidelines and the contribution to the development of government regulation on active labour market measures, as well as the Law on the Employment Agency of Kosovo, have left a solid legal and administrative basis for long-term continuation and sustainability. The development of information tools also creates space for more effective administration of the schemes and more informed labour market policies.

While past and current efforts by UNDP through the ALMP project were deemed to have been successful by external evaluators, they have been so within the limited scope of the project’s areas of intervention and occurred in an institutional context that did not allow for a quicker movement towards stronger local ownership and sustainability. Nevertheless, the long-term sustainability of the established and already functional mechanisms, and thus the provision of future employment opportunities for vulnerable young women and men in Kosovo, remains challenging in light of the persistently deficient capacities at the level of policies and institutions in administration and policy-making, as well as the narrow fiscal space and the lack of established financing mechanisms within the Kosovo budget. These capacity needs will be addressed as part of the ALMP 2 project.

Regardless of its achievements and failures, the experience of the project outlined several ways in which projects operating in a context such as the one in Kosovo could improve their implementation strategies, plan activities or mitigate risks. For example, the project has shown that many risks related to the limited capacities and poor accountability mechanisms in Kosovo’s institutions could be mitigated through a flexible and learning-based approach to the design of activities and a solid monitoring system. To this end, it showed how a project can systematically use a variety of sources and techniques to collect information from beneficiaries and use information to feed project design and re-design. It also showed how different demographic groups could be properly targeted if their motivations are properly understood and incentives designed accordingly. Ultimately, through successes or failures, the project showed the value of using a trial and error approach by piloting schemes before scaling up.
## ANNEX 1: FINANCIAL REPORT (2005-2013)

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ANNEX 2 List of strategic operational and policy documents that were produced with the support of the ALMP project:


• Operation Guidelines on Organizing professional practice in enterprise for students of vocational schools

• Report on Capacity building of Public Employment Service Individual Employment Plans (IEP) in cooperation with ILO office in Kosovo

• Report on Capacity building of labour market institutions Identifying occupational requirements of the Kosovo labour market in cooperation with ILO office in Kosovo 2007

• Guides to detect Employers’ skills needs survey prepared to assist labour market institution officials in planning and conducting skill needs surveys in cooperation with ILO office in Kosovo 2008.

• Tracer Analysis of public vocational training provision from welfare to work programmes in cooperation with ILO office in Kosovo 2008

• Publication on Promoting self-employment opportunities among young people in Kosovo in cooperation with ILO office in Kosovo 2008

• Publication “Easing the transition of young people to work”: practices and tools to support managers and practitioners of employment and training services in the planning, implementation and monitoring of mixed institution- and enterprise based training programmes targeting disadvantaged youth 2009.

• Guidelines to integrate institution- and enterprise-based training programmes to smooth youth’s transition to decent work in cooperation with ILO office

• Conceptual Framework for a Labour Market Information System for Kosovo 2011

• Sectorial Strategy of Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare 2014-2020

• Strategy for improvement of professional practice in Kosovo 2013-2020

• Strategy and Action Plan for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons 2014 – 2020

• Assessment of the structure, organization and performance of Public Employment Services in Kosovo 2010.
“Active Labour Market Programmes for youth (ALMP) was supported by the Government of Norway, Government of Denmark, Government of Kosovo and the United Nations Development Programme.”